

A Contrastive Study of the English Constructions V + O and V + PP + O and the Differences in Translation

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Abstract. This paper researches in the comparison of V+O and V+PP+O constructions of English verbs and the difference in English-Chinese translation. With the help of real examples in corpus and literatures, we discuss different meaning of the sentences using notional verbs expressing actual behaviors or actions as well as notional verbs expressing psychological activities and experience so as to clarify the reasons of the different meaning from linguistic view and give appropriate translations. It is found that comparing to V+O, the influence of verb to object in V+PP+O is smaller and the relationship between subject and object is farther. The reasons come from the increase of grammatical meaning and linguistic distance caused by the insert of preposition. Thus specific adjustment should be considered in translation because differences in meaning cause differences in translation.

Introduction

English verbs can be divided into two parts: transitive verbs and intransitive verbs. It is depended on whether verbs can be directly followed by objects or not. Transitive verbs can be followed by objects which are the targets of the action. Intransitive verbs cannot be directly followed by the targets of action, while they can only add a preposition before the objects. Some verbs can be both used as transitive verbs or intransitive verbs. Whether a preposition is needed or not depends on specific circumstances. Although constructions containing same verbs have similar basic meaning, the meaning of verbs followed directly by objects is different from that of verbs followed by a preposition and the object. The meaning of V+PP+O constructions is usually based on V+O constructions, but they still have slight difference. So the two kinds of constructions are related but still different in meaning.

Translation process is a recreating process. Translators must consider many aspects of translation equivalence, such as vocabulary, semantics, context, and so on. For different meaning causes different translations, we must analyze the meaning of different constructions in English sentences and clarify the reason so as to give more accurate translation. This paper analyzes the different meaning and translations of V+O and V+PP+O constructions and gives some explanation to the reason.

A lot of English V+O constructions have the forms of V+PP+O. The meaning of them is similar but different. For example: shoot sb. and shoot at sb. are close in meaning but a little different. The former implies a direct hit on someone, and the latter implies that someone is shooting, but the result hit or not is unknown, or we must check the context to find the answer. So the translation of shoot sb. is “击中某人” while the translation of shoot at sb. is “向某人射击”. The insertion of the preposition makes a small change to the action and the relationship between the verb and the object is also changed. The two constructions of those verbs are different in the actual examples, and the reasons for the differences in meaning and translation are complicated.

Example analysis

The author selected some V+O constructions and V+PP+O constructions of English verbs from general English verbs and found some example sentences from literature and COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English). By comparing the meaning of the sentences, we found the difference in translation and classified them into several types according to the concrete manifestation. The verbs can be divided into following categories:

Notional verbs representing actual behaviors or actions. First, The content or scope of action is different. Common verbs such as teach, ask, question, tell, talk, read, hear, often collocate with the preposition, about, to make the content of the action on the target object more widely. It is not confined to the object itself. These verbs can also be followed by direct objects. For example:

(1) He teaches the language.

(2) He teaches about the language.

(3) The candidate should get to know the students a bit by asking names. (COCA)

(4) Asking about the availability of one's classroom and about technology that is available (COCA)

Obviously, there are subtle differences in the meaning of the two kinds of construction after the use of the preposition about. We can translate example (1) as “他教授这门语言。” The object of the sentence refers to the language itself, which contains some basic elements including vocabulary, syntax, semantics and so on; In example (2) the teaching content of the professor may be more than the language itself. Rather, he is teaching some courses related to language, such as linguistics, literature, translation and so on. So when translating, we translate it as “他教授语言方面的课程。” “...方面的课程” expands the scope of the content. Example (3) is a typical V+O construction, which can be translated as: “面试者应该通过询问名字的方式逐渐开始了解学生们。” Here the verb is directly followed by an object because the content is just limited in students' name rather than other aspects. So the subject is directly related to the specific object through the action; We translated sentence (4) as “询问教室及技术等方面是否可用” “等方面” means that the content covers more than the classrooms and technology, while from objective experience we know that classrooms and technology is the most important and indispensable elements in teaching conditions. But actually, in order to ensure the smooth of the lecture, you need to inquiry about other things related to teaching equipments. Therefore, if the direct object is a specific thing, we translate it directly. But if the content of the object is abstract, we need to add some words like “等”、“方面” to make the scope broader and deeper.

Second, the method or approach of the action is different. Many verbs can be directly followed by an object or be followed by a preposition and an object. The use of the preposition will cause a certain semantic difference. When translating another type of verbs, we must consider about the change of meaning related to the method or approach to carry out the action. For example:

(5) Mark flew the plane. [1]

(6) Mark flew in the plane. (ibid.)

(7) Mike rode a horse. (ibid.)

(8) Mike rode on a horse. (ibid.)

The two groups of sentences are both syntactically correct. The difference lies in the alienation of the relationship between the subject and the object after the insert of the barrier, preposition. We can translate sentence (5) as “马克驾驶飞机。” and sentence (6) as “马克乘坐飞机。” The suitable translations of sentence (7) and (8) are “麦克骑了一匹马。” and “麦克坐在一匹马上。” The different translations reflect different meaning. In example (5) and (7), the subject directly controls the object through the verb. That is to say, the driver controls the vehicle on his own; while in example (6) and (8), the subject may not control their vehicles by himself. He may control it in some indirect ways. Maybe there is another person control the vehicle and take him. It is obvious that the use of V+O construction makes the control from the subject to the object more direct and strong. When translating such sentence, we should pay much attention to the context and make suitable adjustment.

Third, the difficulty of the action is different. The kind of situation is more special. The use of preposition makes the degree of difficulty of the subject in V+PP+O construction to perform to the object higher. The author selects C+O and C+PP+O construction of the verb, swim, and searches some typical examples in COCA:

- (9) "Live in the sunshine, swim the sea, drink the wild air." #Ralph Waldo Emerson# (COCA)
- (10) The English Channel was first swum in 1875. (Lester, Franklin & Yokota 2009:503)
- (11) Salmon can swim most of the Columbia River. (ibid.)
- (12) We had swum clear across the lake. (ibid.)
- (13) Tigers are adept swimmers and has been recorded easily swimming across rivers. (COCA)
- (14) A string of imaginary yellow ducks nimbly swam across the sea of his mind. (ibid.)

Example (9) can be translated as "生活在阳光下，遨游大海，畅饮野风。" There is no barrier between the word "swim" and "the sea". It emphasizes the full contact of the subject and the water. We use "遨游" which is in accord with the pursuit of freedom and enjoyment of the nature. Example (10) can be translated as: "1875 年第一次有人横渡英吉利海峡。" As we know, the English Channel is not an easy to swim so that the action is directly connected to the object to show the difficulty and thorough contact with the object. That is why we choose "横渡" not "游". Similarly, example (11) can be translated as "萨蒙几乎可以游过整个哥伦比亚河。" The word "几乎可以" emphasize the difficulty of the swimming process. In example (12) (13) (14), there is a preposition "across" between the verb swim and the object in V+PP+O construction, which shows the rather easy action process. For example, (12) can be translated as: "我们已完全游过这片湖。" Obviously, lake is much easier for people to swim across than sea. The word "完全" can give us a easy feeling. Example (13) can be translated as: "老虎是敏捷的泳将，它们曾被记录下来可以轻而易举地游过河流。" It can be found that swimming is more relaxed. Example (14) is translated as: "一群想象中的小黄鸭敏捷地划过他的脑海。" The yellow ducks do not really swim in mind but come into instantly as a image, so the realization of the action in V+O construction is more quick and easy. The word "划过" is shorter than "游过" in meaning.

Another verb, climb can also show this phenomenon. The author uses regular expressions [climb].[v*] * mountain and [climb].[v*] up * mountain respectively to search in COCA. The result of the former is 292, while the latter has only 16, which indicates that when we describe climbing mountain or other difficult objects, we had better use V+O. When we describe climbing some smaller things of low height, such as ladder, scaffolding, table, tree, using a preposition is more appropriate. Here, we use "登" and "爬" to translate "climb" separately. For example:

- (15) When you climb a mountain, you're going to get views you would never get anywhere else. (COCA)

译：当你登上一座山，你将会看到你从未在任何地方看过的风景。

- (16) As they climbed up the ladder to the roof, the photographer took that famous photograph. (ibid.)

译：当他们爬上了屋顶的梯子，摄影师拍下了那张著名的照片。

Forth, the result or effect of the action is different. When followed directly by the object, the result of some notional verb is usually more successful. However, the effect is weakened when there is a preposition before the object. For example:

- (17) I shot the sheriff. [1]
- (18) I shot at the sheriff. (ibid.)
- (19) She kicked the dog. (ibid.)
- (20) She kicked at the dog. (ibid.)

The two groups of sentences are both grammatically correct, but the meaning is slightly different. Example (17) can be translated as "我击中了州长。" "击中" means that I use some tools successfully hit the sheriff and make him injured or dead; Example (18) can be translated as "我向州长射击了。" That means I just do the shooting action, but as a result, whether the subject has some physical damage or not is not clear from this sentence. So the subject may not have substantial

influence on the object. Therefore, the outcome of the former construction is obviously more effective and horrible than the latter. Example (19) can be translated as “她踢到了那只狗。” Example (20) can be translated as “她踢向了那只狗。” “踢到了” and “踢向了” are different in meaning. The former must be a direct kick on the target, and the latter may be missed. Example (17) and (19) are V+O constructions, and there is no other word between the verb and the object, so the object is directly affected. Example (18) and (20) are V+PP+O constructions, and there is preposition between the verb and the object, so it provides additional information on the potential meaning. Thus we need to find appropriate translation to adapt to the uncertain results of the action.

Notional verbs representing psychological activities and experience. The contrast of V+O and V+PP+O constructions of verbs representing psychological activities and experience are more complex. In this paper, we mainly take the two constructions of the verb, forget, as examples. We will explore whether the insertion of the preposition, about, causes the change of meaning and find appropriate translation.

First of all, the meaning of forget and forget about is very relevant to each other. They both mean “fail to remember; put something out of mind; or neglect unintentionally”[2]. However, there are subtle differences in translation. Usually, when we describe not remembering some specific things, we directly use V+O. For example:

(21) I forgot his E-mail address. [3]

译：我忘记了他的电子邮件地址。

The object of this sentence, E-mail address is a specific thing. So in order to make language concise to maintain the principle of economy, the verb is followed directly by the object and we translated it normally. When the verb, forget, means to ignore some abstract things or distract attention temporarily, “about” is usually inserted in construction. For example:

(22) I just forgot about everything outside of yoga. (COCA)

译：我几乎忘了除瑜伽之外的一切事情。

(23) Don't forget (about) your friends when you send holiday cards. [3]

译：当你赠送假期卡片时不要忘记送给你的朋友们。

Example (22) indicates that the object forgotten is a transient, abstract thing, rather than a specific one. This is an exaggerated expression because the subject just neglects it, not really fail to remember. So we use an adverb “几乎” to make it more appropriate. Similarly, example (25) does not mean to really forget his friends, but omit sending cards to them. So in translation, we add “送给” to represent the abstract thing.

Another situation about the verb phrases, forget it and forget about it, is very interesting and of great significance to find differences. For example: you are in a restaurant and you get into an argument with the waitress because she charged you for a Coke that you never order or even receive. In the end, you say: “Ok, forget it. I will pay for the damn coke.” Here, “forget it” has a negative emotion showing the speaker's angry feelings. We can translated it as “拉倒吧；忘记它算了”。 Another situation: You order a Coke you're your meal at a restaurant. Your waitress brings your meal along with the bill, but not the Coke. She realizes it immediately and says she will go and get it, but you say: “No, forget about it. It is not important.” At this time, “forget about it” implies a more complete absolution and we translate it as “没关系；没事的”。 So in V+PP+O, the meaning may have broader scope and we should translate it more neutrally.

Theoretical explanation

By observing the examples above, we can find that the different translations of English V+O and V+PP+O constructions are depended on the different meaning. In order to keep the meaning equivalence, sometimes we need to do some special adjustment in translation. But what is the reason causing these differences? We find that if there is no preposition between the verb and the object, the influence from the subject to the object is more direct and powerful. When the

preposition added, the influence is weakened. In fact, the preposition plays an important role in adding grammatical meaning to the sentence. Grammatical meaning is usually contrasted with lexical meaning. These meanings are carried by affixes, prepositions, articles, etc. The meanings of grammatical constructions are over and above the meanings of constituent lexical items and this may be very abstract information. [4]

Secondly, the preposition increases distance between the verb and the object. George Yule once expressed that linguistic distance can be simply measured by the amount of language (number of words or syllables) between one element and another. As a general observation, the more linguistic distance there is between any elements in English sentence structure, the more conceptual distance there will be in our interpretation of their relationship.[1] So, in English sentences, if the position of two words are close, their relationship maybe more close; otherwise, there is less relation between them.

Conclusion

This paper researches in the comparison of V+O and V+PP+O constructions of English Verbs and the difference in English-Chinese translation. With the help of real examples in corpus and literatures, we discuss different meaning of the sentences using notional verbs expressing actual behaviors or actions as well as notional verbs expressing psychological activities and experience so as to clarify the reasons of the different meaning and give better translations. From linguistic view, we found that comparing to V+O, the influence of verb to object in V+PP+O is smaller and the relationship between subject and object is farther. The reasons come from the increase of grammatical meaning and linguistic distance caused by the insert of preposition. Thus specific adjustment should be considered in translation because differences in meaning cause differences in translation.

The deficiency of this paper is that the coverage of the selected typical verbs is not wide enough, so it is necessary to for us to collect more materials in the future and try to find some translation theory to solve this problem in practice. Linguistics, especially semantics plays an important role in translation practice. We need to make reasonable prediction of the implied meaning and analyze the difference of expression effect before translating V+O and V+PP+O constructions.

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