Study of Discourse Translation Strategies under the Guidance of Cohesion Theory: Taking the English-Chinese Translation of O. Henry’s Short Stories as an Example

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Abstract- Cohesion is one of the most important features of discourse. In recent years, there have been many researches on cohesion theory, but there has not been numerous researches on how translators translate cohesive devices in specific discourses and what are suggestions on translation strategies for English-Chinese cohesive devices that can be offered to translators. This paper adopts comparative analysis method and case analysis method to study O. Henry’s three short stories and Wang Yongnian’s translations under the guidance of grammatical cohesive devices proposed by Halliday and Hasan (1976). Results indicated that the frequency and habits of the use of cohesive devices in English and Chinese discourses are different. In O. Henry’s three short stories, personal reference and substitution are more frequently used, while in Wang Yongnian’s translations, ellipsis and word repetition are more frequently. Therefore, in E-C translation, translators should determined the specific cohesive device which the word represents by the context firstly and should not always preserve the cohesive devices in original texts, but modify these discourse-forming mechanisms according to semantics and context. Furthermore, translators should realize the cohesion from the perspective of the whole discourse.

Keywords- Adolescents, Mental Health, Concepts And Structures.

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the 1960s, the remarkable development of discourse linguistics has greatly enriched translation studies. Translation unit has been expanded from words, sentences to paragraphs and discourses. In recent years, a great number of translators take discourse as the basic unit of translation. Halliday (1976), the founder of system-functional linguistics, defined “discourse” as “the word text is used in linguistics to refer to any passage, spoken or written, of whatever length, that does form a unified whole.” Cohesion, as one of the most important features of discourse, cannot be ignored. According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), cohesion occurs when the interpretation of one component depends on another, and it serves the connection of meanings. A good command of cohesive devices can not only help to better understand the original text, but also to produce a good translation to convey the same meaning as the original text as possible.

In recent years, there have been a number of researches on cohesion theory, but they mainly focus on English teaching or writing, rather than translation studies. Therefore, this paper will compare and analyze the usage of cohesive devices in O. Henry’s short stories and Wang Yongnian’s translation under the guidance of cohesion theory and provide some suggestions for E-C discourse translations.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Introduction to Cohesion Theory

In 1962, the British linguist Halliday first proposed the concept of “cohesion”, and divided it into “grammatical cohesion” and “lexical cohesion”. The former is further referred to two types—structural cohesion and unstructured cohesion, while the latter—reiteration and collocation. The book Cohesion in English (1976) co-authored by Halliday and Hasan was published, which further elaborates and develops the above theories. In this book, cohesive devices are mainly divided into five categories: reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical collocation. Among them, the first four are grammatical cohesion, and the last one is lexical cohesion. After the publication of this book, cohesion theory has attracted wide attention in the linguistic field. It has won support and appreciation while it has also been disapproved by some scholars. Widdowson (1978, as cited in Zhu Yongsheng, 1995) believed that semantically coherent texts had no cohesive ties in form. Enkvist (1978, as cited in Zhu Yongsheng, 1995) also questioned the cohesion theory, arguing that even if there were a lot of cohesion marks in an article, it cannot be regarded as a guarantee of semantic coherence. In addition, some scholars further improved and developed the cohesion theory proposed by Halliday and Hasan (1976). Hu Zhuanglin (1996) thought that the cohesion and coherence of the discourse is multi-level, including social symbols, semantics, structure, vocabulary and phonology. Additionally, he expanded the scope of structural cohesion, adding “parallelism”, “alternation” and “merging” into it. Another scholar, Zhang Delu (2001) proposed the cohesion of interpersonal meaning and the cohesion between
text and context, which expanding the scope of cohesive mechanism.

B. The Application of Cohesion Theory in Discourses and Discourse-based Translations

The application of cohesive devices in different discourse are widely researched. It is found that the frequency of use of different cohesive devices in the same discourse is different, and the frequency of use of the same cohesive devices in different languages is similar to some extent(Afzaal et al. 2019, Krisztina 2017), but there are still some important differences. For example, scientific discourses use less ellipsis than other types of discourses in order to ensure semantic clarity(Yang Lili, 2018).

In addition to the research on the application of cohesive devices in different types of discourses, many scholars have also studied the usage of cohesive devices in English and Chinese. It is found that the usage habits of cohesive devices in English and Chinese discourses are different due to the differences between English and Chinese. According to Chien’s experiment(2019), “Chinese prefers covert rather than overt cohesion, making the target language more concise but without omitting any information in the context.” Therefore, compared to English, lexical cohesion and grammatical cohesion are used relatively less in Chinese, which is also supported by Zhu Lin’s research(2017), believing that English mainly applies grammatical devices to produce a coherent discourse, while Chinese realizes cohesion by context.

On the application of cohesive devices in translation practice, Chen Yang(2016) proposed that the translator should adjust the cohesive devices of the original text to achieve the accurate transmission of meaning. Lu Jieyu(2016) similarly suggested that the cohesion of the original text should be creatively reproduced in the process of E-C translation.

Overall, discourse cohesion theory has been well developed. There are many studies on the application of cohesion theory in discourses, but it still need to further research on how to apply these devices in E-C discourse translation.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

A. Research Questions

Under the guidance of the cohesion theory proposed by Halliday and Hasan(1976), this paper mainly discusses the following two questions:

1) What translation strategies did Wang Yongnian adopt when translating grammatical cohesive devices in English?

2) What are further suggestions for the E-C translation of cohesive devices?

B. Research Materials

The main research materials are O. Henry’s short stories which are well known to the public as literary works and Wang Yongnian’s translated version which is widely recognized, with the former published by Garden City Publishing Company in 1937, and the latter by People’s Literature Publishing House in 2003.

C. Data Collection and Analysis

The original novels and Wang Yongnian’s translation were found on the websites. In this research, we selected three short stories—The Gift of the Magi, The Cop and the Anthem and A Service of Love and their translations for comparative analysis. Before the comparative analysis, we used the ABBYY Aligner tool to align the original text and the translated text and exported a TMX file. After that, we imported the TMX file into the translation memory in SDL Trados Studio, using the search function to compare and analyze those discourses and found some representative examples.

This research mainly adopts two research methods: comparative analysis method and case analysis method. The comparative analysis will be conducted to explore the similarities and differences between English and Chinese cohesive devices in specific discourses; the case analysis will be carried out to study the translation strategies of English cohesive devices in the translation of O. Henry’s short stories.

IV. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Guided by the cohesion theory proposed by Halliday and Hasan(1976), this paper compares and analyzes the original texts and Wang Yongnian’s translated version from the perspective of grammatical cohesive devices. It is found that these cohesive devices are all involved in English and Chinese discourses, but their usage habits are different.

Reference is a grammatical cohesive device. In a discourse, if the meaning of a word must be obtained from the object it refers to, but not from the word itself, it is reference(Wei Xiaoping, 2019). Reference can be divided into personal reference, demonstrative reference and comparative reference(Halliday and Hasan, 1976).

Personal reference is the application of pronouns to refer to nouns that mentioned above, so that the pronoun and the referent in the context form a semantic association, so as to achieve discourse cohesion. Personal reference in the discourse is mainly realized by the use of personal pronouns (I, he, she), possessive pronouns (my, his, her, our) and possessive determiners (mine, yours, theirs).

V. CONCLUSION

The cohesive devices proposed by Halliday and Hasan(1976) have been applied in both English and Chinese discourse. Through comparative analysis of O. Henry’s three short stories and Wang Yongnian’s translations, we find that the frequency and habits of the use of cohesive devices in English and Chinese discourses are different due to the differences in English and Chinese language systems. In O. Henry’s three short stories, personal reference and substitution are more frequently used, while in Wang Yongnian’s translations, ellipsis and word repetition are more frequently.
Based on the above, this paper provides translators with some constructive suggestions on cohesive devices in E-C translation, illustrating that translators should not always preserve the cohesive devices in original texts, but modify these discourse-forming mechanisms to produce coherent translations. In addition, translators should determined the specific cohesive device which the word represents by the context before translation rather than translating with the idiomatic usage of the word. Furthermore, translators should realize the cohesion from the perspective of the discourse. However, due to the limited number of research discourses, this paper does not analyze each subcategories of the four grammatical cohesive devices mentioned by Halliday and Hasan (1976). Thus, it is hoped that researchers will further explore these subcategories of cohesive devices.

REFERENCES


Author Profile

Yanlin Shen, a student from Zhejiang Normal University, majors in translation. She is the leader of publicity center of youth league committee of student union in foreign language college, in charge of the publicity work of the college. And she has been awarded third-class scholarship, outstanding league member and outstanding league cadre of Zhejiang Normal University. Additionally, she won the second prize in the fourth LSCAT Zhejiang translation competition and passed the English test for international communication (advanced).