

# A Contrastive Study of Potential and Practical Errors in On-line Translation Due to Linguistic Differences in Chinese, English and Japanese

Yukito SETA and JIANG Fan\*

Nowadays, some students in China often use on-line translators when they have to write papers, especially the abstract in English or in Japanese. However, the morphological and syntactic differences in Chinese, English and Japanese frequently lead to problems in translation. The present paper aims at exploring the major morphological and syntactic differences among the three languages and demonstrating how these major differences affect translation rendered by on-line translators. Totally, 8 main differences are identified and illustrated with examples. The study might be helpful for the Chinese users of on-line translators and their developers.

Keywords : Chinese, English, Japanese, contrastive study, morphology, syntax, on-line translator

## 1. Introduction

Presently in China, it is a requirement for university students to write the abstract for papers in English or in Japanese. Because of the limited English proficiency, most students resort to free on-line translators, which are easily accessible. Numerous on-line translators are now available, such as Google translator (<http://translate.google.com>), Youdao translator (<http://fanyi.youdao.com>), Yahoo translator (<http://babelfish.yahoo.com>), etc. However, these translators can not always satisfy the users because the translations are sometimes very strange or even incomprehensible. In addition to the misuse of words, problems mainly occur due to the morphosyntactic differences in the three languages. Then what are the major morphosyntactic differences in Chinese, English and Japanese? What should be paid attention to when a text is translated

from Chinese into English or Japanese? The present paper aims at exploring these questions roughly and hopefully it might be of some help to students who use the on-line translators in China and those on-line translator developers.

## 2. Research Design

Chinese, English and Japanese differ morphologically and syntactically in many aspects. In order to examine the efficacy of the on-line translators, fundamentally we have to clarify the basic distinctions in the three languages both morphologically and syntactically. The following section is mainly concerned with a contrastive analysis of the differences. First, a theoretical analysis of the differences between Chinese, English and Japanese are presented, which is followed by one or two examples rendered

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by using Youdao, the widely used on-line translator in China. Thus designed, the potential and practical problems can be clearly identified.

### 3. Results and Discussion

Chinese is different from English and Japanese in many significant respects, among which the following might be particularly relevant to the present study.

#### 3.1. Parataxis and Hypotaxis

The foremost difference between Chinese and English and also between Chinese and Japanese lies in the fact that Chinese is a paratactic language while English and Japanese are hypotactic ones. According to *The New Oxford Dictionary of English*, “parataxis” is defined as “the placing of clauses or phrases one after another, without words to indicate coordination or subordination, as in *Tell me, how are you?*”.<sup>1)</sup>

On the other hand, “hypotaxis” is defined as “the subordination of one clause to another.” Obviously, Chinese is a paratactic language, which rarely uses conjunctions for linking phrases, clauses or sentences. For example, “天阴了。要下雨。快点回家吧。(It’s cloudy. It’s going to rain. Let’s hurry home.)” Contrastively, English is a hypotactic language, which uses conjunctions to show coordination or subordination. Therefore, in the English translation of the last two Chinese sentences (“要下雨。快点回家吧。”), a conjunction must be used to indicate the cause and effect relationship as in “It’s going to rain, *so* let’s hurry home.” The same can be said about the Japanese translation of the Chinese sentences. A conjunctive particle like “から (*kara*)” is necessary as in “雨が降りそうだから、早く家に帰りましょう。(ame ga furisou-da *kara*, hayaku ie ni kaeri-mashou).” In light of this difference, when the Chinese students translate Chinese into English or Japanese, they have to consider the logical relationship between clauses (or sentences) and add appropriate conjunctions or conjunctive particles.

Now, consider the following examples (where

an asterisk (\*) means that the sentence is not grammatical or acceptable):

- (1) Original C(hinese) text: 不快走, 就赶不上车了。
- (2) a. Standard E(nglish) translation: If you don’t hurry, you won’t catch the bus.<sup>2)</sup>  
b. Standard J(apanese) translation: もし急がなければ, バスに乗り遅れますよ。(moshi isoganakereba basu ni noriokure masu-yo)
- (3) a. On-line E translation: \*Walk very fast, he missed the first bus.  
b. On-line J translation: \*歩いて置いて車に不快感を与えました。(aruite oite kuruma ni fukaikan wo atae mashi-ta)

The first Chinese clause “不快走” sets the condition for the second one “就赶不上车了。” In Chinese, however, no conjunction is needed to express this logic “如果(=if).” Therefore, when sentence (1) is translated into English or Japanese, a conjunction or a conjunctive particle is needed to show this logic.

In the case of on-line Japanese translation (3b), a syntactic problem can also be seen. In (1) the Chinese adverb “不” modifies, i.e. negates the whole verb phrase “快走”, not “快” alone. The on-line translator, however, incorrectly identifies “不快” as a unit which means “*fukai-kan* (an unpleasant feeling).”

Consider another example:

- (4) Original C text: 我有钱, 他没有。
- (5) a. Standard E translation: I have money, but he doesn’t.  
b. Standard J translation: 私はお金を持っているが, 彼は持っていない。(watashi wa o-kane o motte-iru ga, kare wa motte-inai)
- (6) a. On-line E translation: \*I’m rich, he doesn’t.  
b. On-line J translation: \*私は金があり, 彼がなかったのだ。(watashi wa kane ga ari, kare ga nakatta noda)

Sentence (4) shows the contrast between the state described by the first clause and that by the second one. As has been discussed above, in

Chinese no conjunction is needed to show this kind of contrast, whereas in English and Japanese a conjunction like “but” and a conjunctive particle like “が(*ga*)” is required as shown in (5a) and (5b), respectively. Quite interestingly, in the second clause of on-line Japanese translation (6b), if “が(*ga*)” is changed to “は(*wa*)” and the tense is changed from past to present, i.e. from “なかつた(*nakatta*)” to “ない(*nai*),” the sentence may sound better.

Put aside the totally misleading translation rendered on-line, the Chinese learners should keep in mind that an appropriate conjunctive element is needed to link the two clauses in both English and Japanese.

### 3.2. Subject Prominence

Chinese is a language which does not necessitate the use of subject for the sake of economy. In actual language use, the subject is often omitted provided that what is being referred to is clear to the conversation participants or readers. However, it is the opposite case for English, which makes use of subject essential for nearly all sentences, except for imperatives and special styles such as diaries, and cases where subjects are easily understood by means of syntactic structures as seen in the sentence below:

- (7) The dog chased the boy, and went downhill.  
(i.e. the dog, not the boy, went downhill)

Now observe the following sentences:

- (8) Original C text: 对不起。来晚了。  
(9) a. Standard E translation: I'm sorry (that) I'm late.  
b. Standard J translation: 遅れて申し訳ありません。(okurete moushiwake arimasen)  
(10) a. On-line E translation: \*I'm sorry, came late.  
b. On-line J translation: \*申し訳ございませんが、遅れてきた。(moushiwake gozaimasen ga okurete kita)

In sentence (8), the covert (i.e. hidden) subject is considered to be “我(=I).” However,

when the sentence is translated into English, the subject is missing, thus making the translation faulty as seen in (10a).<sup>3)</sup> Unlike English, Japanese has a similar characteristic to Chinese in terms of subject prominence as shown in (9b), where the subject of each clause does not appear. Incidentally, on-line translation (10b) sounds strange due to the wrong choice of a conjunctive particle “が(*ga*)” and the translation of “来了,” “きた(*kita*),” which indicates past tense.

In addition, the subject in Chinese is usually actualized by animate nouns, while in English there are a large number of inanimate nouns used as the subject, which is shown in the following examples:<sup>4)</sup>

- (11) Original C text: 喝一杯葡萄酒。你会感觉好点。  
(12) a. Standard E translation: A glass of wine will make you feel better.  
Cf. ?If you drink a glass of wine, your feelings will be better.  
b. Standard J translation: 葡萄酒を一杯飲めば、気分がよくなりますよ。(budoushu o ippai nomeba, kibun ga yokunarimasu-yo)  
Cf. ?いっぱい葡萄酒が君の気分をよくするだろう。(ippai no budoushu ga kimi no kibun o yokusuru-darou)  
(13) On-line E translation: ??Drink a glass of wine, you will feel better.

In sentence (11), the subject of the second clause is “你(=you)” and the covert subject in the first clause is also “你(=you).” In Japanese sentence (12b), the covert subject of the first clause is the same as the Chinese sentence, but unlike Chinese, the (overt) subject is “(あなたの)気分((your) feelings),” which is inanimate. In English sentence (12a), however, the subject is “a glass of wine,” which is inanimate. When we examine on-line English translation (13), we will see that if a conjunction like “and” is added, the sentence will sound much better. But as mentioned above, English prefers inanimate subjects, so the Chinese learners should be careful for the selection of subjects when they

translate Chinese into English.

Ikegami (1981) proposes to divide languages into “*suru* (=do)” type and “*naru* (=become)” type; the “*suru*” type languages pay more attention to an individual concerned, i.e. an agent involved in an event, so that he/she can be prominent in the expressions by the languages, while “*naru*” type languages capture an event as a whole, paying more attention to the course of the event than to an individual (i.e. agent) involved in it. Japanese is said to belong to “*naru*” type, and English to “*suru*” type. This typological difference can be seen in the following examples: <sup>5)</sup>

- (14) Original C text: 出发的日子已经定下来了。  
 (15) a. Standard E translation: We have decided the date of our departure.  
 b. Standard J translation: 出発の日が決まった。(shuppatsu no hi ga kimatta)  
 (16) On-line E translation: ?The day of departure has been decided.

In sentence (14), “出发的日子 (the day of departure)” is the subject, which is similar to Japanese sentence (15b), where “出発の日 (the date of departure),” the counterpart of “出发的日子,” is the subject. From this similarity with Japanese, Chinese can also be classified as “*naru*” type. In English sentence (15a), however, the subject is “we,” not “the date of our departure.” This clearly shows that English tends to select an agent as the subject to make him/her prominent in the event where the agent is involved. From this it is suggested that the Chinese learners be aware of the difference in the selection of subjects between Chinese (Japanese as well) and English so that they can make more natural the English sentences rendered by on-line translators.

### 3.3. Inflections

Chinese is said to be an isolating or analytic language, where “all the words are invariable: there are no endings.” (Crystal (1987: 293)) Thus, in Chinese, grammatical meanings including grammatical relationships are shown through the use of other words or the location

of words, that is, word order. Grammatical meanings are not shown by morphology such as inflectional endings.

Japanese, on the other hand, is said to be an agglutinative or agglutinating language, where “words are built up out of a long sequence of units, with each unit expressing a particular grammatical meaning, in a clear one-to-one way.” (Crystal (*ibid.*: 293))

English seems to be a rather complicated language: it has some characteristics common to an inflecting or synthetic language, where grammatical meanings including grammatical relationships are shown by the use of inflectional endings. It also has some common characteristics with an isolating language and an agglutinative language, which are already mentioned above. <sup>6)</sup>

It is, however, unquestionable that English incorporates the system of showing number, tense, voice, etc. by the use of inflectional endings. Thus, when Chinese is translated into English, attention must be paid to the inflectional endings.

Now consider the following example:

- (17) Original C text: 这些男老师很受欢迎。  
 (18) a. Standard E translation: These male teachers are very popular.  
 b. Standard J translation: これらの男性教員はとても人気があります。(korera no dansei-kyouin wa totemo ninki ga arimasu)  
 (19) a. On-line E translation: \*These male teacher is very popular.  
 b. On-line J translation: \*これらの男性の先生が人気を呼んでいる。(korera no dansei no sensei ga ninki o yonde-iru)

Apparently, the error in on-line translation (19a) occurs in the use of plurality. “这些” means “these,” and as the grammar says, “these” in English should be followed by nouns in a plural form. This point should be born in mind when the Chinese learners use the on-line translator.

In the case of the Japanese translation, this kind of problem does not occur, because

Japanese does not use morphology to indicate number: compare “*kono* (=this) *sensei* (=teacher)” with “*korerano* (=these) *sensei* (=teachers).” The reason why on-line translation (19b) is unacceptable seems to be an unnatural combination of the predicate “*ninki* (=popularity) *o yobu* (=call)” with the animate subject “*sensei/kyouin* (=teacher(s))” and the wrong choice of a case particle “*ga*.”

Observe one more example:

- (20) Original C text: 至于岡山, 葡萄很有名。  
 (21) a. Standard E translation: As for Okayama, grapes are very famous.  
 b. On-line E translation: \*As for Okayama, grape is very famous.

Here again, we can see another problem concerning inflection: in the English translation, “葡萄(=grape)” should be translated into a plural form, because the English word “grape” is a countable noun and when it is used as “generic,” it should be in a plural form.

A little more serious problem can be observed in another kind of example:

- (22) Original C text: 最近, 我妹妹在教日语。  
 (23) a. Standard E translation: My sister is teaching Japanese these days.  
 b. On-line E translation: \*Recently, my sister in Japanese.  
 (24) a. Standard J translation: 最近, 私の妹は日本語を教えています。(saikin, watashi no imouto wa nihongo o oshiete-imasu)  
 b. On-line J translation: \*最近, 私の妹に教えることをつけることにした。(saikin, watashi no imouto ni oshierukoto o tsukeru kotonni shita)

From the results of on-line translations (23b) and (24b), we can say that the Chinese progressive aspect is very difficult to express in English and Japanese, where the progressive form is roughly represented by the formula “tensed *be* + verb in its *ing* form” and “verb + *te-iru/-ita*,” respectively. Again, the Chinese learners should be careful for the formula of progressives in English and Japanese.

### 3.4. Use of Prepositions

Chinese uses relatively fewer prepositions, while English uses a large number of prepositions together with nouns. This is another area of major difference. The following examples well illustrate this point.

- (25) Original C text: 我把她的事告诉了妈妈。  
 (26) a. Standard E translation: I told my mother about her.  
 b. Standard J translation: 私はお母さんに彼女のことを話した。(watashi wa o-kaasan ni kanojo no koto o hanashita)  
 (27) a. On-line E translation: \*I told her mother.  
 b. On-line J translation: \*私は彼女のことを伝えたお母さん。(watashi wa kanojo no koto o tsutaeta o-kaasan)

In English, the word “tell” is usually used as “tell someone about something.” But the Chinese counterpart “告诉(=tell)” needs no preposition to convey the same meaning. The fact is more evident in on-line translation (30a) below.

In the case of Japanese translation (27b), the problem is not the choice of a preposition but the word order of “*tsutae-ta/hanashi-ta* (=told)” and “*o-kaasan* (= (my) mother)” and the lack of a case particle “*ni*,” which must be added to “*o-kaasan*.”

Consider also another example:

- (28) Original C text: 山脚下, 小河边, 小路上, 到处都是垃圾。  
 (29) a. Standard E translation: Garbage is everywhere, at the foot of the hills, near the river and on the lane.  
 b. Standard J translation: 山麓(や), 川辺(や), 路上など, いたるところにゴミが散乱している。(sanroku (ya), kawabe (ya), rojou nado, itarutokoro ni gomi ga sanran shite-iru)  
 (30) a. On-line E translation: \*At the foot of the mountain, the river, the lane, all place is rubbish.  
 b. On-line J translation: \*ふもとに小さい川で小道をしようとも, いずれも処はすべてごみなのです。(fumoto ni chiisai

*kawa de komichi o shiyoutomo, izuremo-tokoro wa subete gomi nanodesu)*

When specifying the location in English, prepositions are often used as in (29a) above. The difference between (28) and (29a) testifies to the fact that when Chinese is translated into English, proper prepositions must be used. In the case of Japanese translation, however, postpositions (not prepositions) are not always required when Chinese is translated into Japanese, which is exemplified in (29b). It seems to us that in on-line Japanese translation (30b), addition of postpositions makes the translation worse, though the whole sentence is anomalous and hard to understand.

### 3.5. Subject-verb Agreement

In Chinese, subjects and predicates are not required to be in accord with each other in person and number. However, in English, the predicate must accord with the subject in person and number. The following example reveals that subject-verb agreement is another area prone to errors in translation.

(31) Original C text: 瓶子里有一些酒。

(32) a. Standard E translation: There is some wine in the bottle.

b. Standard J translation: ボトル／瓶の中にはいくらかワインが入っている。  
(*botoru/bin no naka niwa ikuraka wain ga haitte-iru*)

(33) a. On-line E translation: \*There are some wine in the bottle.

b. On-line J translation: \*瓶の中はいくつかの酒を飲んだ。(bin no naka wa ikutsukano sake o non-da)

In on-line English translation (33a), the subject is “(some) wine,” which must accord with the verb *be* in person and number.<sup>7)</sup> Since the word “wine” is an uncountable noun, the verb should be “is,” not “are.”

Like Chinese, Japanese does not require subjects to accord with predicates in person and number. Therefore, we cannot expect errors in translation such as the one recognized

in on-line English translation (33a). On-line Japanese translation (33b) shows a defect in translating Chinese existential sentences (or “*there* constructions”) into Japanese. “瓶子 (=bottle) 里 (=in)” in (31) means a place where “some wine” exists or is located, but as (33b) clearly shows, “瓶子里” is misinterpreted as the subject (i.e. “grammatical subject”) in translation. Quite importantly, this kind of tendency can be found in English translation as well as Japanese translation, as exemplified in the following sentences:

(34) Original C text: 这个小动物园里有很多猴子。

(35) a. Standard E translation: There are many monkeys in the small zoo.

b. Standard J translation: この小さな動物園にはたくさんの猿がいます。(kono chiisana doubutsuen niwa takusanno saru ga imasu)

(36) a. On-line E translation: \*This small are there many monkeys in the zoo.

b. On-line J translation: \*この小動物園はたくさん猿だった。(kono shou-doubutsuen wa takusan saru datta)<sup>8)</sup>

“这个 (=this) 小 (=small)” in on-line English translation (36a) and “这个 (=this) 小动物园 (=small zoo) 里 (=in)” in on-line Japanese translation (36b) are misinterpreted to be the subject of the sentence, respectively. This clearly suggests that the Chinese learners be careful in translating Chinese existential sentences into English or Japanese when they use the on-line translator.

### 3.6. Locus of Personal Pronoun “I” in Subject Position

In Chinese, the personal pronoun “我 (=I)” is always put before other nouns in subject position. In English, however, more often than not, “I” comes after other nouns in subject position. Kuno (1987: 233) explains this linguistic phenomenon from functional perspective, proposing a principle called *the Modesty Principle* which says that “the speaker should be modest and give himself the lowest priority.”

(37) *The Modesty Principle*:

In the coordinate NP structure, give the least prominence to yourself.

With (37) in mind, consider, first, the following example (where ?? means almost unacceptable, and the acceptability judgment is due to Kuno (*ibid.*: 233)): <sup>9)</sup>

(38) Original C text: 我和约翰是好朋友。

(39) a. Standard E translation: John and I are good friends.

Cf. ?? I and John are good friends.

b. Standard J translation: 私とジョンは親友です。(watashi to jon wa shin-yuu desu)

(40) a. On-line E translation: John and I are good friends.

b. On-line J translation: 私とジョンは親友だ。(watashi to jon wa shin-yuu da)

In (38), we can see that “我(=I)” precedes “约翰(=John)” in the subject position, i.e. in the coordinate noun phrase, while in (39a), the order is opposite, namely, “John” precedes “I,” as predicted by *the Modesty Principle*. As shown in (40a), the on-line translator correctly translates “我和约翰” into “John and I.” In the case of Japanese translation, no error will occur about the order of “私(watashi)(=I)” and “ジョン(jon)(=John),” because Japanese has no such restriction as *the Modesty Principle* puts. Or actually, the order of a 1st person singular personal pronoun and other nouns is more flexible in Japanese than in Chinese and English.

By now there seems to be no problem about the locus of “I” in subject position. But when we look at the following examples, we realize that the difference in the order of conjuncts (i.e. coordinated noun phrases) in subject position between Chinese and English can result in the error of translation.

(41) Original C text: 我和我最小的弟弟去了巴黎。

(42) a. Standard E translation: My youngest brother and I went to Paris.

b. Standard J translation: 私と(私の)一番下の弟はパリへ行きました。(watashi to (watashi no) ichiban-shita no otouto wa pari e iki-mashi-ta)

(43) a. On-line E translation: \*I and my youngest brother went to Paris.

b. On-line J translation: ??私と私の弟でパリへ行きました。(watashi to watashi no otouto de pari e iki-mashi-ta)

(44) Original C text: 昨晚, 我和高中最好的朋友一起打了羽毛球。

(45) a. Standard E translation: Last evening, my best friend at high school and I played badminton.

b. On-line E translation: \*Last night, I and high school best friends played badminton.

(46) Original C text: 我和我同事的女儿露西跳了舞。

(47) a. Standard E translation: My colleague's daughter Lucy and I danced together.

b. On-line E translation: \*I and my colleagues daughter Lucy dancing.

When we compare (40a) with (43a), (45b) and (47b), we can see that if a conjunct other than “I” is somewhat longer, the on-line translator does not reverse the order of “I” and the conjunct. From the above, we suggest that the Chinese learners be aware of *the Modesty Principle* and pay attention to the locus of the personal pronoun “I,” when they use the on-line translator.

### 3.7. Active Voice versus Passive Voice

In Chinese, active voice is much more used than passive voice, while in English, passive voice is used when the active subject, i.e. agent, is self-evident from the context or is unknown or cannot easily be stated or is intentionally not mentioned as illustrated in (48) below. <sup>10)</sup> Besides, passive voice is preferred in English, especially in research literature and scientific reports, for the reason that will be discussed in terms of “information structures” in section 3.8.

(48) a. He was elected Member of Parliament for Leeds.

- b. Her father was killed in the Boer war.
- c. Enough has been said here of a subject which will be treated more fully in a subsequent chapter.

As discussed in section 3.2, Chinese and Japanese do not necessarily require overt subjects, whereas English usually requires overt subjects. Therefore, when a Chinese active sentence without an active subject is translated into English, an English passive sentence must be required, otherwise errors will occur. This is exemplified by the following sentence.

- (49) Original C text: 昨天抓了100多人。
- (50) a. Standard E translation: More than 100 people were arrested yesterday.
- b. Standard J translation: 昨日100人以上の人が逮捕された。(sakujitsu/kinou hyaku-nin ijou no hito ga taiho-sa-re-ta)
- (51) a. On-line E translation: \*More than 100 people arrested yesterday.
- b. On-line J translation: \*昨日に飾って100人で構成される。(sakujitsu/kinou ni kazatte hyaku-nin de kousei-sa-re-ru)

In (49) the subject “警察 (=the police)” is omitted, therefore when (49) is translated into English or Japanese, the object “100多人” should become the subject of a passive sentence in the English or Japanese translation, otherwise the sentence will be ungrammatical as shown in (51a).<sup>11)</sup>

### 3.8. Information Focus

It has been elucidated that when we talk with each other, we try to convey some new information to each other. From this perspective, a sentence is considered to have information structures, whereby new and given (or old) information can be conveyed.

On the basis of his notion “consciousness,” Chafe (1976: 30) roughly claims that “Given (or old) information is that knowledge which the speaker assumes to be in the consciousness of the addressee at the time of the utterance. So called new information is what the speaker assumes he is introducing into the addressee's

consciousness by what he says.”

Halliday (1994: 298), among others, defines New and Given as follows:<sup>12)</sup>

- (52) Given Information and New Information  
 ... information that is presented by the speaker as recoverable (Given) or not recoverable (New) to the listener. What is treated as recoverable may be so because it has been mentioned before; ... The meaning is: this is not news. Likewise, what is treated as non-recoverable may be something that has not been mentioned; ... The meaning is: attend to this; this is news.

In Chinese, the word or phrase with new information is usually put at the end or near the end of the sentence, while the one with given or old information tends to be put at the beginning. For example, indefinite nouns, which convey new information, are usually put at the end of the sentence, whereas definite nouns, which carry given or old information, are usually placed at the beginning of the sentence. The following pair of sentences show this contrast.

- (53) a. 客人来了。(The guest has come.)
- b. 来了一位客人。(A guest has come.)

In (53a) “客人 (=guest)” is placed at the beginning of the sentence and is considered to be a definite noun, i.e. “guest is expected,” whereas in (53b) it is placed at the end of the sentence and then is treated as an indefinite noun, i.e. “guest is unexpected.”

Now observe the following examples:

- (54) Original C text: 桌子上有书。
- (55) a. Standard E translation: There is a book on the table.
- b. Standard J translation: テーブルの上の本があります。(teiburu no ue ni hon ga ari-masu)
- (56) a. On-line E translation: \*A book on the table.
- b. On-line J translation: \*テーブルの上には本です。(teiburu no ue ni wa hon desu)

- (57) Original C text: 书在桌子上。  
 (58) a. Standard E translation: The book is on the table.  
 b. Standard J translation: (その) 本はテーブルの上にあります。(sono) hon wa teiburu no ue ni ari-masu)  
 (59) a. On-line E translation: The book is on the table.  
 b. On-line J translation: \*本は机の上に置いた。(hon wa tsukue no ue ni oita)

In (54) “书(=book)” is placed at the end, which shows that it carries new information and should be an indefinite noun phrase “a book.” In (57), on the other hand, “书” is put at the beginning, which indicates that it carries given or old information and should be a definite noun phrase “the book.” The problem occurs not in the case of (57), but in the case of (54), because in English an element with new information comes near or at the end of the sentence according to the discourse principle (62) given below. Therefore, when a Chinese sentence with a noun phrase with an indefinite meaning such as ones like (54) is translated into English or Japanese, the noun phrase with an indefinite meaning (“书” in the case of (54)) should be placed near the end of the sentence as shown in (55a) and (55b).

Consider one more similar example:

- (60) Original C text: 河边有一个爬满了常春藤的小茅屋。

In (60) “小茅屋(=old hut)” is put at the end of

the sentence. This tells that “小茅屋” carries new information and should be indefinite in meaning. Accordingly, when (60) is translated into English, the English phrase for “小茅屋,” i.e. “an old hut” must be placed at the end of the sentence, otherwise an error will occur, which is illustrated in (61b) below:

- (61) a. Standard E translation: By the river stood an old hut covered with ivy.  
 b. On-line E translation: \*The river has a small hut was covered with ivy.

From the above, it is suggested that the Chinese learners be aware of the discourse principle in English in (62) and see if a noun phrase with new information be near or at the end of the sentence.

(62) *The Discourse Principle in English*

A linguistic unit with given or old information is prone to come at the beginning of the sentence, usually in the subject position, whereas one with new information tends to come near or at the end of the sentence.

#### 4. Summary

In the previous sections, major morphological and syntactic differences in Chinese, English and Japanese are analyzed and demonstrated by using Youdao, an on-line translator. In this section, these morphological and syntactic features are summarized in the following table.

As presented in *Table 1*, these 8 major differences in Chinese, English and Japanese

Table 1. A Contrast of Morphological and Syntactic Features in Chinese, English and Japanese

No.	Morphosyntactic features	Chinese	English	Japanese
1	Parataxis	+	-	-
2	Subject prominence	-	+	-
3	Inflections	-	+	-
4	Use of prepositions/postpositions	-	+	+
5	Subject-verb agreement	-	+	-
6	Locus of personal pronoun “I” in subject position	+	-	? +
7	More active voice than passive voice	+	? -	?
8	End-focus	+	+	-

tend to cause errors in translation. Clearly, Chinese shares more similarities with Japanese while they differ a lot from English.

## 5. Conclusion

As demonstrated above, Chinese is fundamentally different from English while it shares some similarities with Japanese. When Chinese sentences are translated into English or Japanese, many translation errors may occur as a result of the morphological and syntactic differences among the three languages. The 8 features analyzed above are by no means exhaustive. However, they might be areas for special attention when using on-line translators. It is advisable that the translation rendered should be double checked for its accuracy and fluency. Only by doing so can the Chinese learners guard against errors. In addition, the on-line translator developers should take the morphological and syntactic differences among languages into consideration and make proper adjustments in the software so that the on-line translations could be more accurate and reliable.<sup>13)</sup>

## Notes

- 1) "Parataxis" is also called "juxtaposition."
- 2) "Bus" is "公共汽车" in Chinese, but in the phrase "catch the bus," "车" is simply used.
- 3) Sentence (10a) also shows a defect in translation caused by the difference between parataxis and hypotaxis discussed in the previous section.
- 4) All the sentences in (12) and the acceptability judgments (?) are cited from Yoshikawa (1995: 192).
- 5) The sentences in (15) are cited from Yoshikawa (*ibid.*: 193).
- 6) For the examples which show that English is a complicated language in terms of typology, see Seta *et al.* (eds.) (2010: 15), among others.
- 7) By "subject" we mean "logical subject" as opposed to "grammatical subject," which is "there" in this case.
- 8) If "だった (*datta*)" (past tense) is changed to "が<sup>s</sup>いる (*ga iru*)" (a case particle + present

tense), the sentence sounds much better.

- 9) Quite interestingly, Kuno (*ibid.*: 301) gives examples which at first sight seem to be counterexamples to *the Modesty Principle* such as those in the following:

- (i) a. I and someone else went to Paris.  
b. \*Someone else and I went to Paris.
- (ii) a. I and three others went to Paris.  
b. \*Three others and I went to Paris.

He seems to be successful in explaining the unacceptability of (ib) and (iib), but for reasons of space we will not discuss this issue any further here.

- 10) The sentences in (48) are cited from Jespersen (1933: 120-121).
- 11) In (51b), a passive marker "(s)are" is used, which might mean (51b) is a passive sentence. However, the choice of wrong vocabulary and the misinterpretation of syntactic structures make the Japanese sentence quite anomalous. We have not discussed Japanese passive voice in detail. On the types of Japanese passive sentences, see, among others, Masuoka (1987), where three types of passive sentences are proposed.
- 12) Halliday (*ibid.*: 299-300) mentions to the effect that "Given + New" and "Theme + Rheme" are not the same: The Given is considered from the viewpoint of the listener, and the Theme is considered from the viewpoint of the speaker; in other words, "Given + New" is listener-oriented, whereas "Theme + Rheme" is speaker-oriented.
- 13) There are some interesting topics that we have not discussed in this paper. Among them is a contrast between "whole to part" and "part to whole." In Chinese and Japanese, when places or objects are juxtaposed, they usually follow the sequence from whole to part or big to small. Oppositely, in English, they follow the order from part to whole or small to big. The following sentences illustrate this contrast.
  - (i) a. Original C text: 辽宁省沈阳市皇姑区拥有好几所著名中学。

- b. Standard E translation: Huanggu District of Shenyang, Liaoning Province has several famous middle schools.
- c. Standard J translation: 遼寧省瀋陽市皇姑区にはいくつか有名な中学校がある。
- (ii) On-line E translation: \*Shenyang,

liaoning province HuangGuOu has several famous middle school.

The point is clearly demonstrated. As can be seen in on-line English translation (ii), the places “辽宁省,” “沈阳市,” and “皇姑区” are not correctly arranged, as required by the regulations in English.

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