To be Dominated, or to Carve out Its Own Niche?—Embodiment of “The Politics of Translation” in Interpreting Foreign Affairs

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Abstract. Since “The politics of translation” written by Gayatti Chakravotorty Spivak came out, the research on thought of Spivak’s post-colonialism has become a heated topic which has been analyzed and interpreted from various perspectives. However, how to place the thought into practice, especially the thought on the relationship among rhetoric, logic and silence as well put forward with by Spivak, has not been elucidated clearly nationwide. This essay tries to combine the theory expounded by Spivak in her famous essay “the politics of translation” with its practice on interpreting of foreign affairs in China in order to explain the essence of her thought more clearly and more practically.

Introduction and Research Status in Mainland of China

Born in Calcutta, Gayatti Chakravotorty Spivak is one of the most eminent literary and cultural critics of our time. She was educated in India and America, and received her PhD from Cornell University. She has taught in university in America, Australia, Saudi Arabia, Europe, and India. Currently a professor of Comparative Literature at Columbia University, she was the Andrew Mellon Professor of English at the University of Pittsburgh.

She is best known for the essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” considered one of the founding texts of postcolonialism, and for her translation of and introduction to Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology (De la grammatologie)*. Through elaborating the thought from her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak” and her purpose on translation of *Of Grammatology*, it could be clearly reflected that Spivak assumes a systematic Marxist/deconstructive feminist stance, critiquing the phenomenon of colonialism/nationalism, and theorizing its connection to consciousness and class issues. She self-consciously positions herself in differing locations such as 'first world theorist', 'diasporic intellectual', 'teacher', and 'Indian woman'...

Since the publication of “the politics of translation”, Gayatti Chakravorty Spivak’s thought on translation has become a much-talked-about topic and always been analyzed and explored from the perspective of post-colonialism. Among the researchers, some representatives or authorities in doing research on the thought of Spivak have presented in details her thought from various angles. I make attempt to list typical essays to tease out the present situation on research about Spivak’s ideology on “the politics of translation”. For example, “Interpretation on Translation From the Point of View of Post-colonialism—Thought on the politics of translation written by Spivak” published by xiaoliang Yuan, tries to interpret Spivak’s view and analyzes the strength and limitation of translation theory based on post-colonialism [2]. Xiaoping, Fei, who is one of the authorities in doing researching in Spivak’s post-colonialism thought, wrote “the Politics of Translation”: A Cultural Approach to Translation. This essay argues that the discussion on “the politics of the translation” enables the research on translation to remove from the traditional research of translation to the cultural research in which the conflicts, dialogue and mixture among different cultures are highlighted so as to strengthen the link between translation and culture and promote the national and cultural identity at the global level[3]. “The Exploration on the Thought of Translation of Spivak” wrritten by yuhong Li examines comprehensively the thought of Spivak and tries to explore the rich essence of her thought from the four aspects: the nature of translation, translation as a
violence, translation as a reading and translation in general[4]. Xiaoping Fei finished his doctoral thesis titled *The politics of translation—the Research of Translation and Culture* in 2004, which has been the representative work and required book as well on exploring the thought of Spivak. The dissertation tries to present the power of consciousness and unconsciousness during the course of translating, and trace the history of related theories and make some discussion on them[5]. Zhiheng Zhang finished his master’s thesis from the field of interpreting: *The politics of translation In the Field of C-E Interpretation of Foreign Affairs*. The paper starts with the theoretical framework including the origin, representative theories, and current academic situation. It emphasizes the root-causes and references of the politics of translation in Chinese-English interpretation of foreign affairs, especially, the differentiation in ideologies determining the inclination of the interpretation that is carried out by human beings. Finally, the argument is complemented by the instances of Chinese-English interpretation, which deepens the analysis of the theories. This is considered to be beneficial to the practice of both translation and interpretation[6]. “Rethinking on the politics of translation and concept of translation” written by Ping Yang points out that with the spread of deconstruction and cultural turn in translation studies, the subjects of ideology and power relations become an important area of study. The politics of translation manifests itself in many fields such as religion, literature, feminism and post-colonialism. Politics and ideology play their parts in translator’s motivation, the choice of text materials and the employment of translation strategies. Viewed from a political perspective, translatology should be reevaluated in terms of its nature, standards and the role of translator[7].

From what have been mentioned above, thought on Spivak has been dug out more and more and the exploration has been conducted much further, how to place the thought of the politics of translation into practice, especially the relationship among rhetoric, logic and silence as well put forward with by Spivak, however, has not been interpreted clearly nationwide. This essay tries to combine the theory expounded by Spivak in her famous essay “the politics of translation” with its practice on interpreting in the field of foreign affairs in China in order to explain the essence of her thought more clearly and more practically.

**Interpretation of Spivak’s thought of “The Politics of Translation”**

**Several Questions before Approaching to “The Politics of Translation”**

There are several questions before approaching to “The Politics of Translation”: 1. What is the standard of a translation/interpreting activity from your (readers’) own perspective? 2. Do you think a translation/interpreting performance is viewed as a satisfactory work because the translator/interpreter conveys the basic, accurate, even entire meaning of the original text or speaker? Traditionally, the status of translator is regarded as subordinated or inferior to the author. Moreover, the issue on quality of translation is always called into question from one batch of readers to another, from one group of critics to another.

**Traditional Way and Spivak’s ideology on How Goes into the Meaning of the Original Text**

However, Spivak does not treat translation only as a kind of activity to convey meaning of original text. She refutes the privilege of original text and proposes original text always opening up to the outside. She argues that there is no stable identity or stable original text, in other words, meaning of original text is always in the course of dissemination. In “The the politics of translation”, thought above is also embodied, highlighting the dissemination of the meaning such as ‘such a dissemination cannot be under our control,’[8] which reflects her deconstructive thought.

How is the dissemination presented in the essay? In conventional philosophy, logic, grammar, and rhetoric as well are the foundation of humanistic science. Logic among them is regarded as superior to the other two. Grammar which enjoys the partnership with logic helps the logic to express idea in the correct way in order to show the preciseness and normalization of the text. Rhetoric, however, is viewed as a kind of violation of grammar which leads to the confusion of meaning. As a result, this convention misleads the role of rhetoric in the humanities.
Spivak as an opponent of traditional view to rhetoric removes the hierarchical relationship among them. At the same time the new relationship among logic, rhetoric and silence as well is set up. She points out “logic allows us to jump from word to word by means of clearly indicated connections. Rhetoric must work in the silence between and around words in order to see what works and how much.”[8]. Therefore, firstly, the ways in which “rhetoric or figuration disrupt logic themselves point at the possibility of random contingency”[8]—“uncertainty of meaning”. The status of logic has also been dethroned in this way. Then, she makes a metaphor in order to get readers better understood “by juggling the disruptive rhetoricity that breaks the surface in not necessarily connected ways we feel the selvedges of the language-textile give way, fray into frayages or facilitations.”[8]

How to Find the Real Meaning the Original Text Plans to Convey

Since the meaning is so-called “uncertainty”, she argues that translator should permit dissemination of meaning because meaning is no sealed or there is seemingly no stable meaning and “real” meaning is hidden behind the rhetoric and silence. So attention should be paid to the roles of rhetoric and silence through which the real meaning of original text could be explored. The meaning in dissemination could be embodied in rhetoric and appropriated via inbetween discourse, just as she mentioned that “if it is translated with an eye toward the dynamic staging of language mimed in the revision by the rules of the inbetween produced by literalist surrender.”[8]

In conclusion, in “The politics of translation”, Spivak addresses the role of translator, both in the familiar literal capacity and in a trans-cultural capacity, and says "the experience of contained alterity in an unknown language spoken in a different cultural milieu is uncanny." Actively seeking agency in language by commanding an ethical yet intimate translation and trans-culturalization, Spivak aims to question the very status of multicultural inquiries which focus on polarized notions of naïve (indigenous criticism) and sophisticated (post-colonial critiques), and says "post-structuralism has shown some of us a staging of the agent within a three-tiered notion of language(as rhetoric, logic, silence)."

The Politics of Translation Embodied in Interpreting of Foreign Affairs in China

From the aforementioned content, the theory of Spivak’s the politics of translation has been introduced and interpreted clearly, in this section I will try to combine the theory with the practice in the field of foreign affairs in China to show how the politics of translation is embodied in the developed and developing countries. Because China now is still viewed as the developing country, although it is developing fast and emerging and English is regarded as the universal language globally, which dominates the other languages under the influence of hegemony and powerful politics.

Example 1:
This example is selected from the answer to the question raised by a foreign journalist spoken by Primer Wen JiaBao in NPC and CPPCC. The interpreter translated it as follows: “As a big responsible country, China has acted in an active and responsible way during this crisis. We mainly rely on expanding effective domestic demand, particularly consumer demand, to boost economic growth. We have made timely adjustment to the direction of our macroeconomic policy, swiftly adopted a proactive fiscal policy and a moderately easy monetary policy, introduced ten measures to shore up domestic demand and put in place a series of related policies. Together, they make up a systematic and comprehensive package plan aimed at ensuring steady and relatively fast economic growth.”

The words such as “in an active responsible way”, “made timely adjustment”, “swiftly adopted”, “a systematic and comprehensive” are used really appropriately, which show the image of a great power who dares to meet the challenge from different levels, especially from the dominated world. While, it is clearly recognized that the “image of the great power”-China is not paid attention at the equal foot due to the hegemonic status of English in order to get the messages cross to the audience
in the conference. This example embodies the tension between the stable supreme position of English and the rising status of Chinese. In light of the publicity of medium and further development of overseas market, the China’s national interests need to be materialized through the deference to the hegemonic politics. How to resist the pressure from the first world? A comprehensive package plan has been put forward with and carried out, among which expanding the domestic demand, especially extending the consumer demand is regarded as a ground to prompt the economic growth.

If we abide by the advice from Spivak, we need to interpret it as literally as possible, words reflecting the basic stance of Chinese government, which is omitted by the onsite interpreter, should be translated as “fundamental footing” to represent that we, as a responsible county, should put the domestic requirement as the priority so as to help the others out rather than only rely on expanding effective domestic demand, particularly consumer demand, to boost economic growth so as to ensure the steady and relatively fast economic growth of ourselves, while the resolution to help the other out cannot be expressed clearly.

Example 2:
The second example is a heated issue about the Tibet Autonomous Region. The rendition is as follows: When the Tibet Autonomous Region was being organized and prepared in 1965, the Dalai Lama was actually chairman of the preparatory committee, Wen recalled. “But now he established a so-called exile government abroad and advocates the so-called high degree of autonomy for Tibet.” In his request, the Dalai Lama actually asks all the Chinese troops to withdraw from Tibet, and he even asks all Han people and people from other ethnic groups, rather than Tibetans, to leave Tibet as well, which reveals their real intention: hoping to reunify China or to undermine the territorial integrity of China, Wen said. "We need to observe what he says, and more importantly, we also need to watch what he does. I hope the Dalai Lama will be able to make contributions and do more things that are conducive to national unity and the development of Tibet," Wen said. —Premier: Door of dialogue open to Dalai Lama if he gives up "Tibet independence"[9].

The words such as exile government, high degree of autonomy for Tibet, undermine the territorial integrity of China really count in this speech, which could present the China’s firm and consistent position to the issue of Tibetan separation if they are translated appropriately, if they are translated inappropriately, however, the effect is extremely severe. Firstly, “exile government” translated appropriately by the interpreter tells the whole world that Tibet is an inseparable part of Chinese divine territory and Chinese government deny the validity of this temporary government. Secondly, the translation of “high degree of autonomy for Tibet” is selected arouses the sympathy among the audience with the “rhetoric sarcasm” to show the conflict between the national and regional autonomy advocated by Chinese government and so called “high degree of autonomy for Tibet”. Finally, the word “undermine” is selected instead of “break, ruin or destroy”, which reveals what kind of way this split force is used to bring the tremendous hurt to China gradually, dangerously and secretly so that the evil means could be disclosed more clearly. The rhetoric seems to disrupt the logic of surface of the text, actually, reflects the real intention that the speakers plans to convey to the audience from the third world or subordinated countries.

Summary
The politics of translation is a complex and stringent system because as long as there exists the regional diverse cultures, which needs to communicate and bridge and link, there must exist the politics of translation. When it comes to the field of foreign affairs between Chinese and English, the fundamental reason often lies in the disparity of ideology of two different cultures. However, the discrepancy of orientation and interests of diplomatic strategy and policy of foreign affairs is the immediate roots of the politics of translation. As the subject during the course of translation, translators are unconsciously or involuntarily manipulated, at least influenced by the ideology, political power. How should translators perform the appropriate role during the translation? Since language as the carrier of ideology generates the subtle relationship through translation, which makes significant the ideology between Chinese and English cultures. This essay analyzes in details
the theory of Spivak’s thought “the politics of translation”, then illustrates it with several practice in the area of foreign affairs. As a result, it helps to establish and clarify the relationship between the translation and ideology, the translators and translation and translators and ideology so as to make the embodiment of the politics of translation clearly.

From what have been mentioned above, as the branch of emerging post-colonialism, the politics of translation is concerned with the discrepancy of culture and power which gives rise to inequality among language. Under the support of national leaders who also act as the sponsors, the interpreters in the field of foreign affairs serve as the medium of politics and present the politics of translation and the politics of culture. Therefore, through the combination of theory of Spivak’s “the politics of translation” with the practice of interpreting during the course of foreign affairs, the politics of translation between the developed and developing countries, between the first and third world could be interpreted and reflected clearly in Interpreting of foreign affairs.

References