

# The Manifestation of the Interpreter's Subjectivity in the Business Negotiation Interpreting

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## **Abstract**

*With the advent of economic globalization, the exchanges and cooperation between China and the world in the economic field have become increasingly extensive and in-depth. On the one hand, China's vast market has attracted more and more foreign-funded enterprises to invest and set up factories; on the other hand, many excellent Chinese enterprises have gone abroad and started to do business with the whole world. Meanwhile the success of a business depends largely on the business negotiation. However, many restrictive factors, such as language barriers, cultural gaps and thinking difference, will affect the negotiation process between China and foreign companies. At this time, an experienced interpreter is needed as a bridge of communication between Chinese and English. By fully mobilizing the interpreter's subjectivity in the process of translation and adopting appropriate translation strategies, the two sides can reach an agreement smoothly in the negotiation. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the dialogue translation in business negotiation, and to explore how the interpreter should exert his subjectivity in business negotiation and what translation strategies should be adopted to promote the negotiation towards a win-win direction.*

**Key words:** Interpreter's Subjectivity; Business Negotiation; Interpreting Strategies

## 1 Introduction

There is no doubt that interpreters play an important role in a business negotiation between China and foreign companies. In order to reach the consensus of the two sides, interpreters should fully exert their subjectivity, adopt appropriate translation strategies and convey the meaning of discourse as comprehensively as possible. The interpreters should not only accurately convey the meaning of the original text, but also make appropriate modifications according to the actual situation.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Business Negotiation Interpreting

Business negotiation interpretation is a representative language communication behavior of two-way communication. Like interpretation in other industries, it is also a cross-linguistic, cross-border and cross-cultural interactive activity. It is not only a process of language transformation, but also a process of promoting mutual understanding and communication among business parties, as well as strengthening international exchanges and cooperation under the big business environment (Di Ming & Ao Lian, 2013). Business negotiation interpretation is a cross-cultural communication activity with a clear purpose. Translation standards can be adjusted according to different texts, different readers, different requirements and purposes of customers, and all possible strategies can be adopted to achieve the purpose (Tao Youlan, 2010). Li believes that there are three cross-cultural differences in the business interpretation: (1) Differences brought about by cultural accumulation. Chinese culture has a history of more than 5,000 years. A large number of commonly used words have been produced, including old sayings and mottos, which have great Chinese cultural characteristics. Therefore, it will be difficult to translate them directly into English; (2) Differences brought about by cognition. Different nationalities have so different cognitive perspectives on things, that their cognitive styles have their own styles; (3) Differences caused by thinking patterns. In Chinese, the focus of a sentence is often on people, so the active sentences are widely used, while in English, more attention is paid to objective facts or things, and there are more passive sentences (Li Kun, 2019).

In conclusion, there is only one purpose in business negotiation interpretation—to achieve the success of cross-cultural communication. Therefore, the purpose of this oral interpretation is not only a simple transformation of language symbols, but also a good convey of the client's expectation. So it's indispensable that an interpreter should manifest his subjectivity in this process.

### 2.2 Interpreter's Subjectivity

Subjectivity, in the field of philosophy, is the prelude to initiative. It is also the basis for human beings to take initiative. When interpreters deal with the source language, they would choose suitable grammar and words according to the purpose of the person who speaks. At this time, the interpreter's subjectivity will be manifested (Sheng Zhicheng, 2020).

Venuti attached great importance to presence and creativity. In his opinion, interpreters should be placed at the center; at the same moment, they should be visible in the result (Venuti, 1996). Antoine believed that emphasis should be placed upon the subject of interpretation. He put the focus upon criticism theory. In his perception, interpreter should be the subject because they decide the interpretation's stances and strategies (Antoine, 2009). On the premise of respecting the original, the interpreter, as the subject of translation, shows his subjective in translation activities for achieving the purpose of translation (Cha Mingjian & Tian Yu, 2003). In the process of translation, the author and the reader are two "terminals", they are in a passive position, while only the translator is always in an active position. In fact, the translator's subjectivity is a kind of dominance, initiative and creativity, which

means that the translator exerts his subjective initiative, actively mobilizes the existing knowledge system, language foundation, personality quality and inner cultivation, and continuously integrates the translator's own knowledge with the original backdrops (Hu Gengshen). Thus it can be seen that, unlike translators, interpreters have come out of the original text and talk directly with the target audience. What's more, their subjectivity plays a vital role in the progress of interpretation.

### 3 Case Study

As we all know, business negotiations involving the interests of both parties, which are very serious and rigorous. In order to ensure the smoothness of negotiations, interpreters should not only make adequate preparations, but also have the ability to solve unexpected situations. Business English, based on the basic grammar, syntactic structure and vocabulary of English, has unique linguistic features and forms of expression. Its specific features are as follows: (1) rich in vocabulary; (2) a large number of professional terms, and the words are formal and standardized; (3) the application of ancient words and loanwords; (4) the extensive use of abbreviations (Tian Jing, 2011). This paper will discuss the manifestation of the interpreter's subjectivity in the business negotiation interpreting from the following aspects: professional words, culture-loaded words and sentence structure adjustment.

#### 3.1 Professional Words

Most of the contents involved in business negotiation need to be translated accurately, such as time, price, quantity, payment, business terms, legal terms and so on. When translating these words, interpreter should try his best to be faithful. The translation should be as concise, rigorous and solemn as possible. At the same time, the interpreter should ensure the standardization and professionalism of the words and be as humble as possible in tone.

Example (1): It is expensive to open a L/C, so we hope this time you may consider D/P or T/T.

Translation: 开立信用证的成本很高, 所以, 我们希望此次贵方能够考虑使用付款交单或电汇的方式。

In this example, there are many professional abbreviations used in the original——L/C (Letter of Credit), D/P (Documents against Payment) and T/T (Telegraphic Transfer). Abbreviations used in Business English can be roughly divided into four types according to their composition: literalism, clipping, acronym and blends (Deng Daoxuan, 2006). The three terms in the example belong to literalism, which is composed of the first letter of the main words in a phrase, and generally does not include the first letter of function words such as conjunctions and prepositions. As we all know, the use of abbreviations not only reduces the errors of the word meanings, but also saves time and improves work efficiency. However, it is worth noting that although abbreviations are convenient to use, they may cause obstacles to business negotiation if the target listener is not familiar with them. Therefore, the interpreter should know their specific meanings, and then convey them to the target listener, and the literal translation should be avoided. Only in this way, the Chinese listener will not be confused. What's more, we can notice that the interpreter translated "you" as "贵方". It is obvious that the interpreter did this on purpose to make the tone sound more modest, which also plays a lubricating role of the business negotiation.

Example (2): The goods are 5 feet high and 20 inches wide.

Translation: 货物长为 152.4 厘米, 宽为 50.8 厘米。

In some cases, the East and the West will adopt different measure standards. And this kind of information usually involves the core of the business negotiation. A small unit error may lead to the

failure of the whole negotiation. In this example, the interpreter is also aware of this, and makes a unit conversion from feet to centimeter, which is more familiar to Chinese. Similar unit conversions include: Ounce (oz) to Gram (g), Kilogram (kg) to Jin (斤), Cubic Feet (cuft) to Cubic Metre (m<sup>3</sup>), Gallon (gal) to Litre (l), Fahrenheit (°F) to Celsius (°C), etc. In business negotiation, the interpreter should always maintain the sensitivity to such information and ensure the accuracy of the number and unit of the original. If the ability allows, the unit can be converted to facilitate the understanding of the target listener. But if the number is too large to exceed the interpreter's computing ability, literal translation is also an effective strategy under the premise of ensuring the accurate convey of information.

### 3.2 Culture-Loaded Words

Under different cultural systems, people's life experiences are bound to be different, which leads to differences in traditional values, beliefs, social background, historical development and cultural connotations of words. Therefore, there are bound to be divergence in different languages and cultures. Meanwhile, culture-loaded words in one language do not have completely corresponding or compatible words in another language. And mistranslation, missing translation or over translation to be adopted by the interpreters will lead to "cultural vacancy" (Jing Fang & Duan Cheng, 2017). In business negotiations, different languages and cultures often collide with each other. In order to avoid the occurrence of cultural vacancy and to carry out the negotiations smoothly, the correct translation of culture-loaded words plays a vital role.

Example (3): 你现在在中国，必须要入乡随俗。

Translation: You are in China you will do in Rome as the Romans do.

The choice of translation strategies and methods of Chinese culture-loaded words should consider the principle of equality in cross-cultural communication. For some culture-loaded words, a similar expression can be found in the other language, such as example (3). At this time, the interpreter can adopt domestication translation strategy to make it easy for English listeners to understand and convey the original intention more accurately. Similar words include "robbing Peter to pay Paul (拆东墙补西墙)", "Man proposes; God disposes. (谋事在人, 成事在天)", "One can't make bricks without straw. (巧妇难为无米之炊)", "use a steam-hammer to crack nuts (杀鸡用牛刀)", etc.

However, as Jing & Duan said not all culture-loaded words have completely corresponding one in other language, when these words appear, the dissimilation translation strategy should be adopted. In Zheng' opinion, for the dissimilation translation of Chinese culture-loaded words, the specific translation strategies are as follows: transliteration, transliteration plus explanation, literal translation, literal translation plus explanation, transliteration plus literal translation and free translation (Zheng Dehu, 2016). Such as the following example.

Example (4): 会议结束后，我们去吃肉夹馍吧。

Translation: After the meeting, let's eat "Rou Jia Mo"—a popular meat burger or meat sandwich consisting of chopped meat inside a pita-like bun.

As one of the traditional Chinese cuisines, the name of "Rou Jia Mo" naturally belongs to culture-loaded words. Because in the west, there is no corresponding word, the interpreter adopted transliteration plus explanation, similar words include "道" (The Tao, (spelled as Dao in Chinese phonetic symbols) a philosophical term first used by LaoTzu (LaoZi); traditionally translated as Tao (thus Taoism), logos, way, path, road, etc.) and "正月" (The Spring Festival ends on the fifteenth of Zheng Yue (the first lunar month of the New Year)). Although compared with domestication translation, dissimilation translation method will sacrifice some "intelligibility" of the original, it can make up for the loss of

understanding by adding explanation. What's more, the proper use of dissimilation can not only convey the original information, but also maximize the characteristics of Chinese culture, which is conducive to Chinese culture going global. Still more interesting is the fact that "Rou Jia Mo" recently got an official English name: Rougamo—a transliteration of its Chinese pronunciation, which shows that the West is still full of curiosity about Chinese culture. Therefore, dissimilation may be more acceptable to the English listeners than domestication.

### 3.3 Sentence Structure Adjustment

As we all know, many business negotiations are often a tug-of-war. After a long and arduous negotiation, if the two sides still fail to reach an agreement on some issues, their emotions would have some change, or even get out of control. At this time, there will be impolite or even hurtful words in language expression, finally leading to a language conflict between two sides. As an interpreter who acts as a bridge in the middle, it is necessary to correctly judge the true intention and purpose of the speaker according to the situation. The interpreter must not simply and directly translate the source language. Because in business interpretation, the interpreter should not only take into account the language expression and content of the source language, but more importantly, through the translation, which can make the negotiation between the two sides smooth, and ultimately help to achieve business success (Di Ming & Ao Lian, 2013).

Li gave his own opinion on how to adjust the sentence structure, which includes: the use of ambiguous restrictive modifier, indirect expression, subjunctive mood, past tense of modal verb and conditional statements (Li Peng, 2011).

Example (5): 我需要请示董事长之后才能给你答复。

Translation: Could we discuss it next time after I talk it over to our board chairman?

In this example, the interpreter transforms declarative sentences into interrogative sentences, which not only makes the sentence tone more euphemistic, but also reflects the sincerity of the Chinese side. Moreover, compared with the western company, Chinese employees often have to ask their superiors for advice when making decisions, but this usually leads to misunderstanding by foreign side that we lack the sincerity of doing business with them. Meanwhile, this tone of soliciting opinions shows our respect for the foreign side, and we are also eager to reach a consensus. However, in order to be no risk at all, we need to consult the leaders, so as to dispel the concerns of the foreign side and provide opportunities for further negotiation.

Example (6): 不行的话，我们就取消订单。

Translation: If this is not possible, then I'm afraid we shall have to cancel our order.

In Example (6), the original sentence has some meaning of threat. If it is directly translated, which will probably lead to the breakdown of the negotiation. Therefore, the interpreter makes an adjustment of the sentence structure and adopts the conditional statements. The sentence pattern of "I'm afraid" in the subject sentence has already achieved the effect of weakening negation and moderating mood. Meanwhile, the hypothetical conditional sentence used in the clause makes the content of the subject sentence sound tentative, polite and euphemistic, which is more acceptable. What's more, the modal verb "shall" has a tone of negotiation, which alleviates the imposition of the request and not to arouse the foreign side's antipathy.

## Conclusion

In China, international trade activities are becoming more frequent, in which the interpretation plays an important role. Therefore, the interpreter's correct exertion of subjectivity has an important influence on business negotiations, which can not only reduce the misunderstanding of the intention, but also promote the smooth development of negotiation as well as the deepening of cultural exchanges.

An interpreter, first of all, should make full preparation before the negotiation, work out a glossary of professional terms, and train themselves to get used to English spoken by clients with some accents. What's more, interpreters should read widely and get themselves trained constantly on the daily basis to ensure that they have enough ability to deal with emergencies. Next, an interpreter should have his own pace, rather than blindly catching up with the speaker, by using various translation skills to ensure smooth development of the negotiation in a harmonious atmosphere. Last but not least, interpreters should fully understand the differences in living habits, religious customs and ways of thinking between China and foreign countries, and try their best to eliminate misunderstandings caused by these elements in negotiations.

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