Cognitive Linguistic Approach in Translation Studies

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Objectives:
To present interdisciplinary analyses between Cognitive Linguistics and Translation Studies by using multiple translations from Japanese to English.
To describe the zero-encoding subject in Japanese in a comparison of multiple translations in terms of ‘Subjectivity’ and ‘Construal Alternative’. Japanese is a SOV and topic-prominent language.

Zero-encoding subject in Japanese:
(a) I am Jun Nakamura.
(b) 0 Nakamura Jun desu.

Cognitive Linguistics and Translation Studies:
Three major assumptions of Cognitive Linguistics (Creeff and Cruse 2004:1):
(I) Language is not an autonomous cognitive faculty
(II) Grammar is conceptualization
(III) Knowledge of language emerges from language use.

Translation Studies: a contrastive analysis between two or more different languages in terms of what is retained and what is lost from a source text to a target text. Two main streams of key concepts in Translation Studies:
Word for Word ──> Foreignization ──> Formal equivalence ──> Category shifts
Sense for Sense ──> Domestication ──> Functional equivalence ──> Cultural Norms

Case Study: Translation Project of the song called ‘Sukiyaki’.
The project was conducted in the course of Japanese and English Translation Techniques in Massey University in 2015 and 2016.
The procedure: Students in the course had to do the translation practice of a song called ‘Sukiyaki’ from Japanese to English and explain their Skopos and techniques to be used. Then they compared their own renditions with Yoko Ono’s translation in the final examination of the course.
Students could prepare for their translations in advance.
Over the two years, 19 students were involved.

Google translation:

Student 1
Let’s walk looking up
Happiness lies above the sky
Happiness lies above the clouds

Student 2
I hold my head up as I walk
Happiness lies beyond the sky
Happiness lies beyond the clouds

Translated by Oyo Yoko (2014):
Look at the sky as you walk through life
So no one sees your tears
I remember those happy spring days
On this lonely night
I hold my head up as I walk
Happiness lies above the sky
Happiness may seem just out of sight
Beyond the clouds, try as we might

Subjectivity and Construal Alternatives in a Cognitive Linguistic approach
The notion of ‘Subjectivity’ and ‘Objectivity’ proposed by Langacker:
(I) You are looking up
(II) We are looking up
(III) ‘You’ are looking up

The cline of the construals is:  ‘let us walk’ is relatively objective ‘you walk’ is maximally subjective. That is, the aesthetic effects of her work are not motivated by regular equivalences used in a standard model or contrastive literature.

Source Text Domain
Target Text Domain
Shifts of Subjectivity

Let’s walk looking up
You walk
I walk
© indicates ‘Conceptualiser’

Concluding Remarks:
This case study demonstrates that the zero-encoding of the grammatical subject in Japanese can be reanalyzed in terms of ‘subjectivity’ and ‘construal alternatives’ in multiple translations, instead of finding various types of equivalences used in a standard model of Translation Studies.
Previous research of Translation Studies has used a linguistic approach to analyze a relationship between a source text and a target text. Therefore, the main field of translation analysis are often considered as applied linguistics or construative literature.
Moreover, the analysis of translation also has a plenty of potential for examining various linguistic hypotheses and concepts.

Discussions:
The song in the Japanese source text uses no personal pronouns. The first verse ‘You are looking up’ is the zero-encoding subject, which excludes semantic ambiguity but also a possibility of multiple interpretations based on construal alternatives.

The cline of the construal is: ‘let us walk’ is maximally subjective, because the conceptualiser construes himself/herself as the event of the ‘subjective mode’. On the other hand, ‘you walk’ is maximally objective because of exclusiveness of the conceptualiser outside the event. ‘I walk’ is relatively objective, because it is a monologic style and the conceptualiser construes himself/herself as the listener.

Four students construed ‘let us walk’ and two of them kept their construals in ‘inclusive We’ mode, but the other two shifted their construals into ‘monologic I’ mode, which was the same construal as the other 13 students.

The significance of Yoko Ono’s translation is explainable, not as the literature but in the cognitive linguistic analysis. Firstly, she expressed a unique perspective in her construal (exclusive You’ mode), which has never been taken before. Secondly, she dramaticallyshifted her objective construal into his subjective construal (inclusive We’ mode). That is, the aesthetic effects of her work are not motivated by regular construals.

Previous linguistic approaches to the zero-encoding subject in Japanese:
The formal syntactic approach: grammatical omission, which means the absence of what there should be on a syntactic role.
The functional/pragmatic approach: recoverability of deletion disease information, which is based on the cooperative principles of the speech-act participants.
Translation Analyses: depending on translation directions
From Japanese to English, addition of a subject
From English to Japanese, deletion of a subject
Both strategies are aimed for ‘domestication’ with functional equivalences.

Knowledge of language emerges from language use.

Previous References:


Acknowledgement: Funding support from the School of Humanities, Massey University and the students in the course 242307, Massey University.

Linguistics Society of NZ Annual Conference, at Wellington campus, Massey University, 21-22, Nov, 2016
The contrastive analysis of multiple translations: Sukiyaki song from Japanese to English

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2016-11-21