TOPIC-PROMINENT FEATURE DISTRIBUTIONS IN CHINESE TEXTBOOKS

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While English sentences are centred around the subject, Chinese sentences are argued to focus more on the topic[1] (thematic meaning). Several topic-prominent features (e.g., subject omission) are suggested to be more common in Chinese than English[2, 3]. However, these suggestions are based on subjectively selected sentence examples, which may not represent how these features are objectively distributed in contemporary Chinese[2, 3, 4].

The current study examined the distributions of four key topic-prominent features in articles taught in textbooks (grade 7-12) in mainland China[5]. The features included subject switching (SW; switching subjects in a sentence), double subject (DS; two consecutive subjects), flexible passive construction (fPC; passives without a *be*-passive structure), and subject omission (SO).

Preliminary analyses show that SW, fPC, and SO are more common in original Chinese articles (N=8; SW:41.84%, fPC:14.18%, SO:25.53%) than in Chinese articles translated from English (N=3; SW:14.63%, fPC:6.10%, SO:4.88%) and their source English articles (N=3; SW:13.55%, fPC:0%, SO:3.08%). DS was found to be uncommon across all article types. These results confirm that some but not all topic-prominent features are differentially distributed in Chinese vs. English, demonstrating that objective analysis of feature distributions in corpuses can make meaningful contributions to the debate. Further researches will then focus on how these different feature distributions are represented in the brain from different aspects.

Reference

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