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Analysis of Syntactic Structure of Long Sentences in Legal English and Discussion on Translation Strategies

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Abstract

This study conducts an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon of long sentences in legal English, aiming to explore their syntactic structural features and their impact on translation practice. Firstly, through a systematic examination of the syntactic characteristics of long sentences and an analysis of examples from legal texts, the complexity and uniqueness of syntactic construction in legal language are revealed. Subsequently, a scientific theoretical framework for syntactic analysis is established to interpret the intrinsic logic of the syntactic structure of legal texts from a linguistic perspective. On this basis, the paper proposes practical and effective translation strategies, emphasizing adherence to translation principles and the flexible application of methods. It also presents translation cases to demonstrate how theory can be applied to practice, effectively addressing challenges in translating long sentences. Finally, the study summarizes the key points of translating long sentences in legal English, which holds significant importance for improving the quality of legal text translation.

Keywords

Legal English; syntactic structure analysis; translation strategies; long sentence phenomenon; syntactic theory; translation practice

1 Introduction

The syntactic structure of lengthy sentences is one of the most noticeable aspects of legal language's high level of specialization and complexity. Long sentences are commonly used in legal documents to explain rights and obligations and to articulate legal provisions. These sentences often contain multiple clauses and are longer than 25 words, creating an extremely high information density that can make it difficult to understand the clear intent of the law. Furthermore, attributive clauses, adverbial clauses, and parenthesis are commonly used in legal lengthy phrases to boost the information content. For example, a standard definition in writings pertaining to contractual law may have a subject, an object, and many modifying parts, creating a complicated structure.

Multi-layered modification, noun phrase-centered structures, and the usage of legal terminology are some of the syntactic features of lengthy sentences in legal English. The sentence's information burden is greatly increased by the modifying components, which may be separated into necessary and optional sections. These elements are frequently a mixture of several nouns and verb phrases. By using particular syntactic places, such

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as the modal verbs “must not” and “must” at the start of sentences or when joining legal provisions, key phrases frequently strengthen the efficacy of the law.

The correctness of legal phrases and concepts as well as cultural context should be taken into consideration while developing translation procedures. Long sentences are typically handled using either free translation or division techniques. Free translation modifies the sentence structure flexibly while retaining the original meaning to improve the target language’s fluency and readability, while division is appropriate for preserving the original structure and logic and helping to understand and preserve legal intent through the decomposition of nested sentences. To guarantee accurate transmission of legal information in particular translation instances, a mix of phrase matching, contextual analysis, and grammatical structure rearrangement should be applied.

Extra care must be used while using modal verbs, negatives, and linking words in lengthy phrases. Conditional sentences and sentences with interpolated parts are typical phrase patterns in legal writings. To maintain rigor in the legal context, the translation of these sentences must properly take into account the logical links within the sentence. Furthermore, in order to guarantee consistency in every area of the translation, it is imperative that lengthy phrases with legal provisions follow the bilingual comparison principle, particularly where there are substantial legal ramifications or shifts in rights and interests.

Legal translators must have strong language skills and legal expertise in order to tackle the difficulties presented by lengthy phrases in Legal English. They must also use translation tools and resources to recognize and resolve any potential ambiguities in the text. To guarantee that the entire translation process is visible and traceable, dictionaries and common translation software should be used in tandem.

In conclusion, translation techniques and the syntactic structure of lengthy phrases in Legal English are closely related. The efficient distribution of legal information depends on accurate syntactic analysis and suitable translation techniques. The standardization and professionalization of legal translation will be fueled by more studies in this area.

2 Analysis of Long Sentence Phenomena in Legal English

2.1 Syntactic Characteristics of Long Sentences

Complex sentence structures, a variety of constituents, and strict grammatical constraints are the main features of lengthy sentences in legal English. The superposition of several clauses, subordinate clauses, phrases, and auxiliary elements frequently results in long sentences with a high information density. Main clauses, subordinate clauses, coordinate structures, and non-finite verb structures are frequently seen in these phrases. This intricacy makes it possible for legal papers to convey intricate legal meanings and requirements in a condensed form while also making it easier to guarantee their rigor, accuracy, and completeness.

Long sentences can contain a variety of constituent elements, such as appositives, parenthetical expressions, postpositive and prepositive attributives, and more. Using these components improves the sentence’s

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logicality in addition to adding more information. The scope of nouns can be carefully limited by using prepositive attributives, as in "According to Article 156 of the Civil Code, all legally authorized acts of agency must comply with relevant regulations." More specific background information is provided by post-positive attributives, which are frequently used in legal clauses like "Any contract signed on the basis of fraud is invalid." By condensing information, these phrase structures successfully communicate intricate legal relationships.

The syntactic characteristics also manifest in the widespread use of clauses, especially nominal clauses, attributive clauses, and adverbial clauses. Among them, nominal clauses are often used to introduce legal propositions or requirements, such as "The laws and regulations that all enterprises must comply with during their operations include..." Attributive clauses provide detailed explanations and restrictions for nouns in the main clause, enhancing the accuracy of the provisions. Adverbial clauses are commonly used to describe the conditions, time, and manner in which legal acts occur, such as "If the contract provisions are violated, the defaulting party shall bear liability for compensation."

The long sentence in Legal English is not only a grammatical phenomenon but also an important feature of legal texts, serving the dual function of information condensation and grammatical rigor. For instance, in the description of the essential elements for the formation of a contract in the Contract Law, long sentences fully demonstrate multi-layered conditions and relationships, comprehensively covering and clearly elucidating legal relationships through complex structures. Specifically, descriptions involving multiple aspects such as the subject, purpose, conditions, and consequences are integrated within a single long sentence, as exemplified by, "If Party A fails to perform the contract as agreed upon by the specified date, Party B has the right to demand that Party A pay the corresponding liquidated damages and reserves the right to further pursue compensation for other losses."

Translation strategies for legal long sentences must also take into account their structural characteristics, with strategies such as segmentation, free translation, and generalization being widely applied. By "dissecting" and "restructuring" the long sentence structure, the fluency and readability of the translation can be effectively enhanced. Segmentation involves breaking down long sentences into multiple short sentences, simplifying the sentence while maintaining the original meaning. Free translation focuses on conveying the overall intention, emphasizing accurate semantic expression. Generalization, on the other hand, emphasizes the refinement and reconstruction of information to ensure the conciseness of the translation.

In summary, the syntactic characteristics of long sentences in Legal English are manifested in their high information density and diverse grammatical structures. Despite the challenges they pose to understanding and translation due to their complexity, their functionality cannot be underestimated. In practical use, appropriate syntactic application and translation strategies can effectively enhance the standardization and accuracy of legal documents.

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2.2Analysis of Long Sentence Examples in Legal Texts

The long sentence structures in legal texts often pose challenges for readers in understanding and translation. When analyzing these sentences, attention should be paid to their complex syntactic structures and multiple modifiers. Below is a detailed analysis through several example sentences.

Example Sentence 1: "Without authorization, no individual shall transfer, copy, or exploit in any form the intellectual property rights held by him/herself but belonging to others." This sentence contains multiple clauses and supplementary explanations. When splitting it, it is recommended to first identify the main clause "no individual shall transfer, copy, or exploit," which is the primary action. The subsequent phrases "without authorization" and "in any form" serve as conditional and manner adverbials, respectively, clearly defining the scope of the subject's actions. In translation, it is necessary to ensure that the logical relationships are clear and use appropriate connecting words to maintain the integrity of the sentence.

Example Sentence 2: "If a force majeure event caused by law or administrative order prevents the performance of contractual obligations, the affected party shall immediately notify the other party in writing and provide relevant evidentiary materials." The main clause of this sentence is "the affected party shall immediately notify the other party in writing." The condition is "if a force majeure event caused by law or administrative order prevents the performance of contractual obligations." In this context, attention should be paid to the positional relationship between the temporal adverbial "immediately" and the obligatory verb "notify" to ensure that the urgency of action and the nature of legal responsibility are conveyed in the translation.

Example Sentence 3: "In any case, a tribunal shall not transfer a case to another judicial jurisdiction that has not yet acquired legal effect." The main thrust of this sentence lies in the restriction on the power of the tribunal. The main clause is "a tribunal shall not transfer a case," with "in any case" and "another judicial jurisdiction that has not yet acquired legal effect" serving as conditions and supplementary information, respectively. During translation, emphasis should be placed on clarifying the logical relationship between the subject and the action to prevent the loss of meaning due to over-simplification.

When dealing with long sentences, the method of structural nesting should be followed, which involves first identifying the main trunk of the sentence and then progressively analyzing the subordinate information. This approach aids in clarifying the logical framework of the sentence and revealing underlying legal responsibilities and rights. In terms of translation strategy, corresponding terminology should be employed to maintain the rigor and accuracy of legal texts. At the same time, attention should be paid to tense consistency in complex sentences and the professionalism of nouns, ensuring that the translation meets legal standards.

Furthermore, when handling long sentences, it is crucial to be mindful of rhetorical devices, such as guiding words, separators, and the frequent use of passive sentences, which often affect the fluency of the sentence. For instance, many legal documents use clauses and parentheses for detailed explanations, and these structures need to be preserved in translation to facilitate reader understanding and prevent confusion in information retrieval.

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Overall, from grammatical structure to terminology selection, long sentences in legal texts require the translator to possess deep legal background knowledge and language analysis capabilities to effectively reproduce the meaning and legal effect of the original text.

3 Theoretical Framework of Syntactic Structure

3.1 Syntactic Theory from a Linguistic Perspective

Legal English long sentences exhibit complex syntactic structures, often manifesting as multi-layered combinations and nested structures of phrases. This phenomenon can be analyzed through the dual perspectives of generative grammar and transformational grammar. Generative grammar emphasizes the hierarchical and recursive nature of sentence structures, often constructing syntactic trees through Phrase Structure Rules (PSRs) to illustrate the relationships among subjects, predicates, objects, and modifiers. In Legal English, noun phrases are frequently modified by non-restrictive attributive clauses, forming intricate sentence structures that affect the clarity and translatability of information.

In particular, noun phrases (such as “the parties hereto”) and verb phrases (such as “shall be liable”) are used prominently in legal texts, often accompanied by the repetition of high-frequency vocabulary, adding to the sentence’s verbosity. Sentences often adopt the passive voice, with the syntactic form being “passive verb + subject + prepositional phrase,” emphasizing the bearer of legal responsibilities or obligations. For example, “The contract shall be governed by the laws of the State” emphasizes the applicability of legal provisions through a passive structure.

In syntactic analysis, the adoption of syntactic tree structures (such as X-Bar Theory) can clearly demonstrate the hierarchical relationships among various phrases, enhancing the resolution of legal intent. The tree structure presents the syntactic categories of sentences and their combinational relationships. For instance, a Prepositional Phrase (PP) typically contains a preposition and its object, often used in legal texts to clarify the boundaries of rights and obligations.

When turning to translation strategies for Legal English, syntactic-level handling is particularly crucial. When dealing with long sentences, attention should be paid to the order of information delivery and logical cohesion. Commonly used translation strategies include sentence segmentation, free translation, and literal translation. Sentence segmentation involves breaking down long sentences into multiple short sentences to clearly express legal meanings while maintaining cohesion between sentences. Free translation focuses on grasping the core meaning of legal texts and often adopts more colloquial expressions to better serve the understanding of target language readers. For example, translating “the parties hereto agree” as “本协议各方达成一致” can more effectively convey the information.

In specific translation examples, for the translation of the word “shall,” strategies such as “应” or “必须” can be adopted depending on the context to ensure the accurate transmission of legal obligations. Terminology in legal clauses (such as “default,” “arbitration”) should be retained in their original form to avoid ambiguity, with simple explanations added to assist target readers in understanding. The handling at the

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syntactic level determines the efficiency and accuracy of information transmission, making it an indispensable aspect of legal text translation.

Through in-depth analysis of the syntactic structure of Legal English and targeted translation strategies, we can better understand the characteristics of legal language and its cultural background. This, in turn, promotes the teaching and application of Legal English, enabling it to achieve wider dissemination and understanding in the context of globalization.

3.2 Syntactic Complexity in Legal Language

In the study of syntactic structure analysis in Legal English, identifying and understanding the syntactic complexity in legal texts is a crucial aspect. This research first defines the basic characteristics of syntactic structures in legal language and further focuses on identifying the main components in long sentences. Through meticulous analysis, syntactic elements such as clauses, prepositional phrases, and passive structures in long sentences are sorted out one by one, with their functions and positions clarified, revealing the ubiquity of these features in legal language and their impact on understanding.

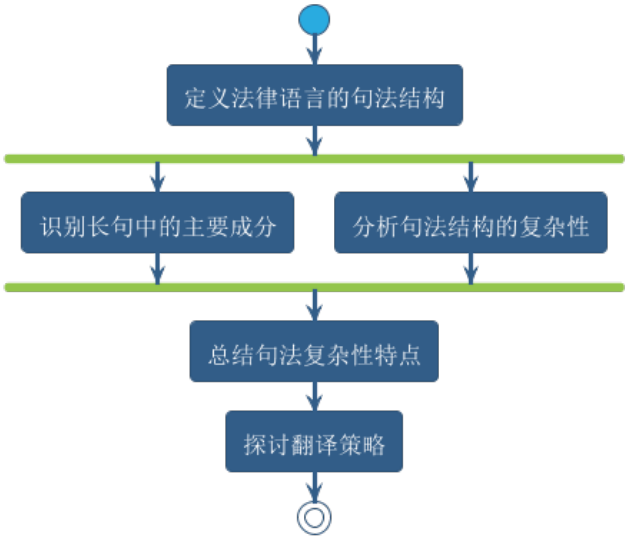
Subsequently, the complexity of syntactic structures is discussed in detail, with a focus on sources of complexity such as long-distance dependencies, multiple clause structures, and noun phrase stacking. These analyses are carried out according to the "Flowchart for Analyzing Syntactic Complexity in Legal English," which guides us from defining the syntactic structures of legal language, through identifying and analyzing the main components of sentences, to ultimately summarizing the characteristics of syntactic complexity. Additionally, this paper explores translation strategies suitable for handling these complexities, aiming to provide effective methods for the English-Chinese and Chinese-English translation of legal texts.

To objectively measure the syntactic complexity of legal texts, this study adopts the syntactic complexity metric formula C = \frac{1}{N}\sum_{i=1}^{N} T_i, where N represents the total number of sentences analyzed, and T_i is the syntactic tree depth of a single sentence. By applying this formula to a large number of legal language samples, the average complexity of the syntactic structures of legal texts is calculated. Supported by data from the "Statistical Table of Syntactic Structure Complexity in Legal Texts," this further reveals the characteristics of the syntactic structures of long sentences in Legal English. For example, the "long-distance dependencies" entry in the table shows a high frequency of occurrence and a large average nesting depth, indicating that this syntactic feature is ubiquitous in Legal English and of high complexity.

Finally, this paper will analyze the syntactic features in the table in detail, from their manifestations and frequencies in legal language to their potential impact on translation accuracy, thereby providing a theoretical basis and practical guidance for reducing error rates in translation and effectively conveying the original meaning of legal texts. Through rigorous methodology and data analysis, this study not only contributes theoretically but also provides practical operational guidance for professionals engaged in legal language translation.

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Figure 1: Flowchart for Analyzing Syntactic Complexity in Legal English



(3-1) Metric Formula for Syntactic Complexity

$$C = \frac{1}{N}\sum_{i=1}^{N} T_i$$

Table 1: Statistical Table of Syntactic Structure Complexity in Legal Texts

Syntactic characteristics	Frequency of occurrence	Average length	Average nesting depth	Transformational complexity	Annotation errorrate
Long-distance dependency	68.25%	22 words	3.8levels	High	2.3%
Multiple clause structures	59.80%	19words	2.6levels	Medium	2.5%
Passive voice	73.50%	17words	1.2levels	Low	1.8%
Noun phrase stacking	64.75%	15words	2.1levels	Medium	3.1%
Use of legal terminology	85.90%	8words	1.0levels	Low	1.2%
Clause citation and internal cross-referencing	77.65%	26words	3.9levels	High	3.7%
Fronting of modifiers	52.40%	20words	2.7levels	Medium	2.9%
Negation and restrictive structures	60.20%	13words	1.5levels	Low	2.4%
Adverbial clauses of condition	55.10%	18words	2.4levels	Medium	2.7%
Granting sentence patterns	49.85%	24words	3.1levels	High	3.2%

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4Translation Strategies for Legal English

4.1 Selection of Translation Principles and Methods

When translating legal English, specific principles must be followed and appropriate methods selected to ensure the accuracy and comprehensibility of legal texts. Firstly, the principle of accuracy stands as the core of legal translation, ensuring that the original intent of legal provisions is not distorted. This principle demands a deep understanding of the source language by the translator, with the ability to recognize legal terminology and its applicable scope. For example, when translating "statute," the translator must determine whether it should be rendered as " 法规 " or " 法令 " based on the specific legal system.

Secondly, the Skopos Theory of translation emphasizes the function and purpose of the translated work, requiring the translator to thoroughly analyze the intended use of the legal text among its audience, such as for official documents, contracts, regulations, etc., and strive to achieve its specific legal effects. The principle of functional equivalence is crucial in this approach, as the translator needs to ensure that the target language text possesses the same legal force as the source language text.

Furthermore, the principle of transparency underscores that translations should be as concise and clear as possible to avoid legal misunderstandings caused by linguistic complexity. When applying this principle, the translator must analyze the complex structure of long sentences, disassemble and simplify expressions, ensuring clear information transmission. For instance, translating "the parties hereby agree to binding arbitration in accordance with the rules set forth by the American Arbitration Association" as " 双方同意按照美国仲裁协会的规则进行有约束力的仲裁 " exemplifies a combination of simplicity and accuracy.

Moreover, the principle of cultural adaptation cannot be overlooked, as legal texts are deeply influenced by cultural backgrounds. During the translation process, the translator must consider the cultural and legal backgrounds of the target audience and make appropriate adjustments to the translation to align with local legal cultural norms. This can be achieved by localizing specific legal concepts or adding appropriate footnotes for explanation.

In choosing translation methods, both literal translation and free translation have their respective advantages. Literal translation is suitable when legal terminology and normative systems are consistent, preserving the legal rigor of the original text. Free translation is more effective when dealing with significant differences between legal concepts in the source and target languages, capturing the practical meaning of legal provisions. The choice between them requires comprehensive consideration of the complexity of the legal text and the relevant legal and cultural differences, with flexible application.

Translation technology also aids translation practice, with numerous translation assistance tools and legal terminology databases available for reference, enhancing translation efficiency and accuracy. For instance, CAT (Computer-Assisted Translation) tools can ensure term consistency, while specialized legal translation software can assist in handling long sentences and complex legal structures. For the handling of long sentences, it is advisable to conduct syntactic analysis before translation, identifying main clauses, subordinate clauses, coordinate structures, etc., and dividing them into hierarchies to ensure that logical relationships are preserved in the translation.

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To excel in legal English translation, translators need to continuously improve their legal knowledge and familiarity with different legal systems and their terminology, blending linguistic skills with legal expertise to achieve an effective balance between accuracy and functionality. Translation is not just a linguistic conversion but a recreation of legal content, requiring translators to possess rigorous legal thinking and flexible language use abilities.

4.2 Case Study on Long Sentence Translation

In the field of legal English translation, the discussion on syntactic structure analysis and translation strategies for long sentences is a crucial aspect for improving translation quality. Based on the characteristics of legal texts, this study adopts a mixed quantitative and qualitative analysis approach to dissect typical long sentence structures and explore corresponding translation methods. During the analysis phase, we first employ grammatical decomposition techniques to clarify the backbone framework and subordinate elements of long sentences, highlighting their logical structure and semantic connections. Especially in the practical aspect involving the "Long Sentence Translation Flowchart," we meticulously dismantle the structural components of each sentence according to this chart to ensure a deep understanding of complex syntactic rules.

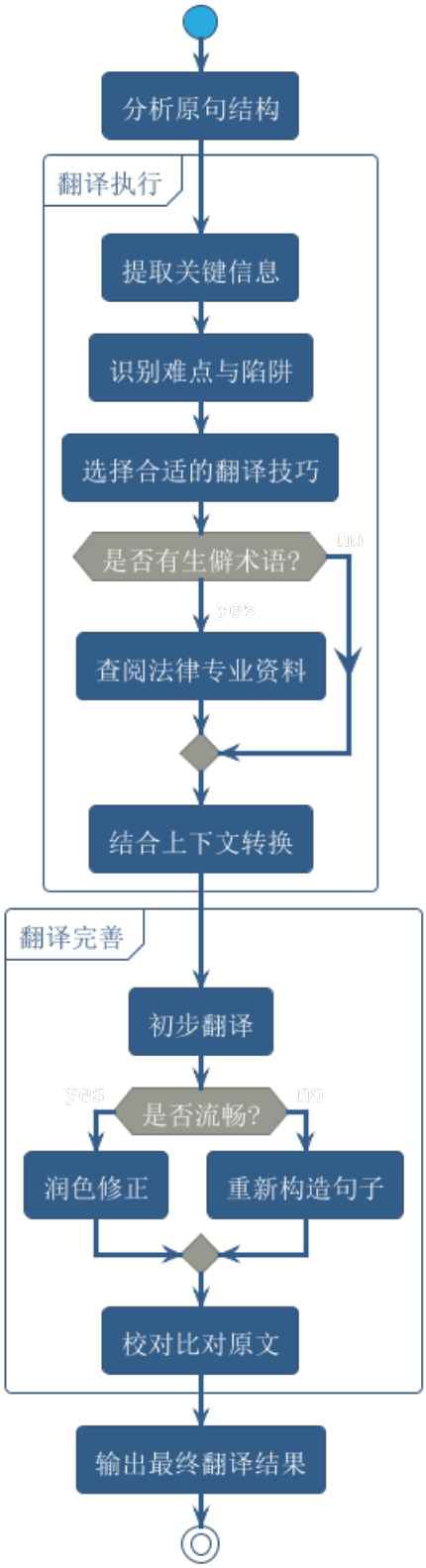
When implementing the translation, we rely on a professional translation execution system, focusing on extracting key information from long sentences and identifying potential comprehension difficulties and translation pitfalls, such as precise correspondences for legal terminology and reasonable transformations of intra-sentence relationships. For legal terms that are obscure or specialized, we consult authoritative legal databases to ensure the accuracy of the terms and their appropriateness within legal contexts. In selecting translation strategies, we consider approaches such as structural simplification, standardization of legal nouns, segmentation of long sentences, and reconstruction of complete meanings to facilitate the fluency and accuracy of the translation results.

During the translation refinement process, we first produce an initial translation. Subsequently, through repeated polishing and revision, we strive to make the translation fluent while remaining faithful to the original meaning. Furthermore, before finalizing the translation, a meticulous proofreading and comparison against the original text is conducted to ensure the rigor and accuracy of the translation. Utilizing the "Long Sentence Translation Comparison Table" significantly enhances the efficiency of evaluating and revising translation quality. This table provides a detailed breakdown of source sentences, syntactic structures, translation strategies, and translated texts, allowing us to systematically conduct comparative analysis of translation results.

Overall, the success of long sentence translation hinges on clear structural analysis, appropriate strategy application, and meticulous refinement. By strictly adhering to the aforementioned process, this study has achieved good application effects in legal English translation practice, demonstrating the mutual promotion between theory and practice. In translation practice, this process not only enhances the accuracy and applicability of the translated text but also holds certain guiding value for the cultivation of translators' legal English abilities.

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Figure 2: Flowchart for Long Sentence Translation



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Table 2: Comparison Table for Long Sentence Translation

源句子 (English)	句法结构 (Analysis)	翻译策略 (Strategy)	译文 (Translation)
Notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information that does not display a valid OMB control number.	P(Notwithstanding) - Subclause(any other provision of law); S(no person) - V(shall be subject) - O(penalty)	结构简化 (Simplification), 法定名词标准化 (Standardization of legal terms)	尽管有其他任何法律规定，但任何人因不遵守未显示有效 OMB 控制编号的信息收集而不受任何惩罚。
The party affected shall have the right to request an administrative hearing within ten days after the receipt of notice of action to contest the director's decision.	Subj(The party affected) - V(have) - O(right) with Modifier(to request); O(hearing) limitated by TIME(within ten days after the receipt of notice of action)	法定用语对应 (Direct correspondence), 长句拆分 (Breaking down long sentences)	受影响的当事方应当在收到行动通知后的十天内有权要求行政听证以质疑主任的决定。
This agreement represents the entire understanding among the parties as to the subject matter hereof and supersedes all prior agreements and understandings, whether written or oral.	S(This agreement) - V(represents) - O(entire understanding); P(among the parties); P(supersedes) - O(prior agreements and understandings)	完整意义重构 (Reconstruction for holistic meaning), 主次分明 (Clarity of primary and secondary clauses)	本协议代表各方之间关于此主题的所有理解，并取代所有先前的协议和理解，无论是书面的还是口头的。
Upon the expiration of the lease, the lessee shall yield up the premises in as good state and condition as they were at the commencement of the lease, reasonable wear and tear excepted.	Time(Upon the expiration) - Subj(the lessee) - V(shall yield up) - O(the premises) with Condition(in as good state and condition as at the commencement), Restriction(reasonable wear and tear excepted)	时态准确性 (Temporal accuracy), 逻辑顺序性 (Logic sequencing)w	租赁到期时，承租人应将房产交还，其状况应与租赁开始时一样良好，但合理的磨损除外。
In the event that the contractor fails to perform any of the services set forth in this agreement, the company shall have the option, but not the obligation, to procure these services from another source.	P(In the event) that-conjunction; Subj(the contractor) - V(fails to perform); O(services); Modifier(set forth in this agreement); Choice(company has option) - Restriction(not the obligation)	条件假设 (Conditional assumption), 选择与约束 (Choice and constraint articulation)	如果承包商未能履行本协议中规定的任何服务，公司有权但没有义务从其他来源获取这些服务。

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5. Conclusion

Legal English's lengthy phrases are difficult to translate and comprehend because of their intricate structures and wealth of specialized terminology. These statements are more exact in meaning because they frequently include nested structures, several clauses, compound sentences, and specialized legal language. Thus, it is essential to comprehend the grammatical links in lengthy sentences, such as complements, adverbial clauses, and attributive clauses. The relationships between the main and subordinate clauses as well as the modifier relationships between the sentence's different parts should be considered when doing the analysis. It is essential to use appropriate translation techniques for various kinds of lengthy sentences.

The splitting method works well for lengthy sentences in court documents. The cognitive load might be lessened by segmenting a lengthy sentence into several shorter ones. Ensuring the correctness of each brief statement is crucial when splitting, particularly to maintain the precision of legal terminology and prevent ambiguity. Another translation technique is to reduce complicated noun phrases to verb phrases. The translation becomes more fluid by simplifying the sentence's structure.

Moreover, generalizative and inductive approaches are also frequently employed. These techniques assist translators in understanding the primary idea without getting sidetracked by extraneous details by distilling the essential information from lengthy sentences. This tactic is especially crucial when handling complex legal obligations. To guarantee that the translation satisfies the requirements and formats of pertinent legal documents, consideration should also be given to the normativity and formality of legal language during the particular translation process.

Transliteration and free translation can be used in tandem when dealing with specific terminology. Direct translation of legal jargon can occasionally cause comprehension issues. Therefore, the translation can be made more accurate by adding annotations, explanations, or examples as needed. Furthermore, preserving the formality and severity of legal writings is a crucial sign of a high-quality translation; arbitrary simplification or colloquialisms must to be avoided.

The intricacy of syntactic structures, the uniform use of specialized terminology, and the features of legal instruments must all be thoroughly taken into account when developing translation algorithms for lengthy sentences in legal English. Translations can be made more accurate and fluid by using a variety of strategies, including splitting, induction, simplification, and others. Enhancing knowledge and research of legal language also contributes to the professionalism of translations and guarantees the accuracy and clarity of the information presented in legal documents.

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