Differences in English and Chinese Cohesive Devices and Their Application in English-to-Chinese Translation Teaching[*]

LIU Sha, WANG Nian-nian

University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China

English and Chinese are different in the way they realize cohesion. The English learners should bear in mind the different cohesive devices predominantly employed in the two languages so as to gain a thorough understanding of the source discourse and then produce acceptable discourse when translating from English to Chinese. Through a contrastive study, with a special reference to the English novel *Vanity Fair* (1996) and its Chinese version *Minglichang* (1997), this paper aims to explore the differences between English and Chinese cohesive devices, namely, reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion and attempt to put forward the corresponding translation strategies. The writers hope that the findings can be helpful in English-to-Chinese translation teaching when the teacher shows how to produce cohesive discourse in the target language.

Keywords: cohesive devices, translation, reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, lexical cohesion

Introduction

The concept of cohesion is described as "a semantic one; it refers to relations of meaning that exist within the text and that define it as text" (Halliday & Hasan, 1976, p. 4). To put it more simply, cohesion occurs where the INTERPRETATION of some element in the discourse is dependent on that of another (Halliday & Hasan, 1976, p. 4). It is the cohesive devices that combine the bits of information into a meaningful and unified whole. According to Halliday and Hasan, cohesion is realized mainly through the following five devices: reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion.

While every language has at its disposal a set of devices for maintaining discoursal cohesion, different languages have preferences for certain of these devices and neglect certain others (James, 1980, p. 109). Although both English and Chinese languages have the above-mentioned five cohesive devices, they favor them in different degrees.

Consequently, in English-to-Chinese translation teaching, the teacher shall first of all draw the English learners' attention to these differences and warn them that the formal structure of English should not be forced upon Chinese and they are to be well prepared to make necessary changes to reproduce the message in

accordance with Chinese language features, with the ideas or information conveyed in the source discourse remaining intact.

To facilitate teaching English-to-Chinese translation in class, especially in the cases concerning cohesive devices, the writers conduct contrastive studies on the differences between the English and Chinese cohesive devices, mainly with a reference to the English novel *Vanity Fair* (1996) and *Minglichang* (1997), its Chinese version translated by YANG Bi (1922-1968). The writers explore the five devices one by one so as to find the differences in the way the two languages realize cohesion and how YANG Bi, a great translator, copes with the differences. The findings may hopefully serve as guidance for the English learners to translate a discourse from English to Chinese.

Reference

Reference is a semantic relation linking an instance of language to its context of situation (exophoric reference) or the surrounding discourse (endophoric reference). This study will focus on the latter since "exophoric reference does not contribute to the integration of one passage with another so that the two together form part of the same discourse" (Halliday & Hasan, 1976, p. 37). Endophoric reference may be anaphoric (referring back to the preceding discourse) as in Example 1 and cataphoric (pointing forward to referent to be introduced in the following discourse) as in Example 2.

Example (1) *Amelia* did not dare to look at Rebecca's pale face and burning eyes, but *she* dropt the letter into her friend's lap. (p. 79, *Vanity Fair*)

Example (2) So that when the day of departure came, between *her* two customs of laughing and crying, *Miss Sedley* was gently puzzled how to act. (p. 6, *Vanity Fair*)

Reference can generally be subdivided into three types, namely, personal (especially the third person pronouns: *she*, *he*, *it*, *they*), demonstrative *(here/there*, *now/then*, *this/that*, *these/those)*, and comparative (*equal*, *similar*, *other*, *more*, etc.). What is worth noting is that the first and second personals are exophorical and do not contribute to the cohesion within the discourse. As a result, only the third personal pronouns will be discussed here.

Personal Pronouns

In both English and Chinese languages, the use of personal pronouns for reference is more or less similar, but the differences do exist.

The biggest difference lies in frequency of occurrences. In English, pronouns have a considerably higher frequency of occurrences mainly because of the language's rigidness on the completeness of the formal structure. For instance, the determiners (articles or pronouns) generally precede the common nouns. Chinese, however, is economical in using pronouns and other determiners. As a matter of fact, the third person pronouns " (male)", " (female)", and " (inanimate)" did not appear in Chinese language until the May 4th Movement. Besides, the three pronouns, though different from each other in forms, have exactly the same pronunciation. When spoken, they may be ambiguous for the listener. For example: *she told them he never gave her any information about his friend at Cambridge fearing that she would in one way or another leak it out*. If the pronouns are literally translated into their Chinese equivalents, it will be like this:

(LIU, 1985, p. 371). The listener will be completely confused and soon lose track of referents.

Instead of using pronouns, Chinese language tends to re-use the nouns. As a result, more often than not, the speaker or writer would rather use other devices (e.g., lexical cohesion) for reference to avoid the potential ambiguity.

In translation from English to Chinese, the way to deal with the abundant pronouns in English needs the translator's close attention and flexible readjustment. Otherwise, the translation may be translationese and sound awkward.

The students should bear in mind all the differences, especially the fact that Chinese is economical in using pronouns, thus avoiding the unnecessary use of pronouns in translation. Let us take a look at Example 3.

Example (3) *You* may be sure that *she* showed Rebecca over every room of the house, and everything in every one of *her* drawers; and *her* books, and *her* piano, and *her* dresses, and *her* necklaces, brooches, laces, and gimcracks. *She* insisted upon Rebecca accepting the white cornelian and the turquoise rings, and a sweet sprigged muslin, which was too small for *her* now, though *it* would fit *her* friend to a nicety; and *she* determined in *her* heart to ask *her* mother's permission to present *her* white Cashmere shawl to *her* friend. Could *she* not spare *it*?—and had not *her* brother Joseph just brought *her* two from India? (p. 20, *Vanity Fair*)

Example (4)

(p. 18, *Minglichang*)

YANG Bi's translation (Example 4) well illustrates the striking differences two languages have in the use of the personal reference. In the English discourse, there are 20 pronouns while in its Chinese translation, only half, 10, are used.

When an English discourse is re-presented in Chinese, the pronouns sometimes are simply omitted under the condition that no ambiguity arises. Among those omitted are mainly the possessive pronouns and those acting as objects of the transitive verbs and prepositions. For example, possessive adjectives are seldom used except when contrast is intended. They can be dispensed with together if the possessor is evident to the hearer or the reader, as can be seen from the same example mentioned above. Of the 11 possessive pronouns *her* in this discourse, only two remain in YANG Bi's translation. And the omission contributes to the naturalness of the translation.

In another scenario, the pronouns can be restored to their referents by repeating the nouns since Chinese is more likely to employ repetition as cohesive device (see Example 5).

Example (5) If people would but leave children to themselves; the teachers would cease to bully *them*, if parents would not insist upon directing *their* thought, and dominating *their* feelings… small harm would accrue. (pp. 53-54, *Vanity Fair*)

In YANG's translation, *them* is translated into   (students), and *their*,   (sons and daughters).

A close study of *Vanity Fair* and YANG Bi's translation also revealed another interesting phenomenon: the English pronoun, *they*, when referring to inanimate things, is translated into its referent, a noun, without exception. Although it is far from wrong to use   (they) to refer to inanimate things, a Chinese will

instinctively avoid using them if he/she can. He/she can simply omit them or repeat the noun forms or replace them with their synonyms or general words.

Demonstrative Pronouns

Chinese scholars are very interested in the differences between English demonstratives *this/that* and their Chinese equivalents   /   . According to XU Yu-long, English remote demonstrative *that* seems to have a higher functional load than near demonstrative *this*. So *that* is much more frequently used than *this*. In Chinese, however, the opposite seems to be the case.

The writers' statistical survey reveals that, of the 101 demonstratives *that* in 15 Chapters (1-7, 13, 15, 17, 28-32) in *Vanity Fair*, a considerable portion (33%) are reproduced into   (this). This shows that some of the functions performed by *that* in English in referring to something remote will be played in Chinese by the near demonstrative   (this). The preference to the use of   (this) in Chinese lies in the inclination of the Chinese mind to bring the distance near. The choice of near and remote demonstratives and adverbs is thus determined more by psychological factors than by real-world time and space, as is the case in English (XU, 1992, pp. 253-254).

In English-to-Chinese translation, therefore, the translator can switch from *that* to *this* if the referent is psychologically near, as we can see from Examples 6-7.

Example (6) When Jos heard *that* dreadful sound, he made up his mind that he would bear this perpetual recurrence of terror no longer, and would fly at once. (p. 456)

Example (7)   (p. 401)

Substitution

Substitution refers to the replacement of a previous expression with an item like *one*, *same* (nominal substitution), *do* (verb substitution), and *so* (clausal substitution). And they coincide with "…   ", "   ", "   ", and "   " in Chinese. After the exhaustive statistical study in six chapters (1, 2, 3, 5, 13, and 29) in *Vanity Fair*, the writers find 26 cases of substitution. All of the replaced elements are reiterated in the Chinese version with only four exceptions.

When transferring from English into Chinese, it is handy to adopt the same strategy of substitution. In many cases, however, there is not a one-to-one correspondence in terms of substitution. Comparatively speaking, substitution is more frequently adopted in English than in Chinese, and substitution in English may be realized by means of reference or repetition in Chinese.

Ellipsis

Ellipsis (nominal, verbal, and clausal) "creates cohesion by leaving out what can be taken over from preceding discourse" (Halliday & Hasan, 1976, p. 196). In other words, it leaves out something unsaid that is understood or inferable from the context. It is left to the reader to make clear the omitted elements. As a popular cohesive device both in Chinese and English, ellipsis presents more or less different features, largely due to the different language types.

Firstly, nominal ellipsis is more common in Chinese discourse, especially when involving the personal pronouns acting as subjects. This is also referred to as zero-anaphora. It means the pronouns referring to the same thing or person in the same discourse can be omitted without giving rise to misunderstanding or ambiguity, e.g.,

"   "

". The sentence leaves out the same personal pronoun   six times which otherwise fills the brackets. This is unacceptable in English.

Secondly, in English, the same predicate can be omitted, which never occurs in Chinese. For example: "*History makes men wise, mathematics subtle; logic and rhetoric able to contend*". The omission of the verb *makes* guarantee(s) the sentence's conciseness, but when translated into Chinese, the left-out verb has to be restored.

The clausal ellipsis in the two languages is largely the same. The writers will not elaborate it here.

A comparative study of *Vanity Fair* and its Chinese translation also reveals two tendencies in Chinese: (1) If the ellipted part is presupposed somewhere distant from the elliptical form, not in different sentences, for example, the repetition of the same content is adoptable. It will not be considered repetitious in Chinese; and (2) If the omitted parts are presupposed somewhere within the same sentence, the repetition may sound monotonous and tedious. It is more likely to use the expression synonymous to each other.

Conjunction

Conjunction involves those linguistic forms that connect clauses and establish various kinds of relations, such as temporal (then), causal (so), additive (and), and adversative (but). These connective forms essentially make explicit the implicit relations between clauses.

English is very rich in connecting words which the reader usually relies on to figure out the semantic or logical relations between the clauses while Chinese language, due to its parataxis language attributes, has much fewer connecting words. The internal relation between the sentences is usually implied and can only be inferred in the context, e.g., "   ". The causal relation between the two sentences is not highlighted by the overt linguistic marker, but the native Chinese readers are not likely to misunderstand it largely because of Chinese language's relatively fixed word order, which more agrees with people's natural thought flow. Generally, Chinese sentences follow the patterns as listed below: (1) cause before effect; (2) reason before result; (3) analysis before conclusion; and (4) premise before assumption.

When reproducing the English discourse in Chinese, it is natural to shift the overt markers to covert relations.

Lexical Cohesion

Lexical cohesion falls into three categories: (1) repetition of the same lexical item; (2) reiteration, the use of a synonym, near-synonym, hyponym, or a general word to refer back to a lexical item; and (3) collocation, the association of lexical items that regularly co-exist. The sentences in a discourse are related through these lexical relations so that interpretation of one sentence is dependent on another.

English seems to hate repetition. People incline to avoid using the same words twice in a sentence unless they are repeating intentionally for emphasis or for clarity. Variation is valued in English discourse. Chinese, however, is more likely to re-use the same nouns.

Example (8) … with respect to *the piano*, as it had been Amelia's, and as she might miss it and want one now, and as Captain William Donbbin could not play upon it than he could dance on the tightrope, it is probable that he did not purchase *the instrument* for his own use. (p. 223)

This sentence clearly illustrates the English discoursal habit of avoiding repetition, and the word *piano* is replaced by its hyponym, *instrument* when the thing is mentioned for the second time. In YANG Bi's version, however, the term   occurs three times to indicate the same thing.

Conclusions

English and Chinese are different in the way they achieve cohesion in discourse due to different language types on the one hand, and the different discoursal organization patterns resulting from the different thought patterns on the other hand. The differences lead to readjustment accordingly. The translator should respect the features of the target language's discourse realization and exploit the potentialities of the language to the greatest possible extent. The teacher, when teaching translation from English to Chinese, should impress on students the differences in cohesive devices and necessity of making adjustment.

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