

Flexibility and Invisibility of Interpreters of Foreign Trade Business

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Abstract—Interpreter’s invisibility not only refers to the interpretation strategy, but also refers to the invisible yet artificial traces during the interpretation performance. Interpreter’s performance will directly show in the interpretation tasks immediately. So the flexibility and invisibility is a major research topic for it could help the MTI students and new interpreters to understand more about interpretation business. In this paper, a detailed analysis of real foreign trade business examples was made through literature survey method and comparative study method. The purpose of this paper is to help MTI students or interpreters have an overall understanding of relevant theories and key concept of the subjectivity of interpreters. Consequently, enable universities in China with MTI program to add some thinking of interpreter’s subjectivity in curriculum arrangement too.

Keywords—invisibility; flexibility; interpretation; foreign trade; subjectivity

I. INTRODUCTION

Translator’s invisibility is becoming a popular topic with the publishing of the book *The Translator’s Invisibility—A History of Translation*. In this book, Lawrence Venuti had quoted Norman Shapino’s words in the very beginning of his book: “I see translation as the attempt to produce a text so transparent that it does not seem to be translated. A good translation is like a pane of glass. You only notice that it’s there when there are little imperfections: scratches, bubbles. Ideally, there shouldn’t be any. It should never call attention to itself.[1]”

However, translation is very different with interpretation. Translators are more like writers; their works need be creative as well as loyal to the original text. Translators can have a considerably long time to search documents and find the best way for them to not only keep the writer’s style, but also make the readers to understand the translation works without any obstacles. Different languages vary to suit the purpose of users, not like translators, interpreters can only have a very limited time to interpret. They have only 1-3 seconds to react after the speaker finished and also their interpretation duration need to be basically as long as the speech. Also sometimes in the foreign trade business, the interpreters even need to help organize words for the speakers in different circumstances. Different dialect or logic thinking varies from different speakers, and they want the interpreters to help them cover their logic or grammatical mistakes automatically. So it is

difficult for the interpreters of foreign trade business to find the balance between flexibility and invisibility.

During Interpretation, the interpreters will be inevitably influenced by many elements. In foreign trade business, interpreters should not only be “invisible” in three aspects: (1) be neutral at any time; (2) hide their own personalities at any time; (3) be loyal to whatever the speaker said at any time. But also they need to be flexible in three aspects: (1) interpret the whole packages, communicate not only with the words, but also with the emotions or the purposes that the speaker wants to deliver ;(2) organize the words or even correct the speakers if the speeches are spontaneous; (3) deliver the words and meanings according to the speaker’s requirements when the communicative events are tense or confidential.

Successfully combining flexibility and invisibility is as difficult as being an insulator and a conductor at the same time. It is impossible to be perfect. Interpretation is not like a mechanic transfer to languages, it means to find the most optimal correspondent way to perform to the audiences. This paper will discuss the below questions: (1) What is interpreter’s subjectivity? (2) Models of interpretation (3) Different roles in foreign trade business that interpreters play, and how are those roles need affect them to adjust between flexibility and invisibility and back again. (4) The interpreting experience influence the interpreter’s judgment. This paper aims to help inspire the interpretation training and set a basic self-evaluation standard of interpretation for MTI students and interpreters.

II. GENERAL REVIEW OF THE THEORY OF INTERPRETER’S SUBJECTIVITY

A. *The General Review of the Theory of Interpreter’s Subjectivity*

Translation is fully accredited as an independent disciplinary instead of a subcategory under the foreign linguistics and applied linguistics. The research and theory of translation had improved greatly now. However the study on translator’s subjectivity focused mainly on literature translation, or some text translation, only a few studies are focused on the subjectivity of interpreters. So despite real experiences, the students of interpretation major or new interpreters can only find some blur ways to improve their interpretation skills.

Interpretation activities will always take place under some certain cultures, time and occasions, and this activity’s serving targets are different people with completely different purposes

and cultures. Interpreters need to transfer the language to the audience through complicated psychological process such as understanding, paraphrasing and reorganizing the words. Interpreters as the participants of communicative events and the exact existences of consciousness, their subjectivity will be reflected from their cognitive mind, cultural consciousness and backgrounds. Yan Linhai believes that after the translator's finish of reading an original text, they will ignite the existing knowledge structure in their mind and transfer the original words to psychological chart. During the process, interpreters will experience cultural assimilation from the original text, and then they will inevitably adjust, and balance the cultural conflict between original language and target language[2].

Interpretation researchers had gradually found that the simple "language equivalence" can't cover the standards of the quality of interpretation works. Franz Pochhacker[3] believes that the good interpretation will somehow be biased from the "language equivalence" and yet the interpretation will still be loyal and accurate from the perspective of communicative purpose. Interpreters during foreign trade business, as the performers of interpreting, they should attract both the listeners and also the speakers. Gao Wenjun[4] had pointed out that interpreters need not only verbal skills but also non-verbal skills, such as good memory and quick adaptation ability to changing situations.

Moira Inghilleri[5] and Mona Baker[6] and other researchers had pointed out the concept of "cultural conflict" from the perspective of politics. Those researchers had focused on the different levels of translation had different influences on politics or even wars. They believe that translation is a major variable component of war. Hence, Baker thought that translation can influence and maintain the spread and legalization of the war's narration. The theory on "translation conflict" varies from western to China, Western theory focused mainly on political conflict and paradox while China's theory focused mainly on cultural and religion conflict. However the conflict elements that the above researchers mentioned had ignored one major problem that is those elements are already part of translation and can't be separated. Therefore, we can't simply view "translation" as the tool of conflicts[7].

B. The Unique Characteristics of Foreign Trade Business and its requirements on Interpreter's Flexibility

Foreign trade business is just like a miniature war with plenty of inevitable and yet flexible elements, and in those elements are big parts of interpretation and can't be separated. So during the foreign trade business, no matter it is text translation or interpretation of conferences, negotiations, the performers are all variable elements that can affect who process. In almost every formal diplomatic situation, the both parties will bring their own interpreters to make sure every piece of messages are delivered completely, however, in foreign trade business, we seldom see both parties bring their own interpreters. So sometimes, the key to a good and smooth foreign trade business meeting or negotiation depends largely on the skills of interpreters. And the interpretation of foreign trade business has its own characteristics which require interpreters to adjust their subjectivity accordingly.

1) The different education background and knowledge

During the foreign trade business, normally the two parties come from different countries with completely different education background. Even the two parties may have many years of business experiences with each other, or have many branch companies in the other party's country, sometimes they still have a huge gap on education background and cultural knowledge. It requires the interpreters to be well prepared for the communicative events and each culture's taboos. Languages don't have social status, but the people in different social status will choose their own language behavior[8]. Interpreters should use their preparation and solid skills to eliminate or to narrow down the language distance caused by social status. During the communicative events of foreign trade business, it will normally have three co-participants, and each participant have their own world. Claudia V. Angelelli wrote in her book *Revisiting the Interpreter's Role_a Study of Conference, Court and Medical Interpreters in Canada, Mexico and the United States* Benjamin's Translation Library. (In order to gain deep knowledge, we need to study the interpreted communicative event as a social or political event[9]. And then we must examine the interpreter's multifaceted role within that event. Ideally, we would embrace the reality of a participant bring the self to the table during each communicative event—not ignore it).

2) The highly participate level for interpreters

Professor Renwen's research on the visibility of interpreters starts from their subjectivity. He thought that the subjectivity of interpreters is a self-consciousness of the interpreter's position, ability and value, and also the inner demand of interpreters when they are performing creativity after they had fully understood each parties' goal and culture. He had pointed out the three characteristics of interpreter's visibility. (1) Interpreter is the message's gate keeper. (2) Interpreter is the co-interlocutor. (3) Interpreter is the coordinator of the communicative events[10].

Therefore during the communicative events of foreign trade business, interpreters should understand they need not only to exchange the words, but also they need to reorganize the speech, to highly participate in the communicative events.

3) The complicated interpretation environment

In the communicative events of foreign trade business, the interpretation environments are quite complicated. Sometime the communicative events are spontaneous, and the speakers may make some little mistake that need the interpreter to correct them automatically. In that case, the interpreter are both "visible" and "invisible", for they can't take credit for correcting the speaker's mistakes, and they do need to make efforts to let their interpretation smooth and elegant.

III. FLEXIBILITY AND DIFFERENT TECHNIQUES OF INTERPRETATION REQUIRED IN FOREIGN TRADE BUSINESS

Interpreters of foreign trade business need to adapt to the changing situations, for the communicative events of foreign trade business are comparatively more flexible, unofficial, and spontaneous than other fields.

A. *Two Flexibility Modes of Interpretation in Foreign Trade Business*

Researchers had built two interpretation models from different disciplinary perspectives, which can be applied in different situation. But for MTI students or fresh interpreters, they still need more practice and experiences to change their interpretation models accordingly.

1) *Conduit Model of Interpreting*

From the name we can know the meaning of conduit model of interpreting; this interpreting model refers to the interpreter extract meanings from source language, and then put the meaning to the target language. Under this model, even sometimes due to the cultural difference, extra paraphrasing need to be added to achieve effective communication, it should be the speaker's job to add the information, not the interpreter. The interpreter is not responsible to explain cultural difference, and the procedure of interpretation have two steps, one is understanding and the other one is expressing[11]. In this model, no over interpretation or repeat interpretation will appear.

Example:

· Speaker: Our company's brand product Pu'er tea was inspired by The Classic of Tea written by Lu Yu.

It is the speaker's job to explain that Lu Yu is a "tea saint" of Tang Dynasty and his book he Classic of Tea Twas the world's earliest treatise on tea leave production. And if the interpreter explained that first, when the speaker explain again, things will turn awkward and repeat interpretation or over interpretation will appear.

This model shows the complete hidden of interpreter's subjectivity, which can happen under three hypothesis (1) the two parties communicate in a simple way and the two parties are well known with the cultural differences. (2) the communicative events are well arranged and prepared, while the interpreter only need to read the draft text of translation.(3) no culture elements are involved during the communicative events, the interpreter need only to translate data, facts and so on.

However, during the communicative events of foreign trade business, these three hypotheses are hardly existed. If the subjectivity of interpreter has been erased completely, the communication will be awkward and also a waste of time.

2) *Interpretative Triangle Model of Interpreting*

In the interpretative triangle model of interpreting, the interpretation procedure had been divided into three steps. (1) Speaker use source language to express, while the interpreter picks up the meanings. This theory believes that different communities have the same communicative demand, which is mutual understanding, concept exchanging or cooperation in the possible field. Hence, the purpose of interpretation should be transferring the meanings instead of stick strictly to the words or structure of the speech. Interpreters need not only require the verbal skills, but also they need to equip with a great deal of non-verbal skills. (2) the interpreter extract the real meaning from the shell of the source language, and store the meaning in the brain.(3) the interpreter express the real

meaning freely without fell the restriction of the source language. Danica Selekovitch once marked that during the third procedure, interpreter has a certain level of freedom to reorganize the meaning and express with the way they are familiar with, but unconscious misunderstanding happens all the time[12].

During the foreign trade business interpreting, this interpretative triangle model applies all the time, for it can show some subjectivity of interpreter, and can well deliver the meaning of the source language. However, it relies on the interpreter to have solid and equal knowledge on both languages. Somehow the interpreter takes the third procedure too casually, which will cause the interpretation to be less well organized than the original speech.

B. *Different Techniques of Interpretation Required in Foreign Trade Business*

1) *Amplification Techniques in Foreign Trade Business*

The amplification techniques usually refer to "explanatory translation", Peter Newmark once said "explanation is the translation[13]." He thought the inner words are functions anyway instead of the inner performance of the output words, so the purpose to use language or language activity is using "images". Translators need to translate the "image" or explain the "image" to achieve the actual correspondence.

2) *Explanation Techniques Apply when Interpreters as Life Assistance*

During the foreign trade business, we will always receive guests from foreign countries or come to foreign countries for business trip. Danica Seleskovitch in his book *Interpréter pour traduire* 1992[14] had explained the understanding and expressing procedures of interpretation from the perspective of linguistics, logistics, and psychology, and also had compared the similarity and difference between translation and interpretation, and revealed the basic pattern of simultaneous interpretation and on spot interpretation. She believes that the interpretation is an act of communication, and its purpose is to deliver the communicative meanings.

When interpreter plays the role as life assistance, we have to use our flexibility from the minute we meet our guests or hosts. Therefore explanation technique is quite necessary. It will have the below three functions :(1) to warm the atmosphere. (2) To let the mutual side have a more detailed impression. (3) To make a complete interpretation, and then achieve a complete conversation. Below are the examples we might meet as interpreters of foreign trade business.

Example:

· When the mutual part had successfully reached an agreement, sometimes the Chinese speaker will say "OK, that's it, sends them back in the afternoon then we are done." In this case, the interpreter should fully understand the speaker's meaning and make an explanation interpretation such as "It was great to meet you all, we will say good bye to you in the afternoon, and we surely hope our cooperation will begin soon."

3) *Omission Technique in Foreign Trade Business*

Due to the different language styles and structures, omission always has to apply in interpretation. It can make the whole interpretation work more refined, more exact and smoother. Sometimes the interpreters are not only need to interpret the languages, but also need to be the real participants of this conversation. Therefore, omission technique is critical, sometimes it will lose the exact meaning of the source language, but it can help to improve the whole conversation's quality.

Omission should apply to certain circumstances: (1) The conversation has not been well prepared, and the speech was simultaneous, so the omission is required to correct the logic or syntactic construction of the speech. (2) The conversation was in a tense mood, during negotiation, mutual part showed impatient and unnecessary offending words happened. (3) The draft of speech has too much repeated words. During the foreign trade business, omission need to be applied carefully, because deleting words normally means deleting meanings. The omission should (1) Never jeopardize the whole conversation's direction. (2) It should aim to a smoother conversation instead of just saving time and energy of interpreter. (3) Be doubling confirmed with the speaker if the omission is critical and may be against the speaker's wish.

Example 1.

· In the Chinese welcome speech, the guests and participants all need to add one "distinguished" or "honorable" in front of each title, and we will use different words to show our respect. In that case, interpret only one distinguished will be fine.

Example 2.

· During foreign trade negotiation, especially during the complaining and reimburse negotiation, the interpreter need to understand the speaker's intention, if they still want to cooperate with each other in the future, try to eliminate the unnecessary cursing words or insulting words.

4) *Adaptation Technique in Foreign Trade Business*

Verschueren had put forward the adaption theory in his book *Understanding Pragmatics*, in which he described the use of language as a procedure of selection and adaption[15]. He believes that understand meaning is the critical content in human's linguistic activities. We should put languages inside of the changing communicative process, and interpret the meaning according to the context.

a) The Application of Adaptation Theory in Foreign Trade Business

During formal speeches, even with the written speech drafts in the interpreter's hands, somehow, the interpreter sometimes still have to change their interpretation method according to different audiences' cultural background. For example, normally the introduction speeches of China's companies will use a lot of propaganda words, four words expressions, numbers and words together expressions, it will require the interpreter to adapt their method and find the most optimal way to deliver the messages.

In foreign trade business, interpreters will always find themselves under the difficult situation in adaptation; it normally will occur in negotiation, welcome speech, and feasible plan discussion meetings and so on. Because the two languages' structure, pronunciation, and cultural background are different, here are two examples of the application of adaptation theory in foreign trade business.

· Example for the adaptation of history and culture taboos.

In Yunnan, you can always see the "drinking performance" in the restaurant, the minority nationality will dance with a small bowl of rice wine and ask the guest to drink more, the lyric goes "Like it, drink it, dislike it, drink it, regardless you like or not, drink it." For some guests who had their own taboo on drinking, it is the interpreter's job to use adaptation method to solve the dilemma.

· Example for the adaptation of euphemism

During welcome banquet, some host will say "let's eat casually; we didn't prepare anything, only some rough meal." In that case, an interpreter will need to use adaptation techniques to translate the euphemism as "we had chosen this restaurant for its good food and convenient location."

IV. INVISIBILITY OF INTERPRETATION OF FOREIGN TRADE BUSINESS

The invisibility of interpretation does not only refer to the excellent interpretation work without any artificial traces, but also refer to the invisibility of interpreters as the participants of the communicative events. Interpreters should never stand out during the interpretation. Even when the direction of the conversation had been diverged or the atmosphere had been cold and tense, sometimes, interpreters should put themselves in a neutral position, instead of participate the conversation.

Normally speaking, when the level of seriousness of the source speech is increasing, the range of invisibility will increase as well. Diplomatic interpretation is the most serious interpretation type, while foreign trade interpretation is more flexible than diplomatic interpretation. Somehow the performance level of interpretation are even higher than the speeches, but invisibility should be applied due to different situations[16].

A. Invisibility Applies When the Context is Clear

The interpreters need to always fully understand the speaker's intention, especially speaker's intention which your sponsor's (the side who hired you) interested in. During the foreign trade business, sometimes the speaker need to create a certain atmosphere, and that requires the interpreter to fully understand that before or during the meeting. The interpreter need only to do the interpretation job, instead of try to jump out and shift the whole meeting's direction of atmosphere..

B. Reconfirm with the Speaker for Invisibility

Sometimes during the foreign trade business, the misunderstanding did not only occur between the mutual parts, but also occur between the interpreter and the speaker. In that case, we should reconfirm with the speaker to make sure our interpretation work went smooth, and invisible, instead of cause more misunderstanding between the two parties.

V. INTERPRETER'S SOCIAL STATUS DURING FOREIGN TRADE BUSINESS

From the Research on Self Recognition of Professional Characters of Meeting Interpreters[17]. We can see from the below tables.

TABLE I. INTERPRETER'S WORKING YEARS

Interpreter's experience	NO.
Freshmen (under 3 years)	34
Medium level experienced (3-5 years)	46
Rich experienced (more than 5 years of)	55

TABLE II. THE LEVEL OF BEING NEUTRAL IN INTERPRETATION (NUMBER AND PERCENT)

	Very low	Low	Average	High	Very high
Freshmen	5/15%	6/18%	4/11%	6/18%	13/38%
Medium level experienced	12/26%	8/17%	11/25%	4/8%	11/24%
Rich experienced	17/31%	10/18%	13/24%	3/5%	12/22%

The freshmen have the highest level of being neutral, and then come to the medium-level-experienced interpreters and rich-experienced interpreters.

TABLE III. OMISSION TECHNIQUES IN INTERPRETATION

	Very low	Low	Average	High	Very high
Freshmen	10/29%	7/20%	7/21%	4/12%	6/18%
Medium level experienced	12/26%	9/19%	10/22%	6/13%	9/20%
Rich experienced	10/18%	8/15%	9/16%	13/24%	15/27%

Rich-experienced interpreters considered the necessity of omission during interpretation is important; the figure is significantly higher than the freshmen.

VI. CONCLUSION

The paper showed during the interpretation in foreign trade business, invisibility is not the common goal for the interpreters, or for the speakers and the audiences. In more situations, interpreters will participate, influence or even decide the conversation with their flexible interpretation strategy. It should be clear in which situation of foreign trade business an interpreter should exchange from invisibility to flexibility or the other way around. And the interpretation experience as well as the bilingual level will also influence the interpreter's choice.

This paper also showed that during interpretation, the interpretation in foreign trade business is more than a simple exchange of languages, but more a complicated social activity.

The evaluation of an interpreter performance should take all the factors into consideration. The theory on interpretation is still developing, and those new interpreters and MTI students should have a good knowledge on the theory of interpretation and be able to apply them in their interpretation practice or real interpretation works. A good combination of theory and practice can also help the students to achieve success in or cooperate with other academic fields such as computer science and psychology. The discussion of flexibility and invisibility of interpreters will still have a long way to go and may have a significant change to MTI teaching and learning.

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