Analysis of the Explanatory Power of Cognitive Construal Theory on Translator's Subjectivity and Objectivity

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Cognitive Construal Theory, a branch of cognitive linguistics, is of great benefit to translation studies. Wang Yin proposed four dimensions of "cognitive construal process" based on Langacker's classification, namely, scope and background, perspective, salience, and specificity. This article aims to apply the Cognitive Construal Theory to translation by using different Chinese translations of *The Remains of the Day*, a classic novel, as an example to explore the translator's subjectivity and objectivity.

Keywords: Cognitive Construal Theory, translator's subjectivity, translator's objectivity, *The Remains of the Day*

Introduction

Cognitive science has emerged in the academic community recently, providing a new research perspective for translation studies. Cognitive translation believes that translation is inseparable from human cognition, and the translation process is no longer a simple transcoding process between two languages, but a human cognitive activity process. Since translation is a human cognitive activity, translators, as the main participants in translation practice, will exert their subjective initiative. Therefore, the cognitive comprehension ability of translators is an important factor that affects translation.

The Remains of the Day by Ishiguro Kazuo won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2017. This novel describes the story of the protagonist's sudden realization of the true meaning of life while traveling. Its profound themes, delicate narratives, and convoluted plot have created a classic work.

This article aims to analyze the bidirectional interaction between the translator and the original text, as well as translator's subjectivity and objectivity in the translation process, based on Cognitive Construal Theory, by comparing Mao Guoan's translation version (later referred to as Mao's version) and Feng Tao's translation version (later referred to as Feng's version) of *The Remains of the Day*. At the same time, it also promotes the development of the translation studies of *The Remains of the Day* and similar classic literary translation studies.

Cognitive Construal and Translation

With the rising of cognitive science, both domestically and internationally, cognitive linguistics, as a branch of it, has also received much attention in the field of linguistics. Cognitive linguistics believes that there is no definite boundary between semantics and pragmatics, and semantics is like conceptualization, which is closely related to the user's experience and cognitive processing (Langacker, 2013). He also pointed out that "construe"

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is the ability of humans to describe the same thing in the world using different concepts, languages, etc., based on their own different experiences of perception. Different types of cognitive operations are formed on the basis of human perception of nature and social experience. Construe is a bridge between language and the real world. According to different ways of understanding, the world perceived by humans is also different. Correspondingly, in the field of translation, translators will exert their subjective initiative in the translation process, so the subjectivity of translators is particularly important for the language expression form and concept formation of the translation. Even for the same subject, different translators have different understandings, which contributes to different translation versions.

Study on the Chinese Translation of *The Remains of the Day* From the Perspective of Cognitive Construal Theory

Scope and Background

The scope from a cognitive perspective refers to the cognitive domain triggered by the information receiver based on the meaning expressed by the information expresser. Base and profile are its main components. Background refers to the common sense foundation possessed by the information receiver to understand the information. If one wants to master a specific expression, it requires the support of other relevant experiential expressions, which is the background. Language is closely related to national culture and the way humans understand it. Therefore, translation involved in two languages is influenced by it. During translation, the translators activate their relevant cognitive domains and background knowledge, process the original text accordingly, or supplement, transform, or delete certain information in order to find expressions that approach cognitive equivalence.

Example 1.

ST: Coming out of the blue as it did, I did not quite know how to reply to such a suggestion.

Mao: 对这突如起来的建议，我还真不知如何回答。

Feng: 这个建议突如起来，我一时间不知该如何应答才好。

Blue often represents melancholy, but in Example 1, "come out of the blue" does not mean to step out of melancholy. If one does not know the relevant background of this phrase, it will lead to mistranslation. The term "blue" here refers to sky because the sky is often blue. And "out of the blue" actually means "out of the sky", referring to when a piece of blue in the sky suddenly disappears, dark clouds cover, and lightning strikes. Therefore, "come out of the blue" metaphorically refers to the sudden occurrence of something. Mao and Feng understand the relevant cultural background of the specific expression, translating them as "突如其来", which is a manifestation of the objectivity of translation. Although the subjectivity of the translator is particularly important, it is not arbitrary for the translator to translate, but rather to restore the meaning expressed in the source language as much as possible. The translation order of "out of the sky" is different in these two translation versions, which also reflects translator's subjectivity.

Perspective

When observing the same thing, if humans choose different perspectives, the content and results they perceive are often different. The perspective here refers not only to the actual perspective, but also to the perspective of virtual existence. Wang (2005) defined "perspective" based on Cognitive Construal Theory as "the

perspective from which humans describe things". In fact, language expression also has different perspectives. For example, Chinese emphasizes subjective thinking and commonly uses personal subject while impersonal subjects are often used in English (Lian, 2010). Due to different perspectives of different languages, translators need to choose how to handle them during translation, making the translator's subjectivity more important. For literary translation, if there are different "perspectives" between the target language and the source language, translators need to consider whether to change "perspective", mainly involving the transformation of narrative person, part of speech, causal order, voice, positive and negative discourse, etc.

Example 2.

ST: The idea of such a journey came about, I should point out, from a most kind suggestion put to me by Mr. Farraday himself one afternoon almost a fortnight ago, when I had been dusting the portraits in the library.

Mao: 我还得说明的是，萌发这次旅行的念头源于法拉戴先生亲自对我提出的忠告。那还是两星期前的一个下午，我在为挂在书房里的那些肖像除灰。

Feng: 之所以有此旅行的念头，我应该特意指出，是源自差不多两个礼拜前的一个下午，由法拉戴先生本人主动向我提出的一个最为慷慨的建议。当时我正在藏书室里为那些肖像掸尘，……

The source text of this example is relatively long, so both translators have chosen to change sentence structure, starting from interruption, to make the translation closer to the perspective of the target language habit of using short sentences to depict thing. Furthermore, the original text used "The idea of such a journal", the perspective of impersonal subject, while Mao chose to follow the subject thinking of Chinese, using "I", the first person as the subject. Feng chose to follow the narrative perspective of the source language, but shifted the perspective of using nouns in English to the perspective of using verbs in Chinese. Overall, Mao's translation is closer to the perspective of describing the subject in Chinese, while Feng's translation tries to reflect the perspective of describing the subject in the source language as much as possible without affecting the reading of the target language readers.

Example 3.

ST: …at least one French gentleman with unambiguous influence over his country's foreign policy.

Mao: ……于是，这就更为迫切地需要至少要邀请一位法国要员出席在达林顿府举行的聚会，此人必须对其国家的外交政策具有毫不含糊的影响力。

Feng: ……也就更为迫切地需要在达林顿府举行的聚会上至少请到一位对于本国的外交政策拥有明确影响力的法国绅士与会。

The word "unambiguous" in this example is presented from an anti-said perspective. Mao's translation version uses "毫不含糊", which is closer to the original text but makes the translation less fluent, as influence in Chinese is usually not modified by "毫不含糊". Feng's translation version has shifted from a reverse perspective, presenting the translation from a positive perspective, making it easier for the target language to understand. This also reflects the subjectivity of translation, as different translators choose different translation methods.

Salience

Human beings have the cognitive ability to determine the focus of their attention. Language can be seen as the conceptualization of what language users observe, and in this conceptualization process, cognitive subjects are constrained by the salience of attention. Attention is influenced by human subjective factors, which means

that different focuses of attention will produce different ways of salience. Salience from the perspective of Cognitive Construal Theory reflects the parts of a subject that humans are more interested in. Due to the involvement of subjective factors, different aspects of the same thing can be highlighted, resulting in different language expressions.

For literary novel translation, salience is closely related to the translation of the title of the novel and sentence structures. The language of literary novels is generally lengthy, and due to cultural and linguistic differences between the two languages, which part needs to be highlighted, deleted, or omitted becomes another important manifestation of the translator's subjectivity.

Example 4.

ST: *The Remains of the Day*

Mao: 长日留痕

Feng: 长日将尽

The Remains of the Day is the title of the novel. Mao's version highlights "Remains", closer to the source text, while Feng's version highlights the theme of the novel, making it easier to associate the title with the ending and main idea of the novel. It is difficult to say which version is better, each with its own merits, and both translation names have survived. The salience during translation depends on the translator's subjectivity. When translating novel titles into Chinese, if the translator does not highlight the source text, the translator often highlights the euphonious Chinese rhythm. For example, many titles of novels by Kazuo Ishiguro are translated by four characters into Chinese. For example, *A Pale View of Hills* is translated as "群山淡景"; *An Artist of the Floating World* as "浮世画家", *Never Let Me Go* as "莫失莫忘"; *The Unconsoled* as "无可慰藉". All of these translations reflect the rhythmic characteristics of Chinese language, full of poetic and picturesque elements.

Example 5.

ST: You will understand then something of the climate prevailing around Darlington Hall by the time of my father's fall in front of the summerhouse.

Mao: 基于这特殊的情况，也就不难理解当我父亲在凉亭前跌倒时，整个达林顿府就被某种紧张气氛所笼罩。

Feng：这样您或许就能理解，家父不巧在凉亭前摔倒时整个达林顿府里所笼罩的紧张气氛。

In this example, the salience of translation is different. Feng highlights the tense atmosphere more, while Mao breaks the original sentence and uses the entire Darlington mansion as the subject, highlighting the location of the event. It can be seen that different translators have different judgments on the prominent aspects of the translation, which is also a reflection of translator's subjectivity.

Specificity

Specificity based on Cognitive Construal Theory refers to the subjective intention of humans to describe the same subject with different levels of precision and detail. For example, green can be described in more detail as aqua green, crystal green, etc. If described more concisely, it can be described as "colored". The cognitive construal subject can autonomously choose which scenario to focus on for detailed description, and can also autonomously choose to ignore or delete certain parts of things. For literary translation, due to different specificity in describing the same thing in two languages, the translator needs to choose a translation with different levels of

detail. The judgment is to refine the original text, such as selecting words with more precise expression, selecting words with rougher expression, adding annotations, etc., or deleting or omitting redundant parts of the original text. These choices are closely related to the translator's subjectivity, and whether to add or delete, be detailed or omitted largely depends on the translator's own subjective judgment.

Example 6.

ST: An expedition, I should say, which I will undertake alone, in the comfort of Mr. Farraday's Ford;

Mao: 我应言明的是，这次旅行我将独自享用法拉戴先生那辆舒适豪华的福特轿车；

Feng: 我应该说明的是，这是一次叨光法拉戴先生的福特轿车的舒适旅行；

The author believes that in this example, Mao's version is more faithful to the original text in terms of specificity than Feng's translation. Feng add "叨光", a polite expression of gratitude to the other party when receiving benefits in his translation. Although the gratitude of the protagonist can be felt through the context, this sentence in the original text does not directly reflect his gratitude. The term "叨光" here was added by the translator based on the meaning that the original author intended to express, so Feng's translation is more detailed.

Conclusion

This article takes the theory of cognitive understanding as a theoretical framework and applies it to the field of translation studies, exploring the objectivity and subjectivity in translation. The subjectivity of the translator is crucial in translation activities. The translator has a unique way of understanding in terms of scope and background, perspective, salience, and specificity, which is different from others. Therefore, different translators have different ways of understanding, which will create different translations. Even with the change of the translator's own cognitive understanding ability, their own translations will also change, which is the embodiment of translation subjectivity. But this does not mean that translation is a subjective cognitive activity that is arbitrary and indulgent. In order to present a more equivalent translation to the original text, the translator strives to experience the original text and gain a deeper understanding of the target language's culture and language habits. Although different translators have different translations, they are all the result of their efforts to present the culture, content, and main idea of the original work. The translation process is also limited to different interpretations within the scope specified in the original work, rather than just following the translator's subjective will, which reflects translator's objectivity.

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