A Corpus-Based Comparative Study of Translators’ Styles: With the English Version of Congcong as an Example

CHEN Qianpei, JIANG Cheng
University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China

With the corpus tools of Antconc and Wordsmiths, this paper makes comparison between Howard Goldblatt’s Haste and Zhu Chunsheng’s Rush to figure out their different translation styles through the analysis of Type Token Ratio (TTR), high-frequency words, the average sentence length, and logic explicitation. It is found that the natural language convention, in some extent, delivers impact in the translators’ style, so that two translators chose words and make sentences based on their own language rules, and have disparate logical understanding on the original text. Further we can explore the difference between native translator and nonnative translator in translation.

Keywords: Howard Goldblatt, Zhu Chunsheng, corpus, translator’s style

Introduction

Congcong is a well-known prose created by Zhu Ziqing, a famous modern scholar in China, which vividly expresses the author’s helplessness and sadness for the passage of time. Thanks to various rhetorical devices, such as personification, metaphor, parallelism, etc., this prose is characterized by simple and concise language as well as beautiful artistic conception, and has been translated into many versions. Up to now, the English versions of Congcong by Zhang Peiji, Zhu Chunsheng, and Zhang Mengjing have been widely circulated and studied by scholars in China. On the contrary, domestic attention to the American translator Goldblatt’s English version of Congcong is lower. Taking “Congcong” as the key word, the author searched on CNKI. Of 24 papers, it is found that the comparative studies of Zhang Peiji’s and Zhu Chunsheng’s English versions remained dominated. Besides, most of these papers were analyzed through qualitative method, and only 33% are based on corpus. Therefore, through qualitative and quantitative analysis, this paper compares the two English version of Congcong by Goldblatt and Zhu Chunsheng. The two translators represent the native and non-native translators of Chinese literatures and their different language and cultural background, professional practice and language proficiency in both the source and the target language are considered to have left traces in their translation. Therefore, the findings of the comparative study are supposed to reveal differences between them at the lexical and syntactic level, and further to figure out their distinctive translation styles.

Comparison at the Lexical Level

Two commonly used corpus analysis tools, Antconc and Wordsmiths 6.0, were employed to compare and
analyze the two English versions from following aspects: tokens, types, Type Token Ratio (TTR), and high-frequency words, revealing that the word choice vary from translator to translator, which composes a very important aspect of the translator’s style.

**Type/Token Ratio**

Token refers to the total number of words in a text and type is the number of different word forms in a text. Type/Token Ratio (TTR), which the number of types divided by the number of tokens, is a measure of vocabulary variation within a written text. A high TTR means that the translator uses a wider range of words while a low TTR indicates that the translator’s word choice is restricted. The relevant figures for the two English versions are listed in Table 1.

|                    | Goldblatt’s version | Zhu’s version |
|--------------------|---------------------|--------------|
| Tokens             | 481                 | 466          |
| Types              | 223                 | 230          |
| TTR                | 46.3%               | 49.4%        |

According to Table 1, the number of all words in Goldblatt’s translation is slightly less than Zhu’s. 49.4% and 46.3% of TTR values indicate that Zhu’s version is featured by richer words compared with Goldblatt. In addition, in the case of word-limited text, Yang Hui-zhong (2002) believed that lexical density was equal to TTR. While the lexical density is higher, the translated version indicates more reading difficulties. In other words, Goldblatt’s version is more friendly to readers than Zhu’s.

Example 1: 我的日子滴在时间的流里，没有声音，也没有影子。

Goldblatt: My days are disappearing into the stream of time, noiselessly and without a trace...
Zhu: My days are dripping into the stream of time, soundless, traceless...

The author compares “my days” to water drops to describe how the time lapse. Goldblatt translates “滴在” to “disappear into”, which simply and explicitly depicts that lost time will never come back, whereas Zhu uses “drip into” to remain the metaphor employed in the original text, more vividly describing that how time goes away as easily as water dropping into the sea. Moreover, Goldblatt treated “没有影子” as “without a trace” to express the meaning clearly, easy for readers to understand. But “traceless” in Zhu’s translation seems to be more appropriate in that both “traceless” and “soundless” end with the suffix “-less”, which remains the beauty in sound. Goldblatt’s translation is featured by simple and concise words and pursues accurate expression of meaning, while Zhu’s translation, with the pursuit of faithfulness, retains the artistic conception and rhythm of Chinese literature.

**High-Frequency Words**

Word frequency refers to the number of occurrence of the words in a given text. Through comparing the word frequency of the text, the characteristics of the translator’s word can be further revealed. Table 2 presents the top 15 most frequent used words by the two translators.

As can be seen from Table 2, the words that appear most frequently in Goldblatt’s translation are: “I”, “the”, “my”, “and”, and “it”, accounting for 16.63% of the total words, among which there are three pronouns, one definite article, and one conjunction. In Zhu’s translation, “the”, “I”, “in”, “my”, and “have” account for
19.36% of the total vocabulary, including two pronouns, one preposition, one definite article, and one verb. The above results indicate that both translators use the first person “I” to reflect the content and theme for the source text faithfully, in line with the principle that English is the subject-prominent language (Qiu, 2019, p. 56).

Table 2

| Word Frequency Statistics |
|---------------------------|
| No. | Goldblatt’s version | Zhu’s version | No. | Goldblatt’s version | Zhu’s version |
|-----|---------------------|----------------|-----|---------------------|----------------|
| 1   | I                   | the            | 9   | to                  | days           |
| 2   | the                 | I              | 10  | a                   | and            |
| 3   | my                  | in             | 11  | but                 | is             |
| 4   | and                 | my             | 12  | days                | day            |
| 5   | it                  | have           | 13  | that                | hands          |
| 6   | are                 | to             | 14  | they                | of             |
| 7   | of                  | a              | 15  | what                | as             |
| 8   | is                  | but            |      |                     |                |

In English, lexical or content words refer to the words with certain meaning (verb, noun, adverb, adjective, etc.); function words refer to the words whose meanings are ambiguous, but have specific grammatical functions (such as articles, pronouns, conjunctions, prepositions, auxiliary verbs, etc.) (Wang & Hu, 2008, p. 17). In above table, it is found that there is only one content word “days” in Goldblatt’s translation, while four content words in Zhu’s translation: “have”, “days”, “day”, “hands”. Then we can infer that the number of function words is 14 and 11 in these two English versions respectively. English is the language characterized by hypotaxis, so function words are commonly used to play a cohesive role, clearly indicating the logical relationship. Therefore, compared to Zhu’s version, Goldblatt’s version is better in line with language features of English.

Example 2: 太阳他有脚啊，轻轻悄悄地挪移了；我也茫茫然跟着旋转。

Goldblatt: The sun, does it have feet? Stealthily it moves along, as I too, unknowingly, follow its progress.

Zhu: The sun has feet, look, he is treading on, lightly and furtively; and I am caught, blankly, in his revolution.

“啊” is a typical interjection in Chinese. Goldblatt treats the first sentence as a rhetorical question, which is stronger in tone than that of declarative sentence in Zhu’s translation and more close to the original in emotion. Goldblatt adopts “it” to represent “太阳” (the subject of Example 2), while Zhu’s version chooses “He”, indicating that Goldblatt follows English grammar rules, but Zhu remains the rhetorical device of personification, in line with the literary features of the source text.

Comparison at the Syntactic Level

Average Sentence Length

Average sentence length is the number of words in a sentence, which reveals the translators’ personal habit of sentence making and describes the complexity of a sentence in a text. In a nutshell, the longer the sentence, the more complex it is. Table 3 shows that the total number of sentences in Zhu’s version is less than that in Goldblatt’s, but the average sentence length of the former is longer than that of the latter. So it is easy to consider that the sentences in Zhu’s version are more complex and make the text less reader-friendly.
Table 3

|                      | Goldblatt’s version | Zhu’s version |
|----------------------|---------------------|---------------|
| Sentence number      | 31                  | 27            |
| Average sentence length | 15.45              | 17.22         |

Example 3: 于是——洗手的时候，日子从水盆里过去；吃饭的时候，日子从饭碗里过去；默默时，便从凝然的双眼前过去。

Goldblatt: Then as I wash up, the day passes through my washbasin, and at breakfast through my rice bowl. When I am standing still and quiet, my eyes carefully follow its progress past me.

Zhu: Thus—the day flows away through the sink when I wash my hands, wears off in the bowl when I eat my meal, and passes away before my day-dreaming gaze as reflect in silence.

There are three sentences divided by two semicolons in Example 3. Zhu’s version retains the original sentence structure, connecting the three verbs with “and”. In Goldblatt’s translation, there are just two sentences, which makes the division of sense-group more strict.

Logical Explicitation

Different from implicitness, explicitation means that the translator explicitly expresses the information implied in the source text in the target text (Feng, 2008, p. 220). In the process of E-C translation, the translator can add explanatory phrases and connectives, or explicitly express the implied meaning in the target language, so as to make the translation logical and improve its readability. Chinese is parataxis-prominent, marked by its coordination, loose or minor sentences, run-on sentences, and so forth, whereas English is hypotaxis-prominent with plenty of subordinate clauses and phrases. Given the great difference between two languages, the translator needs to supplement necessary connectives in C-E translation. In present study, the manual calculation helps to exclude the conjunctions directly translated in the target text, including “但是 (2)”, “但 (2)”, “而 (1)”, “……的时候 (3)”, “……时 (3)”, “于是 (1)”. And the figures about explicited logical connectives for the two versions are listed in Table 4.

Table 4

| Explicited logical connectives          | Goldblatt’s version | Zhu’s version |
|-----------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------|
| Juxtaposition                           | and (6), or (2)     | and (2), or (1)|
| Action happens in succession            | and (4)             | and (2)       |
| Contract relation                       | and (3)             | and (1)       |
| Transitional relation                   | but (4), then (3)   | but (5), yet (1), then (1) |
| Causal relation                         | 0                   | so (1)        |
| Supposition relation                    | 0                   | if (2)        |
| Time                                    | as (2)              | as (1)        |
| Total                                   | 24                  | 17            |

From the above data, it can be seen that the degree of explicitation of Goldblatt’s version is significantly higher than that of Zhu’s. However, there are only five kinds of logical relations in Goldblatt’s translation, while seven in Zhu’s translation. It seems that the Chinese feature of parataxis limits the nonnative translator’s thorough understand on the logical relationship of the original text, but compared with Zhu’s version, Goldblatt’s version can better reflect the characteristics of hypotaxis in English.
Example 4: 我觉察他去的匆匆了，伸出手遮挽时，他又从遮挽的手边过去……
Goldblatt: I can sense …, and when I stretch out my hands to cover and hold it, it soon emerges from under my hands and moves along.
Zhu: I can feel…, so I reach out my hands to hold him back, but he keeps flowing past my withholding hands.

The implied logical relations in Example 4 are explicit in both Goldblatt’s and Zhu’s versions. But the two translators adopt completely different conjunctions. The first “and” in Goldblatt’s translation represents the juxtaposition, and the second “and” indicates the sequence of actions; Zhu uses “so” and “but” to indicate causal relation and transitional relation respectively. For native speakers, it is easy to find out the logic relation in Example 4, even when only one connective “……时” is adopted, whereas the lack of conjunctions and relative words in the original text will affect Goldblatt’s understanding on the logical relationship of the original text to some extent.

Conclusion

Through the quantitative analysis of the two English versions of Congcong from the linguistic perspective, it is found that the two translators present different styles in translation. With the pursuit of faithfulness, Goldblatt’s translation is characterized by concise and simple words and makes the sentence structure easy to understand. Although his translated version is more in line with the language manners of English, Goldblatt’s ability to handle implied logical relationship seems not as good as the native translator’s in C-E translation, whereas Zhu’s version demonstrates a higher lexical density, and he seeks to reproduce the beautiful artistic conception and beauty in sound of the source text and tries his best to remain the rhetorical devices such as metaphor, personification, and parallelism in translated version, which adds vividness of the translation text but makes the text less reader-friendly at the same time. However, though Zhu uses longer sentences, his use of conjunctions is less than Goldblatt whose version seems more target-language-like.

References
Feng, Q. H. (2008). Translators’ style as a product of the native language culture. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
Qiu, D. P. (2019). A new approach to contemporary language theory and practice. Wuhan: Wuhan University Press.
Wang, K. F., & Hu, X. Y. (2008). A parallel corpus-based study on lexical features of translated Chinese. Chinese Translators Journal, 29(6), 16-21+92.
Yang, H. Z. (2002). An introduction to corpus linguistics. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.