

# A Study on the Chinese Translation of English Existential Sentences

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**Abstract**—Based on a statistical analysis of the Chinese translation of English existential sentences in E-C parallel corpus concordance, it is found that there are mainly eight corresponding forms in the Chinese translation of English existential sentences, i.e. "You" sentence, "Shi" sentence, fugitive sentence, "Zhe" sentence, "Le" sentence, "Mei/Meiyou" sentence, "Bu/Wu" sentence, and "Haowu/Wufa" sentence, accounting for 79.9% of the total. The first five corresponding forms are Chinese existential sentences, accounting for 52.7%, while the other corresponding forms are not Chinese existential sentences.

**Keywords**—English existential sentence; Chinese translation; corresponding form

## I. INTRODUCTION

Scholars have been paying close attention to the Chinese translation of English existential sentences, but there are not many achievements. Based on the analysis of English existential sentences and their variants, Zhang Yunqing (2003) enumerates some translation techniques in English-Chinese translation. On the basis of comparing the existential sentences between English and Chinese, Deng Wei (2006) summarizes a number of principles of English-Chinese translation. Fan Xing (2012) discusses several kinds of lower class translation mode of English existential sentences. Zhang Zongjie (2014) believes that non-existential sentences are chosen in the translation of existential sentence between English and Chinese due to the context. There are few studies on the Chinese translation of English existential sentences based on the statistical analysis of quantitative corpus, so this paper makes a statistical analysis of the usage of the corresponding forms in the Chinese translation of English existential sentences in the English-Chinese parallel corpus<sup>1</sup> (hereinafter referred to as E-C corpus for short) with 332,000 English words, and then sums up the corresponding forms and distribution of English translation of each type of English existential sentences.

## II. TYPES OF ENGLISH EXISTENTIAL SENTENCES

According to Zhang Jin and Zhang Keding's (1998) criteria, the typical form of English existential sentences is: there + V + NP + LP. According to this, we select five common forms as follows: (ET stands for sentence; N<sub>p</sub> stands for word/phrase of existential subject, L<sub>p</sub> stands for word/phrase of existential place):

- ET 1 There+be+N<sub>p</sub>+(L<sub>p</sub>)
- ET 2 There+be+N<sub>p</sub>+relative word (or elliptic relative word)+clause
- ET 3 There+be+N<sub>p</sub>+infinitive structure
- ET 4 There+be+N<sub>p</sub>+past participle
- ET 5 There+be+N<sub>p</sub>+V-ing

## III. A STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF THE CHINESE TRANSLATION OF ENGLISH EXISTENTIAL SENTENCES

We have retrieved 483 English existential sentences from E-C corpus and the distribution of the five common forms is shown in "Table I":

TABLE I. DISTRIBUTION OF FIVE FORMS OF ENGLISH EXISTENTIAL SENTENCES

existential sentence	ET1	ET2	ET3	ET4	ET5
number of examples	300	100	53	9	21
percentage	62.1%	20.7%	11.0%	1.9%	4.3%

<sup>a</sup>. Note: The percentage is the percentage of the number of examples in this form to the total number of English existential sentences.

From the above data, it can be found that the proportion of T1, T2, and T3 is largest, accounting for 93.8%. It can be seen that English existential sentences are distributed in these three forms, i.e. There+be+N<sub>p</sub>+(L<sub>p</sub>), There+be+N<sub>p</sub>+relative word (or elliptic relative word) +clause, There+be+N<sub>p</sub>+infinitive structure. The corresponding situations of five forms of Chinese translation of English existential sentences are discussed below.

### A. The Chinese Translation of "There+be+N<sub>p</sub>+(L<sub>p</sub>)"

"There+be+N<sub>p</sub>+(L<sub>p</sub>)" is the most common and typical form in English existential sentences, which is translated as "某地有某物/某人" in Chinese. There are 300 sentences with the

<sup>1</sup> The corpus used in this paper contains 332,000 words (number of original words) and includes Great Gatsby, Thorn Bird, Camellia Girl and Gone with the Wind (Chapters 1 to 4).

form of "There + be + N<sub>p</sub> + (L<sub>p</sub>)" in the 483 English existential sentences, of which 218 are positive forms and 82 are the negative forms of "There + be + negative + N<sub>p</sub> + (L<sub>p</sub>)". For example:

- (1) There's a bird on the lawn .....  
草坪上 有 一只鸟, .....
- (2) There was an inexplicable amount of dust everywhere .....  
到处 都是 多得莫名其妙的灰尘, .....
- (3) There was a flagpole in front of the Masonic hall; .....  
共济会的门前 立着 一根旗杆, .....
- (4) There was a ripe mystery about it, .....  
(这房子) 充满了 引人入胜的神秘气氛, .....
- (5) There was a long silence in the drawing room, .....  
客厅里 出现了 一阵长时间的沉默, .....

We find that 78% of "There + Be + N<sub>p</sub> + L<sub>p</sub>" sentences are translated into the above five corresponding forms in Chinese, i.e. "You" sentence, "Shi" sentence, fugitive sentence, "Zhe" sentence, and "Le" sentence<sup>2</sup>, as exemplified in (1)-(5). Among them, "You" sentence is the most commonly used corresponding form. Let's look at the negative forms:

- (6) Still there was no sign of Gerald on the quiet winding road.  
寂静、蜿蜒的路上还是 没有 嘉乐的身影。
- (7) ..... there was no question of guilt or innocence, .....  
不存在着 有罪或无罪的问题, .....
- (8) There is no one there.  
(屋里) 没 人。

The statistics show that 85% of "There+be+negation word+N<sub>p</sub>+(L<sub>p</sub>)" sentences are translated into three forms, i.e. "Meiyou" sentence, "Bu" sentence and "Mei" sentence, respectively, such as (6)-(8). "Meiyou" sentence is the most commonly used corresponding form.

#### B. The Chinese Version of "There+be+N<sub>p</sub>+relative word (or elliptic relative word) +clause"

In E-C corpus, there are 100 cases of "There+be+N<sub>p</sub>+relative word (or elliptic relative word) +clause", of which 69 cases are positive form and 31 cases are negative form of "There + be + negative word+ N<sub>p</sub> +

relative word (or elliptic relative word) +clause". For example:

- (9) for there was a stall at my side which remained empty the whole evening, .....  
因为我旁边 有 个座位整个晚上都空着, .....
- (10) ..... there were fine lines of pain on her face that he had never seen before, .....  
她的脸上 出现了 痛苦的细纹, 以前他从未见过。
- (11) There was no indication by a reaction of rage or indignation that she had even heard the last part of what he said.  
听了最后的那句话, 她并 没有 流露出恼怒和愤慨。

The statistical data show that 78.2% of the positive forms of "There+be+N<sub>p</sub>+relative word (or elliptic relative word)+clause" are translated into "You" sentence (case 9) and "fugitive sentence" (case 10), while 80.7% of the negative forms are translated into "Bu/Mei/Wu" sentence and "Meiyou" sentence (case 11).

#### C. The Chinese Version of "There+be+N<sub>p</sub>+Infinitive Structure"

There are 53 cases of "There+be+N<sub>p</sub>+infinitive structure" in the English existential sentences, of which 19 cases are positive forms and 34 cases are negative forms "There + be + negative word+ N<sub>p</sub> + infinitive structure". For example:

- (12) There were the last rites to be administered, in case the soul had not yet left the body; .....  
在灵魂尚未离开尸体的时候, 要 进行最后的礼拜式, ....
- (13) There's no need to swear, Mary.  
这没有起誓的必要, 玛丽。
- (14) ..... and there was no disgrace for a man of paddy's age to love best the books his children also adored: .....  
帕迪这种年纪的人最爱读的书, 孩子们也爱看。这并不是什么丢脸的事。

The statistics show that 78.9% of the positive forms "There+be+N<sub>p</sub>+infinitive structure" are translated into "You" sentence and "Yao + V" sentence (case 12), while 94.1% of its negative forms are translated into "Meiyou" sentence (case 13) and "Bu/Mei/Wu" sentence (case 14).

#### D. Chinese Version of "There+be+N<sub>p</sub>+past participle"

In 483 English existential sentences, 9 are in the form of "There+be+N<sub>p</sub>+past participle", for example:

- (15) There was a man in Brisbane called Inigo Jones who wasn't bad at long-range weather predictions, .....  
布里斯班 有 个叫因格·琼斯的男人, 在长期天气预报方面还算有两下子, .....
- (16) There was another one wasted.

<sup>2</sup> Chinese existential sentence includes existential sentence and fugitive sentence. The "You" sentence, "Shi" sentence, "Zhe" sentence, and "Le" sentence are existential sentences, and the fugitive sentence refers to "LP + V" (了) + NP "(V is the verb of "appear, disappear", tendency verb, or move tendency phrase).

- 这是 又一个被耽误了的人。
- (17)There is something written on the first page. Ten francs.
- 书扉页上 写着 些字, 起价 10 法郎。
- (18)There have been many priests made here, thousands upon thousands, .....
- 这里 造就了 许多教士, 成千上万。

From the statistical data, it is found that 77.8% of the "There+be+N<sub>P</sub>+past participle" are translated into the above four forms in Chinese, i.e. "You" sentence, "Shi" sentence, "Zhe" sentence and "Le" sentence, respectively, as follows (15)-(18).

#### E. Chinese Version of "There + be + N<sub>P</sub> + V-ing"

We retrieve 21 cases of "There + be + N<sub>P</sub> + V-ing" form, of which 13 cases are positive and 8 cases are negative "There + be + negative word + N<sub>P</sub> + V-ing" form, such as:

- (19)There was a boat waiting in Ostend harbor loading immigrants for Australia.
- 在奥斯顿港, 有 一条船正等待着装运去澳大利亚的移民。
- (20)Far too intelligent to pretend there was nothing causing his brown study, .....
- (拉尔夫神父) 机智有余, 没有不自然地装出自己没走过神的样子。

According to statistical data, 76.9% of "There+be+N<sub>P</sub>+V-ing" sentences are translated into "You" sentence (case 19), and 87.5% of its negative forms are translated into "Haowu/Wufa" sentence and "Meiyou" sentence (case 20).

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Through the statistical analysis of the Chinese translation of English existential sentences in E-C corpus, it is found that the corresponding Chinese forms of each type of English existential sentence are shown in "Table II":

TABLE II. DISTRIBUTION OF CORRESPONDING FORMS OF CHINESE TRANSLATION OF ENGLISH EXISTENTIAL SENTENCES

English Existence sentence	Corresponding form of Chinese translation									
	You	Shi	Zhe	Le	fugitive sentence	Mei/Meiyou	Bu/Wu	Haowu/Wufa	other	Total
ET1	113	19	14	14	10	52	18	0	60	300
ET2	49	0	0	0	5	11	14	0	21	100
ET3	14	0	0	0	0	23	6	0	10	53
ET4	4	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	9
ET5	10	0	0	0	0	2	0	5	4	21
Subtotal	190	20	15	15	15	88	38	5	97	483
Percentage	39.3	4.1	3.1	3.1	3.1	18.2	8	1	20.1	100

As can be seen from the table above, in the 483 corresponding forms of Chinese translation of English existential sentences, "You" sentence and "Mei/Meiyou" sentence are the two most commonly used forms, accounting for 39.3% and 18.2% respectively; Secondly, "Bu/Wu" sentence and "Shi" sentence are also common corresponding forms in Chinese translation of existential sentences, accounting for 8% and 4.1% respectively; The proportion of "Zhe" sentence, "Le" sentence, fugitive sentence and "Haowu/Wufa" sentence is small, accounting for 3.1%, 3.1%, 3.1% and 1% respectively. Therefore, about 79.9% of English existential sentences are translated into the above eight Chinese sentence patterns. About 52.7% of the English existential sentences are translated into Chinese existential sentences, i.e. "You" sentence, "Shi" sentence, fugitive sentence, "Zhe" sentence, and "Le" sentence, while the other corresponding forms are not Chinese existential sentences. It can be seen that most English existential sentences are corresponding to Chinese existential form after being translated into Chinese, which shows that the degree of correspondence of English existential sentences after translation is high. In addition to the translator's writing habits and translation methods, the translator often takes into account the syntactic patterns of English in the translation, which makes the Chinese translation is more corresponding to the original English sentence form. Therefore, the induction of the corresponding form of English existential sentences after translation in this study has certain reference value for the application fields such as machine translation or second language teaching.

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