

# Enlightenment of Discourse Analysis to Translation Teaching

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**Abstract**—In recent years, experts' evaluation and analysis on English majored students' translation ability shows that mistranslation, omission and poor translation are largely caused for reason that students are lack of the ability to understand and convert the discourse. This paper explores the problems to be noted in translation teaching with respect to cultivating students' ability to deal with important textual features such as cohesion and coherence. It is considered that by cultivating students' logical thinking ability, enriching students' cultural background knowledge, and explaining the differences between English and Chinese in terms of textual cohesive means, it is available to complement the shortcomings of traditional translation classroom that focuses on words and techniques, and improve the text translation skills of English majored students.

**Keywords**—discourse analysis; translation teaching; enlightenment

## I. INTRODUCTION

As shown in many domestic relevant studies in recent years, it has been a universal problem that English majored students are lack of discourse awareness. For example, when Dr. Ding Guoguo commented the translation items of 2005 TEM 8 on 2006 Chinese Translators Journal, he pointed out that: "about 80% of the examinees provides many poor translation and mistranslation; by analyzing the reasons, it should be concluded that it is caused by misunderstanding; and misunderstanding may be mainly caused for reason that they cannot properly master the entire unity and coherence in writing of the short essay of less than 200 words." Further, he also explained that, "the so-called 'unity and coherence in writing' is the clue of an article, and refers to the semantic connection between the language components of the discourse, or the relation between two components of the discourse that can be explanation for each other." In the same column of the Journal in 2005, Professor Shao Zhihong also published the paper "Strategies for English and Chinese Discourse Cohesion Contrast and Translation" with respect to the "Universal problems in the Chinese-English Translation Test" in 2004. In addition, as mentioned in the Report on the Evaluation of the 18th Han Suyin Youth Translation Award published in the Chinese Translators Journal, "the more universal problem is that 'there is only sentences, without chapter'; namely each sentence seems to be correct, but the connection and transition between

sentences are not carefully managed, so that there is a lack of fluency in the overall reading." Also, as mentioned in the Report on the Evaluation of the 18th Han Suyin Youth Translation Award, "the more universal problem is that the translation only expresses the literal meaning of the original text, failing to explore its connotation and the internal relation between the context and sentences." The above comments not only clearly point out the universality of students' lack of discourse awareness, but also indicate that the lack of ability to process discourse may greatly restrict the translation level of English majored student. Therefore, improving the discourse processing ability is a problem that cannot be ignored and needs to be solved urgently.

However, the current methods for translation teaching often focus on instilling theoretical skills and pursue for equivalence in words and sentences, and only pursue for equivalence in small linguistic units such as words, phrases, and sentences regardless of the cohesion between sentences, the restriction of context to the language and the different means of discourse cohesion in English and Chinese. The focus of this translation method also reflects in the textbooks currently widely used in colleges and universities. Over an analysis on the six kinds of textbooks currently used in colleges and universities, including the "A Short Course in English-Chinese Translation" published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press (Zhuang Yichuan, March 2002), and the "A New Coursebook on English-Chinese Translation" (Sun Zhili, April 2003) and the "A Coursebook on Pragmatic Translation" (Fang Mengzhi, March 2005) published by Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, etc., it is found that although the currently commonly used translation textbooks mostly introduce translation from the perspectives of genre, style, strategy, etc., and pay more attention to the combination of theory and practice for students to receive systematic training, there are still the following two problems: first, the relation between appreciation and criticism is not well handled; a textbook is basically simply appreciation of good translations or blindly criticizing mistranslations; few of the textbooks may involve and rationally allocate the role of both appreciation and criticism so that students are lack of understanding of the factors causing typical mistranslation; second, the relation between imparting knowledge and developing skills is not well handled; many translation textbooks introduce many translation theories and translation methods, but ignore the

role developing students' thinking ability and cultural awareness at a deeper level as played in the translation process. Therefore currently, few translation teaching methods and textbooks can really achieve the goal of "teaching students how to translate instead of teaching students the knowledge" so that students cannot explore the connotation of the text to be translated. In such a training mode, there is no doubt that students seem to be able to correctly translate each sentence of a text, but the translated text as a whole may appear to be awkward. Combined with the current status quo, it is believed that in translation teaching, it is needed to strengthen the following aspects of the training for students, namely: logical thinking ability, cultural background knowledge, and the differences between English and Chinese in terms of discourse cohesion.

## II. LOGICAL THINKING AND DISCOURSE COHESION

The cohesion of contents in a discourse can be realized by many means. Halliday & Hason (1976) got the means of cohesion in English divided into: reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical cohesion. Wherein, reference, substitution and ellipsis are derived from the feature that English focuses on simplicity and diversity, while conjunction and lexical cohesion reflect that English focuses on "hypotaxis". A combined use of those means may produce well-known and beautiful sentences and discourses, but may also bring certain obstacles for students to understand the original text. Students need to have good logic thinking ability to correctly grasp those relations, accurately understand the original text and reproduce the original meaning in the translated language; otherwise it is prone to appear mistranslation and missing translation. The following example is a passage said by Heathcliff in the "Wuthering Heights" to Catherine who is going to die:

"It is hard to forgive, and to look at those eyes, and feel those wasted hands," he answered, "kiss me again; and don't let me see your eyes! I forgive what you have done to me. I love my murderer—but yours! How can I?"

Chinese translation 1: "看着你那双眼睛, 抚摸着你的双手, 也难怪你," 他答道。"再吻我吧, 别让我看到你的眼睛。我原谅你对我所做的一切。我爱害死我的人—可是害死你的人! 叫我怎么爱他呢?"

Chinese translation 2: "宽恕是很难的, 就是看看你那双眼睛, 摸摸你那双消瘦的手, 也是很难的," 他答道。"再吻我一次吧, 别让我看见你的眼睛! 我爱害了我的人—但是害了你的人! 我怎么能爱她呢?"

In Chinese translation 1, there are two serious errors. First, the translator fails to make clear and well express the indicative relation between the "it" in the first sentence and the followed infinitives; second, the translator misunderstands the "yours" in the penultimate sentence. In Chinese translation 1, the "他 (him)" is easy to be linked to Linton, husband of Catherine, giving reader a wrong feeling that it seems that Heathcliff is very jealous and thinks that Catherine is killed by Linton. However, the fact is that in this episode, Linton is always absent. Heathcliff and Catherine do not mention Linton at all. Then, it is wondered how the "he" represents. In Chinese translation 2, the translator uses "她

(her)". Combined with the words said by Heathcliff in the former text, "Why did you betray your own heart, Cathy? I have not one word of comfort. You deserve this. You have killed yourself", it may be understood that this is actually the sorrow of Heathcliff from the bottom of his heart. He is helplessly blaming Catherine: "It doesn't matter if you killed me, but you should not kill yourself who I treat as everything of myself!" In other words, the murderer killing Catherine is Catherine herself! The word "她" clearly indicates this meaning and links this sentence to the context. In addition, the Chinese translation 2 not only correctly expresses the indicative relation between the "it" and the followed infinitives, but also more carefully expresses the implicit relationship indicated in "and", instead of simply translating it in fully equivalent parallel relation. This short sentence involves four means of cohesion such as indication, substitution, ellipsis and conjunction. If the student lacks logical thinking, how can he well understand and express such complex and implicit meanings in the discourse? So in translation teaching, it is necessary to strengthen the comparative analysis on good and poor translations, especially to timely point out any errors in logical relationship in the translation. At the same time, students should be encouraged to use logical thinking to translate. Any logical relation difficult to be expressed should be creatively reproduced, instead of being literally translated. A good logical thinking ability is the key to ensuring a correct understanding of the original text and a reasonable organization of the translation.

## III. CULTURAL BACKGROUND AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

In the process of communication, the meaning of language is usually determined on the basis of the context; the same linguistic unit may have different meaning in different context (Zhang Meifang: 2005). Therefore, in the process of translation, it is necessary to deeply understand the context of the original text; otherwise, it is possible to accurately express the original meaning. Hu Zhuanglin (1994) got context divided into three types: linguistic context, situational context and cultural context. Wherein, cultural context refers to the social, cultural, economic, religious, historical and political backgrounds involved in the discourse. Mr. Wang Zuoliang (1989) once incisively pointed out that "what translators are dealing with in translation are individual words and what they are facing are two major cultures". Nida also clearly proposed that, "to be bilingual, one has to be bicultural"(要掌握两种语言, 必须掌握两种文化). Hence, translation is the translation of language, but more the translation of culture; and cultural context is the specific embodiment of social and cultural environment in the discourse. If translator doesn't understand the culture of the source language, he/she may neither be able to keenly get aware of the enriching and limiting effects of culture on the original text, nor be able to accurately understand the original text. Without understanding the culture of the translated language, translator may not be able to properly express the meaning of the original text. For instance:

- "Draw, if you be men. Gregory, remember thy swashing blow." This is a dialogue in "Romeo and

Juliet". With respect to the word "Draw", what firstly coming into mind of students is "画画", "平局" and so on, but this is obviously not logical in the context. This also indicates the role of logical thinking. And if they understand that the story took place in an era, where people may fight against each other if they fail to reach any agreement, and combine the two attendants' meeting as described in the context, they can easily associate the scene of the battle, and translate the sentence into "是汉子就亮出佩剑, 格里戈里, 别忘了使出必杀技".

- "...with her black ringlets, her flashing eyes, her noble aquiline profile..." The "aquiline" here is a trap. The English and Chinese language cultures have great differences in the use of words for describing the beauty and ugliness. If the word "aquiline" is translated literally, Chinese can only see the noble "hook nose" of the beauty when she is sideways. It'd be better to translate this sentence as "她乌发鬟髻, 双眸明亮, 侧面望去, 高高的鼻梁, 显得颇为高贵".

From the above two examples, it can be seen that no matter in the process of understanding or expression, social and cultural factors play a decisive role in the selection of word and its meaning. Thereby, in translation classroom, teacher should never neglect students' accumulation in cultural background knowledge. Teacher should intentionally introduce to students some sentences or paragraphs containing cultural factors, explain the connotation and relevant background and enlighten students making reasonable language conversions on this basis. Of course, it is more important to cultivate students' cultural awareness, encourage them to take the initiative to identify the cultural context of a discourse, find the sentences containing cultural factors, and try to independently interpret and reproduce the cultural meaning, and hence truly "teaching students how to translate".

#### IV. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ENGLISH AND CHINESE IN THE MEANS OF DISCOURSE COHESION

Different language has different means of discourse cohesion. A major difference between Chinese and English discourse organizations is that Chinese tends to use repetitive means, while English tends to use alternative means. Chinese neither like to use synonymous substitution nor like to use pronouns, because the former means may distract the spirit and the latter means is easy to make the indication unclear (Shao Zhihong: 2005). For example, with respect to the use of the English phrase "vice versa":

- We gossip about them and vice versa (they gossip about us).

我们谈论他们的是非, 他们也谈论我们的是非。

- 为了推动中美关系的发展, 中国需要进一步了解美国, 美国也需要进一步了解中国。

To promote the development of China-U.S. relations, China needs to know the United States better and vice versa.

In Chinese, the part replaced by a phrase such as "vice versa" is usually restored by the repetition of words, in order to conform to the expression habit of Chinese.

The following shows the Chinese translation of the omitted part in English discourse:

Reading makes a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man. (F. Bacon: Of Studies)

读书使人充实, 讨论使人机智, 笔记使人准确 (translated by Wang Zuoliang).

The words that have been omitted in English due to recurrence are restored in the Chinese translation, forming a repetition and parallelism form and retaining the neatness and charm of the original text.

All of the above examples show that English usually uses indication, substitution and ellipsis and other means to express meaning, while Chinese prefers to use repetition means to realize cohesion. So in practical translation, it is necessary to treat the text flexibly. As far as the connection of sentences is concerned, English pays attention to hypotaxis, while Chinese pays attention to parataxis. Therefore in English-Chinese translation, conjunctions and relational words are often replaced by the internal relations between semantics in the translation. For example, "Happy the people whose annals are tiresome; happy the people whose annals are vacant" can be translated as: "国史沉闷, 国民幸运; 国史无录, 国民有福" (translated by Qian Zhongshu). In the translation, words such as relational words and definite articles that have little influence on semantics are generally omitted in order to preserve the neat arrangement characteristics of the original sentence. With respect to those differences, in translation classroom, teacher should combine with typical translation examples to introduce the characteristics of those translations to students, to help students mastering the rules of converting and dealing with the means of discourse cohesion to the extent that they can naturally and completely translate without translationese.

#### V. CONCLUSION

In recent years, with the rise of discourse analysis, the translation circle has also considered the principles and evaluation of translation more from the perspective of discourse analysis. This is also a great inspiration for translation teaching. The traditional mode of translation teaching stays in emphasizing static linguistic equivalence. It is needed to be enriched with some basic concepts in discourse analysis; and more importantly, it is needed to focus on cultivating students' discourse awareness and the ability to consciously explore the discourse features of the original text and handle the translation by reasonable means. In this process, students' logical thinking ability, cultural background knowledge, and understanding of the differences between the means of cohesion in English and Chinese will be the key to their understanding and expression of discourse. Paying attention to cultivating those aspects of translation skills is the golden key to truly granting students the way of discourse translation. It is also the specific embodiment of

the modern teaching mode oriented to students and focusing on ability.

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