

Interpretation Context From the Perspective of Adaptation Theory

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Abstract

The adaptation theory that came up in 1971 argued that people react to good and bad events in their life, but they eventually return to a stable level of well-being. Adaptation to context is a very important subject that attracts much attention from many branches of linguistics. we should do deep study about the paper.

As Malinowski suggests that utterance “becomes only intelligible when it is placed within its context of situation.” Interpretation, in essence, a communicative activity, also only takes place in the special context. Due to its extemporariness, interpretation is more dependent on the context. Study of the relation between context and interpretation should gain its due attention in this field.

Interpretation is dynamic contextual communication. Inspired by Vershueren’s adaptation theory from the viewpoint of pragmatics, which involves the issue of language choices, this paper attempts to study on interpretation context from the perspective of adaptation theory in this thesis.

Key words: Adaptation interpretation; Interpretation; Context; Communication

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INTRODUCTION

The paper mainly study a point that is on interpretation context from the perspective of adaptation theory. The

adaptation theory that came up in 1971 argued that people react to good and bad events in their life, but they eventually return to a stable level of well-being. Adaptation to context is a very important subject that attracts much attention from many branches of linguistics.

The theory of adaptation contains four angles of investigation, i.e., contextual correlates of adaptation, structural objects of adaptation, dynamics of adaptation, and salience of the adaptation process. Nonetheless, not much research work has been made on the introduction of “theory of adaptation” into interpretation. For that reason, this paper attempts to probe into how interpreters are supposed to adapt to various contexts in interpretation.

Interpretation is dynamic contextual communication. During interpreting, interpreters will inevitably encounter the problem of language choices in lines with different contextual factors in order to transfer original message accurately and achieve smooth communication.

Context, as an important linguistic concept, has attracted much attention in various fields without exception in interpretation. Context plays avital role in interpretation performance. Context adaptation is always mentioned in translation as well as in interpretation.

1. DEFINITION OF ADAPTATION AND CONTEXT

1.1 Introduction to Adaptation Theory

The adaptation theory that came up in 1971 argued that people react to good and bad events in their life, but they eventually return to a stable level of well-being. Researchers from Michigan State University, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, France and England confirmed this theory based on a study conducted to evaluate the effects of marital transitions on life satisfaction. 24,000 individuals were followed for 15 years and were frequently questioned about their life satisfaction.

As what have been stated above, the nature of interpretation is a kind of special communication. But in the process of communication, the components of communication, such as stimulus, temporal factors, spatial factors, and personal factors are always changing. In Larry A. Samovar and Richard E. Porter's "Communication between Cultures, four reasons are put forward to support this point. In order to adapt to these new communicative situation, language users (communicators) have to make choices. They choose the topics purpose techniques of communication. Since interpretation is a kind of communication, this dynamic process also is true to the process of interpretation. The interpreter inevitably meets with all kinds of language choices in the process of interpretation: Adaptation theory is most applicable in analysis and study of communication. It is the same with the study of interpretation. So we can also apply it in the study of interpretation. In this paper, it will be mainly applied into study of contextual analysis in interpretation.

1.2 What is Context ?

Context is the environment in which language exists, develops and is used. It limits the use of language and decides on the fate of language. Many linguists have done researches on it. As to its definitions, different schools also hold different opinions about it. In "A Dictionary of Chinese Grammar and Rhetoric" (1988, p.505), it says: Context: a. The context in a passage. Every word, phrase, sentence all can has its respective context; b. The environment in which a conversation or text takes place, including all kinds of relative background information, such as the traditions and customs, personal information, purpose of communication, and so on.

2. CONTEXT ADAPTATION IN INTERPRETATION

2.1 Adaptation to Linguistic Context in Interpretation

2.1.1 Adaptative Ways to Realize Coherence

First we'll discuss how to adapt to the linguistic context at the phrase level. We have known if the linguistic context exists in a phrase, we call it the linguistic context at the phrase level.

For example, when we interpret these two phrases: "伟大而艰巨的任务" and "心有余而力不足", it should be noticed that the same word "而" appears in these two phrases. How to interpret it appropriately in these two phrases? At this time, this word obviously is only affected by the different linguistic contexts existing in these two phrases. So we must firstly analyze the different linguistic contexts in these two phrases before we begin interpretation: Although the two phrases have the same word "而", it connects different words so as to generate

different meanings. In the first phrase, it connects two adjectives to moth a noun and the two adjectives just describe the two kinds of quality belonging to the noun. So it expresses the relationship of juxtaposition between these two words, whose function is similar to that of "and" in English. However, in the second phrase, it connects two phrases, which can stand independently. So firstly we have to understand meaning of these two phrases. "心有余" means "someone hopes to do something", while "力不足" means "someone can not do something lack of strength". So the same Chinese word "而" has different meanings "and" and "but" in the two phrases due to different linguistic contexts at the phrase level. The second example, when we interpret these two phrases "和为贵" and "君子和而不同", it should be noticed that they share the same Chinese word "和". The first phrase 27 should be interpreted as Peace is precious. But sometimes people will put forward a series of Chinese phrases all together in a speech like "以诚为本, 以和为贵、以信为先". This is a special rhetoric way of expression. Hence, the interpreter cannot utter "贵", "先" one by one, because it is really redundant. Thus, it should be interpreted as "Honesty, peace and good faith are the most prized values". As for the second phrase, it should be interpreted in a totally different way. Here it should be interpreted as "Gentlemen seek harmony but not uniformity". Of course, on various occasions, "和" may have many different interpretation versions, especially when is used as adjective.

Through the analysis of these four examples, we notice the linguistic context at the phrase level is the minimal unit in the analysis of linguistic context. This is also the first stage when we attach greater importance to the linguistic context.

a. At the text level

If the interpretation of the target unit is affected by certain text, we think it is in the charge of linguistic context at the text level. Here I will firstly define the "text". In a form of written communication like interpretation, the text can refer to some chapter in a passage or a book, or refer to the whole passage without the division of chapters. As the text consists of many paragraphs, it is more complex for us to analyze the linguistic context at the text level. But first of all, we should have the consciousness to pay attention to it.

A case in point is:

1998年, 面对复杂严峻的国内经济环境, 全国人民在党中央的正确领导下, 认真贯彻落实增加投入, 扩大内需为主的一系列力一政策, 努力克服亚洲金融危机和特大洪涝灾害造成的重重困难, 深化各项改革. 促讲经济改革. 取得了举世瞩目的成绩。

Here the underlined sentence should be interpreted as "Various reforms were further deepened and economic growth was promoted, resulting in remarkable achievements."

b. At the vocabulary level

Adaptation to linguistic context at the vocabulary level, here, attaches importance to the accurate interpretation of vocabulary including numbers and abbreviation, based on the interpreter's solid language knowledge. Besides fundamental vocabulary mastery, the interpreter has to pay attention to conventional expressions for the same concept in different languages. For example, “母乳喂养” 15 “breast-feeding” rather than “mother-feeding”, “基层” “grass-roots” rather than “base level”, “基础设施” “infrastructure” rather than “basic facility”, to name a few.

As we know, as there is quite a difference in the number expression in English and Chinese, number interpretation sometimes produces big obstacles for interpreter. Incorrect number interpretation will lead to misunderstanding and even serious results, especially on the occasions of foreign affairs activities and trade negotiation. As practice makes perfect, number interpretation can be accurate and fluent through constant practices. In addition, abbreviation is popular not only in the written form of magazines and newspaper, but also in the verbal channel like interpretation. The widespread of abbreviation requires interpreters a good mastery of abbreviation updated with times.

To name a few just for example:

NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization)北大西洋
公约组织

WMD (Weapons of Mass Destruction)大规模杀伤性
武器

ASEAN (Association of South-East Asian Nations)东
南亚国家联盟

2.2 Adaptation to Non-Linguistic Context In Interpretation

Verschuereen classifies context into three kinds: social, mental and physical world. But he does not specify the detailed content in the three kinds of context. I think this kind of classification is very reasonable and scientific and relatively complete.

2.2.1 Adaptation to Social Context

Adaptation of social context is most frequently discussed in interpretation. Social Verschuereen once said: “The social world has much to do with properties settings and institutions (Jef. Verschuereen, 2000, p.91).” The social context include many aspects related to society that I cannot list them all. Here in this thesis I just pick out the most representative one in interpretation among the aspects of it for discussion.

In the first chapter, we have already talked about the classification of context. We just divide physical context into two parts: time and topic. Each utterance is produced audience, in a special physical environment by the place; specific speaker to a group of in a definite setting relating to a special topic, and also with the non-verbal information of both the speaker and the audience to show different emotional effects. All these factors, which

make up the so-called situational context, play their roles in interpreter's understanding the original message and in achieving an appropriate and accurate interpretation.

The social world includes person deixis, attitudinal deixis, social settings or institutions and culture. Person deixis helps identify utterers and interpreters and position people in a social world. Attitudinal deixis affects forms of address, pronoun choices, matter of style and content. When we translate the English elliptical constructions, in most cases, we need to refill the elliptical sentences or clauses. Social settings and institutions impose many types of principles and rules on the ways in which certain types of linguist are acts can be performed. In the pragmatic literature, culture has its invocation of norms and values, and has been a favourite social-world correlate to linguistic choices. The adaptation of language to the social world is indeed pervasive. In a nutshell, social world provides the prescribed norms and principle for language users.

The physical world contains the temporal reference and spatial reference. It also includes the utterer's body postures, gaze, physical appearance (including clothing), physical conditions (exhaustion, illness or drunkenness) and biological property. In many cases, all these ingredients are important in determining certain linguistic choices Aspects of physical, social, and mental reality get “activated” by the utterer and interpreter in their respective choice-making practices and that is how they become part of language use as elements with which the making of choices is inter-adaptable and their meanings.

Interpretation has considerable requirements for adapting various situations. We all know that interpretation covers many areas, such as meeting, conversation, speech, press, negotiation, visiting, amusement, shopping and daily life etc. On different occasions, the interpreter should adapt himself to the situational context and do perfect interpretation. Here we have several examples to show how the interpreter adapts to the situational context.

Example 1: 在这个问题上我们的态度没有改变。

Script 1: We have not changed our view on this issue.

Script 2: On this issue, our position remains unchanged.

Here we have two version of this sentence interpretation. And it is obvious that the second version is much more formal if it is used in a diplomatic situation. Therefore, interpreter should adapt himself to the proper occasion and make the right choice.

Example 2:

朱熔基: 但是, 不管前面是地雷阵还是万丈深渊, 我将勇往直前, 义无反顾, 鞠躬尽瘁, 死而后已。

朱彤 (Interpreter): But no matter what is waiting for me in front of me ,being land mines or an abyss, I will blaze my trail and I have no hesitation and no misgivings and I will do all my best and contribute, devote all myself to the people and the country until the last day of my life.

“勇往直前” normally will be translated as “advance bravely” and “义无反顾” should be translated as “be duty-bounded not to turn back”; and the explanation for “鞠躬尽瘁，死而后已” is “give one’s all till one’s beat stop beating”. However, if the interpreter just interprets Premier Zhu Rongji’s words like this, she cannot not express Premier’s meaning and strong determination clearly. In this formal foreign situation, she should adapt herself to this situational context and interpret this sentence like the above-mentioned paragraph. By doing so, we can easily notice the image of our greatest Premier Zhu Rongji and feel his strong and firm determination, which moves all the people present.

Example 3:

朱熔基: 如果你要求我把它说得具体一点的话, 那我可以概括一下。就本届政府现在面临着要干的几件事情可以概括为: “一个确保、三个到位、五项改革”。

(Interpreter): If you expect me to give you some specifics, then I can just make a generalization of the tasks that this government is expected to accomplish. One assurance, three put-into-place and five reforms. The interpreter adapt herself to interpret three Chinese phrases “确保”, “到位”, “改革” into three English nouns: assurance, put-into-place and reform. Later on she also explain what is main contents for each phrase in detail.

CONCLUSION

Interpretation, as an important means for international exchanges and cooperation, has aroused more and more attention of researchers since 1950s. Interpretation research has developed more interdisciplinary-oriented both at home and abroad. Discussions have been made on many influential factors in the process of interpretation, such as noise, cultural difference, extra linguistic knowledge, interpreters’ mental adjustability, etc. Therefore, from a linguistic-adaptation perspective, this thesis explored the role of context in interpretation.

This paper has made a review of Verschueren’s theory of adaptation. From the point of view of theory of adaptation, the process of language use amounts to that of language selection. Language users may make constant selection of the language under different

salience. Language possesses the characters of variability, negotiability and adaptability, while adaptability is the core in the process of language use. A language user is supposed to make a dynamic adaptation in the process of language use. Under the framework of “adaptation”, interpretation is to make a dynamic adaptation to the context of source language and linguistic structures. An interpreter should rest on the linguistic structures and context to identify the intent of the communicators of source language and make a best choice of words and phrases to convey the meaning of the original speakers.

Based on the theory of adaptation and the analysis on the linguistic-adaptive nature of interpretation as a way of communication and information processing and a review of studies on context by different scholars, this thesis discussed the role of context in interpretation theoretically and experimentally. The roles that linguistic context, non-linguistic context play in each phase of interpretation have all been discussed within the frameworks of adaptation theory with abundant illustrations.

In order to confirm the role of context in interpretation, a case study was carried out to verify how interpreters adapt themselves in different situations. Context is a very complex concept.

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