

# A Consecutive Interpreting Study of the Keynote Speech on the Opening Ceremony of the Conference on Dialogue of Asian Civilizations

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**Abstract:** As a real-time bilingual processing activity, consecutive interpreting consists of three stages: source language listening and identification, information memorization and target language production. This paper chooses the consecutive interpreting recording of keynote speech on the opening ceremony of the Conference on Dialogue of Asian Civilizations as the study text. The author manage to analysis the target language text from lexical level, syntactic level and textual level.

**Keywords:** Consecutive Interpreting; Four-Character Structure; Syntactic Linearity.

## 1. Introduction

The text and corresponding recording analyzed in this paper is the Keynote Speech by H.E. Xi Jinping President of the People’s Republic of China at the opening ceremony of The Conference on Dialogue of Asian Civilizations, entitled Deepening Exchanges and Mutual Learning Among Civilizations For an Asian Community with a Shared Future (hereinafter as the “keynote speech”), with 3670 words in total, and the Chinese to English interpretation lasts about 28 minutes.

Conference on Dialogue of Asian Civilizations refers to another important dialogue and cooperation mechanism proposed by China mainly for Asia after the Boao Forum, aiming at inheriting and carrying forward the brilliant civilization achievements of Asia and other countries around the world, building a platform for mutual learning and common prosperity, enhancing cultural confidence in Asia, stimulating Asian innovation vitality, and providing spiritual support for the construction of a community with a shared future for mankind.

As Chen Shi, deputy editor-in-chief of China Foreign Languages Publishing Administration, director of the International Communication Center said in the keynote speech of the Fifth Transner Conference, 2022: “Dialogue among civilizations refers to a two-way communication and overseas publicity is a cross-cultural communication. The promotion of cultural communication has always been a long and silent process. In promoting Chinese culture to the world, we should face up to the difference and bridge the gap between Chinese and foreign cultures. On top of that we are committed to standing at the height of the common value of all mankind, to transform and develop the excellent Chinese culture creatively, thus to realizing the goal of empathy, resonance and applicability.

## 2. Translation on the Lexical Level

### 2.1. The Translation of Four-character Structures

The four-character structure is a common feature in Chinese idioms. English and Chinese belong to different

language families with different features. English refers to “chain language” and Chinese is a kind of “block language”. In other words, English is morphological language, which reflects grammatical category and expresses semantic meaning through morphological changes, while Chinese is non-morphological language, which reflects different meanings in different collocations and contexts. (He Gangqiang, 2000) There are more reduplicated words, four-character structures as well as sound and sense matches in Chinese than in English to manifest the aesthetic value and bridge the void between the listener and the author.

The translation of four-character structures in the text are shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1.** The translation of four-character structures

exchanges and mutual learning	I am delighted to join you in a dialogue.	calling for joint responses	the vast and beautiful continent
exquisite	beautiful	through interactions	add to the diversity
to achieve harmony between man and nature the underlying philosophy	be closely connected	We need to see where the world is going, and ride on the trend of the times.	live and work in content
decent lives	open and better-connected	people-to-people connectivity	uphold the beauty and the diversity of each
advance with the times	heritage from one generation to the next	adapt itself to the changing times and break new ground	confluence of Islam and Confucianism
the introduction of Western learning	amity and good neighborliness	deliver prosperity and security to the people	to keep pace with the times through reform and innovation the abiding commitment

According to the *Table 1*, the translation of four-character structures (hereinafter as “FCS”) can be divided into 4 categories: fuzzy translation, literary quotation, parallel

construction and developing sentence.

Firstly, FCS1 literally describes “a breeze blowing over lake or river surface” in Chinese, which indicates a tranquil and serene picture. The interpreter translates this four-character structure into “beautiful” in the recording, weakening the “water” image and emphasizing the characteristic instead. The interpretation of another four-character structure FCS2 in the text uses the same method. FCS2 means something is arranged just like stars in the sky or chess pieces on a checkerboard, suggesting a large number or a wide range of something. The interpreter translates it into “It has...”, which weakens “numerous” meaning and underlines “something DOES exist somewhere”. FCS3 are usually to describe a close relationship between two countries or regions, which literally means two places are linked by common mountains and rivers, and their people inhabited on the continent are engaged in inter-civilizational exchanges and mutual learning. The interpreter translated FCS3 into “be closely connected”, blurring the subject in the original Chinese four-character structure, only to reserve link and connection meanings.

Secondly, FCS4 and FCS5 are two well-known historical events in Chinese traditional culture. The former is cultural exchange, communication and integration of Islamic culture and Confucian culture including philosophy, moral cultivation, custom and other aspects of daily life in Ming and Qing Dynasties (1368-1912 A.D.). And in the latter period, western academic ideas and scientific technologies spread to China, which drove China’s social development and progress objectively. Based on historical background, the interpreter explained such events, and translated FCS4 into “confluence of Islam and Confucianism” and FCS5 into “the introduction of Western learning”. FCS6 is a typical Taoist thought, from Chapter 25 of Tao Te Ching, wrote by Lao-zi, which means man is an integral part of nature and Tao way follows the nature. The explanation “to achieve harmony between man and nature the underlying philosophy” is followed by a comprehensive understanding of classics of the Taoists.

Thirdly, a large portion of four-character structures are translated as parallel constructions. For example, FCS7 into “exchanges and mutual learning”, FCS8 into “the vast and beautiful continent” and FCS9 into “open and better-connected”.

Fourthly, in Chinese, there is a type of sentences known as non-subject sentences and it is quite often used. Subjects of this structure are either implied and acquiescent or be articulated in the context. In this way, the interpreter developed a word into a sentence by adding subjects to express a whole meaning. FCS10 is translated into “I am delighted to join you in a dialogue”. By adding the subject “I”, it suggests the speaker expressed a warm welcome on behalf of the speaker himself and organization. FCS11 is translated into “We need to see where the world is going, and ride on the trend of the times”. By adding the subject “we”, the targeted language express appeals to make a joint effort for a better future.

## 2.2. The Translation of Chunks

Lexical chunks, a fixed structure combining vocabulary, grammar and context, can be accessed in an integrated way, which can lead to less cognitive consumption and better language quality in consecutive interpreting. Due to the differences in research objectives and perspectives, scholars have used various terms to refer to chunks, such

as formulas, prefabricated patterns, routines and patterns, lexicalized sentence stems, ready made complex units, stock phrases, recurring textual elements, formulaic frames with analyzed slots, prefabricated chunks, etc. To some extent, the characteristics of the chunks reflected in the above-mentioned terms are consistent, that is to say, chunks are fixed structures that integrate the trinity of vocabulary, grammar, and context and can be conjured as a whole.

Phrasal constraints refers to lexical chunks with fixed outer frame, while contents and details inside the frame are based on concrete text, for example, “the commencement of the forum/ conference/ studio...” are specific expressions inside the frame “the commencement of...”. Another example is “...-oriented” can be extended to “people-oriented”, “profit-oriented” and “information-oriented” in the keynote speech.

Lexical chunks consist the main part of authentic text in English. Becker(1975), who proposed this concept said that the memory, storage, output, and usage of language are not measured in words, but in chunks. In the real practice of consecutive interpreting, it is fair to encounter repeated terminologies and professional terms and sentence structures.

Taking an excerpt of the keynote speech as an example:

**TT1:** Your Excellencies Heads of State and Government, Your Excellencies Heads of International Organizations, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, Friends:

On behalf of the Chinese government and people and in my own name, I extend sincere congratulations on the opening of the Conference on Dialogue of Asian Civilizations and a very warm welcome to all of you!

...

To conclude, I wish this conference every success!

Thank you.

**Analysis1:** Obviously, there are a large number of set phrases and sentence structures in this keynote speech. Such as “Your Excellencies...”, “Distinguished Guests”, “On behalf of...”, “I extend sincere congratulations and a warm welcome to...” and “I wish...very success”.

If these terms and phrases can be memorized as a whole in forms of chunks without much analysis in advance, then more translation problems may be solved accordingly, and interpreters can complete more unmarked translations, thus to providing more time and cognitive resources for larger interpreting units and deeper interpreting information. Therefore, interpreters can save the consumption of cognitive resources on low-end information by acquiring a large number of vocabulary chunks in the learning and pre-translation stage. In the process of listening and identification, and save cognitive resources to professional and complex information, so as to understand the logic, intention and emotions behind the text, and improve the efficiency and quality of listening.

## 3. Translation on the Syntactic Level

In terms of surface structure, there are significant differences between English and Chinese, mainly manifested as follows: Chinese values parataxis, featured by internal meaning and coherence, while English attaches importance to hypotaxis with multiple external cohesive devices. Formation of vocabulary (character orientation of Chinese and word orientation of English), nature and structure of sentence patterns (“topic-description” structure in Chinese and “subject-predicate” structure in English), logical order of

language expressions are concrete aspects.

In view of the distinct difference in word order between English and Chinese, in order to achieve consecutive translation, the interpreter can only translate the overall information of the source language in line with the original text word order listened to. Translation skills such as sentence division, repetition, and part of speech conversion are widely used in the practical consecutive interpreting.

### 3.1. Sentence Division

“Sentence division” is to cut English sentences into appropriate sense groups or conceptual units and translate them into target language. The British psycholinguist Frieda Goldman-Eisler conducted an interpreting experiment of 6 professional interpreters in English, French and German in 1972. The experimental results showed that 11% of translations are cut in line with the pause or the information units of the source language, and the information content is expressed in the corresponding word order. Sentence division is not rigid, and the ultimate purpose of which is to connect sense groups smoothly.

**TT2:** Today, //the Belt and Road Initiative, together with the Two Corridors and One Belt, the Eurasian Economic Union and other initiatives, //have greatly expanded intercultural exchanges and mutual learning. //Cooperation among nations //in science, technology, education, culture, health and people-to-people exchanges //are thriving like never before. //Thanks to exchanges and mutual learning among themselves and with other civilizations in the world, //Asian civilizations have grown from strength to strength.

**Analysis:** TT2 is a long sentence with large quantities of information and its word order is quite different from that in Chinese. Therefore, in order to ensure the coherence and timeliness of output, the interpreter divided the sentence into 8 groups, and added appropriate conjunctions to connect them in a natural way.

### 3.2. Part of Speech Conversion

Part of speech conversion is widely used in consecutive interpretation characterized by flexibility and universality, for it can be implemented by inflexions. The part of speech of English words are shown by affix (-ness, -ility, -ible...) to express corresponding meanings.

**TT3:** This vast and beautiful continent covers a third of the earth's land mass and has two-thirds of the world's population.

**Analysis3:** The part of speech conversion in ST3 is from verb to adjective. A portion of verb in Chinese can play adjective role in English. Verbs more frequent in Chinese than in English. English sentences often use only one predicate verb, but in Chinese, multiple verb structures can be used concatenated. The subject-predicate structure in ST3 is transformed into an attributive structure to show nature and property of Asia continent.

Another case of part of speech conversion is following:

**TT4:** The world today is becoming increasingly information-oriented. All this points to promising prospects for the future.

**Analysis4:** The part of speech conversion in ST4 is from none to adjective. TT4 in Chinese means a dynamically gradual process, such as “economic globalization” , and “cultural diversity” in the keynote speech. The subject of ST4 is top-heavy, leading to an imbalance of the sentence structure. By changing part of speech into adjective, the sentence is more balanced and rich in readability.

## 4. Translation on the Textual Level

In the process of interpretation, interpreters divide the entire sentence into several sense groups and information units in accordance with sentence order of the source language they heard, and translate the overall meaning naturally with conjunctions to connect these units. This translation method is known as “syntactic linearity”.

Interpreters mainly need to coordinate three basic tasks of listening analysis, short-term memory and target language expression. At the same time, interpreters need to take control of the time interval, also be called as “ear-voice-span” during interpreting, that is the time interval between hearing the source language and outputting the target language. In this several-second interval, the interpreter need to listen to, analyze the input information, and complete prompt interpretation output. Therefore, if the translator make great adjustment to the structure of the source language, it is bound to have two situations: First, as listening analysis, short-term memory and target language output are simultaneous in most cases, a long time and a large amount of energy are spent on listening and analyzing. Such uneven distribution of energy, resulting in a reduction of memory information, and even a loss of important information, which ultimately affects translation output. Second, the longer the ear-voice-span lasts, the more information the translator needs to store in short-term memory. Therefore, interpreting in line with the word order of the source language can shorten the ear-voice-span, avoid imbalances in energy distribution, and ease the memory burden.

**TT5:** I wish to express our sincere hope to the people of the Conference on Dialogue of Asian Civilizations, whose keen perspectives and insights has made a perspective to create an even better tomorrow for civilizations in Asia and beyond!

**TT6:** The Conference on Dialogue of Asian Civilizations has a wide-ranging agenda, and I look forward to your keen perspectives and insights. By putting our heads together, we will create an even better tomorrow for civilizations in Asia and beyond!

**Analysis5:** According to the rules of translation, the translator must wait for the entire sentence of the speaker. The ear-voice-span will push the interpreter to memorize more information, and the output will also be delayed. As a result, the efficiency of interpretation reduced. Therefore, the translator applied the principle of “syntactic linearity” in TT6, without changing the word order of the original text. Interpretation does not need to be that thoughtful, compared to translation. By changing the part-of-speech ensure fluent sentences expressions, the burden of memory will be reduced and the rapidness and accuracy of information transmission will be improved.

Furthermore, syntactic linearity does not mean the one-to-one corresponding relation of word to word and the original text to the source text. The translator does not mechanically follow the word order of the source language, but initiates the relevant language knowledge, background subject and cognitive knowledge to actively divide the source language into several sense groups, and translate sense groups in sequence.

Here is another example in the keynote speech:

**TT7:** Such situation must change that in some parts of Asia, people, women and children in particular, are still suffering from poverty, hunger and disease.

**TT8:** In some parts of Asia, people, women and children in particular, are still suffering from poverty, hunger and disease, and this must change.

**Analysis6:** In terms of structure of sentence patterns, Chinese tend to make a conclusion after specific run-on sentences, while conclusions are always put ahead in English with additional clauses following by.

TT7 mentioned above is the translation version using domesticating translation method. However, the interpreter have to memorize more information until the end of the sentence, which greatly increase memorize and attention distribution burden and reduce interpretation accuracy and efficiency. TT8 conforms to the principle of “syntactic linearity”, whose word order is in keeping with the speech for a high-quality output.

## 5. Conclusion

Interpretation must be completed within a limited time after the end of the speech by the speaker in source language. Therefore, interpreters should manage to minimize the time span between language output and the speech in source language.

The interpretation of the keynote speech at the opening ceremony of the conference on dialogue of Asian civilizations, Deepening Exchanges and Mutual Learning Among Civilizations For an Asian Community with a Shared Future

studied in this paper uses several consecutive interpreting methods and skills worth discussing and learning from.

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