

A study on the Interpretative Theory from the Perspective of Culture

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Abstract: According to the interpretive theory, the process of interpreting is actually a process of conveying the sense. The scholars of the interpretive school argue that interpreting does not simply translate the information on the surface or its form of expression. A faithful interpretation is faithful to the sense of the original speech. In achieving the sense of the original speech, culture plays a significant role. The focus of this thesis is to study the interpretive theory from the perspective of culture.

1. Introduction

Since the interpretive theory is put forward by Danica Seleskovitch basing on the observation of conference interpretation practice, there are many researches applying the interpretive approach to the conference interpretation. According to its practice, it argues that the nature of interpreting is not to interpret its linguistic meaning but the non-verbal sense of discourse. That is the famous sense-equivalence Seleskovitch put forward three steps of the interpreting process known as the triangular model, which has brought a great of influence to the further study [1]. The most emergent task for the interpreter is to concentrate on conveying the “sense” of the original speech and better facilitate their communication between the speaker and the audience.

2. A General Description of the Interpretive Theory

2.1 The Triangular Model

In the interpretive theory, the scholars argued that during the real interpreted activities, the interpreters can actually remember not the special words or sentences but the cognitive meaning. For further development, Danica Seleskovitch and Marianne Lederer also expounded the process of interpreting from the aspects of linguistics and psychology, which marked an important milestone for this theory, and formulated the famous Triangular Model in the process of interpreting [2]. It means that as soon as the arrival of comprehension, sense will occur immediately by means of deverbalization. The most important element is the sense that the interpreter wants to reproduce during the interpretive activity.

2.2 Main Ideas of the Interpretive Theory

In the interpretive theory, interpreting is actually regarded as a communication activity. For the interpreter, his or her duty is to ensure each party of the conversation to understand each other and keep the communication running. The theory holds that interpreting should focus on the level of discourse rather than on that of language. According to Seleskovitch, the original message will be changed into a form accessible to the listener, and interpreting is a process which is conducive to the communication between the interlocutors [3].

The most important concept that Seleskovitch wants to emphasize in her theory is sense, which begins before the speaker begins his speech, and ends after the listener receives the speech. It is apparent that the object of interpreting from the perspective of the interpretive theory is the sense of the source discourse. The sense represents not only the meaning of words but also the connection with the content. The sense embraces normally both linguistic meaning and extra-linguistic meaning. The linguistic meaning refers to the linguistic symbols uttered by the speaker, which involves both the linguistic and grammatical levels. The extra-linguistic meaning also contains the given context, the cognitive knowledge and so on. During the interpreted activity, the interpreter needs to express

the extra-linguistic meaning more than the linguistic meaning. That means on the one hand the interpreter needs to work on the linguistic meaning, and on the other hand he or she should also consider the cognitive context of what has already been said, the setting where the interpreting is happening and the world knowledge that he or she already has.

3. The Analysis of the Processing Model from the Perspective of Culture

A great number of interpreting and translating scholars originally held the opinion that the interpreting procedure included only two stages, namely, comprehension and reproduction. In this way, people usually regarded the interpreting as a direct transcoding activity between two languages. The emergence of the interpretive theory presented new ways to explain the real procedure of interpreting. It was the triangular model that added another phase named deverbalization in the middle, thus the procedure was composed of three phases, namely, comprehension, deverbalisation, and re-expression. In the following part, the three processing model will be analyzed from the perspective of culture.

3.1 The Influence of Cultural Perspective on Source Language Comprehension

As the first phase in the Triangular model, comprehension is considered as the basis of interpreting, which plays a vital role in comprehending the source language correctly and completely. In order to understand a discourse, the interpreter needs both linguistic and extra-linguistic knowledge. As for the linguistic knowledge, it is the knowledge of language, which is absolutely the basis for the interpreter to comprehend the source language and re-express it in the target language, and inadequate linguistic knowledge can lead to misinterpreting. Thus, for a qualified interpreter, a solid linguistic foundation is necessary. Linguistic knowledge serves as the basis for his or her further comprehension of the source language.

The interpretive theory argues that interpreting is a communicative activity. And the essence of interpreting is communicating sense not linguistic symbols. In spite of the great importance of linguistic knowledge, it is not enough. In this part, culture plays a significant role in comprehending the speaker's intention. Culture is used to go further into the speech and gain both the explicit and implicit meaning of the source language. The acquisition of cultural knowledge is the result of accumulative reading and thinking. It is accumulated little by little by people's memory, formal education, reading and previous interpreting experience, feelings and independent thinking, and it also includes theoretical knowledge and imaginations. According to Bao Gang, encyclopedia or world knowledge is usually remained as the long term memory within human minds in the form of images [4]. During the process of interpreting, the relative cultural knowledge, which is stored in the cognitive baggage, would appear immediately from the interpreter's minds to assist him or her to comprehend the speech or the would-be speech. Here is an example to illustrate this point of view.

E.g. He was elected to the House of Representatives because he rode on the President's coattails [5].

In the above sentence, if the interpreter knows nothing about the American political terminology, while facing the word "coattail", he might feel puzzled. The original meaning of "coattail" is "the skirts of a dress coat, cutaway, or frock coat", which does not make any sense in this sentence. But as an American political terminology, it has already been amplified to the meaning of the influence or pulling power of a popular movement or person as a political candidate. If interpreters did not have the cultural knowledge stored in his cognitive baggage, they could not interpret it correctly, which may make the listeners confused.

3.2 The Influence of Cultural Perspective on Deverbalization

The deverbalization phase is added between the comprehension and re-expression by the scholars of the Paris School, which is regarded as an innovation in the interpretive study. It seems that the phase of deverbalization is hard to get and comprehend and it seems invisible. However, it does exist and it is the core and foundation of the interpretive theory.

For interpreters, what they need to grasp is the content or sense, not individual words or sentences [6]. Since they have to translate the content into another form of language, there is no need for them

to recite all the words. Linguistic units or forms like words or sentences here are just carriers which generate ideas. Deverbalization is the essence of interpreting, which separating sense from the linguistic form of the source language. Without the help of cultural knowledge, the sense of the source language can't be achieved, not to mention the purpose of interpretation or communication.

The message is deverbalized in the association of the speech meaning with a great deal of cultural knowledge, and that speech is produced from this successive crystallization of sense by an unconscious program at cultural level. So it is fair enough to say that deverbalization exists in the whole process of interpreting including the speech perception, the grammatical analysis of sentences, the further construction of sense and the final target language production. In a word, deverbalization postulates that interpreting is fundamentally a set of operations of comprehension and reformulation, in which the role of culture couldn't be ignored.

3.3 The Influence of Cultural Perspective on Reformulation

Reformulation is the last and the most obvious stage of interpreting procedure, which finally finish the communicative activity. The process of interpreting is a dynamic process of understanding, analyzing and reformulating thoughts [7]. In this process, reformulation plays a role of reorganizing and reformulating the original content. What the audiences receive is directly related to re-expression. The target of re-expression is to reformulate the complete content of the original and to make it easy for the audience to understand.

No matter in translation or interpreting, the duty of the translator or interpreter is to express the writer or the speaker's real thoughts to the audience. As for the rational analysis in the target language, an interpreter has to think of the ways to faithfully transfer the thoughts, image and emotion, to take the different linguistic and cultural backgrounds into account to achieve the communicative effect.

When reformulating the sense in the target language, the interpreter should remember that the final target of their interpretation is to make the audience fully understand what the speaker intends to express, so they should reformulate the sense in the way that the audience can accept. Due to different languages and cultures of the source language and target language, it is really important for interpreters to take cultural elements into consideration. In the process of the production in the target language, the interpreter should get rid of the original linguistic form, and focus on organizing the sentence pattern and content of the re-expressed edition which should be in agreement with the speaking habit of the target language and the cultural features of both sides.

4. Summary

The article is aimed to prove that interpreting is not only word to word translation but also cultural transformation by analyzing the effects of cultural elements on the processing model of interpretative theory. Hoping this leading theory can be better utilized for all the interpreters in their interpreting practice with the perspective of culture.

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