

Theoretical Transplantation into Translation Studies

—An Analysis on the Pragmatic Application of Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

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The deepening process of globalization has given rise to restless cultural exchanges among people from different regions of the world through newspapers, books, and other written media. However, the significant differences in languages and cultures have become an insurmountable gap in intercultural communication. To lubricate cultural exchanges, new translation theories that focus on the transformation of different cultural concepts shall be introduced and adopted. This paper aims to extract applicable notions from Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions for pragmatic translation studies by laying emphasis on its pragmatic value through case study. By such theoretical transplantation, valuable suggestions are proposed to tackle cultural misunderstandings and conflicts encountered amid cultural exchanges.

Keywords: cultural exchange, Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions, pragmatic translation studies, theoretical transplantation

1. Introduction

Globalization has become an irreversible process shaping our world today. With the advancement of technology and easier access to the rest of the world, intercultural communication between different regions has accelerated significantly. By means of newspapers, books, and other forms of media, people from all corners of the globe are now more closely connected than ever before. However, amid the worldwide course of integration, we cannot overlook the substantial differences in language and culture that exist between societies, which pose challenges and create a daunting gap in cultural communication. To endow translation with an ability to bridge those cultural gaps, new concepts targeted at cultural issues shall be introduced from pertinent theories to make interdisciplinary contributions to intercultural communication. Therefore, this paper revolves around a well-known theory, Hofstede's Cultural Dimension Theory, which elaborates cultural differences between Eastern and Western cultures from five dimensions. Analysis will be conducted to offer applicable suggestions from the perspective of pragmatic translation studies to bridge cultural gaps.

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Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Geert Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory was proposed after two rounds of questionnaire surveys of the staff at IBM (International Business Machines Corporation) from 1967 to 1973, covering more than 116,000 individuals from 72 countries in over 20 languages.

The surveys focused on cultural differences demonstrated by the staff's sense of value. He classified the results of the surveys and concluded five cultural dimensions: Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Collectivism versus Individualism, and Masculinity versus Femininity and Long-term versus Short-term Orientation. In 2010, he added the sixth dimension, Restraint versus Indulgence, which is not as frequently referenced.

Power Distance

The concept of Power Distance, borrowed from the work of the Dutch social psychologist Mauk Mulder, refers to the measure of the interpersonal power or influence between two people P and S, where P has more power than S (Hofstede, 2003: 83). A country or society with greater Power Distance reflects rigid stratification and centralized power, while a culture showing less Power Distance is featured with legitimate use of power and a wider range of empowerment. Normally, western cultures show less Power Distance than eastern cultures.

Uncertainty Avoidance

Uncertainty Avoidance refers to opinions from different societies in face of uncertainty. Various societies have developed distinct approaches to dealing with uncertainty, which vary not only between conventional and contemporary societies but also within contemporary societies. (Hofstede, 2003: 146) Eastern societies normally boasts higher Uncertainty Avoidance, equipped with a more comprehensive set of rules and guidance to cope with unpredictable events.

Collectivism versus Individualism

Collectivism and Individualism, as the names suggest, differentiate in the tendency of gregariousness or solitude. When observing a wide array of human societies, both traditional and modern, it becomes evident that there are disparities in gregariousness. These variances can be observed in various aspects, such as the intricacy of familial structures, which subsequently impact individuals' daily conduct. (Hofstede, 2003: 210) Most western societies focus more on individual benefits.

Masculinity versus Femininity

A society is characterized by masculinity when there is a clear differentiation in social gender roles: Men are expected to possess qualities of assertiveness, resilience, and ambition, focusing primarily on material success, while women are expected to exhibit traits of modesty, gentleness, and a focus on the overall quality of life. In contrast, femininity refers to a society where social gender roles blend together: Both men and women are anticipated to display characteristics of modesty, gentleness, and an emphasis on the overall quality of life. (Hofstede, 2003: 297)

Long-term versus Short-term Orientation

When considering Long-term Orientation, it signifies the promotion of virtues that are focused on reaping future benefits, especially traits like persistence and frugality. Conversely, the opposing ideology of Short-term

Orientation emphasizes the development of virtues connected to the past and present, specifically emphasizing the importance of tradition, maintaining one's reputation, and fulfilling social responsibilities. (Hofstede, 2003: 359)

Pragmatic Translation Studies

Pragmatic Translation Studies, an interdisciplinary academic field, emerged at the end of the 1980s. This area has experienced nearly 30 years of development and is stuck in an impasse in which the progress is stable while the bottleneck is hard to break through. (Li, 2023: 8) Research on the Pragmatic Translation Studies in China revolves around the Relevance Theory, proposed by D. Sperber & D. Willson in 1986, and the Adaption Theory, proposed by J. Verschueren in 1999.

Relevance Theory

The Relevance Theory assumes that language communication is a process from explicitness to inference. To simplify, the speaker expresses what his or her intention is through words and the listener tries to infer the implication from the words. The situation holds true for the process of translation, where the explication of the original text is revealed and the translator shall make attempts to show the implication in his or her rendition. (Yan, 2022: 74) The Relevance Theory emphasizes the diversity of specific contexts. It is assumed that there is an optimal relevance to every explicit communicative act. (Zhan, 2023: 36)

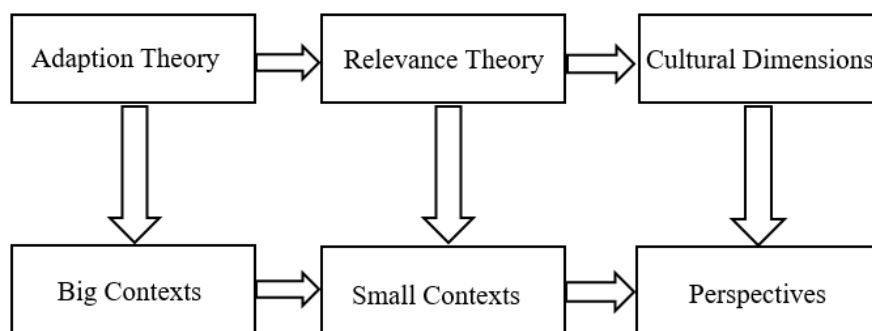
Adaption Theory

According to the Adaption theory, translation should adapt to different communicative contexts and individuals, selecting language patterns that are in tune with the specific interlocutors and situations. As a form of cross-cultural communication, translation involves a dynamic process of adapting to the linguistic choices based on the varying contexts and language structures, aiming to fulfil the communicative needs of both sides to the greatest extent possible. (Xia & Chen, 2023: 128) Compared with the Relevance Theory, the Adaption Theory is heavily weighted in favor of bigger contexts — social and cultural backgrounds.

Theoretical Transplantation

The field of interdisciplinary studies is now deemed as the guiding principle for the transformation of higher education in the 21st century and as a key term in university strategic planning. (Jiao & Yang, 2023: 29) On the basis of interdisciplinary research, translation is one of the academic areas that came into being and has since thrived. (Zheng, 2023: 36)

In this paper, Theoretical Transplantation refers to taking Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions as referential perspectives. Translators can have a clear understanding of the contexts in the original texts according to the Relevance and Adaption Theories from pragmatic translation studies, which can formulate a complete pre-translation workflow (hereinafter referred to as "the workflow") as follows:



Translators are supposed to obey the analytical order from the left to the right. Under the Relevance Theory, translators shall focus on the “Big Contexts”, normally the cultural, social or economic backgrounds of the original texts. By the Relevance Theory, translators need to infer the implicit messages from the “Small Contexts”, including the specific place where events happen, the relationship between the characters and so forth. Finally, the Cultural Dimensions by Hofstede serve as specific perspectives from which translators can develop a variety of methods and strategies of how to process the information from the texts.

The workflow can be processed orderly. Firstly, to avoid detachment from the cultural contexts, the original text is analyzed in conjunction with its historical setting. Subsequently, the specific occasion in which the events occur is analyzed, narrowing down the scope of the overall context. Lastly, taking into account the Cultural Dimensions, profound insights from both “Big and Small Contexts” are explored to offer suggestions to translating, followed by the application of appropriate translation strategies and methods.

Case Analysis

The theoretical reasonability of the workflow has been explained, acting as a guide to realize the pragmatic application of Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions, which can only be achieved eventually by examining the actual effect on the process of translation. Therefore, a case analysis will be conducted separately for different types of translation by using suitable Cultural Dimensions as referential perspectives.

Business Translation

Business translation is a highly practical type of translation that happens every day. In business translation, translators shall first take cultural elements into consideration, such as differences in titles and etiquette.

For business translation, the workflow can be perfectly implemented to tell the subtle differences of workplaces in different countries. Among the Cultural Dimensions, Power Distance and Collectivism/Individualism can be a suitable perspective in this case, and an example is shown as follows:

Source Text:

尊敬的伊恩·雅各布斯校长：

您好！近日身体是否安好？我们代表XX大学诚挚邀请您出席新南威尔士大学八月的签字会。我方出席的人员包括我校校长及六名陪同学术人员。我方希望获知您的行程安排，以便我们安排签字会具体日期。

丹尼尔·张，XX大学学术部主任

2023年8月14日

Translated Text:

Dear Principal Ian Jacob,

Best regards and hope you enjoy good health. We, on behalf of XX University, sincerely invite you to attend the signing ceremony at UNSW in August. Our principal and other six teachers will attend the ceremony, and we hope to know your schedule so that we can confirm the exact date of the ceremony.

Yours sincerely,

Director of Academic Committee, XX University

August 14, 2023

This is an example of email translation which is processed by conveying the meaning of the original text. However, owing to the distinctions of business cultures between China and Australia, the translation may appear slightly inappropriate and offensive.

First, the Big Context is the conflict of Chinese and Australia business cultures. Next, we can know that this is an email by XX University from China to invite the Principal of UNSW from Australia to attend a ceremony, which is the Small Context. Moreover, from the perspective of Collectivism/Individualism and Power Distance, we can conclude that the two cultures have different attitudes to privacy and titles.

Therefore, the translator are not supposed to ask about the Principal's personal information. Besides, it is strange to put the title of Ian Jacob at the beginning due to the small Power Distance in Australia. A revised version is shown as below:

Revised Text:

Dear Ian Jacob,

We hope this email finds you well.

This is a sincere invitation from XX University for you, Principal of UNSW, to attend the signing ceremony to be held at UNSW in August. A delegation from XX University including our Principal and other six excellent research members, will be dispatched to attend the ceremony, and the exact date of the event will be confirmed at your convenience. Therefore, we would appreciate it if you inform us of your planned date of attendance.

Yours sincerely,

Daniel Zhang

Director of Academic Committee, XX University

August 14, 2023

By analyzing the source text through the lens of Power Distance and Collectivism/ Individualism, translators can get useful suggestions to make their renditions for business contexts more acceptable for readers from other parts of the world, especially native English speakers.

Historical Translation

The genre of historical translation needs more consideration of various cultural elements than any other kind of translation. History, as a humanities discipline, has great value in academic exchanges and research. The introduction of Cultural Dimensions will act instructively in the exploration of defining factors for historical translation.

Source Text:

越践反国，乃苦身焦思，置坐，坐卧即尝胆，饮食亦尝胆也。“汝会忘耻邪？”身自耕作，夫人自织，食不加肉，衣不重采，折节下贤人，厚遇宾客，振贫吊死，与百姓同其劳。

选自司马迁《史记》

Translated Text:

After King Goujian of Yue returned to his country, he contemplated and worked hard. He hung the gall bladder on his seat and could sit and lie down to taste it. He could also taste the gall bladder in his diet. He also said, "Have you forgotten the shame on Kuaiji Mount?" He cultivated the land on his own, and his wife weaved the cloth by herself, and there was never any meat or vegetables in his meal. He never wear clothes of two or more colors, and he tries to be polite to wise people, compromises, treats guests warmly and sincerely, helps the poor, mourns the deceased, and works together with ordinary people.

An excerpt from Historical Records by Sima Qian

The paragraph records a well-known event that happened in the Spring and Autumn Period in the Chinese history — the Big Context, in which King Goujian of Yue lost the battle with King Fuchai of Wu and returned to Yue after being captured by Wu — the Small Context. The descriptions contain a series of movements by Goujian, showing his unwavering resolve to revenge himself on Wu regardless of the disastrous defeat, even at the expense of years of hard work and austerity, which is an example of Long-term Orientation and Masculinity in Chinese history — the cultural perspectives. The translator shall use proper strategies, the method of amplification for instance, to articulate Goujian's long-term view and his masculinity-targeted preference on hard work for material success. A revised text is provided below for reference.

Revised Text:

After being released, King Goujian of Yue returned to his country, sitting and contemplating revenge for the shameful days he went through in Wu. He hung a gall bladder over his seat and tasted its bitterness every day as a reminder for the disastrous defeat. He promised, "Never will I forget the shame on Kuaiji Mount!" Besides, he strove harder for excellence and governance. As a king, Goujian dressed himself plainly; he treated able men and scholars with the greatest courtesy and remained quite accommodating for the overall interests; he extended warm welcomes to guests and made them feel at home; he gave material assistance to the poor and expressed condolences to the families of the deceased; and he joined his people in daily sweated labor.

An excerpt from Historical Records by Sima Qian

The revised version puts its emphasis on explaining the ambition and efforts in an explicit manner. It uses the method of amplification several times to vividly depict the image of Goujian. By analyzing the source text from the perspective of Long-term Orientation and Masculinity in the Chinese culture, the implication is wide open for English readers to understand.

Political Translation

Political translation is another critical type of translation, playing an important role in promoting different political ideas and enhancing multilateral understanding in the international community. Under the workflow, the political ideas in one culture can be analyzed and elaborated clearly in another language from the perspective of a compliant Cultural Dimension.

Source Text:

城狐社鼠皆微物，为其有所凭恃，故除之犹不易。况世家贵戚，旧号难理，汉、晋以来，不能禁御；武德之中，以多骄纵；陛下登极，方始萧条。

选自吴兢《贞观政要》

Translated Text

Foxes in the city and mice in the temple are all small things, and because they have special nests, it is still difficult to eliminate them. The noble relatives of the Aristocratic Family were difficult to manage, and they have not been eradicated since the Han and Jin dynasties; During Wude times, there is much arrogance and indulgence, which began to decline after your Majesty ascended to the throne.

An excerpt from *Zhenguan Political Dignitaries* by Wu Jing

Zhenguan Political Dignitaries is a document about political discourses and ideas during Zhenguan times written by Wujing in the Tang Dynasty, the Big Context of the material, when there is potential risk resulted from the abuse of power and privilege by the noble relatives of the imperial house, the Small context for the discourse about the danger.

The discourse by the Minister Wei Zheng uses the rhetoric of simile, comparing the noble relatives to small yet harmful animals such as foxes and mice. He intended to emphasize the looming danger of negligence of inconspicuous risks from noble relatives, showing the high level of Uncertainty Avoidance in the ancient Chinese culture. From this perspective, proper methods shall be used to highlight the simile and stress the concern of Weizheng.

Revised Text:

Wei Zheng acclaimed, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Small dangers such as the foxes and mice in the city, which are hard to eradicate, can cause enormous losses, and it holds true for the noble relatives, who started to abuse and usurp power since the Han and Jin Dynasties and remained unharmed at large. During Wude times, the arrogance of the noble relatives peaked, significantly impairing the supremacy of the imperial house. The situation began to gain resilience as your Majesty ascended to the throne.”

An excerpt from *Zhenguan Political Dignitaries* by Wu Jing

At the beginning, a proverb aims to offer explanatory information about the simile. Besides, it puts “foxes and mice” and the “noble relatives” parts together to strengthen the connection of the signified and the signifier. The revised text, guided by the principle of amplifying the effect of simile, renders the political ideas herein comprehensible by English readers.

Conclusion

The advocate for theoretical transplantation in this paper is reasoned and proved by the process of explaining the theories involved, constructing theoretical framework and conducting case analysis, and conclusions can be obtained from the following aspects.

(1) The possibility of the theoretical transplantation herein can be envisaged. There are intricate connections between translation and cultural studies, and the interdisciplinary tendency is expected to grow. The pragmatic application of Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions will offer new insights for both translators and cultural researchers.

(2) The feasibility of the workflow established herein can be guaranteed. The workflow is constructed on the basis of successful theoretical transplantation Through case analysis, it can be further proved that the workflow has hand-on application in the pre-translation analysis.

(3) The diversity of applicable translation types can be anticipated. In this paper, three types of translation are adopted in the case analysis and they get improvements in the revised version of translated texts under the workflow. As the branches of translation diverge and stretch, new types of translation will emerge, and the workflow may provide further references.

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