Reverse Thinking is also Needed in Translation
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Abstract: Thinking is intimately bound up with language as well as translation. Reverse thinking which aims to seek for difference and creativity acts as guidance on translation practice, and also greatly promotes the development of translation theory and the discipline. Deconstructionism, based on reverse thinking, has brought a flourishing situation and different translation schools to translation studies.

Introduction
Nowadays translation studies have broken off the bondage of language switch and translation skills, displaying more and more interdisciplinary characteristics, one important aspect of which is the research between translation and thinking. It is justifiable to say that translation is more of thinking switch than language switch. “Language is only a sort of information vehicle and a means for linguistic switch; however, thinking is the basis of translation.”[1] Creativity in translation is primarily dependent on creative modes of thinking, including divergent thinking, reverse thinking, lateral thinking, non-linear thinking and open thinking. This paper aims to probe into the effect of reverse thinking on translation practice and theory.

Thinking, Language and Translation
Thinking is closely bound up with language because language is the most essential means of human communication and meanwhile because thinking cannot go without the vehicle of language. Li Ruihua says, “Without language, there is no way to show the form, style and content of thinking.”[2] Thinking dictates language, and the various modes of thinking contribute to diverse expressions of language. Language development leads to thinking development, and vice versa.

Translation is likely to take place just because all human races have something in common in modes of thinking. In Bao Huinan’s view, “Human’s common capability and law of thinking enable all peoples in the world to share some perceptions about the same matter. All human races live in the same world with their languages reflecting the commonalities of perception. Different as their languages are, they can employ the same concept, reasoning or judgment to denote a thing, explicate a word, tell reasons and express feelings.”[3] This is called ‘isomorph’ in thinking, and isomorph provides motivation for translation. According to Fang Mengzhi, “For the same content of thinking, different expressions may arise from different angles of thinking. The Chinese ‘yī jǔ liǎng dé’ (一举两得) or yī jiàn shuāng diāo (一箭双雕) may be ‘to kill two birds with one stone’ in English, ‘zwei Fliegen mit einer Klappe schlagen (meaning ‘a pat killing two flies’)’ in German, and ‘faire d’une pierre deux coups (meaning ‘a stone hitting two places’)’ in French.”[4] As can be seen from the above examples, translation is probable under different modes of thinking. Translation is imperative just because people speak different languages resulting from different thinking modes. Otherwise, if God had not deterred the building of the Babel tower, and all human races spoke the same language now, translation would not be necessary at all. Due to the geographical isolation, easterners and westerners may have different modes of thinking. Fu Lei once said, “Easterners and westerners are divergent in thinking. The former attach more importance
to synthesis, induction, hint and reservation, while the latter lay greater emphasis on analysis, nuance and detailed description. The two mentalities can hardly reconcile.”[5] Though translation is probable, cultural vacancies may deter translation in some ways. Commonalities in people’s thinking are far more than the differences, so in general translation can be achieved.

Reverse Thinking and Translation

Thinking, in nature, has its directions, including positive thinking and reverse thinking. “It is a binary division. Generally, positive thinking refers to people’s conventional or customary way of thinking, whereas reverse thinking denotes reversion to people’s thinking habits.”[6] Reverse thinking exists in the way opposite to people’s conventional thinking, usually starting from the opposite point.[7] Thus, reverse thinking challenges the norm of thinking, but sometimes offers a better avenue for the solution to some puzzles, and may deepen people’s perception about a certain matter.

Reverse thinking can be applied in every field, and can be represented in many ways. People may think in the way opposite to the conventional thinking due to the binary opposites such as ‘soft and hard’ and ‘high and low’. Sometimes people may think by changing the position of somebody or something, like the upper or lower position. Therefore, reverse thinking is critical in that it betrays the convention or common sense, overcomes people’s fixed, customary and sometimes rigid thinking pattern, cultivating a sense of thinking in the opposite way.

As applied to translation, reverse thinking plays a vital role in obtaining the idiomatic expressions from the target language. In the earlier analysis we know that different modes of thinking lead to different linguistic expressions. Without a good care of these differences, a rigid or mistaken expression will occur in the target language because of the influence of the source language and the translator’s customary thinking. Sometimes the seemingly “good” translation cannot actually convey the essence of the original, or in other words the formal equivalence cannot result in functional equivalence in translation. What’s more, readers of the target language cannot get the same comprehension and feeling as those of the source language can. Reverse thinking can change all of this and may make the translation not only faithful to the original but also suitable in the habit of the expression of the target language.

Reverse Thinking in Translation Practice

At the Lexical Level

Reverse thinking requires a translator to think in the opposite way so as to conform to the thinking habit in the target language. While the people in the source language express something with positive thinking, the people in the target language may express the same idea with reverse thinking, and vice versa. Thus, in translation we must respect both the author of the original and the readers of the translation. To put it in another way, the translator must convey the true meaning of the original and meanwhile make the translation ideal to the target readers’ expectation and understanding. In Chinese, people say “nín xiān qǐng (您先请)” and “chí zǎo (迟早)”, whilst British people say “after you” and “sooner or later”. In expressing time or place in English, it is usually put in the order from the smallest unit to the bigger, and then the biggest unit, but the opposite is true in Chinese. In Chinese, we say “dōng běi (东北), “dōng nán (东南), “xī běi (西北)” and “xī nán (西南)”, but in English “northeast”, “southeast”, “northwest” and “southwest” are translated accordingly.

In translating placards, translators also use reverse thinking. We can often say the signs like “cǐ lù bù tōng (此路不通)” –Blocked; “xián rén miǎn jìn (闲人免进)” –Staff Only; “qǐng wù chū mō (请勿触摸)” –Hands off; “tài píng mén (太平门)” –Emergency Exit; “<chē liàng> bù zhǔn biàn dào (<车辆>不准变道)” –Keep in Lane; “qǐng wù jiàn tà cǎo píng (请勿践踏草坪)” –Please Keep off the Grass.
Different modes of thinking between easterners and westerners usually result from different angles of observing things on the basis of different cultures. The English equivalent of “bā zhé (八折)” is “20% off or 20% discount”. The Chinese expression focuses on the actual amount of money the customer pays for something, while the English one emphasizes the amount of money deducted from the total sum. “zì xué (自学)”, which focuses on learning, is equivalent to “self-taught” in English, emphasizing teaching. “hán yī (寒衣)” actually means “warm clothes” in English. The former tells the function of defending somebody from the cold, whereas the latter means keeping warm. Other examples of such reverse thinking are: “shuǐ huǒ (水火)” – fire and water, “yì tong (异同)” – similarities and differences, “dé shī (得失)” – losses and gains.

At the Syntactical Level
At the syntactical level, when doing translation, the translator feels it more natural to express in the target text the content of the source text in the opposite way by way of reverse thinking, as illustrated by the following four examples (translations from English to Chinese):

1. The guerrillas would fight to death before they surrendered.
   yóu jī duì yuán nínɡ yuàn zhàn dòu dào sǐ, ér jué bù tóu xiáng.
   (游击队员宁愿战斗到死,而决不投降.)

2. It would be most disastrous if even a rumor of it were given out.
   shèn zhì zhǐ yào yǒu yì diǎn diǎn fēng shēng lòu chū qù, jié guǒ jiù bù kān shè xiǎng.
   (甚至只要有一点点风声漏出去, 结果就不堪设想.)

3. Hitler’s undisguised effort to persecute the Jews met with world-wide condemnation.
   xī tè lè duì yóu tài rén de lù gǔ pò hài xíng wéi shòu dào quán shì jiè de qiǎn zé.
   (希特勒对犹太人的露骨迫害行为受到全世界的谴责.)

4. Mr. Rumsfeld said the Soviet Union was unprecedentedly engaged in a missile-building program.
   Lā mǔ sī fēi ěr dé shuō, sū lián zhèng yī kǒng qián de guǐ mó tū xíng zhì zào dào dàn de jì huà.
   (拉姆斯菲尔德说,苏联正以空前的规模推行制造导弹的计划.)

From the above four examples, please note the bold-faced English and Chinese equivalents. In the first two examples, the English sentences are expressed positively and the Chinese negatively. In the last two examples, the bold-faced English words have suffixes of negation, while the Chinese equivalents are expressed positively. It is better to use the bold-faced expressions in these translations because they are more natural in the target readers’ mind.

Reverse Thinking in Translation Theory
Translation theory is applied in translation practice, and in turn the latter provides nutrition for the former. As analyzed in the above parts, reverse thinking in translation practice generates translations that may conform to the target readers’ reading habit, thus highly catering to these readers. Enlightened by this, I think that translation theory and even the development of translation studies also need reverse thinking.

The divergences between the easterners and westerners lie in the fact that the former seek similarities, but the latter differences. The Chinese hold the philosophical perspective of seeking common ground while preserving differences. The inadequacy of the perspective is that people adhere much to the conventions and norms, daunted to call into question what they doubt. This is detrimental to the construction and development of translation studies. The traditional Chinese translation theory lacks systematization, showing the fragmentary features based on translators’ experience. This, in my opinion, is largely due to the conventional restriction of forward thinking and convergent thinking. Since Yan Fu proposed the translation principles of “faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance”, translators have deemed them as the law of translation to follow. Influenced by Yan Fu, the other Chinese translation theorists proposed similar principles, and hardly any new theories came into being. Due to the convergent thinking, the Chinese translation theorists
just follow blindly the traditional translation principles or theories, lacking critical and creative spirits. The result is that China, unlike the western countries, can hardly have systematic translation theories.

Westerners pursue divergent or reverse thinking, hardly influenced by experience, convention or norm. They usually try different angles or means to find out solutions to problems, to construct theories and develop the discipline. Deconstructionism applied in translation theory is a good case in point. Before deconstructionism was put forward, western translation theory focused on language in a text, emphasizing “equivalence” in translation. However, right after the deconstructionism was proposed by Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), the translation studies became prosperous in its development mainly because of reverse thinking that aims to seek something different and new.

Arising in the 1960s, deconstructionism was and is a typical representative of divergent and reverse thinking. The translation school absorbing and applying deconstructionism is called “innovative school of translation”. Deconstructionists take the views that are totally opposite to what constructionists hold when translating. “Deconstructionists’ perspective of translation is as follows: The source text (ST) has its stable meaning and the author of ST is the subject of ST. Therefore, the translator must think highly of the ST and hold the ST author in esteem. And the translator’s task is to reproduce the ST in translation so as to achieve equivalence between the original and the translation.”[8] Deconstructionism is just a reversion and criticism of constructionists’ theory. According to deconstructionists, ST is not a stable and closed system, and the meanings of ST have the features of difference, instability and iterability. Besides, the meanings of ST are not set or constant but temporary and open to new meanings on different occasions.

Deconstructionism arose from reverse thinking by thinking in the opposite way, which is concerned with binary opposition. Deconstruction actually went so far as to deconstruct the binary opposition, and subvert logocentrism. Deconstructionists claim that the translation, compared with the original, is not secondary, neither is it an imitation or reproduction of the original. According to them, there is actually no original in the real sense. The translation and the original are symbiotic to each other, with no superiority for one or the other. In this way, the status of the original and that of the translator are promoted.

Deconstructionism, as a novel representation of reverse thinking, has undoubtedly brought a great impingement on the conventional translation theory. As a result, people’s mind gets activated, and lots of translation theories have sprung up, initiated by reverse thinking. Zhu Xiangjun says, “Much influenced by deconstructionism, the ‘gate’ of translation studies is widely open, the topics like political right, cultural identity, and ethnicity enter. Schools of translation studies have arisen one after another, and the discipline has become unprecedentedly prosperous. After deconstructionism, there have come such translation theories as polysystem theory, communicative theory, skopos theory, functional theory, reader’s response theory, feminism, post-colonialism, and cultural theory.”[9] Today’s prosperity of translation studies is dependent on interdisciplinary research, i.e. the combination of translation studies with other disciplines. This feat is largely attributed to reverse thinking.

Conclusion
Enlightened by reverse thinking, we may often achieve something that is unachievable by normal thinking. As the British philosopher, Karl Popper (Jul. 28, 1902-Sep. 17, 1994), claimed that a theory which cannot be verified may be falsified by reverse thinking. The German materialist philosopher, Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach (Jul. 28, 1804, 28—Sep. 13, 1872), pointed out, “Easterners may neglect differences when they see unity, whereas westerners may forget unity when they see differences.”[10] This may not be true in all situations, but it tells the divergences between the eastern and western thinking pattern. In my view, although there may be differences in the aspect of thinking between easterners and westerners, similarities in thinking do exist; or else, translation would be impossible! As for the different modes of thinking, we cannot tell which is superior. The key point is that easterners should consider westerners’ thinking mode while thinking.
and vice versa. Only in this way can a translator produce more idiomatic translations which care about target readers as well as the author of the original.

In the history of western translation theory, why is there such a dramatic prosperity within a century? The answer is: reverse thinking! Without it, there may hardly be any development of translation studies.

References


