

# Analysis of Philosophical Problems in Translation Studies

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**Abstract-** *Translation studies are closely related to philosophical theories. Each translation research theory or paradigm has its philosophical basis and each philosophical theoretical trend will have different degrees of influence on the theoretical development of translation studies. From the research paradigm of translation theories, this paper selects general philosophical issues, such as the relationship between subject and object in translation, relativism and general rationalism in the study of translation theory, constructivism and deconstruction, and elaborates their relationships.*

**Keyword-:** *Translation; Philosophical Issues; Theoretical Paradigms*

## 1. PHILOSOPHICAL THINKING ON CONTEMPORARY TRANSLATION STUDIES

Looking at the history of Chinese and foreign translation studies, we find that many translation research theories originate from certain philosophical thoughts, such as relativism, rationalism, transcendentalism, and so on. Translation studies can be examined from the point of view of physics and also should be interpreted from the perspective of metaphysics. The relationship between philosophy and translation studies is inextricably linked. Some translation theories adopt a certain philosophical research paradigm or theory to solve translation problems, and some of them in turn explore the philosophical issues from the perspective of translation studies (Quine 1996). There are also translation theories which start with metaphysical arguments from the question of translation itself. Regardless of the perspective of translation studies, they all involve the philosophical issues of scientific research. This paper, from the research paradigm of translation theory, chooses more general philosophical issues and discusses their relationship with translation theories and practice.

## 2. THE SUBJECT AND OBJECT IN TRANSLATION

The subject is the bearer of social activities and cognitive activities, while the object is the object of the subject social practice activities and cognitive activities. The object refers not only to concrete things and common phenomena but also to non-existent things. Any subject is individual existence and different existence, which determines the subject's different feelings, experience, imagination and understanding of the object. Any subject is a historical product and spiritual projection of the cultural context, which determines that each subject views the objective world from the historical and cultural background of the self. The subject always listens to the

world with its own ideology, responds to reality, evaluates life, and eliminates characters. The history of the subject may always be a history full of prejudice, imagination, and ideal. The trajectory of the subject's cognitive activities and value judgment may be constantly approaching to the other side of truth

However, there are essential differences between subject and object. There is a social relationship between the subjects of practice and cognition. They are different people engaged in social practice activities and cognitive activities. They themselves have both natural and social attributes, manifested in their attachment to nature and to society. The object is the object of people's practice and understanding that enters people's social practice field and is closely linked with the subject. The object's exclusion of the subject's arbitrary depiction or identification of it is manifested as an external reality (Liu Miqing, 2001). These two are unified: the subject and the object are the cognition and the cognized relationship in the cognition activity. At the same time, the object has the restrictive effect on the subject, and the subject also subjectively reflects the cognized object. The basis for unity of subject and object is practice. In the practice of cognition, the subject and the object are in the relation of transforming and transformed. In addition, there are still other aspects of relationship between subject and object in cognitive activities, such as value relationship and aesthetic relationship.

In translation practice, the subject of translation can refer to the translator of the original text, while the object of translation refers to the original text, original author, original reader, and target reader. The subject and object of translation activities are closely related and integrated in the process of translation. As a subject, the translator cannot be separated from the object text, the original author, the original reader, and the target reader as object elements. Without the object, it is not even necessary to translate it and it is futile. Because the translator's individuality and difference exist, he has different feelings, experiences, imaginations and understandings of the

source text, and has different understanding of the translation value. Due to the translator's subjective initiative, he can choose different objects, such as different texts and target readers; in the process of translation, he can properly and reasonably translate the texts according to certain principles and standards. The object not only provides the subject with specific practical objects, but also provides a value object and value reference system.

The translator as the subject must use the object as a reference point to continuously examine the translation and related object environment, instead of freely exerting the subjective initiative. Otherwise, it will cause misinterpretation, mistranslation or even random translation from the object. The translator's subjective status is very obvious in the process of translation practice. Translators are not only readers and interpreters, but also the creators of translations. First of all, translators need to exert their subjective initiative in the process of translation practice to mobilize their various emotions, cultural and value orientations, conscious aesthetic imaginations and other linguistic and non-linguistic capabilities, thereby constructing a complete text of the original text significance. Secondly, the translator tries to dig the ideological connotation and aesthetic significance of the original text by understanding the original text, and analyzes the literary value and social significance of the text. Finally, the translator uses code-switching to reproduce all the information of the original text as much as possible.

The relationship between subject and object in the above translation practice activities shows that the relationship between subject and object in philosophical sense has important guiding significance for the study of translation theory. This significance is particularly manifested in how to establish translation norms and standards. Translation activities should not only emphasize the subjective initiative of the subject, but also pay attention to objectivity, complexity, and diversity of the object. The theory of translation standards should be based on the characteristics and interrelationships of the subject and the object in order to obtain a balance between subject and object.

### **3. Relativism and Universal Rationalism in Translation Studies**

When a translator is faced with a text, he should consider that his translation product is for people of different languages and cultural backgrounds. People with different languages and cultural backgrounds refer to people who have different historical cultures, participate in different social practices, and speak different languages. Considering translation from a philosophical point of view, we face two basic perspectives. The first is relativism. The perspective of relativism in philosophy views our understanding of the cognitive process as a filtering of the cultural stereotypes of conceptual thinking. Therefore,

general biological or genetic factors, such as ethnicity, have a bearing on the formation of knowledge systems and concepts. Other factors are insignificant in providing an environment for human development. In short, we can say that human beings are not born with these knowledge systems, but cultures create these knowledge systems and determine human development. We can also look at translation from a second opposite approach, universal rationalism. Universal rationalism proposes biological and psychological determinism. The theory advocates localization, homogenizing all human practices and concepts, and the differences are relatively superficial and secondary. In the field of linguistics, Chomsky is one of the advocates of universal rationalism. In the 1950s, he proposed a universal grammar theory to defend the innateness of language functions. According to Chomsky's view, among the 4,000 or more existing languages, there is a similar syntax despite differences in speech and writing. It is likely for us to translate from one language to another. Selecting different philosophical perspectives will have different effects on translation practice activities and have a completely different perception of translators. From the perspective of universal rationalism, translators must trace the reality revealed by a text, confined to a certain transformation. The readers of the translation and the readers of the original text have common biological traits and psychological characteristics. Therefore, from the perspective of universal rationalism, translators can easily interpret the target text, even if the text has many references to different cultural scenes. In fact, the differences in different cultural contexts are influenced by the biological and psychological characteristics of the readers of the original texts and readers of the target texts. In this case, translation is basically a linguistic problem. There are two differences in translation from the perspective of relativism and general rationalism.

First, although people accept that both discourses share common biological and psychological characteristics, the determinacy of these characteristics at the cognitive level is questionable. Therefore, the focus of translation lies in the different interpretation strategies which readers commonly have due to different cultural contexts. In this case, the translator pays more attention to readers of the target text and their acceptance of the translation. This means using different codes to say the same thing, while retaining the stylistic effects of the original text. Translation is not just a matter of linguistics. People not only translate words but also translate concepts and even contexts.

The second is the equivalent of translation. In the past 20 years, translation studies under the perspective of relativism have caused fierce debates among scholars. Scholars who oppose such translations suggest that we will get the same discourse? At the extreme, this problem has led us back to the metaphysics and meta-theory problems of translation because it requires a redefinition of the entire translation exercise. The problem we face is translation equivalence. The original text and the target text are

equivalent in terms of words, information, and even grammatical structure. The ideal state is that the translator is committed to a high degree of fidelity at the language level as long as he is not involved in the interpretation of the target language. This is a self-regulating theory of communication. According to this theory, the sender of the information (the referent here) adjusts information according to the recipient (translation target reader) and other contextual factors in the process of self-regulation to achieve equilibrium. The balance here can be understood as an ideal result, that is, using the information to achieve the maximum understanding with the smallest language components and structures.

## 4. DECONSTRUCTION AND CONSTRUCTIVISM IN TRANSLATION STUDIES

### 4.1 Deconstruction in Translation Studies

In the 1960s, Derrida, a French philosopher, proposed the theory of "deconstructionism" based on his criticism of structuralism in linguistics. It was an anti-traditional trend of thought. Derrida took Nietzsche's "words beyond all ideas" and Heidegger's deconstruction thought. He believes that the interpretation of Western rationalism should be subverted and replaced by metonymic thinking. The study of translation theory is limited by traditional binary philosophical thinking, manifested as equivalence and inequality, surface structure and deep structure. Derrida thinks that Western philosophy is "metaphysics on the scene," that is, there is a fundamental principle, a center, an absolute truth behind all things, and his theory of deconstruction is to subvert this "metaphysics." On the basis of Benjamin, he proposed the famous concept of "difference" 延异 and questioned the ontological "existence": Is presence present? The presence of "divergence" is the absence because it does not exist at all. In discourse analysis, discourse meaning is difficult to confirm in the interrelationship between spatial "extra" "异" and temporal "extension" "延". Therefore, discourse is no longer a given structure on site, but a collection of continuous analysis of deconstruction. Deconstruction believes that the source text does not have a fixed identity, and its identity changes with each reading or translation. Its meaning is not determined by the original text but by the translation. Derrida believes that each interpretation of the source text by the translator in the process of translation will have a different experience from the previous understanding, but it is impossible to reach the real world of primitive language, but only to sense the trace of a meaning—The result of different delays. At the same time, he believes that the essence of language can be grasped only when there is a difference between specific languages. Therefore, translation is a process of deconstructing the original meaning of the original text, and it is also a process in which the translation is constantly being modified. The differences in semantics,

syntax, and phonetics of different languages result in different ways of expressing meaning, and translation is the balancing of similarities and differences in never-ending analysis. Whether deconstruction translation is seen as a school of translation theory (Liao Qiyi, 2000)<sup>4</sup> remains to be verified. However, deconstructionism has indeed added new directions for translation theory.

### 4.2 Constructivist Translation Studies

The constructivist paradigm of translation studies is based on the philosophy of practice. Constructivist philosophy has many theories. The earliest ideas can be traced back to St. Simon, Kant, and Marx, followed by symbolic interactionism, phenomenal sociology, and communicative action theory. The constructive theory thinks that human beings always create and reform the environment, reshape and transform society, create and transform the world. In the course of natural transformation, society recognizes the natural environment, recognizes itself and recognizes the world, and spirals up the understanding and transforms the world in accordance; humans fulfill self, enjoy themselves, enjoy self-realization, and realize in this practice and understanding activities. Self-realization is the fundamental purpose. The above three aspects of the human activity process are intertwined with each other and they constitute an inseparable whole. This whole is what philosophy of activism calls "practice."

Therefore, the "practice" of the activism philosophy has three basic meanings: the first is to engage in the process of creating or transforming external things other than self; the second is to understand the activities of external things other than self; the third is the self-satisfaction, enjoyment, pleasure, and realization achieved in this process.

So what do these constructivist ideas have to do with translation studies? Donald Kiraly<sup>2</sup> believes that constructivism should be opposed to the entire coding-decoding paradigm. According to the latter's point of view, knowledge is transmitted from a passive receiver to another receiver, just as water is poured from a tray into a bucket. Some knowledge will enter a text and then be transmitted to another text. Some scholars compare it to a pipe, through which meaning flows from one language to another. Translation is nothing more than a transfer process. In fact, the meaning of the Latin verb 'translation' is poured in, which means that the same amount of water is poured into containers of different shapes. For Kiraly, translator training is based on the same transmission. The teacher is seen as a source text and has knowledge that can be poured into the minds of passive students. These students are arranged in the classroom like many empty containers. Constructivism believes that knowledge does not work this way. Just as students are actively involved in their learning process, translators actively construct the texts they want to produce. Kiraly focuses on the effect of constructivism on translator training.

The constructivism paradigm of translation studies is a rebellious reflection on the paradigm of past translation studies. The translation study of the constructivist paradigm emphasizes the study of "discourse", and has an

important influence on the translator's activities in the view of language and discourse. The source text is no longer seen as a static finished language product, but as an interaction between the translator and the original author, the translator and the reader. This interaction will inevitably cause translators to pay attention to various pragmatic and social factors. Therefore, in translation practice, the translator must pay attention to the language level as well as the social and cultural level, so that the translation practice can be furthered.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Translation is the central issue of cross-cultural communication. Translation studies theory is influenced by different philosophical paradigms and different language theories. These philosophical trends of thought and language theories have an important guiding for the establishment of various translation models. This paper introduces and discusses the philosophical thinking paradigms of modern translation research theories. The translation theories of different philosophical thoughts have different perspectives, and their differences have major impacts on the nature and value of translation, such as the relativism and universal rationalism translation perspective, constructivism and deconstruction translation perspective. In translation studies, modern translation research theories must summarize and compare the philosophical sources of different translation schools and

the concept of language communication, so as to establish a comparative scientific system of translation research theories.

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