

Study on French and Chinese Articles from the Perspective of Gustave Guillaume's Article Mechanism

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Abstract: As the representative of Indo-European inflections, French has a relatively complete article system. As early as the beginning of the 20th century, Gustave Guillaume, a linguist in France, clarified the root cause of the problem of articles in French in his linguistic work *Le problème de l'article et sa solution dans la langue française*, which is human thinking activity. Different from French, Chinese is a typical isolated language. Articles can hardly be found in Chinese grammar books. Usually, there is only the expression "determiner". Is there really no article in Chinese? This paper will use Guillaume's article mechanism to analyze and explain the phenomenon of "article" in Chinese.

1. Introduction

Guillaume specially wrote articles in his book *Le problème de l'article et sa solution dans la langue française*, in 1919, and introduced the deep reasons for the emergence of definite articles and indefinite articles in French. In 1929, he put forward the theory of psychological mechanism in *Temps et verbe*, and "active time" became his fundamental point of argument. This concept is a useful supplement to the previous article system.

In his work published in 1919, Guillaume wrote: "nouns exist in a state of potential before they become part of speech, so that the speaker can make them effective when speaking. The speaker goes through an inevitable process, and the way to complete the transition process is attached to the noun for a long time. The functions it needs to complete include part of speech function, quantity function and case function, among which quantity function plays a major role. Then at some point, the noun is liberated from these additional functions and the article comes into being. [1] Does Chinese have the form corresponding to French articles? If Guillaume's theory about articles is used to analyze Chinese examples, is it feasible? The author will analyze the "potential" form of articles in Chinese and the "separation" of articles in French from the perspective of linguistic typology, list and classify the corresponding expressions in Chinese, and try to use Guillaume's article mechanism to analyze the phenomenon of "articles" in Chinese.

2. Articles under the framework of linguistic typology

Article is a word that plays a defining role in a sentence in Indo-European and Semitic languages, which is before or after a noun or noun phrase. An article is a function word, it cannot be used alone. General grammar books regard articles as a kind of determiner. French comes from Latin, where there is no article, which came into being when Latin was converted to romance. Ille (the Latin equivalent of "this") and unus (the Chinese equivalent of "one") were borrowed as articles, and the French article category was born. [2]

Although French and Chinese seem to be very different on the surface, human languages have common features in a deep level, but only the specific ways of implementing the common features are different. Therefore, we can compare the two languages and analyze the reasons for the article differences through the research framework of linguistic typology. The inflection form and grammaticalization degree of French are relatively high, and the expression unit of each meaning is clear, so it is not easy to produce ambiguity. Articles in French naturally have independent meanings and forms. Articles in French can be divided into definite articles, indefinite articles and partial

articles. The article in Chinese is attached to the modified noun, so it has no independent form. The relationship between words in a sentence is determined by word order and function words. [3]

3. Guillaume's article mechanism

Guillaume believed that language is a system of systems, consisting of various subsystems. He focused on the study of article system and verb system. "Activity time" is the theoretical cornerstone of Guillaume's theory of psychological mechanism, which refers to the physical time experienced from the beginning of thinking activity to the end of thinking activity. The activity time may be long or short. "Active time" can be visualized in space, represented by a vector with an arrow pointing in the direction of a single, irreversible line.

Because of active time, language is not static, but dynamic. "The French indefinite article "un" is a prominent mental activity of the person who goes from 'general' to 'individual', while the definite article "le" is a reverse movement from "individual" to "general". When articles are used in speech, the function of context is to pause these activities or capture some instantaneous pictures that only record a moment as we wish. [4] Therefore, this kind of round-trip movement from "general" to "individual" and from "individual" to "general" is the reason for the article system.

Language has two parallel planes: the general form and the individual form. The first level of segmentation of language activities is the dynamic movement diagram from "general" to "individual" or vice versa. The second layer of segmentation is to intercept a fixed moment from this moving diagram. The different interception time corresponds to different meanings. Just because of the dynamic nature of language activities, it is not rigorous to divide articles into absolute definite articles and absolute indefinite articles. The indefinite article "un" constantly moves from the "general" form to the "individual" form, so the starting point is the "general" of "chaos", rather than the "orderly" and "organized". In this dynamic process, there are numerous interception points. If the intervention is carried out too early, the meaning of "un" is similar to that of "general" form. If the intervention is carried out too late, the meaning of "un" tends to be "individual" form. Contrary to the indefinite article, the definite article "le" constantly moves from the "individual" form to the "general" form. If cut off too early, the "le" meaning is similar to the "individual"; if cut off too late, it is closer to the "general" form. As shown in the figure below:

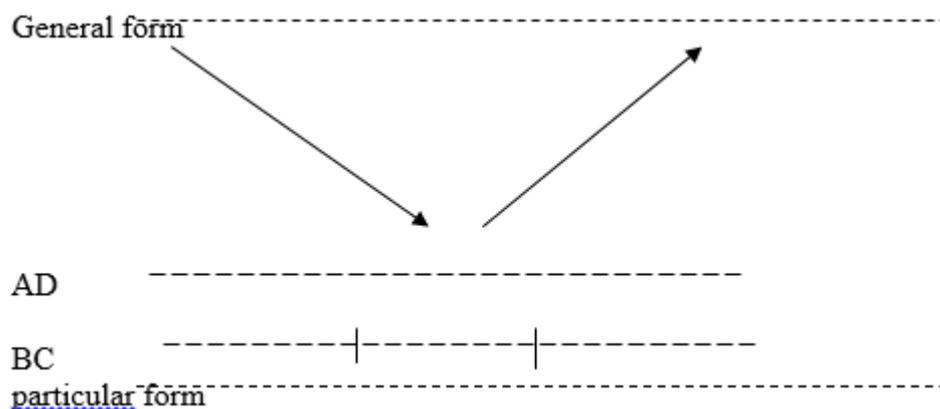


Figure 1

Here are four examples:

- A. Un enfant est toujours l'ouvrage de sa mère. The child is the mother's masterpiece. (Indefinite article premature intervention)
- B. Un enfant entra. A child entered. (indefinite article late intervention)
- C. L'homme entra. The man came in. (the definite article is cut off prematurely)
- D. L'homme est mortel. All men will die. (definite article late intervention)

Example A and example B are the syncopation of opposites at different moments of movement, while example C and example D are the syncopation of opposites at different moments of the definite article "le". Although example A is an indefinite article and example D is a definite article,

both of them can express nearly universal significance. Example B is an indefinite article and example C is a definite article, but both of them can express nearly individual significance. Guillaume, from the perspective of dynamics, revealed the fundamental driving force of French articles.

4. The corresponding form of "article" in Chinese

In addition to the "好" in Hainan dialect that equivalent to article word in English, people who understand the modern Chinese grammar knows no "article" in Chinese grammar. If there is no article in Chinese, how to understand the words "来客了" and "客来了"? Many people think these two sentences have the same meaning, but carefully taste, do these two sentences really have the same meaning? If a child is playing outside the door and sees someone coming, say, "来客了." His parents would ask, "who's here?" The word "guest" is preceded by an indefinite article, which means a guest is coming. If the child says, "客来了." His parents wouldn't ask, "who's here?" Instead, it might be, "get your XXX in here!" They knew who was coming. The word "guest" is preceded by a definite article, which means the guest is coming.

Mr. Ye Qisheng explained the phenomenon of " a guest is coming " and " the guest is coming " qualitatively with the topic. Here "qualitative" is equivalent to a definite article, and "non-qualitative" is equivalent to an indefinite article. He mentioned in the *Outline of Linguistics* (2010) that the entity related to semantic information in a sentence is the "topic" of the sentence, and the rest of the sentence developed for the topic is the "explanation". The information that the speaker chooses relates to the object, and is generally "determinate". "Youding" means that the speaker thinks that a certain part of speech in a sentence can be confirmed by both sides. " the guest is coming " this sentence takes "the guest" as the topic, used to indicate that "guests" is the speaker, listener plan in the visitor, namely "determined" visitors. But if it is changed to "a guest", it means that the visitor is heard of both sides of the unplanned uninvited guests. [5] The concept of qualitative is originally derived from the study of Indo-European languages. It usually refers to the function of articles modifying nouns and is a grammatical marker with or without definite articles for nouns with definite articles and nouns without definite articles (Xu Tongqiang 1997:1). From the perspective of qualitative semantic function and pragmatic function, the existence of Chinese noun phrases is of definite and indefinite, but their expression forms and pragmatic features are different from English ones.

Qu Chengxi (2005:211) pointed out the relationship between determinative index and word order: Chinese word order is closely related to the determinative index of nouns. In short, unless otherwise specified, the noun before the verb has a definite form and the noun after it has no definite form. Chinese mainly uses word order and lexical means to express definite and indefinite fingers, and relies on word order means to express the topicality of nouns (Hu Mingliang, 2007:17). Whether it is qualitative or not directly affects the word order in a sentence. This also proves that most grammars in Chinese are implicit. Such as:

- A. 飞机来了。(The plane came.)
- B. 来飞机了。(A plane came.)
- C. 他把盘子打碎了。(He broke the plate.)
- D. 他打碎了盘子。(He broke a plate.)

The words "plane" and "plate" in example A and example C are definite before verbs. The word "airplane" in example B and example D is indefinite after the verb.

The above analysis shows that articles do have corresponding forms in Chinese and are usually expressed by "definite" and "indefinite".

4.1 Definite article form

- 1) Word order. If you put the verb in front of the predicate, it will be a definite.
- 2) Use "这" and "那". Besides relying on word order, when it comes to articles in Chinese, the

then the former can be any rain, the latter refers to a specific rain. Most scholars generally believe that the component (usually the subject) before the predicate verb in Chinese is determinate, and the latter is indeterminate. Some scholars think this explanation is too far-fetched, because both A and B are known as "雨" by both sides. Although the naked rod noun after the predicate verb is considered as indeterminate, its actual meaning is more determinate, which is similar to the example Un enfant entra of Guillaume article mechanism.

(2) Foreground and background in the discourse. Guillaume believed that indefinite articles and definite articles were obviously opposed to each other in the context of expressing specific epitomes. Definite articles represent known, certain concepts that have been formed in memory and can be regarded as background information in the discourse. On the contrary, indefinite articles represent unknown concepts and serve as foreground information in discourse. Foreground information plays a key leading role in the development of the discourse, and background information plays a role in the development of the discourse and plot, which is conducive to the expression of foreground information. The two relationships can be expressed as follows:

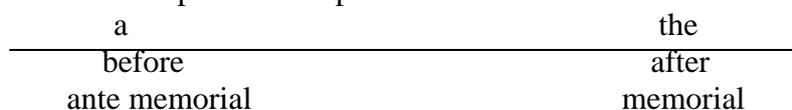


Figure 2

Langacker, a cognitive scientist, developed Guillaume's known and unknown theories on articles, proposed the concept of "mobile attention window", and divided it into the current window and the aforementioned window, in an attempt to reflect the actual occurrence process of dynamic language. [7] If the current window overlaps with the aforementioned window, it means that it is known and serves as background information in the text; On the contrary, it is unknown, expressing foreground information.

Chinese is a paratactic language, and the signs of definite and amorphous forms are often implicit. We still take the bare rod nouns "客来了" and "来客了" as examples. The former refers to the visitor within the plan of the speaker and listener, that is, the "determined" visitor, serving as background information. The latter means that the visitor is an uninvited guest beyond the plan of both parties and is the prospect information in the text. In addition, the role of context cannot be ignored. For example, the absence of definite and indefinite markers of Chinese bare stick nouns must be made up by other contextual factors. Obviously, this kind of mark is more suitable for Chinese.

(3) Tentative ideas on the evolution of Chinese article. According to Guillaume's explanation of the etymology of articles, language signs are the reaction of people's thinking to the external world, and the change of the psychological system will inevitably lead to the change of the sign system, because the sign system should be able to express the new content in the psychological system. However, the language system cannot be infinite expansion, must follow the economic law of language. So originally there were no articles in Latin, people used articles to define the scope of "individuality" and "totality". The original demonstrative pronouns ille and numerals unus in Latin were used as articles, which later evolved into le and UN in French. Therefore, it is safe to assume that the Chinese language USES seven different forms to express two categories of articles similar to the definite and indefinite articles in French, which will inevitably cause great burden on classification and memory. Will there be a tendency of economic principles in the process of evolution?

After Saussure initiated the modern linguistics, the research focus of linguistics gradually changed from static state to dynamic state. Guillaume proposed the concepts of "activity time" and "thought fragment", which showed that the origin of language was the dynamic activity of human thinking. Article is the reflection of people's thinking activities, so article only definite article and indefinite article two categories cannot clearly explain this dynamic process. In this paper, we have verified the phenomenon of "articles" in Chinese through a large number of examples. Articles are potentially attached to nouns, and the absence of definite and indefinite markers must be

compensated for by other contextual factors. Just as the French interpretivism believes that it is necessary to study the meaning of the original language shell, the author attempts to study the structural variation of human language through Guillaume's article mechanism under the framework of linguistic typology, and explore the reasonable explanation of these variations.

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