

English Infinitive Form of Verb and Chinese Subjective-Object Construction: Towards a Generative Analysis

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Abstract: English Infinitive Form of Verb and Chinese Subjective-Object structure are accusative in nature. In the two sentence patterns, the first verb gives their own objects cases, and the two deep structures give the second verbs logic subjects. In the surface of syntax, the two sentence patterns have same characteristics.

Key words: English infinitive form of verb, Chinese Subjective-Object construction, generative grammar

1. Introduction

English infinitive form of verb complements the action of the object, which is very common as Chinese both subject and object construction in English and Chinese languages. According to the rules of transformational-generative grammar (TG), both structures involve theoretical issues such as argument structure, phrase structure rules, translation rules, government and binding as well as synchronic study. There are many introductions about the infinitive form of verb and Chinese subjective-object construction, but less to compare the combination of these two theories. This paper will discuss these two syntax phenomena from the perspective of TG.

The universal grammar of TG believes that human languages are bound by a series of conditions, which confine various grammatical categories of various possible human languages. Language differences exist in those common principles within permitted scope. Human languages will not go beyond the scope of this common condition principle despite they are ever changing. These conditions and principles constitute a framework system that is universal grammar. From this point of view, we can find Chinese and English share many common rules. Regarding universal grammar as the research object, Chinese and English with a greater difference must rise to the level of abstract structure, find out their commonness and compare infinitive form of verb and Chinese subjective-object construction of this two kinds of surface structure.

In terms of form, English infinitive form of verb is a complement form of object after a verb in the sentence. It is a kind of verb phrase structure composed by "to + verb phrase". According to rewrite rules, the basic structure of the formative can be represented as: $VP \rightarrow to + V + NP$ (V represents verb, N nouns and P phrase). For example:

Jeeves requires the detective to distinguish the clues.

In this sentence, the element that connects infinitive form of

verb is NP+VP, this example can be rewritten as $S \rightarrow NP + VP$, in which NP and VP are commonly indefinite phrase with reference uncertainty. The universal grammar shows that $S \rightarrow NP + VP$ can generate several sentences with same surface structures but different deep structures. One limitation in infinitive form of verb is that the modified nouns must be the doer of the action.

The research of infinitive form of verb is mainly about the source of action, confirmation of logical subject and person or thing affected.

In structure containing infinitive form of verb, NP and VP are commonly indefinite phrase with reference uncertainty, which is regarded as a surface structure transferred by two deep structures of NP and VP.

Two deep structures are:

a: Jeeves requires the detective.

b: The detective distinguishes the clues.

The first step of transformation is to move b after the verb of a to construct an argument (we call NP argument) and a prediction. As follows:

Jeeves (this part is argument) requires the detective (the detective) distinguishes the clues (this part is prediction).

The second step is to delete overlapping argument in b and a, because the trace left by the moved phrase must be strictly administered by antecedent. In this two deep structures, the argument in b and a is the same thing, after combining to the same deep structure, it can't be under the jurisdiction of itself, so the noun phrase in b is no longer existed in the new structure, which requires to insert infinitive "to" in omitted trace position to construct infinitive form of verb. The verb behind the infinitive should turn third person singular into room form of the verb. This infinitive form actually equals to a clause and reconstructed to form a new prediction in a.

The key question is why we use "to" to instead of a clause after

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the movement of the second step. Some linguists believe that people always put indefinite noun phrase of conveying unknown message into verb phrase, imagining that “to” has functions of discourse. According to general principles of discourse that known information appears first and unknown information appears second, “to” can express information in the second deep structure till it moves to the end of the sentence. It is clear that the discourse function of “to” is to remind us that it is easier to express the message of action than a clause.

The objective case of infinitive form is a key theory of sentence structure research. According to the case theory of generative grammar by Chomsky, case is the necessity of nominal composition of phonetic form into the syntactic level, without playing thematic roles, noun phrase without case form is not licensed of the universal grammar for it cannot be fully explained. The existence of infinitive form shows it does not exist case problem. From the perspective of deep structure, the logic subject can obtain case form from root form of the verb without tenses, and noun phrase behind infinitive form also can obtain case form from accusative verbs. Therefore, the logic subject of infinitive form bearer of the action of whole sentence. For example: “Jeeves requires the detective (arugument1) to distinguish the clues.” It is the first argument of prediction rather than the argument of whole sentence, and it is not the NP in $S \rightarrow NP+VP$, which is agent of the whole sentence rather than logic subject of infinitive form of verb. The bearer of NP action is the logic subject of infinitive form.

In Chinese subjective-object construction, “object and subject” concurrent component is the predicate.

Here are two typical Chinese subjective-object construction sentences:

- 1.王先生 || 叫儿子做作业。
- 2.李不通 || 有个姐姐教英语。

Compared with infinitive form of verb, Chinese subjective-object construction shows some same characteristics: verbs are accusative in nature, mainly are: first, the first predicate verb is about order and forbidden such as “make”, “please”, “send”, “urge”, “force”, “persuade”, “let”, “stay”, “beg”, “entrust”, “command”, “mobilize”, “stop”, “launch”, “organize”, “appeal”. The second verb is the aim or expected result of the former action, just like sentence1. Second, the first predicate verb use “have” to show existence, the second predicate verb also is the aim or expected result of the former action, just like sentence2. If both former and latter verb states the subject of the whole sentence, it is a predicate form instead of concurrent sentence. Second, noun phrase shows infinite effect so it is definite noun phrase. Third, the sentence cannot pause and insert adverbial modifier after the first predicate verb in subject and object construction. For example, we cannot express “组织上派我下半年

去边疆” as “组织上派(下半年)我去边疆”. The sentence is not correct for it does not conform to these conditions. Meanwhile, there is no difference of the logic subject between infinitive form of verb and Chinese subjective-object construction, which is the definite noun or noun phrase after the first verb.

There is no infinitive form in Chinese that is similar with “to” in English, so the theory focuses on the first argument in predicate, namely the objective case of the first verb. Chinese subjective-object construction is pronoun or synonym, which is determined by semantic feature of object of the first verb. Theoretically, there are three domain arguments in Chinese subjective-object construction, which appears behind the first verb of the surface of predicate, and it is impossible to appear in the position of the surface of the subject or behind the second verb of the surface of predicate. Actually, Chinese subjective-object construction and English infinitive form of verb are deep structures composed by two different surface structures in sentence pattern. For example:

3. 妈妈催儿子早点睡觉。

This deep structure can be analyzed as two surface structures:

- a 妈妈催儿子。
- b 儿子(早点)睡觉。

It is the same in infinitive form of verb, when two surface structures merge into a deep structure, the subject brought forward in sentence b can be omitted, the object after the verb in sentence a moves out to sentence b where the subject is. “儿子” is the Chinese subjective-object construction here for it is the object in the sentence a and subject in sentence b. The noun or pronoun as subject or object in Chinese has no forms as in English, which is easy to make us confused about its objective case. This is because the first objective verb gives the cases to the verb that follows.

Form this article, we can see that these two English and Chinese sentence patterns share the same generative grammar construction, which can be summarized as: first, the object after the first verb obtains its case from the predicate, second, the object after the first verb is the logic subject of the predication structure. For the discussion of this article is in the syntax level and is confined to the scope of sentence and grammar, the reasonable explanation of some problems needs to be achieved at the discourse level.

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