



Application of the Interpretive Theory of Translation in Interpreting Practice

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Abstract

This paper makes a research on Application of the Interpretive Theory of Translation in Interpreting Practice and reviews the major developing condition and applications of interpreting studies throughout its history, from which we can see that research methodology of interpreting studies is evolving from objective speculation based on experience to objective description based on data. Since the establishment of the 1980s, with the gradual improvement of the theoretical framework and unique theory angle of view, Interpretive Theory became the dominant interpretive theory in the western countries, leading the Western interpretation research into a new stage dominated by practitioners, which has a significant influence on the research of interpreting in China as well. The theory still has an important guiding significance on the nature of translation, analysis of interpreting process and objects, ideas on interpreting teaching, and on today's interpreting practice and teaching. This paper tries to make a comprehensive evaluation on the background, developing lines, basic views, creative contribution and prospects, in the hope of promoting the theory in China.

Key words: Interpretive theory; Interpreting; Practice; China

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INTRODUCTION

As a relatively young subject, interpreting is produced and evolved from translation and it has a much more irreplaceable instance and communicative effect than translation. Interpreting acts as a significant bridge for the globalization. Whereas, the research on the theory of interpreting is lag behind than its counterpart. The lack of Interpretive Theory is not only set a limit on the development of the practical interpreting but also lead to the uncertain standard on interpreting.

The Interpretive Theory is sometimes called "interpretative approach" or "theory of sense". This theory on interpreting and translating is adopted by the personnel of the Academy of Translation and Interpretation of Paris. They are also called "Paris School", which is a French school researching the theory and teaching on interpreting and non-literature text born in 1960s. The French School considers translation as paraphrasing, which is an explanation that a translator made on the sense of the original text through linguistic signals and supplemented by the translator's own understanding. What a translator should do is the equation of the sense or effects of the original text rather than the linguistic units. Professors like M.Lederer, D.Seleskovitch, and F.Herbulo, whose sharing of theoretic concepts made a foundation for their teaching careers in the Paris Senior Translation and Interpretation School.

1. ISSUES CONCERNING INTERPRETIVE THEORY

Interpretation, as a verbal form of translation, dates back to the early period of human activity. Given the difficulty in keeping the verbal data, relevant materials are lacked to keep track of the early evolution of interpretation. Back to the primitive society, people of different cultures lived in several tribes. The isolated life made communication impossible, and thus blocked the social progress on a general scale.

In order to communicate with people from other cultures, interpretation began to take shape. Interpreter began to be taken as a profession some two thousand years ago. Those who interpreted the ideas were called Ji (寄) in east China, Xiang (象) in south China, Didi (狄鞮) in west China, Yi (译) in north China respectively.

Historically, interpretation was less mentioned than written translation in China. There has been a popular notion among people that the one who knows both of the two languages is bound to do interpretation. So for a long time, interpretation practice has been informal. If people from two different cultures wanted to communicate, they might find someone that had a basic knowledge of the other language; they could either use gestures to express themselves. Under these circumstances, the early interpretation was done unprofessionally, without any skills or guiding theories. It was the two world wars that kicked off the formal interpretation. In 1919, at the negotiation meeting in Paris, the English-French interpretation made its debut, thus interpretation began to be regarded as a formal profession. At the end of the Second World War, where Nazi war criminals were taken to trial, interpretation in four languages made a success, as it speeded up the whole process. Thus, the two world wars were prelude to contemporary interpretation, as they marked a turning point in the development of interpreting as a profession. In China, since its opening up and reform, there have been more international conferences and more opportunities to communicate with foreigners. So interpretation, as a bridge between different cultures, witnessed a boom. Accordingly, with the introduction of western interpreting theories, the interpretation training in China has become formal and professionalized. In universities, interpreting classes were introduced in the curricula, igniting a great interest among the students in becoming professional interpreters. With the increasing globalization, the demand for interpreting talents would be greater than ever before.

The criteria in interpreting cover the follow aspects:

Accuracy: Accuracy is the preliminary and the most important criterion to evaluate interpreting in practice. Being accurate means interpreters should be loyal to real intention of both the communicating parties. And on the basis of loyalty, interpreters should make a thorough and complete understanding to the speaking content, and deliver the exact information to the other party to guarantee the smooth going of communication and exchange between two different languages.

Fluency: Being fluent refers that interpreters should make sure the delivery of interpreting proceed coherent and smooth, especially in language, which should maintain a normal speed and fluency. Otherwise, the quality of interpreting would be greatly affected.

Instantaneity: Being instant is the request of interpreting corresponding to the time limit in interpreting.

Interpreters are supposed to deliver the message to the listener at the short pause or break in a discourse, therefore, there is little time left for them to think over the information and choose the proper words and sentences. Interpreters should maintain a relative fast interpreting speed; otherwise, the communication would be deferred or closed off for discontinuity.

Appropriateness: Being appropriate means the interpreting should agree with the speaker's language style, social status and the occasions interpreting is held. Interpreters should manage to merge the interpreting into the speaking style or atmosphere, whether it is formal or informal, interpreters should choose the proper language style or words to suit to the communication or exchange.

Interpreting is the twin brother of translation. There exists a great deal of common traits between them in nature. Besides that, interpreting act has its own distinguishing features and characteristics. Therefore, the evaluating criteria in interpreting quality must pinpoint to its unique features to standardize the interpreting quality and provide guideline for the healthy development of interpreting.

2. THE BASIC POINT VIEW OF INTERPRETIVE THEORY

In the interpretive theory of translation, it is believed that translation or interpreting is interpretive by nature. The purpose of interpreting is to serve for communication. It sees the interpreting process into three stages: the comprehension of the meaning, deverbalization and re-formulation of the meaning.

Interpreting as a kind of communication activity, its target is the transition of meaning instead of language symbols. Before the forming of interpretive theory, interpreting study was mainly linguistic paradigm. What interpreters and interpreting teachers cared about were interpreters' language ability and the semantic features of the interpreting material. The fundamental distinction between the Interpretive Theory of translation and linguistic structural paradigm is the former sees interpreting as an act of communication in a particular situational context. The aim of such communication is for the meaning; therefore, the ultimate purpose of interpreting is to seek an equivalence of meaning; while the latter instead firmly believes that interpreting is a process of language transition in seeking the correspondence of words and sentences. Prof. Seleskovitch believes interpreting is a process based on the comprehending of meaning, which is both "conscious" and "nonverbal". The meaning is consisted of the created linguistic meaning at the sound of speakers and the cognitive supplement closely related to the linguistic meaning.

As the purpose of all communications is to deliver information and meaning, therefore, interpreting is not

simply an act of linear decoding of language structures and units, but a process of recapturing and re-formulating of the textual meaning, which requires interpreters' cognitive supplement to make interpreting to the source text content, that is interpreting of the connotation. As in Prof. Seleskovitch's words, the information provided by the speaker must be interpreted by its receiver (the interpreter), thus under any circumstances, the receiver is the annotator. As interpreting is a human instinct, interpreters need to be interpretive in their interpreting.

Prof. Seleskovitch believes translation (interpreting) is interpretive. In the interpretive theory, accuracy is emphasized and important, but it seeks no complete equivalence between two languages. Prof. Seleskovitch points out that in interpreting, interpreters should not always keep in mind that the purpose of it is delivery of meaning, and should never accommodate themselves to words form and sentence structures of the source text, do not try to interpret in the original word orders and sentence structures, because all the words and structures are only symbols, which shows the path, but not the path itself.

In her opinion, language is the result of human's need in expressing human's ideas and thoughts by bearing, conveying, delivering meaning, therefore, language is only a tool for communication of meaning. Thus in the study of translation (interpreting), the language spoken (*parole*) instead of language behavior (*langue*) should be at the priority of research. Seleskovitch makes it quite clear that the task of translation (interpreting) is to convey the meaning of communication, and the content of comprehending should also be the meaning of communication. She once compared interpreters to painters instead of photographers that painting is the outlook of the painter, who extracts equivalent meaning and information from the reality to re-present the intended reality. So it is with translation (interpreting) that interpreters should cross the barrier of language forms into the meaning of the language spoken to extract the real meaning of the text and discourse, then re-present the meaning in an appropriate form.

Therefore, comprehension of the meaning is the first and prerequisite step in translation (interpreting). Without the right-to-the-point comprehension to the original text or discourse, translation (interpreting) would either go off the track becoming some sort of fabrication, or simply go nowhere because there provides no direction at all. Comprehension to the original passage or discourse needs the solid foreign language ability as well as the encyclopedic knowledge. Comprehension is a combined effort of interpreters' language knowledge and extra language knowledge (encyclopedic knowledge).

In interpreting, the comprehension of the meaning highly relies on the cognitive supplement of the interpreters. Prof. Seleskovitch pays special attention to the meaning of the whole discourse in a situational context

instead of the isolated meaning of specific words by analyzing the course of the nature of linguistic ambiguity. The interpretive theory of translation makes clear distinction between explicitness (simile, the expressed meaning) and implicitness (metaphor, the un-spoken intended meaning). In the viewpoint of the interpretive theory, as the communication participants (parties) would share some common comprehending and knowledge background, so that speaker would not speak everything out he or she hopes the other party to get, on the contrary, the speaker only express the information that the other party comprehends. In addition to that, the speaker would often use some specific features to express the whole object or idea, and through these local features or ideas to express his or her whole intended meaning. For example, people often use the drinking ware to refer the wine to drink. Another example is to express the same meaning, some would say as simple as, "Bolt the door", others may make it a little more complicated as "Bolt the door, or the cat would get in", still others would be more specific as "Bolt the door to guard against the cat getting in, for I hate it making a mess on the sofa (Danica, & Marianne, 1995)". Therefore, the discourse meaning in the source language may include both the explicitness and implicitness. The former makes it clear-cut straightforward to avoid a wordy and tedious statement to some clear meaning; while the latter would try to make the implicitness obvious so that readers or listeners would get the un-spoken meaning easy and correct. As Prof. Lederer puts it, "The complete comprehending of meaning depends on the shared knowledge between speaker and listener/interpreter, for without the shared knowledge, meaning would not come out automatically (Lederer, 2005)." Prof. Seleskovitch also explains that what the interpreters attempting to express is not the linguistic/verbal meaning of discourse in source language, but the speakers' intended meaning that is born in the specific situational context and deverbilized from its source language. That the expressed linguistic meaning embodied in speakers' verbal signals must be interpreted by interpreters/listeners through their cognitive supplementing (*les compléments cognitifs*, also known as cognitive inputs) to get the whole meaning (*sens/sense*) of the discourse.

The cognitive supplement depends on interpreters' cognitive knowledge (*baggage cognitif/cognitive baggage*) and cognitive context/contextual knowledge (*contexte cognitif*). The supplemented content includes world knowledge/encyclopedic knowledge and contextual knowledge. The encyclopedic knowledge is consisted of linguistic knowledge and extra-linguistic knowledge, while the latter also covers thematic knowledge and general knowledge. The cognitive context or contextual knowledge is text or discourse related knowledge form interpreters' accumulated meaning units in the course of discourse listening or text reading from the source

language. The realization of comprehending depends on interpreters' linguistic knowledge, thematic knowledge, encyclopedic knowledge and the specific situational context. Comprehending is an integrated process including comprehending of linguistic knowledge, cognitive supplement and specific situational context and etc. Once the coming new information integrates with related knowledge, the comprehending arises.

Interpreting is a process of interpretive translation, which is based on the spoken meaning (explicitness) of the discourse in the source language, during which interpreters try to extract (interpret) the implied meaning (implicitness) by using his or her own cognitive knowledge, so as to comprehend and re-express the exact overall meaning of the original text or discourse. Interpretive translation is mainly a process of realizing the equivalence of meaning, occasionally seeking the linguistic translation of the correspondences to make the trans-coding. Interpretive translation in nature is a translation skill made from language spoken to meaning, then meaning to language delivered, which requires interpreters to extract the content of meaning from one language, and re-present it to another, but not to imitate one language into another. The purpose of translation (interpreting) is to convey the meaning of discourse or text in an equivalent form from one language into another one. In the act of translation (interpreting), translators or interpreters should first get the meaning of the discourse or text (a process of deverbilization), make the meaning of his or her own part, then re-present the discourse or text in another language as if it were spoken or written in that language. Lederer makes further explanation that interpretive translation is not the so called free translation because the latter would make a lot of adding, deleting and an extensive restructuring of ideas.

Prof. Seleskovitch sees interpreting as a continuous, step-by-step information processing act in which meaning comes from words, but not the added sense of all the words and phrases. The ultimate task for interpreters is not to seek the equivalent words or phrases from the source language to the target language (translated language), but to transit the meaning and sense of the discourse from the source language to the target one in an effort to seek the equivalence of meaning. That is to say, interpreting is not simply a one-way process of decoding from the source language to the target one, but a process of re-presenting the meaning in target language on the basis of interpreting to the original discourse.

Polysemy and ambiguity are the common existing phenomena when words and expressions are deprived from the specific situational context. However, once these syntactic structures are placed in the discourse with specific situational context, these phenomena of polysemy and ambiguity would disappear. Since polysemy is a linguistic phenomenon, but not a discourse phenomenon,

therefore in a discourse with communication intention (exchange intention), polysemy and ambiguity actually do not exist, nor will they cause any potential trouble for interpreters except for the case that the speaker, out of some motive, intentionally distorts his or her discourse for polysemy and ambiguity. Ambiguity is caused for the interpreters (listeners) lack enough cognitive knowledge, failing to make necessary cognitive supplement to the meaning and sense of the original discourse.

Based on the above comprehending and finding, Prof. Seleskovitch vigorously advocates that research and study of interpreting should refer to the cognitive and psychological act of interpreters instead of the overwhelming paradigm of structural linguistics in the 50-60s of the last century, and that the research and study of interpreting must take people's (interpreters/listeners) cognition and thinking into consideration, seeking features and laws in extracting, memorizing and expressing of discourse meaning, not simply restricting on the linguistic level. Under the encouragement of these consensus and findings, Prof. Seleskovitch and Prof. Lederer started to be engaged in probing into the cognitive thinking process in conference interpreting from 1960s on in reference of the experimental psychology, neuro-psychology, genetic psychology as well as linguistics.

In traditional linguistic translation theory, the translation (interpreting) process was segmented into two phases that is the comprehension and expression. It was commonly believed that translation (interpreting) is the direct contact between two different languages, that translation (interpreting) is the just the trans-coding process within the two languages. However, at the close observation and analysis to consecutive interpreting, Seleskovitch believes that in the process of translation (interpreting), the cognition of people is an active participant in translation (interpreting), and that there exists another imperceptible phase of meaning separated from its language (the later hypothesis of deverbilization). Prof. Seleskovitch quoted the experience by Freud that after he had read some parts from a book, all the original language disappeared from his memory within a few seconds, and then only the meaning of sense would occur to him so that he could re-express the idea in another language in a clear, natural way. That is to say in other words, that in the interpretive theory of translation, interpreting is by nature an act in which interpreters extract the meaning by deverbilizing the input information in its original linguistic form, and then express the extracted meaning out in the target language naturally. Thus, the discourse by the speaker in the source language, the comprehended (extracted) meaning of the interpreter and the re-expression by the interpreter in his or her native language come to form a triangular relationship. On the basis of that, Prof. Seleskovitch brought out the interpreting triangular model, or the three-

formula hypothesis in interpreting, by which the act of interpreting is consisted of comprehension/interpreting, deverbalization and reformulation. The process of interpreting carries forward by units of meaning, and the interpreters interpret one unit of meaning and then express it out in the target language, and then continue to the next unit of meaning repeating the process. Only when the interpreters integrate his own knowledge to the input semantic meaning in the source language, could they establish the meaningful cognitive structure. In order to construct the interpreting triangle, Seleskovitch created a core conception—deverbalization. Seleskovitch believes that in-between the comprehending and reformulation in the process of interpreting, there exists a phase in which the meaning separates from its language form, and that just in this phase the comprehended meaning is stored in the brain of the interpreters in the form non-language consciousness, and then in the phase of reformulation, it instantly finds the corresponding language form in interpreters' mother tongue. Prof. Lederer gives a clear definition to deverbalization in one of her publishes, that deverbalization refers to a phase of meaning comprehending of a passage or discourse, and represented in another language. That deverbalization is the generated cognitive meaning and emotional sense goes along with the language symbols, which is the transcending to language symbols. Without the deverbalization, meaning cannot be extracted, so that no real translation (interpreting) can accomplish. The direct trans-coding from one language to another is just the mechanic transforming of codes instead of translation (interpreting) in the real sense. Prof. Lederer further brought up the idea of explicit (simile, the word meaning) and implicit (metaphor, that is the un-spoken meaning). Prof. Lederer believes that simile and metaphor are not the unique phenomenon in figure of speech, but the common existing practice in the communication activity of human being. Some words in a certain context would always mean something un-spoken. Here is an example, when people say "I graduated finally", the word meaning the sentence is "I have finished a certain period of learning or school life", but putting in a certain context, it may imply the following meaning such as "I did not waste my time, and have achieved something" or "I'm going to start my new career" or other meaning depending different context.

In 1984, Prof. Seleskovitch co-authored with Prof. Lederer a book of "Interpreter pour Traduire", in which the idea of the triangular model of interpreting was brought out. In the triangular model (see illustration 1), both sides of the bottom corners stand for the source language and target language respectively, while the top corner represents the meaning. At the interpreting and comprehending of the discourse in the source language, and on the basis of the comprehended meaning of the interpreters (at the top of the triangle), the acquired

meaning is expressed in the target language, that process is interpretive translation.

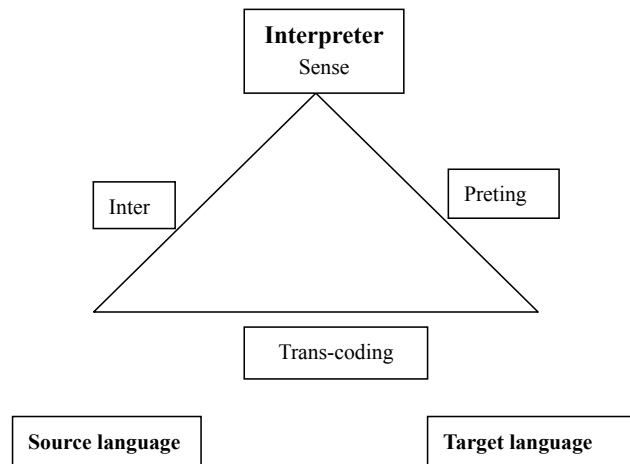


Figure 1
The Interpreting Triangular Model

According to this triangular model, interpreting is a process from the source language (listening and perception) to meaning and sense (vouloir dire), and to the target language (reformulation of meaning); Trans-coding only applies to the simultaneous interpreting of terms, numbers, names from the source language to the target one; The process of reformulation of acquired meaning in the target language is the process of interpretive translation, the most important way in interpreting. Under the interpretive translation, meaning is the integration of language and cognitive knowledge, and the formation of meaning is the prerequisite for reformulation, if this condition does not establish, then it is impossible for interpreters to express the original discourse in another language.

The hypothesis of interpreting triangular model implies the following notions: first, interpreting is process at the participation of the interpreters, it is actually process of the interpreters' psychological activity; second, the object of interpreting is the meaning of the spoken text or discourse, instead of the language shell itself; third, interpreting is a process of comprehension and re-expression of meaning; fourth, language and thought are separable, the comprehension and storage of meaning does not necessarily need the media of language symbols, that the interpreters can decode the original text or discourse at the participation of his or her own cognitive knowledge, and separate the acquired meaning from its original linguistic form and grammatical structures, and store it in their brain in a non-verbal form of consciousness.

CONCLUSION

To wrap up the dissertation, the author would like to sum up the ideas in the paper.

Interpreting has a long history both in China and in the west. The popular concept that a person having a good command of both two languages can be an interpreter proved to be a misunderstanding. Interpreting is actually a high-demanding job. In fact, a qualified interpreter should have a good command of both linguistic and extra-linguistic knowledge.

The criteria judging the adequacy has varied from time to time. The idea of correspondence and equivalence has existed for more than two thousand years. Once, correspondence in lexicon and grammar between the source language and the target language was held as a major criterion for the propriety of interpretation. But it was argued later by some experts that languages differ from each other in terms of grammar, phonology and so on, and literal translation or interpretation is bound to distort the original meaning. It was based on this conception that the Paris School came into existence. According to interpretive theory proposed by the Paris School, correspondence and equivalence are two totally different conceptions. The aim of interpretation is to achieve the communicative sense.

Taking a glance at the interpreting research both domestic and abroad, it's easy to understand the indispensable role played by interpretive theory. Compared with the research development in the West, the situation in China was characterized by lack of empirical study. But thanks to the efforts made by some experts to push for revolutions, such as Bao Gang, Liu Heping and so on, China has introduced many important interpretation theories from the west over the years. Examples are given to show the importance of interpretive theory in the

implementation. Through these examples, it's not difficult to realize that the best way to do interpretation is to grasp the essence of the original sentence, while ignoring or paying little attention to linguistic forms. Of course, interpretive theory has its limitations, in that it is not so applicable to written text of literary translations. But it's not the point this paper focuses on. The wide application of interpretive theory to the interpreting practice is a fact that brooks no denial.

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