

Designing the Strategy for Teaching Chinese Discourse as SLA by a Comparative Analysis of the Different Co-reference Devices in English and Chinese Discourses

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Abstract

Structures and strategies pertaining to discourse organization are crucial to the acquisition of the language as well as natural and effective communication. Chinese is described linguistically as a typical discourse-oriented language. In the field of teaching Chinese as a second language acquisition (SLA) in advanced level, there is a general consensus that discourse is hard to be specified and difficult to teach and learn. This paper is proposed to lay out specific elements in Chinese discourse structures by making a comparative study of Chinese and English discourse devices and designs the strategy in teaching and learning these structures. English discourses and Chinese discourses share some similarities in the cohesive devices employed, but there exist great differences in the practical choice of them and the frequency of using them. For example, co-reference in English and Chinese discourses are basically same but there exist differences in concrete use and frequency of using them. ZA, a peculiar device in Chinese, is mainly used in referring to living people or animals and usually appears in descriptions and narrations. In the same circumstance, English prefers to pronouns. There are three reasons to explain why the frequency of using pronouns in English is much higher than in Chinese: the first is that there is no ZA in English; the second one is that the frequency of using possessive pronouns in English is much higher than in Chinese; the last one is that the usage of pronouns in Chinese is more limited while in English it is less limited. In the co-reference of inanimate things or conceptions, both English and Chinese prefer to NP, especially the repetition of NP, but synonyms in NP is relatively less used. However the frequency of using demonstrative pronouns in English is much higher than in Chinese. Researches and experiments have showed that Zero Anaphora (ZA) is a peculiar device in Chinese discourses while English discourses prefer personal pronouns; the frequency of using personal pronouns in English discourses is much higher than in Chinese ones but the frequency of using noun phrases (NP) is on the contrary; the frequency of using repetition and general words in noun phrases tends to be consistent in both English and Chinese discourses although there exist differences in special reference words. In addition, whether in English discourses or Chinese ones, the choices of reference is influenced by genres, types of referring objects and their roles playing in discourses. The correct use of cohesive devices in the discourse makes the whole essay coherent. This paper cites a famous English description, The Song of the River and a well-known Chinese essay The Lotus Pool by Moonlight as examples to make a comparative analysis of devices of co-reference expression in two languages. Studies in language processing show that languages differ in their discourse pattern and that L2 learners tend to transfer their L1 discourse processing strategies into L2. Thus, it is anticipated that Chinese learners with an L1 such as English, which does not allow NP deletion in obligatory contexts, would exert unacceptable redundancy or grammar errors beyond the sentence level and help Chinese teachers eliminate the fear of teaching discourse so that they treat discourse structures the same as any other grammatical elements in Chinese classes and have a better understanding of the reason that English-speakers make such mistakes when they write paragraphs.

Key Words: discourse; cohesion; coherence; cohesive devices; coreference

1. Introduction

Cohesion is the tangible net of a discourse while the coherence is the intangible net of a discourse. Connecting sentences in a reasonable and logical way makes a paragraph cohesive while connecting paragraphs by using all kinds of cohesive methods makes the whole text coherent. In this paper the author will first analyze different cohesive devices in English discourses. Then an emphasis will be made on comparative analysis of differences in devices of coreference^[1] in Chinese and English discourses, one of cohesive devices in English discourse and Chinese discourse.

The author chose *The Song of the River* written by famous modern English novelist W.S. Maugham and *The Lotus Pool by Moonlight* written by the well-known Chinese writer Zhu Ziqing because both of them are elegant essays of describing scenery and expressing their feelings at the same time.

2. Cohesive Devices of the Discourse

Discourse is a general term for examples of language use, i.e. language which has been produced as the result of an act of communication. Whereas grammar refers to the rules a language uses to form grammatical units such as clause, phrase, and sentence, discourse refers to larger units of language such as paragraphs, conversations, and interviews, etc. Sometimes the study of both written and spoken discourses is known as discourse analysis; some researchers, however, use discourse analysis to refer to the study of spoken discourse and text linguistics^[3] to refer to the study of written discourse. Some linguists prefer to include the study of all spoken texts, particularly if they are longer than one sentence, in discourse analysis. But some famous linguists such as Halliday, Guirk thought that the discourse refers not only to written language but also spoken language. In my paper, the discourse refers to paragraphs in written texts.

Texture is the quality of being recognizably a text rather than a collection of unconnected words or clauses (Thompson, 2000:148). These are generally grouped together under the label of “cohesion” (Halliday, 1994: Chapter 9; Halliday & Hasan, 1976). In *Introducing Functional Grammar*, the author thinks the terms ‘cohesion’ and ‘coherence’ may seem almost interchangeable, but there is an important difference between them. Cohesion is the grammatical or lexical relationships between the different elements of a text. These may be the relationship between different sentences or between different parts of a sentence. Coherence, is the relationships which link the meanings of utterance in a discourse or of the sentences in a text. This link may be based on speakers’ shared knowledge. Cohesion is a tangible web of the discourse and coherence is an intangible web of the discourse. Their relationship is that the cohesion is an important factor but not the only one that ensures a discourse’s coherence. Cohesion is the linguistic characteristic of connecting sentences into the discourse and it has five devices in the superficial construction of the discourse. They are: reference, ellipsis, substitution, conjunction and lexical cohesion. If a writer can use the cohesive devices correctly and skillfully, his readers could feel the coherence of the whole text. The study of coreference is included in the study of cohesion. Therefore, before analyzing characteristics of coreference in English discourses, the author will introduce five cohesive devices in detail at first.

(1) Reference is the set of grammatical resources, which allow the speaker to indicate whether something is being repeated from somewhere else in the text (i.e. we have already been told about it), or whether it has not yet appeared in the text (i.e. it is new to us). In the following sentences, “it” refers to the same entity as “their bedroom”, whereas “a” in “a large bed” signals that this is something not mentioned so far.

They came again into their bedroom. A large bed had been left in it.

Reference can be divided into two categories: exophoric (pointing outwards), and endophoric (pointing inwards). Both uses of reference serve the broad function of showing how the message fits into its context; but exophoric reference links the language to the external context, while endophoric reference signals how the message fits specifically into its textual context (the “co-text”). For example, in “*That’s the Anglican Cathedral there*”, “that and there” is exophoric. It is the latter – reference as cohesion – that we will focus on. Most cohesive, endophoric, reference is anaphoric (pointing backwards): the meaning that is being repeated has already been mentioned earlier in the text. Less often, reference may be cataphoric (pointing forwards): this signals that the meaning of the reference item will not be specified until further on in the text. In “*The song goes something like this*”, “this” is cataphoric. The following example comes just before a full quotation of the “different idea” as set out in Pat’s answer paper – “here” points forwards to that quotation (“different” also has a cohesive function (see “comparative reference” below).).

*But Pat and another kid had a different idea. Here is Pat’s paper.
These sensations were very frightening.*

In terms of forms, there are three main types of cohesive reference.

(1) The third personal pronouns:

*Parnell was generally not a hater. He spoke tolerantly of his foes.
Cholera first struck England in 1832. It came from the east.*

(2) **Demonstrative:** “this”, “that”, “these”, “those”. “This” as a cohesive signal means “the one I have just mentioned”, and “there” means “the place I have just mentioned”, “the” has a wider scope. It essentially means something like “you know which I mean, either because I have already mentioned it, or because I am about to mention it, or because you are familiar with it from your own knowledge and experience”. Note that “here” and “there” and “now” and “then” also come into this group.

The British Council also arranges refresher courses for teachers of English in the summer vacation. These courses are often organized in conjunction with a university.

He later made the unusual switch to the army. There he had a brilliant career.

(3) **Comparative:**

Do you want some more paper?

Otherwise his story is the same as Katharine's.

(2) **Ellipsis** is the set of resources by which full repetition of a clause or clause element can be avoided, and by which it can be signaled to readers that they should repeat the wording from a previous clause (or, in some cases, from their own knowledge). There are two basic ways of doing this. In ellipsis proper, the element is simply missed out; in the example below, the reply presupposes the wording “he is ... old”:

“How old is he?” “Two months.”

(3) **Substitution**, on the other hand, is a linguistic token which is put in the place of the wording to be repeated from elsewhere; in the example below, “so” stands in the place of “large for five months”:

It's large for five months, but not abnormally so.

My computer is too slow. I need to get a fast one.

(4) **Conjunction** refers broadly to the combining of any two textual elements into a potentially coherent complex semantic unit. We can start from the clause constituents which we have already identified as serving a textual function: in particular, conjunctions such as “but” and “because”, and conjunctive adjuncts such as “nevertheless” and “therefore”. Conjunction is a kind of device that shows various logical relationships in the discourse by using conjunctions. According to semantics, conjunctions can be divided into four groups: additive, adversative, causal and temporal.

And in all this time he met no one. (additive)

Yet he was hardly aware of being tired. (adversative)

So by nighttime the valley was far below him. (causal)

Then, as dusk fell, he sat down to rest. (temporal)

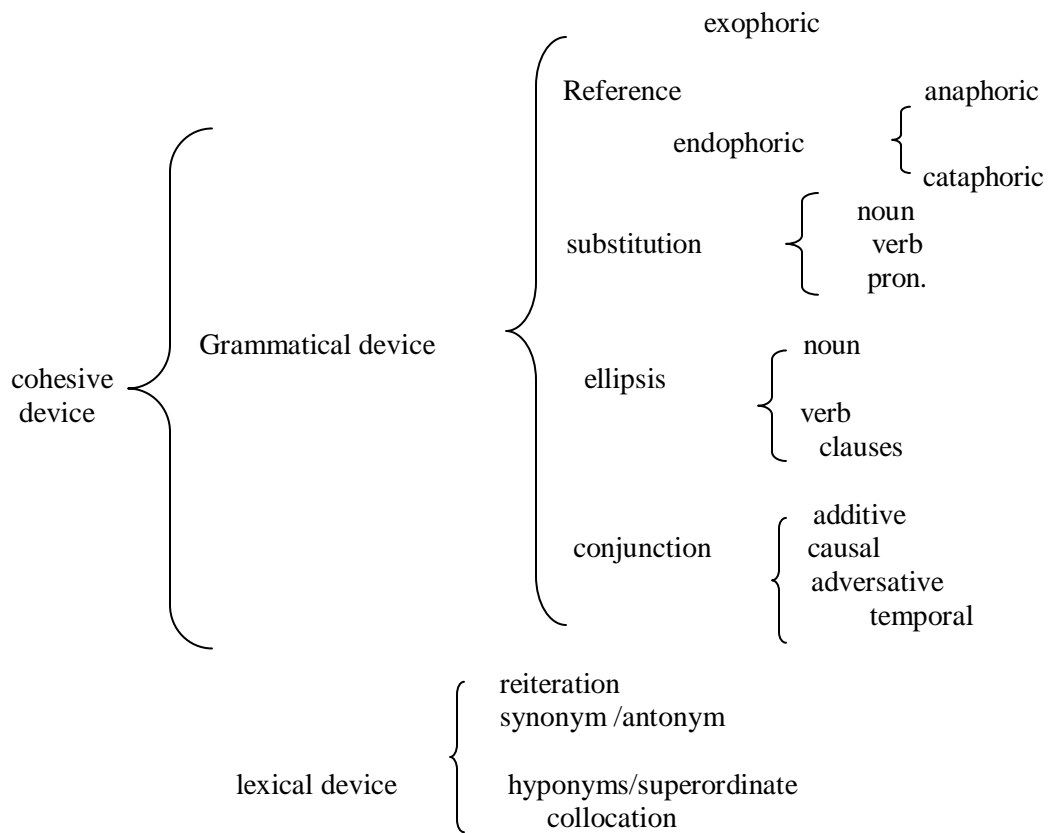
(5) **Lexical cohesion** is a kind of device that shows semantic relationship of the discourse by some lexical devices such as, reiteration, synonym, antonym, hyponyms, superordinate and co-occurrence or (collocation). For example:

I saw a boy win the spelling bee. The boy was delighted afterwards. (reiteration)

I saw a boy win the spelling bee. The lad was delighted afterwards. (synonym)

I saw a boy win the spelling bee. The child was delighted afterwards. (hyponymy)

This is a diagram of the cohesive devices in the discourse.



From the form of expression's point of view, the discourse cohesion can be understood in this way.

Grammatical device	lexical device	
time: during, after, meanwhile	(reiteration)	
place	(collocation)	
Reference	Logical cohesion	Conj.and adv.: and, but, then, yet, so, therefore, etc.
Substitution		phrases: as a result, in addition, on the contrary, etc.
ellipsis		clause: what is more, considering all that, that is to say, etc.

Among these five cohesive devices, coreference expression include pronouns (belonging to personal reference and demonstrative reference), repetition, synonyms, general word (belonging to reiteration) and substitution.

In English discourse, the connection of sentences is realized through these devices mentioned above. I think in Chinese discourse there certainly exists many cohesive devices that make the whole essay very coherent although it is often said the English is a hypotactic language, while the Chinese is a paratactic one. Sentences in Chinese in most cases are connected by cohesive devices rather than textual connectives. The following explanation is about one of cohesive devices in Chinese discourse, which is similar with the English one.

The late linguist, Dr. Liao Qiuzhong (1992:45)though that there are three kinds of typical coreference in Chinese discourses:1. repetition/ full repetition; 2. partial repetition; 3.different form which can be divided into four groups: a. synonym, b. general word, c. pronoun, d. zero anaphora, ZA. ^[5] (ZA is a type of anaphora in which a form may be omitted because its referent is known or can be guessed. For example, "Kim went down town and met Kenji." The verb met has a "zero" subject: neither a noun nor a pronoun appears as subject, but the referent "Kim" can be inferred.)

It is easy to see that forms of coreference in English and Chinese discourses have more similarities than differences: the repetition (including partial repetition), synonyms, general words and pronouns are in common; the difference lies in ZA in Chinese discourses while substitution in English ones.

3.A Comparative Analysis of Differences of Cohesive Devices in English and Chinese Discourses

The Song of the River

W.S. Maugham

(1) You hear *it* all along the river. (2) *You* hear *it*, loud and strong, from the rowers as *they* urge the junk with *its* high stern, the mast lashed alongside, down the swift running stream. (3) *You* hear *it* from the trackers, a more breathless chant, as *they* pull desperately against the current, half a dozen of *them* perhaps if *they* are taking up a wupan, a couple of hundred if *they* are hauling a splendid junk, *its* square sail set, over a rapid. (4) On the junk a man stands amidships beating a drum incessantly to guide *their* efforts, and *they* pull with all *their* strength, like men possessed, bent double; **and** *they* pull with all *their* strength, like men possessed, bent double; **and** sometimes in the extremity of *their* travail they crawl on the ground, on all fours, like the beasts of the field. (5) *They* strain, strain fiercely, against the pitiless might of the stream. (6) The leader goes up and down the line **and** **when** *he* sees *one* who is not putting all *his* will into the task *he* brings down *his* split bamboo the naked back. (7) Each one must do *his* utmost or the labor of all is vain. (8) **And** still *they* sing a vehement, eager chant, the chant of the turbulent waters. (9) I do not know how words can describe what there is in it of effort. (10) *It* serves to express the straining heart, the breaking muscles, and at the same time the indomitable spirit of man which overcomes the pitiless force of nature. (11) **Though** the rope may part and the great junk swing back, in the end the rapid will be passed; **and** at the close of the weary day there is the hearty meal...

(12) **But** the most agonizing song is the song of the coolies who bring the great bales from the junk up the steep steps to the town wall. (13) Up and down *they* go, endlessly, and endless as *their* toil rises their rhythmic cry. (14) *He*, aw-ah, oh. (15) *They* are barefoot and naked to the waist. (16) The sweat pours down *their* faces **and** *their* song is a groan of pain. (17) *It* is a sigh of despair. (18) *It* is heart-rending. (19) *It* is hardly humans. (20) *It* is the cry of souls in infinite distress, only just musical, **and** that last note is the ultimate sob of humanity. (21) Life is too hard, too cruel, **and** this is the final despairing protest. (22)*That* is the song of the river.

Reference

1. anaphoric:

a. **pronouns** : personal pronouns: it (1),(2),(3) refers back to the song of the river; they (2) (3) (4) (5) (8) refers to rowers; he (6) refers to the leader; it (10) refers to the vehement, eager chant; they (13) (15) refers to the coolies; it (17) (18) (19) (20) refers to the song of the coolies.

possessive pronouns: its(2) refers to the junk's; their (4) his (6) refers to the leader's refers to rowers'

b. **Demonstrative**: this (21); that (22)

c. **Comparative**:

2. cataphoric:

Ellipsis:

Substitution:

Conjunction: **additive**: and (4) (6) (8) (10) (11) (16) (20) (21)

causal:

adversative: though (11) but (12)

temporal: as (2) (3)

Lexical cohesion:

Repetition: junk (3) (4) (11); song (12) (16) (22)

Hyponyms:

Superordinate:

Synonym: despair and distress; efforts and strength; vehement and turbulent;

Antonyms: weary and hearty

Collocation:

荷塘月色

The Lotus Pool by Moonlight

朱自清

By Zhu Ziqing

这几天心里颇不宁静。今晚在院子里坐着乘凉，忽然想起日日走过的荷塘，在这满月的光里，总该另有一番样子吧。月亮渐渐地升高了，墙外马路上孩子们地欢笑，已经听不见了；妻在屋里拍着闰儿，迷迷糊糊地哼着眠歌。我悄悄地披了大衫，带上门出去。(English translation is as follows.)

The last few days have found me very restless. This evening as I sat in the yard to enjoy the cool, it struck me how different the lotus pool I pass every day must look under a full moon. The moon was sailing higher and higher up the heavens, the sound of childish laughter had died away from the lane beyond our wall, and my wife was in the house patting Juner and humming a lullaby to him. I quietly slipped on a long gown, and walked out leaving the door on the latch.

沿着荷塘，是一条曲折的小煤屑路。这是一条幽僻的路；白天也少人走，夜晚更加寂寞。荷塘四面，长着许多树，蓊蓊郁郁的，路的一旁，是些杨柳，和一些不知道名字的树。没有月光的晚上，这路阴森森的，有些怕人。今晚却很好，虽然月光也还是淡淡的。

A cinder - path winds along by the side of the pool. It is off the beaten track and few pass this way even by day, so at night it is still more quiet. Trees grow thick and bosky all around the pool, with willows and other trees I cannot name by the path. On nights when there is no moon the track is almost terrifyingly dark, but tonight it was quite clear, though the moonlight was pale.

路上只我一个人，

背着手踱着。这一片田地好象是我的；我也象超出了平常的自己，到了另一世界里。我爱热闹，也爱冷静；爱群居，也爱独处。象今晚上，一个人在这苍茫的月下，什么都可以不想，便觉是个自由的人。白天里一定要做的事，一定要说的话，现在都可不理。这是独处的妙处；我且受用这无边的荷香月色好了。

Strolling alone down the path, hands behind my back, I felt as if the whole earth and sky were mine and I had stepped outside my usual self into another world. I like both excitement and stillness, under the full moon, I could think of whatever I pleased or of nothing at all, and that gave me a sense of freedom. All daytime duties could be disregarded. That was the advantage of solitude: I could savour to the full that expanse of fragrant lotus and the moonlight.

(1)曲曲折折的荷塘上面，弥望的是田田的叶子，叶子出水很高，象亭亭的舞女的裙。(2)层层叶子中间，零星地点缀着些白花，有袅娜地开着，有羞涩地打着朵儿的；正如一粒粒的明珠，又如碧天里的星星，又如刚出浴的美人。微风过处，送来缕缕清香，仿佛远处高楼上渺茫的歌声似的。(3)这时候叶子和花也有一丝的颤动，象闪电般霎时传过荷塘的那边去了。(4)叶子本是肩并肩密密地挨着，这便宛然有了一道凝碧的波痕。(5)叶子底下是脉脉的流水，遮住了，不能见一些颜色；而叶子却更见风致了。

As far as eye could see, the pool with its winding margin was covered with trim leaves, which rose high out of the water like the flared skirts of dancing girls. And starring these tiers of leaves were white lotus flowers, alluringly open or bashfully in bud, like glimmering pearls, stars in an azure sky, or beauties fresh from the bath. The breeze carried past gusts of fragrance, like the strains of a song faintly heard from a far-off tower. And leaves and blossoms trembled slightly, while in a flash the scent was carried away. As the closely serried leaves bent, a tide of opaque emerald could be glimpsed. That was the softly running water beneath, hidden from sight, its colour invisible, though the leaves looked more graceful than ever.

(6)月光如流水一般，静静地泻在这一片叶子和花上。(7)薄薄的青雾浮起在荷塘里。(8)叶子和花仿佛在牛乳中洗过一样；又象笼着轻纱的梦。(9)虽然是满月，天上却有一层淡淡的云，所以不能朗照；但我以为这恰是到了好处——

酣眠固不可少，小睡也别有风味的。(10)月光是隔了树照过来的，高处丛生的灌木，落下参差的斑驳的黑影，峭楞楞如鬼一般；弯弯的杨柳的稀疏的倩影，却又象是画在荷叶上。(11)塘中的月色并不均匀；但光与影有着和谐的旋律，如梵婀玲上奏着的名曲。

Far and near, high and low around the pool were trees, most of them willows. These trees had the pool entirely hemmed in, the only small clearings left being those by the path, apparently intended for the moon. All the trees were somber as dense smoke, but among them you could make out the luxuriant willows, while faintly above the tree-tops loomed distant hills - their general outline only. And between the trees appeared one or two street lamps, listless as the eyes of someone drowsy. The liveliest sounds at this hour were the cicadas chirruping on the trees and the frogs croaking in the pool; but this animation was theirs alone, I had no part in it.

荷塘的四面，远远近近，

高高低低都是树，而杨柳最多。这些树将一片荷塘重重围住，只在小路一旁，漏着几段空隙，象是专为月光留下的。树色一例是阴阴的，乍看象一团烟雾；但杨柳的丰姿，便在烟雾里也辨得出。树梢上隐隐约约得是一带远山，只有些大意罢了。树缝里也漏着一两点路灯光，没精打彩的，是瞌睡人的眼。这时候最热闹的，要数树上的蝉声与水里的蛙声；但热闹是它们的，我什么也没有。

...

Cohesive devices of the discourse

Coreference

repetition / full repetition: 叶子(leaves) repeats 9 times ; 月光 (moonlight) (10) repeats one time

荷塘(lotus pool)(4) (8) repeat three times; 树(tree) and 杨柳 (poplar) repeat two times respectively.

Partial repetition : 荷叶(lotus leave) (10) ; 月色(moonlight) (12) 塘中(12)

In the coreference of inanimate things or conceptions, both English and Chinese prefer to NP, especially the repetition of NP, but synonyms in NP is relatively less used. However the frequency of using demonstrative pronouns in English is much higher than in Chinese. The research and study result is important to teaching Chinese as a second language.

Notes

[1] The use of a same or different expression to refer to a person, thing, object, state, action or time, place which reappears in a certain place in a discourse mentioned the first time is generally called as the coreference.

[2] W.S. Maugham is a famous English modern novelist. He traveled around China in 1920s and wrote the volumes of essays *On a Chinese Screen*. This essay is cited from this volume.

[3] The text linguistics is a branch of linguistics which studies spoken or written texts, e.g. a descriptive passage, a scene in a play, a conversation. It is concerned, for instance, with the way the parts of a text are organized and related to one another in order to form a meaningful whole.

[4] Geoff Thompson. *Introducing Functional Grammar*. Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press & Edward Arnold (publishers) Limited, 2000.148-158.

[5] In Chinese, ZA is used very frequently. For example, if we translate “这几天心里颇不宁静。今晚在院子里坐着乘凉，忽然想起日日走过的荷塘...” into English, we must say “I have felt quite upset recently. Tonight, when I was sitting in the yard enjoying the cool, it occurred to me that the Lotus Pond...”

[6] For example, if we translate the sentence into English, “.....可是有时毫不可笑的事，他会冷不防放声大笑，笑得翻江倒海，仰面朝天，几乎连人带椅子要翻过去了，喉结在脖子上乱跳，满脸胡子在抖.....”, we should say “However, when it came to topics of the most dull nature, he would burst into uncontrollable laughter, roaring while rocking in his chair, almost falling flat on his back, his Adam’s apple dancing up and down in his throat and his whiskers fluttering all over his face.” (冯骥才《西式幽默》，刘先农译)

[7] For example, “今天，人类最沉重的负担是军备竞赛，军备竞赛残酷地把我们带向灾难的边缘。我们有责任制止并逆转军备竞赛，以防止军备竞赛扩散到外层空间。”The original English version is “Today, the heaviest burden on mankind’s shoulders was the arms race, which was inexorably bringing it to the edge of an abyss. It is our duty to stop and then to reverse it, to prevent it from spreading to space.” (Mikhail Gorbachev, “Today, The heaviest Burden on Mankind’s Shoulder Is The Arms Race”) In this sentence, there are 60 Chinese characters but “军备竞赛”，these four words repeat three times.

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