Ideational Coherence Reconstruction in E-C Translation Teaching—A Sample Study on Xu Chi's Version “Walden”

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This paper is a tentative endeavor to apply a new functional discourse analysis mode to translation teaching and study, intending to find out what kind of coherence features the translator represents in the version, and how those coherence features as well as the significance of the coherence reconstruction are reconstructed by analyzing the translation sample from the levels of ideational coherence. The significance of this paper lies in that it may shed a new light on the application of discourse coherence to translation teaching and study.

Keywords: functional analysis, discourse coherence reconstruction, translation, ideational coherence

In de Beaugrande and Dressler's *Introduction to Text Linguistics* (1981), which was supposed to be an introductory textbook on text linguistics, the central concern is textuality, which is based on seven standards: cohesion, coherence, intentionality, acceptability, informativity, situationality, and intertextuality. Among these standards, coherence can be considered as a very important one. As Beaugrande points out, “coherence is clearly not a mere feature of text, but rather the outcome of cognitive processes among text users” (Beaugrande & Dressler, 1981, p. 6). Therefore, in translation, whether the target language (TL) reader feels the version coherent or not is viewed as an important standard. Since different languages may have different coherence mechanisms, for a translator, the most important task is to realize and establish the coherence reconstruction in the process of rendering the source language (SL) to TL.

The original book *Walden*, written by Henry Thoreau, is not a novel, a narrative poem, or a play. There is no clear story line, no plot line, nor is it autobiography, although much of it is based on Thoreau's life at Walden Pond. It was not until Xu Chi had translated this book that the Chinese version of *Walden* became popular among the Chinese literature field, though, Xu Chi's version is used by most of the literary scholars who are doing research on the ecology theory of *Walden* rather than on the version itself. Xu Chi's translation work *Walden* is famous for its beautiful language, fresh tone as well as skillful translation skills. So the author of the present paper argues that it is very necessary to make some research on this version from the angle of discourse analysis so as to find out how the version establishes coherent reconstruction in the process of translation.

The ideational function is to convey new information, to communicate a content that is unknown to the hearer. Present in all language uses, the ideational function is a meaning potential, because whatever specific use one is making of language, he has to refer to categories of his experience of the world (Halliday, 1994, p.

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179). According to this definition, language is used to organize, understand, and express our perceptions of the outside world and of our own consciousness. That is to say, language is used to describe our experience of the outside world and the worlds in our minds. The ideational metafunction can be classified into two subfunctions: the experiential metafunction and the logical metafunction. The former largely concerns content or ideas. The latter concerns the relationship between content and ideas.

Since that the ideational metafunction of language is what a language is used to represent the world outside and inside the language users, a discourse has ideational coherence when it is produced in such ways that it effectively represents the real or imagined worlds as most of us perceive them to be. The book *Walden* tells the author's quiet life when he lived by the Walden Pond. The wonderful description about the pond, woods, animals, and everything the writer experienced makes great and deep impression on the reader. Besides, the writer also describes a spiritual world in the original text, which reveals the writer's ideas about the nature, the universe. The book fully represents the world outside the writer and inside his minds. Thus it can be concluded that this long discourse is coherent at ideational level.

According to Cheng Xiaotang (2005), language must be organized into coherent discourse, and that in order for discourse to construe ideational meaning effectively, it must represent the worlds (real and imagined) as the majority of us perceive them to be. Based on this assumption, it is proposed that coherent discourse should show a certain degree of normality; it should represent the worlds in certain orderings; and it should have a focal topic at both local and global levels.

Normality

Normality is defined by van Dijk (1977) as a discourse property such as individuals, events, and states of affair and their relations represented in discourse corresponding with our general understanding of the way actual world individuals, events, and states of affair relate. Although texts often provide novel information and represent unusual events or states of affair, in order for texts to be coherent, text worlds must have some degree of normality. According to van Dijk (1977, p. 99), an important cognitive condition of semantic coherence is the assumed normality of the worlds involved. Our expectations about the semantic structures of discourse are determined by our knowledge about the structure of worlds in general and of particular states of affair or courses of events. When we interpret text worlds, we relate what we read to what we know about the normal worlds. If we can establish some relationships between the text worlds and the worlds we are familiar with, we feel the text is coherent. Otherwise, we will feel the text is incoherent.

E.g.,

...In most books, the I, or first person, is omitted; in this it will be retained; that, in respect to egotism, is the main difference... Perhaps these pages are more particularly addressed to poor students. As for the rest of my readers, they will accept such portions as apply to them. I trust that none will stretch the seams in putting on the coat, for it may do good service to him whom it fits.

……许多书，避而不用所谓第一人称的“我”字；本书是用的；这本书的特点便是“我”字用得特别多。……下面的这些文字，对于清寒的学生，或许特别地适宜。至于其余的读者，我想他们是会取其适用的。因为，没有人会削足适履的；只有合乎尺寸的衣履，才能对一个人有用。（Xu, 2004, p. 1).

Relate the affairs or events to the TL culture. In the last sentence, “none will stretch the seams in putting on the coat” is a normal thing in SL culture, but may be abnormal or strange in TL culture. If it is translated

literally as “穿衣时把衣缝撑开”, the TL reader may feel it odd. In Xu’s version, this clause is converted into an Chinese idiom “削足适履”, which not only represents the original meaning of the states, but also fits in with the TL reader’s thinking and reading habits. They could easily relate this idiom to what they know about the text, thus the text reads very coherent to them.

大错底下劳动的啊。人的健美的躯体，大半很快地被犁头耕了过去，化为泥土中的肥料。像一本经书里说的，一种似是而非的，通称“必然”的命运支配了人，他们所积累的财富，被飞蛾和锈霉再腐蚀掉，并且招来了胥篋的盗贼。这是一个愚蠢的生命，生前或者不明白，到临终，人们终会明白的。(Xu, 2004, p. 3)

As can be seen from the original extract, everything is normal in the original text world. However, if they are literally rendered into Chinese, some parts of the original text will be very strange to the TL reader, such as “a better part of the man” and “if not before”. Although the meaning of each word is very clear, the TL reader can not relate what they read to what they know, thus the text reads abnormal and incoherent. In order to create a normal world for the TL reader, Xu Chi supplies the full meaning of those abnormal parts in his version, making them clear and understandable: “a better part of men” actually means “most part of men’s fine body”, so it is rendered into “人的健美的躯体，大半……”. tually means “if they cannot find that (it is a fool’ life) before their death”, so it is translated into “生前或者不明白”. After being given the full messages in the TT, the reader will be able to understand the meaning of the original, for they can easily relate what they read to what they know. In this way, the TT will read normal and coherent.

Discourse Orderings

Generally, if texts are to represent the world as they are, they must also reflect the orderings in which events take place or states of affair exist. A principle of text sequencing is that “without overt indications to the contrary, the order of mention of certain items may be assumed to reflect the order of these items in reality or in our conceptualization of reality” (Dik, 1997, p. 435). This is the same as saying that textual description of events or states of affair should follow either the order which actually exists in the worlds described or the order in which we perceive the worlds. As Dik further points out, “as long as the ordering within the discourse is in accordance with these natural defaults, this adds to the overall coherence. Where such orders are shifted around, overt markers must warn the interpreter of this marked situation” (Dik, 1997, p. 436).

However, due to the differences between languages, the arrangement of the sequence of events, especially time and space sequence in SL and TL may differ considerably, though they may also share something in common. As a cross-language mediator, a translator should put those differences in their pockets and try to adapt to them. On considering that, in a text, words or characters are only language signals, a translator has to find out the “dynamic image” in the process of understanding the ST and rearrange the time and space sequence in the TT according to this “dynamic image” and reproduce the “dynamic image” by using TL.

E.g.,

At evening, the distant lowing of some cow in the horizon beyond the woods sounded sweet and melodious, and at first I would mistake it for the voices of certain minstrels by whom I was sometimes serenaded, who might be straying over hill and dale; but soon I was not unpleasantly disappointed when it was prolonged into the cheap and natural music of the cow. I do not mean to be satirical, but to express my appreciation of those youths’ singing, when I state that I perceived clearly that it was akin to the music of the cow, and they were at length one articulation of Nature.

黄昏中，远方的地平线上，有一些牛叫传入森林，很甜美，旋律也优雅，起先我以为是某些游唱诗人的歌喉，有些个晚上，我听到过他们唱小夜曲，他们也许正漂泊行经山谷；可是听下去，我就欣然地失望了，一拉长，原来是牛的声音，不花钱的音乐。我说，在我听来，青年人的歌声近似牛叫，我并不是讽刺，我对于他们的歌喉是很欣赏的，这两种声音，说到最后，都是天籁。(Xu, 2004, p. 115)

In ST, the first phrase shows the events happened “at evening”, and the writer uses “at first”—“soon” to represent the event order which pushes forward the development of the text. The main event here is that the writer is “listening to the sound”, which can be considered as the “dynamic image”. So in translation, the translator grasps this “dynamic image” and renders “at first, then” into “起先，听下去” rather than “开始，后来”。“听下去” here is a key transition of connecting the former event and the following one. Meanwhile, it vividly reproduces the dynamic image “listening”. Thus the TL reader will feel it coherent and natural.

Topical Continuity

Topic, in its common sense, refers to a particular subject that we discuss or write about. In linguistics, however, the term has been used to refer to different notions. For some linguists, topic is part of the binary structure of a sentence, with the other part being referred to as comment. In this binary topic-comment sentence structure, topic is “what is being talked about”, and comment is “what is said about the topic” (Bussmann, 1996, p. 487). Although the topic-comment structure plays a significant role in the account of discourse coherence (Van Dijk, 1977), in this part, the term “topic” will be used in a different sense as “discourse topic” rather than “sentential topic”.

As for discourse topic, a distinction is often made between local topic and global topic. A local topic concerns components or elements of text, whereas a global topic concerns the whole text. Generally, in coherent texts, topics, especially local topics, may change from element to element. However, the change of topic is governed by some constraints. The adjacent topics must be connected or related to each other in one way or another in order to make the topic continuity. A translator should find those relations of the adjacent topics and keep topic continuity in TL. Take the following extract as an example:

Like the water, the Walden ice, seen near at hand, has a green tint, but at a distance is beautifully blue, and you can easily tell it from the white ice of the river, or the merely greenish ice of some ponds, a quarter of a mile off. Sometimes one of those great cakes slips from the ice-man's sled into the village street, and lies there for a week like a great emerald, an object of interest to all passers. (1) I have noticed that a portion of Walden which in the state of water was green will often, when frozen, appear from the same point of view blue. (2) So the hollows about this pond will, sometimes, in the winter, be filled with a greenish water somewhat like its own, but the next day will have frozen blue.

像湖水一样，瓦尔登的冰，近看是绿的，可是从远处望去，它蓝蓝的很美，你很容易就辨别出来了，那是河上的白冰，或是四分之一英里外的湖上的只是微绿的冰，而这是瓦尔登的冰。有时候，从挖冰人的雪车上，有一大块冰掉在村中街道上，躺在那里有一星期，像一块很大的翡翠，引起所有过路人的兴趣。我注意到瓦尔登的一个部分，它的水是绿的，一俟冻结之后，从同一观察点望去，它成了蓝色。所以在湖边的许多低洼地，有时候，在冬天，充满了像它一样的绿色的水，可是到了第二天，我发现它们已冻成了蓝色的冰。(Xu, 2004, p. 274)

The global topic of this text is “the Walden's ice in the author's eyes”, so the following local topics should be centered on this global topic. In the above underlined part of the ST, sentence (1) has the local topic “I noticed that”, and in sentence (2), the local topic is “the hollow frozen”. Actually, the latter is also the observation of the author. However, the writer omits this information of “observation” in the ST. Obviously, “the blue” is not the real color of the ice, but the color observed from the author's point of view. Therefore, in

order to keep the topic continuity, the missing information should be supplied here. In his version, the translator adds “我发现它们（已经冻成了蓝色的冰）”, which keeps consistence of the former local topic. Thus the whole text reads coherent and smooth.

Conclusion

To achieve ideational coherence, Xu Chi establishes in his version the relationships between the text worlds and the worlds the TL reader are familiar with. In other word, he creates a normal world for the TL reader. To achieve this purpose, some translation techniques have been applied, such as supplying necessary information when necessary to make the meaning clearer, rendering words in terms of the context, and trying to relate the affairs or events in the SL world to the TL culture.

Secondly, as a text should follow certain discourse orderings such as temporal order and space order, the key point here is to grasp the “dynamic image” and the “static image”. In his translation, Xu Chi successfully grasps these two images and reconstructs the time and space order of the ST in his version, which makes the TT coherent. Moreover, the TT should keep the topic continuity both at global topics and local topics. Xu Chi finds out those relations of the adjacent local topics and reconstructs the local topics according to the global topic, thus keeping the topic continuity in TL and achieving coherent version.

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