

Analysis of Translation Strategies of Lin Yutang's Translation of *Six Chapters of a Floating Life* from a Perspective of Cognitive Construal

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Different translators adopt various translation strategies due to their distinct cognitive construal operations. Based on the theory of cognitive construal, this paper focuses on the translation process of Lin Yutang's English version of *Six Chapters of a Floating Life*, exploring the translator's cognitive construal operations in understanding the source text and producing the target text, as well as examining the cognitive motivations behind these operations. The translation of literary works is not the process of decoding and re-encoding between languages, but also the outcome of the translator's cognitive construal. Lin Yutang's translation possesses a high degree of specificity, respecting the relationship between figure and ground in the original text, highlighting the beauty of the literary works. This study helps reveal the multiple interactive relationships among the translator, the original text, and the readers.

Keywords: cognitive construal, translation strategies, foreignization, domestication

Introduction

Cognitive Translation Studies represents a novel research paradigm that integrates Cognitive Linguistics with translation. This paradigm analyzes translators' translation processes through the linguistic expressions of translated texts, offering insights into the psychological mechanisms of translators during translation and essentially exploring the formation process of translated texts. Currently, Cognitive Translation Studies has exhibited a diversified and multi-modal research trend, with research outcomes primarily categorized into two types: The first type focuses on the essence or process of written translation from the perspective of Cognitive Linguistics. Scholars either employ Relevance Theory, Subjectivity, and Cognitive Stylistics to study specific translation practices or explore the applicability of Cognitive Linguistics theories in translation practice. The second type delves into the occurrence process of interpretation based on Cognitive Linguistics theories. Such research often requires the use of experimental equipment, with scholars concentrating on the cognitive

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psychological processes of interpreters during their work and discussing the interactive relationship between Cognitive Linguistics and interpretation.

As a significant way of spreading the Chinese culture, the translation of literary works is a fundamental component of the practice of promoting Chinese culture to the world. *Six Chapters of a Floating Life* is an autobiographical work in the form of notes by Shen Fu, a literati of the Qing Dynasty. The original work consists of six chapters. The author uses concise and vivid classical Chinese to describe his longing for a happy married life and his reflections on life. The autobiography also contains numerous descriptions of landscape gardens and literary and artistic criticism, which are indeed the essence of our traditional language and culture. The research about the translation of *Six Chapters of a Floating Life* is still at the primary stage; moreover, the research based on the paradigm of Cognitive Translation Theory is relatively weak. Drawing on the theory of cognitive construal, this paper takes the English translation by Lin Yutang as the research object, analyzing the translator's construal operations in understanding the original text and producing the translation. The aim is to examine the cognitive rationale behind Lin Yutang's translation, and to provide a reference for scientifically evaluating the translator's translation strategies and behaviors, as well as for understanding the essence of traditional Chinese literary translation.

The Theoretical Foundation

This chapter is to explain the cognitive construal theory, and it is right to apply the theory to explain the translation.

The Theory of Cognitive Construal

Construal is a crucial concept in Cognitive Linguistics (Tan, 2016). According to Cognitive Linguistics, a vital aspect of meaning lies in the speaker's conceptualization of context (physical, social, and sociocultural contexts), which is referred to as construal. Construal involves conceptualizing based on embodied experiences within scenarios and pertains to the configuration of scenarios and subjective viewpoints. Different modes of construal determine humans' varying cognitive semantic structures for the same real-life situations, thereby generating different linguistic expressions. Therefore, construal serves as the means by which speakers mentally form and construct the semantic content of expressions. Construal typically encompasses four dimensions: specificity, focusing, perspective, and prominence, all of which play significant roles in the organization of linguistic structures and their semantic expressions. According to Langacker (2008), construal refers to "our ability to perceive and depict the same situation in different ways." He proposes the four dimensions of cognitive construal. "Construal seems inherently connected with translation. Bringing up this 'old topic' again today, especially in the context of cognitive construal and translation from a cognitive linguistic perspective, is like putting 'new wine' in a 'new bottle'" (Wen, 2019, p. 130). As an important mechanism explaining the causes of linguistic structures, cognitive construal provides an explanatory channel for the variability in linguistic expressions (Wang, 2008).

Cognitive Analysis of the Translation of *Six Chapters of a Floating Life*

This chapter is to briefly introduce the literary work *Six Chapters of a Floating Life*. Lin Yutang has his own consideration for choosing this work to translate. From a cognitive construal perspective, we analyze Lin's translation process.

The Translation of *Six Chapters of a Floating Life*

According to the information above, translation is the process of reconstructing the meaning in the new context, and it is also the result of meaning construction or conceptualization, that is, construal. By integrating their embodied experiences within the target language culture, translators can dynamically interpret and adjust for the commonalities and differences between the source and target languages and cultures, presenting a dialectical relationship characterized by "sameness within difference" and "difference within sameness." This, in turn, provides both freedom and constraints for their diverse and creative translation strategies. Consequently, the theory of construal can be used to examine the cognitive rationale behind translators' processes and provide an explanatory channel for their choice of translation strategies.

The book *Six Chapters of a Floating Life* embodies themes of love, advocates for the liberation of individuality, opposes feudal ethics, and champions individuality, all of which are fully expressed through its elegant, concise, refreshing, and lively writing style. The book has always occupied an important position in the history of Chinese prose. Lin Yutang is well-versed in both ancient and modern, Chinese and Western knowledge, and has made outstanding contributions to introducing Chinese culture to the West. He was deeply moved by the author of this book and his wife Chen Yun's natural disposition and their spirit of contentment with humble surroundings, seeking true love and beauty, as expressed in the phrase "simple clothes and coarse rice are enough for a happy life" (Shen, 1999, p. 56). Moved by this, he vowed to translate it into English (hereinafter referred to as Lin's Translation), revising his translation drafts no less than ten times before completing it in 1935. It was then published in the English-language monthly magazines "*Tianxian*" and "*Xifeng*". The translation is proficient and mature, easy to read and understand. In February 1992, Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press published this translation in China.

Cognitive Construal Operation of Lin Yutang's Translation Process

Cognitive Translation Studies believes that translation is a cognitive interaction between the translator and the original text. Therefore, due to the differences in each translator's cognition, the translation strategies adopted will also vary.

The manipulation of specificity in translation

The degree of specificity refers to the precision and level of detail in describing a situation. The higher the degree of specificity in language, the more meticulous the portrayal of details. Due to individual differences in interaction experiences with the objective world, the degree of specificity in describing the same object can vary (Weng, 2019). For instance, when describing a beloved pet, some may simply say "dog", while others may specify "long-haired dog", and still others may further elaborate as "white long-haired dog". The sequence of "pet→dog→long-haired dog→white long-haired dog" essentially reflects the hierarchical relationship of specificity, also known as taxonomies. An expression with a high degree of specificity, such as "white long-haired dog", provides a detailed description of the object, making it easier for the listener to understand.

Conversely, an expression with a low degree of specificity, such as “dog”, only offers a general description, requiring the listener to possess richer general knowledge to comprehend. In translation, translators often adjust the degree of specificity based on their understanding of the original text. From this perspective, there are two translation approaches: the first approach focuses on the original text, aiming for a translation that highly corresponds to the original’s precision, which we call literal translation. Conversely, to align with the pragmatic habits of foreign readers, translators often recreate the original text, which reduces the translation’s correspondence to the original’s detail, resulting in unfaithful translation. This is because it expands the meaning of the original text to some extent and weakens the direct communication between the original author and readers, which is referred to as “free translation” or “mistranslation” in the translation field. *Six Chapters of a Floating Life* was written in the Qing Dynasty by ancient Chinese, which expands on the obstacles and difficulties to understanding. At the time, translators can engage in creative construal of the specificity of the original, adding the omitted background knowledge and cultural implications to facilitate the intersubjectivity between the original author and the translator, as well as the intertextuality between the original text and the translation, thereby assisting the target language readers in better understanding the meaning of the text.

Example (1)

若夫园亭楼阁，套室回廊，叠石成山载花取势，又在大中见小，小中见大，虚中有实，实中有虚，或藏或露，或浅或深，不仅在周回曲折四字，又不在地广石多，徒烦工费。

As to the planning of garden pavilions, towers, winding corridors, and out-houses, the designing of rockery and the training of flower trees, one should try to show the small in the big, and the big in the small, and provide for the real in the unreal, and for the unreal in the real. One reveals and conceals alternately, making it sometimes apparent and sometimes hidden. This is not just rhythmic irregularity, nor does it depend on having a wide space and great expenditure of labor and material.

The original text mainly introduces garden cultivation, focusing on the author’s approach of “the small in the big, and the big in the small, and provide for the real in the unreal, and for the unreal in the real.” This approach provides considerable inspiration for today’s garden design and allows readers to appreciate the refined temperament of intellectuals who seek beauty with a pure and ascetic heart through such elegant design. Lin takes the literal translation strategy to directly translate the description of the garden design, which is the performance of high specificity for the original.

The manipulation of focusing in translation

Through language expression, we can access specific domains of the conceptual world (Langacker, 2008, p. 57). Focusing involves both the selection of conceptual content for linguistic features and the choice of the described domain for that conceptual content. The relationship between these two can be summarized as the relationship between figure and ground. Focusing is the area of attention, which is prominently manifested in the cognitive structure of “figure/ground” in language. The original has numerous different types of sentences, like the frequent use of prepositions and verbs.

Example (2)

其形削肩长颈，瘦不露骨，眉弯目秀，顾盼神飞，唯两齿微露，似非佳相。

Of a slender figure, she had drooping shoulders and a rather long neck, slim but not to the point of being skinny. Her eyebrows were arched, and in her eyes there was a look of quick intelligence and soft refinement. The only defect was that her two front teeth were slightly inclined forward, which was not a mark of good omen. There was an air of tenderness about her which completely fascinated me.

Lin Yutang, based on the construal of the original, takes multiple translations of the sentence and preposition from his own translation purpose, which reflect the translators' different focus in the translation process. The form of four words is usually employed in classical Chinese. The translation of these sentences by Lin embodies the other figures, like the use of "she", "Her eyebrows". Since Lin Yutang held Yun in the highest esteem, he made every effort to portray her with concise yet exquisite language in his translation, presenting a graceful and intelligent Eastern female to the Western audience. "Her eyebrows were arched, and in her eyes, there was a look of quick intelligence and soft refinement," revealing a unique Eastern charm (Lin, 1999, p. 7).

The manipulation of perspective in translation

Perspective refers to the spatial and temporal position, standpoint, and direction adopted by people when observing and understanding things, which is essentially the choice of a cognitive reference point. People with different construals stand at different cognitive reference points. When describing the same situation or object, they often produce different results, which are reflected in language through different expressions. In the process of translation, perspective is embodied in the relationship between the translator and the original text, and referring language expressions, which involves the choice of sentence patterns and the use of vocabulary.

Example (3)

时已薪水不继，余佯为雇骡以安心，实则囊饼徒步，且食且行。

At this time, we are already unable to meet our daily expenses, but in order to ease her mind, I pretended to her that I was going to hire a donkey. As a matter of fact, I took the journey on foot, merely eating some wheat cakes in my pocket whenever I felt hungry.

Compared with the original, Lin's translation is close to the English expression habits. English emphasizes the harmony of the form, which expresses the inner connection of the sentence through conjunctions. The original text consists of four clauses, which are not connected by conjunctions. The first clause presents a reason, the second implies a purpose, and the clauses are in a juxtaposition relationship. However, there is a turning point between these two clauses and the subsequent ones. Due to the linguistic limitations of the target readers, retaining the syntactic features of the original text would make it difficult to achieve coherence in the translation. Therefore, Lin adopts the domestication translation method. Lin's translation uses "but" to indicate the turning point and "in order to" to express the purpose.

The manipulation of prominence in translation

In the process of cognition, people cannot fully focus on the entirety of an object but instead choose to highlight a certain part, making the other parts the background. Similarly, in translation, due to different motives and creativity of translators, the original text they choose to highlight will vary. With highlighting, there is inevitably suppression; the aspect of the original text that the translator wishes to emphasize will be highlighted, while other aspects will be suppressed. Different translators have different emphases, which are

reflected in variations in the linguistic expression of their translations. The literary works are loaded with many images that connect with the original language's cultural background. At this point, the translator must exert their subjectivity and selectively emphasize certain aspects. The different translation strategies adopted by translators for Chinese culturally-loaded words reflect their different habits of emphasis. To fully and faithfully present the essence of the Chinese culture to Western readers, Lin's translation goes all out to promote foreignization in highlighting the unique conceptual connotations of Chinese culture.

Example (4)

芸曰：“妾见市中买馄饨者，其担锅灶无不备。”

She said, “I have seen Wonton sellers in the streets who carry along a stove and a pan and everything we need.”

For the term “Wonton”, Lin's translation adopts the transliteration method, aiming to introduce Chinese food culture to Westerners. If we translate “馄饨” into “dumpling”, it is just satisfying the taste of Western readers, rather than spreading Chinese culture. Of course, in the application of translation strategies, Lin Yutang also employs domestication. Since English and Chinese belong to different languages, in order to make the information conveyed by the language more easily accepted by the target culture, Lin's translation adopts domestication strategies.

Conclusion

Lin Yutang took it as his mission to spread Chinese culture, striving to introduce Chinese culture into the dominant Western culture in a disadvantaged colonial context, to achieve equality with Western culture. To this end, he preserved almost all of the original content, and the overall structure and layout of his translations largely maintained the style of the original essay-style novels. On the surface, Lin's translations faithfully reproduce the stylistic features of the originals. At a deeper level, his preservation of the essay-style novels is not only an introduction and dissemination of this unique new literary genre in China at that time, but more importantly, through this literary means, he reproduces the original novel author's outlook on life, views on love, Chinese landscapes, and the extremely high literary taste and aesthetic abilities of the literati of the time. Taking gardening and plant cultivation as examples, Lin Yutang believed that nature, as a whole, enters our lives, encompassing all sounds, colors, shapes, emotions, and atmospheres. The harmony between man and nature is an important part of the spirit and life of poets and essayists. Faithful translation should reproduce these elements in the target culture. It should be said that Lin's translations achieved this.

This paper analyzes the translation strategies of *Six Chapters of a Floating Life* from the four dimensions of cognitive construal, trying to promote the cognitive research paradigm of literary translation. In the progress of spreading Chinese culture to the world, the cognitive construal provides new insights into the selection of translation strategies and critical studies of translation behavior, as well as a fresh perspective for understanding the essence of Chinese literary translation.

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