

Probing into English and Chinese Oral Interpretation Instruction from the Cultural and Pragmatic Perspective

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ABSTRACT : *After reviewing the related literature, this paper summarizes studies about oral interpretation on the base of culture and pragmatics. Then the paper illustrates the function of culture and pragmatics in oral interpretation teaching and analyzes the relationship between culture and oral interpretation as well as the relationship between pragmatics and oral interpretation. And then it discusses about cultural and pragmatic oral interpretation teaching, and points out pragmatics has a significant guiding to oral interpretation teaching. Finally, it suggests that culture and pragmatics should help to facilitate oral interpretation instruction, including the following aspects: increasing pragmatic awareness, implementing teaching in context, emphasizing cultural teaching and employing authentic teaching materials.*

KEYWORDS - Culture, pragmatics, oral interpretation, English instruction

I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, as the largest developing country in the world, China is in urgent need of high-quality interpreters, which flourishes interpretation work. For this sense, all the foreign language universities and international studies universities have offered oral interpretation courses. And also, these universities almost have advanced interpretation colleges. Besides, schools of foreign languages in some comprehensive universities offer interpretation courses, and some comprehensive universities (such as Zhongshan University) and normal universities (such as Qufu Normal University) also have interpretation colleges. However, the amount of high-quality interpreters who have been trained is so small that it is difficult for average graduates of English to find a job and there is critical shortage of high level interpreters. For this case, the author argues that English-Chinese oral interpretation instruction should be improved so that oral interpretation teaching can be improved and quality of interpreters increased.

II. STUDIES ON ORAL INTERPRETATION

In history, interpreters' position in society was so low that they were called "dragomen" or "intermediaries". At that time, interpreters were regarded as "arbitrary", "natural bilingual people" and born specialists special talents who were unable to be trained." In old days, "dragomen" or "intermediaries" had such had reputation that the government of Qing Dynasty set up School of Combined Learning in Beijing in 1862 in order to train interpreters who took place of "dragomen" or "intermediaries". As we all know, the production of spoken language precedes the written language, Interpreting history is also before the translation, but Interpretation research lags behind translation. For a long time, people always think that the written language is superior to spoken language, especially by the influence of the ancient civilization of Greece and Rome, the literary language has been paid attention to and become the focus of the study. For a long time, people change the spoken language and the interpreter into a talk. However, the former belongs to the category of language, while the later is part of translation (Chai Mingjiong, 2010) [1]. Nowadays, translation is being separated from language and literature, becoming a new discipline. Interpretation, as a branch of translation, has attracted more and more attention from the academic circle. Since the reform and opening up 30 years ago, especially since the new century, more and more articles on "interpretation" have been published in the academic circles. The author in the title input "interpretation" in chki.net, and find 6863 articles from 1980 to 2015, of which from 1980 to 1989 there are 176 articles, from 2000 to 2009 there are 1956 articles, and from 2010 to 2015 there are 4659 articles. As Figure 1 shows:

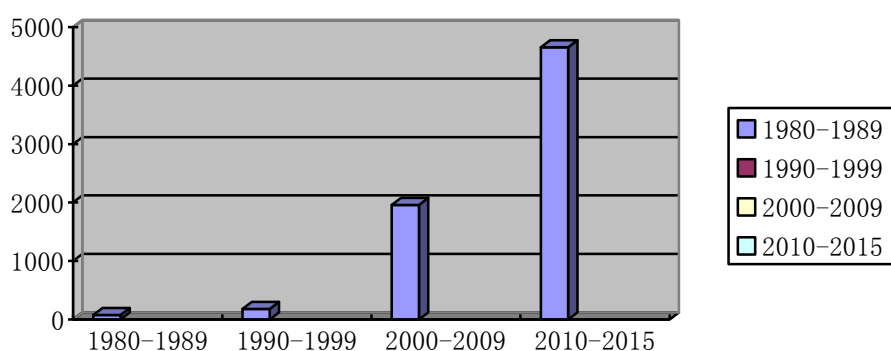


Figure 1 statistics of interpretation articles published in China from 1980-2015

Although the articles on "interpretation" do not fully limit to the translation of the two languages of English and Chinese, but from Figure 1, we can see the academic circle's attention to interpretation. Especially in the first 15 years in the new century, that is, 2000-2015, related articles published takes up 96.39% of the amount, being as 26.67 times many as the sum of 1980-1999. Only from the quantitative perspective, can we see that the number of articles on interpretation is large indeed, and research topics are also more extensive, from theory to practice, from teaching strategies to teaching models, from interpretation skills to interpretation training, from corpus construction to network assisted instruction, from the curriculum offer to the teaching reform, and from interpreting elements to interpreting notes, etc., which undoubtedly plays a positive role in interpreting teaching and research in our country. However, There are few articles on interpreting from the perspective of culture or language, And the articles which integrate culture and pragmatics into oral interpretation are not more than 40, not taking up 1% of the amount.

Although some articles discussed the interpretation of cultural context and pragmatic meaning, which has certain positive role in interpreting teaching, but they seldom analyze the relationship of culture and pragmatics, and seldom explore the origin of East and west culture. The author believes that culture and pragmatics are important factors that can not be ignored in the process of interpretation, and even the key factors. To a certain extent, the quality of the interpretation depends on whether the interpreter can find meaning connection on the fulcrum of the two cultures to achieve the best pragmatic effect. Therefore, that interpreters only know English and Chinese languages have different cultural facts is not enough, and they should be aware of the cultural origin of cultural differences, and fundamentally solve the problem of cross culture. On the other hand, culture and pragmatics have connections and distinctions. Cultural differences can lead to pragmatic failure and pragmatic mistakes are not caused by the cultural context. Therefore, we should pay attention to cultural and pragmatic utility in interpreting.

III. THE EFFECT OF CULTURE AND PRAGMATICS IN INTERPRETATION

Professor Ming Deming points out that "Interpretation refers to a verbal expression, which will transform the information which is heard accurately and quickly from into another language, and achieve the aim to transfer and exchange information, and which is a basic tool of communication on which humans rely in cross-cultural, cross ethnic interaction activities" (Luo Xuanmin, 2008) [2].

The interpreters are not those who only have knowledge of English and Chinese. Besides being familiar with the two languages of English and Chinese, interpreters also should know cultural differences between the two languages, grasp the pragmatic rules, so as to achieve "pragmatic equivalent translation" during the interpreting process, and effectively achieve the purpose of communication.

Culture and Interpretation

Culture and translation are closely related. Eugene Nida, American translation theorist pointed out: "translation is communication between two cultures. For truly successful translation, familiarity with two cultures may be even more important than the mastery of two languages because words makes sense only in the cultural background in which they play roles" (Chen Baorong, 2008)[3]. "Culture and its communication are the origin of translation occurrence. Translation is the product of culture; thus, the former can't do without the latter"(Wang Kefei,1994)[4]. "Translation is comparison between languages, and the interpretation is conveying

thought.” There are two kinds of interpretation. One is the code interpretation, which is to change a language (L1) into another language (L2) according to the meanings of words. The other is to interpret L1 into L2 after L1 is understood. The interpreter will indicate the original cultural characters, show the image and habits of the original language, at the same time, he or she also needs to take into account the cultural habits of the target audience to implement conversion of the original information according to the actual situation and the specific context, especially those words of carrying a certain cultural connotation (Wang Yuliang, 2009)[5].

It is evident that culture influences translation activities by thinking. Western culture is influenced by Christian culture so deeply that the western nation focuses on masculine and straightforward character, talking directly, not including twists and turns. However, the national character of our country, influenced by Confucianism, Tao and Buddhism, is partial to feminine and tender, paying attention to introversion. This cultural difference which is reflected in the language style is that in English, what is important and stressed is first expressed, and then explanations or additional conditions. On the contrary, generally speaking, Chinese, who are very particular about the right and proper, first explain causes and then give the result. At the same time, to express their rational and restrained behavior, Chinese people often explain the background first, and then make their request, taking the method of convolution type (Zhao Xiufeng, 2009)[6]. Thus, the difference of thinking is reflected evidently in English and Chinese interpretation. Cultural context influences interpretation. For example, “lay the cards on the table” can be interpreted into “da kai chuangzi shuo liang hua” (frankly speaking) in a certain situation.

British and American people focus on rationality, emphasize on logical thinking, and thus, transitional words become an indispensable language link. Therefore, when English and Chinese interpretation is being implemented, if interpreters are limited to Chinese thinking, the sentence will be monotonous and lack coherence so that a series of simple sentences are out of tune with native English. For example,

(1) The teacher held a book in her hand, she walked into the classroom quietly, nobody noticed her.

This is a typical run-on sentence, in which the clauses are separated by commas. In this way, it seems to be converged, or integrated, but in fact, not only punctuations are used improperly, but also does it show a strong trace of Chinese thinking. If we think in English, instead of Chinese, we translate it into a complex sentence such as:

(2) Book in hand, so quietly did the teacher walk into the classroom that nobody noticed her.

Sentence (2) shows, the sentence structure is interlocking, compact and powerful, natural and smooth. Therefore, Chinese students need to know the differences between the English thought pattern and Chinese one so as to organize their views and ideas according to the westerners’ thinking way and textual structure. In this way, they keep an eye on psychological schema of “target readers” while interpreting or translating.

Another example is “shiji zhi jiao, zhongguo waijiao kongqian huoyue.” Lots of Chinese students translate the sentence into the English sentence “At the turn of the century, China’s diplomacy is most active”. This sentence structure is common in Chinese, but for westerners, it is too Chinglish, for in English the subject of “active” should be a living thing (who has life); therefore, it is not proper to diplomacy with active. It is idiomatic if it is interpreted into “The turn of the century finds China most active on the diplomatic arena.” Besides, it conveys the meaning of the original sentence accurately.

Westerners like to praise others with the words “You look wonderful today!” And the interlocutor is pleasant to say “So do you! Thanks a lot.” and the like. On the other hand, The Chinese people are not used to this way, especially between the opposite sexes.

Pragmatics and Interpretation

Pragmatics is the study of the understanding and use of language, the learning of property and appropriateness of language (He Ziran, 1997:2-5) [7]. Pragmatics focuses on the larger part of the conversation, which regards speech as a dynamic process and analyzes speech closely based on the context.

According to relevance theory, language communication is a purposeful and intentional activity, and its purpose is to convey the speaker's intention. Communicative activities involve two intentions: informative intention and communicative intention. The speaker always expresses information in a straight and clear way expression so that the listener can understand their intention. In order to catch the speaker's intention, the listener must put the information into the clear mode of reasoning for deductive reasoning. The important evidence of purpose of deductive reasoning is to obtain the maximum relevance of information and context, and the best relevance is derived from the best contextual effect; the more successful people’s thinking of the

utterance and the context hypothesis is, the more clear the inherent relationship between words is clear, and thus thinking and reasoning process does not need too much effort for good effect in the context, so that people correctly understand the utterance and make the communication successful. The principle of relevance is actually the pragmatic principles of discourse, which has become the new theory of pragmatic translation.

How should pragmatic translation deal with the practical problems in translation? The relevance theory emphasizes that people's mutual understanding is a kind of "mutual manifestness". If people are able to cognize a certain thing, it can be manifested to the object in translation. So when the translator thinks that the literal meaning of the original text is the author's original intention, he (she) will certainly do the right translation. As for the author's implied intent, a translator should determine the author's real intentions through all sorts of relevant information by reasoning, and to give "manifestness" in the process of translation. If he or she thinks that readers cannot get the meaning through the literal translation, the translator / interpreter employs free translation. For example, the Chinese slogan "gaogao xingxing shangban que, pingping anan huijia lai" can not be literally translated into "go to work happily, go home in peace." And it should be translated into "Safety is first" He Ziran (1997) even translates it into "Good luck" [7]. The latter two fully reveal the context of the original text and the intention. Pragmatics also emphasizes the contextual effect and finds the relevance between the original text and the context in order to grasp the author's real intention. For example, when you visit a site, if the accompany says, "No hard cap, no entry", you can translate it into the Chinese "Qing daishang anquanmao" (Please put on your safety helmet.)

Thus it can be seen that translation is a cross-cultural communication means, and proper expression and accurate comprehension of utterance meaning is done in a different context. Therefore, only understanding the literal meaning of the language is far from enough, and the interpreter must infer the real intention or implication of language properly according to different context and custom of another culture.

IV. CULTURE AND PRAGMATICS VS INTERPRETATION INSTRUCTION

The guiding role of pragmatics in interpretation

Pragmatics is becoming more and more important in real interpretation because of the pragmatic equivalence principle, which can take care of the reader's cognition and effectively realize cross cultural communication. Now, the discussion on how to carry out the equivalent translation in interpretation is as follows:

(1) (Please walk fast, and ahead is one of Wuxi's scenic spots!) Xian du wei kuai!

The sooner you see, the happier you will be! (Equivalent translation)

It is what a guide said to Canadian tour group that was visiting Wuxi, Jiangsu, China. in brackets is the premise of the original text. "Xian du wei kuai!" can interpreted into "to consider it a great pleasure to be among the first to read" according to *A Chinese-English Dictionary*. It is improper to be employed here, however, for the context is changed, not "read a book", but "view and admire the scenery". Therefore, the sentence "the sooner you see, the happier you will be!" is concise, catchy, rhythmic and agitative, representing the language function of the original language (Chen Hongwei, 1998:130) [8].

(2) In the front of the boat is put up a long rudder, whose shape is just like Guan Yu's falchion with Green Dragon.(literal translation)

In the front of the boat is put up a long rudder which is shaped like the knife on the westerner's dinner table. ((Equivalent translation)

In addition, pragmatic translation is more common in the diet culture. Chinese like to use "four word phrases", while English like to equivalent translation, such as "Chickens Steamed in Water Melon", "Stir-fried Shrimps with Peas" and "Stewed Potatoes with Mushrooms", etc.

This shows that the Chinese diet name pays more attention to the beauty of the name, while English is more emphasis on the presentation of its information content.

The Enlightenment of culture and pragmatics to the teaching of interpretation

With the reform of College English teaching, the academic circles have come to realize the importance of improving students' intercultural and pragmatic competence. According to the survey (Gu Tongqing, 2003)[9], the pragmatic competence of college students and graduate students in our country is rather low, and the high level of grammatical competence does not mean that pragmatic competence is also very high. There are two main reasons for the low pragmatic competence: one is the negative transfer of the mother tongue, the other is the lack of the knowledge of the target language. Therefore, it is very necessary to take effective measures to improve the pragmatic competence of students in the interpretation teaching.

(1) Enhancing pragmatic awareness

Pragmatics is a general course for English majors and the undergraduate students, especially non English majors have little contact. Therefore, teachers should consciously introduce some pragmatic knowledge in teaching, especially the Relevance Theory and the Cooperation Norms to improve the students' ability of pragmatic inference. At the same time, teachers should let students understand that the translation is not always "literal translation", in some cases it is only "equivalent translation" that is proper.

(2) Emphasis on context teaching

Pragmatics emphasizes context terribly; thus, pragmatics can be regarded as the study of meaning in context, studying suitability and appropriateness of language in different conditions. The words which are cut from the context may cause ambiguity. Therefore, teachers should let the students learn to master the range of collocation and usage of words in different contexts, to improve the students' cognitive pragmatic ability. Not only the meaning of a word or a phrase depends on the context, but also the meaning of a sentence also depends on the context. Therefore, the context teaching helps train students' ability to utilize language.

(3) Attaching importance to culture teaching

Teachers should pay special attention to teaching some of the following aspects in the teaching process: custom and culture, differences of speech act and understanding speech acts between Chinese and English, taboo topics in English, differences between English and Chinese cultural values and pragmatic principles, and the discourse structure and rhetorical differences caused by difference of English native speakers' thought pattern.

(4) Increasing the authenticity of teaching materials

Teachers should use authentic materials as they can, selecting materials from the actual interpretation, or contrasting its vocabulary, structure, rhetoric and style with those of Chinese, to find significant differences. At the same time, students learn about social and cultural factors of English speaking countries using through the Internet.

V. CONCLUSION

Interpretation and culture are closely related to pragmatics, and interpreting is inseparable from the culture and pragmatic participation and contextual appropriateness. In fact, cultural awareness and pragmatic competence are an important part of language ability; thus, interpretation teaching should emphasize cultivating cultural awareness and pragmatic competence, the use of context and the use of authentic materials. On the other hand, the improvement of students' cultural awareness and pragmatic competence helps to improve the quality of interpretation teaching and the ability of interpretation.

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