Translation of Temporal Dialect in *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* From the Perspectives of Scope and Background

ZHAO Yushan[a],*; XU Yanan[a]

[a]School of Foreign Languages, North China Electric Power University, Beijing, China.
*Corresponding author.

Abstract

Temporal dialect is widely adopted in the novel *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*, for the novel involves many great times in China and all sorts of temporal dialects are the reveal of different eras. Therefore, in light of its importance of showing the features of different times, temporal dialect should be attached great significance to the translation studies. This paper aims to study the translation of temporal dialect in *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* from the perspectives of scope and background in Construal theory in order to verify the feasibility of scope and background in explaining the translation of temporal dialect. Based on the scope and background, encyclopedic knowledge can be formed for the purpose of understanding the temporal dialect in the original and producing the same translation version as the cognitive domains evoked in translator's mind. What is more, suitable translation methods should be employed in the translation process under the guidance of scope and background in order to help target readers understand the theme and features of the original well.

Key words: Construal theory; Scope and background; *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*; Temporal dialect; Translation

INTRODUCTION

Chinese literature works are one of the medium for conveying Chinese culture to the international literature world, and its translation is also of great significance. Awarded Nobel Prize in Literature in 2012, Mo Yan, one of the most outstanding writers in China, has brought Chinese literature into the world. The reason why Mo Yan' works can be valued in the international literature field is not only the remarkable and attractive writing of Mo Yan's novels, but also the good translation versions, including versions in Swedish, English, Vietnamese and so on. Chinese scholar Wang Ning (2012, pp.5-11) puts forward that Mo Yan is so lucky to meet the excellent translator— Howard Goldblatt. English translator Howard Goldblatt plays an important role in conveying the originals of Mo Yan to target readers and thus his translation version has attracted many scholars to do researches from different perspectives with different theoretical foundation, aiming at studying why Goldblatt can produce the translation work successfully and summarizing useful translation strategies and methods for the practical purpose. According to the previous studies, Construal theory is rarely employed as the basis of theory guidance in the study of the translation of Mo Yan's works.

The paper focuses on the English version *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* published in 2006 and studies how the Chinese-English translation is produced. Howard Glodblatt, the vital translator for this novel, finished the translation in 2008, which is helpful to introduce this novel in the world. Therefore, some examples of dialects are exemplified from *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* translated by Goldblatt. Certainly, how these dialects are translated by Goldblatt in order to transfer the theme and characteristics of the original deserves to be studied. The story *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* tells about the fifty-year rural life in China, from 1951 to 2000, with the periods of Land Reform, the Cultural Revolution, Agricultural Operatives and so on. As a result, temporal

dialect can be found throughout the whole novel in different times. The task of translating these temporal dialects in this novel is one of the obstacles, which is still vital to western readers for the comprehension of the original. The paper is to study the translation of temporal dialect in Mo Yan's work *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* from the perspectives of scope and background dimensions in Construal theory. The purpose of the paper is to study how scope and background guide the translation of Goldblatt and what kinds of translation methods he applies in his translation version under the guidance of these two dimensions.

1. TEMPORAL DIALECT AND *LIFE AND DEATH ARE WEARING ME OUT*

Temporal dialect is one of the classifications of dialect based on the user of language, which is one of the respects for appreciating the novel *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*. The paper aims to study the translation of temporal dialect on the basis of the examples from *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*.

1.1 Dialect

Dialect is a linguistic variety and can be deemed to be subdivisions of a particular language, which is different from other varieties in respects of grammar, vocabulary and phonology (Chambers & Trudgill, 1990, pp.3-5).

There are several different methods to classify the dialect. Based on the user of language, Catford (1965, pp.85-89) has divided dialect into geographical dialect, temporal dialect, social dialects, and idiolect. Geographical dialect refers to dialect used in different regions; social dialect is used by people with different social status, age, gender and other aspects; idiolect involves the differentiation and habit of language usage among different people; and temporal dialect is applied by people in different times. The paper mainly studies the temporal dialect in *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*.

1.2 Temporal Dialect

Temporal dialect refers to the linguistic variety related to the provenance of the language users and the message that has come into being in the time dimension (Catford, 1965, pp.85-89), which displays the language change over time, such as "Old English", "Middle English" and "Contemporary English". As we all know, people in different times have the specific language expressions. Terms such as "德先生" and "赛先生" show that the text is a product of the New Culture Movement in the time of around 1919 in China, while the expressions of "红卫兵" and "红小兵" define the text as in the time of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976. Translators are confronted with the difficulties in temporal dialect translation process owing to the different culture, history, politics between two countries, which

need them grasp the background knowledge to understand the meaning and context of temporal dialect as clearly as possible for the product of translation version.

1.3 *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*

Written in 2005 and published in 2006, *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* is one of the representative works of Mo Yan, which is a novel full of bold fantasy and creativity. It was awarded Fukuoka Asian Culture Awards in 2006 and the Second Dream of Red Mansion Awards and the Newman Prize for Chinese Literature in 2008.

Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out describes the vicissitude of fifth years in the countryside from 1951 to 2000. This novel explains the relationship between peasants and the land by focusing on the topic of land, and shows the new life and the positive and strong sprite of peasants in New China.

Mo Yan applies to the Chinese translation written style, that is, Chapter Titles (Zhanghui in Chinese), to complete this novel that observes the change of countryside through different animals' eyes, which is the noticeable feature of this novel. In addition, *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* is filled with a great many dialects in Mo Yan's hometown—Gaomi, to show the rural life in Gaomi. Temporal dialects should be thought highly of, for this novel is related to fifty-year history in China, which is beneficial to the comprehension of this novel's characteristics and theme.

2. SCOPE AND BACKGROUND OF CONSTRUAL THEORY

The capacity of construing the same situation with the alternative ways refers to construal, which mainly includes specificity, domain, background, perspective, and prominence (Langacker, 1991, p.4). Construal can explain why people have different expressions with the same subject, which is applicable to the cognitive process of translation. Translation process contains two steps, that is, the understanding of the source language text and the expression of target language text. During these two activities, the construal ways between the author and translator are generally different. However, no matter how translators construe the original, it is of great significance that the construal result of translator is the same as the author.

Scope and background share the common core, which are relevant with encyclopedic knowledge or background knowledge. In accordance with the cognitive domain, scope is the configuration of the conceptual content activated (Wang, 2006, p.25), which is the array of content a predication specially evokes for its characterization (Langacker, 1987, p.4). The maximally prominent entity designated is called profile, which can be thought of the focal point, while scope is describable as the context

necessary for the characterization of the profile (Ibid., p.118). The semantic value is founded by the combination of both profile and base.

Cognitive domain is the relevant conceptualized field in which semantic items can be described. Langacker (1987, pp.148-150) puts forward that domain can be divided into basic domain and nonbasic domain which are also called abstract domain. The former usually means three dimension domains, color domain, taste domain, touch domain, and so on, while the latter any complicated concept, such as body of human beings, the rules of game, kinship network, and so on.

According to the scale, scope can be divided into maximal scope and immediate scope. Maximal scope is the total contents of concept activated, which is the semantic base of certain expression, while immediate scope has limited scale, directly relevant with a specific purpose and it is metaphorically defined as the "onstage region", the general region of viewing attention (Langacker, 2008, p.63). The word "Arm" is the immediate scope for the "elbow" and "hand", while "body" is the maximal scope for "arm", "elbow" and "hand".

In the process of construing some concept, the domains evoked may be multitudinous. For example, the construal of the "pants" may activate material domain, color domain, emotion domain and so on which are basic domain. And abstract domain also can be evoked. For instance, the expression "clothes" constitutes an abstract of "pants", whose function domain is preventing cold or for beauty. In this example, "pants" is the immediate scope of "shorts", and "clothes" is the maximal scope for "pants" and "shorts". The notion "shorts" evokes the direct mental access to *pants*, which in turns evoke "clothes".

Cognitive linguistics holds the point that the construing process of meaning is within scope made up of encyclopedic knowledge. In the translation process, the conceptualization of linguistic units is formed with the reference of certain encyclopedic knowledge. Translators can activate the relevant scopes stored in mind and the entity construed can be separated to prominent part and background knowledge.

3. SCOPE AND BACKGROUND DIMENSIONS AND TRANSLATION OF TEMPORAL DIALECT

Encyclopedic knowledge is necessary for the translation, for temporal dialect exhibits the characteristics of people in specific time. According to dimensions of scope and background in Construal theory, cognitive domains provide the reference and background for the cognition of temporal dialect in the original and its translation version, which establish the encyclopedic knowledge. Translators can give an outstanding translation version for temporal dialect only if they possess the encyclopedic knowledge.

Consequently, temporal dialect should be translated under the guidance of scope and background dimension in Construal theory as well as the adoption of the suitable translation methods for the benefit of the understanding of the original. Several cases of temporal dialect are analyzed in the following to illustrate that scope and background dimensions in Construal theory are feasible to guide the translation of temporal dialect with the translation methods for the purpose of avoiding mistranslation, maintaining the feature of temporal dialect and providing enjoyable reading experience for western readers.

Example 1:

……一个大好人，竟被他们<u>五花大绑</u>着，推到桥头上，枪毙了！(Mo, 2006, p.4)

…a good and decent man, was t*russed up like a criminal*, marched off to a bridgehead, and shot! (Goldblatt, 2008)

The temporal dialect "五花大绑" is one of the ways of arresting and binding the criminal. Abstract domain "binding a criminal" should be activated to translate, for the basic domains are not helpful for the comprehension of the original here. In light of the scope and background, Goldblatt renders it into "truss up like a criminal" with the application of liberal translation and annotation, which activate the abstract domain of "五花大绑". The phrase "truss up" expresses the meaning of "五花大绑" and the annotation of simile "like a criminal" helps readers clearly understand this temporal dialect. Based on the encyclopedic knowledge of this temporal dialect, Goldblatt conveys the meaning of the temporal dialect "五花大绑" to western readers, which is beneficial for their comprehension of the way that Ximen Nao is arrested vividly.

Example 2:

……但赶车的人却不是我家的<u>长工</u>. (Mo, 2006, p.7)

…but the man on the wagon was not one of my <u>hired hands</u> (Goldblatt, 2008).

The basic cognitive domains of temporal dialect "长工" can be "workers", "hired person", "helper", "working for long term period" and so on. The meaning of "长工" in its cognitive domain is the peasants who are hired by landlord for long term period before 1949. These basic cognitive domains should be evoked in mind while Goldblatt chooses suitable expressions and translation methods to translate this temporal dialect. In addition, the abstract domain of "hand" in English can be labor, which is a usual and idiomatic expression for western readers. Golblatt digs out its meaning of "长工" with the help of his encyclopedic knowledge and the background of the context, and then employs scope and background principles to further explain this temporal dialect, which is conducive to the comprehension of this temporal dialect and the original for western readers. The explanation can make the relationship between Ximen Nao and "长工" get through to western readers who are lacking of encyclopedic knowledge.

Example 3:

既要应付游击队, 又要应付黄皮子. (Mo, 2006, p.10)

I had to cope with the guerrillas and *the puppet soldiers* (Goldblatt, 2008).

The temporal dialect "黄皮子" is the term for Chinese soldiers helping Japanese army carry out military activities during the Anti-Japanese War. This temporal dialect expresses the detestation of "黄皮子". The basic domain of "黄皮子" is "people in yellow clothes", while the abstract domain is "the Chinese soldiers, whose uniform is in yellow, controlled by Japanese army", which should be activated during the construal of this temporal dialect. The abstract domain of "puppet" is the person controlled by others. Based on the domains and encyclopedic knowledge evoked in his mind, Goldblatt construes temporal dialect "黄皮子" as the soldiers like puppets controlled by Japanese army, and thus paraphrases "黄皮子" as "puppet soldiers" in light of scope and background dimensions. The word "puppet" help western readers clearly realize the attitude of people in that time toward "黄皮子".

Example 4:

我的主人出身贫苦，根正苗红. (Mo, 2006, p.20)

My master was born to poverty, *a member of the proletariat, red as could be* (Goldblatt, 2008).

The temporal dialect "根正苗红" is a special term in a time when poor peasants or proletariats are highly recognized while rich peasants or capitalists are cracked down. The basic domains of "根正苗红" are category domain, space domain and color domain, that is, "root and seeding of a plant", "straight", and "red", which can be extended into the abstract domain, that is, "poor peasants or proletariats recognized". Owing to the lack of Chinese political background for western readers, literal translation would make western readers confused. Therefore, Goldblatte selects its abstract domain to translate it into "a member of the proletariat" with the application of paraphrasing and chooses color domain to render it into "red as could be" with the application of literal translation to modify the expression. With the combination of free translation and literal translation, the meaning of the temporal dialect "根正苗红" and its political background can be conveyed clearly and vividly to target readers.

Example 5:

我代表党, 代表政府, 代表西门屯的穷爷们儿. (Mo, 2006, p.21)

I represent the Party, the government, and *the impoverished residents* of Ximen Village (Goldblatt, 2008).

The basic domains of "穷爷们儿" are "poor person" and "male", and the abstract domain is "residents". In addition, the immediate scope of "穷爷们儿" is "poor men", and the maximal scope is "poor residents". In this context, "穷爷们儿" means poor residents in the whole village instead of just "poor men". As a result, Goldblatt chooses the maximal scope in the abstract domain to offer an accurate translation. With this background and encyclopedic knowledge, Goldblatt employs explanation in light of principle of scope and background to translate the temporal dialect "穷爷们儿" into "impoverished residents". The meaning of the temporal dialect "穷爷们儿" can be transferred to the western target readers without leading to the misunderstanding.

Example 6:

……自然也包括西门金龙和西门宝凤那两个地主崽子. (Mo, 2006, p.21)

…including, of course, those two *landlord brats* Ximen Jinlong and Ximen Baofeng (Goldblatt, 2008).

"地主崽子", a derogatory expression, means the kid of landlord. In the process of translation, Goldblatt evokes the basic domains of "地主崽子" in mind, that is, "an abusive expression", "child", "landlord's family". In English, "brat" is also a derogatory word, whose basic domains are "an abusive expression" and "kid". The cognitive domains of "brat", similar to "崽子", provide the reference for the cognition of this word and establish the encyclopedic knowledge. Goldblatt further explains the phrase "地主崽子" into "landlord brat" with the reference and background of basic domains which consist of the encyclopedic knowledge and background knowledge. Guided by scope and background principles, further explanation can express the speaker's attitude toward Ximen Jinlong and Ximen Baofeng, which is conducive to western readers' understanding of this temporal dialect and the context.

Example 7:

……一群杂姓人, 混在一起, 一个锅里摸勺子, 哪里去找好. (Mo, 2006, p.22)

… so what good is *putting strangers together to eat out of the same pot*? (Goldblatt, 2008)

The temporal dialect "一个锅里摸勺子" is to describe the situation of sharing food in the period of Agricultural Cooperative in China. The basic domain of "一个锅里摸勺子" is "using many scoops in one pot", which can be extended to the abstract domain, that is, "people sharing the food in the same pot" in this context. According to scope and background dimensions in Construal theory, encyclopedic knowledge of this temporal dialect and background knowledge of this context can be formed by the abstract domain evoked, which can be conducive to the construal of this temporal dialect. Therefore, Goldblatt paraphrases "一个锅里摸勺子" as "putting strangers together to eat out of the same pot" with the guidance of scope and background.

CONCLUSION

Temporal dialect plays an important role in revealing the theme of the novel *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* and it is a necessity to translate it well for western readers.

In the process of translating temporal dialect, a good translator should have enough encyclopedic knowledge and background knowledge to the original work and target language text. According to the scope and background in Construal theory, cognitive domains activated in translators' mind can be the reference and support of the establishment of encyclopedic knowledge, which can be used to avoid the mistranslation. Suitable translation methods, such as literal translation, paraphrasing, etc., should be applied while translating temporal dialect under the guidance of scope and background in Construal theory to convey the encyclopedic knowledge about temporal dialect correctly.

REFERENCES

Catford, G. (1965). *A linguistic theory of translation: An essay in applied linguistics*. London: Oxford University Press: OUP.

Chambers, J. K., & Trudgill, P. (1990). *Dialectology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Goldblatt, H. (2008). *Life and death are wearing me out*. New York: Arcade Publishing.

Langacker, R. W. (1987). *Foundations of cognitive grammar: Theoretical prerequisites (Vol.1)*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Langacker, R. W. (1991). *Foundations of cognitive grammar: Descriptive application (Vol. II)*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Langacker, R. W. (2008). Cognitive Grammar: A basic introduction. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mo, Y. (2006). *Sheng si pi lao*. China: Writers Publishing House.

Wang, N. (2013). The reposition of translation and culture. *Chinese Translators Journal,* (2), 5-11.

Wang, Y. (2006). *An introduction to cognitive grammar*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.