On the Inter-subjectivity in Translation: Viewed From "Distance" in Triangulation Model

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Abstract

Davidson constructs the triangulation model to express the person-person-world interaction in the language communication. This paper discusses the inter-subjectivity among translation subjects based on Davidson's triangulation model. No translation can be appropriately generated without inter-subjectivity activities. The triangulation model provides a three-dimensional perspective for discussing the interactions among a writer, a source text, a translator, a target text and a target reader.

Davidson introduces "distance" and "width" to solve the ambiguity of the cause concept, and this paper focuses on "distance" and creates translation subjects' triangulation. The paper explores how to achieve the best translation through adjusting the distance to approach the optimized triangle by analyzing the translation practice of Jane Austen's *Emma* and aims at guiding the practices using triangulation model.

Key words: Translation; Triangulation; Inter-subjectivity; Distance

In recent years, many scholars in translation field have begun to study some translation issues from the inter-subjective point of view and have achieved much. Of these inter-subjective studies, most of them are inclined to state the evolvement of inter-subjectivity, or describe the inter-subjectivity from philological, structural linguistic or deconstructive perspective. This paper goes beyond previous studies and applies Davidson's Triangulation model of communication by language to inter-subjectivity. It not only broadens and deepens inter-subjectivity, but also guides the discipline construction of translation studies.

Davidson's triangulation model provides us a three-dimensional perspective to study inter-subjectivity, which makes theories more objective and vivid. Based on Davidson's triangulation model and "distance" (introduced to solve the ambiguity of the cause concept), the paper constructs the dynamic variable "distance" and builds translation subjects' triangle. It helps us to understand the translation and subjects in translation more comprehensively and objectively, ultimately to settle the mutual relations between the subjects. In addition, to combine theories with practices and guide practices, the paper lists many translation examples of Jane Austen's *Emma.* Through analyzing the interactions between Jane Austen (the writer), translator (Li, & Cai, 2006; Zhu, & Zhu, 2008), *Emma*, target text and target reader, the paper digs out how to achieve the fusion of visual realms among them.

The application of triangulation model of communication by language allows us to raise translation studies to a full height to give an objective analysis of subjects in translation. It can provide new theoretical perspective and research methodology through revealing the essence of translation and explaining translation phenomenon. In addition, triangulation model of communication by language can also provide a solid philosophical foundation and comprehension point of view for understanding inter-subjectivity. The principles induced from this research can also be the judging standards for deciding the quality of translation.

1. INTER-SUBJECTIVITY AND TRIANGULATION

Translation inter-subjectivity is an intrinsic quality among the plural subjects in translation. "Dialogue entails the presence of the two parties involved,···although dialogue may not be seen in the linguistic form and the essentials of dialogue may not be represented in the language itself, but the dialogue must be one between or among subjects" (Cai, 2001, p.162). Liu (Liu, 2006, p.5-9) regards it as an interaction and a dialogue of communication between subjects, in which they identify and respect each other, rather than the subject conquering the object.

The concept of "triangulation" was first proposed by Donald Davidson in his *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective.* D. Davidson uses "triangulation" to represent the person-person-world interaction in language communication. For resolving the ambiguities of the concept of cause, Davidson thinks that, in the simplest cases, what causes a belief gives it its content. In the present case, he thinks the cause is doubly indeterminate: with respect to width, and with respect to distance. In China, there haven't been so many studies in Donald Davidson's triangulation, some of which conduct philosophical analysis. In 2011, Fang Xing and Sun Zihui made related researches on triangulation.

The paper not only explores the variable distance in triangulation, but applies the translation theory to *Emma*, which was Jane Austen's last famous work. The novel tells the story of a rich, witty, beautiful and privileged girl, Emma Woodhouse. She puts her mind not to marry, but she loves to be a matchmaker. Every time she matches her friend with others, she is just a kick in one's gallop or act on impulse, and she always mismatches, thus the marriage ends in failure automatically. Emma's meddling in others' marriages arouses her friend, Knightley's dissatisfaction. He persuades her not to meddle with others' marriage and let them love freely, which makes Emma reflect on herself. Finally, Emma does not make a match, but marries with Knightley herself.

Nowadays, some researchers still focus on the theory discussion of texts, but ignore the relationships among these subjects in real communication. Foreign researchers in this field mainly focus on philosophy, while the domestic researches are lack of philosophical theories to support and they barely apply translation studies to translation practice. The value of theories can be shown only when it's used to guide translation practice and benefit for practice. Hence, combining triangulation model and translation practice is the inevitable choice.

2. TRIANGULATION—INTER-SUBJECTIVITY: MULTI-DIMENSIONAL INTERACTION

Translation is an activity involving many factors. From the basic level, it includes a writer, a source text, a translator, a target text, a target reader, etc. Based on Davidson's triangulation, translation, as a cross-language and cross-culture exchanges, should be a process involving all these subjects. In another word, the inter-subjectivity among them is the result of "triangulation".

According to Davidson's triangulation, three elements are necessary for communication: two communicators and their common world, each of them occupies one apex of the triangle, having the equal status. For a speaker and an explainer, they depend on each other. The speaker tries to make the explainer understand, and the explainer tries to dig out what the speaker says.

2.1 Writer-Translator-Source Text (W-T-ST) Structure

In writer-translator-source text structure, the relationships among these three subjects in the triangulation will be:
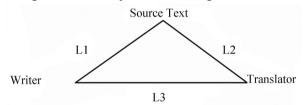

Figure 1

Triangulation not only stresses subjects' subjectivity but their interactions, thus places the writer, the translator and the source text in a three-dimensional multi-direction. Translation starts from translator's reading the source text, and the translator's explanation of the source text must be confined by the writer's creation and his own comprehension of the writer and the source text. That's to say, translation involves L2, L1 and L3's interactions. L2 is confined by L1 and L3. Both L1 and L3 can influence L2, that's, the dialogue between a writer and a source text, a writer and a translator can influence the communication between the translator and the source text. And no matter how the translator reacts, his explanation must be inspired and led by the source text. Therefore, when translating, the translator must read the source text carefully and avoid his own pre-understanding, and meanwhile, he should "talk" with the writer through the source text. Therefore, a good translation is the result of the triangulation of the source text, the writer and the translator.

2.2 Translator-Reader-Target Text (T-R-TT) Structure

In translator-reader-target text structure, the relationships among these three subjects in the triangulation will be:
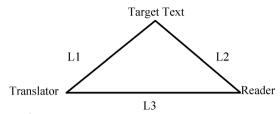
Figure 2

The subjects -- a translator, a reader and a target text, occupy three apexes in Davidson' triangulation. The target text is located on the top and equal to the object in creatures' common world; the translator is located at one apex and equal to creature 1; and the reader is located at another apex and equal to creature 2. Thus, L1 represents the interaction between a translator and a target text, and L2/L3… In the above triangulation, to arouse the target reader's appreciation of the target text as the source reader of the source text has, the translator would communicate with "implied readers" when translating. The more the translator understands the source text, the better it helps the target reader appreciate the target text. But the more communication of the target text the translators have with the target reader, the better the target text could be improved. Thus, L1, L2 and L3's interactions are essential. As a result, a translator often adds some cultural factors into the target text, which is familiar to the writer and the source reader in order to cater to the target readers. Translator's effort is just the result of his triangulation with the target reader and the target text.

3. "DISTANCE" IN TRANSLATION GUIDED BY TRIANGULATION MODEL

In Davidson's opinion, social interaction, triangulation, gives us the only account of how experience gives a specific content to our thoughts. Without other people with whom to share responses to a mutual environment, there is no answer to the question what it is in the world to which we are responding. Davidson thinks it's essential to resolve the ambiguity of the concept of cause, and the cause is doubly indeterminate: width and distance. With respect to DISTANCE, it has to do with the ambiguity of the relevant stimulus, whether it is proximal (at the skin, say) or distal. What makes the distal stimulus the relevant determiner of content is again its social character; it is the cause that is shared. The stimulus is thus triangulated; it is where causes converge in the world. (*The Emergence of Thought*, Donald Davidson**)**
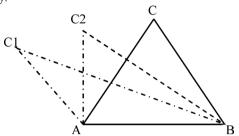
The paper applies the variable distance, but a little different from Davidson's "distance", to discuss how to coordinate translation subjects' inter-subjectivity to achieve good translation.

3.1 Distance

In Davidson's opinion, "distance" refers to the location of the relevant stimuli that generates communication,

that is, it is proximal or distal, which leads to the conflict of "proximal theory" and "distal theory". Davidson is opposed to take the proximal stimulus as the determinate factor, because if it's too near from the subject, there would be lack of the publicity for language exchange.

Here, "distance" refers to the abstract distances among these three subjects in triangulation, which can be drawn like the following Figure to help explain inter-subjectivity visually.

(A/B: Creature, C: Object, C1/C2: Changing location of the Object)
Figure 3

In the above graphic, triangle ABC is perfect, while triangle ABC1 and ABC2 can be equal to triangle ABC through improving its length related. If C is like C1, AC1 is shorter than AC, and BC2 is longer than BC, then triangle ABC1 is less close to triangle ABC. However, if we adjust the distance between them, like changing AC1 to AC2, BC1 to BC2, obviously, we can get triangle ABC2, which is much closer to triangle ABC.

Corresponding to the above graphic, in the condition that the distance between the two creatures' is fixed and unchanged, we find that the changing location of the object determines its distance from two creatures. That's, the degree of two creatures' communication with the object, influences the outcome of the interaction. Obviously, if the communication is more frequent and better, the outcome of the interaction is more effective. The purpose of the communication is to achieve the fusion of visual realms. Next, subjects' relationship in translation will be discussed in details using the Figure above.

3.2 Writer-Translator-Source Text (W-T-ST) Structure

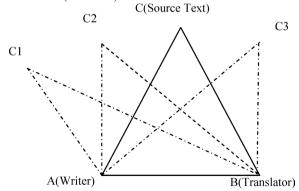According to Figure 3, the triangular of Writer-Translator-Source Text (W-T-ST) Structure will be:

Figure 4

As shown in the Figure 4, when the distances between a writer, a translator and a source text are equal, it's the perfection. That's to say, when the relationship between a translator and a source text is almost the same as that between a writer and a source text, the translation is the best.

Writer, as the mother of the source text, is definitely closer to a source text. As for a writer, his speeches about the source text, his experiences, value orientation, literary concepts, ideology and his other works constitute authorial subject. A source text, in fact, is the shield of a writer. While a source text is not a static subject, but a dynamic product. Even for the same text, different historical periods have different understandings and explanations. As time passes, some source texts may break away from the writer's historical background, but are endowed with new historical meanings and conform to translator's times. A text, especially the literary text, has the character of symbolization, visualization and metaphor, thus it has many blanks and uncertainties. The *blanks* and *uncertainties*, of a source text, stimulates and leads a translator (reader and target text producer) to fill up creatively and link imaginatively, which is just the process that a translator communicates with a source text and a writer.

A source text contains writer's personal emotions, backgrounds, preferences, experiences, beliefs and other personal stuff. One of the tasks for a translator in the translation process is to adjust the location of a source text between himself and a writer. For a translator, through observing and communicating with a writer and source text, and digging out, he is pulling the source text to him. A source text can rise to C1 and C3, but never surpass C in Figure 4.

In another way, a translator is not ready to accept a source text passively, but interprets it with his own expectation. As for a translator, his personal interests, knowledge, experiences, culture origins even personal beliefs and other factors constitute a translator's subjectivity of comprehending and interpreting a source text. While exchanging and communicating with a source text with open structure, the above personal factors undoubtedly influence a translator's interpretation. However, if a translator gives excessive play to his subjectivity for a source text, he is bound to be closer to a source text, like C3 in Figure 4. In this situation, a source text is not fairly treated and deviates from a writer too far, which is inadvisable and inappropriate.

Therefore, translation in fact is a pursuing process from triangle ABC1 and ABC2 to approaching triangle ABC. That is, a source text has the same distance with a writer and a translator, which means a translator has exactly the same understanding just as a writer creates the source text, then good translation can be achieved. It's required that a translator should work hard to achieve the best coordination with a source text and a writer.

In translating Jane Austen's *Emma*, any translator should achieve the best coordination with Jane Austen and *Emma*. With respect to Jane Austen, we should know that: Jane Austen was born in Steventon, Hampshire, where her father was a rector. She was the second daughter and seventh child in a family of eight. Jane's mother fed her infants at the breast a few months, and then sent them to a wet nurse in a nearby village to be looked after for another year or longer. Jane Austen was mostly tutored at home, and irregularly at school, but she received a broader education than many women of her time. She started to write for family amusement as a child. In her letters she observed the daily life of her family and friends in an intimate and gossipy manner. Austen never married, but her social life was active and she had suitors and romantic dreams.

With respect to *Emma*, we should know that: Jane Austen's main concern is about human beings in their personal relations, human beings with their families and neighbors. Because of this, her novels have a universal significance. Austen shows a human being not at the moment of crisis, but in the most trivial incidents of everyday life. Life is made up of little things, and human nature reveals itself in them as fully as in big ones. A picnic in the woods shows up selfishness, kindness, vanity and sincerity as much as a battle on the front. As for her interest in the study of human beings in their relations with other people, Jane Austen is particularly preoccupied with the relationship between men and women in love. Stories of love and marriage provide the framework for all her novels and in them women are always taken as the major characters.

The above information of Jane Austen and *Emma* provides a translator a fair and general perspective for choosing words, manner of speaking, style and type for a target text. It's impossible for a translator to keep the same distance with the book *Emma* as that with Jane Austen, but it's entirely feasible to be closer to *Emma* through effective communication with Jane Austen and *Emma*. Above all, a translator should get closer to a writer and a source text, try his best to comprehend social cultures and conventions of a source text's period, make a comprehensive analysis of a writer's attitude towards life and personal values.

3.3 Translator-Reader-Target Text (T-R-TT) Structure

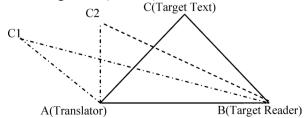According to Figure 4, the triangular of Translator-Reader-Target Text (T-R-TT) Structure will be:

Figure 5

As shown in Figure 5, when the distances between a translator, a target reader and a target text are equal, it's the perfection. That's to say, if the relationship between the target reader and target text is almost the same as that between a translator and the target text, we can say that it's an excellent translation.

A translator, as the special reader of the source text, takes responsibility to express to the target reader what he comprehends. The target reader's responses depend on whether a translator delivers information of the source text accurately, faithfully and elegantly. The best result is just like triangle ABC in Figure 5, in which a translator expresses his comprehension of the source text to the target reader fully, and the target reader achieves resonance with a translator with respect to the target text. That's, what the target reader gets from the target text, is just the same as what a translator endows the target text. In order to achieve a perfect target text, a translator has to pursue the process of getting the structure of triangle ABC from triangle ABC1 and ABC2. That is, a target reader can understand the target text just as the translator does, then high-quality translation can be achieved.

It's essential for a translator to consider about a target reader's expectation and requirements of the target text. A target text can be alive only when a target reader can appreciate it. Through exchanging and communicating, a translator can have better observation of a target reader's reading level, and have a better understanding of a target reader's expectations and aesthetic orientation. All these help a translator make choices in translation, and adjust the target text approaching to the target reader.

A target text, as a product of a specified period, cannot transcend the time. Thus it can have dialogues with the target reader just in the present place at the present time. Target readers of different times have different accepting consciousness, which changes with time, cultural, economic and political environment. And the interpretation and representation of the source text is also required to cater to the times. Hence, to achieve an excellent target text, it's a translator's responsibility to keep abreast with the times, conduct constant communication with the target reader and adjust the distance between him, the target text and the target reader.

Take Chinese versions of *Emma* for example, Liu Zhongde, Zhang Jinghao, Sun Zhili, Li Wenjun & Cai Hui, Zhu Qingying & Zhu Wenguang, all have translated the famous work. They live in different times, they refresh the target text and convey the language and cultural diversities of the source text in appropriate way continually. Through the triangulation among a translator, a target text and a reader, a translator tries to satisfy new target reader's acceptance and aesthetic expectations for other cultures.

In the triangulation model of Translator-Reader-Target Text, to ensure a target reader require the same feelings of a target text as a source reader of the source text, a translator communicates with his imaginary readers at any time during the process of translation. However, during the process of a writer's creation, he always takes a general estimation of his knowledge, experiences and the imaginary readers. Hence, a writer would omit source reader's and his common cultural information. With respect to this, a translator is bound to fill up the lacking foreign cultures in the target text, which is quite clear to a writer and a source reader, but complicated and unknown to a target reader. In some cases, a translator tends to represent the original feature of a source text to the target reader, for the target reader prefers to know about the original foreign culture; while some translators tend to fuse the original foreign culture and target culture together to cater to the target reader, for some target reader prefers to absorb a source text in target cultural background. Hence, a translator's effort is just the result of triangulation between him, target text and target reader. For example in *Emma*:

(1) In chapter 50, after Emma and Mr. Knightley knowing that they love each other, there is a paragraph describing Mr. Woodhouse:

Poor Mr. Woodhouse little suspected what was plotting against him in the breast of that man whom was so cordially welcoming, and so anxiously hoping might not have taken cold from his ride.(2006, p.524)

Li & Cai's version：可怜的伍德豪斯先生满腔热情地欢迎客人，还挺替他操心的，路上淋了雨可别着了凉才好哇，可是他怎么也没有想到人家心里可是在想挖他的墙角哩。

Zhu & Zhu's version：可怜的伍德豪斯先生没想到，自己由衷欢迎，又一心希望在骑马途中没有着凉的那个人心里正酝酿着对他不利的计划。

Compared with Zhu and Zhu's simple and plain version, Li and Cai adds "可是他怎么也没有想到人家心里可是在想挖他的墙角哩" in their translation, which points out Knightley's plot and sounds humorous to readers. It strengthens and highlights the contradictory atmosphere that Mr. Woodhouse never wants Emma to get married, but Knightley has decided to marry Emma. Li and Cai not just report literal meaning, but expose the hidden contradictions to the target reader vividly and enrich the target text.

(2) Another example in chapter 35, Mrs. Elton wants to introduce a job for Jane:

"I know you, I know you; you would take up with anything; but I shall be a little more nice, and I am sure the good Campbells will be quite on my side;……"(2006, p.360)

Li & Cai："我才了解你呢，我才了解你呢。你是拣到篮里就是菜的，我可就要挑剔一些了，我相信好心的坎贝尔夫妇一定会完全赞同我这种态度的。……"

Zhu & Zhu："我了解你，我了解你；你什么职位都会接受；我可要比你挑剔一些，我肯定，善良的坎贝尔夫妇一定完全支持我的做法。……"

In translating this sentence, Li and Cai use the slang "拣到篮里就是菜的" to describe Jane's ease attitude and make the character of Mrs. Elton come to live through her causal dialogue. The slang shortens the distance between the target text and the target reader, and gives the target

reader familiarity. By contrast, Zhu and Zhu's version is faithful to the source text, but seems unappealing.

(3) In chapter 48, Emma concerns that friends won't visit Hartfield and it will get longly nooner. There is the sentence to describe Emma's feelings:

> The prospect before her now was threatening to a degree that could not be entirely dispelled—that might not be even partially brightened.(2006, p.509)
>
> Li & Cai："她如今看到的前景只是满天的黑云滚滚，别说云消日出是休想，只怕连露出一角青天都未必有什么希望。
>
> Zhu & Zhu："现在她眼前出现的前景在一定程度上预示这不可能被完全消除——甚至不可能部分地变得光明起来。

Zhu and Zhu employ literal translation to achieve the equivalent form and expressions as the source text. It conforms to the speaking voice of the source text, while it makes the target reader difficult to understand the real meaning behind the obscure words. Li & Cai apply a series of lively and colorful words, like "黑云滚滚", "云消日出", "一角青天", to give a vivid and fresh description of Emma's feelings.

(4) In chapter 29, Frank and Emma discuss about the place for hosting the dance party and Emma thinks the parlor is too crowded to host 10 pairs' dancers.

> "No, no," said she, "you are quite unreasonable. It would be dreadful to be standing so close. Nothing can be further from pleasure than to be dancing in a crowd——and a crowd in a little room."(2006, p.296)
>
> Li & Cai："不行，不行，"她说，"你好不讲道理。弄得这样挨挨挤挤的，简直难受死了。这样人挤人的跳舞，哪还有半点乐趣呀——而且是螺蛳壳里人挤人。"
>
> Zhu & Zhu："不，不，"她说，"你太不近情理。站得那么近，太可怕了！挤在一块儿——又是在一间小屋子里挤在一块儿跳，再没什么比这更扫兴的了。"

Zhu and Zhu convey the information of the source text clearly and concisely, while Li and Cai deftly use the common saying "螺蛳壳里人挤人" to show the readers how crowded it will be. Li and Cai's version offers the readers a vivid visual impression and sounds humorous.

(5) In chapter 36, Mr. Weston talks with Mrs. Elton about when Frank will come. Mr. Weston expressed that, if things are going untowardly one month, they are sure to mend the next. And Mrs. Elton associates her experiences:

> ...because things did not go quite right—did not proceed with all the rapidity, which suited his feelings—he was apt to be in despair, and exclaim that he was sure at this rate it would be May before Hymen's saffron robe would be put on for us!(2006, p.369)
>
> Li & Cai:"因为事情进行得不是很顺利——发展的速度不称他的心——他就往往嗒然若丧，唉声叹气，说照这样的速度下去，到五月海门①怕还不肯为我们披上他的深红长袍呢。"
>
> ① 希腊神话中的婚姻之神，系阿波罗之子。
>
> Zhu & Zhu: "因为事情进行得不顺利，不像他希望的那么快，他都失望了，直嚷嚷说，按这个速度，婚姻之神还没为我们披上番红色长袍①，就已经要到五月了！"
>
> 英国诗人弥尔顿（1608--1674）所写长诗《快乐的人》中有这样两句：
>
> 婚姻之神常在那儿出现，
>
> 穿着番红色长袍，拿着明亮的蜡烛。

In dealing with *Hymen's saffron*, Li and Cai translate it into "五月海门", with the annotation "希腊神话中的婚姻之神，系阿波罗之子". Though the annotation offers the information of Hymen, the translation remains obscure to the target reader who isn't familiar with the source culture. By contrast, Zhu and Zhu deliver more information to the target reader. They add Milton's verses to describe Hymen's saffron concretely. And the suggestion for these two version is to combine their translation: adopting "海门" instead of "婚姻之神", which is more faithful to the target culture, and combining these two annotations, which can give a more detailed description and explanation to the target reader.

It's the translator's triangulating with the potential target reader and possible target text that makes a translator take efforts to treat the source text appropriately and achieve target reader acceptant target text.

CONCLUSION

To achieve a successful translation, all the subjects, a writer, a translator, a target reader, the source text and the target text, should carry out equal dialogue continuously. The triangulation model provides a three-dimensional interactive channel for studying inter-subjectivity, and it's deviated from the obscure and elusive theories telling. It shows us clearly what and how we should do to improve the translation: seeking to adjust the distances between the three subjects in a triangular to equal. The critical point (where the relationship between a writer and the source text is just the same as that between a translator and the source text; so is it with a writer, the target text and the target reader) in a triangular can never be reached, but the process of approaching to it is the process of optimizing translation.

With respect to the variable "distance", the paper provides specified suggestions for coordinating subjects' relationships in triangulation model. Through analyzing the translation examples in *Emma*, the paper applies the triangulation model to study inter-subjectivity in practical translation activities. In subsequent studies, we should continue to test and verify the feasibility and reliability of triangulation model in translation, and applies it to more extensive translation activities.

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