

英语“选择比较”的结构、语义及用法

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【摘要】文章用较为充分的语言实例,对英语的一种特殊比较形式——“选择比较”的结构、语义及用法进行分析和归纳;同时,对英语中的“选择”、“比较”、“选择比较”为读者提供了较为清楚的概念和认识。

【关键词】选择;比较;选择比较

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一 “选择比较”的概念

“选择”和“比较”是人类语言思维过程中两个不同的环节和概念。英语中,单纯的“选择”(choice——picking out or selecting sb./sth. that one prefers or considers the best, most suitable from a greater number; showing what one wants by taking)”是指根据一定的主、客观标准对人或事物或情形从众多的量中进行筛选以便做出取舍。如:“This one is blue, and that one is red. Which one do you want?”“I want the blue one.”(根据颜色标准加以选择)。单纯的“比较”(comparison——examining or judging one thing against another in order to show the points of likeness or difference)”是采用一定的主、客观标准对人或事物的相同属性加以对比、衡量以找出程度上的差异或差距。如:Mike is five inches tall. Jim is four inches tall. So Mike is taller than Jim.(根据高度来衡量以找出差距)。

而本文所讨论的“选择比较”指的是两种情形相比较而言,肯定(取)其中一种,否定(舍)另一种,以表示说话人态度的某种倾向或意愿或建议。“选择比较”这一思维过程通常是采用某些比较结构,或特殊的词汇,或短语来表达的。可以说是一种特殊的比较形式,但又不是简单的“选择+比较”结构。如:I'd rather play tennis than basketball.(我宁愿打网球而不愿打篮球)。“选择比较”的特点是寓取舍(选择)意义于比较形式之中。从语言表达形式上看,“选择比较”结构虽然大多没有明显的表示否定的词语,但是含有否定的意义,因为肯定一种情形就意味着否定另一种情形。汉语里面也有选择比较的说法,常见的句式是:“与其说是……宁毋说是……”,“宁可(愿)……而不(愿)……”,“与其……不如……”,“最好(还是)……”等。

二 “选择比较”的结构、语义及用法

1. (Would/should) prefer ...to/rather than...结构

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此结构意为“choose rather; like better”(ALDCE)。“to choose(one thing or action)rather than another, like better”(LADCE)。表示“喜好,优选”。译为“宁可(愿)……而不……”。to前后接名词或动名词,rather than前后接不定式或动名词。可用于一、二、三人称,但二人称多为疑问句。如:

(1) He prefers sweaters and slacks to suits. (Current Biography, July 1965)(MWDEU)

(2) ...prefer to leave rather than to subvert their values (Shelly Halpern, Changing, Nov.-Dec.1969)(MWDEU)

(3) ...prefer to stand rather than sit (Current Biography, September 1964)(MWDEU)

(4) ...preferred to preach in it rather than in his mother tongue. (Dictionary of American Biography, 1936)(MWDEU)

(5) He preferred living like a Grecian to dying like a Roman. (J.W.Crocker, 20 July 1815, in The Crocker Papers, 1884 [OED])(MWDEU)

(6) It seems we prefer reading magazines to books. (John Barkham, Saturday Rev., 13 Feb.1954)(MWDEU)

(7) ...the rich preferred reading rather than investing. (Times Literary Supp., 2 July 1971)(MWDEU)

(8) I should prefer to wait until evening.(ALDCE)

(9) I should prefer you not to go (that you did not go) there alone.(ALDCE)

(10) “Would you like meat or fish?” “I'd prefer meat, please.”(LDCE)

(11) Would you prefer that I come on Monday instead of on Tuesday?(LDCE)

当两个供取舍的项目是名词时,用to连接;是不定式时,用rather than连接,避免接连出现两个to,

而且,后一个不定式还可省略to;是动名词时,用rather than或to均可。如果前后两项是不定式或动名词且动词又相同时,后一个不定式或动名词可以省略。Prefer后也可接一个分句。

2.had better do...结构

had better 相当于一个助动词,意为:①.would find it more suitable; more to your advantage, etc.; would be wise to do“最好……”(劝告或建议用语)(ALDCE);②.ought to; should“应当,应该”(LDCE)。had是过去式,但并不表示过去时间,而是虚拟语气表示现在或将来时间,使语气更委婉。在当代英语中, had不能换成would/should/could。had better后跟动词原形,不与than搭配,因为没有比较对象,其比较含义隐含在具体的语境中,说话人是根据事态情形的分析,建议某人“最好做……”或觉得自己“最好做……”。此结构主要用于较随便的口语中。可以用于一、二、三人称。如:

(1) You had better mind your own business. (ALDCE)

(2) We'd better be starting back now. (ALDCE)

(3) Hadn't you better take an umbrella? (ALDCE)

(4) "I thought I'd better warn you, in case David should ever mention it." (LDCE)

(5) ...he had better think again.—(Barzun, 1985) (MWDEU)

此结构的否定式是在better后加not。如:

"I'd better not go round at lunch time." (LDCE)

当主语是名词时, had不与主语缩写在一起。如:

John had better go at once. 不能说/写成: John'd better go at once.

当主语是代词时, had不与主语缩写在一起则语气更强。如(1)。

当had better用于简短对话的答语中时,其后的部分可省略,并且had和better的位置互换,以加强语气。如:

——You'd better go to New York with your parents.

——Yes, I better had.

在较早的英语中亦见用had best。如:

You had best talk to him. (Love and a Bottle, 1698) (MWDEU)

It had best be a good letter. (Penelope Gilliatt, New Yorker, 1 May 1971) (MWDEU)

虽然《朗文词典》将其注释为ought to; should,但had better与should, ought to有时还是有一定区别:

had better多针对某一具体的情形提出“劝告、建议”,并含有if the advice is not followed, something bad will happen.而should, ought to侧重指普遍、通常的情形,并含有“义务、责任”之意,译成“最好……”,但语气比had better更强。如: You'd better do what I say or else you will get into trouble. You shouldn't say anything about it. You should dress more appropriately for the office.

3.would rather...than...结构

此结构中, rather是副词,意为“情愿”,“更愿意”(more willingly/readily; by preference); would是情态助动词。rather也可换作sooner; than引出比较的对象以便做出取舍。than前、后用平行结构,主要是动词原形,并且than后通常采用省略形式。than前是肯定意义, than是否定意义。整个结构用以表示主观愿望,意为“宁愿(情愿)……,而不愿……”,“宁可……,而不(愿)……”主要用于一、二、三人称,但主语是第二人称时,多为疑问句。比如:

(1) She would rather have the smaller one than the larger one. (ALDCE)

(2) I'd rather play tennis than swim. (LDCE)

(3) I'd sooner die than marry you. (LDCE)

(4) Would you rather stay here or go home? (Swan)

值得注意的是:

(1)当主语是人称代词时, Would或had/should可以与代词缩写在一起。如, I'd rather play tennis rather than swim. 当主语是名词时,则不能缩写在一起。如,不能说(写)成: Tom'd rather play tennis than swim.

(2)在一般疑问句中than通常改为or。如例(4)。而在否定疑问句中仍可用than,如Wouldn't you rather be liked than feared? (ALDCE)

(3)would rather后也可跟一个分句,分句的动词须用过去时,这是虚拟语气的一种表达方式,使语气更委婉。如: I would rather you came tomorrow than today. 我宁愿你于明天而不是今天来。(ALDCE)。I would rather you did it now. (Thomson)

(4)若要表示强调,可将rather/sooner和than写在一起置于句首,如: Rather than refuse to help you, I would borrow money from my bank. Sooner than marry that man, she would earn her living as a waitress. (ALDCE)

(5)当rather than连用时,相当于more than或(but)not。意为“……是……而不(是)……”。《朗文

词典》注: rather——more; in a greater degree (in the phr. rather than), 并给予如下例句: John ought to go rather than Jean. He ran rather than walked. It was what he meant rather than what he said.

(6) 有人认为 would 可以省略, rather 和 than 可以连用。但在《朗文词典》(LDCE) 中却找不到省略 would 的例句, 只有《牛津词典》(ALDCE) 在 rather 词条下有如下例句: He resigned rather than take part in such a dishonest transaction. 他宁愿辞职也不愿参与这种欺诈的交易。而在 soon 词条下又有一例句: He would sooner resign than take part in such dishonest business deals. 他宁愿辞职也不会参与那样不诚实的买卖。

4. more/less...than...结构

“more/less...than...”意为 It is not true to say... than... (LDCE)。常用来表示同一事物/人的不同属性、状态、特征, 其含义是对某种说法加以修正。常译为“与其说……不如说……”。than 前、后用相同的词性, 可分别接两个不同的名词, 形容词, 不定式等, 用以描述不同的属性、特征。more...than 结构中, more 后的内容是选择(肯定)的对象, than 后是舍弃(否定)的对象。less...than...结构中, less 后是舍弃(否定)的对象, than 后是选择(肯定)的对象。主要用于第三人称。如:

(1) Mike's father is more good than bad.

(2) She is more shy than unsocial.

(3) Mary was more hurt than frightened.

(4) She is less a singer than a poet.

(5) He is more brave than wise.

(6) Lucy is our English teacher. But she is more (of) a friend than a teacher. 露西是我们的英语老师。与其说她是老师, 不如说她是朋友。

(7) It remains our view that a definition would be more likely to interfere with than to assist the competent organ of the United Nations to take quick and effective action to ensure the maintenance of peace. 我们仍认为, 一项定义与其说是有助于、倒不如说是妨碍于联合国各主管机构采取迅速而有效的行动, 确保和平。

(8) He is more mad than stupid. (LDCE)

无论形容词是单音节还是多音节都须用“more+形容词”, 而不是“单音节形容词+er”或特殊形式(如 good-better), 如例(1)、(2)、(3)。More 和名词之间可加 of, 如例(6)。

More than 两词连用, 后面接一个与前面相对应

的平行结构。此时 more than 的含义等于“(and) not”。汉语译为“是……而不是……”。如:

It was Jack, more than I (=not I), who broke the window. 打破窗户的是杰克而不是我。

The president, more than the board (=not the board), was responsible for this. 应对此事负责的是董事长而不是董事会。

5. not so much...as...结构

从结构上看, not so much...as...与 not so/as...as...相同, 但语义上却有差别。前者是选择比较, 后者是差等比较。用法上也不同, not so much...as...结构中的 so 不能换成 as, much 必须紧跟在 so 后, 且不能省略, as 意为“but (rather)”, much 和 as 后应跟两个平行的结构, 通常是动词、名词、不定式或介词(短语)、形容词或副词(短语)。not so much 后为否定意义, as 后为肯定意义。其含义是对某种说法加以修正。汉语译为“与其……不如……”, “不是……而是……”。如:

(1) I don't so much dislike him as hate him. (LDCE)

(2) Oceans do not so much divide the world as unite it (i.e. they serve to unite countries rather than to divide them). (ALDCE) 与其说海洋分隔了世界, 不如说海洋联结了世界。

(3) He is not so much unintelligent as uneducated (i.e. he lacks education, not intelligence.) 与其说他不够聪明, 不如说他未受教育。(ALDCE)

(4) She is not so much poor as careless with money. (ALDCE)

(5) His loss of money was not so much by chance as by carelessness. 他丢钱与其说是偶然, 不如说是粗心大意。

(6) The aim of college education is not so much to teach students knowledge as to provide them an experience of life. 大学教育的目的与其说是教给学生知识, 不如说是给学生提供人生的体验。

(7) He is not so much an artist as a singer.

当 not so much as 不分开时, 实质上是语气较强的否定, 意为“(甚至)连……也不(没有)”。如:

(1) He left without so much as saying “Thank you!”. 他走了, 甚至连“谢谢”都没说。(ALDCE)

(2) He had not so much as fare home. 他甚至连回家的车费都没有。(ALDCE)

(3) When left, he didn't so much as drink a glass of water. 他离开时连一杯水也没喝。

(4) He didn't so much as (didn't even) ask me to sit down..(ALDCE) 他甚至没请我坐。

6. Better (to) do... than (to) do... 结构

一看结构便知, than 前后须是平行的带 to 或不带 to 的不定式, 但在具体使用时, 若前后两个动词相同, than 后可省略动词。表示在两个动作行为之间做出取舍。此结构是一种简练而强调的句式。主要用于谚语中, 意为“(与其)……不如……”, “宁愿……不愿……”, 如:

(1) Better be alone than in bad company.

(2) Better to do well than to say well.

(3) Better to light one candle than to curse the darkness.

(4) Better master one than engage with ten.

(5) Better say nothing than nothing to the purpose.

有时也省略不定式, 或换用其它词语。如:

(6) Better late than never.

(7) Better without gold than without friends.

此结构由 “It is better to do... than to do...” 简略而成, 但又不能转换成 “To do... is better than to do...”。因为后者是一般的差等比较结构。若将例(1)改为 To be alone is better than (to be) in bad company. 则意为: 没朋友比起交坏朋友更好些。

7. would (just) as soon... as... 结构

此结构意为 like... more than.../do... more

willingly than..., 与 would rather/ sooner... than... 的含义相同----表示愿望, 译为“宁愿(情愿)……, 而不愿……”, “宁可……, 而不(愿)……”。第二个 as 前后使用平行结构, 通常是动词原形。在上下文意思清楚时, 后一 as 引出的部分可省略, would 也可与代词主语缩写在一起。主要用于第一人称。如:

(1) I would (just) as soon stay at home (as go for a walk). (ALDCE)

(2) I'd just as soon come at five. (Allen)

(3) I'd go there as soon as not. 我更愿去那儿。(ALDCE)

(4) “Will you dance?” “I'd just as soon not, if you don't mind.” (LDCE)

Would (just) as soon 后也可接一个分句, 动词用一般过去时虚拟式表示愿望。

I'd just as soon you didn't speak to her that way.

I'd just as soon you didn't take those thick clothes with you.

三 小结

综上所述, “选择比较”结构不是简单的“选择”加“比较”, 也不是对人或事物的相同属性进行比较以找出差异(距), 而是就具有不同属性的两(多)种情形进行对比分析, 以便采取更(最)佳的行动或态度; 或表示强烈的主观愿望; 或提出建议、劝告; 或表达喜好(爱); 或对某种说法加以修正。

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The Structures, Meanings and Uses of “Choosing-by-Comparison Structure” in the English Language

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Abstract: This paper, by giving lots of examples, analyzes the structures, meanings and uses of “choosing-by-comparison structure” in the English language, and at the same time, it presents a clear explanation of “choice”, “comparison”, and “Choose-by-Comparison” in the English language.

Key words: Choice; Comparison; Choosing-by-Comparison Structure

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