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Grammatical Cohesion in Discourse Translation: A Case Study of *The Old Man and the Sea* Translated by Wu Lao

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Abstract

*Discourse is used as the basic translation unit in most literary translations. Discourse translation should pay more attention to textual cohesion. Cohesion refers to that the parts of one paragraph are connected grammatically or lexically. This connection may exist between different sentences or several parts of a sentence. Cohesion is an important feature of discourses and the core of discourse research. This paper will take Hemingway's novel *The Old Man and the Sea* and Mr. Wu Lao's translation as examples to show the concrete embodiment and application of grammatical cohesion in literary translation.*

Keywords

Discourse, Grammatical cohesion, Cohesive devices, Reference, Translation

1. Introduction

Discourse is a linguistic body, which can be presented by different genre forms, such as novels, dramas, essays, etc., or it can be composed of words, phrases, sentences, and chapters arranged according to certain semantic and logical relations, in which sentences are interrelated and have similar meanings, rather than simply stacked. As a discourse combining semantics and structure, discourse not only has cohesion, coherence, logic and integrity in grammar, but also has intention, communication, functionality and integrity in meaning. Discourse translation is a dynamic intercultural communication process that takes the discourse as the operating unit of translation and the translation action as a discourse. Discourse is not only the main object of translation, but also the basic unit of translation. Translation must be based on discourse.

Cohesion and coherence are the essential elements of discourse analysis, and they are closely related to each other in the formation of a discourse. Cohesion is embodied in the surface structure of a discourse, which is a tangible network, while coherence exists at the bottom of a discourse, which is an invisible

network (Huang, 1988). Halliday, the founder of systemic functional linguistics, first proposed the concept of cohesion. He concretely classified cohesion into five types: reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical cohesion, of which the first four are grammatical cohesion, while the latter one is lexical cohesion (Yang, 2022). Among them, reference refers to a certain element of a statement can be used as a basis for another; ellipsis is to reduce unnecessary repetition, so some elements in the discourse are omitted, thus making the content closer and more continuous. In order to reduce repetition, some parts of the discourse are omitted, so its specific meaning must be explained by those parts that are replaced. Connection refers to some words that describe the connectedness of logical relationships such as time, conditions and causality. Overlap, synonym, anti-sense, upper and lower sense and collocation are the main ways of word connection. The application of these methods in discourse translation can improve the coherence of the discourse and play an important role in the translation process. This paper mainly takes Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* as an example to illustrate these four grammatical cohesion devices.

2. Overview of Cohesion

2.1 Properties of Cohesion

Cohesion was first proposed by Halliday, the founder of systemic functional linguistics and a famous British linguist. He argues that cohesion is “the connection between the meanings that exist in a discourse and make it into a discourse”. This also reflects the three attributes of cohesion.

2.1.1 Cohesion is the Presentation of Semantic Relations

In other words, cohesion is the external connection presentation or interpretation of each component of a discourse under the influence of semantic relations. When the intrinsic meaning of one component in a text needs to be explained by another component, an interpretive relationship between the two components is formed (Zhao, 2021). When the interpretive relations in a text are closely connected, a semantic interpretive network is gradually formed, that is, cohesion of the discourse. This relational attribute is manifested as some linguistic features of the text and forms the tangible context of the discourse.

2.1.2 Cohesion is a Necessary Condition for Composition

The recipients of a discourse need to rely on cohesion to construct and distinguish the logical branches and the content of this discourse and to trace and repeat the structural integrity and meaning integrity of the discourse under the load of these two, so as to complete the generation and understanding of the discourse (Lan, 2019). This necessary condition not only exists in the consciousness and cognition of the discourse receivers, but also is a potential Intention of the discourse receivers to control the external world and the discourse world with his own mental world, which can be specifically called the cohesive consciousness of the discourse.

2.1.3 Cohesion is a Means of Composition Marking

Cohesion depends on certain forms to be realized and determined in the discourse. Halliday categorized

cohesive devices into the following five types: reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical cohesion. The first four are grammatical cohesion devices, and the last one is lexical cohesion device (Guo, 2011). Among them, grammatical cohesion is one of the most typical features of a discourse. The explicit cohesion between the components of a discourse is inevitably related to the grammatical system of a language. Differences between grammatical systems may lead to differences in clarity or information in a discourse. For example, cohesion in the conversion of English-Chinese discourse is embodied in the adjustment or conversion of grammatical system parameters between the two languages. “Grammar, vocabulary and narrative” are regarded as another cohesive device classification, the latter two of which do not belong to functional grammatical concepts or categories, and therefore do not involve the adjustment of linguistic parameters in the grammatical system, because “vocabulary” and “narrative” can be intuitively presented in the target text (Zhao, 2021).

2.2 Importance of Cohesion

English is a language specially used in the practical environment and is the main language used in international business activities. At the same time, it is inseparable from translation, and the contents that it covers are also very broad, involving finance, securities, transportation, customs and many other fields, so English translation in business for a variety of application scenarios in the practice, also has undeniable significance. In addition, the current researches on English also focus on the relationship between English words and style. However, the emergence of text linguistics has made the problem of word-text cohesion in English extremely crucial. Studying its features from the perspective of text connection and adopting corresponding translation countermeasures and methods is an important way to further improve the accuracy and consistency of English translation (Shi, 2020). As far as textual cohesion is concerned, translation is an important way to improve the quality of English translation. At present, with the increasing awareness of discourse, it is important to take professional words, sentence patterns and business terms into account in the translation naturally. It is not only necessary to take stylistic characteristics into account, but also to pay attention to the linguistic characteristics of the text, and to connect them with the translation to make it more accurate (Liu, 2000). Therefore, discourse cohesion is very crucial. English translation must first cultivate a certain professional awareness of artistic English. English is an expressive language, while Chinese is an ideographical language, it is essential to reconstruct the thinking habits and language expression forms of Chinese in the process of understanding, so as to correctly express the artistic meaning of the original text. In this process, translators must use a lot of knowledge related to the text content to enhance the correctness of the translation connotation and the tightness of the language structure, and lay a solid theoretical foundation for active communication (Zuo, 1995).

Translation practice must be guided by the theory of discourse cohesion and carried out by overcoming language barriers and traditional cultural barriers. Because of the close relationship between the discourse and the traditional culture, the translation must use the knowledge system composed of the discourse cohesion theory and the text to reveal the traditional culture behind the source language

(Wang, 2020). The working process of translation is that of comparing the source language with target language, and is related to comparative linguistics. There is a substantial and formal connection between comparative linguistics and discourse cohesion theory, but the connection is two-way.

3. Reference

3.1 Concepts

In a discourse, if a word itself cannot be explained directly, information can be sought from the object that the word itself refers to, which gives rise to the reference relationship (Lan, 2019). Therefore, reference is a semantic relation, that is, the relation between one linguistic component in a discourse and another linguistic component with which it can be interpreted. According to Halliday and Hassan's discourse analysis theory, reference can be divided into personal reference, demonstrative reference and comparative reference.

3.2 Personal Reference

Personal reference is a means by which a pronoun refers to a noun in context. Its function is to establish the semantic connection between the pronoun and the noun in the context, so as to form the coherence of the discourse (Hu, 1994). In English, reference is used much more frequently than in Chinese. Comparatively speaking, pronouns are used more often in English texts to refer to the preceding elements, while the frequency of using Chinese pronouns is relatively low, and even “zero reference” sometimes occurs, that is, the coherence of the meaning before and after is formed in the discourse without using cohesive words, such as:

Example 1:

Original text: “I can remember the tail slapping and banging and the thwart breaking and the noise of the clubbing. I can remember you throwing me into the bow where the wet coiled lines were and feeling the whole boat shiver and the noise of you clubbing him like chopping a tree down and the sweet blood smell all over me.”

Translation: “我记得鱼尾巴砰砰地拍打着，船上的座板给打断了，还有棍子打鱼的声音。我记得你把我朝船头猛推，那儿搁着湿漉漉的钓索卷儿，我感到整条船在颤抖，听到你啪啪地用棍子打鱼的声音，像在砍倒一棵树，还记得我浑身上下都是甜丝丝的血腥味儿。”

In this discourse, the personal pronouns “I” and “You” appear many times, forming the reference cohesion of the discourse and making it cohesive.

Example 2:

Original text: “Can you really remember that or did I just tell it to you?”

Translation: “你当真记得那回事儿？还是我不久前刚跟你说过？”

In this translation, the translator does not need to translate the pronoun “it” directly in the original text, that is, to form the reference of the text in the way of “zero pronoun”. Not only will it not cause distortion or semantic loss, but also the translation is coherent and smooth. Without any sense of abruptness, it also achieves effective cohesion (Liu, 2000).

3.3 Demonstrative Reference

The use of demonstrative pronouns or corresponding determiners and articles to realize the referential is called demonstrative reference. In demonstrative references, the speaker determines the referent by pointing out its distance in time or space. In terms of the concepts of time and space referred to by the demonstrative words, “this”, “these”, “now” and “here” refer to something near, while “that”, “those”, “then” and “there” refer to something far, and “the” is something neutral (Zhu, 2006). This kind of words form reference in context, so as to realize semantic cohesion. However, in the actual English-Chinese translation, we should not simply translate “this”, “that”, “these”, “those” into “这”, “那”, “这些”, “那些”, and translate “here”, “there”, “now”, “then” into “这里”, “那里”, “现在”, “那时”. It should be flexible according to the requirements in specific scenes and actual semantic cohesion, such as:

Example 3:

Original text1: “Do you think we should buy a terminal of the lottery with an eighty-five? Tomorrow is the eighty-fifth day.” “We can do that,” the boy said. “But what about the eighty-seven of your great record?”

Translation: “你看我们该去买张末尾是 85 的彩票吗? 明儿是第八十五天。”“这样做行啊, ”孩子说。“不过你上次创的记录是八十七天, 这怎么说?”

This translation translates “that” into “这样” rather than “那样” as is commonly understood. In this way, the contextual information is closely linked together, which makes the writing compact and logical, and also enables readers to understand the semantics more clearly and directly.

3.4 Comparative Reference

Comparative reference refers to the reference relationship expressed by the comparative of an adjective or adverb and some words containing comparative meaning (e.g., same, similar, different, equal, otherwise, etc.). A comparison needs to exist between at least two things, therefore, they are interdependent. Without any comparison, comparative references cannot be formed. Comparative reference is realized by two means: lexical way is used in general comparison, and grammatical way is used in specific comparison (Liu, 2000). The comparative meaning is expressed by changing the morphology of adjectives and adverbs, such as:

Example 4:

Original text: “I must give him something more than the belly meat then. He is very thoughtful for us.”

Translation: “这样的话, 我该在鱼肚子肉以外, 再送他一些东西。他对我们真关心。”

In the translation of example 4, “more” is translated as “再送一些东西”, which links the context well.

Example 5:

Original text: “Everything about him was old except his eyes and they were the same color as the sea and were cheerful and undefeated.”

Translation: “他身上的一切都显得古老, 除了那双眼睛, 它们像海水一般蓝, 显得喜洋洋而

不服输。”

This case translates “same” into “像... 一般” to achieve comparative reference. It compares eyes with blue water and describes the intense and resolute eyes of the old man. Comparative references like this are common and easy to translate, but they also need to be handled flexibly according to the specific context.

4. Substitution

4.1 Concepts

Substitution refers to replacing an element in the context with an alternative form. Translators choose alternative words or phrases to avoid repetition and better connect the context. English often uses pronouns, nouns, or phrases to replace those that are repeated (Zhu, 2006). However, it is necessary to search for the replaced words from the context to fully understand the meaning of sentences containing alternative words or phrases. Therefore, substitution plays an important role in connecting the context.

4.2 Case Study

Nominal substitution refers to using one noun in place of another. Personal pronouns, possessive pronouns, relative pronouns, interrogative pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, and possessive and indefinite pronouns can serve as nominal substitutes. Such as:

Example 6:

Original text: “But remember how you went eighty-seven days without fish and then we caught big ones every day for three weeks.”

Translation: “不过你该记得，你有一回八十七天钓不到一条鱼，跟着有三个礼拜，我们每天都逮住了大鱼。”

In the above sentence, the noun “fish” in the original text is replaced by “ones”, so that the context is effectively connected, and the article is smoother.

In addition, verbal substitution often uses a substitute word to replace a verb or verb phrase. English discourse often uses its special auxiliary verbs to achieve substitution, like do/does, shall, can, etc. Such as:

Example 7:

Original text: “I wish I could feed the fish, he thought. He is my brother. But I must kill him and keep strong to do it. Slowly and conscientiously he ate all of the wedge-shaped strips of fish.”

Translation: “我巴望着也能喂那条鱼，他想。它是我的兄弟。可是我不得不把它弄死，我得保持精力来这样做。”

In example 7, the original text uses “do it” instead of the preceding phrasal verb “kill him” to achieve verbal substitution. If in the translation, the translator simply repeated the complete content of the previous text, the translation would be cumbersome. Therefore, the verbal substitution can make the context connection more fluent and natural.

5. Ellipsis

5.1 Concepts

Ellipsis means to omit some repetitive elements in the text. Proper ellipsis would not affect readers' understanding of the text but can make the text intelligible, natural, and smooth, and important information will be more prominent. However, in the process of translation, the translator needs to fully translate the omitted content for readers to understand (Hu, 1994).

5.2 Case Study

Among them, nominal ellipsis refers to the ellipsis within a noun phrase, which can include the omission of the central word, the modifier, or the whole phrase, such as:

Example 8:

Original text: "And the best fisherman is you." "No. I know others better."

Translation: "你是最好的渔夫。" "不，我不知道别人。"

In example 8, "others" replaces "fisherman" above and "fishermen" is omitted. The translator also didn't translate "fisherman" repeatedly to make the context more cohesive and the article more natural and smoother.

In addition, verbal ellipsis refers to certain verbs or verb groups in an elliptical discourse, such as:

Example 9:

Original text: "He looked down into the water and watched the lines that went straight down into the dark of the water. He kept them straighter than anyone did, so that at each level in the darkness of the stream there would be a bait waiting exactly where he wished it to be for any fish that swam there."

Translation: "他俯视水中，注视着那几根一直下垂到黑魑魑的深水里的钓索。他把钓索垂得比任何人更直，这样，在黑魑魑的湾流深处的几个不同的深度，都会有一个鱼饵刚好在他所指望的地方等待着在那儿游动的鱼来吃。"

In the sentence "He kept them straighter than anyone did", the phrasal verb "keep straight" is omitted and replaced with "did" to make the discourse more concise and compact.

6. Conjunction

Different from the other three types of cohesion methods, the connection can closely link the discourse logic through obvious connection signs to enhance the fluency and readability of the discourse, and to connect the contextual logic relations (Guo, 2011), such as:

Example 10:

Original text: "Keep the blanket around you," the boy said. "You'll not fish without eating while I'm alive."

Translation: "把毯子披在身上吧，" 孩子说。"只要我活着，你就决不会饿着肚子去打鱼。"

In example 10, the original English text uses "while" to connect the context, making the semantics more cohesive and the logic clear.

7. Conclusion

Cohesion is the formal symbol of semantic coherence and the tangible network of discourse. To achieve coherence, discourse must be cohesive. Coherence is the semantic feature of a discourse. The various concepts and relationships expressed in a discourse must be related to each other so that readers can rationally reason about the deep meaning of the text. The application of grammatical cohesion not only plays the role of cohesion, but also contributes to the fluency and coherence of writing. Grasping the cohesive means of discourse can help us better understand the original text better and improve information transmission.

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