

## Contrastive Study of English Zeugma and Chinese Nianlian

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**Abstract.** The English Zeugma and Chinese Nianlian are rhetorical devices which are different but share similar structures and functions. This paper begins with the definition of Zeugma and Nianlian, and analyzes similarities and differences between them through exemplification. The similarities are mainly illustrated from function, namely semantic function and rhetorical function of Zeugma and Nianlian. The differences are explained from category and structure. The reasons for differences are analyzed through language construction and custom habits.

### Introduction

The word “Zeugma” is from Greek word “zeugnynai”, which means “yoke”. In Chinese, “yoke” is a kind of tool that takes the shape of “<”, which is used to be fixed onto the neck of animals like cattle and horses for their obedience [1]. The basic feature of Zeugma we can obtain is that one word is used to modify or govern two or more words, but only one pair of them is valid grammatically, logically and semantically, which means in Zeugma there is only one normal collocation, others being abnormal. Strangely, this special expression is not regarded as mistake or confusion, but accepted by people. For example:

① Lawsuit consumes time, and money and rest and friends. (proverb)

While Nianlian is a Chinese figure of speech which is similar with Zeugma in English.<sup>[2]</sup> Chen Wangdao gave his definition of Nianlian in his book *An Introduction to Rhetoric*: “When someone is talking about A and B, sometimes he or she will use the words that are appropriate for A to express the concept of B. This manner of expression is called as Nianlian, which can be used no matter whether A is beforehand or B is beforehand.” There are three factors of Nianlian which are essential and important: nianci, the former item, and the latter item. For example:

②红烛啊，既制了，便烧着！烧罢，烧罢！烧破世人的梦，烧沸世人的血。（闻一多《红烛》）

No matter how different Zeugma in English and Nianlian in Chinese are, they have one thing in common: they often use one “key word” to “govern” two or more subjects or objects. The “key word” is named as “yoking word”.

### Similarities between English Zeugma and Chinese Nianlian

Zeugma/Nianlian makes language more exquisite and expressive based on the strange semantic links. Using Zeugma/Nianlian appropriately can enhance the ability of language comprehension, expression and literary appreciation. Analysis of their similarities is proposed from two aspects: semantic function and rhetorical function.

Similar semantic functions could be found from examples①and②. Firstly, there are at least two collocations in one example, and usually one contains concrete semantic relations, namely normal collocation, while the other does not, called abnormal collocation. Secondly, abnormal collocations could only be accepted based on normal collocations, which means some internal logical connection exists between normal and abnormal collocations. Thirdly, the abstract abnormal collocations are the semantic core of the whole sentence. Normal collocations are the foundation of understandings,

and main message that the sentence conveys is the abstract meaning hidden in abnormal collocations.

Similarly, the rhetorical function of Zeugma/Nianlian makes language more vivid and interesting. Especially in literary works, unexpected effects often could be achieved. Rhetorical function is explained from the principle of economy, strengthening of expressive effect and beauty of style and rhythm. The principle of economy, or the principle of least effort, could be adapted to all living bodies. This principle is used perfectly in the process of human's evolution, as well as the development of human's language. Language is always in a shifting balance because of the need of least effort and the want of better communication. So it is inevitable to express with least words but with most abundant meanings. Guided by the principle of economy, Zeugma/Nianlian makes language simple but with profound implications.

In addition, Zeugma/Nianlian always strengthens expressive effect that writers want to convey to readers. Generally speaking, Zeugma/Nianlian is often applied to strengthen humorous effect, sarcastic effect and others.

## Differences between English Zeugma and Chinese Nianlian

### Categories of English Zeugma and Chinese Nianlian

The category of Zeugma is a controversial issue for different standards chosen by different scholars in different periods. This paper will discuss Zeugma's category from a different point of view from Zhang Yin [3], who sorts Zeugma into three types considering the place of yoking word in sentences, namely, prozeugma, mesozeugma and hypozeugma.

Prozeugma: a zeugma where a verb in the first part of a sentence governs several later clauses in series.

③ *Lust conquered shame; Audacity, fear; madness, reason.*

Mesozeugma: a zeugma where a verb in the middle of the sentence governs several parallel clauses on either side.

④ *Both determination and virtue will prevail; Both dedication and honor; diligence and commitment.*

Hypozeugma: a zeugma where a verb falls at the end of a sentence and governs several parallel clauses that precede it.

⑤ *Through rain or sleet or dark of night, the mail must get through. (Motto of postal carriers.)*

Compared with Zeugma, there are more standards for the classification of Nianlian. Here is a form listing the main classifications:

Table 1. Main classifications of Nianlian from different scholars.

Scholar(s)	Classifications
Chen Wangdao	Shunlian
Wu Zongyuan	Shunlian, fanlian, leilian
Meng Zhaoquan	Common Nianlian, variant Nianlian, chiasmus Nianlian

From Chen Wangdao[2], it is not hard to find that most examples are of the same kind, which is called shunlian. Wu Zongyuan[4]classifies Nianlian into three types: shunlian, fanlian and leilian. Fanlian is the type with meaning opposite or contrary while leilian is the type with meaning of the same kind.

⑥ *希望大家积极支持文字改革工作，促进这一工作，而不是促退这一工作。(周恩来《当前文字改革的任务》)(ibid.:25)*

⑦ *爷爷算了嘛，管它迎春迎夏，又不是什么了不起的事。(任大霖《爷爷和我过日子》)(ibid.:25)*

Case⑥ is the example of fanlian while case⑦ is for leilian.

With respect to its nature, Meng Zhaoquan[5]divided Nianlian into three types: common Nianlian, variant Nianlian, and chiasmus Nianlian. Common Nianlian can be further divided into affix Nianlian, word Nianlian and phrase Nianlian. Variant Nianlian can be still divided into reduced-form Nianlian, compressed Nianlian and borrowing Nianlian. Chiasmus Nianlian can be still classified into homophonic Nianlian, polysemous Nianlian and general-specific Nianlian.

From the categories of Zeugma and Nianlian, we can find that their classifications are totally different. Zeugma is sorted into three kinds according to the position of the verb, while Nianlian is classified by its forms, and these forms are controlled by sentences' contents and meaning.

### **Structures of English Zeugma and Chinese Nianlian**

The structure of Zeugma will be defined from five kinds of sentence constituents. The first kind is: verb + object + object. The second kind is: subject + subject + verb. The third kind is: preposition + object + object. The fourth kind is: adjective modifying two or more nouns. The fifth kind is: subject + copula + predicative. Here is the example:

⑧When I and my sorrows are dust. [16]

On the other hand, there are three kinds of structures in Nianlian. The first one is: subject + predicate. The second kind is: predicate + object. The third one is subject + predicate + object.

It is obvious that the first two kinds of Zeugma are similar to the first two kinds of Chinese Nianlian, but differences overweigh their similarities: Zeugma has more peculiar characters. The third and the fourth kind of Zeugma's structure cannot be found in Chinese Nianlian. What's more, the yoking word in Nianlian often needs to be repeated, but in Zeugma, it is not necessary to be repeated. For example:

⑨我们买衣服既合身，又合时。

In this typical example of Nianlian, the yoking word “合” is repeated. Nevertheless, Zeugma in English is different:

⑩She was dressed in a maid's cap, a pinafore, and a bright smile. [7]

In this example, the yoking word “dress” only appears once.

From the contrast of the structures of Zeugma and Nianlian, it is not hard to find that Zeugma and Nianlian has their peculiar characteristics. Firstly, Zeugma has five sentences structures while Nianlian has three kinds of that. Secondly, nouns have played an important role in Zeugma's structures, while verbs have much of importance in Nianlian. Thirdly, the third and the forth kinds of Zeugma's structures cannot be found in Nianlian, but the third kind structure of Nianlian is particular in Chinese. Fourthly, the yoking word in Nianlian needs to be repeated, but usually not in Zeugma.

## **Reasons for Differences**

### **Reasons in Language Construction**

At the lexical level, firstly, nouns and nominal phrases are preferred in English. And nominalization is one of the main features of English language. The popular use of nouns leads to the wide application of prepositions in English. However, verbs are the most important elements to express certain meaning for a Chinese sentence. That's the reason why Zeugma's structures are different from Nianlian's. It has been analyzed that five structures are found in English Zeugma and nouns play an important role. The first, second and third kind of structures of Zeugma focus on nouns, especially the third one—preposition + object + object, which is quite unique in English. Furthermore, the fourth kind structure—adjective modifying two or more nouns also proves nouns' absolute identity in Zeugma's structures. On the contrary, Nianlian's three kinds of structures all contain “predicate”, which shows the importance of verbs in Chinese.

At the syntactical level, firstly, English tends to be hypotactic while Chinese tends to be paratactic. So the classification of Zeugma and Nianlian has different standards. Zeugma is classified by the verb's position, which belongs to the grammar category, but Nianlian is sorted into reduced-form Nianlian, extended-form Nianlian and compressed Nianlian, which shows multiple

forms but one absolute standard—sentences' contents. So no matter whether the sentence is long or short, no matter how complicated or simple the sentence is, contents and meanings matter much.

Secondly, there is obvious difference in the information distribution between English and Chinese. English prefers to state results, opinion and information before reason, statement and background, which is called silent order. Chinese likes to state results, opinion and foreground information at the end of a sentence. In fact, Chinese often states information according to the development order of actions, which is named chronological order. Thirdly, influenced by the different ways of information distribution, English and Chinese have different sentences structures. English sentences are characteristics of tree-like structure, and Chinese sentences of bamboo-like structure.

### **Reasons in Custom Habits**

Language is the tool of thought, and thought is the product of a nation's culture. It is well known that the geographical environment in China and English-speaking countries is quite different, which results in different cultures and thinking models.

According to western people, there is a huge gap between human and nature. People should try to be independent of nature. Western people regard nature as object to be explored, so they wish nature to fit for human. Besides, western people focus on individuality, and they chase equality because of Christianity.

According to Chinese people, however, human and nature should be harmonious. Chinese people wish to be integrated into the nature, and usually regard human being as participant in the development of nature. Besides, Chinese people values group's beneficiary, and they are likely to be modest and polite influenced by the traditional Confucius thought.

Affected by different kinds of beliefs, different literature works show different cultures at the same time, reinforcing their influences on language.

### **Conclusion**

This paper gives a contrastive study of English Zeugma and Chinese Nianlian. It starts with the definition of Zeugma and Nianlian respectively. As an important rhetorical device in both languages, Zeugma and Nianlian inevitably share some similarities, namely, similar semantic function and rhetorical function. Semantically, Zeugma and Nianlian both have at least two collocations, which include normal and abnormal ones. The abnormal collocations are the cores of the whole sentence, but it cannot be accepted if there is no normal collocations as the foundation. In rhetoric, both Zeugma and Nianlian practice the principle of economy, strengthening expressive effect and having the beauty of style and rhythm. Differences between Zeugma and Nianlian are the core of analysis, which are explained from the category and structure. According to their categories, the author finds Nianlian has more categories than Zeugma does. Zeugma is sorted into three kinds according to the position of the verb, while Nianlian is classified by its forms, and these forms are controlled by sentences' contents and meaning. According to their structures, Nianlian tends to use more verbs while Zeugma has more nouns; the yoking word in Nianlian often needs to be repeated, but usually not in Zeugma. Because of differences of language construction and custom habits, Zeugma and Nianlian have such differences on their categories and structures. Due to personal limitation, there is still room for further exploration, such as the category of the rhetoric, which could be redefined from different perspectives. [8]

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