A Register Theory Analysis in Zhang Peiji's English Translation of Prose "Peanuts"

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Abstract: *Halliday's register theory mainly analyzes the relationship between situational context and language, which can be used to guide the translation of some texts to a certain extent. Nowadays, the research on the application of register theory in translation is rising, but the number of relevant studies on the guiding role of register theory in modern and contemporary prose translation in China is still small. Based on Mr. Zhang Peiji's English translation of the famous local prose "Peanuts", this paper aims to analyze the equivalence and error of the three elements in register theory, so as to explore the importance of realizing the equivalence of the three elements and the guiding role of register theory in prose translation, finally making contributions to the spread of Chinese culture.*

Keywords: *register theory, Peanuts, prose translation*

1. Introduction

In the 1990s, discourse analysis based on Applied Linguistics gradually began to be introduced into the field of translation research, because translation research needs the support of linguistic theory, and register theory can be used to guide translation practice, which was developed from British "contextualism". Finally, Halliday, the famous British contemporary linguist and founder of Systemic Functional Linguistics, constructed this theory as a complete theoretical framework. The three elements of field, tenor and mode proposed in Halliday's register theory correspond to the equivalence of semantic, pragmatic and structural elements in the "Translation Equivalence Theory" proposed by Catford, another representative figure of the London School, a famous British linguist and translation theorist[1].

Prose is a narrative literary genre that expresses the writer's true feelings and diverse writing techniques. Its prominent features mainly include meaningful language and far-reaching significance. Its English translation version helps to promote China's modern and contemporary excellent literary works, especially China's unique local literary works, to the world. "Peanuts" is a prose with local color, which is a masterpiece of modern Chinese writer Xu Dishan. Many scholars have translated this article into English, but Zhang Peiji's translation has its unique style, because his translation always follows Halliday's register theory, and takes this theory as a guide as far as possible to achieve the overall equivalence between the three elements of the original text and the translated text. Therefore, Zhang's translation instinct provides a theoretical reference for the English translation of modern and contemporary proses in China to a certain extent.

2. Register Theory

2.1 Development of Register theory

Register theory is a theory of great significance in systemic functional linguistics. Its concept originates from British "contextualism". Malinowski, a British Polish anthropologist, first put forward the two important concepts of "situational context" and "cultural context" in the 1930s, believing that context has a certain restrictive effect on the meaning of language. The concept of "situational context" put forward by him avoids the limitation that predecessors only study context; Later, Firth, Halliday's tutor, further refined the situational context and expanded the connotation of "context" into the theory of "semantics exists in context"[2]. However, the concept of "register" was first proposed by Raid when he studied Bilingual Phenomena in 1956. While inheriting his tutor's theory, Halliday found in his research in the 1960s that language will change with function and situation, and believed that the language variant distinguished by functional use is register. In 1978, Halliday divided register into three elements: field,

tenor and mode, and established a relatively complete theoretical framework in 1985. These three elements correspond to the three language meta-functions of concept, interpersonal and discourse in systemic functional grammar.

2.2 The Analysis of Register Theory on Prose Translation

Prose is an artistic style famous for its vivid expression and beautiful connotation, and the translation work is difficult because of the aesthetic characteristics of prose, so there is relatively little research on prose translation in the field of Chinese and western translation practice. Halliday's register theory has been widely used in translation studies since the 1990s. Its theoretical analysis model is to analyze the text from three aspects: field, tenor and mode. Based on the three elements of register, it analyzes whether the translation has achieved semantic, pragmatic and structural equivalence to the original text, and carries out corresponding interpretation and analysis to evaluate the quality of the translation. This theory provides a new research perspective for prose translation. This paper is based on Mr. Zhang Peiji's English translation of "Peanuts", analyzes and explores the equivalence and deviation in the three elements of register, and finally evaluates its translation quality level, so as to provide a relatively new perspective for the study of prose English translation((all the following example sentences are quoted from[3]).

3. A Register Theory Analysis in Zhang Peiji's English Translation of Prose "Peanuts"

3.1 Field Analysis

3.1.1 Field Equivalence

Field equivalence mainly refers to the translator's choice of transitivity system and vocabulary in the target language to achieve the unity of the theme and content of the original text, that is, the equivalence of conceptual meaning. The choice of transitivity system shows the change of the type of sentence process in the translation process. However, in order to achieve the equivalence of the conceptual function of the translation to the original text, or to reduce the complexity of the translation language to achieve a concise and refined translation effect, sometimes the formal structure of the original language must be slightly changed.

3.1.2 Transitivity System Selection

The choice of transitivity system reflects the different types of processes in language and the language structures expressed in this process. The equivalence of the translation to the original language field is achieved by the unity of conceptual meaning through this choice. In systemic functional linguistics, transitivity system is also divided into six different processes: substance, psychology, relationship, behavior, speech and existence.

Translation: Why not have them planted here.

In this sentence, there is a unique vocabulary structure in Chinese, that is, the serial phrase "bi lai", but there is a lack of equivalent language structure in English. Therefore, in order to achieve the equivalence of the translation to the original language field, Mr. Zhang Peiji had to adopt a special translation method to change the sentence structure of the original sentence and turn the material behavior process of the original sentence into an existing process. According to the translation quality evaluation model proposed by Professor Si Xianzhu, a Chinese linguist, if the conceptual deviation of the translation from the original text is to maintain the consistency of the textual meaning of the whole text, then the inconsistency in the selection of the transitive system is of positive and positive significance to the translation quality of the translation, and should not be regarded as the deviation of the field.

3.1.3 Vocabulary Selection

Translation:Behind our house there lay half a mou of vacant land. Mother said, "It's a pity to let it lie waste."

Mr. Zhang Peiji accurately and vividly expressed "half a mou of vacant land" through "lay", a dynamic English verb, instead of the "there be" structure often used by English learners. At the same time, the expression of the phrase "it's a pity to..." is also a very authentic English expression, which accurately reflects the mother's regret for the empty ground in the original text.

3.1.4 Field Deviation

The deviation of the field refers to that the transitive system and the choice of words in the translation do not fully show the conceptual meaning of the sentences in the original text, resulting in the deviation of the field to a certain extent, which may cause the reader to misread the original text, so the translator should try to avoid it in translation. Mr. Zhang Peiji's English translation has achieved conceptual equivalence to the original text as a whole, and only a few sentences have field errors:

Translation: And soon we started buying seeds, plotting the land and watering the plants.

According to the content of the original text, it can be seen that the originators of the actions of buying seeds, plotting the land and irrigating the garden are several different children, and not everyone completes each action together. However, the translator translates it as "we", which is different from the actors of the material process in the original text, and fails to show the division of labor meaning of "everyone does different thing" in the original text. Therefore, there is a certain deviation between the conceptual and functional meaning of the translation and the original text, To a certain extent, it causes field errors.

3.2 Tenor Analysis

3.2.1 Tenor Equivalence

Tenor equivalence refers to the translator's choice of mood system and evaluative vocabulary in the translation to achieve the interpersonal function consistency of the original text, that is, "pragmatic equivalence". The interpersonal function of this language, that is, the participation function, is a meaning potential of the participants, because the speaker, as a conversation participant, should personally participate in the situational context when talking with others, express his ideas and thoughts, and thus affect the emotional attitudes of other speakers. In the process of translation, the translator sometimes changes the language structure of the original text to a certain extent in order to achieve the equivalence between the target text and the original text, that is, interpersonal function. The original text of "Peanuts" describes the trivial matter in daily life that the author's family get together to celebrate the peanut harvest festival from the first-person perspective. Mr. Xu Dishan mainly uses the declarative structure used to provide information in his article. When describing the dialogue between parents and children, Mr. Xu Dishan skillfully uses imperative sentences and interrogative sentences to express verbal functions such as commands and questions, and visually shows the relationship between parents and children to readers. In terms of realizing the interpersonal function of the text, Mr. Xu Dishan expressed his approval for his father's painstaking words through the choice of mood system, that is, people should learn the beautiful characteristics of peanut without seeking false fame and silent dedication, and Zhang Peiji's translation also achieved the semantic equivalence of the original text as a whole.

3.2.2 Tone System Selection

The mood system consists of a subject (a noun phrase) and a qualifying component (adversarial, modal auxiliary verbs), and the equivalent of the meaning in the translation It is necessary to achieve the unity of the original text in emotion through the tone system. Judging from the reciprocal situation of the choice of the tone system, Mr. Zhang Peiji's translation better reproduces the short and concise language in the original text Structure:

Translation:So you must take after peanuts.

In Mr. Zhang Peiji's translation, the modal verb "to" in the original text is translated as "must", rather than the word "should" that most people would use. The tone of "must" is stronger and more affirmative than that of "should", so Mr. Zhang Peiji chose to use the word must more accurately to express the father's ardent hope for the child, and achieved the parity of the original text in terms of meaning.

3.2.3 Evaluative Vocabulary Selection

Evaluative vocabulary is the second part of the interpersonal function of language, which is mainly reflected in grammar and vocabulary. In the process of translating prose, the translator must think about whether the choice of emotions, attitudes, and evaluative words in the translation is equal to the original text, because only in this way can the readers, writers, and characters in the text be fully reflected social and interpersonal relationships between:

Translation:Father's words remain engraved in my mind.

In the original sentence, Mr. Xu Dishan used " remain engraved in my mind " to reflect that his

teachings to his father benefited a lot and will never be forgotten, and also reflected his respect and miss for his father from the bottom of his heart, the word "engraved" selected in Mr. Zhang Peiji's translation sentence means "cut words or designs on sth", and there are also sentences engraved on the heart. Therefore, the choice of this word accurately and vividly conveys the emotion of the original text, expresses the same interpersonal meaning, and realizes the equivalence of language.

3.2.4 Tenor Deviation

The deviation of tenor refers to that the choice of mood system and evaluative vocabulary in the translation does not fully convey the interpersonal function of the original text, resulting in a certain degree of deviation of tenor. This kind of tenor error may affect readers' experience of reading, especially their understanding of the emotional attitude of the original text. Therefore, translators should try to avoid errors in tenor when translating. Mr. Zhang Peiji's translation has achieved equivalence to the tenor of the original text as a whole, but a few sentences have errors, which slightly affect the quality of the translation:

Translation: Since you all like to eat peanuts so much, why not have them planted here.

The original sentence shows what the mother said to her children. As it is a relatively daily scene, the mother's words should be colloquial, so Xu Dishan used imperative sentences to highlight the command function of language. However, in Mr. Zhang Peiji's translation, "Ji Ran" is translated into "since", which to a certain extent caused the semantic deviation of, because the usage of this word is more formal and written. Although imperative sentences are translated into interrogative sentences, they also show the meaning of proposal and order, so the interpersonal meaning of the translated sentences is equivalent to the original.

3.3 Mode Analysis

3.3.1 Mode Equivalence

Mode equivalence means that the translator realizes the equivalence of the meaning of the original text through the choice of explicit and implicit cohesion, information and thematic structure in the translation process, that is, "structural equivalence". Its equivalence also affects the final translation quality of prose to a certain extent. There are many differences in the language structure between English and Chinese, so the formal structure of sentences must be adjusted appropriately according to the context when translating prose into English to make it conform to the authentic English expression:

3.3.2 Explicit and Implicit Cohesion Selection

Cohesion is the meaning potential that connects the influencing factors in a text, and it also constitutes a part of a text, including explicit cohesion and implicit cohesion. Explicit cohesion is the embodiment of the coherence of grammar and vocabulary within the text language, including the cohesion of vocabulary, grammar and connectives to express the surface meaning of sentences; Implicit cohesion refers to the semantic relevance between paragraphs, and the coherence of text meaning depends on context or logical reasoning. It is necessary for prose translation to reflect the equivalence of forms through the choice of explicit cohesion and implicit cohesion:

Translation:How about giving a party this evening to celebrate the harvest and inviting your Daddy to have a taste of our newly-harvested peanuts?

Mr. Zhang Peiji choses the explicit conjunction "and" to connect two short sentences in the translated sentence, and translated "how" into "how about" with interrogative color, which perfectly presents the interpersonal meaning and language structure of the original text, and also reflects the characteristics of English "hypotaxis", achieving the equivalence of mode and tenor.

3.3.3 Information Structure and Thematic Structure Selection

Information structure contains both old information and new information, and thematic structure can be divided into theme and rheme. It is an important part of discourse function in functional grammar and has a wide range of application value. Among them, theme is the starting point of information, while rheme is the remaining sentence component. Information and thematic structure are not only the focus of research in the field of linguistics, but also one of the main factors that can ensure that the translator's translation has textual characteristics, so it is worth paying attention to in Translation:

Translation: We started buying seeds, ploughing the land and watering the plants. We gathered in a good harvest just after a couple of months!

In this translated sentence, although as mentioned above, the use of several verbs in the translated sentence failed to reflect the conceptual meaning of children's "respective division of labor", so there is a slight deviation in the conceptual meaning. But in this sentence, Mr. Zhang Peiji uses two "we" to express the thematic progression mode, which is roughly equivalent to the original sentence in terms of syntax, and basically realizes textual equivalence.

3.3.4 Mode Deviation

Mode deviation refer to the failure of the translation to achieve the equivalence with the textual function of the original text through the use of explicit or implicit cohesion, information and thematic structure, thus affecting the overall translation quality of the full text to a certain extent. But sometimes, in order to achieve semantic and pragmatic functional equivalence, translators have to sacrifice some textual functional equivalence and change the language structure in translation to create a translation that conforms to the grammar and language structure of the target language:

Translation: Peanuts are so cheap that anyone can afford to eat them.

First of all, the original sentence of this sentence only contains a material process, but Mr. Zhang Peiji's translation adds a relational process, which leads to inequality in the choice of transitivity. At the same time, the theme structure of this sentence in the original text is "no matter who", so it emphasizes that everyone can buy peanuts regardless of their status. However, Mr. Zhang Peiji's translation changes the theme structure to "peanuts are so cheap", highlighting that peanuts themselves are cheap and worthless. Therefore, the concept and textual function are different from the original text, and there are deviations in the field and mode.

4. Conclusion

Under the condition that the English translation level of modern and contemporary prose masterpieces in China is uneven, register theory just points out a new research direction for the English translation of prose. It can be said that translating prose is a process of finding the equivalent translation register and expressing the register completely on the basis of analyzing the register of the original text. Based on the register theory of systemic functional linguistics, this paper analyzes the equivalence and deviation between the three elements of register in Mr. Zhang Peiji's English translation of "Peanuts" and the original text, and finds that Mr. Zhang Peiji's translation basically realizes the equivalence of the original text field, tenor and mode, except that a few parts have a certain degree of register translation bias, which slightly affects the quality of translation, But on the whole, the translation has tried to convey vividly and accurately the local flavor and the children's respect and missing for their father in simple and concise English sentences. It can be seen from this that the comparative analysis of the three elements of register between the translation and the original text through register theory can objectively evaluate the quality of prose translation and provide guidance for linguistic theory and translation strategies. Only by striving to achieve the equivalence of the three elements of register in the translation and reducing the occurrence of deviations, can translators achieve prose translation at a higher level as possible and make contributions to Chinese culture going out and telling Chinese stories well.

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