

The Effect of Cohesive Devices on the Chinese Students' Translation Performance

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Abstract: This study focuses on the effect of coherence and cohesion on the Chinese students' translation performance. An experiment was conducted to find out the correlation of the usage of cohesive devices and translation quality. Thirty MTI students participated in this study. Based on twenty students' translation quality, these students were divided into two groups: high-score group and low-score group. Data collection and data analysis were carried out to find out the differences and similarities of the usage of cohesive devices between the two groups. The results showed that there was a correlation between the usage of cohesive devices and the translation quality. The High-score students were more capable of using cohesive devices effectively to achieve textual coherence in their translations. Based on the experiment, similarities of the two groups were found in the usage of such cohesive devices as ellipsis, reiteration and collocation, while there is a significant difference of the two groups in the usage of reference and conjunction. The implication of the study is that teachers can exploit cohesive devices effectively during their translation classes to improve the translation quality.

1. Introduction

The development of modern linguistics provides a theoretical basis for translation studies, especially in the 1970s and 1980s when Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) was proposed by Halliday. Theorists of translation found they can make more systematic analysis of translation and get guidance on translation practice from linguistics. Cohesion theory, as an important achievement of SFL, is of great significance to translation studies and translation practice. With the application of SFL to translation studies, the unit of translation has rank shifted from the word and sentence level to the whole text.

According to Beaugrande and Dressler [1], a well-formed text must meet the following seven factors: cohesion, coherence, situationality, intertextuality, intentionality, acceptability and informativity. It can be found that cohesion is one of the crucial components in constituting a well-formed text. Halliday and Hasan's *Cohesion in English* published in 1976 made cohesion widely-accepted in text linguistics. In this book, Halliday and Hasan stated that cohesion "occurs when the interpretation of one element in the discourse is dependent on that of another." [2] They also stated "Cohesion is expressed partly through the grammar and partly through the vocabulary" (ibid). Thus they introduced two main cohesive devices, i.e. the grammatical cohesive devices and the lexical cohesive devices. The former can be further divided into four branches: "reference", "substitution", "ellipsis", and "conjunction"; the latter can be divided into "collocation" and "reiteration." Sanders and Maat [3] summarized the grammatical and lexical cohesive devices as the following:

Reference: two linguistic elements are related in what they refer to.

Substitution: a linguistic element, which is not repeated but is replaced by a substitution item.

Ellipsis: one of the identical linguistic elements, which is omitted.

Conjunction: a semantic relation, which is explicitly marked.

Lexical cohesion: two elements share a lexical field

According to Mona Baker [4] "cohesion is the network of lexical, grammatical and other relations which provide links between various parts of a text". That is to say, cohesion is a

necessary condition in text production and thus holds an important position in text translation. Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to strengthen the students' awareness and mastery of cohesive devices. It is also important for students to identify the cohesive differences between the source language and the target language. If the translator can identify the cohesive devices in source text and transfer them properly and effectively to target text, the quality of the translation will be improved. Theoretically speaking, there is a correlation between cohesive devices and translation quality.

This thesis carried out an experiment to make a contrast between the students' translations from the perspective of cohesive devices. The focus of the study is to investigate the differences and similarities of the High-score group and Low-score group students in adopting the cohesive devices. Then the study found out the correlation between cohesive devices and students' translation quality and provided some implication to the teaching of translation.

2. Research Questions and Research Design

2.1 Research Questions

The present study intends to answer the following questions:

What are the differences and similarities between the High-score translators and Low-score translators in translation process concerning the use of cohesive devices?

What is the relation between cohesive devices and students' translation quality?

2.2 Research Design

To see what effects cohesion devices have on the translation quality in Chinese student translators, an experiment is designed. The research design involves the student participants, testing materials, and evaluators, etc.

2.2.1 Student Participants

Thirty students from Shannxi Normal University were selected. They were freshmen of Master of Translation and Interpreting (MTI) aged from 23 to 26. They were exposed to English as a foreign language for at least 10 years before being accepted at this level. They were asked to translate the same text with permission of using dictionaries.

2.2.2 Material for Translation

The translation task was to translate one Chinese text into English. The Source Text (ST) was the famous speech made by Chairman Mao in 1944, which was entitled *Serve the People* (为人民服务).

2.2.3 Evaluators and Rating Scale

Three English teachers of the Foreign Language Department were invited to evaluate the students' translations. They are all experienced teachers and have been teaching translation courses for many years. The translation products of the participants were rated according to the grading standards for translation part in TEM8. Meanwhile a translation version taken from *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung* was provided for the evaluators as a standard criterion for the evaluation to refer to. The total mark was 10. Then the mean of the three scores given by the three teachers was adopted. The mean scores would be the standard to divide the translation into the group of High-score translations and Low-score ones.

3. Data Collection

To find out the correlation of the usage of cohesive devices and translation quality, the cohesive devices exploited in the source text and target text should be collected in order to compare the students' translation. Thus the collection of data contains two parts: one part is the usage of cohesive devices of the source text and the target text; the other is the usage of cohesive devices in

students' translation.

3.1 The Contrastive Analysis between the ST and TT in the Use of Cohesive Devices

In order to clearly reveal the differences between the usage of cohesive devices in ST and TT and make a comparison with the students' translation, the following tables show the results of cohesive devices employed by the ST and TT. The ST and TT are accessible on the Internet, thus the present thesis doesn't provide the text.

Table 1 The total sum of the cohesive devices exploited in the ST and TT.

Cohesive devices	Source Text	Target Text
reference	17	26
ellipsis	10	2
conjunction	13	22
reiteration	9	9
collocation	6	9

Table 2 The detailed analysis of the cohesive devices exploited in the ST and TT.
(SN represents Sentence Number)

Cohesive devices	Source Text (ST)		Target Text (TT)	
	SN	衔接词汇	SN	Cohesive Words
reference	5	或（人）	2/3	these (battalions of the revolution)
	5/6/7/8	重于;轻于(比...还重;比...还轻)	4/5	it (death)
	8	他的（张思德同志）	5/6/7	heavier
	10	谁（不管是什么人）	5/6	lighter
	11/12	你（不管是什么人）	7	his (Comrade Chang Szu-teh)
	14	他（李鼎铭先生）	8/10	them (shortcomings)
	17	这一条路（前一句话）	10/11/26	he/his(anyone)
	20	他们（中国人民）	11	it(what he proposes)
	23	那些不必要的牺牲	12	better troops and simpler administration
	25	他（不管死了谁）	13	he (Mr. Li Ting-ming)
	26	这（前一句话）	13	it (The idea "better troops and simpler administration")
	27	这个方法（第 25 句）	15	this objective (a common revolutionary objective)
	29	这样的方法（第 25 句）	17	this(we already lead base areas with a population of 91 millions)
			18	more
			21	them (The Chinese people)
			25	each other (all the people in the revolutionary ranks)
			27	this(第 26 句话)
		28	it(第 26 句话)	
		30	In this way(第 26 句话)	
ellipsis	9	我们是为人民服务的（队伍）	9	no matter who (he is)
	9/10	指出（缺点）	18	more (base areas)
	11	改正（缺点）		
	12	照你的（办法）办		
	13	李鼎铭先生提出来的（意见）		

	14	采用了（这一条意见）		
	15	坚持好的(办法); 改正错的		
	18	但是（这）还不够		
	25	不管（他）是炊事员		
conjunction	4/18/22	但/但是	4/6/17/23	but
	9	因为	5	Though
	9	所以	7/13/15/16 /21/22/23/ 25/28	and
	9	如果	8	if
	10/25/2	不管	8	because
	11/15/2	只要	9	no matter who
	23	不过	10/11/14	if
			24	Nevertheless
collocation			28	as well
	1/18	革命-解放-根据地	2	liberation-- people
	7	法西斯-剥削-压迫	5	heavier--lighter
	9/11	缺点-批评指出-改正	6	fascists--exploiters-oppressors
	13/14	意见-提出-采用	8	shortcomings-pointed out- criticized
	20/21/2	受难-解救-牺牲-痛苦	12/13	idea-put forward-suggestion- adopt
	25/29	死-送葬-开追悼会-哀思	21/22	suffering--struggle--sacrifice
		26-30	die -- funeral ceremony-- memorial meeting -- mourning	
reiteration	原文的复现词汇	出现次数	译文的复现词汇	出现次数
	我们	25	we/us/our-/ours/ourselves	56
	人民	18	people	15
	死/牺牲	14	die/death/died/sacrifices/dead	17
	队伍	6	battalion	3
	利益	6	interests	3
	革命	3	revolution/revolutionary	3
	重于泰山/比泰山还重	3	heavier than Mout Tai	3
	轻于鸿毛/比鸿毛还轻	2	lighter than a feather	3
张思德同志	2	Comarade Zhang Side	2	

3.2 Grouping and Marking the Data

Two groups were obtained for the statistical analysis based on their mean scores. Each group had 10 students' translation sample for analysis. Then, the researcher marked all the cohesive devices and got the following statistics:

Table 3 The High-score students' use of Cohesive Devices.

	HS1	HS2	HS3	HS4	HS5	HS6	HS7	HS8	HS9	HS10	Mean
reference	27	25	24	28	25	24	26	29	25	24	25.7
ellipsis	2	4	3	1	5	3	4	2	1	4	2.9
conjunction	18	22	24	19	20	21	23	26	24	22	21.9
reiteration	11	9	10	12	8	7	9	11	10	12	9.9
collocation	7	8	6	9	10	11	10	10	8	9	8.8

Table 4 The Low-score students' use of Cohesive Devices.

	LS1	LS2	LS3	LS4	LS5	LS6	LS7	LS8	LS9	LS1	Mean
reference	19	16	14	15	18	17	16	19	15	14	16.3
ellipsis	3	4	2	1	5	2	4	2	1	4	2.8
conjunctio	18	12	14	19	13	11	13	16	14	12	14.2
reiteration	12	8	11	11	7	8	12	11	9	12	10.1
collocation	7	8	6	9	10	11	10	10	8	9	8.8

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 The Correlation of Cohesive Devices with the Quality of Translation

The result of the contrastive analysis between the ST and TT in the use of cohesive devices confirmed the previous study. English and Chinese are different in the frequency of reference and substitution. Because English is a hypotactic language, it has a higher frequency in using reference than Chinese; while Chinese is a paratactic language, and it uses more substitution than English. By comparing the usage of cohesive devices between the High-score and Low-score students' translation, it is found that the High-core students' translation get closer to the translation for reference. Thus it shows that the usage of cohesive devices has a direct correlation with the quality of translation. The results of Table 3 and Table 4 show that the High-score students are more capable of using cohesive devices effectively to achieve textual coherence in their translations, thus their usage of cohesive devices get closer to the TT. While Low-score students use fewer cohesive devices and their translations exhibit a lack of variety in the use of cohesive devices. What's more, the statistic shows that their usage of cohesive devices is closer to the SS, which means that they tend to translate the text according to the Chinese text literally.

4.2 The Similarities between the Usages of Cohesive Devices of the Two Groups

There are great similarities between the two groups in the use of ellipsis, conjunction and collocation. Due to the typology of the ST, there are a few ellipses of the subjects in the original text. Almost all students from the two groups can deal with this cohesive device properly in their translations. Therefore, there is no significant difference between the two groups in the use of ellipsis. As for collocation, not many differences are found. Both of the two groups can transfer the collocation of the SS into the TT.

4.3 The Differences between the Usages of Cohesive Devices of the Two Groups

There is significant difference in the usage of reference and conjunction. From Table 3 and Table 4 it can be found that reference used in the translation of the High-score group is obviously with more variety and more accurate than that in Low-score group. In fact, this implies that the translators of Low-score group often simply repeat the same words of the original text in their translations, and do not pay attention to the differences of cohesive devices between English and Chinese. Whereas the High-score group uses some repetition to transfer the reference in the ST, thus there are more varieties in the High-score students' translation.

Conjunction is an important type of semantic relation between clauses, sentences and paragraphs. The function of conjunction is that the readers can understand "the semantic relation between sentences and even predict the semantic meaning of the following sentence through the preceding sentence by logic." [5]. From Table 1 we can see that there are only 13 conjunctions used in the ST but 22 in the TT. This is because of explicitness and implicitness of the conjunction. In English, conjunctions are used explicitly to show the logic between clauses, sentences and even paragraphs to achieve cohesion of the text, while in Chinese, the logic or meanings are always implied, without using conjunctions [6]. This can be confirmed by Table1. Form Table 3 and Table 4 it can be found

that there is great differences between the two groups. The High-score students show high frequency usage of conjunctive elements, thus making the translation more readable and having a complete structure with all the relevant elements joined together by various conjunctives. Thus the quality of the translation is high. While the Low-score students just transfer the conjunctions of SS into TT without any change, thus the translations are lack of cohesion and in low quality.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

The results of the present study provide empirical support for the significance of using cohesive devices in the translation courses. The statistics show that the quality of translation has a correlation with the usage of cohesive devices, thus it is crucial for the teachers to strengthen the students' awareness and mastery of cohesive devices and their recognition of the cohesive differences between the ST and TT. If the students can identify the differences and similarities of Chinese and English usage of cohesive devices, their translation quality will be improved consequently. Therefore, the most significant pedagogical implication is that the teachers can make a good use of the cohesive devices during their translation classes.

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