On the Role of Cognitive Environment of Translation for English-Chinese Translation

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This paper put forward the concept of cognitive environment of translation based on the concept of cognitive context and proposed world knowledge, language knowledge and translation knowledge as its three constituents. World knowledge can also be referred to as encyclopedic knowledge, including all the knowledge acquired about diverse aspects of internal and external life through direct and indirect experience. Language knowledge refers to all the knowledge about the phonetics, phonology, lexicology, syntax, pragmatics, stylistics, etc. of the two languages involved and the comparative and contrastive features between the two languages. Translation knowledge concerns all the knowledge about the strategies and techniques for translation in general and specific solutions applicable for the translation between the two languages in question. The three types of knowledge get involved at different stages of translation: world knowledge and language knowledge about the source text facilitate accurate understanding of the source text, knowledge about the target language and knowledge about the comparative and contrastive features between the source and the target language, in combination with translation knowledge help with the translation process. All the knowledge can be activated more than once in case any uncertainty occurred at understanding or translation stages. As regards English-Chinese translation, translators are expected to use Chinese words, syntactic and textual structures most acceptable to the Chinese readers to replace the original English text, rendering them as close as possible in content, style and receptor effect. Efforts must be made to cater to the Chinese conventions of language use. Three major suggestions, among others, can be summarized in the paper. The first one is to use suitable words or expressions to match the Chinese ways of expression in various cases. The second one is to break the chains off the long and sophisticated English sentences, using shorter Chinese ones with a subject or theme, converting the nouns in English back to the verb or adjective they are derived from, etc. The third is to re-organize the textual structure of the target text according to the temporal, spatial and logical ways of expression in Chinese.

1. Introduction

As cognitive context is crucial to language understanding and interpretation, so is cognitive environment of translation to translation. Cognitive context is a structured and cognized environment for language use, while cognitive environment of translation can be said as a structured and cognized environment for translation. Translation

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involves a proper understanding of the source text and the proper conversion from the source text to the target text. The first "proper" is inseparable from the conventional cognitive context, and the second "proper" involves the language knowledge about the target language, bilingual contrastive knowledge, translation knowledge and related world knowledge. These bodies of knowledge constitute a cognitive environment of translation and play a significant role at the relevant stages of bilingual translation.

2. Cognitive Environment of Translation and Its Composition

Cognitive environment of translation is a concept put forward by the writer of this paper upon the inspiration of cognitive context. As is well known, context is the environment in which language occurs, both linguistic and non-linguistic. According to Xiong Xueliang [1], context mainly refers to cognitive context, i.e. structured specific situations and the language frequently used or appearing in it. In other words, the original specific contextual factors become structured as cognitively structured units and relationships. That is to say, cognitive context mainly refers to the prototypical cognitive relationship between a language expression and the related context that can be mutually activated. According to Xiong [1], cognitive context involves three pragmatic categories: situational knowledge (specific occasions), knowledge about the linguistic context (working memory) and background knowledge (relevant world knowledge). Moreover, it also includes collective consciousness shared by social groups. That is, the "methods of doing things, thinking mode or believing values" of social cultural groups. The collective consciousness is stored in the individual's knowledge structures in the form of "social representation", so to make the individual's language behavior suitable for the social, cultural and political environment. What Xiong calls situational knowledge (specific occasions) refers to prototyped situational knowledge. In order to facilitate the discussion, the article put situational knowledge, background knowledge and social representations under the term world knowledge, while knowledge about the linguistic context is put under language knowledge. Since translation is an activity of language use involving bilingual translation, i.e. language use plus translation, it is rational to say that translation depends on the cognitive contexts for both languages and knowledge about translation, while knowledge about translation can not exclude the comparative and contrastive features of the two languages and translation knowledge. Till now, it is clear that translation depends on three kinds of knowledge, i.e. world knowledge, language knowledge and translation knowledge. The article put them under one term and named

it cognitive environment of translation. Below are further elaborations.

2.1 World Knowledge

World knowledge in the broad sense is also called encyclopedic knowledge. There are all kinds of existence in the world at large. Most of which are real and a few are imagined. In addition to the constituents, characteristics, events, states, relationships, social and cultural meanings, etc. subsumed by these beings, there are also connections between different beings, either real or imagined. A single, simple connection can be integrated into a more complex network of connections. The knowledge about these beings and their connections is the target and result of our cognition of the world, and constitutes our knowledge of the world. The world knowledge in this article is in a narrow sense, which specifically refers to the part of world knowledge activated by a certain language expression. It includes the prototypical situational knowledge, background knowledge, and possible social representational knowledge related to a certain language expression. Representations mainly concern cultural knowledge. As to what can be activated by a specific language expression, it depends on the principle of relevance [2]. Language communication and human cognition are governed by the principle of relevance which is not a human-made principle, but a natural attribute of communication and cognition. It is one of the guiding principles of pragmatic reasoning.

2.2 Language Knowledge

In addition to the knowledge about the linguistic context, language knowledge involved in translation also includes knowledge of the essential characteristics of the source language and the target language and their similarities and differences. Knowledge about a particular language is not only limited to the phonetics, phonology, lexicology, semantics, syntax and textual linguistics; instead, it also includes knowledge of stylistics and rhetoric, pragmatics, etymology, etc. Only by mastering a thorough and deep bilingual knowledge can a translator understand the source text correctly, find substituent structures from the target language easily during bilingual conversion, and tell whether he has made the right choice. An extensive comparative and contrastive study of English and Chinese language is the basis of English-Chinese translation. What count most in translation are the differences between two languages, though similarities also matter.

2.3 Translation Knowledge

For a qualified translator, knowledge of translation

studies is a must. Whatever the case, a translator has to solve the problems of macroscopic translation strategies and microscopic translation techniques. The essence of translation is nothing more than the proper conversion of the source language text into the target language text with an aim at equivalences in the text type of the source language text and the writing style of the original writer, so as to help the target language readers get roughly equivalent receptor effects [3] to those received by the source language readers. To put it in detail, the translator needs to deal with the relationships between form and content, between loyalty and creation, between literal translation and free translation, between foreignization and domestication [4]. Any extreme opinions, for example, poems are untranslatable, and a translator must be 100% faithful to the original text, etc. [5] are all irrational, hence unacceptable. The microscopic knowledge in translation techniques mainly involves how to achieve the appropriate conversion from the source language text to the target language text from all levels of language. A translator can adopt such strategies as adding, omitting, splitting, integrating, extracting, transliterating, noting, zero translating, and so on on the condition that most of the original meaning, style and receptor effect can be kept and carried over to the target text. Beyond that, literary brilliancy should be attempted at consciously so as to make the target text more readable. This is a piece of advice operable for the translation of all types. But for the translation between any two specific languages, some hard nuts must be hammered in terms of the languages involved.

3. The Role of Cognitive Environment of Translation in English-to-Chinese Translation

Cognitive environment of translation runs through the entire process of translation, but at different stages of translation, different components gets involved. The stage of understanding the source language text is mainly influenced by the world knowledge and the language knowledge about the source language, esp. about the source language text, while the stage of translation from English to Chinese mainly by the language knowledge of the target language, knowledge about the contrastive features between the two languages and translation knowledge. At the stage of proofreading and reviewing before the final draft, all components of the cognitive environment of translation may be activated again. Since the last stage just repeats what may happen at the first two stages, discussions are directed only to the first two stages. Due to it being impossible to cover all the aspects of English-to-Chinese translation, examples given below can only deal with some typical issues.

3.1 The Role of Cognitive Environment of Translation at the Stage of Source Text Understanding

An accurate understanding of the source language text is the first step of translation, without which all translation strategies and techniques are in vain. At this stage, world knowledge and language knowledge about the source language play the pivotal role. The world knowledge behind the source language text and the language knowledge about the source language help with disambiguation and meaning choice.

Example 1: If you really want to be slim, don't eat. *Fast*! [5]

Comments: The word "fast" can be an adjective, an adverb and a verb. Besides the world knowledge about the relationship between being slim and the amount of food to be eaten, the sentence pattern of the imperative mood helps with choosing it as a verb, meaning "eat nothing/ little".

Example 2: ...it makes me realize to the bone, to the marrow, how poor I am—how poor I am, and how miserable, how defeated, *routed*, annihilated! [5]

Comments: The word "routed" is an adjective derived from the noun "route". It is very likely for it to mean "having a route/wayout"; however, the negative nature of the surrounding words, i.e. *poor, miserable, defeated, annihilated*, directs to its antonym, "having no route/ wayout", in Chinese, ZOU TOU WU LU. This is a very special case for a word to mean its opposite depending on the linguistic context and relevant world knowledge.

Example 3: The cook was *knifing* the fish carcass into thin slices.

Comments: The word *knife* is a verb derived from the noun *knife* as a tool for cutting, hence the meaning "use a knife to cut". Nouns used as a verb without suffixation is quite common in English. World knowledge about the nature of the referent of a noun in the real world helps with the understanding of such verbs. The meaning is always closely connected with the ways human beings are related to the referent. For example, to *doctor* means *to serve as/ like a doctor, to weed a garden* is *to remove the weed, to Christmas* somewhere is to spend the festival somewhere, to *rain off* a game is *to cancel a game because of the rain, to fold* the sheep is *to put the sheep* in the fold, etc. However, *to bottle wine* is to put wine in the bottle, but *to bottle a bad guy* is to *beat a bad guy with a bottle*. So the collocation in language will also help with activating the relevant world knowledge which in turn helps with the choice of meaning of a verb derived from its cognate noun.

Example 4: With Asia's economic meltdown rattling

the Beijing leadership, Zhu and his colleagues now have a powerful argument that China must *get its own house in order* to prevent meddling by the International Monetary Fund or other outsiders. (China: Zhu is Taking a Broom to the Bureaucrats) [5]

Comments: "Get one's house in order" is an analogy based on a very famous Chinese saying "If one can not get his own house in order, how can he be expected to win and reign a whole empire?" With this knowledge, it will be much easy for one to put "get its own house in order" within one meaning unit rather than putting "in order to" within one meaning unit. World knowledge and language knowledge, esp. Knowledge about rhetorical devices in language help one quite much in identifying and understanding rhetorical devices such as metaphor, metonymy, pun, hyperbole, etc.

3.2 The Role of Cognitive Environment of Translation at the Stage of Converting the Source Text to the Target Text

Example 5: It was a day as fresh as grass growing up and clouds going over and butterflies coming down can make it [5].

Translation for reference: lVCAO QIQI, BAIYUN RANRAN, CAIDIE PIANPIAN, ZHE RIZI SHI RUCI QINGXIN KE'AI.

Comments: The original sentence is a rather long and complex sentence with a comparative structure embedded; however, Chinese tends to use short and simple sentences. Consequently, the English sentence can be broken down into four short clauses:

Grass grew up, clouds went over, butterflies came down, and such a day was so fresh.

To put it clearer, when translating longer English sentences into Chinese, normally the sentences will be broken down into shorter ones, and when necessary, a deictic structure will be used to repeat an element to make the whole sentence cohesive and coherent. Sometimes, a subject or a theme inferrable in the context can be added to make short clauses. Refer to Example 6 for this.

Example 6: Dawn breaking over the islands, very beautiful in a soft grey light with many clouds.

Translation for reference: TIAN GANG POXIAO, ROUHE DE HUISE TIANGUANG TOUGUO YUNCENG ZHAOZAI DAOSHANG, MEI JI LE.

Comment: In Chinese, "tian" is indispensable to make "TIAN POXIAO", customary to Chinese speakers, meaning "dawn breaking" .

Example 7: I should have liked to be asked to say what I knew [5].

Translation for reference: WO DANGRAN XIHUAN

KAO WO DONG DE NEIRONG.

Comments: In English, people tend to use passive voices much more often than in Chinese. So when acceptable, passive voices are often converted into active ones in Chinese.

Example 8: Rebecca's wit, cleverness, and flippancy made her speedily the vogue in London among a certain class [5].

Translation for reference: LIBEIJIA JIZHI, CONGHUI, NENGSHUOHUIDAO, HENKUAI CHENGWEI LUNDUN MOUGE QUANZI DE HONGREN.

Comments: English tends to use much more nouns than Chinese due to the flexibility of word class derivations. So when doing translation, it is highly advisable to change nouns in English to verbs, adjectives, or adverbs whenever feasible.

Example 9: You never realize how fortunate you are to have good health until it is suddenly brought home to you by the sight of suffering.

Translation for reference: CHUFEI QINYAN MUDU *BIEREN DE* BINGTONG, NI SHI BUHUI DUNWO YONGYOU JIANKANG SHI DUOMO XINGYUN.

Comments: Many times, a translator is supposed to do addition, cutting, re-ordering, integration, splitting, extraction, repeating, etc. to make the translated version customary to the target language. In this sentence, BIEREN DE (other people's) should be inserted before "suffering" to make it explicit.

Example 10: "You should have killed yourself last week," he said to the deaf man.

Translation for reference: NI SHANGZHOU ZISHA, YAOSHI SIDIAO JIU HAO LE.

Comments: This sentence is chosen from Hemingway's short story "A Clean, Well-lighted Place". The story was unfolded in a café among two waiters and a deaf old man who attempted to kill himself but failed. The quotation is the utterance by the younger waiter who was in a hurry to go home for his wife. Simple as it is, it is not equally simple to translate it. Since the attempt of suicide is a fact, only the result can be put under the subjunctive mood, hence the suggested version.

4. Conclusions

English-to-Chinese translation depends heavily on the translator's world knowledge, knowledge about the two languages and their differences, and knowledge about translation strategies and techniques, the three together making the cognitive environment of translation. Such knowledge can be accumulated consciously and put to use consciously in translation. It makes an essential part of the qualities for a good translator.

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