

An Analysis of the Two Translations of The Border Town Based on the Differences between the Active and Passive Voice in English and Chinese

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Abstract : In the process of English-Chinese translation, there are many differences in sentence structure, grammatical features, rhetorical devices, methods of expression, ways of thinking, and socio-cultural factors, making it difficult to translate. In particular, the differences and similarities between the English and Chinese translations regarding active and passive usage can easily cause things to go wrong in translation. In English, the passive voice is more considered a common grammatical phenomenon, compared to Chinese where the active form expresses the passive meaning is more dominant. This paper selects the translation of *The Border Town* by Dai Naidie & Yang Xian Yi and Jeffrey C.Kinkley as examples to understand more about the similarities and differences between the two languages through the analysis of the passive and active in the two different structures of English and Chinese to promote the improvement of translation quality.

Keywords: Active Voice; Passive Voice; *The Border Town*; Chinese and Western Differences

1. English translation of Chinese active sentences

In Chinese expressions, the personal subject is the main subject, and the corresponding sentences in the active voice are more easily accepted by language users. Moreover, Chinese passive sentences with passive markers have the semantic feature of indicating unfortunate and unpleasant, so passive sentences are rarely used in Chinese. On the contrary, in English expressions, object subjects are more common, and thus passive constructions are more common. However, even though the active form of Chinese expressions is more acceptable to the language speakers, different expressions of passive semantics exist, so it is very common to translate the active form of Chinese into the passive structure of English.

例：女儿一面怀了羞惭，一面却怀了怜悯。依旧守在父亲身边，待到腹中小孩生下后，却到溪边故意吃了许多冷水死去了。

Dai's Version: Shame and pity kept the girl at her father's side. But as soon as her child was born she killed herself by drinking too much cold stream water.

Jeffrey's Version: The daughter, feeling shame but also compassion, stayed at her father's side until the child was born, whereupon she went to the stream and drowned herself in the cold water.

In the original text, the whole sentences are used with active expressions, and some connecting words are used to link the whole sentences together. But in the treatment of translation, the two translators have handled it differently. First of all, Dai treats the phrase "吃了许多冷水死去了" as "she killed herself by drinking too much cold water." And in Jeffrey's translation, it is treated in the active form and translated as "She went to the stream and drowned herself in the cold water." In contrast, Dai's translation is more in line with the structural form of the English language.

2. English translation of Chinese passive sentences

There are two types of "marked passive sentences" according to different markers, including "marked passive sentences" with "被" and "quasi-marked passive sentences" with "给、让、叫".

3. English translation of Marked Passive Sentences

The word “被” means “to suffer” in ancient Chinese. After the Eastern Han Dynasty, the word “被” was grammaticalized and came to mean passive. The word “被” was once called unfortunate morpheme, which was mainly used to express something unsatisfactory or undesirable for the subject. Modern Chinese has been influenced by Western languages, and the use of “被” has been expanded, and sometimes it can be used to express things that are not as good as they should be and it also used to express something that is not as desired. The following is an analysis of the two versions of The Border Town for the passive sentences with the obvious marker “被” in Chinese.

Example 1: 她记起祖父嘱咐她不要离开原来地方那一句话, 便又为自己解释这想头的错误, 以为祖父不来, 必是进城去或到什么熟人处去, 被人拉着喝酒, 故一时不能来的。

Dai's Version: He had told her to stay where she was, and to disprove her wild notion she assured herself that some friend must have kept him drinking.

Jeffrey's Version: Keeping in mind that Grandpa had asked her to stay in this spot, she tried to disprove the awful thought to herself by imagining that he must have gone into town and run into an acquaintance, maybe been dragged off to have a drink.

Example 2: 那黄狗好像明白翠翠被人欺侮了, 又汪汪的吠起来;

Dai's Version: Brownie started barking again, as if aware that his mistress was offended.

Jeffrey's Version: As if aware that Cuicui had been insulted, the yellow dog began barking again.

Example 3: 不知怎么的, 从城里被人打发来送酒葫芦的, 她觉得好像是个熟人。

Dai's Version: The young man who has brought the gourd has a strangely familiar face.

Jeffrey's Version: She sensed, somehow, that she knew this city fellow who'd been dispatched to return the wine gourd.

From these examples selected, there is certain flexibility for the English translation of passive sentences with absolutely obvious markers in Chinese. Although the noun is immediately followed by the verb, the noun is "general" and does not need to be specifically translated. From this perspective, we can turn our attention to the remaining three examples, in which the perpetrators are all "specific".

4. English translation of Passive sentences without passive verbs

Unlike English, where the subject and the predicate and the active and the passive are distinguishable, Chinese verbs do not have morphological changes. On the other hand, there is no morphological change in Chinese verbs that express behavior, and verbs with the same form can express both active and passive meanings. The use of the passive tense again receives great restrictions. Therefore, the format of “subject + verb” has become an expression habit of the Chinese people since ancient times, and its passive meaning is jointly perceived by the context of the five elements and premonitions of the interlocutor. The tendency to use tense subjects extensively has led to a large number of "Passive sentences without passive verbs". Generally speaking, the more authentic the Chinese language is, the more such sentences are found.

Example 1: 痴着, 忽地站起, 半簸箕豌豆便倾到水中去了。伸手把那簸箕从水中捞起时, 隔溪有人喊过渡。

Dai's Version: In a pet she jumps up. Her peas drop into the water. And as she reaches down to recover the basket, someone hails the ferry from the further shore.

Jeffery's Version: In her own little world, she stood up abruptly, spilling half her pan of peas into the creek. As she retrieved the pan from the water, someone hailed the ferry from the other shore.

Example 2: 边地俗话说: “火是到处可烧的, 水是到处可流的, 日月是到处可照的, 爱情是到处可到的。”

Dai's Version: ...where folk have a saying; There is no place on earth where fire cannot spread, water flow, sun and moon shine, or love make its way.

Jeffery's Version: A common saying in the borderlands was: "Fire can burn and water can flow anywhere; sunshine and moonshine also reach everywhere; and so, too, does love."

From the above examples, we can see that both translations tend to deal with the Passive sentences without passive verbs in the active tense and do not pursue the passive tense.

5. English translation of Chinese sentence without a subject

Chinese is a thematic language, where the subject is the topic rather than the subject, and its syntax is characterized by a

focus on meaning, as long as the meaning is clearly expressed, not requiring formal rigor everywhere. This kind of sentence omits the subject of the act, which is grammatically called the absence of a subject. English, on the other hand, is a language with a significant subject, and its syntax is formal, English requires formal neatness.

Example 1: 小溪既为川湘来往孔道，限于财力不能搭桥，就安排了一只方头渡船。

Dai's Version: The water fluctuates considerably, and while there is no money to build a bridge a ferry has been provided a barge which holds about twenty men and horses---more than that and it has to make a second trip.

Jeffery's Version: This little stream was a major chokepoint for transit between Sichuan and Hunan, but there was never enough money to build a bridge. Instead the locals set up a square-nosed ferryboat that could carry about twenty passengers and their loads.

In the original text, the entire sentence is expressed in the active structure. In the last half of the sentence,“就安排了一只方头渡船”is a typical unattributed statement. The two translators, Dai Naidian and Jin Jiefu, have adopted very different approaches to the translation of this sentence. In Dai's translation, he translates “方头渡船” as "ferry" and raises it to the beginning of the sentence as a passive sentence. On the contrary, in Jin's translation, he adds a "subject" according to the semantics of the context and translates it as an active form. From the perspective of the transformation of the subject-passive form, Dai's translation is more appropriate to the thinking and expression habits of English speakers.

Conclusion

In this paper, we analyze the active and passive forms of translation in the translation of *The Border Town* by Dai & Yang and the translation by Jeffery and summarize the analysis, firstly, we clarify the reasons why there are fewer passive forms in Chinese, and analyze them from four aspects, namely, the reasons for the administration, syntactic requirements, rhetorical considerations, and stylistic needs. The differences in the forms and usage of active and passive voice in English and Chinese are compared and contrasted. It is found that English mostly uses passive forms; however, in Chinese expressions, the expression of active sentences is more dominant, and passive sentences in Chinese are divided into obvious marked passive sentences, unmarked passive sentences, and course passive sentences, and Chinese either uses the active voice to express passive meanings or other sentences that can express passive meanings such as no main clause. All in all, the passive voice is the dominant form in English expressions, while the active form is more common in Chinese expressions.

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