

The Role of Palmer Cultural Linguistics in Translation

Hong-Li GAO^{1,a}, Xian-Feng FENG²

¹Faculty of Humanities and Foreign Languages, Xi'an University of Technology, Xi'an, China

²Faculty of Automation and Information Engineering, Xi'an University of Technology, Xi'an, China

^agaohl@xaut.edu.cn

Key words: Palmer Cultural Linguistics, Schema, Imagery, Translation.

Abstract. Palmer Cultural Linguistics, a linguistic cultural theory which makes imagery as its core, develops from the combination of Boasian linguistics, ethnosemantics (ethnoscience) and ethnography of speaking, making great contribution in many fields relating to language. Therefore, this paper expounds and analyzes the basic principles and standpoints about Palmer Cultural Linguistics, discloses the important role of Palmer Cultural Linguistics in the course of translation so as to improve the level of translation practice and serves translation better.

Introduction

Gary B. Palmer is an American linguistic anthropologist; he is the first person who uses “cultural linguistics” as the name of his discipline, and his monograph “Toward a Theory of Cultural Linguistics” (Palmer, G B., 1996) [1] becomes the first one which concentrates on cultural linguistics’ in the works on western linguistics anthropology and studying of language and culture. Palmer Cultural Linguistics is a kind of language—and—culture theory which makes imagery as its core; the imagery is its nuclear conception. He thinks that by utilizing imagery as the perspective people could look into the inner world and thinking model of various nations’ language users.

What Palmer has devoted to is linguistic anthropology which has three central traditional approaches: Boasian linguistics, ethnosemantics (ethnoscience), and the ethnography of speaking. He believes that the three approaches are all significant by themselves, and if they could be synthesized with cognitive linguistics, a new theory—cultural linguistics theory will appear, which could explain more reasonably many linguistic phenomena confronting anthropologists in the course of cultural research, Palmer also names it “a theory of culturally defined mental imagery”, namely, “a cultural theory of linguistic meaning”. (Palmer. G B-1996:4) [2]

Cultural Linguistics

What is cultural linguistics on earth? It is a theory that intends to connote a broad interest in language and culture, a concern with folk knowledge, and a reliance on both ethnographic and linguistic methods. It is concerned with almost the same domains of language and culture that interest the above anthropological approaches, but it assumes a perspective on those phenomena that is essentially cognitive. There are some basic principles and standpoints about Palmer Cultural Linguistics, we will look into several major ones

Firstly, Palmer uses “imagery”, which is one of the nuclear terms in cognitive linguistics, as the central conception of his cultural linguistics theory. Cultural linguistics and cognitive linguistics are fundamental theories of mental imagery. They seek to understand how speakers deploy speech and how listeners understand it relating to various imageries, including cognitive models, symbols, image—schemas and social scenarios, etc. The conventional meanings of words are all formed by relating to the imagery, it is the construal in cognitive model, while the cognitive model is basically constructed by culture, namely,

it forms in certain social and cultural environment, we could say that virtually all imageries are structured by culture and personality for perceptions are framed and filtered by imagery in the cognitive model that is culturally constructed. Imagery is either socially constructed or embedded in social constructions. Therefore, when some cognitive models are activated and assembled, some scenarios or some discourse models will take on in people's minds. Since the various kinds of imageries differentiate with each other according to different perspectives, scopes, emotional values and so on, when the scenarios or discourse models appear in people's minds, different people will have different comprehensions. While the cognitive mainly contain imagery model, metaphor model, metonymy model, folk verbal postulate model and proposition model, there are also other models like the combination of the above mentioned models. Cognitive model forms usually on the basis of several kinds of sensory organs 'experience, moreover it interweaves intricately with human being's emotion, intention, design and expectation.

Secondly, in the flux of context, it is the culturally constructed, conventional, and mutually presupposed imagery of world view that provides the stable points of reference for the interpretation of discourse. For example, the film about saucer men gives us the schematized imagery, which gradually becomes the common knowledge and the basis of talking about saucer men. This imagery belongs to what T Givón (Givón, T., 1992 (30): 12) [3] called "the generally shared context, or cultural knowledge", to what Deborah Schiffrin (Schiffrin, D., 1987:28) [4] called the "information state", which concerns "what a speaker knows and what a hearer knows", and to what Deborah Tannen and Cynthia Wallat (Deborah Tannen and Cynthia Wallat, 1993: 60) [5] called "knowledge schemas", which are "expectations about people, objects, events, and settings in the world".

Thirdly, the widespread conception structures in the brain could be activated at the same time or in certain sequence, they could echo with each other, and the result of echo is the language appearance. The schemas that are activated by multi—dimensional speech, grammar and world view undergo a long course of conjunction and accompaniment, then could form a set of conventional structure, which is the constraints of language.

Fourthly, language, semantic system, cognitive model and world view are all constructed in social culture, but cultural linguistics will not follow the thorough cultural relativism. Although different languages own different cultural backgrounds, human beings' language has many common characters, which are just the basis of communication among different cultures and countries.

Palmer Cultural Linguistics' Role in Translation

Translation is the activity in which one language is converted to another. It is the application of language knowledge; while linguistics is a discipline which studies language both in its own right and as a tool for generating meanings. Before people have ever considered translation as a branch of linguistics, it is explicitly that translation and linguistics have very close relationship. It should therefore have a great deal to offer to the budding discipline of translation studies, "it can certainly offer translators valuable insights into the nature and function of language" (Mona Baker., 2000:5) [6]. This is particularly true of modern linguistics; Palmer Cultural Linguistics is not an exception.

As we have mentioned in the part of main principles of Palmer Cultural Linguistics, schema is a very important concept. It could be treated as "learned, internalized patterns of thought feeling that mediate both the interpretation of ongoing experience and the reconstruction of memories" (Claudia Strauss, 1922a:3) [7]. Vocabularies related to schemas, so that in a particular instance of usage each word corresponded to a part of some schema or a perspective on a schema. A word must be defined relative to its schema. To understand a word as its speaker intended or to use it appropriately, it is necessary to know that schema or schemas to which it belongs to in a particular context of use. The identification of a word's meaning needs the help of schemas in the course of translation.

And no matter translation or interpretation, if we want to do the work better, we must grasp sufficient knowledge, besides we could command and use skillfully the mother tongue and foreign languages.

Knowledge schema plays an important role in comprehension of reading matters and abstraction of memory, realizing which could help us raise translation level. Knowledge schema's strengthening function in comprehension of reading matters are mainly showed in three aspects:

Knowledge schema provides reference for explaining the context of writings, during the course of reading information, the content of the writing could be combined with the knowledge schema in readers' minds, and form newer and more concrete schema, consequently the comprehension is accomplished; Knowledge schema is helpful in identification and choice of words. Many words are polysemous, they express different meanings in different situations. For example, submarine's original meaning is "the naval vessel that can operate underwater as well as on the surface", its another extended meaning is "a kind of sandwich made from a long bread roll split lengthwise and filled with meat, cheese, salad, etc". If one day you hear someone order "submarine" in an American restaurant, even if you do not know what the customer ordered is actually a sandwich, you could guess that he ordered a kind of food not a naval vessel, for the knowledge schema on restaurant in your mind helps you to choose the reasonable word's meaning; Knowledge schema is beneficial for the prediction of the later development of writing. When people read writing the content of the writing could activate the relevant knowledge schema in reader's mind, while once this schema is activated, it could help the reader to predict the possible scene later on. Certainly, the "reasonable prediction" could not be the only one, what we have want to prove is that although knowledge schema could not predict the later development absolutely correct, it could relatively restrict the content field and probability of the later development.

And the function in strengthening memory and abstracting information represents itself as follows: Knowledge schema provides a guide for abstraction of information, for example, people could recall a concrete situation in the bank with the help of the common knowledge of "deposit" in knowledge schema; and knowledge schema benefits the reconstruction of information. Sometimes people could not recall certain concrete content, they could complement and reconstruct the information by making use of relevant knowledge schema.

From the above analysis we could abstract that in the course of translation, there is also a complex cognitive course. Schema is the knowledge structure of rational cognition. And the forming of translation cognitive schema needs many steps: the translators compare the existing knowledge schema in their minds with the schema described by the original author competing; according to the comparison translators propose hypothesis and examine it constantly until the expression by translator is the same as what the original author wants to express.

In translation field the conception of imagery means a kind of artistic state formed by the combination of the descriptive scene and the thought and emotion in the literary works, which could affect the readers through imagination and association as if they are personally on the scene. The conception of imagery in Palmer Cultural Linguistics is also very important. It means a mental representation of something (esp. a visible object), not by direct perception, but by memory or imagination. Language has very close relationship with imagery. It is better to say that discourse invokes conventional imagery and provokes the construction of new imagery. And the imagery structures discourse; they are mutually constitutive. Through time and incessant pattern, speakers in language communities collaborate and negotiate over the imagery of evolving world view.

Cultural Linguistics considers imagery as linguistic factor which should be combined with culture, which could advance each field. The imagery in idioms and proverbs always has certain national cultural content, however, so far people have not sufficiently recognized the cultural imagery, they often separate imagery from culture; put it with visual words, allusions, idioms, tropes, proverbs, etc. treating it as some rhetorical means. Undoubtedly, imagery has very close relationship with above literary forms, but they do not on a parallel level, cultural imagery penetrates into them and involves wider and deeper connotation.

Literary work as a kind of art includes aesthetic factors besides language information, in the course of translation translators carry out cognition of language and taste of aesthetics, through these two kinds of activities translators comprehend the original and form a general imagery in mind, and then recreate this imagery by using the target language, so as to realize the shift and recreation of literary art. And the

same imageries will have different meanings according to their different cultural backgrounds, to which we should pay much attention for successful translation.

So we conclude that the imagery which is adequately chosen in translation could transmit correctly certain emotions, moral ideology, author's experiences or ideas to readers and could form some grand, traffic, horrified, mysterious, holy or merciful specialty. The imagery should be examined and chosen with readers' knowledge schema of cultural background.

Summary

Through the analysis of schema and imagery's role of Palmer Cultural Linguistics in the course of translation, we could know that Palmet Cultural Linguistics has close relationship with translation. The translators should make full use of its linguistic accomplishment to serve their translation work and should examine the original work with the schema, prototype, imagery and the cultural background to find out the adequate choice of imagery in target language. Culture just like the image—schema generates from sense is the means and tool on which comprehension, understanding and processing depend. There are more close relationship between Cultural Linguistics and translation theory and practice, which wait for us to explore, we should try our best to do research with great efforts and confidence to let them serve translation better.

References

- [1] Palmer, G B, *Toward a Theory of Cultural Linguistics*. University of Texas Press, 1996.
- [2] Palmer, G B, *Toward a Theory of Cultural Linguistics*. University of Texas Press, 1996.
- [3] Givón, T, *the Grammer of Referential Coherence as Mental Processing Instructions*. Linguistics. 1992.
- [4] Schiffrin. D, *Discourse Markers*. Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- [5] Deborah Tannen and Cynthia Wallat., *Interactive frames and knowledge schemas in interaction: Examples from a medical examination / interview, Framing in Discourse*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993
- [6] Mona Baker, *In Other Words: A Course Book on Translation*. Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2000.
- [7] Claudia Strauss, *Models and Motives. Human Motives and Cultural Models*. Cambridge University Press, 1992.