

A Study on News Headline Translation from the Cognitive Perspective-Based on Conceptual Blending Theory

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Abstract

In the light of cognitive linguistics, particularly the conceptual blending theory the author holds that translation is a cognitive activity closely related to human cognition and bodily experience. What the translator needs to do is re-experience the cognition and mental or physical experience of the source language writer and transfer it into the target language with reference to the target language readers' cognition and experience. Translation is the blend of concepts concerned in the two language spaces via the translator's mental work. The same is true with the process of news translation. Combining the conceptual blending theory with the practice of news translation, the author aims at on-line exploring and investigating the process of translation and explains it from cognitive perspective.

Keywords: conceptual blending theory, news headline translation, conceptual blending model of translation

1. Introduction

The embryonic form of the conceptual blending theory is from Gilles Fauconnier's Mental Spaces in 1985. Fauconnier believes that mental spaces are small conceptual packets constructed as we think and talk, for purposes of local understanding and action. (Fauconnier & Turner, 1996, p. 113) Mental spaces mainly concern the immediate meaning construction, that is, on-line constructed message convergence when we are speaking and thinking. They are co-related and showing active and immediate change while the communication goes on, and also different inner-spaces elements form mappings. Based on this theory, Fauconnier & Sweetser (1996, p. 7) proposes the Principle of Access or Identification Principle, “if space A has a cognitive relation to space B, the thing ‘a’ in the space A will trigger the thing ‘b’ in the space B, namely, the pragmatic expression “a” will stimulate the target “b”. According to mental spaces, Fauconnier proposes the Conceptual Blending Theory, which is a general cognitive operation and lies in human's thinking, especially in the creative process of thinking and actions. It is a “multiple-spaces” conceptual mapping model. This modal has four mental spaces: Input Space 1, Input Space 2, and there is cross-space mapping of counterparts between the Input 1 and 2-Generic Space, This Generic Space reflects some common, usually more abstract structure and organization shared by the two inputs and defines the core cross-space mapping between them. Cross-space mapping and project can be realized by means of common abstract configuration of the generic space. The partial elements of the two inputs are projected into the fourth space -Blend Space, which has emergent structure that does not exist in the two input spaces. So the four spaces construct a Conceptual Blending Network through projection chains. (See Figure 1)

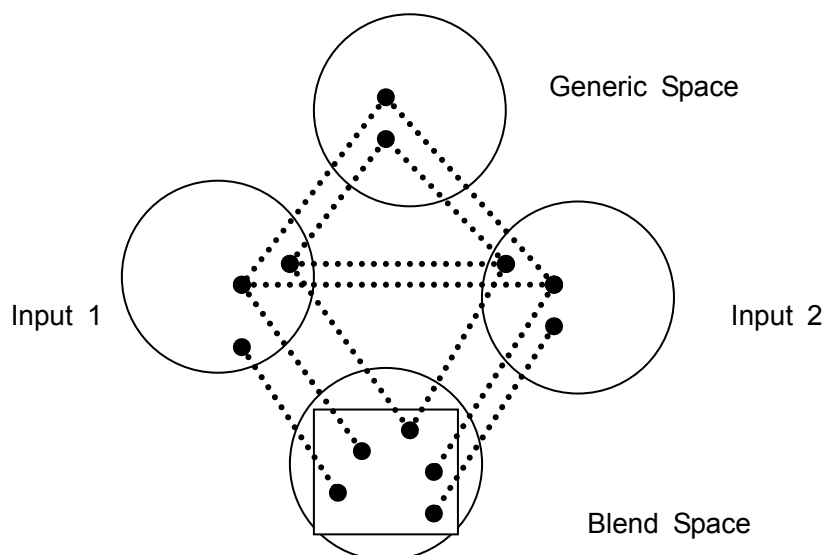


Figure 1. The Conceptual Blending Network

2. The Conceptual Blending Theory Modal in Translation

Translation is a complicated cognitive process in nature. It includes three main steps: unpacking, projection and blending. During this process, according to the translator's understanding the source text can be unpacked into several conceptual events which project into the generic space. The blending space of the translated version represents the process in which the translator blends the conceptual events in source text space and the grammar and related cultural background schema of the target language and produces the target text. So the process of translation is on-line blending while communication is going on between the author and translator. The specific steps as follows:

2.1 Unpacking the Source Text

In the process of translation, the network mappings are based on the correct unpacking of the source text which blends the source language grammar and the author's intention. The translator has to unpack the described events from the original text at first, and then construes the cognitive schema in terms of his understanding. A number of source language related messages, such as, common mental cognitive schema and the cultural background, are involved during the translating. The purpose of translation is to express this cognitive schema precisely in the target language, so the foremost thing that the translator is concerned about is the analysis of the meaning and background of the source text, to study the author's writing style and characters. At the same time, the pre-understanding is constructed, for the translator has his/her own knowledge composition, cultural background, life and social experience, and his/her aesthetic abilities and tendency. The source text forms the Input 1 space and translator's mental space forms the Input 2 space.

2.2 Project to the Generic Space

Generic space is the abstract frame mapping onto each of the input spaces. It reflects some common, usually more abstract, structure and organization shared by the two inputs and defines the core cross-space mapping between them so that the cross-space mapping and projecting are realized smoothly. The translator aims at re-creating the author's thought, ideology and emotion, that is, translating is confined by many elements from the source text. Therefore some consider the translation process as "Dancing with chains" (cited from Xie, 2000, p. 134). Because of the differences in thinking pattern of English and Chinese languages, it is difficult to reach the equivalence in grammatical structures between them. As the matter of fact, the conceptual frames are the important elements in the generic space, whatever specific or abstract, virtually act as the chains to connect the two input spaces, manifest a certain cognitive connection between them. We have the version that is integrating the schematic structures of communicated events by the source text and grammatical structure and related background schema of the target language. That is to say, the generic space is formed by the shared meaning and thought of the translator and author.

2.3 Blending in the Target Space

The process of language cognitive activities in translation represents not only unpacking the source text, but also

reconstructing the target text. Guided by the conceptual blending framework, the version which is the result of the mapping, clashing and integrating between languages, is selectively projected to the blended space, finally forming the emergent structure after the translator's cognitive practice. In translating, we are integrating the discovered schematic structures of communicated events with target language structure, reconstructing and preserving the information, so we reach the goal of translation.

Conceptual blending theory elaborates the translation process from cognition. Translation can be understood as a dynamic, on-line meaning construction process, which solves the problems in the previous static study in translation, such as domestication (liberal) and foreignization (literal), equivalence and translatability, and answers the question of what is translation, the criteria of translation, the meta or multiple criterion of translation. (Wang, 2001)

From the angle of cognition, we develop further comprehension that translating is essentially a body experience. With this theory, the paper exemplifies the news headlines translation in the following.

3. Specific Application of Blending Theory in Translating News Headlines

The headlines of English newspaper situate a prominent position on the papers for the purpose of catching the readers' eyes, exercising the figures of speech, such as, auxiliary words, special clausal structure and rhetoric methods to display its function in revealing, warning and commenting of the news content. The characteristic of the headlines is simple, novel, penetrating and appealing, which is a guide or miniature of the whole news content. (Zhang Jian, 2008) The news headlines have its unique features in the expression and vocabulary, and if the readers do not command the background of the news, it is difficult for them to discover a matching word or concept in their mind to equate or map that of the news conveyed, which is the reason why news headlines always make them feel puzzled when they are reading.

Example 1: ST: Lakers, Celtic in finals (*USA Today*, 2010-5-29); TT: (湖人“射日”总决赛战绿军)

In Example 1, the title “Lakers, Celtic in finals” is translated into corresponding one of “湖人‘射日’总决赛战绿军”, if readers are in lack of the knowledge about sports, this news headlines will make them confused. Here “Lakers” refers to one of the famous NBA basketball teams in the Los Angeles, named after the Five Lakes in the United States, who beats the Phoenix Suns 111-103 Saturday to clinch their Western Conference finals series 4-2, setting up another NBA finals epic against the Boston Celtics. Celtic is obviously another basketball team. They will meet and fight in the final competition. In translating, the translator should scan the whole story of the news and present a concise and exact headline version to catch readers' eyes. While we are reading the news, in our mind we are setting up different mental spaces. Lakes, Phoenix Suns and the Boston Celtics are all Input1 elements, all the famous NBA teams, Lakes beat the Suns and will meet the Celtics in the final. Next we can view the version as the Input 2 elements. “湖人” is corresponding to Lakers, “绿军” is identical with Celtics (the basketball team players always wear green sport shirt), and also nicknamed“绿衫军”. “射日”, which makes Chinese readers associate with the ancient Chinese legend “后羿射日”. Hou Yi, the great powerful man shot nine of ten suns down, so the human survived.

We employ the conceptual blending theory to analyze this piece of news: there are some fundamental elements in the source text space and the translator space which can be matched from form and sense. Such as, Lakers—湖人队, the Phoenix Suns—太阳队, in finals—总决赛, the cross-space mappings are constructed: a-a', b-b', c-c' (see Figure 2). These connected counterparts have formed the common abstract structures in the generic space that is the basic condition to project into the blend space. During translation, the connected ingredients in the source text will trigger the counterparts in the translator space and project directly. However, in order to convey the information, the translator should apply different translating techniques to reach this goal. In this news, “绿军” stands for the Celtics because the team players always wear green shirts when they are on the playground. This kind of cognitive association only exists in the translator space, d connected to d' in the version space. “射日” is a legend tale of ancient China, here referring to the two basketball teams the Celtics defeating the Phoenix Suns. The translator has used the domestication to express the original text so that Chinese readers can understand the message well. As a result, the version contains the projection from the generic space a", b", c" and also includes some distinctive structures d', e'. The network frames are structured after the four spaces crossing mapping. The creativity of the translation manifests obviously.

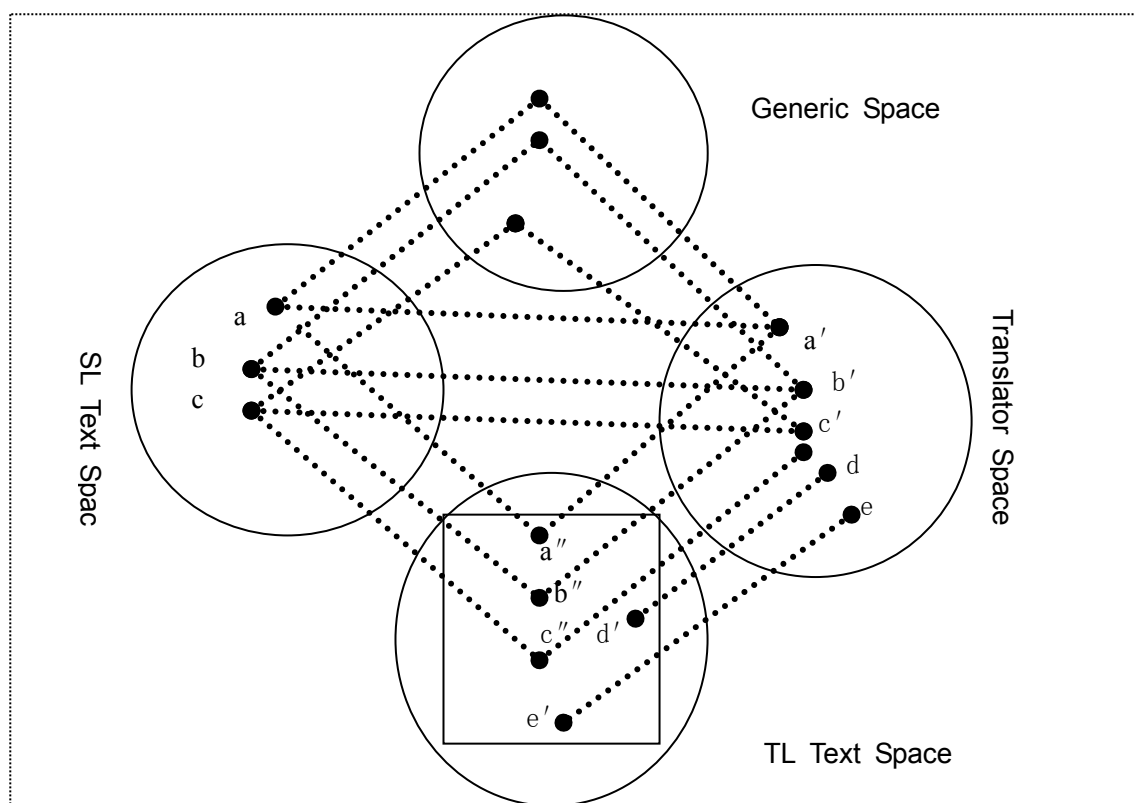


Figure 2. The four crossing and mapping space

Example 2: ST: “Tritanic” sank, 0 -2; TT: (“三色泰坦尼克号军团”战败, 0-2)

(www.yahoo.com\2002FIFA. Worldcup)

Another example is from the Milenio, a newspaper of Mexico. The exact meaning of the word “Tritanic” is difficult to be figured out in the news if readers have no adequate knowledge about the Western cultural background. The readers who are fond of football culture may well be aware of the nickname of the National football of Mexico “Tricolor”. Meanwhile, “Titanic” is the household name in the world, an excellent film produced by Hollywood. “Tritanic” itself is a blended coinage word to pursue the eye shocking effect in the source readers. Certainly even more significant connotation hints in the headline are that it is unbelievable that the world top football team of Mexico is defeated by the weak American football team, 0-2, which is similar to the huge advanced luxurious “Titanic” coming across the unexpected iceberg, sinking immediately and of course tragically.

Here the translator unpacks all information that is hidden in the source text, and seeks the counterparts in the target space. 三色泰坦尼克号军团 stands for Tritanic revealing the real meaning of the word and avoiding the ambiguity, then the target readers catch the word meaning easily even though they do not know how to pronounce or spell it; “沉没了” is identical with sinking, 0 比 2 is equal to 0-2. They are the same in the level of form and meaning, forming the mapping.

Example 3: ST: Watergate’s anonymous ‘Deep Throat’ source revealed (21st century, 2005-6-8)

TT: (美国“水门事件”线人公开亮相)

Many mental spaces are constructed after our reading this headline. “Watergate” and “deep throat” are well known among the Chinese and English people. The Watergate scandal referred to a 1970s United States political scandal resulting from the break-in to the Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate office complex in Washington, D.C.. Effects of the scandal ultimately led to the resignation of the President of the United States, Richard Nixon, on August 9, 1974, the first and only resignation of any U.S. President. It also resulted in the indictment, trial, conviction and incarceration of several Nixon administration officials. Deep Throat is a pornographic film in 1972 which was first introduced to the public in the 1974 when Watergate

Scandal happened. Deep Throat is the pseudonym used in the news field, given to the secret informant who provided information about the involvement of United States President Richard Nixon's administration. Thirty-one years after Nixon's resignation, Deep Throat was revealed to be former Federal Bureau of Investigation Associate Director Mark Felt.

According to these input spaces, the translator who clearly grasps the cultural background of the West should find the equivalence in the target language. “水门事件” corresponds to “Watergate”, 线人 corresponds to “anonymous ‘Deep Throat’ source”, not translated it into “匿名的‘深喉’来源”, for the purpose of matching in the meaning. “公开亮相” is identical with “revealed”. Projections are formed in blend space or version space.

4. Conclusion

The greatest characteristic of news translation is the “three closeness” principles, close to the practice of China's development, close to foreign audience demands for Chinese information, close to foreign audience's language and their habits of thinking. The headlines of news are almost an encyclopedia, including all the material and spirit achievement created by human. In comparison with the literary works, news entails much more cultural elements of background. If a news translator could not master a wide knowledge of culture and linguistic features, the translation practice will confront many obstacles.

From the above-mentioned examples, we perceive the different features of Chinese and English news headlines. English headline structures generally are simple, preferring to accentuation, namely, employing a refined word to summarize a certain point or side to arrest readers. While, Chinese headlines which are inclined to totality reveal the news content deeply and widely, embrace the whole content as far as possible. To some extent, we regard the English headlines as “a skeleton of the news” while Chinese is “a mini-story in capsule form”. (Zhang, 2009)

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