

# Study of Cross-cultural Awareness in Business Interpretation

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**Abstract.** In Business interpreting, an interpreter should be equipped with cross cultural awareness so as to ensure the successful communication between two parties. This paper explores into the application of cross-cultural awareness in business interpretation from the perspective of mode of thinking, linguistic level and business behavior.

**Keywords:** Cross cultural awareness; Business interpretation; Translation strategy.

## 1. Introduction

With the development of world economy, cross cultural business negotiation is more frequently carried out than before. More and more people realize that they need the assistance of business interpreters to conclude business successfully. Correspondingly, interpreters are required to equip with cross cultural awareness and eliminate barriers existing in business communication and ensure communication goes smoothly.

## 2. Cross Cultural Awareness

Robert G. Hanvey came up with the term “cross cultural awareness” [1], arousing great discussion in the west at that time. He divided cross cultural awareness into four levels: the first level is the phenomenon of cultural awareness often interpreted as exotic or strange. The second level is awareness of significant and subtle cultural traits that contrast markedly with one's own the third level is the cultural traits are regard as credible through rational analysis. The fourth level is awareness of "empathy" and "culture into"[2]. Therefore, cross-cultural awareness means that interpreters can form a cognitive standard about cultural elements and regulate behaviors consciously or unconsciously in cross cultural communication. It is the particular thinking mode, judgment ability and their sensitivity to cultural factors.

Business interpretation is an activity which at least involves two kinds of languages. A qualified interpreter should have a comprehensive understanding of different cultures and identify their differences in terms of mode of thinking, linguistic level and business behavior and then adopt countermeasures accordingly so as to avoid misunderstanding and guarantee successful communication between two parties.

## 3. Application of Cross Cultural Awareness in Business Interpretation

### 3.1 From the Perspective of Mode of Thinking

Mode of thinking means the way you think, and it plays a crucial role to decide people's statements and actions. The way in which people communicate can be influenced by people's thinking mode. In fact, the interpretation between easterners and westerners is the transition of the different mode of thinking.

Easterners and Westerners have formed different ways of thinking with different historical and cultural background. The thinking mode of westerners is linear model. They focus on analyzing rationally and revealing the essence of their dialectical logic. Besides, they are direct and use less non-verbal communication to deliver information. They like equality and freedom. They are more likely to come straight to the point. Unlike Chinese, they don't prefer to follow strict rules or moral principles. They tend to count on individual values, but this does not mean that they don't consult.

They endeavor to fight for their positions. Besides, they prefer to concentrate on one problem at a time. They tend to take risks and accept uncertainty. They value their privacy very much.

On the contrary, thinking mode of the easterners follows a curve model, and they place extra emphasis on observation and intuitive awareness of itself and the outside world. So Chinese seldom express their thoughts straightly and they like a roundabout way. Chinese are less open than Easterners. For example, An American has established successful cooperation with the Chinese party, he said happily, "I just show you my wallet". However, it may be considered rude for Chinese. In fact, the American just wants to express their sincere feeling for cooperation.

In view of difference of mode of thinking between Chinese and westerner, it is necessary for interpreters to be empathetic. Empathy refers to putting you in other's position. People who have strong empathy ability can understand other's ideas, emotions and purposes deeply.

For example, at the end of an international business negotiation, an American client was watching a picture hanging on the wall before he was going to leave. He said he liked this style. Then the Chinese host insisted on sending this picture to client by saying "Since you like it, please do take it as my gift to you". In this case, the client would feel confused if the interpreter interpreted word for word directly. In fact, the client demonstrated the typical thinking mode of westerners. He liked this picture and praised it, and there was no special meaning. While the Chinese host manifested the typical thinking mode of easterners, inferring the client was implying something else. Therefore, the interpreter should make mediation so as to avoid communication barriers.

As a business interpreter, he or she should be sensitive to the different thinking mode and make both parties better understand each other's positions and build up sound foundation for the future friendly cooperation. For example, if a foreigner bluntly rejects the Chinese businessman's invitation, the interpreter can further explain to the Chinese about the westerner's typical style of being direct and straightforwardness and there is no necessity of feeling hurtful for being rejected.

Each culture has its way to express emotion in the business interaction process. Interpreters can excise their ability to fight against differences which dramatically influence the business negotiation and help people better understand each other.

### **3.2 From the Perspective of Linguistic Level**

linguistic level means the level of the language. In business interpretation, an interpreter is required to have strong cross cultural awareness so as to adopt proper translation strategy in a limited time to better convey information in business cross cultural communication.

Lawrence Venuti was the one who brought forward the translation strategy of domestication and foreignization[3]. The translation strategy of domestication means the interpreter should keep company with the target language readers, delivering information which the target language readers are familiar with.

In interpreting idioms and phrases, the translation strategy of domestication can be used by interpreters. As a matter of fact, in Chinese, there are many idioms and phases which are usually related to historical events, cultural allusions and the myths. For instance, in a business negotiation, Chinese party uses an idiom "fight between a snipe and a clam" to indicate that both parties don't have to do suicidal competition in the common market currently, otherwise it will make the third competitor have opportunity to gain benefit. In this case, the interpreter should have a full understanding with this idiom, and deliver correct information to make the other party understand the real meaning of this idiom. This idiom can be interpreted into "Please be more considerate, and we must take the long run to avoid the third competitor's attack or "We are fighting hard in the boxing match, while the next party is waiting for our touchdown". This interpretations fit well with American culture. Americans can understand easier than direct translation based on this strategy.

Lawrence Venuti also said "foreignization is an approach that the translator leaves the author in peace, as much as possible, and moves the reader towards him" [3]. The translation strategy of foreignization aims to highlight the exotic color and introduce the foreign customs, culture, values, thinking mode and language features, let the reader feel different national characteristics and language

habits. Therefore the translation strategy of foreignization is a translation method which tries to maintain the foreign culture as much as possible with the purpose of transferring the source language.

For example, For Chinese phrases “You can know a man and his face but not his heart”, if you use the translation strategy of domestication, it can be translated into English “Appearances certainly are deceptive”. Yet translation strategy of foreignization is also acceptable.

Al in all, domestication and foreignization are both necessary for cross cultural communication. It is necessary for interpreters to take the situation into consideration, and decide what measures should be adopted. To use the translation strategy of domestication more or foreignization more depends on whether you can interpret the meaning of original speaker correctly.

### **3.3 From the Perspective of Business Behavior**

Business interpreters are the direct participants of cross cultural communication,. Actually, the business cooperation can not be concluded without all participants’ proper business behavior, which might affect people’s impression on each other, ultimately influence the result of the business negotiations.

Business etiquette, one kind of decorum, includes meeting etiquette, manners, telephone communication skills, and so on so forth. Good manners are always significant in all aspects. There are some certain common sets of business etiquette interpreter should comply with. However, in some cases, business behavior of interpreters should also varies depending on what people you are dealing with and what cultural background they are from. For example, in North America, business people will leave a gap of 4 feet between themselves when interacting. While in South America or the Middle East, business people enjoy getting along with each other closely. Another example, when facing people who are from North America, North and Northwest Europe, Australia who highly value timetables and personal responsibility, it would be better for the interpreter to be punctual and work with per-agreed agendas. However, when dealing with people from South America, Middle East, Africa and India, interpreters should get used to their doing several tasks at the same time and not keeping to the timetable. It is also important and necessary for the interpreter to play the role of mediator and serve as a bridge to facilitate the communication and cooperation between the two parties.

Therefore if you want to be a good business negotiator or interpreter, you should bear business etiquette in mind. What’s more, you should know how to behave well in a professional and efficient way in different cross cultural business situations.

Moreover, non-verbal communication also plays a significant part in cross cultural business communication. Anthropologist Ray Birdwhistell found that the amount of information delivered in a face to face communication is less than 35%, and more than 65% of information are delivered through body language[4]. The research of body language contains eye contacts, facial countenance, gestures, body movements and postures. Body language in one culture may have different connotation in another culture. Therefore, interpreters must take the body language of the speaker into account to avoid cultural barriers. For example, People are likely to use a series of actions to match their talk, and these movements are unconscious, so body language can better reflect the real thoughts of speakers. Therefore interpreters should not only listen to their words, but also observe their behaviors. Through their manners or facial expressions, the inner thoughts can be caught. To become a skilled interpreter, you need know the real meaning of body language in different countries, so that misinterpretation will be avoided. For example , we Chinese usually nod our heads to signify “yes”, however, Indian people usually tilt their heads and then get back quickly to show “yes” or “I know”. This gesture is often under-mistaken as “no” by Chinese without cross cultural awareness. In a word, interpreters can’t judge their body language of showing emotions by his or her own cultural criteria.

## **4. Conclusion**

In order to ensure business negotiation goes smoothly, interpreters have to take many aspects into consideration, like different mode of thinking, translation strategy which should be adopted, and

correct business behavior. All of these aim to reduce and avoid unnecessary conflicts. Above all, cross cultural awareness plays an indispensable role in business interpretation.

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