International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Growth Evaluation.

On the cultural differences between English and Chinese on the basis of a contrastive analysis of the introductory *It* pattern and Its Chinese Translation

SHI Xiutang [iD]
Foreign Languages School, Kaili University, Guizhou 556011, PR China

* Corresponding Author: **SHI Xiutang**

Abstract
This paper focuses on one of the English introductory *It* patterns, which is known as Thematised Comment in the Theme-rheme theory of Functional Grammar, and its Chinese translation. By examining the self-built micro-corpus, we find that in such English sentences commenting words are usually put at the beginning part and the relating parts come after, stating the facts or reasons, while the Chinese versions are usually the other way round. This language characteristic reflects the different cultural psychology or thinking habits of the two nations, which, I believe, is caused, in turn, by the different productive forces and production relations between the two places. At the same time I hold that it remains to be proven whether there are factors of geographical environment, or even of race. In short, the two languages have their respective characteristics, and it's not a wise idea to say one is better or worse than the other. In essence, translation, in a sense, is a transformation of thinking mode. Only by understanding the thinking characteristics underlying the target language, can language learners realize the transformation between languages more quickly and more smoothly.

1. Introduction
Here I do not intend to explore Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which refers to the claim that features of one's language affect one's thoughts (linguistic determinism), so that different languages foster different conceptual systems (linguistic relativity). [1] On the contrary, I am trying to prove the other way round, that is, the language of a group embodies its cultural and even thinking characteristics. In other words, under the language, which we can observe, is culture, and under the culture lies thinking. The way of thinking determines the cultural characteristics, which manifest themselves in the language and speech acts in addition to other behavior modes. English is one of the most important members of the Indo-European language family, and Chinese is a major language of the Chinese-Tibetan language family. The phonetic, writing and grammar systems of the two languages are distinctly different, each reflecting the cultural characteristics and thinking characteristics of its ethnic group. This paper focuses on one of the English introductory *It* patterns, which is known in the Theme-rheme theory of Functional Grammar as Thematised Comment, [2] 127-129 and its Chinese translation. As for the English introductory *It* pattern, many researches have been done in China and other countries on this linguistic phenomenon, but these studies have limited their discussion to classification of the pattern, translation skills relevant to the pattern or parameters affecting the use of the pattern by different groups of people, such as Zhang Zhenbang (1995) [3], Liu Fulian (2011) [4], LUO Liumei (2014) [5], Tove Larsson (2017) [6], Richmond Sadick Ngula (2018) [7], etc.. In my eyes they only deal with the external aspects of the sentence pattern, far from touching the cultural characteristics and way of thinking contained in the pattern. Shi Xiutang & Yang Ying (2012) [8] analyzed the English introductory *It* patterns from the perspective of functional grammar and culture, with focus on interpreting the sentence pattern so as to help English learners in China understand better the function and cultural tints of such sentences.

In contrast, this paper tries to make a contrastive study of the sentence pattern and its Chinese translation, and then dig out the distinctive cultural characteristics and thinking habits of the British and Chinese nationalities, as well as the possible factors that cause the differences between the two nationalities.

2. Thematised Comment and its Chinese translation
The following sentences are all typical Thematised Comments:
1. It's illegal to drive without a license.
2. It was pleasant meeting you in London that day.
3. It was not known whether there was gold left in the mine.
4. It doesn't matter whether/if we are a bit late.
5. It's a pity that you can't stay longer.

Translated into Chinese, they can be as follows respectively
1. '无证驾驶是非法的 (illegal).
2. '那天在伦敦遇见你真是令人愉快 (pleasant).
3. '矿山是否还剩下金子尚不知晓 (not known).
4. '我们是否迟到一点不重要 (doesn't matter).
5. '你不能再多停留些时间，真是遗憾. (a pity).

Through a simple comparison one can easily see that in the English and the Chinese versions, the position of the words expressing the comments, views or judgement of the speaker is in sharp contrast, with "illegal", "pleasant", "not known", "doesn't matter", "a pity" located at the beginning of the English sentences (let's call it CR pattern, namely Comment-Relating), while in Chinese translations their counterparts appearing at the end of the sentences (RC pattern). Some may think that the translation of the above English sentences is subjectively done by the author of this article. Then, in order to clear such doubts, I randomly decided to choose a set of course book used for many years by many universities in the mainland of China as the survey object. I collected all the texts, built a mini corpus, retrieved all the Thematised Comments and compared them with the Chinese translations in the corresponding teachers' books. When translating such sentences, the course book compilers could be believed to be in a relatively "natural" state. At least it can be sure that they couldn't offer their translations just to cater to my purpose of writing the present article. After all, I have no knowledge of any of the compilers and vice versa.

3. Empirical research on the corpus: data support
The set of course book I chose is *Innovation College English (integrated course)*, published by East China Normal University Press in 2016-2018 in Shanghai (the second edition), with FU Yonglin as the chief editor, which includes 4 books, a total of 48 texts, 36589 word tokens, 5662 word types. I used *antconc3.2.4w* to search the self-built micro corpus, and got a total of 59 Thematised Comments. Due to the limited space here, it is not appropriate to list all, only picking up randomly the first five as below:

6. It's natural for some homesickness to accompany your first two or three weeks of adjusting to college dorm life.
Chinese translation：在适应大学宿舍生活的最初两三周里，思乡心切是很自然的。

7. During that stretch of days it was tough to maintain my 60 miles per day average.
Chinese translation：在那段日子里，要保持平均日行60英里真够呛。

8. Once children reach age 10 or 12, it is very difficult to change their habits or force them to eat healthier foods.
Chinese translation：一旦孩子年满十或十二岁，就很难改变他们的习惯或强迫他们吃更健康的食物。

9. It saddened me to see others walk past the prisoners looking straight ahead or with eyes averted so as not to acknowledge their presence.
Chinese translation：看到路人经过他们身边时，要么直视前方，要么避而不见，我感到难过。

10. It was heart-warming to see their eyes light up as they returned the smile, none of us speaking a word.
Chinese translation：自始至终，我们谁都没说一句话。但看到他们回以笑意时眼中闪动的光亮，心里暖洋洋的。[9]

Among these examples, only the translation of sentence (8) does not meet my expectation, that is, the Chinese counterpart of "difficult" does not appear at the end of the Chinese version, but it is not impossible. On the contrary, it can be done easily. It can be acceptable without any problem if translated as "一旦孩子年满十或十二岁，再想改变他们的习惯或强迫他们吃更健康的食物就很难了", in which the commenting word is put at the end. I examined, screened and analyzed the 59 sentences and their translations one by one and found 37 translations in line with my expectations, accounting for 62.7%, which is very close to the percentage of 66% obtained from a small-scale field survey I conducted 12 years ago among the Chinese teachers teaching English and students of English major.[8] Of the remaining 22, only about three are not very easy to translate into RC pattern. The emergence of the more than 30% should be ascribable to two aspects: the translator's personal Chinese expression habits and the changes in word order of Chinese sentences since the end of Qing Dynasty, due to the influence of foreign languages, especially European and American languages (English, to be exact). Many scholars on both sides of the Taiwan Straits have noticed and dealt with the topic of Europeanization of Chinese language, but failed to come to an all-agreed conclusion. No matter whether the existence of Europeanization phenomenon is acknowledged or not, Mr.WANG Li's view should be easy to be accepted by the majority of Chinese academic circle: "Modern Chinese has accepted and is accepting the great influence of Western languages, including grammar, which is an undeniable fact. But until now, it has been proved that Chinese accepts this influence in accordance with its own internal development rules."[10] Another scholar also asserted," That is to say, only the Europeanization that conforms to the language habits and cultural psychology of the Chinese nation can eventually become a part of the Chinese language."[11] During the time of more than 100 years all that could be changed has changed,

and so the percentage of more than 60% of RC mode can be regarded as a kind of retention and persistence of Chinese, and therefore it can be seen as one of traditional Chinese typical characteristics, for it stood up to all kinds of impact for such a long time.

4. Analysis: In the final analysis, it is the difference in thinking

It can be seen from above that, as far as the position of the key information in the introductory *It* pattern is concerned, the English version and its Chinese counterpart are usually opposite. This language characteristic reflects the different cultural psychology or thinking habits of the two nations. As we all know, the character of native English speakers in interpersonal communication,as apposed to Chinese people, is their tendency to go straight to the point. "Westerners' character or thinking habit is being direct, clear, outgoing, confident, and explicit, while Chinese people's character is indirect, fuzzy, introverted, modest and implicit. These characteristics may manifest themselves, more or less, in language and language use, from time to time. After all, one's way of thinking and ideas will naturally show up through speech and other behavior."[8] When uttering a sentence, if the speaker, intentionally or unintentionally, delays showing his or her own attitude until the end, that is a kind of implicitness and fuzziness. Others can make such a judgement that he or she is not straightforward enough. However, that is only a difference that we can see at the verbal level. The root can be traced to the different thinking habits of the two nations, and the formation of thinking habits is the result of many social and cultural factors.

I used to probe into the English negative sentences, and learned that the negative word, which expresses the attitude or judgment of the speaker, used to be "implicitly" put at the end of the sentence until the 15th and 16th centuries, such as:

I love thee not.
He saw you not. [12]
We know, of course, now the case is:
I did not love you.
He did not see you.

I think one of the important factors contributing to these language changes is the changing mindset of English-speaking people in different historical periods, which, in turn, is caused by the great social changes brought about by the unprecedented development of productivity. "The development of productivity has brought about changes at all levels of society, which in turn leads to changes in people's mentality and thinking, which ultimately evolve into changes in the language at the surface."[13]"One of the impacts and changes that development of productivity and social changes brought to people's state of mind and thinking is their pursuit of greater and greater efficiency, which means a faster and faster pace of life. Under such circumstances, people were becoming more and more eager or impatient and straightforward, and they took a more and more pragmatic attitude towards everything. When it comes to use of language, that is, when people exchange information the speaker tend to put the most important information forward, which usually includes his/her attitude."[13] This is a discourse strategy to avoid redundant and verbose information. According to Scollon's analysis of intercultural communication, C-B-S (clarity-brevity-sincerity) was not the

discourse style Western writers had always preferred from the very beginning (as demonstrated by the negative examples above). By the Middle Ages, their expression of ideas had still been largely inductive, a more roundabout rhetorical strategy. C-B-S is thought to be advocated and led by the Royal Society of 17th-century Britain. At that time, with the rise of science and technology and the gradual development of commerce, this pragmatic or utilitarian discourse style was gradually becoming the mainstream way for people to conduct effective communication.[14]99 It is not known whether the introductory *It* pattern discussed in this article was formed at that time (which needs to be viewed from the diachronic corpus), which is not so important, but at least this sentence pattern is very well in line with the westerners' tendency in choosing discourse strategies, which, in turn, is determined mainly by their characters of being relatively extroverted, confident and open. Regardless of when this sentence pattern originated and what factors caused its appearance, at least from the results we can see, between the two paradigms of CR and RC, the English-speaking nations ultimately chose the former while the Chinese-speaking nations chose the latter. At the same time, Thematised Comment allows the speakers to show their attitude at the beginning part of their utterance, which reflects a sense of what Scollon called "time urgency" that people living in the utilitarian discourse system commonly have. The discourse strategy Chinese speakers habitually choose is that relating comes first and commenting after-the speaker's attitude was kept hidden until the end. This is consistent with the inductive rhetoric strategy that Scollon thought the Easterners usually adopt. It is also consistent with the implicit and indirect characteristics of Chinese culture. Scollon also pointed out that the sense of "time urgency" is spreading around the world, with more and more internationalization of business and government, to wherever people live in the utilitarian discourse system.[14]146 For more than a century, under the influence of Western languages and thanks to China's carrying out reform and opening up, Chinese society has undergone tremendous changes, somewhat like what happened in Britain several centuries ago, and the pace of life of people here has been greatly accelerated. Therefore, the discourse mode of CR has gradually appeared within the scope of grammar, such as the above example (8).

5. Conclusion

What I want to clarify above is the development of British social productivity promoted the great change of the local society, leading to people's mentality becoming more pragmatic and eager, which eventually manifests itself at the level of language and language use, with comments appearing at the beginning of the sentence, and the details of the statement in the following. The case in Chinese is mostly the other way round. In addition to social productivity and production relations, are there any other factors such as geographical environment and even race that cause the English and Chinese nationalities to form such different thinking habits, mindsets and language systems? I do not hold any racism, but just doubt that different genes may have some different characteristics, which may affect people's way of thinking and psychological tendency, and eventually produce two distinctive language systems. As to their respective languages with the distinctive characteristics, it's not a wise idea to say one is better or worse than the other. After all, sometimes being direct and confident can more satisfactorily

meet communication needs, while sometimes euphemistic, implicit and modest expression can produce better communication effects.

In essence, translation is sort of a transformation of thinking mode. Only by understanding the thinking characteristics underlying the target language, can language learners manipulate the transformation between languages more quickly and more smoothly.

6. References

1. https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopedia-of-chinese-language-and-linguistics/sapir-whorf-hypothesis-COM_000092
2. Thompson, G. Introducing Functional Grammar [M]. London: Edward Arnold/Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 1996/2000.
3. Zhang Zhenbang. A New English Grammar Coursebook [M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 1995, 493-500.
4. Liu Fulian. Cognitive Schema of *It*-sentence Patterns and Their Translation [J]. Journal of Heilongjiang College of Education. 2011; 30(1):138-140.
5. Luo Liumei. *It*-sentence Patterns with a Distinct Attitude [J]. Guangdong Education (High School). 2014; 30(1):36-52.
6. Larsson T. A functional classification of the introductory *it* pattern: Investigating academic writing by non-native-speaker and native-speaker students [J]. English for Specific Purposes. 2017; 48:57-70.
7. Ngula RS. A Corpus-Based Study of the Phraseological Pattern *It + V-link + ADJ + That Clause* in L1 and L2 Expert Academic Writing [J].International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature. 2018; 7(5):127-134.
8. Shi Xiutang, Yang Ying. Examination and Interpretation of *It*-sentence Pattern in English from the Perspective of Functional Grammar and Culture [J]. Journal of Shangluo University. 2012; 26(4):57-59-84.
9. Fu Yonglin, *et al*. Innovation College English (Integrated Course) [M]. Shanghai: East China Normal University Press, 2016-2018.
10. Li Chunyang.One hundred years of achievements and demerits of the Europeanization of Chinese [J]. Social Science Forum, 2014; 12:76-109.
11. Zou Minggui.On the Influence of "Europeanization" on Modern Chinese Translation: Reviews of Translation and the Changes of Modern Chinese (1905-1936) [J]. Contemporary Education Sciences, 2014, 09.
12. Dai Weidong, He Zhaoxiong. A New Concise Course in Linguistics for Students of English [M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2010, 97.
13. Shi Xiu Tang, SU Meijuan. Our Analysis of the Prototypical Form of Transferred Negatives in English [J]. Journal of Ankang University. 2015; 27(1):37-39.
14. Scollon R, SW Scollon. Intercultural Communication: A Discourse Approach [M]. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2000.