

The Shift of Thought between English and Chinese in Translation

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Abstract: As we all know, the key to learn languages is the shift of thought. The students' style of thought, however, cannot be shifted right or thoroughly in their translation learning because their thinking is influenced by different style of thought, which may cause "Europeanized Chinese", or "Chinglish". How to shift their thought properly is the final goal in learning for both the English teachers and the students themselves.

Keywords: Thought of Chinese, Thought of English, Shift of Thought

1. Introduction

As English teachers, we can frequently find in teaching that the students' translation expressions both in Chinese and English are hard for foreigners to understand. Neither Chinese nor English translations make native Chinese speakers or English speakers not confused. The reason is that both their Chinese expressions and English ones are not so standardized that the expressions can hardly convey their ideas, which is shown in the following picture:

Let's take the following expressions as shown in the followings in table 1.

Table 1: Expressions influenced by shift of thought.

Example 1, top performer of the company	
inappropriate translation: gongsizuijiabiaoyanzhe	appropriate translation: gongsizuijiayuangong
Example 2, a picture by Picasso is hung on the wall	
inappropriate translation: bijiasuodeyifuhuaguanzaiqiangshang	appropriate translation: qiangshanguazhebijiasuodeyifuhua

There are many misleading translations in floor indications in public places like supermarket, hospitals and so on, such as 1F for the F1, meaning Floor one, 2F for F2, meaning Floor 2, etc. They are typically translated in Chinese thinking style because this kind of translation has confused the usage of cardinal numerals and ordinal numerals.

The right translation expressions should be F1, F2..., just as the cardinal numerals for numbers while the ordinals for orders, and we can find many other usages of this at times, such as lesson 1, lesson 2, etc.

Example 2,

The recently popular expression in web is "good good study, day day up" for "Study well and make progress everyday", which is the typical expression of Chinglish.

2. The cause of Europeanized Chinese and Chinglish

From the above expressions we can find out that English learners translated English into Europeanized Chinese, which is immature, or Chinese into Chinglish, and the main cause is their styles of thought are incompletely shifted between these two languages, as shown in the followings in table 2:

Table 2: Different thought shifts in translation.

Chinese into English:		
Chinese-----thought of Chinese into thought of English -----English		
English into Chinese:		
English-----thought of English into thought of Chinese -----Chinese		

Originated from language, thought dominates language well. And, attached to thought, language also is the carrier of thought. Translation, therefore, is not only a linguistic activity, but also a kind of thought. Common doctrine of thoughts is the base for bilingual translation. Different thoughts systematically explored in different nations are beneficial for us to further understand the deep cause in levels of linguistic expressions, which will inspire and lead translation practice [1].

So, what is the definition of thought of language? It is widely accepted by some linguists that thought of language refers to a kind of psychological phenomenon in which language, as the tool for communication, is applied. And thought of language is divided into two categories. One is human beings rely on language for thinking, such as generally referred “thought of Chinese”, and “thought of English”; The second one means that thought of language works like a running system of language symbols in which human beings’ brain always works independently so that the pronunciation, form and meaning of a certain language symbols connect with different language symbols in forming words, phrases, paragraphs and discourses. Therefore, it seems that the brain produces language symbols and later words, sentences, paragraphs and discourses, whose procedure is like the action of “being able to think”[2]. During this procedure of “the ability to think”, a unique working characteristic is formed, namely language thought character, and language, one of thought tools, cannot produce effective, rational or reasonable thought without the involvement of human beings’ language. Language thought is the most mature thought and the so-called deep consideration is generally referred to the internally abstracted thought, so abstract thought is mainly preceded by means of language.

3. Analysis of the Cause

Being the arbitrary signal system for human communication, language itself is the necessarily important tool for human beings to express meanings and thought. And human brain reflects the course of thought, to put it specifically, thought is a recognition procedure in which analysis, comprehension, verdict and inference, etc are applied. On one hand, language is the crystallization of thought recording the achievement of thought, namely the externalized thought carrier and the material enclosure of thought. So, the expression of thought depends on language and the development of thought promotes language development. On the other hand, thought is the content of language, which decides language. Language development cannot carry out without the involvement of thought, and simultaneously, it increases the development of thought [3].

During the translation process from one language to another one, the communication between original author and the translator can continue based on common doctrine of thought which restricts the overall activity of translation. Mr. Dong Shiliang, a professor majoring in bilingual translation in Jiangxi Industrial University, holds the idea that the internal doctrine of translation relies in human being brain and thought activity to be further studied will be the outbreak in translation.

3.1 Different Thinking Habits Toughen Understanding and Influence the Accuracy of Translated Content

The associated meaning of vocabulary is the best reflection of thought variety and at the same time confuses the understanding of vocabulary. In translation, the translator often makes association basing on his own accumulated experience and mindset. For instance, when Chinese people talk about “dog”, they always associate it with the pejorative expressions like “zougou, gouzazhong, zhugouburu, gouzhangrenshi. While in British culture, dog is mainly neutral, mostly commendatory expressions like “a lucky dog, every dog has its day or Love me, love my dog”. If the translator translates “dog” mechanically without any involvement of English thought, the translated content will be certainly confusing. In general, different thinking habits will surely influence the accuracy of translation by mistake [4].

3.2 Different Thinking Style and Sentence Structure Focus Will Influence Translation

Both Chinese and British have individual thinking styles which form their own sentence structure focuses. Unjusted translation in sentence structure can hinder fluency of translation. In English, the sentence begins with main content, while in Chinese the main idea is generally laid at the end of the sentence according the expression turn of logic and time. For example, “A stone smashed harmlessly on the ground when it dropped from the building.” will have definitely different meaning because of the expression turn in Chinese.

Different emphasis leads to various expressions impeding the form of natural and fluent translation. British thinking style focuses more on logic and structure while Chinese one on content more than structure. If the translator neglects, the translated content must be broken in English, or lengthy and insipid. We can find quite a lot of instances like “find one’s leg, pull one’s legs, set one back, etc”. The translator must master different emphasis theory in both languages so as to avoid confusing the accuracy of translation [5].

There are similarities in human beings’ thought style and varieties as well. Different ideas may be expressed with different languages. Language is contained in specialized culture and gradually forms its peculiar expressions. Simultaneously, various language speakers also master their own expressional language belonging to its language system. Furthermore, there is generally differences in different languages, nevertheless, presenting in various forms, which demands that learners can take both target language and source language into consideration, changing their thought styles in time and reconstructing source language information with precise target language so as to meet the expression of target language, which will be beneficial to readers’ comprehension and acceptance and represent the cultural characters of source language [6]. In other words, this is defined as English learning, especially the shift of perspective in translation, namely the shift of thought.

As above mentioned, completely correct shift of thought from Chinese to English will lead to idiomatic English expressions; while incomplete or incorrect shift of thought Chinglish, because the construction characteristic of Chinese is “undispersed expression in dispersed structure”, that is to say, Chinese expression mainly depends on meaning rather than sentence structure. Undispersed expressions, however in English, must be synchronously with sentence structure, namely sentence structure is as necessarily important as expression. Vice versa, completely correct shift of Chinese thought in translation from English to Chinese can lead to idiomatic Chinese instead of Europeanized Chinese.

Surficial cultural phenomenon should be integrated into cultural structure of the deep target language in English teaching, therefore, when we are cultivating students’ cultural consciousness and the capacity of cross-culture communication, we should take the differences of target language and source language into consideration, getting familiar with culture characters of the target language, and also meet the communicative rules of target language. Nevertheless, the fact is when students are trying to translate English into Chinese, they don’t completely shift the English thought to Chinese one, so the Chinese translation is somehow strange or awkward because of being influenced by thought of English [7]. There are many differences between target language and source language, though some similarities still exist. If the translators are not conscious about it, which causes incomplete shift of thoughts, Europeanized Chinese in three aspects will appear including phonetics, vocabulary and sentence structure. The most typical example is shown in modern China time when the Western big powers forced Qing Dynasty to sign a series of unequal treaties in which frequently translated Europeanized Chinese appeared for the simple reasons that the Westerners lacked adequate shift of Chinese thought and idiomatic Chinese expressions.

The basic reason why Europeanized Chinese appeared is that the translators haven’t mastered solid Chinese, so their expressions of translating, writing or speaking are something that are not similar to Chinese or English, which is far more opposite from Chinese great translator, Yanfu’s standard of being faithful, expressive and elegant to judge translations.

Secondly, when Chinese is translated into English, the translators can hardly shift the thought from Chinese to English just because of being influenced by English character and lacking of solid English knowledge, which will lead to “Chinglish”. Only by casual attention can we easily find out that the so-called “bilingual publishing” at present in China has quite a few mistranslations in English[8]. Furthermore, as the further development of Chinese society and the appearance of earth village, the need of bilingual expressions like translations in roads, public areas and media etc. is marvellous. Many of them have emerged as the form of not real English expressions whose influences have reached in

depth and width far beyond our imagination.

In addition, something needs explaining. What we have defined here in this essay refers to narrow meaning of Europeanized Chinese and Chinglish, which should be separated from widely accepted Europeanized Chinese and those English expressions with Chinese characteristic in describing China. For instance, when government work report is translated into English, many of the expressions must be adhere to the accuracy of themselves, together with the language rules of English. It is verified that the widely-accepted Europeanized Chinese and Chinglish are correct and are in wide application[9]. The appearance of narrow meaning of Europeanized Chinese or Chinglish is the inevitable period in learners' life, which at some extent is harmful and not accepted generally. The reason is that on one hand it misleads English learners in China, and on the other hand severely ruins China's public images all over the world.

The thought is certainly corresponding to language and thinking style decides language expression. Different thinking styles appear not only in language but also in sentence structure. The differences of thought styles manifest in four aspects: imaginal thinking and abstract thinking, comprehensive thinking and analytical thinking, subjective thinking and objective thinking, forward thinking and backward thinking [10].

It is generally thought that avoiding narrow Europeanized Chinese or Chinglish is extremely high demand for English learners. They have to master not only the knowledge of source language and target language, but also the background information of both languages including politics, economy, culture, history and so on. What's more, they have to get acquainted with the specific majors involved if they focus on them [11]. The ideal translation condition is to express idiomatically in English or Chinese by means of reading and listening rules of target languages, and the precondition first is to complete the shift of thoughts in English or Chinese.

4. Conclusion

Though it is hard to shift the thoughts, it is definitely true that any translator can make it if they undertake the strategies as follows in English translation:

Firstly, they should cultivate Chinese knowledge and expression manners so as to master perfect thought of Chinese under the base of proficient Chinese.

Secondly, a large amount of English recitation and wide involvement of various knowledge for further horizon, together with experienced English expressions, correct sentence structure, and concerned background information are beneficial to from comprehensively complete thought of English [12].

The relationship between translation and culture is determined by the relationship between language and culture. Actually translation is to reproduce information of one language from another language in which culture information is also involved [13]. Due to the cultural difference of target language and source language, the symbolic references, pragmatics and internal or external information does not reach one-to-one correspondences. If equivalent translation is in your pursuit, complete shift of thought in English and Chinese must be undertaken, with necessary translation variation and compensation applied. Only the above two strategies are achieved can English learners accomplish the tasks with ease in the shift of thought and also can idiomatic source language be expressed with accurate target language, which is the ultimate purpose of English learning[14].

As the inter-cultural communication tool, translation is not only the shift of two languages, but also the shift of two thoughts. Due to different thinking styles between British and Chinese, the translation expressions vary in content and form, which should be paid attention to and adjusted reasonably so to improve the translation[15].

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