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INFORMATION ABOUT THE JOURNAL

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PART 02

KAZGUU LIBERAL ARTS DIGEST

RESEARCH
PAPERS

WORD ORDER IN ENGLISH AND CHINESE: A CASE STUDY OF THE CHINESE FOLK TALE

ASSEMGUL KHAMIDULLOVA

Abstract: Language is considered an integral part of culture. Different cultures with their indicative characteristics reflect the distinctions in languages with the grammar and syntax. The current research compares word order in the English and Chinese languages. The former of the languages concentrates on formal representation, while the latter adopts conceptual one. The foundation of the study is a Chinese folk tale 木头平板电脑 (Mùtóu píngbǎn diànnǎo) and its version translated into English, The Wooden Tablet. The word order is analyzed by dividing sentences to the three communicative types which are imperative, interrogative, and declarative. According to the findings, only imperative sentences depicted identical structure of ordering the words.

Keywords: word order, English language, Chinese language, sentence types

In achieving the intended communicative aim, speakers of all languages place words according to the word order rules of the spoken language. However, there are six main diverse language families classified by their geographical position: Indo-European, Sino-Tibetan, Niger-Congo, Afro-Asiatic, Austronesian, and Trans-New Guinea (Ethnologue, 2019). What leads to the content of the problem of the research is the fact that each of the families has its own development history of syntax, i.e., word order. English and Chinese languages, belonging to two diverse language families therefore have distinctive word order rules. This, in turn, encourages the researcher to outline the relevance of the research. Basically, that is the dissimilarities in the syntax which complicate the process of learning another language, i.e., English in this case.

The current research aims at locating similarities and differences in the rules

of ordering the words in the English and Chinese sentences. To achieve this aim, the following objectives will be completed:

- to examine the existing word order rules in the studied languages;
- to locate and categorize examples that backbone those rules basing on the Chinese folk tale and its English translation;
- to interpret the data found in accordance with the theoretical rules.

Therefore, the methods of the research are descriptive and comparative.

Despite the existence of research on the word order differences and similarities in English and Chinese (Li, 1998; Yitong, 2020; Zhao & Cao, 2016), uniqueness of the present research underlies in the choice of the material base which provides the novelty.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Throughout history, views about Chinese and English word order have been discussed by many linguists. Yitong (2020), for example, believes that Chinese people center on holistic thinking due to their philosophical mindset. Accordingly, he (2020) states that the language structure resulted in being loose, “using less or no formal words when making sentences” (p. 52). That is why it was mentioned that non-predicate verbs, auxiliary verbs, independent subjects and articles are missing in Chinese grammar which is not peculiar to the English language.

English language started as a synthetical language which gradually shifted to analytical one. It accounted for the word order being “relatively fixed while also changing” (Yitong, 2020, p. 53). “Chinese pays attention to the coincidence of meaning, it is often simple and clear. While English pays attention to the coincidence of form and structure, and it is rigorous” (Lin Kuan, 2014, as cited in Yitong, 2020, p. 52). Jiang (2009) also agrees that vision of word order of the two nationalities are disparate by denoting English as “sentence-oriented” and Chinese as “discourse-oriented” languages (p. 11). Ordering words is a grammatical matter in English language and rather a semantic matter in Chinese language.

In order to analyze word order of the two languages, they will be examined from the perspective of division of sentences according to their communicative aim – imperative, interrogative, and declarative. Each of the sentence types possesses several rules peculiar to them. Further, the three sentence types will be described along with their set of rules.

IMPERATIVE SENTENCE

“The imperative sentence expresses inducement, ... it urges the listener, in the form of request or command, to perform or

nor to perform a certain action” (Kirvalidze, 2013, p. 70). Generally, it is built by omitting the subject and keeping the verb or verbal phrase unchanged (Po-Ching & Rimmington, 2006).

While there is one characteristic in common, there are cases when a couple of particles are also added to the imperative sentences in Chinese. For instance, the particle 吧 (ba) is added at the end of the sentence to make a suggestion (Po-Ching & Rimmington, 2006). However, in order to make a command, it is discarded. 吧 does not have an analogue in English language. Another particle is 着 (zhe) which indicates that an action is induced to last for some time.

INTERROGATIVE SENTENCE

“The interrogative sentence expresses a question, i.e., a request for information wanted by a speaker from the listener” (Kirvalidze, 2013, p. 70). She (2013) continues that in English, four types of questions are depicted – Wh-questions, Yes-No questions, tag and alternative questions.

LanGeek (n.d.) provides word order rules for these questions. Wh-questions start with wh- interrogative words such as what, when, where, which, whom, why, who, whose, and also how. They are built with the help of the wh-word which comes before the auxiliary (or modal) verb, subject, and main verb. Sometimes they are also constructed without auxiliary verbs. In this case, wh-word comes first, main verb and the rest of the sentence comes after. The next type, that is Yes-No questions, are formed by putting auxiliary (or modal) verbs at the very first place, following them with the subject and the main verb. To make a tag question, a tag is added to the end of a statement. The principal rule is that a positive statement is followed by a negative tag and vice versa. Alternative questions, in their turn, request the listener to decide on one option between two or more. The

options are connected with each other by conjunction or.

Meanwhile, question types in Chinese can be divided into question-word questions, general questions, surmise questions, affirmative-negative questions, and alternative questions (Po-Ching & Rimmington, 2006).

Po-Ching and Rimmington (2006) delineated structure rules of these questions as follows. Question-word questions are built by placing interrogative words in the question where the answer is supposed to be. To make a general question, the particle 吗 (ma) is added to the end of a declarative sentence without changing its structure. The same structure is used for surmise questions but with the particle 吧 (ba) instead of 吗 (ma). Affirmative-negative questions are made with the help of an affirmative adjective or verb preceding their negative form; for instance, 好不好 (hǎo bù hǎo), 有没有 (yǒu méi yǒu). Alternative questions are built by placing 还是 (hái shì) between verbal clauses to provide two alternative variants.

Last but not least, rhetorical questions should also be taken into account when analyzing literature. These questions are peculiar to any language for they belong to stylistics rather than grammar. In English, there is no structure rule for rhetorical questions that is peculiar only to them. The prime principle is that they do not require any answer (LanGeek, n.d.). In Chinese, on the other hand, one of the methods to form such a question is to negate general questions (Ross & Sheng Ma, 2014).

DECLARATIVE SENTENCE

“The declarative sentence expresses a statement, either affirmative or negative, and as such stands in syntagmatic correlation with the listener’s responding signals of attention” (Kirvalidze, 2013, p. 69). Unlike previous sentence types, this kind of sentence does not possess a universal

word order rule according to which it would be possible to make an analysis of all given declarative sentences. This is because there are parts of a sentence that one declarative sentence may have and another may not. Therefore, these sentences are to be examined on the basis of the word order of direct and indirect objects, time phrases, negation, modal verbs, and location if there are any in a sentence.

According to Teng (2017), two languages share a common rule of ordering direct and indirect objects. As in English, direct objects come after verbs in Chinese. If there are any indirect objects, they are placed between verbs and direct objects.

Time phrases in two languages also have a peculiarity in common. When placed at the beginning of a sentence, word order coincides in these regards. At the same time, they can be placed before the verbal phrase in Chinese (Teng, 2017).

According to Ross and Sheng Ma (2014), ordering negation in Chinese is not similar to one in English since negative particles are used before a word to be negated. English negative particle not corresponds to Chinese 不 (bù) and 没 (méi). 不 is used with time tenses and adjectives, while 没 is used with 有 (yǒu) and comparison (Ross & Sheng Ma, 2014).

The same authors (2014) stated that word order of modal verbs match in two languages. Modal verbs, such as 喜欢 (xǐhuān) (to like), 要 (yào) (to want), 可以 (kěyǐ) (can, be able to) and others, precede the main verb in a sentence. The structure is also met in English language grammar (Ross & Sheng Ma, 2014).

Lastly, expressing location is also to be examined. There are several means of giving information about placing objects, according to Po-Ching and Rimmington (2006). One of them is using 在 (zài) which means to be placed preceding location phrases as 下面 (xiàmiàn), 南边 (nánbian) and many other. Another way of

describing location is the English there is (are) sentence. In Chinese, the structure is as following: location phrase is followed by 有 (yǒu), the qualifier, and noun in the end (Po-Ching & Rimmington, 2006). The authors also state that for this structure, 是 (shì) may also be used instead of 有.

Aforementioned basic word order rules will be used to analyze one and the same text in its original Chinese version and the translation into English.

METHODOLOGY

Every person tends to associate new information with something familiar to him or her; thus, I learn Chinese making parallels with English. At the first stage of learning the language, it is easier to understand the structuring of sentences by translating them into English if the word order of the sentences coincides. In order to classify similarities and disparities, I have resolved to analyze the two languages basing on the case of the elementary-friendly literary work called 木头平板电脑 (Mùtóu píngbǎn diànnǎo) [The Wooden Tablet] and its translation into the English language.

The folk tale was checked for the presence of the principal word order rules mentioned earlier. Hence, it has the potential to give a basis for the analysis. In the quantitative part of the research, all of the sentences will be counted and grouped into three sentence types. I will then conduct a qualitative part analyzing correspondences and differences of word order rules. The results will be interpreted after which recommendations for future research on a related issue will be given.

FINDINGS

In order to perform analysis of word order of English and Chinese, sentences of the folk tale were firstly divided into three sentence types – declarative, interrogative, and imperative. The next step was to analyze the word order rules of each sentence type,

comparing them between the source text, i.e., the original version of the folk tale in Chinese, and the target text which is its translation into English. Hereinafter, the two terms are abbreviated as ST and TT correspondingly.

Overall, there are 193 sentences in the piece of work. Imperative sentences comprise the smallest fraction equaling to 12. Interrogative sentences encompass 21 of all sentences. Meanwhile, the share of declarative sentences is the most substantial one which amounts to 160. Further each sentence type is described referring to the rules mentioned in the theoretical part.

Imperative sentence

Every sentence of this type was scrutinized. All 12 sentences preserved their word order when translated into English:

ST: 放下那个篮子。(Fàngxià nà gé lànzi) (Literally – Put down that basket.)

TT: Put down that basket.

As it is intrinsic to imperative sentences, verbs are placed in the first place both in English and Chinese. 放下 (fàngxià) refers to Put down and 那个篮子 (nà gé lànzi) refers to that basket.

Another sentence used 请 (qǐng) for a polite request which correspond to English please:

ST: 请帮助他!(Qǐng bāngzhù tā) (Literally – Please help him!)

TT: Please, help him!

Here, 帮助 (bāngzhù) is help, 他 is him. Again, the word order of ST totally matches with TT.

There is one sentence with the 吧 (ba) particle which is used for suggestion. It is omitted in translation as in:

ST: 想想吧。

TT: Think about it.

Overall, 11 Chinese imperative sentences including two with 吧 (ba) and 请 (qǐng) particles have the same word order when compared to respective English ones.

Interrogative sentence

As mentioned above, there are several types of interrogative sentences in English and Chinese. First and foremost finding is that some types of questions in English and Chinese are compatible. Therefore, similar question types will be represented in pairs. Among 21 interrogative sentences in the folk tale, four pairs of question types were identified. The first pair is the English Wh-questions and Chinese question-word questions. Both of them convey one and the same idea. Nonetheless, they have different word order. While interrogative words are put at the very beginning of a question in English, these words are located in a place where the answer is supposed to be in Chinese.

This pair was found to be the most popular. In all 13 questions of this pair, the word order is not preserved:

ST: 但是他可以去哪里呢? (Dàn shì tā kěyǐ qù nǎlǐ ne?) (Literally – But he could go where?)

TT: But where could he go?

哪里 (nǎlǐ) is English where. While the interrogative word is placed at the beginning in English, it is exactly the opposite in Chinese. If the question was asked, 哪里 would be substituted by an adverbial modifier of place.

The second pair of question types is English Yes-No questions and Chinese general questions. They possess one communicative meaning but they are structured differently. The folk tale introduced six sentences of this pair, one of which is:

ST: 他们想要一间小泥屋和一些旧衣服

吗?(Tāmen xiǎng yào yī jiàn xiǎo ní wū hé yīxiē jiù yīfú ma?) (Literally – They want a little mud hut and some old clothing 吗?)

TT: Do they want a little mud hut and some old clothing?

Do and 吗 (ma) indicate that the sentences are interrogative. Nonetheless, the former is placed at the beginning, whereas the latter is located at the end.

The third type of question pairs that is similar in English and Chinese is tag and surmise questions. Actually, they are different in their structures as described in the Literature Review. Still, tag and surmise questions possess one and the same meaning for 吧 (ba) corresponds to the tag part of questions in English. However, it was detected that an English tag question in the folk tale is a translation not of a Chinese surmise question, but of an affirmative-negative question:

ST: 你非常爱你的父亲,是不是? (Nǐ fēicháng ài nǐ de fùqīn, shì bù shì?) (Literally – You very love your father, are not are?)

TT: You love your father very much, don't you?

是不是 (shì bù shì) here indicates that the sentence belongs to affirmative-negative question type. Since this question type lacks in the English grammar, the translator was to make a choice of existing question types to render it with.

The folk tale does not represent any other examples neither of surmise nor affirmative-negative question type.

The fourth pair of questions type is alternative questions in English with the same name in Chinese. These questions are asked in identical situations. The folk tale comprises no such questions; therefore, analysis of word order of these questions cannot be conducted.

The last type which is a rhetorical question:

ST: 你不知道,你不应该偷东西吗?(Nǐ bù zhīdào, nǐ bù yīng gāi tōu dōngxī ma) (Literally – You do not know, you not should steal things 吗?)

TT: Don't you know, you shouldn't steal things?

As it can be seen, the structure of the question belongs to the English Yes-No questions and Chinese general questions pair. As the name of Yes-No questions suggests, the question demands to be answered with either yes or no. However, since the given question is rhetorical, it does not require any answer. Therefore, it was resolved not to assign this particular question to the Yes-No questions type. Still, the word order is not similar in ST and TT as in Yes-No questions and general questions mentioned before.

As far as interrogative sentences are concerned, none of the questions did not indicate any similarity. Even though most of the question types in Chinese and English are asked with identical communicative purposes, they are not similar in their structure. Moreover, comparison analysis of alternative questions in the two languages and Chinese surmise question was not performed due to the absence of these questions in the folk tale.

Declarative sentence

In this part, declarative sentences are to be analyzed from the perspectives of direct and indirect objects, time phrases, negation, modal verbs, and location.

Direct and indirect objects

There are 59 sentences containing direct objects and one with both direct and indirect objects. Referring to the rule, direct objects follow verbs in English as well as in Chinese:

ST: 他打开盒子,用手指小心地抚摸了一下平板电脑。(Literally – He opened the box, with fingers carefully touched the tablet).

TT: He opened the box and carefully touched the tablet with his finger.

Here, 盒子 (hézi) and the box, “平板电脑” (píngbiǎn diànnǎo) and the tablet function as direct objects and place after verbs in both languages. However, sentences may also have indirect objects. In this case, the structure alters:

ST: ... 他不再向父亲问任何关于平板电脑的问题。(Literally – He no longer to his father ask any about the tablet questions).

TT: ... he did not ask his father any more questions about it.

In the ST, the overall structure is as follows: subject precedes indirect object, verb, direct object. While in the TT, the verb precedes the indirect object.

Thus, sentences with a direct object have the same word order in two languages. But the structure changes when there is also an indirect object.

TIME PHRASES

12 sentences indicate a particular time. In ten of them, a time phrase is placed at the beginning:

ST: 早上,康普睁开眼睛。(Literally – In the morning, Kangpu opened his eyes.)

TT: In the morning Kangpu opened his eyes.

The Chinese sentence has the same word order as in English. In particular, the time phrase 早上 (zǎoshang) and In the morning both locate at the first place.

However, there are two sentences where time phrases in Chinese do not place at the beginning:

ST: ...我们今天就不会住在这个泥屋里。(Literally – ... we today not live in this mud hut).

TT: ... we would not be living in this mud

hut today.

So, when time phrases do not place as in the first case, the word order of sentence alters.

NEGATION

As it was stated in the theoretical part of the present study, negation in Chinese is of two types – 不 (bù) and 没 (méi). Unlike in English, they occur before the word to be negated. There are 35 sentences with negation that follow this rule. For example:

ST: 他又累又饿,但不能回去。(Literally – He was tired was hungry, but not could back go).

TT: He was tired and hungry but he could not go back.

Here, could is a word to be negated. While in English negative particle is used after this word, it is quite the opposite in Chinese.

MODAL VERBS

18 declarative sentences with modal verbs were identified. Among a number of sentences with various modal verbs, an example with 必须 (bìxū) meaning have to is depicted:

ST: 今天,我必须去城里卖菜和买一些米。(Literally – Today, I have to go city to sell vegetables and buy some rice).

TT: Today I have to go to the city to sell our vegetables and buy some rice.

The Chinese sentence is almost fully similar to the English one in terms of the word order. Especially, attention should be drawn to the modal verb 必须 (bìxū) or have to in English that comes right after the subject and before the main verb.

LOCATION

The declarative sentences that express location are to be analyzed in regards of

verbs 在 (zài), 有 (yǒu), 是 (shì) and various location phrases. In general, it was counted that there are 16 of them. 在 when used with location phrases mostly appears immediately after subjects:

ST: 我在这些鸡毛下面不能呼吸。(Literally – I in these feathers under not can breather).

TT: I can't breathe under these chicken feathers.

In Chinese, location is the first information to indicate after the subject. Thus, verb 在, i.e., to be at, and location phrase 下面 (xiàmian), i.e., under, order with the location name (these feathers) between them. At the same time, the location phrase in English is mostly placed at the end.

There is (are) sentence that structure with the help of 有 or 是:

ST: 他的村庄里没有石墙。(Literally – His village in not were stone walls).

TT: There were no stone walls in his village.

As it can be noticed, none of the verbs and phrases indicating location do not coincide in their structure.

Considering all this, the two languages sometimes do not differ from each other in their word order. However, this may not be the case depending on the sentence type and its constituting parts. In the next part, differences and similarities will be outlined.

DISCUSSION

The aim of the present study was to investigate word order in English and Chinese. This was accomplished by analyzing imperative, interrogative, and declarative sentences in the folk tale 木头平板电脑 (Mùtóu píngbǎn diànnǎo) and its translation The Wooden Tablet. This chapter will interpret the results presented in the Findings and give recommendations for future research on the related topic.

Word order of imperative sentences

The word order rule of imperative sentences is that the subject is usually omitted and verbs are placed in the first place as it was stated by Po-Ching and Rimmington (2006). This rule is used both in English and Chinese. However, Chinese express suggestions with the help of particle 吧 (ba) in imperative sentences. In contrast, suggestions, commands, and any other inducement in English are not differentiated by any grammatical means. Therefore, all 12 imperative sentences excepting one with the particle 吧 have the same word order in the two languages approving Po-Ching and Rimmington's (2006) rule. Hence, according to these authors' view it might be concluded that imperative sentences with this particle are different in word order when compared to English.

WORD ORDER OF INTERROGATIVE SENTENCES

The grammar of English and Chinese was represented by LanGeek (n.d.) and Po-Ching and Rimmington (2006). It was declared that there are four and five types of questions respectively. The correlation between them, which is based on the meaning, is drawn in the Findings chapter in the following pairs: Wh-questions and question-word questions, Yes-No and general, tag and surmise questions, and alternative question. It was found that Chinese affirmative-negative questions described by Po-Ching and Rimmington (2006) have no direct analog in English which is condemned in the folk tale. The data revealed that this question is compensated by the English tag question. Nonetheless, there is no literature which could formalize it in theory. It was also resolved to add a type of rhetorical questions to these types of sentences from stylistic considerations. All in all, among 21 interrogative sentences, no similarity between English and Chinese word order was found.

WORD ORDER OF DECLARATIVE SENTENCES

In order to examine word order of declarative sentences, they were searched for a row of characteristics that may change word order of a sentence.

DIRECT AND INDIRECT OBJECTS

The findings of this section backed the premise about the fact that direct objects precede verbs in both of the languages which was brought forward by Teng (2017). All 59 sentences with direct objects followed this rule. However, the structure differed drastically when there was also an indirect object.

Time phrases

The data proved the viewpoint of Teng (2017) who declared that English and Chinese grammar tend to place time phrases at the beginning of a sentence. Ten sentences out of 12 that indicate time showed similarity in word order in these regards. The remaining two sentences with time phrases either in the middle of the sentence or at the end differed in structure.

Negation

It was asserted by Ross and Sheng Ma (2014) in the chapters before that negative particles are put before the word to be negated in Chinese and the exact opposite in English. The data evidently highlighted that none of the 35 sentences with negation are not similar in structure. Thus, the structure of negation is viewed differently in the two languages.

Modal verbs

Ross and Sheng Ma (2014) pointed out that the word order is identical. Both languages place modal verbs before the main verbs. All 18 sentences that have modal verbs attested following this rule. It might be recapitulated that the word order rule of modal verbs in the folk tale is the same.

Location

Po-Ching and Rimmington (2006) depicted several methods of expressing location in Chinese. There were 16 sentences containing indicators of location. However, all of the sentences opposed the word order rules of these authors (2006). Consequently, the folk tale substantiated the fact that ordering location phrases are unlike in the two languages.

Limitations and recommendations

The present research is small-sized and is conducted on the basis of a folk tale. Thus, it is not able to fully investigate word order in Chinese and English. The amount of studied sentences is insufficient to generalize the findings. Moreover, the folk tale does not provide all sentence types. In other words, there is no example of alternative and affirmative-negative questions in the piece of writing.

The study did not give insight into tenses and structural types of sentences. As these may also cause changes in word order, further research is advised to take them into account.

CONCLUSION

The current research was devoted to analyze differences and similarities in word order of English and Chinese, basing on the Chinese folk tale called 木头平板电脑 (Mùtóu píngbǎn diànnǎo) [The Wooden Tablet] and its English version. To accomplish the purpose, every sentence was analyzed in terms of its sentence type – imperative, interrogative, and declarative. Further, each sentence type was classified according to their peculiarities. The findings were thoroughly investigated. Despite the limitations of the present study, the analysis helps draw conclusions. Thuswise, imperative sentences presented in the Chinese folk tale have identical word order in English. The structure of all Chinese interrogative sentences did not match with those of English. In the declarative

type, sentences were viewed from several perspectives. Structure of declarative sentences with direct objects and modal verbs coincided fully, whereas those with time phrases coincided partially. At the same time, the sentences with indirect objects, negation, and indicators of location completely changed the word order of the sentences. Hence, the word order of imperative sentences only is similar in Chinese and English as examined in the folk tale.

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