A Brief Study of Pragmatic Meaning Equivalence of Translation in College English Teaching

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Abstract: This paper mainly deals with pragmatic meaning equivalence of translation between source language and target language in terms of associative meaning, and also deals with meaning equivalence of translation from two different levels—lexical equivalence and textual equivalence, finally illustrates the significance of translation in college English teaching and learning.

Introduction

During the further study different branches of Linguistics and Semantics, more and more people feel that there is a close relation between semantics and translation. Translation is not only the transfer course of language, but also the course of cultural exchange in terms of interlingual communication. [Peng P25]. Almost every aspect of life in general and of the interaction between speech communities in particular can be considered relevant to translation, a discipline which has to concern itself with how meaning is generated within and between various groups of people in various cultural settings. [Baker, 4]. So, in translation between English and Chinese, people find that it is possible to have some different ways of translating a sentence from the point of view of grammar, but if we want to achieve the same expressive effect between source language and target language, we must understand and master the potential function and deep semantic structure and pragmatic meanings in each sentence, and also, should connect the specific context with translation.

Translation is a kind of interlingual communication. Therefore, translation between source language and target language should be equivalent in meaning. Because the style of source text language, the content of passage is totally different, the requirements and criteria are certainly different. Mona Baker in her book, In Other Words—A Course book on Translation, has proposed five kinds of equivalence, such as, equivalence at word level, equivalence above word level, grammatical equivalence, textual equivalence, and pragmatic equivalence. I think, no matter which kind of translation, the best important factor, which translators should consider, is semantic meaning of language. Semantic meaning can also be divided into surface meaning and deep meaning (pragmatic meaning). So in translation, the comprehension of words or sentences meaning is the basic and key factor. In fact, a word doesn’t only have a meaning which is direct, superficial or literal, but a meaning is connotative, affective or reflected, even social or collocative. To achieve the equivalence translation, the semantic meaning, especially pragmatic meanings in terms of associative meaning of words or sentences should be valued highly.

The Notion of Associative Meaning

Then, we should know the classification of meaning. Geoffrey Leech, the great British Linguist, in his book “Semantics”, breaks down meaning in seven different types, which are conceptual meaning, connotative meaning, social meaning, affective meaning, reflected meaning, collocative meaning and thematic meaning. He further classified the six types (excluding thematic meaning) into two categories in general: conceptual meaning and associative meaning. Leech summarizes connotative meaning, social meaning, affective meaning, reflected meaning and collocative meaning as associative meaning because “they all have the same open-ended, variable character.”

Associative meaning is variable because it is not the meaning in the word itself, but the association the speaker/writer has over or above the conceptual meaning of the expression. It varies.
from culture to couture, age-to-age, time to time. For example, A personnel deficit has existed for years. (renyuan duanque de qingkuang yijing henduo nian le.) Generally speaking, deficit is often translated as chizi, kuisun or niche in Chinese. In modern English, deficit gradually formed its associative meaning—buzu or duanque in Chinese. What’s more, if we translate this English sentence as “ren yuan kui sun / chi zi” in Chinese, it is difficult to be accepted by Chinese people.

Associative meaning is culture-specific. Language is deeply rooted in its culture, and it reflects the belief and feelings of the speakers in the community. Vocabulary as the basic component of language is, therefore, necessarily associated with the culture of the language. Let’s take color words for example. In Chinese notion, the color “red” symbolizes “passion”, “happiness”, so “hong bai xi shi” in Chinese couldn’t be translated word by word, it actually means weddings and funerals. “hong de fa zi” has its English associative meaning as “(of a person) extremely popular.” On the other hand, when we do English-Chinese translation, we should also pay more attention to the associative meaning of words. For example, in England, dog is considered as man’s best friend, so, the word “dog” is always used to imply human being, it can be proved from the following phrases or idioms: Every dog has his day (fan ren jie you de yi ri), Dog does not eat dog (tong lei bu xiang can), lucky dog (xing yunr) and so on.

The Meaning Equivalence of Translation in Terms of Associative Meaning

3.1. Supposed that, what does a translator do when there is no word in the target language, which expresses the same meaning as the source language word? Then the translator should consider the meaning equivalence between source language and target language. Due to the differences between source language and target language, the translators should not translate the text word by word. They should use some strategies to achieve the same expressive effect in terms of meaning equivalence. Here in this paper, meaning equivalence can be illustrated from two levels — lexical equivalence and textual equivalence.

3.2. As we mentioned above, associative meaning plays a very important role in cross-cultural communication, and it is quite variable. So the translators should consider the first level of meaning equivalence, that is lexical equivalence, in order to keep the feature of source language, let’s look at the following example, “qiao fu nan wei wu mi zhi chui”, which means Even the cleverest housewife can’t cook a meal without rice. Although, there is an English idiom like this, “one cannot make bricks without straw”. Such kind of translation sometimes would bring a certain misunderstanding.

Therefore, translators have to use some strategies to deal with the differences between the source and target texts in terms of meaning equivalence. There are main strategies illustrated as the following:

a) Translation by a more general word (super ordinate)
This is one of the commonest strategies for dealing with many types of meaning equivalence particularly in the area of associative meaning [Baker, p26]. For example, English words “pliers”, “pinchers”, “clipper” and “forceps” express the same kind of instrument, but in Chinese, there’s no equivalent word for each word, so the translator had better choose their super ordinate “qian zi” in Chinese.

b) Translation by cultural substitution
This strategy involves relating a culture-specific item or expression with a target language item, which does not have the same associative meaning but is likely to have a similar impact on the target reader[Baker, p31]. It is similar to Nida’s idea--functional equivalence. The main advantage of using this strategy is that it gives the reader a concept with which he/she can identify, sometimes, Chinese word “hong” could not be translated as “red” in English, but “green” or some other expression. “yi hong yuan” is translated as “Happy red court”, or “House of green delight”.

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Translation using a loan word or loan words plus explanation. This strategy is particularly common in dealing with culture-specific items, modern concepts, and buzzwords. [Baker, p34] Translation by paraphrase using unrelated words. If the concept expressed by the source item is not lexicalized at all in the target language, the paraphrase strategy can still be used in some context [Baker, p38]. For example, “catch –22” should be translated as “zuo you wei nan” in Chinese.

Naturally, there are other strategies to deal with the difference between source and target language. Here, we should not describe them in more details.

3.3. Generally speaking, collocations are faintly flexible patterns of language, which allow several variations in form. Idioms and fixed expressions are at the extreme end of the scale from collocations in one or both of these areas: flexibility of patterning and transparency of meaning. The main problems that idiomatic and fixed expression pose in translation relates to two main areas: the ability to recognize and interpret an idiom correctly; and the difficulties involved in rendering the various aspects of meaning that an idiom or a fixed expression conveys into the target language.

Some idioms are misleading, they seem transparent because they offer a reasonable literal interpretation and their idiomatic meanings are not necessarily signaled in the surrounding text. A large number of idioms in English, and probably all language have both a literal and an idiomatic meaning. Therefore, if translators emphasize the literal meaning too much, they must ignore the associative meaning, and cannot show the expressive effect of source text. What’s more, an idiom in the source language may have a very close counterpart in the target language, which looks similar on the surface but has a totally or partially different meaning. Let’s look at the examples between English and Chinese translation.

- storm in a tea cup (xi ti da zuo)
- throw caution to the winds (gan shi lu meng)
- food for thought (shen si shu lv)
- like a bat out of hell (heng chong zhi chuang)
- like water off a duck’s back (wu hao ying xiang)

3.4. The textual equivalence can be regarded as the super-level of meaning equivalence in translation. Here we discuss the translation difficulties between source and target language at the level of text by looking at cohesion. Cohesion is the network of lexical, grammatical, and other relations, which provide links between various parts of a text. Cohesion is a surface relation; it connects together the actual words and expressions that we can see and hear. Halliday and Hasan identify five main cohesive devices in English: reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion [Baker, p180]. Here we just discuss reference and conjunction in translation between source and target text. Every language has certain items, which have the property of reference in the textual sense. The most common reference items in English and a large number of other languages are pronouns. Third-person pronouns are frequently used to refer back to an entity, which has already been introduced into the discourse. Apart from personal reference, English also uses items such as the, this, and those to establish similar links between expressions in a text. What’s more, patterns of reference can vary considerably both within and across languages. However Chinese has a totally different pattern. Pronouns are hardly ever used and, once a participant is introduced, continuity of reference is signaled by omitting the subjects of following clauses. So, when we translate a Chinese text into an English text, or English into Chinese, sometimes we couldn’t find the most appropriate pronouns in target text have to keep accordance with the source text, to express the intention of the source text, we have to consider the source text from the meaning equivalence in order to different language features.

Conjunction is another device in English, which has a close relation to translation between source and target language. But, we should know that, languages vary tremendously in the type of conjunctions they prefer to use as well as the frequency with which they use such items. For example, Chinese prefer to use simpler and shorter structures and to mark the relations between these structures explicitly where necessary.
The significance of meaning equivalence of translation in college English teaching

As we discussed above, we know the equivalence of translation between source language and target language has no absolute criteria. It depends on the context, the aim of translation and other factors. It is obvious that the differences between source and target languages exist. So the translators should find an appropriate way of translation in order to make translation work perfect. Here, I think the most fundamental one is to keep the meaning equivalent between source and target text. Then the associative meaning should be valued during college English teaching. Teachers should have the awareness that communication is the main function of learning English. As one of the basic skills of learning language, translation should contribute to master and understand the linguistic and cultural differences between source language and target language.

References