

A Study on the Adaptation and Selection of Simultaneous Interpreters from the Prospective of Eco-Translatology —A Case Study on the Simultaneous Interpretation at A Recent Multidisciplinary Forum*

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The “First Multidisciplinary Forum on COVID-19,” as one of the pivotal medical forums organized by China during the initial outbreak of the pandemic, garnered significant attention from numerous countries worldwide. Ensuring the seamless execution of the forum’s translation necessitated exceptionally high standards for simultaneous interpreters. This paper, through the lens of the Translation as Adaptation and Selection theory within Eco-Translatology, conducts an analytical study of the live simultaneous interpretation at the First Multidisciplinary Forum on COVID-19. It examines the interpreters’ adaptations and selections across multiple dimensions—namely, linguistic, cultural, and communicative—with the aim of elucidating the guiding role and recommendations that Eco-Translatology can offer to simultaneous interpretation. Furthermore, it seeks to provide insights that may enhance the quality of interpreters’ oral translations.

Keywords: Eco-Translatology, simultaneous interpretation, COVID-19

Introduction

The significance of translation in conveying “China’s voice” to the world is self-evident, and in cross-cultural communication, the role of interpreters as “conduits” is indispensable. Fundamentally, interpreters provide “on-the-spot” facilitation for individuals seeking to communicate across linguistic and cultural barriers. The forum titled “Emerging from the Darkest Hour—The First Multidisciplinary Forum on COVID-19” was convened on March 7, 2020, during the initial phase of the COVID-19 outbreak in China. The forum was broadcast live via the internet, featuring simultaneous interpretation. In such medical interpretation

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events, interpreters are not only required to possess extensive knowledge of medical backgrounds but also to demonstrate exceptional professional competence.

The Translation as Adaptation and Selection theory within Eco-Translatology offers a framework for interpreting translation activities. The interaction between the interpreter and the translation eco-environment determines the effectiveness of the translation. This interaction is characterized by mutual adaptation and selection. Eco-Translatology provides a novel perspective on translation activities, aiding interpreters in their translation methods (Guo, 2011).

Literature Review on Eco-Translatology

Eco-Translatology represents an exploratory approach to translation studies from an ecological perspective. The inception and development of Eco-Translatology can be traced back to December 6, 2001, when Professor Hu Gengshen presented his paper *A Preliminary Exploration of Translation as Adaptation and Selection* at the Third Asian Translators' Forum of the International Federation of Translators. This marked the beginning of a promising future for the advancement of Eco-Translatology. Subsequently, Professor Hu's 2004 monograph, *Translation as Adaptation and Selection*, provided a more systematic introduction to how the fundamental principles of "adaptation and selection" from Darwin's theory of evolution, such as "natural selection" and "survival of the fittest," could be integrated into the field of translation studies (Hu, 2004).

As for interpreting research, Hu explored adaptation by interpreters in consecutive interpreting. Eco-Translatology posits that the interpreter is the legitimate leader in the interpreting process, and the interpreter's adaptation, selection, judgment, and creativity directly determine whether the two parties can successfully achieve cross-cultural communication (Chen, 2011). Therefore, the roles of the interpreter, such as messenger, guide, and negotiator, are closely linked to the intermediary role, and the interpreter fully utilizes bilingual authority to facilitate communication and exchange between the parties. Thus, in the ecological environment of the "First Multidisciplinary Forum on COVID-19," the simultaneous interpreter occupies a central position. The interpreter must adhere to the principles of ecological aesthetics, such as "symmetry," "balance," "rhythm," and "order" (Hu, 2011). At the Forum, simultaneous interpreters had to selectively adapt and adaptively choose from the linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions of the interpreting ecological environment.

The Multidimensional "Adaptation" and "Selection" of Simultaneous Interpreters

The Translation as Adaptation and Selection theory posits that translators should engage in adaptive selection—making choices while adapting—and selective adaptation—adapting while making choices. These processes are characterized by two key aspects: first, "adaptation," where the translator adapts to the translation eco-environment; and second, "selection," where the translator, acting as part of the translation eco-environment, makes choices regarding the target text. According to this theory, the optimal translation is one that achieves the highest degree of "holistic adaptation and selection" (Hu, 2006).

Adaptation and Selection in the Linguistic Dimension

Eco-Translatology simplifies translation methods into “three-dimensional” transformations. Among these, “adaptation and selection in the linguistic dimension” refers to the translator’s adaptive selection and transformation of linguistic forms during the translation process (Hu, 2011).

At academic forums hosted by China, such as the First Multidisciplinary Forum on COVID-19, simultaneous interpreters frequently encounter vocabulary with distinct Chinese characteristics. In such contexts, interpreters must quickly comprehend and analyze the speaker’s message, employ appropriate translation strategies and methods, and accurately produce the target language to fully convey the speaker’s intended meaning. This requires not only linguistic proficiency but also the ability to adapt to the unique linguistic features of the source text and make informed choices to ensure effective communication.

Example (1)

SL: 闲在家里闲久了，会出现各种各样的问题的。亲子冲突、夫妻冲突、代际冲突，另外由于还有担心啊我的生意怎么办啊、我的学业怎么办啊、我安排的计划怎么办啊、我的今年的年度工作计划怎么办啊。

TL: When people stay at home for a long time, there will be psychological issues like the conflict between the parents, between the parents and the kids, and even between generations. And people worry about what to do with the work, with the study, the schools.

The speaker’s delivery was highly colloquial, and the series of questions in the latter part of the speech conveyed a sense of public anxiety. However, for the interpreter, translating every word verbatim would have been overly lengthy and time-prohibitive. Therefore, the interpreter integrated the source language information during the interpretation.

First, from the linguistic dimension, the interpreter analyzed that “亲子冲突” “夫妻冲突” and “代际冲突” served as supplementary examples to the main theme of “various problems.” The interpreter added an explanatory note, “psychological issues,” and used a general-to-specific sentence structure to clarify the internal logic of the sentence. This reflects the interpreter’s selection and transformation of the source text at the syntactic level.

Similarly, the interpreter integrated the information from the series of questions in the latter part. The repeated phrase “what to do” essentially expressed people’s anxiety. The interpreter used “worry” as the predicate verb, omitting redundant expressions, and summarized the corresponding subjects with simple terms such as “work,” “study,” and “school.” This demonstrates the interpreter’s selection and transformation of the source text at the lexical level.

The entire translation retained the original sentence order almost unchanged, achieving informational equivalence. This approach not only streamlined the interpretation but also effectively conveyed the speaker’s intended meaning and emotional tone to the target audience.

Example (2)

SL: 我们拿到这些交流、好的一些成果、取得的一些成绩、获得的一些经验，用于第二期的治疗和防疫。

TL: So good lessons and good knowledge will be really good for the phase 2 of the fighting against the coronavirus.

The speaker's remarks included a series of parallel verb-object phrases such as “拿到这些交流” (obtained these exchanges), “取得的一些成绩” (achieved some accomplishments), and “获得的一些经验” (gained some experiences). In the process of interpretation, the interpreter did not rigidly adhere to the source language's form of expression. From the perspective of the linguistic dimension, “交流” (exchanges), “成果” (achievements), and “成绩” (accomplishments) constitute a group of near-synonyms, all conveying a positive connotation. Therefore, the interpreter employed a reduction strategy, summarizing them with the phrase “good lessons.” Additionally, the interpreter did not translate the source language's subject “我们” (we) word-for-word. In accordance with the principle that Chinese tends to use animate subjects while English favors inanimate subjects, the translation used an inanimate subject, making the sentence's focus clearer and more comprehensible to the target language audience. This approach accurately conveyed the speaker's meaning. The interpreter's adaptation and selection at the linguistic dimension reflect a selective adaptation to the ecological environment of the forum's interpretation.

Adaptation and Selection in the Cultural Dimension

Cultural adaptation and selection strategies in translation refer to the translator's focus on transferring and interpreting cultural meanings and connotations between languages (Hu, 2011). The key lies in understanding and balancing the cultural nature and content differences between source and target languages, avoiding one-sided interpretations from the target language's cultural perspective. The translator should focus on adapting to the entire cultural system of the language they are using. Given the unique cultural backgrounds of participants in oral interpretation, the translator must fully consider the target language country's culture, values, history, religious beliefs, and other factors to prevent misunderstandings and communication discrepancies.

Example (3)

SL: 我觉得这种观点的话，里头的话呢，僧多粥少的情况下，我觉得这是是一种策略，我自己体会到它是一种策略，是吧。

TL: So, this is the view taken in the U.S. I believe that they cannot meet the needs of their people, this is a strategy.

The Chinese idiom “僧多粥少” originally refers to a situation where there are many monks but little food, symbolizing an imbalance in resources. In translation, this idiom can be rendered as “cannot meet the needs of their people,” which conveys the meaning of insufficient resources or inadequate allocation of resources. As a translator, one must interpret this idiom from a cultural perspective, ensuring that the translation aligns with the cultural and contextual nuances of the target language, thereby making an adaptive choice that better suits the cultural environment of the listeners. This approach facilitates a more accessible and comprehensible interpretation of the original meaning in the target language.

Adaptation and Selection in the Communicative Dimension

Adaptation and Selection in the Communicative Dimension refers to the translator's emphasis on the communicative intentions and adaptive selection transformation between the communicating parties during the

translation process. It requires the translator to focus the transformation on the communicative level, where, beyond converting linguistic information and conveying cultural connotations, the core lies in ensuring that the communicative intent of the source language is reflected in the target language. In this forum, the interpreter must act as an intermediary, effectively conveying the communicative intentions of both parties, enabling the translated text to exhibit the communicative functions intended by the speaker, and guiding the cross-cultural communicative behavior towards the anticipated direction.

Example (4)

SL: 现在我们是怎样的话, 已经有这个7个省从一级将为二级了, 还有9个省从一级降到三级了。

TL: So, we have looked at 7 provinces; they have really removed themselves from the first-level emergency and they are not in the second-level emergency, which is better.

It is evident that the interpreter, from the perspective of the communicative dimension, opted to selectively omit the speaker's interjection “现在我们是怎样的话” during the process of interpretation. The terms “一级” and “二级” refer to the “level of public health emergency response,” and the interpreter, clearly well-versed in the background knowledge, made a selective addition to clarify this. The appended non-restrictive relative clause “which is better” at the end of the sentence effectively conveys the speaker's implied meaning, demonstrating an adaptive selection from a communicative standpoint. This approach aligns with the ecological environment of the forum's interpretation, thereby fully conveying the speaker's intended message.

Conclusion

In this paper, by analyzing the real-time simultaneous interpretation outputs from the “The First Multidisciplinary Forum on COVID-19,” the study reveals that the content of interpretation is the result of the interpreter's “adaptation” and “selection.” Furthermore, the research also indicates that interpreters need to undertake thorough preparatory work before and after the interpretation process. In the pre-interpretation phase, interpreters must gain a comprehensive understanding of the theme of the interpretation event, the specialized background knowledge, as well as the cultural contexts, values, religious beliefs, and customs of both the source and target language countries. This preparation enables them to better and more swiftly adapt to the ecological environment of interpretation, thereby facilitating timely “selection” during the interpretation phase, transforming content across linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions.

Globally, simultaneous interpreters are considered “scarce talents” due to the high entry barriers, intense work demands, and high professional competency requirements of the field. By improving the methods and principles of interpreters through the multi-dimensional “adaptation” and “selection” under the perspective of eco-translatology, the quality of translation can be effectively enhanced, ultimately better achieving the purposes of cultural exchange, communication, and dissemination.

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