Meaning in Context and Nature of Translation

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Abstract—The study of meaning is closely related to the research of context. One cannot understand the accurate meaning of a sentence without the study of context. Translation can only be conducted on the basis of right understanding of meaning in context. The paper explores culture from the aspects of context of culture (genre) and context of situation (register). Based on the ideas of functionalism, the paper tries to explain the term "equivalence" in translation in a more scientific way.

Index Terms—context, genre, register, equivalence

I. INTRODUCTION

Modern linguistics is characterized by two main directions of research: formalism and functionalism. Formalism focuses on the description of the formal features of language, while functionalism stresses the communicative function of the language form. Scholars who focus on the functions of language tend to make use of the intuitive, non-formal, and non-theoretical generalizations to explain the language facts, and avoid exact formalization. Functionalists try to analyze the base f its form, so the scopes of the interest and concerns of functionalists are much larger than formalists. The study of meaning cannot be satisfactory without the analysis of context, so this section will first explore meaning in context, and then make a study about the strategies of translation. In semantic communication, determined by the factors of context, meanings can be communicated in a 'right' and therefore most effective way, or in a 'wrong' and therefore ineffective way. If we want to make claims about the 'acceptability' of a sentence, a word or word order etc, we have to appeal to contextual considerations. Since the beginning of the 1970s, linguists have become increasingly aware of the importance of context in the interpretation of sentences.

II. CONTEXT

A. Genre

There are two levels of context, one is the context of culture, and the other is the context of situation. In order to understand how people use language, we need to consider both the context of culture and the context of situation. For example, we are able to communicate with the sellers when we buy things because we are familiar with what a buying and selling encounter should be like in our culture; the stages such an encounter involves, and the types of language used to achieve the stages. These particular stages are called context of culture, and in linguistics,, we use the term "genre". It can be thought as the general framework that gives purpose to interactions of particular types, adaptable to many specific context of situation that they get used in. Whatever language is being used to achieve a culturally recognized and culturally established purpose, there genre will be found. Speakers make different lexical-grammatical choices according to the different purposes they want to achieve. For example, the type of words and structures used in a translational genre will not be the same as those used in an exchanging opinion genre. Genres are realized through language, and this process of realizing genre in language is mediated through the realization of register.

B. Register

Generic considerations alone are not enough to explain how you identified the sources of the texts. Besides genre, language is mediated through realization of register. To understand what a specific word means, we should refer to the second level of context, context of situation. It is easy to recognize that language usages vary according to the different situations. Through the years, linguistic scholars have explored this field.

C. Ideas of the Three Functional Linguists

Malinowski's viewpoints

One of the first researchers to pursue this issue was the anthropologist, Branislaw Malinowski. Malinowski is distinguished for his semantic theory, in which he illustrates context of situation and emphasizes that the meaning of the word is not related to features of the objects it refers to, but related to its function, that is: the meaning of an object is the correct use of the tool. The linguistic events are only interpretable when additional contextual information about the situation and the culture are provided. "Utterance and situation are bound up inextricably with each other and the context of situation is indispensable for the understanding of the words…a word without linguistic context is a mere figment and stands for nothing by itself, so in reality of a spoken living tongue, the utterance has meaning except in the context of situation." (Malinowski, 1946. p307)

Firth's Viewpoints

One scholar who develops a more general theory of meaning-in-context, influenced by Malinowski, is the linguist of London school, J.R. Firth. Firth considers language as a social and signals, so he holds that the object of linguistics is language in use. According to Firth's view, expressed in an article he wrote in 1935, all linguistics was the study of meaning and all meaning was the function in a context. The mode of experience of people determines the mode of meaning. Firth studies language from a sociological point of view. Here meaning not only means lexical meaning and grammatical meaning, but also meaning in its social context. Firth maintains that the study of meaning is the center of linguistics and that meaning could be viewed in terms of what an utterance is intended to achieve rather than merely the sense of the individual words making up the utterance. Meaning could best be viewed in terms of "functions in context". According to Firth, "What I may call the total meaning of a text is the meaning in situation". (Firth, 1935. p53)

Halliday's Viewpoints

Another very influential figure is M.A.K Halliday whose influence has surpassed that of Firth. He takes over the use of "context of situation" and ultimately develops a sociologically and semantically oriented approach to linguistics. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Halliday was working on what was then called "scale and category grammar". Since the 1970s, he has been advancing a "systemic-functional grammar" which reveals a much more overtly sociological or what Halliday has called a "social semantics" perspective. Halliday's theory emphasizes the functional aspects of language where language is seen as serving communicative purpose in society, and it emphasizes the intrinsic inter-relationship of language and society, so the study of language must be approached from a fundamentally social point view. In his "categories of the theory of grammar", he asserts that language has three primary levels: "substance", "form" and "context". "Substance" is the raw material, phonic or graphic; "form" is the organization of this material into meaningful events and context is the relationship of form to the non-linguistic features of the situations in which language operates and to those linguistic features of the situations in which language operates and to those linguistic features not immediately being scrutinized. The major contribution of Halliday's approach to context has been to argue for systematic correlations between the organization of language itself and specific contextual features.

Following the systemic-functional tradition, Halliday also asks which aspects of context are important. He is famous for introducing "register theory" which describes the impact of the immediate context of situation of a language event on the way language is used. According to Halliday "language varies as its function varies: it differs in different situations. The name given to a variety of a language distinguished according to usage is register" (Halliday. 2000, p132). It is by their formal properties that registers are defined. Halliday further classified field, mode and tenor. Mode is the amount of feedback and role of language; field is the focus of the activity; and tenor is the role relations of power and solidarity. The three factors are related to each other and mutually affect each other. Tenor is perhaps the most crucial factor on regulating the complex relationships between addresser and addressee. "Tenor" concerns the level of formality of the relation between the participants in the linguistic events. Halliday explains this with the following terms: "The language we use varies according to the level formality, of technicality, and so on. What are the variables under this type of distinction? Essentially, it is the role relationship in the situation in question. Who the participants in the communication group are, and in what relationship they stand to each other" (Halliday, 2000. p231). Tenor is closely related to interpersonal meaning, and in translation, it will affect the translation strategy.

D. The Relation of Genre and Register

Genre and register are at two different levels of abstraction. Genre can be seen as more abstract, more general than register. One register may be realized through many different genres, and conversely, one genre may be realized through a number of registers. Genres are traditional norms of language in use, each with its own functions and goals adopted by a given community of text users or socio-cultural groups to cater for a particular social occasion, so the features of different genres can be realized according to the context of situation-register. The relationship between genre and register can be expressed in this way: registers impose constrains at the level of discourse structure. Furthermore, genre specifies conditions for the beginning, structuring and ending of a text, and for this reason, genre, unlike registers, can only be realized in completed context. It is the register that confines the use of language directly. The more the analysts know about the features of register, the more likely they are to be able to predict what is likely to be said and in turn the more he will know how to transfer the meaning in translation, so register is a crucial factor to decide our translation strategy.

III. MEANING AND CONTEXT

Language has formal meaning and context meaning. The formal meaning of an item is its operation in the network of formal relations. The context meaning which related to extra-textual feature is an extension of the popular and traditional linguistic notion of item in its place in linguistic form. Context meaning is therefore logically dependent on formal meaning; so formal criteria are also important, taking precedence over contextual criteria, and in our study of context meaning, we could not deny the importance of "form". This paper will analyze how context affects translation strategy by analyzing how the "form" is transferred into another language.

The previous section has explained the three types of meaning defined by functional grammar. Halliday further suggests that these types of meaning can be related both "upwards" (to context) and downwards (to lexical-grammar). The upward link is that each register variable can be associated with one of these types of meanings. Thus, field is

expressed through patterns of experiential meaning in text; mode is expressed through patterns of experiential meaning in text; mode is expressed through textual meaning; tenor through interpersonal meaning; and these interpersonal meanings are realized through the mood patterns of the grammar.

Feature of the context	Functional component of semantic system
Field of discourse (what is going on)	Experiential meaning (transitivity, naming, etc.)
Tenor of discourse (who are taking part)	Interpersonal meaning (mood, modality, person, etc.)
Mode of discourse (role assigned to language)	Textual meanings (mood, modality, person, etc.)

In order to be clear, functional grammar uses this table. In fact, the three pairs mutually influence each other.

IV. NATURE OF TRANSLATION

A. Equivalence

All the analysis of meaning serves for the analysis of translation strategy in this paper, and now, we turn to the nature of translation. Because of the complexity of the nature of meaning, the definition and nature of translation has also puzzled many who are in and out of this field. For a long time, many scholars tried to dig into the equivalence in translation, but as we know, translation is a very complex activity, and there is no such thing as equivalence conceived as sameness across language. Besides, there is always a context in which translation takes place, which influences the decisions that the translators have to make, whereas equivalence is a static, result-oriented concept describing a relationship of "equal value" between two texts or, on lower ranks, between words, phrases, sentences, syntactic structures and so on. So using the static term "equivalence" cannot be satisfactory to describe the requirement of translation.

Through translation cannot reach the equivalence of the source and the target text, the equivalence should not be neglect entirely either. The previous chapter has examined meaning, genre, and register, and only on the basis of them, translation theory and practice can be studied scientifically. We all have the ability to predict accurately what language will be appropriated in our own specific context, but in translation which involves two languages, things become different, and the intuition may not work because one of the languages involved is not our native language. This requires us that when we translate, we have to be conscious of the context, and it is the context that helps us make acceptable decisions.

Though it is very difficult to give a satisfactory definition of translation, most translation theorists accept the main point that in translation, it is not word for word but meaning for meaning that we handle with, for words are not clear-cut and distinct entities, and each word normally does not have only one clear and distinct meaning. When we talk or write, we rarely use them in isolation, but use them in a certain environment, and this environment may cause the words to have different meaning from the meaning given by the dictionaries. As the vehicles of communication, words cannot be ignored in the research of translation, but they are not all that we should notice. We should study it in a wider range instead. According to the theories of functional linguistic, we have to study them from the inner side and outer side. What inner side emphasizes is "faithful", and what the outer side emphasizes is the "acceptable". It is the interpersonal meaning that is the center of the "acceptability", and if we examine many bad translation works, we will find that the main problem is that the translators pay much attention to the form meaning, but do not pay enough attention the context meaning, much less to the importance of the interpersonal meaning.

B. Context and Translation

Translation theory is not only concerned with the mechanical, lower-level of the linguistic system, but also higher-order considerations of language in use and text in context. It is not the static entity that we are concerned with, but the wider environment which becomes the key factor to translation practice, understanding of translation work, and even translation teaching.

In his *Translatology,* Huang Long points out that there are three constituent ingredients in the original text: context, form and style. These three are closely interrelated and inseparably interacting. (Huang, 1987. p21-37). The relation between content and form has been discussed by many scholars, and in recent years, style aroused the interest of linguists and translation theorists. Style is the unity of the comment and the form reflecting the gusto and flavor. It is a complex term under which all kinds of factors, such as textual and contextual are involved.

Since translation involves two structures of languages, translators have to deal with the two entirely different forms on the one hand; on the other hand, they should not forget other features bound up with language of the translation, that is to say, the transmission of meaning in translation is determined by the differences of the two languages, the two authors, and two situations involved. More specifically, translation may deal with different types of works, for example, texts of economy, political essays, technical materials, legal documents and literary works, etc. the text type is at the center of contextual analysis. Translators cannot translate without the study of context, and the translation theory cannot be satisfactory without the analysis of text type. It is clear that the differences in style should be maintained in translation, and the stylistic interpretation is considered as one of the most important aspect of translation analysis in this occasion. In some sense, we can say that style is the meaning. In other words, style is an indispensible part of the message to be conveyed. Translation equivalence, therefore, can be adequately established only in terms of criteria

related to text type, and translation theory and practice has been shifted from the concern with equivalence between the source and target texts to the recognition of the need for adaptation to the target situation and purpose.

Style mat be seen as the result of motivated choices made by text producers, and it is the different language usage in different situations by particular language users. To analyze different styles, the individual components must be analyzed, which together manifest a certain characteristics. As Levy remarked, "we have to deal with details which are often hardly perceivable, yet are none the less significant, since they inform us about the artistic type not by means of themes, composition, and transformation of reality, but by delicate stylistic nuances". Firth also argues this from the angle of meaning, "what I may call the total meaning of a text in situation is broken down and dispensed at a series of levels such as the phonological, the grammatical and the situational levels."(Huang, 1987. p.18)

The analysis of translation must accompany the analysis of function, register, and style of the two languages involved. Among many different schools of translation theory, the "scopes theory" is most plausible which considers translation as a form of human interaction and, as such, determined by its purpose or scopes is the great achievement of Vermeer and Christiana Nord: the founders of scopes theory. In order to achieve a certain purpose in communication, the sender of the message has to choose certain strategies of text production considered appropriate for this purpose, so in translation practice, the translators should pay enough attention to the context of the original text, the relation between the roles, and the purpose the original text expects to achieve.

In the previous part, the paper has pointed out that it is not scientific to use the term equivalence in translation and here the scopes theory gives another term "adequacy" to displace "equivalence". Compared with the static character of equivalence, adequacy is a dynamic concept related to the process of translation action and referring to the "goal-oriented selection of signs that are considered appropriate for the communicative purpose defined in the translation assignment" (Reiss, 1989. p.163). Equivalence at word rank does not imply textual equivalence. The scopes of translation determine the form of equivalence required for an adequate translation. In short, translation theory is conducted on the basis of contrastive linguistics and discourse analysis, and the development of translation theory can also add depth and breadth both to contrastive linguistics and discourse analysis. The following examples show that some lexical ways can express the different interpersonal meaning, and in translation, the translator must use the equivalent words in target language to express the meaning in source language. These are examples to show Lexical ways of expressing interpersonal meaning and their translation strategy:

The vocatives are a very potent area for the realization of interpersonal meanings, an area very sensitive to these contextual constraints of tenor. Now let's look at the following examples. Although the different ways of vocative represent the same person, it is apparent that they can show quiet different interpersonal meaning.

(1) My dear baby, would you like to stop crying?
(2) My little dear, would you like o stop crying?
(3) My dear, stop crying, please.
(4) Dear, don't cry any more.
(5) Stop crying, son.
(6) Child, stop crying.
(7) John, stop crying.
(8) You little fool, stop crying.
(9) You fool, if you don't' stop crying, I will beat you to death.

In the above examples, all the vocatives refer to the same person "John", that s to say the ideational meaning is the same, but the communicative effect is quite different. In the first four examples, we can see the tender love of the parent to the child, and from the fifth example to the seventh one, the vocatives have the neutral meaning, but the last two examples show that the parent begins to lose his patience, and man even get angry at the baby's crying. These examples show that we should use different vocative ways to correspond to different situations.

Translation of the 9 sentences should be:
(1) 亲爱的宝贝，不要哭了好吗？
(2) 小宝贝，不要哭了好吗？
(3) 宝贝，请不要哭了。
(4) 亲爱的，不要哭了。
(5) 不要哭了，儿子。
(6) 孩子，别哭了。
(7) 约翰，别哭了。
(8) 小傻瓜，别哭了。
(9) 你这个傻瓜，还哭的话我揍死你。

Although the vocatives refer to the same child, the different vocatives express the feeling of the parent clearly. When translating these sentences, translators must imagine the situations where the sentences are said.

Compared with English, Chinese doesn't have tense or inflection or finite elements, so we have to use the lexical ways to express meaning expressed by the grammatical ways in English, that is to say, we should often need to add some words when we translate from English to Chinese.

E.g. No hard feeling, I said I'm sorry, didn't I?

别生气啦， 我不是说了对不起了吗？The two characters "啦"and "吗" has the feeling of soothing others, which is expressed by the tag question in English.

V. CONCLUSION

Meaning is probably the most complex term in linguistics and because of the complexity of meaning, the nature of translation becomes difficult to define. It has been proved through the history that the theory of meaning in functionalism s more scientific than that of other schools. It divides meaning in three parts and every part has its own system.

In functional linguistics, the study of meaning serves for the analysis of discourse. A successful discourse has to accomplish two tasks: one is to find the right form to express the meaning. As to the interpersonal meaning, it is to choose the suitable ways to express the sentiment or attitude of the speaker or writher. The second is that the choices should be defined by the context factors. The first task is the internal requirement and the second one is external requirement. The theory of functionalism is more scientific than the theory of formalism because it pays more attention to the contextual factors. Translation is closely connected to discourse, so a successful translation should also accomplish the two tasks: first, it should meet the internal requirement of meaning, and second it should also meet the external requirement of context. Translation is the transmission of language meaning in use, so the study of translation should adhere to the environment of language is in, context is one of the crucial factors to decided the translation strategy.

The nature of translation and the nature of the functional linguistics have some agreements on their attention of context. In recent years, many scholars have applied the theory of functional linguistics to the theory of translation. Theories of functional linguistics can provide scientific bases for translation practice.

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