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## A Comparative Study of Syntactic Hypotaxis and Parataxis in English and Chinese From the Aesthetic Perspective of Classical Painting

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### Abstract

Parataxis is the main grammatical feature of Chinese sentences while hypotaxis is the main grammatical feature of English. Similarly, Chinese classical paintings stress on the psychological harmony of subject-object unity and Western classical paintings on extrinsic form. It is found that the aesthetic thinking of classical painting is reflected in English and Chinese syntactic structure.

**Key words:** Classical painting; Hypotaxis; Parataxis; Aesthetic thinking

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### INTRODUCTION

With the combination of aesthetics and translation, the comparative study of syntactic hypotaxis and parataxis in English and Chinese has presented a new development trend. Different national aesthetic psychology is reflected in the national culture, national language and other aspects. In the process of the translation of English to Chinese, it is argued that aesthetic subject and aesthetic object are activated by each other. As the aesthetic subjects, it should have the creativity, imagination and artistic ability. The aim of this paper is to discover a new aesthetic aspect to appreciate the beauty of English and Chinese language through the comparison of syntactic

hypotaxis and parataxis in English and Chinese from the aesthetic perspective of classical painting.

### 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

M. A. K. Halliday and Eugene A. Nida have mentioned the concepts of "parataxis" and "hypotaxis" (Halliday, 1994, p.218; Nida, 1982, p.16; 1969, p.168, 202, 204), and pointed out that parataxis and hypotaxis are two types of interdependency of sentence constituents. Parataxis is defined in existing literature as the binding of elements of parallel structure while hypotaxis is the binding of elements of subordinate structure. However, the two terms are studied as important linguistic phenomena by domestic scholars in linguistics and translatology, and they have different viewpoints to non-Chinese academics. Wang (2007) summarized the viewpoints of the two terms in two main perspectives, one represented by Lian Shuneng who regards the two terms as the syntactic binding ways that the distinction of parataxis and hypotaxis is the connecting way of sentence, the other is represented by Liu Miqing and Pan Wenguo who consider that the two terms are not only on or under the syntactic level but also on the level of discourse and regards parataxis and hypotaxis as the way of language expression and organization.

Some domestic scholars have mentioned that Chinese as a language stresses on ideorealm and English is a language that stresses on the harmony of forms from the perspective of aesthetics. In the book *Aesthetics and Translation: A Textbook*, Liu Miqing describes Chinese has the characteristic of fuzziness which is used to express the beauty of the context, while English has the characteristic of rational beauty. In addition, in the book *Aesthetics in Translation*, Mao Ronggui describes the rational beauty and tonality beauty of English and finds that the logical relation of English sentences are expressed by different connectives, but without the constraint of

connectives, Chinese has a distinctive sense-compound feature which makes the Chinese language more concise. In conclusion, all the aesthetic viewpoints of parataxis and hypotaxis are compared in academia from a broad perspective, and thus there remains a great potential for the research of the two terms from the specific area of aesthetics.

## 2. THE LINK BETWEEN PAINTING AND LANGUAGE

Painting can be defined as an art form that uses visual image organization in the second dimensional space to create a new visual world. In a sense it is a formal language (Zheng, 1992, p.227). This thesis argues that there is a close connection between language and painting. Chinese classical painting is often accompanied by poetry. It was what said to be “paintings of poetry and poetry in paintings”. There are differences between Chinese and Western painting and language due to inherently different cultural origins, founded in ways of thinking as well as national ideologies. But there is arguably a similarity between the painting style and language of Chinese and English that this paper will explore.

## 3. A COMPARISON OF SYNTACTIC HYPOTAXIS AND PARATAXIS IN ENGLISH AND CHINESE FROM THE AESTHETIC PERSPECTIVE OF CLASSICAL PAINTING

Chinese classical painting often aims to reflect spiritual beauty without placing much importance on the restrictions of bound of form and proportion. Further, Chinese classical painting gives emphasis on the harmony and unity of painter’s spirit with the painting’s meaning. Chen Hongshou (1599-1671), for example, was a famous figure painter during the end of the Ming Dynasty. His paintings consisted of flowing and flexible lines presenting the figure in his mind’s eye, rather than the realistic features of the actual figure. From his figure painting Portrait of Qu Yuan, we can feel the figure’s strength and thoughtfulness through the casual but powerful lines. Chinese classical painting does not deliberately aim to imitate the true proportions of the real world, but it is best at extracting lines from objects and combining them subjectively to fulfill a harmonization of the whole artistic conception. Similarly, Chinese syntactic constructions emphasize on the artistic conception.

Western classical paintings stress on form and proportion to imitate the greatest degree of the real

objects. Diego Rodriquez de Silvay Velasquez, the European master who was active during the same period of Chen Hongshou is an ideal example of this. His work Portrait of Pope Inocencio X is very different from Chen Hongshou’s style, as the visual impression of this painting is very real and the proportion is as close as the real person, emphasising realism and reproduction of the “true” image. In this way, Western classical painting contains reasonable logic thinking which is also reflected in English syntactic constructions.

From the aesthetic perspective of Chinese and English classical painting, it is found that the constituents of Chinese sentences are connected without rigorous arrangement but convey profound meaning, just like the flowing lines in Chinese classical painting. The Chinese subject-predicate structure is very flexible and the sentence pattern is diffusive, with the clauses connected by parataxis. There is almost no explicit conjunction in Chinese sentences which emphasis covert coherence, logical sequence, function, meaning and similarity in substance rather than in form (Lian, 1993). Both Chinese sentences and lines in Chinese classical paintings are topic-prominent, they convey the subjective perception in all aspects, even every word in a sentence or every flowing line in a painting. Chinese linguistic patterns include subject-predicate sentences, non-subject-predicate sentences and complex sentences, and the subject-predicate structure is very complex in that the noun, verb, and adjective all can be used as the predicate. Chinese sentence structure is flexible to the extent that a subject is not essential in a sentence, which is different from English.

English on the other hand is a overt coherence-prominent, hypotactic language and its clauses are arranged one after the other with connectives showing the relation between them (Ibid.). Different cohesive devices exist in English sentences and the sentences patterns are structured rigidly with little flexibility. Simple sentences, compound sentences, complex sentences in English have rigorous subject-predicate structure to show the logical relation.

他走了几步，回过头看见我，说，“进去吧，里边没人。” (Zhu Ziqing, *The Sight of Father’s Back*)

After a few steps, he looked back at me and said, “Go back to your seat. Don’t leave your things alone.” (Translated by Zhang Peiji)

This sentence describes the movement sequence: the father walked away, then looked back. There are no words showing the time sequence in Chinese sentences, but we can also realize the father’s deep love because the main idea is conveyed by paratactic context. When translated into English, the sentence is added with the preposition “after” to show the movement sequence by hypotaxis.

“忽逢桃花林，夹岸数百步，中无杂树，芳草鲜美，落英缤纷” (*The Peach Colony*)

After having gone a certain distance, he suddenly came upon a peach grove which extended along the bank for about a hundred yards. He noticed with surprise that the grove had a magic effect, so singularly free from the usual mingling of brushwood, while the beautifully grassy ground was covered with its rose petals. (Translated by Lin Yutang)

This sentence describes the scenery of a peach grove. Although there are no subjects before the words “忽逢” (suddenly came upon), “夹岸” (extended along the bank) in the Chinese sentence and no conjunctions between them, it depicts a beautiful and wide picture of peach grove with grass and rose petals through the paratactic sentence. This Chinese sentence is very concise and immaculate in that every phrase is combined with four or five words. Further it brings the reader an unlimited image space to thoroughly understanding the harmonic beauty of the spirit and the nature, which has a similar effect on Chinese classical paintings. As for the translation of Lin Yutang, the boldface English words indicate the subject or conjunctions added by him for the purpose of showing the well-organized English sentence structure.

The contrast between the linguistic features of Chinese and English can be shown in an example such as this sentence in *Walden* written by Jean Jacques Rousseau:

When this bar is gradually increased by storms, tides, or currents, or there is a subsidence of the waters, so that it reaches to the surface, that which was at first but an individual lake, cut off from the ocean, wherein the thought secures its own conditions—changes, perhaps, from salt to fresh, becomes a sweet sea, dead sea, or a marsh.

It is a typical English sentence connected by different conjunctions, such as the preposition “by”, the conjunction “or”, the relative pronoun “that”, and the relative adverb “when”. Just as the western classical paintings, English sentence is well organized by hypotactical devices and differs in the underlying meaning in Chinese sentences, as it conveys the meaning iconically and visually. No matter Western classical painting or English sentence structure, they present the most concrete and real objects through a more empirical, positivist perspective.

#### 4. REASONS OF DIFFERENCES

Both painting and language are manifestations of human thought, and are arguably inherently interlinked with culture, history and national ideologies. Chinese aesthetic perception is deeply influenced by Confucianism and Taoism. The core of Chinese traditional morals is concord, otherwise known as “Ren” in Confucianism, which stresses concord and unity. Taoism regards the perfect harmony of nature as a state of “Supreme Beauty”, which forms its natural value of “man is an integral part

of nature”. Hence, Confucianism and Taoism constitute the Chinese classical aesthetic spirit. This spirit is also reflected in Chinese classical paintings and Chinese language.

The western aesthetics originates from ancient Greece and based on 2500 years of aesthetic theory heritage of Western Europe and North America (Zhu, 2015). The idea of “the harmony of extrinsic form” is seen throughout Western aesthetic historic axis and Ancient Greek idea of art imitating nature. The Pythagorean school of thought explored art from the perspective of achieving harmonious proportions, while during the Renaissance Thomas Aquinas advanced the three factors of aesthetics: *Integritas*, *consonantia*, *claritas*. Davinci stressed on the reality of art and proposed that the heart of an artist should like a mirror. Thus, it is clear that Western aesthetics hold a relatively more rational and positivist from the 17<sup>th</sup> century and clearly insists on reverting to reality with the integration of structure and form. Both Western classical paintings and English language are influenced by western aesthetics, they all focus on the beauty of logic, precision and realism, with a strict adherence to a more empirical approach.

#### CONCLUSION

Syntactic hypotaxis and parataxis in English and Chinese are relative and not absolute, or more accurately, paratactical syntactic structure is extensively used in Chinese while hypotactical syntactic structure is extensively used in English. The enjoyable sensory experiences of aesthetic subjects cannot be separated from the aesthetical information conveyed by aesthetic objects. Translation is the process that aesthetic subjects and objects are stimulated with each other, so aesthetic perspective is very necessary for translation. This paper attempts to locate a specific aesthetic perspective to compare syntactic hypotaxis and parataxis in English and Chinese to provide the methods of translation.

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