

Reading for Translation: How University Students' Reading Stances Interact with Translating Process

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Abstract

This paper examines how reading experiences of the university students affected their reading stances, and in what ways the learners' stance transacted with the texts during translating. Adopting Rosenblatt's (2004) transactional theory of reading, a class of English majors from a university in Taiwan was given two texts to translate into Chinese: a narrative story and business writing. Interviews were conducted to elicit their reading stance and translating process. It was found that the students worked bi-directionally from the text in its source language and then to the text that was being created. They deconstructed the text and integrated prior knowledge to reconstruct a translation. The results revealed that the students' performances were influenced by their reading experiences. Diverse reading materials are suggested to be included as warm-up activities.

Keywords

Reading stance, transactional theory, translation

1 Introduction

Currently in Taiwan, translation is either a required or a selective course for English major undergraduates. The course is designed to offer language training and also as a preparation for the future translators. The instructors tend to agree that there is a need for closer links between training offered by the school and the Taiwanese market. Since translation is a process involves both reading and writing, the study focused on exploring how the reading experiences affected the writing production of translations.

To carry out a translation task, the difficulty lies not only in the fact that the writer of the source language use a different language of the translators, but also that the writer and the reader have to seek a common linguistic experience, which might be common memory, common understanding of norms, pragmatics and references. There is limited research regarding how one person comes to acquire the

functionally equivalent knowledge that is required for translation. The role of a translator being a reader is clearly important since the consequences of their 'decoding' would influence the quality of the translation. This paper adopted the transactional theory of reading developed by Rosenblatt (1985) to analyze the reading process of Taiwanese university students.

Reading, as Rosenblatt (1994) defines it, is a "dynamic, fluid process", "an interdependent relationship in time between a reader and part of the environment". Therefore, a reading act reaches further back since a reader not only 'brings' their present concerns but also their whole past to the reading event. As translation involves comprehending one language and rendering it into a written form in another language, students need to take a 'stance' and 'interact' with the text that they read in the source language from which they are translating into. There are two stances in the transactional theory: aesthetic and efferent. The former arouses readers' "emotions, associations, and images that are called to mind while reading", and the latter is to "make meaning out of a text, which involves selective attention to what is to be retained" (Rosenblatt, 1994). The readers might need to have the already obtained knowledge of the subject matter in order to "retain" the meaning.

2 Procedure

A stance reflects the reader's purpose toward reading. To initiate the translating process, the student reads the text many times over, and then continues to read in different language, the reading process goes two ways, including both the text in source language and the text that is being created in target language. As a student reads, he/she normally selects appropriate schemata that will enable him/her to make sense of the texts that is read based on the clues provided by the text (Wade, 1990). If a reader is able to select a proper schemata and connects it with the message presented with the text, the better comprehension occurs, which may lead to a better translation product.

The researcher selected two texts which require

the two stances for reading. A translation class consisting of 17 students was chosen for the study. The students were given a story that required aesthetic stance, and also a piece of business writing which required efferent stance. Their translations were graded, and an interview was conducted immediately after they had finished the translation to see how they interacted with the text.

3 Performances

When adopting the 6/4 scale (Lai, 2008) as the assessment tool to grade the students, it was found that for the 17 students, the mean score for the narrative writing is higher than the business writing assignment. However, the score variations among the individuals were huge. Some students performed much better than the others. And those who performed better in translating narrative story were not necessarily the same ones who performed better in business writing.

The interview data revealed that it was through their connections and emotions toward the narrative text that they created a reading experience facilitated the translation. If the students could feel, hear and experience the author's world in a personal way, this aesthetic stance would allow them to bring their translation to life. Most of the English majors enjoyed reading the narrative story. They said that the courses offered by the department had helped them to understand literary stories. For the few students who did not perform well in the task, it was found that they failed to take an analytical approach to deal with the difficult spots that require more skillful translation strategies.

For the business writing, the students who had attained the desired results were those who had taken business-related courses or had read business sessions habitually in the newspapers. They took an efferent stance to translate. It demonstrated that they could recognize and establish the discourse structure of both the source and target texts. Most students in the English department, however, were not aware of the genre in business writing. They could not bring themselves to deal with the organization and use proper cohesion devices that were required. It also found that, for those good performers, after their initial efferent stance, they also brought into their personal experiences as they mentioned that the business issues were related to their lives.

4 Pedagogical Implications

It was found that a reader's stance can have a powerful impact which determines how successfully and appropriately a student translator comprehended a text. However, it also indicated that the stances involved in the translating event

was a multi-layered transaction, it was too complicated to situate this kind of reading and writing event such as translation in the monolithic efferent-aesthetic continuum as it was originally conceived by Rosenblatt. A student translator's transaction with a text had at least two folds: a reader was required to first read through the text either aesthetically or efferently. Afterwards, for both types of writings, a rereading with the purpose of translating was required. This two-fold reading process is particularly evident in the field of translation.

It also demonstrates that to create a successful business translation, the students need to be aligned with an efferent stance for the first reading. As for the story type of literary text, the first reading requires mostly an aesthetic stance. To evoke the applicable stance, a reader needs to develop the background schemata. For the English majors, it is generally easier to generate the aesthetic stance but more difficult to elicit the efferent stance for business writing. As Taiwan being a highly-developed capitalist economy, the student translators cannot escape translating business writing after they graduate. It is necessary for the instructors to provide them sufficient business reading materials and procedural knowledge regarding the subject matter so that they could be equipped with the textual and subject competence before they venture into the field of business translation.

5 References

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