Causal Analysis of Cohesion and Coherence Errors in Discourse Translation

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Abstract: *Cohesion is an important means of ensuring discourse coherence. Both English and Chinese have cohesive ties. But they are different on the use of cohesive devices including reference, ellipsis, substitution and conjunction. English focuses on grammar, hypotaxis and subject, while Chinese concentrates on vocabulary, parataxis and theme. Understanding the factors of cohesive errors can help students improve their translation ability.*

Keywords: *discourse; cohesion; cohesive devices*

1. Introduction

One of the core issues in translation is to solve the cohesion and coherence of the discourse well to make the whole discourse flow smoothly. A discourse is composed of several paragraphs and a paragraph is composed of several sentences. How those sentences connect each other, and how to make those paragraphs more logical? Based on the questions, Halliday and Hasan offered discourse cohesion theory in their book "Cohesion in English". They defines cohesion as "set of semantic configuration which is systematically connected with a particular type of context of situation", and coherence as an attribute which makes a text different from a pile of sentences randomly put together expressing no meaning[1]. In the past 20 years, linguists at home and abroad have paid more and more attention to the study of discourse cohesion and coherence. Most scholars accept that cohesion is ordinarily overt. It's the surface tie of a discourse, it is a semantic connection, being reflected on the surface structure of the texts. Coherence refers to the semantic correlation in a text. It can be both overt and covert. When cohesive devices offer sufficient cues for the realization of textual coherence, it's overt. When semantic tie exists in the deep structure of the text, it's covert[2]. It is known that cohesion and coherence of a discourse is Mainly realized with the help of cohesive devices. Although there are cohesive devices in both languages, the cohesion methods of the two languages have their own characteristics due to the great differences between English and Chinese. English emphasizes hypotaxis which requires sentence structure to be complete and cohesive devices are used explicitly to realized the cohesion and coherence of a discourse. Chinese, on the other hand, emphasizes parataxis and generally does not require the completeness of sentence structure. The cohesion and coherence of a discourse is realized by meaning rather than explicit cohesive devices. The differences make the translation between English and Chinese more difficult. If not properly solved, it will often result in westernized Chinese or Chinese English. And various types of errors emerge.

This article mainly focuses on the analysis of discourse errors in translation between English and Chinese, trying to reveal the reasons for the occurrence of discourse errors in translation.

2. Cohesive errors

2.1 Reference Errors

Reference means that in a sentence a participant or circumstantial element introduced at one place in the text can be taken as a reference point for something that follows [3]. It reflects a semantic relationship between words and occurs not only inter-sententially, but also intra-sententially. Reference has three types named personal reference, demonstrative reference, and comparative reference.

If the words of entity, time, or place appear repeatedly in a discourse without corresponding words for reference, although they are grammatically correct for each sentence, they do not conform to the

rules of language in the discourse. In Chinese, personal reference is generally substituted for by repeating the name of the person, whereas in English mostly personal pronouns are used. Due to language-specific preferences, Chinese students may prefer repetition to personal reference, which makes the sentences redundancy and violates the economic principles of language use in Chinese-English translation. . Take the following examples as a comparison:

Example 1:

*-After you read the article, retell **the article** in your own words. (Chinese English)*

*-After you read the article, retell **it** in your own words. (English)*

Example 2:

*-Mary is a healthy girl, she likes sports. But when I ask **Mary** whether she would take part in the next Marathon. (Chinese English)*

*-Mary is a healthy girl, she likes sports But when I ask **her** whether she would take part in the next Marathon.(English)*

All the expressions of the two examples are grammatically and semantically correct, but Chinese English versions are done based on Chinese expression habits and did not follow English rules or the principle of minimalism. If personal reference is used properly as the English versions, the expressions will be better.

In English, demonstrative reference refers to the use of demonstrative pronouns such as "this that, these, those", the definite article "the" and the corresponding determiner to refer to other parts of the text. Compared to Chinese, pronouns are more commonly used to refer to the preceding components in English. In Chinese, demonstrative reference is commonly used to refer to "these (some), that (those)" without the definite article. Sometimes, there may even be "zero referential", meaning that the coherence between the preceding and following sentences is naturally formed by meaning in the discourse without the use of cohesive devices. Demonstrative reference is extensively used in English, explicitly showing the coherence of the sentences. While demonstrative reference is not so often used in Chinese, the coherence of the sentences is implicitly illustrated. When using demonstrative reference, students often make mistakes too. For example:

Example 3:

*-I got Hu from my roommate two years ago. And **Hu** has never left me from then on.(demonstrative reference is not used，corresponding word is simply repeated)*

*-I got Hu from my roommate two years ago. And **the cat** has never left me from then on.(demonstrative reference "the cat" is used to refer to former word "Hu")*

Example 4:

*-The weather in Hangzhou is hotter than **the weather** in Beijing in summer.(demonstrative reference is not used, corresponding word is simply repeated)*

*-The weather in Hangzhou is hotter than **that** in Beijing in summer.(demonstrative reference "that" is used to refer to former word "the weather")*

Through comparison, it can be seen that sentences with demonstrative references are smoother in terms of meaning expression and discourse connection.

In addition to personal reference and demonstrative reference, there is another form of reference, namely comparative reference. English commonly uses comparative reference words such as "more, same, different, similar, in comparison to, in contrast, such, same, other" to indicate the referential relationship, enabling discourse semantics to be connected. There is not much difference in the types of comparative reference between English and Chinese. The frequency of use it is not very high, and students have a lower error rate. So this paper will not elaborate more about it.

2.2 Substitution Errors

Substitution refers to the use of pronouns, synonyms, synonyms, and alternative sentence structures to replace a certain part of the text. The substituting element has the same structural function as the element it substitutes. In grammar and rhetoric, substitution is considered as an important language cohesive device employed to avoid repetition. English substitution is used more frequently than

Chinese. English emphasizes substitution and Chinese repeats more often, which is true at the sentence level and also at the paragraph level[4]. In English, the echoes between sentences are often done by word substitution, while in Chinese, repetitive words are often used to connect the sentences in order to echo each other and constitute the semantic coherence within the paragraph. Therefore, when translating from English to Chinese, the alternative parts of the original text are often translated by means of repetition; On the contrary, when translating from Chinese to English, the words repeated in the original text are often translated by means of substitution so as to make the translation semantically coherent. However, students may make mistakes in the translation process due to native language transfer. For example:

Example 5:

*-Many young people choose to work in one city but live in a nearby **city**. Since they can commit by CRH train every day. (No substitution used)*

Example 6:

-They usually spend half an hour practicing swimming every day.

*-**We spend half an hour practicing swimming too.** (No substitution used)*

Example 7:

-Is she coming back tonight?

*-I guess **she is coming back.** (No substitution used)*

In example 5,6,7, if substitutions are used instead of lexical repetition, it would conform English rules.

Example 5:

*-Many young people choose to work in one city but live in a nearby **one**. Since they can commit by CRH train every day.*

Example 6:

-They usually spend half an hour practicing swimming every day.

*-**So do we**.*

Example 7:

-Is she coming back tonight?

*-I guess **so**.*

In Chinese English translation, students can use substitution to translate Chinese lexical repetition to achieve semantic coherence, and vice versa.

2.3 Ellipsis Errors

Ellipsis means leaving out parts of a structure when they can be presumed from what has gone before in order to avoid repetition and make the language expression concise and compact. Ellipsis in English mostly occurs at the grammatical level. Chinese ellipsis mostly occurs at the level of meaning, and the frequency of using ellipsis is much higher than that of English. In Chinese, lexical repetition is often used to achieve sentence balance symmetry, or other rhetorical effects to achieve semantic coherence. When translating from Chinese to English, students should use ellipsis to replace Chinese lexical repetition to make the translation be more consistent with English expression habits, while in English-Chinese translation, students should leave out components of the structure to make the sentences simple and clear. But students always translate the target language according to their native language rules leading to ellipsis errors. Take the following sentences as examples:

Example 8:

*-This is a lucky place; if it isn't **a lucky place**, why do more and more people come to live here. (Chinese English, lexical repetition used)*

-This is a lucky place; if it isn't, why do more and more people come to live here [5].(English version, Ellipsis used)

Example 9:

*-Gas can be changed into liquid and liquid **can be changed** into solid. (Chinese English, lexical repetition used)*

-Gas can be changed into liquid and liquid into solid. (English version, Ellipsis used)

In example 8, the second phrase "*a lucky place*" should be omitted in the sentence. The elliptical sentence "*if it isn't*" is used to make the whole sentence both concise and clear without affecting semantic coherence at all. In Example 9, predicate verb phrase "*can be changed"* should be omitted. From examples 8 and 9, we can see that only the appropriate use of ellipsis can make the sentence concise and clear.

Another distinctive feature of English and Chinese in terms of ellipsis is that English discourse is strictly structured and almost every sentence has a subject, while Chinese discourse is loosely structured and often omits the subject, the discourse revolves around a theme. Therefore, English is called a subject language, while Chinese is a theme language, and attention should be paid to the mutual conversion when translating from one to the other.

2.4 Conjunction error

Connectives that belong to the category of conjunction form a semantic connection that enables inference of the relation between preceding and following parts of the text. Conjunctions establish connections between parts of the text that follow one another but are not structurally connected. Michael Halliday and Hassan initially divided the connection into four types: "additive", "transitional", "causal", and "temporal".

The English language emphasizes formality, so it requires a clear hierarchy in expression, and the juxtaposition of multiple clauses cannot occur. The semantic connection between sentences in Chinese is not directly shown by cohesive devices, but by the logical relationship between them and the sequence of the sentences. Thus according to language rules, in Chinese-English translation, students need to add conjunctions to the text while in English-Chinese translation, students need to omit conjunctions in the text. The fact is students often fail to add or omit conjunctions appropriately, owing to the systemic differences of the languages, or as a result of their decision. For example:

Example 10:

-We should not waste our time on computer games, we should spend time on studies.(no conjunctions)

*-We should not waste our time on computer games **but** should spend time on studies.(conjunction used)*

Example 11:

-It is raining; we will not go camping.(no conjunctions)

*-It is raining; **hence** we will not go camping.(conjunction used)*

From example 10 and 11, we can know that sentences with conjunctions are more logical in sentence structure and coherent in meaning.

3. Cause analysis

3.1. Native Language Transfer

In translation, influenced by native language, students tend to make cohesion errors in terms of culture, way of thinking, and communication strategies. Chinese discourse is mainly composed of simple sentences, and there are no necessary cohesive devices between sentences. The coherence in Chinese discourse mostly relies on implicit cohesive means, which achieves logical relationship through the meaningful combination, and the structure of the discourse is loose. In contrast, the organization of English sentences is structured and "formative", and the coherence and flow between sentences and discourse depend on explicit cohesive devices to form certain logical relationships.

Influenced by their mother tongue, students tend to ignore the importance of cohesion in translation. Therefore, when translating from Chinese to English, students are prone to make short simple sentences,

failing to make long logically correct English with cohesive devices. When translating from English to Chinese, students do not know how to deal with excessive cohesive words in English, and translate them directly, resulting in redundancy.

The perspective and order of thinking can also cause cohesion and coherence errors in discourse. Chinese thinking order is from big to small, far to near, surface to point, whole to individual, general to individual, while English thinking order is the opposite. The order of Chinese thinking order is linear, with more single sentences, while English thinking is curvilinear with a lot of inserted elements. Whats more, the subject of a Chinese sentence usually has many modifying elements, the subject of an English sentence is simple with the modifier located in the latter part of the sentence. Therefore, affected by conventions and formal preferences, Chinese students are used to putting the clause led by conjunctions such as *"because"* at the beginning of a sentence, leading to sentences without subjects , which is not in line with the English expression habit.

3.2. Lack of training

Training is essential to achieve discourse coherence in translation. However, at present, English teaching is mostly confined to the explanation of grammar and syntax. Students lack translation training on English sentence patterns and sequences, and cannot grasp the similarities and differences between Chinese and English. In Chinese-English translation, students don't know they can achieve semantic coherence by adding cohesive vocabulary, changing syntactic structure, and changing sentence structure. In English-Chinese translation, students don't know how to omit unnecessary connectors in target language, which will cause unnecessary redundancy and affecting the coherence of the discourse.

After students have mastered certain means of cohesive devices using, teachers should consciously conduct comprehensive analysis and training on the logical structure of discourse in their daily teaching, which is beneficial for the improvement of students' comprehensive English language proficiency. In terms of discourse, students should not only be able to flexibly use cohesive devices, but also should have the ability to manage the discourse

The training of discourse cohesion should not only focus on translation training, but also include reading and writing training. By reading original English works, students can better understand western social customs, culture, and historical background, and consciously cultivate their sensitivity to cultural differences. Through writing training, students can develop the ability to plan and layout their essays, enhance their overall language skills, and improve their translation ability and language proficiency.

4. Conclusion

Discourse coherence plays a crucial role in translation. Only a coherent discourse or speech sequences can lead to correct understanding. Combining words into sentences and sentences into a discourse is rather a dynamic process than a static one. Semantic and logical coherence often relies on the regular progression of language surface information. Therefore, when translating between English and Chinese, it is necessary to understand the differences of cohesive devices between the two languages, especially to understand the ways of cohesion and coherence in the target language, and to be proficient in using them. Only in this way can we flexibly use the cohesive devices and methods during the translation process.

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