

# Intersubjectivity in Pragmatic Texts Translation

## —A Case Study on English to Chinese Translation of Topper Owners Manual

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**Keywords:** Intersubjectivity; Pragmatic Texts Translation; Translation Strategies and Techniques; Topper Owners Manual

**Abstract.** Pragmatic texts translation has become increasingly important. By adapting to the shift from subjectivity to intersubjectivity, this paper discusses intersubjectivity in pragmatic texts translation by taking Topper Owners Manual as an example, analyzing the translation of terminologies, sentences and paragraphs, along with translation strategies and techniques adopted accordingly. It stresses that the author, the translation initiator, the translator and the target reader actively involved in pragmatic texts translation should be treated equitably.

### Introduction

Based on the theory of communicative rationality developed by Jürgen Habermas in *The Theory of Communicative Action*, recent researches on translation studies have begun to place emphasis on intersubjectivity, which refers to different subjects of equal value involved in the activity of translating interacting with one another. Many Chinese scholars believe intersubjectivity has exerted a positive influence on translation studies. But their researches mostly explore intersubjectivity in translation theoretically. Thus, this paper discusses intersubjectivity in pragmatic texts translation, aiming to apply intersubjectivity to translation practices and avoid overemphasizing the role of a certain subject, such as the author, texts or the translator.

This paper focuses on analyzing intersubjectivity in pragmatic texts translation with examples drawn from Topper Owners Manual, a translation material that gives a brief introduction of a type of sailboats and its operation, mainly involving translations of terminologies, sentences and paragraphs. It is divided into three parts: the introduction, the body and the summary. The body includes three chapters. Chapter one is intersubjectivity in translation, which introduces the origin, development and achievement of translation studies on intersubjectivity. Moreover, it highlights the significance of the shift from subjectivity to intersubjectivity in translation studies. Chapter two gives a brief introduction of pragmatic texts translation and Topper Owners Manual. Chapter three illustrates intersubjectivity in the English-Chinese translation of Topper Owners Manual, which contains consistency and specification of terminologies, word order in sentences, and translation of paragraphs.

In short, this paper tries to define the role of the author, translator, translation initiator, target reader played in the translation of Topper Owners Manual. It is worth mentioning that the four subjects who exert an effect on the selection of translation strategies and techniques are equally important in the translation process and reached an agreement on the translation. Therefore, intersubjectivity in pragmatic translation ensures translation may become more accurate and readable.

## **Intersubjectivity in Translation**

Philosophical research always exerts an effect on the study of translation studies, such as the linguistic turn and the cultural turn in western philosophy. In the long process of development, translation studies have gone through three main phases and realized their three major turns. Each major turn reflects the change of research paradigm. The transformation of translation paradigms changes the perspective, method and focus of translation studies [1]. Chinese scholars first introduced intersubjectivity into translation studies and attempts to develop a new way of thinking. Jürgen Habermas proposed communicative rationality, aiming to have rationality shift from subjectivity-oriented to intersubjectivity-oriented[2]. His theory provides a theoretical basis for translation studies on intersubjectivity in China.

At current, translation studies still center on subjectivity, especially the subjectivity of the translator. Compared to subjectivity, intersubjectivity in translation places emphasis on all subjects and their involvement in the translation process. The future of translation studies as a field may lie precisely in making a similar shift from a subjectivity-based to an intersubjectivity-based mode of thinking [3]. The activity of translating can be regarded as a dialogue among different subjects instead of translating a source-language text into a target-language text only [4]. Translation is a complex communicative action. The author, the translator and the target reader are an interactive relationship [5]. The author of the source text is the creative subject, the translator the translating subject, the audience the receptive subject, and the sponsor the sponsoring subject [6]. A good translator is able to overcome linguistic and cultural barriers, manage the relationship among the subjects and reconstruct a text faithful to the original in terms of contents and spirit. Only a translation that faithfully and harmoniously reproduces the original messages is known to have greater chance to maintain its vitality at book market [7]. Translations are the rational communicative actions among translators, writers and readers, in which they understand each other successfully in the way of communicating equally and restraining each other rationally [8]. Xu Lina applies the theory of intersubjectivity to explore the interactive relationship between translators and original texts, translators and target language readers, translators and translation initiator, as well as translation techniques [9]. It is necessary to make a shift from subjectivity to intersubjectivity in translation studies and translators should attach great importance to the interactions among texts, authors, target readers and translators [10]. There are three research paradigms concerning pre-subjectivity, subjectivity and intersubjectivity, and although the development of intersubjectivity in translation studies is in its early phase, it can break the boundaries of two disciplines and achieve the integration of two research paradigms [1]. However, domestic scholars only describe intersubjectivity in translation theoretically and outline a vision for the future, so intersubjectivity cannot be completely put into translation practice [11].

To sum up, intersubjectivity in translation lays its stress on dialogues between the translator and other translating subjects, who make concerted efforts to work on accurate translation. It is vital that translation studies adapt to the shift from subjectivity to intersubjectivity and apply intersubjectivity to translation practices.

## **Pragmatic Texts Translation and Topper Owners Manual**

Pragmatic texts translation plays an important role in the translation market and can be classified into business translation, technical translation, news translation, political translation, tourism translation, advertisement translation and translation of other texts. It is characterized by informativeness, persuasiveness, anonymity and timeliness [12]. Topper Owners Manual gives an account of details of the sailboat, the equipment supplied or fitted, its systems and information on its operation and maintenance, which can be defined as general technical texts of technical translation. This document is given by a sailing company who is dedicated to expanding sailing business and attracting new customers, whose target readers cover all kinds of people, such as instructors, amateurs and professionals ranging in age from 7 to 60. For this reason, translating this document is required to take all factors into account so as to meet goals of translation.

## Intersubjectivity in the English to Chinese Translation of Topper Owners Manual

In the process of translating Topper Owners Manual, intersubjectivity represents the interactions among the translator, the author, the translation initiator and the target reader who come to an agreement on translation. Before the final draft was finished, the translator had sought opinions from the author, the translation initiator, the target reader and made adaptations. This chapter analyzes the translation of terminologies, sentences and paragraphs in order to illustrate intersubjectivity in pragmatic texts translation, demonstrating what translation strategies and techniques are employed under the guidance of the theory of intersubjectivity.

**Consistency and Specification of Terminology.** The consistency and specification of terminology are the priority of pragmatic texts translation. It is essential for translators to determine the meaning of a term which may appear many times in a text. The meaning of general terms largely depends on context. Contrary to technical terms, which account for a small proportion in a passage and are characterized by precise meanings that cannot be affected by context, semi-technical terms with a wide range and a large quantity, will go through the processes of terminologization because of different semantemes. The meaning of semi-technical terms depends on the specific field, context, hyponymy, synonymy, etc. More importantly, terminology translation should be accurate, comply with the industry norms and adapt to certain specific contexts [13]. Topper Owners Manual is full of semi-technical terms and technical terms, such as owner, painter, trolley, traveler, control line (refer with: Table 1). Due to lack of specialist knowledge about sailboats, the translator had to revise the translation of terms after communicating with the translation initiator and the target reader. For example, according to Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, owner refers to someone who owns something. In Topper Owners Manual, owner means someone who owns a sailboat. Owners manual and owners are both present in this document, so it is the translator's job to ensure the meaning of terms are consistent on condition that the translator, the translation initiator and the target reader agree on the meaning of terms.

Table 1 Terminology in Topper Owners Manual

	Frequency		Frequency
overhand knot	3	trolley	9
buoyancy compartment	4	painter	10
transom	4	owner	11
control line	5	strap	11
strop	5	karabiner	12
bowline	5	downhaul	13
pin	5	traveler	17
capsize	5	kicker	21
rigging	6	outhaul	24
block	8	mainsheet	24
cleat	8	pulley	25
daggerboard	8	boom	26

**Word Order in Sentences.** Since English and Chinese differ greatly in word order, the word order in a sentence is required to adjust in the translation process. Sentences are the main focus of translation and the translator often organizes and arranges the information unit by taking a sentence as a unit. If the word order in a sentence makes sense, the relationship and the meaning will be clear, and vice versa. Time sequence, logic sequence, information center, collocation and structure are major factors in making adjustments to word order in a sentence [13]. In Topper Owners Manual, there are numerous sentences describing operating instructions which contain a large amount of technical terms. In addition, as mentioned before, the translator lacks sailing experience who must seek professional help from people engaging in sailing. Thus it is significant to communicate with the author, the translation initiator and the target reader to adjust the word order for clarity and provide useful guides for learners who are interested in assuming the control of sailboats. For example,

In very light airs, beating to windward, it may help to push the boat round from one tack to another if the blade is raised two notches.

In this sentence, the real subject is “to push the boat round from one tack to another if the blade is raised two notches” which should be put at the beginning of a sentence in Chinese. But the translator mistook “it” for “beating to windward”. After checked by the translation initiator and the target reader, the translator revised this sentence. Therefore, if other subjects, like the translation initiator, the author and the target reader, cannot be treated equally in the translation process, or the role of the translator is greatly exaggerated, the translation may be full of mistakes.

**Translation of Paragraphs.** If a paragraph is regarded as a translation unit, the translator is expected to take the paragraph of the original text as a whole and consider it to be a logic unit in the translation process. Accordingly, the translation should correspond to the paragraph of original text. The translations of words, phrases and sentences are subject to the equivalent translation of the whole paragraph. In practice, it should be noticed that logical relation, the centrality of a paragraph’s meaning, word matching and the adjustment of structures [13]. Topper Owners Manual was translated on jeemaa.com, an online computer-aided translation platform which divided this document into many segments. Hence the translator has to check the original text before translating. The translation initiator suggested the first draft needed further modification and the target reader thinks the translation was rough and difficult to understand. For instance,

In order to do this correctly - yet not allow the blade to come up during normal sailing - the friction at the joint between the tiller and rudder must be adjusted correctly. This is done by adjusting the spring nut on the tiller pivot bolt. You must get this right by trial and error.

This paragraph above consists of three sentences and is divided into two segments on the translation platform. The translator integrated it into one sentence in the end after reading the original text and taking opinions of the translation initiator and the target reader into consideration.

In a word, intersubjectivity in Topper Owners Manual is reflected in the translation process of terminology, sentences and paragraphs whose translations should be accurate, comply with the industry norms and adapt to certain specific contexts. It is the translator, the author, the translation initiator and the target reader involved in the translation process that determine what translation strategies should be adopted. By engaging in dialogues, the four subjects accept the translation they all agree on.

## Summary

The shift from subjectivity to intersubjectivity in translation studies has become the main topic for discussion in recent years. Due to the characteristics of pragmatic texts translation, the theory of intersubjectivity can provide a broader perspective for pragmatic translation studies. This paper tries to establish a connection between intersubjectivity and pragmatic texts translation and illustrate intersubjectivity in pragmatic texts translation from three aspects, including consistency and specification of terminology, word order in sentences and the translation of paragraphs. Under the guidance of the theory of intersubjectivity, translators, authors, translation initiators and target readers take an active part in the translation of Topper Owners Manual through dialogues and discussions.

With examples taken from Topper Owners Manual, this paper analyzes translation strategies and techniques used in translating terminology, sentences and paragraphs which are considered to be the focus of translation. The translator, the author, the translation initiator and the target reader are indispensable for translating Topper Owners Manual. It is necessary to define their role played in the translation process and figure out how the four subjects interact with each other. However, it is a pity that the translation cannot be present in this paper because it is in Chinese. Otherwise examples will be more representative. Thus, this paper fails to clearly illustrate how the author, the translator, the translation initiator and the target reader interact with each other. It is expected that this problem will be resolved in future researches.

In conclusion, this paper emphasizes that the translator, the author, the translation initiator and the target reader of equal importance should be actively involved in the translation process. It is

inevitable that the focus of translation studies will shift onto intersubjectivity instead of subjectivity, although intersubjectivity in translation is at the early stage which needs to be further developed.

### Acknowledgements

2017 Teaching Research Project of Wuhan University of Science and Technology: A Study of Intercultural Competence of Translation Undergraduates under the B&R Initiative.

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