

On the Inter-Subjectivity in Translation: Viewed from “Triangulation” Model

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Abstract

Most studies of inter-subjectivity are about the translators' subjectivity, which pay less attention to the subjectivity of writers and readers. Some papers center on binary dialogue among translation subjects, and place one subject in the center. Based on Davidson's triangulation model, the paper provides a clearer ternary dialogue for inter-subjectivity. Davidson adopts “triangulation” to express the person-person-world interaction in the language communication. Translation, as the cross-cultural communication involving many subjects, is the result of the triangulation among the subjects. Triangulation in translation should be: a writer, a source text and a translator; a translator, a target text and a target reader.

Based on triangulation, the paper creates distance and width among a writer, a source text and a translator; a translator, a target text and a target reader to discuss the inter-subjectivity. Adjusting the distance and width to approach the optimized triangle is to explore how to achieve the best translation. Based on these two three-dimensional multi-directional interactions with triangulation, the paper achieves the fusion of visual realms among the translation subjects.

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

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INTRODUCTION

Since the twentieth century, more and more western traditional philosophical theories concerning about subject and subjectivity have been brought under suspicion, thus, the trend has turned from subjectivity to inter-subjectivity. Inter-subjectivity refers to correlation and relevance with others when man is regarded as subject in objectified activity. The theoretical development of philosophical inter-subjectivity is credited to philosophical movement of Phenomenology advocated by Edmund Husserl. (Smith, B. 1995)

Edmund Husserl first published his work on inter-subjectivity in the Cartesian Meditations in 1929, which inspired contemporary thinkers in psychotherapy, psychological research and the human sciences. Husserl thought that, the visual object of the external shaped and other persons' movements indicated their interiority.

From then on, Max Scheler, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Sartre, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Alfred Schutz and other philosophers began to study the inter-subjectivity. The theory of communicative action put forward by Uergen Habermas was of far-reaching significance. It originated and established inter-subjectivity research in a social and historical way, and took inter-subjectivity as the central issue.

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. It's accepted that the translation activity is a process that involves several interactive subjects including the original author, the translator and the target reader. The equal subjects coexist in translation activity, and they interact and cooperate to convey the artistic and aesthetic pleasure of the original text.

Of those previous relevant studies of inter-subjective in translation, all of them theoretically verify the inevitable

shift from subjectivity to inter-subjectivity in translation, or just describe the communicative relationship from the perspective of inter-subjectivity, or from philological, structural linguistic or deconstructive perspective. This paper not only applies Davidson’s Triangulation model of communication by language to inter-subjectivity, but also creates variables to explain triangulations models. It makes attempt to explain how the subjects coordinate to achieve the best translation.

1. INTER-SUBJECTIVITY AND TRIANGULATION

In philosophy, the concept of inter-subjectivity should be defined within the interrelationship between self and others with language acting as the medium; because of the practicality and sociality of human existence, the study of inter-subjectivity should never be separated from the social background of subjects.

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 Xinle, 2001, p.162). Liu (Liu Weidong, 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 study of inter-subjectivity in translation has become a more independent discipline involving varied theories in many fields, and it has gone different period:

Philological Paradigm: Generally speaking, the translators in this period advocate not verbal expression but implicit sensing with the so-called “power of understanding”, so the nature of translation study in this period is pre-scientific.

Structural Linguistic Paradigm: The structural paradigm stresses the common properties of languages. However, it completely dispells the translator’s subjectivity and over emphasizes on the objectivity as well as the structure of different languages.

Deconstructive Paradigm: In deconstructive paradigm, the translator, the first reader of the text, is an active subject without any restriction of regularity in translating and his subjectivity is extremely exaggerated.

Constructivist Paradigm: In this paradigm, translation turns into a cross-cultural communication, taking a series of basic issues of translation studies into consideration. Inter-subjective understanding and communication become the focus of the study translator’s subjectivity.

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. 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.

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 support. Both of them are insufficient in studies. Only to combine these two together can the translation achieve a more reasonable interpretation about the translation subject issue.

2. TRIANGULATION MODEL OF COMMUNICATION BY LANGUAGE

Davidson uses triangulation to reveal the relationship between exchanging subjects in language communication and the world they face. The relationship between the exchanging subjects and their common world is social causation, which reflects that what the subjects communicate is caused by the events and objects in their common world. One creature’s statement or thought is not only from external events and objects, but also influenced by another creature’s similar reaction.

2.1 The Definition of Triangulation

With regard to the problems, like what kind of causes in external world deciding the thoughts generates ideological similarities in externalism, Davidson brought in “world” to establish direct relations with perceptive externalism. He placed the “world” in the causal relationships and created a triangulation model, structured by two similar creatures and the objective world they can distinguish in perception: these two creatures were located at two apexes of the triangulation, and the object causing their similar reactions was located at another apex. Hence, the identification of ideological object can be based on the world. However, without one creature observing another creature, there won’t be a triangulation in a common world involving relevant objects.

The cause provokes these two creatures’ similar reactions, which can be called common cause. For example, two creatures both observe a tiger. They are both stimulated by the tiger and react to the stimulation. Their sights converge at the common stimulation. Davidson attaches importance to the exchanges of the two creatures. He thinks, without the signal transmission between the observing points, a triangulation won’t exist.

2.2 The Model of Triangulation

If someone is the speaker of a language, there must be another sentient being whose innate similarity responses are sufficiently like his own to provide an answer to the

question, what is the stimulus to which the speaker is responding? On the other hand, the speaker's responses are linguistic, they must be knowingly and intentionally responded to specific stimuli. The speaker must have the concept of the stimulus—of the bell, or of tables. Since the bell or a table is identified only by the intersection of two (or more) sets of similarity responses (lines of thought, we might almost say), to have the concept of a table or a bell is to recognize the existence of a triangle, one apex of which is oneself, the second apex another a creature similar to oneself, and the third an object (table or bell) located in a space thus made common. (Davidson, D., 2001a)

According to the above, a triangle in the following can be drawn.

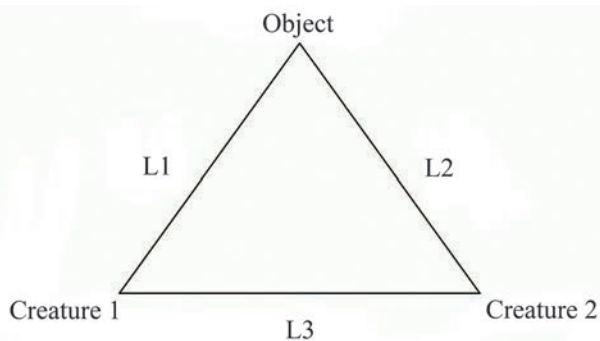


Figure 1

The Relationship Among L1, L2 and L3. L1: relationship between Object and Creature1; L2: relationship between Object and Creature 2; L3: relationship between Creature 1and Creature 2.

The only way of knowing that the second apex of the triangle -- creature 2 reacting to the same object as creature 1, is to know that creature 2 has the same object in mind. But creature 2 must also know that creature 1 constitutes an apex of the same triangle and he occupies another apex. And both creature 1 and creature 2 find out their reaction similar, but these two creatures must react to each other's reactions, that's, L1 & L3 and L2 & L3 must interact and establish relationships.

If two persons are to know of each other, they are so related and their thoughts are so related, and it requires that they be in communication. Each of them must speak to the other and be understood by the other. They don't have to mean the same thing by the same words, but they must be an interpreter of the other.

2.3 The Essence of Triangulation Model of Communication by Language

In Davidson's opinion, communication starts from the polymerization of the causes. Hence, if the communication is defined as the truth belief caused by the same event and object, then one creature's sentences have the same meaning with those of other creatures.

Just like Davidson said, it takes two points of view to give a location to the cause of a thought, and thus to define its content. We may think of it as a form of triangulation: each of two persons is reacting differentially to sensory stimuli streaming in from a certain direction. Projecting the incoming lines outward, the common cause is at their intersection. If the two persons now observe each other's reactions (in the case of language, verbal reactions), each can correlate these observed reactions with his or her stimuli from the world. A common cause thus is determined. The triangle which gives content to thought and speech is complete. But it takes two to triangulate.

The first person acquires the same knowledge of the world, and the second too, and these two communicators realize that they share the same world, and the triangulation can be built. So knowledge of other minds and knowledge of the world are mutually dependent; neither is possible without the other. Shown as 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.

3. 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".

3.1 Translation System Structure of Triangulation

Generally, the heated discussion about inter-subjectivity includes: the inter-subjectivity between a translator and a sponsor; the inter-subjectivity between a translator and a source text; the inter-subjectivity between a translator and a writer; the inter-subjectivity between a translator and a target reader, etc, which often involves two subjects. In the following, the inter-subjectivity among three subjects will be discussed in a triangular.

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

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

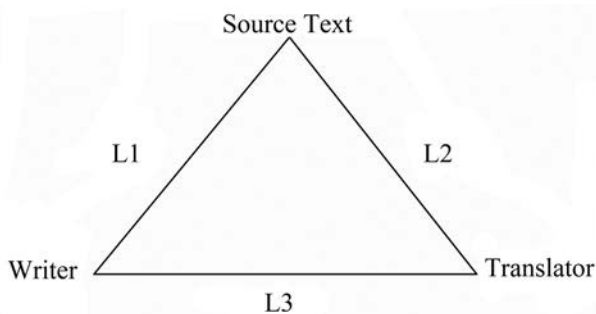


Figure 2
These Three Subjects -- a Writer, a Translator and a Source Text, Occupy three Apexes in Davidson’ Triangulation. The source text is located on the top and equal to the object in creatures’ common world; the writer is located at one apex and equal to creature 1, representing X language user; and the translator is located at another apex and equal to creature 2, representing Y language user. Thus, L1 represents the interaction between the writer and the source text, and L2/L3...

Triangulation mode of communication by language stresses the subjectivity and autonomy of the communication participants. The writer, as the creator, creates the work with his experiences. The translator has his own pre-structure or pre-understanding of the source text, and he definitely brings in his own understanding into the translation, which all reflects his subjectivity while the source text has time distance with the writer and released from the writer’s contextual correlates, that’s to say, once the source text finished, it already becomes a dependent object.

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.

3.3 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:

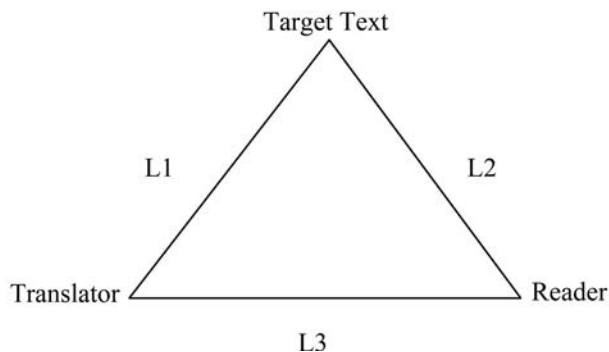


Figure 3
The Subjects -- a Translator, a Reader and a Target Text, Occupy Three Apexes in Davidson’ Triangulation. The target text is located on the top and equal to the object in creatures’ common world; the translator is located at one apex and equal to creature 1; and the reader is located at another 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.

4. STUDY OF VARIABLES GUIDED BY TRIANGULATION MODEL

To solve the ambiguity of the cause concept, Davidson introduced “distance” and “width”. Here, the paper applies these two variables, but a little different from Davidson’s “distance” and “width”, to discuss how to coordinate translation subjects’ inter-subjectivity to achieve high-quality translation.

4.1 Distance

In Davidson’s opinion, “distance” refers to the location of the relevant stimuli that generates communication, that is, it’s near us or far away from us. 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.

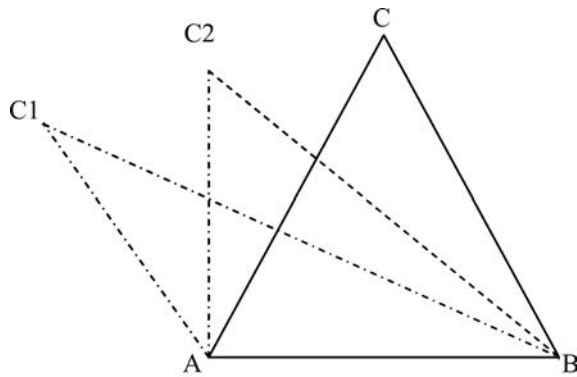


Figure 4
Triangle ABC is Perfect, While Triangle ABC1 and ABC2 can be Equal to Triangle ABC Through Improving its Length Related (A/B: Creature, C: Object, C1/C2: Changing location of the Object). Next, subjects' relationship in translation will be discussed using the diagram above.

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

According to Figure 4, the triangular of Writer-Translator-Source Text (W-T-ST) Structure will be:

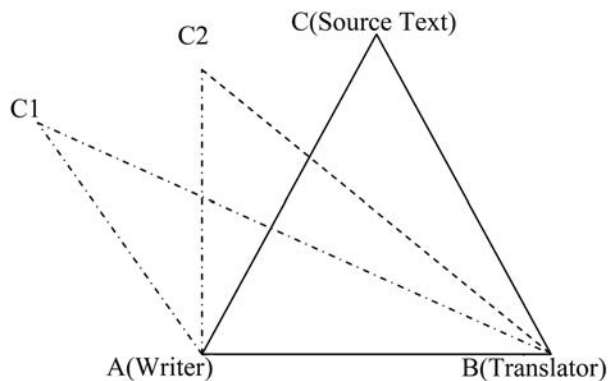


Figure 5
As Shown in The Triangulation, when the Distances Between a Writer, a Translator and a Source Text are Equal, it's the Perfection.

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. For some reasons, like writer's self-emotions, backgrounds, preferences, etc, the source text is definitely nearer to the writer. When the source text contains more personal stuff, that is, the distance between the writer and the source text is shorter, it is definitely harder for the translator to fully master the source text, that is, the distance between the translator and the source text is longer.

Translation in fact is a pursuing process from triangle ABC1 and ABC2 to approaching triangle ABC. That is,

the source text has the same distance with that of a writer and a translator, which means the translator has exactly the same understanding just as the writer creates the source text, and high-quality translation can be achieved. Therefore, a translator should work hard to achieve the best coordination with the source text and the writer.

4.1.2 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:

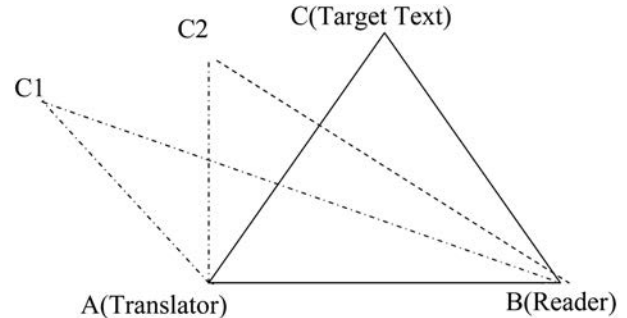


Figure 6
As Shown in the Triangulation, when the Distances Between a Translator, a Target Reader and a Target Text are Equal, it's the Perfection.

That's to say, the relationship between the target reader and target text is almost the same as that between the translator and the target text. Every reader has his own understanding of the same work. A translator, as the special reader of the source text, of course, has his own understanding of the source text, which would be brought into the target text definitely. And in some way, such reasons would influence the target reader.

In the same way, if the target text contains more personal factors of translator, it means the distance between the translator and the target text is shorter, and the target text is difficult for the target reader to understand. It reveals that the distance between the target reader and the target text is longer.

In order to achieve the perfect target text, the translator has to pursue the process of getting the structure of triangle ABC from triangle ABC1 and ABC2. That is, the target text has the same distance with the translator and the target reader, which means the target reader can understand the target text just as the translator does, and high-quality translation can be achieved.

4.2 Width

In Davidson's opinion, "width" refers to the amount of causes in the belief having relationship with the contents of the belief. Here, "width" refers to the amount of information one subject owns of another subject in triangulation, which can be drawn like the following graph. That's, if one subjects owns more information of another, then the line will be wider, in adverse, the line will be narrower.

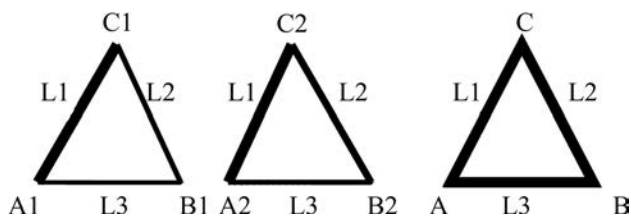


Figure 7

In the Above Figure, Triangle ABC is the Perfection, in Which the Width of L1, L2 and L3 is Equal, While Triangle A1B1C1 and Triangle A2B2C2 are Similar to Triangle ABC but not Exact (A/B, A1/B1, A2/B2: Creature, C/C1/C2: Object). Next, specific subjects’ relationship in translation will be discussed using the above triangles.

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

As shown in Figure 7, A/A1/A2 represents the writer, B/B1/B2 represents the translator and C/C1/C2 represents the source text, while the width of L1/L2/L3 represents the amount of information between subjects. Therefore, when the amount of information between a writer and a translator, a writer and a source text, a translator and a source text are equal, it’s the perfection (Triangle ABC). There’s no doubt that, the amount of information between the writer and the source text is fixed like triangle ABC. However, the amount of information a translator masters about the writer and the source text is unfixed and changeable, like triangle A1B1C1 and triangle A2B2C2. If the translator knows more about the writer and the source text, it definitely influences his translation.

It’s clear that, triangle ABC is the destination, which means that the information of the writer and the source text the translator has is equal to that of the writer and the source text. Triangle A1B1C1 and triangle A2B2C2 shows the gradual changes approaching perfect Triangle ABC. Thus, in the practical translation, a translator should broaden his understanding of the writer and the source text, and he needs abundant knowledge to optimize the target text.

4.2.2 Translator-Reader-Target Text (T-R-T T) Structure

As shown in Figure 7, A/A1/A2 represents a translator, B/B1/B2 represents a target reader and C/C1/C2 represents target text, while the width of L1/L2/L3 represents the amount of information between subjects. When the amount of information between a translator and a reader, a translator and a target text, a reader and a target text are equal, it’s the perfection. There’s no doubt that, the amount of information between a translator and the target text is fixed like triangle ABC. However,

the amount of information about the translator and the target text which the target reader masters is unfixed and changeable, like triangle A1B1C1 and triangle A2B2C2.

If the target reader knows more about the translator and the target text, it definitely influences his understanding and appreciation. Triangle ABC is the goal, which means that reader’s information of the translator and the target text is equal to that of the translator and the target text. Triangle A1B1C1 and triangle A2B2C2 shows the gradual changes approaching perfect Triangle ABC. Hence, it’s required that, a translator tries his best to convey the information completely to the target reader, that’s, a translator should present highly qualified target text to the target reader.

CONCLUSION

Triangulation model provides us with a new perspective for translation studies and translator’s inter-subjectivity. No translation can be appropriately generated without inter-subjectivity activities. Triangulation model presents a pluralistic interactive perspective, and it builds a bridge to fill the gaps of the subject, the inter-subjectivity and the object, and makes it possible to interpret meaning from the interaction between people and the world.

In the triangulation model, there exists a co-existed harmonious relationship between translation subjects. They depend on each other and can’t be replaced by each other. To achieve a successful translation, all these subjects should carry out equal dialogue continuously. And the triangulation model not only provides a multi-interactive platform to optimize translation, but stresses the equal importance of all the subjects in translation activities.

Every high-quality translation results from the triangulation of translation subjects. Optimizing translation means: 1) the distances between three subjects approaching equal, the relationship between the translator and the source text is just the same as that between the writer and the source text, which would never realize but would be the constant task; so is it with the writer, the target text and the target reader; 2) the amount of information between the writer and the translator, the writer and the source text, the translator and the source text are equal; so is it with the writer, the target text and the target reader.

This paper is just a tentative study of the application of Davidson’s triangulation model to inter-subjectivity, and it is impossible to cover every facet in depth in translation studies. We should go further to combine new ideas and theories with inter-subjectivity to guide practical translation and try to apply the new models to the practical translation activities.

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