

A Comparative Study of Zero Anaphora in English and Chinese

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Abstract

Different language has different cohesive devices. In this paper, a comparison of zero anaphora in English and Chinese has been made. We found that zero anaphora is rare in English, only occurring in informal chatty English; while zero anaphora is widely used in Chinese, which is one characteristic of Chinese language. Based on comparison, some implications for translation were given out. While we are translating, we should consider different cohesive patterns especially different use of zero anaphora in different languages to adapt to target readers.


Keywords

Chinese, English, Zero anaphora.

1. Introduction

Language does not serve just one function. It has multi-functions. The function that serves to express the content is described as transactional function and the function that serves to express social relations and personal attitudes is described as interactional (Brown and Yule 1). Discourse is always concerned with people, things and events and so on. Therefore, when language is used to express content, social relations etc. in a discourse, we always refer to one person, one thing or one event more than once. So what kind of language should we use to refer to the same people or things? How to have our readers better understood? All of these are concern with the issue of cohesion. What are main cohesive relationships?

The cohesive relationships which particular interest Halliday and Hasan are reference, substitution, ellipsis and lexical relationship (Brown and Yule 192). According to Halliday and Hasan, (Halliday and Hasan 18), reference consists of endophora and exphora. Where the interpretation of co-referential terms exists outside the text, in the context of situation, the relationship is said to be an exophoric one which plays no part in textual cohesion. Where their interpretation lies within a text, the relations are endophoric and form cohesive ties within the text. Endophoric relations are of two types: those which look back in the text for their interpretation, which Halliday&Hasan call anaphoric relations, and those which look forward in the text for their interpretation, which are called cataphoric relations. These relationships are exemplified below (Brown and Yule 192):

a) exphora: Look at that.(that= )

b) endophora:

(i) anaphoric—Look at the sun. It's going down quickly.

(It refers back to the sun.)

(ii) cataphoric—It's going down quickly, the sun.

(It refers forwards to the sun.)

In this study, we do not to cover all the issues of reference, but just focus on anaphora. Anaphora, is the special case of cohesion, where in a cohesive relationship the meaning (sense and/or reference) of one item (the anaphor) is, in isolation, somehow vague or incomplete, and can

only be properly interpreted by considering the meanings of the other item(s) (the antecedent(s)) (Carter 33).

In the broadest sense, anaphora may include any linguistic situation in which a grammatical form functions to refer back in the discourse, thus covering words, phrases and tenses that point backward to verbs, adverbs, clauses as well as nouns. For example:

(1) a. Does he often play basketball at the stadium?

b. Yes, he does it there very often.

In this example, the verb *does*, the pronoun *it* and the adverb *there* in 4b are all forms of anaphora, for they are used to refer back, respectively, to the verb *to play*, the noun *football* and the adverbial phrase *in the stadium* in 4a.

In a narrower sense, however, anaphora is restricted to the use of nominal and pronominal co-referring with previous nominal or pronominal expressions (Chu 1998). In this sense, *did* and *there* in 4b above are excluded from the class of anaphors. In this study, we will restrict anaphora into a narrow sense, that is to say exclude any verbs, adverbs, clause.

According to Chen Pin (365), there are three main kinds of anaphora in Chinese; they are zero anaphora, pronominal anaphora and nominal anaphora. In this paper, we will adopt Chen Pin's classification and center our discussion on zero anaphora in both Chinese and English, to find out their similarities and differences and apply them to the learning of the English language especially in translation and writing.

2. Zero Anaphora

2.1. The definition of zero anaphora

But what is zero anaphora? Zero anaphora is the use of a gap, in a phrase or clause, which has an anaphoric function similar to a pro-form. It is often described as "referring back" to an expression that supplies the information necessary for interpreting the gap. Zero anaphora is a special case of anaphora which has no actual phonetic and syntactic form but have semantic and pragmatic meaning. Following are two examples of zero anaphora in English and Chinese. 0 represents zero anaphora.

(2) There are two roads to eternity, a straight0and narrow0, and a broad 0 and crooked 0.

In this sentence, the gaps in *a straight and narrow gap*, and *a broad and crooked [gap]* have a zero anaphoric relationship to *two roads to eternity*.

(3) 他的那位“老爷”很有手面，0在洪门中，0辈份很高。

In this sentence, 0 co-refer to “老爷”, represent zero anaphora.

2.2. The identification zero anaphora.

As we have mentioned above, ZA is a special case of anaphora in the sense that it takes a zero form as the anaphor. Such a zero form is not realized syntactically so that there must be a way to identify its existence. Obviously, to identify the existence of a ZA is the preliminary step to compare Chinese and English anaphora.

If in the meaning, there is a referent which co-refers with some item that appears preceding it, but it has no physical lexical form, then we hold that ZA appears in this position (陈平366).

2.3. The necessity of use zero anaphora?

As Chen Pin said that substitution is a kind of language reduction from the point of semantic and pragmatic view, in order to avoid repetition to save recourses, or it is a kind of "economy principle" (Xiong Xueliang 3). Zero anaphora in essence is ellipsis, using a gap to substitute the preceding entity. Therefore, the using of anaphora is in line with the principle of economy principle. Besides of the reason of economy, zero anaphora can make language more in focus.

By not repeating the old information, speaker can focus his effort on expressing the new information. (Xiong Xueliang 3) Look at the following sentence.

(4) 那狗黄毛,0 黑眼圈,0 长身材,0 细高腿,0 特别地凶猛,0 要咬住人,0 不见点血腥味儿,0 决不撒嘴。(0 =狗)

In this sentence, there are seven zero anaphora which all refer back to the dog. However, if all these zero anaphora is substituted with noun “dog” or pronoun “it”, it will be prolix. Therefore, by using of the zero anaphora can make discourse concise. However, using of zero anaphora in both Chinese and English has some conditions. Ariel (1990) thought that there were four conditions for selecting of zero anaphora. They are distance, competition, saliency and unity.

3. Zero Anaphora in English and Chinese

3.1. Zero anaphora in English

The four factors such as text, semantic, pragmatic and style all affect the use of zero anaphora, but the most fundamental condition to use zero anaphora is that that language must be a topic prominent language, like Chinese. However English is a subject prominent language. Most of its sentences must have a subject especially in formal style. So use of zero anaphora in English is not frequent as in Chinese. Although English does have the use of zero anaphora, it always presents in informal chatty discourse (Xiong Xueliang 56).

(5) Guess what! I bumped into Linda. 0 Smiled as nicely as ever, and 0 behaved even more elegantly than before. Do you want to have her electronic address (Xiong Xueliang 56)?

(6) Place egg whites in a saucepan. Beat 0 until foamy (Xiong Xueliang 64).

(7) Here's some syrup for you. Shake 0 before using 0 (Xiong Xueliang 62).

All above three sentences are examples of zero anaphora in English, but they are quite rare. In the example 5, 0 refer back to Linda; in the example 6, 0 refers back to egg; and in example 7, 0 refer back to syrup. The basic sentence pattern in English must have a subject and there must be an object after the intransitive verbs, so all these examples will not see in the discourse of a formal style.

3.2. Zero anaphora in Chinese

It is well observed that zero anaphora occurs frequently in Chinese discourse, especially in narrative and descriptive styles. Zero anaphora is used to represent topic or the theme of most discourse either in written Chinese or in spoken Chinese. (56) It will be categorized into five categories according to its own position and function in the sentence.

3.2.1. Zero anaphora that has its antecedent in the position of topic in the head of the sentence

The antecedent of zero anaphora can be the noun phrase in the topic place of the sentence.

For example:

(8) 这么重要的事情你不告诉他, 0 别人也会告诉他。

(9) 这样的话他已经说了好几遍了, 0 也不管用。

(10) 可是, 去年那“灵验”, 现在老通宝想也不敢想0。

Above three sentences well exemplify this category of zero anaphora. In example 8, 0 refers back to the topic of the sentence “这么重要的事情”. In example 9, 0 refers back to “这样的话” and in example 10 refers back to “灵验”.

3.2.2. Zero anaphora that has its antecedent in the position of modifier of the subject

(11) 他的脸色突然变了, 0 心头不知是高兴呢, 抑是生气.....

(12) 范博文的脸色又变了, 0 只差没转身走掉。

(13) 菜园子的事情以前归父亲和哥哥管理，他只知道吃黄瓜，吃辣椒，才不管猪呀羊呀进0来不进0来呢!

In all these examples, the antecedents are the modifier of the subject. In example 11, 0 refers back to “他”; in example 12, 0 refers back to “范博文”; and in example 13, 0 refer back to “菜园子”. All the antecedents of zero anaphora are in the position of modifier of subject.

3.2.3. Zero anaphora that has its antecedent in the position of object

(14) 他向来没有反对过林佩珊的任何主张，现在他也不能反对0。

(15) 老陈老爷见过洋鬼子，0红眉毛，0绿眼睛，0走路时两条腿是直的。

(16) 她到现在还记得很明白的是五六年前在土地庙的香市中看见一只常常会笑的猴子，0一口的牙齿多么白!

In example 14, zero anaphora refers back to “林佩珊的任何主张”; in example 15, all three zero anaphoras refer back to “洋鬼子”; and in example 16, zero anaphora refers back to “猴子”. The antecedents of all these zero anaphora are in the position of object.

3.2.4. Zero anaphora that has its antecedent in the position of subject

(17) 吴荪甫冷冷地看了莫干承一眼，0又看看屠维岳，0就一直.....

(18) 她的语调又温柔又圆浑，因而本来有点气愤的范博文听了以后,0似乎觉得心头很舒服.

In example 17, zero anaphora refers back to the subject of the sentence “吴荪甫”; and in example 18, zero anaphora also refers back to the subject of the sentence “范博文”.

3.2.5. Zero anaphora in the position of the modifier of object

(19) 阎罗王追还陈老爷家的金元宝横财，0所以败得这么快。

In the example 19, zero anaphora refers back to the modifier of object “陈老爷家”.

From above five categories of Chinese zero anaphora, we can see that zero anaphora can refer back to almost any nominal or pronominal elements of discourse, so it is more frequently used in Chinese than in English.

4. Comparison of Zero Anaphora in English and Chinese

4.1. Similarities

There is phenomenon of zero anaphora both in Chinese and English, because zero anaphora has some functions which were mention in the section of the necessity of zero anaphora. In addition, the identification of zero anaphora in both Chinese and English is similar.

4.2. Differences

Though there are phenomenon of zero anaphora in both Chinese and English, jet zero anaphora in Chinese is much more than in English, according to analysis of the corpus of Xu Yulong. As said above, zero anaphora is mainly in informal spoken English and occurs not as frequently as in Chinese. But why is that?

(1) There are differences between English pronoun system and Chinese one. The English language has lost its most stringent morphological markings through the history and now operates only on a pronoun system. One of the differences between a language like Chinese and one like English is that reference tracking operates with a covert anaphoric system in the former but with an overt system in the latter. In Chinese a lot of pronouns are substituted by zero anaphora and in English, pronouns are used where zero anaphora are used in discourse.

(2) English is a hypotaxis language and Chinese is a parataxis language. The former one focuses on language cohesion in form and the latter focuses significance of the continuous coherence.

The English discourse lay emphasis on structure while Chinese on meaning. Therefore, using of zero anaphora is one characteristic of Chinese language.

5. Implications for English Translation

Based on the comparison, some implications for translation can be drawn.

5.1. Chinese-English translation

Different language has different cohesive devices. Chinese is a zero anaphora free-using language. Where zero anaphora is used in Chinese pronouns is often used in English. Therefore, when you are translating Chinese into English, it is important and necessary to add some pronouns to be the subject of the sentence. Look at the following example.

(20) 王冕是个很有天赋的人,0不到20,0早已精通天文、地理和古典文学

译文: This Wang Mian was gifted. He was not more than twenty years of age. He had already mastered everything in astronomy, geography, and classics. . .(54)

English is a subject-prominent language; subject is in the focus of the sentence. Therefore zero anaphora in source language which refer back to the subject of the sentence “王冕” is replaced by the pronoun “he” in the translation. Thus, “he” has the function of textual in this discourse.

5.2. English-Chinese translation

(21) a. They said that they were coming to help us with our house repair today.

b. 他们说，他们打算今天帮助我们修我们的房子。

c. 他们说，今天来帮助我们修房子。

Most foreigners will translate the Chinese version into sentence b, while most Chinese people will translate it into sentence c, (Fang Wuqing 1998: 11-2) because sentence c is more appropriate for Chinese readers. In the sentence c, the pronouns in English version are dropped out but zero anaphora is used. While we are translating English to Chinese, where pronouns are used in English is often replaced by zero anaphora or nouns. Look at another example while well exemplify this point.

(22) a. In the natural science we are rather backward, and here we should make a special effort to learn from foreign countries. And yet we must learn critically, not blindly.

b. 自然科学方面，我们比较落后，特别要努力向外国学习。但是也要批判地学，不可盲目地学。（5）

Zero anaphora is used in the translation version to make sentence more concise.

6. Conclusion

Anaphora is a case of cohesion and zero anaphora is a special case of anaphora which is different in different languages. In this paper, we explore the similarities and differences of zero anaphora in Chinese and English. We found that though zero anaphora exists in both languages, zero anaphora in Chinese is far more than that in English. Based on the comparison, we suggest that while we are translating, we should pay special attention to different cohesive devices and try to adapt to the target readers.

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