

On Chinese-English Translation of the Instrument Case in *Wolf Totem* from the Interface Perspective

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Keywords: instrument case, interface study, Chinese-English translation, reproduction

Abstract: Instrument is an object with which the agent does something, and a means by which the agent attains the end. Its typical syntactic performance is playing the adverbial and marked with “yong” in Chinese and with “with” in English. This is not the only instance. By comparing and analyzing various Chinese-English translations of the instrument case collected from *Wolf Totem* and its English version, this study categorizes three degrees of reproduction according to the changes in their semantic meaning, syntactic structure and pragmatic function and concludes tendencies and motivations of these translations.

1. Introduction

After the Cultural Turn, translation studies have stressed external factors, namely, social and cultural factors. With the enlightenment of the semantics-syntax interface theory, translation can be studied from a new perspective. Semantic, syntactic and pragmatic planes and their interfaces are the concerns in linguistic studies. By far translation studies have failed to attach sufficient attention to the three levels and their interactions. In Chinese-English translation, in order to reproduce the meaning of source texts, translators should strive to find the most proper syntactic performance in the target language; however, because of the variations between Chinese and English, incongruence occurs. This study focuses on the instrument case in *Wolf Totem* to examine tendencies in transforming the meaning from Chinese to English.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Case

Initiated by C.J. Fillmore in the late 1960s, Case Grammar is a grammatical theory as well as a semantic theory that stresses the relationships between syntactic structure and semantic meaning. It is a type of generative grammar developed by C.J. Fillmore. Fillmore holds that “the grammatical notion ‘case’ deserves a place in the base component of the grammar of every language.” He uses the term “case” to identify the underlying syntactic-semantic relationship. His case relationships refer to “many semantically relevant syntactic relationships involving nouns and the structures that contain them” and these relationships form a specific finite set. This set of case notions includes Agentive, Instrument, Dative, Factitive, Locative and Objective [1].

In this grammar, “it analyzes various relations between verbs and nouns” [2]. The verb is regarded as the most important part of a sentence, and has a number of relationships with various noun phrases. These relationships are called CASES [3].

2.2. Semantic Role

The semantic role refers to the role played by the argument in an event and possesses three features so far as translation is concerned. First, it is stable. Once a semantic role is assigned, it does not change. Secondly, it must be shared by the source language and the target language in

translation. Thirdly, a semantic role in the source language can predict and even determine the syntactic performance in the target language. Generally speaking, there are several semantic roles: agent, patient, theme, experiencer, beneficiary, instrument, location, goal and resource [4]. The semantic role is very complicated, often obscure at first sight and coming to the front with a closer look. This is partly due to the lack of one-to-one correspondence between the semantic role and its syntactic expression.

The difference between semantic role and case lies in the relationship involved. Semantic role is the role played by various grammatical constituents, while case is the relationship between a verb and its related nominal phrases. There exist three planes in language, i.e., semantics, syntax and pragmatics. Syntactic level studies the relation between linguistic signs, semantic level studies the relation between linguistic signs and their referents and pragmatic level studies the relation between linguistic signs and their users. The study of syntax-semantics interface is centered with the relation between lexical meaning and syntactic structure. Researchers have found that the meaning has exerted a determinant influence on syntactic forms.

According to Nida and Taber, translation consists of reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning, and secondly in terms of style [5]. So translation can be regarded as reproduction happening on the levels of syntax, semantics and pragmatics. From this definition of translation, we can draw some implications. First, the target text should be “closest” to the original in meaning and style; secondly, acceptability (naturalness) of the rendered should be taken into consideration; thirdly, loss of information may occur so the translator has to judge.

As an inter-linguistic transformation activity, translation seems to transform forms, but the form, as a matter of fact, is determined by meaning and its corresponding semantic structure. It is important to analyze the semantic structure of the original language before the syntactic form for it in the target language is chosen. In this aspect, Case Grammar and its related theories, which focus on the study of the effects of meaning on the syntax, can be employed to understand the relationship between the meaning in the source language and its potential syntactic performance in the target language.

2.3. Instrument Case

2.3.1. Definition

“The instrument is an object with which the agent does something, a means by which the agent attains his end. It can be a man-made instrument, a natural object, or a human body part” [6]. The ability to use the instrument is an essential feature distinguishing human beings from animals. The Instrument case is the object controlled by the agent to influence the patient; and it is the intermediate through which the agent transfers the energy to the patient. Chinese and English employ functional prepositions such as *yong* and “with” respectively. Here are some sentences including typical Instrument cases:

- (1) wo yong mao bi xie le yi feng xin.
- (2) ta yong shi tou da po le yi shan chuang hu.
- (3) xiao li yong tou zhuang kai le men.
- (4) He opened the door with the key.
- (5) He washed his car with water.
- (6) He draws with his fingers.

Examples (1) and (4) are man-made instruments, including many objects such as transportation means, weapons, working facilities, utensils and the like. Examples (2) and (5) are natural objects, which include whatever that may be used as instrument. It implies that whether a stone, a stick and the like are to be regarded as instruments or not depends on whether or not they are used as means to certain ends. Examples (3) and (6) belong to the category of human body parts. These instances imply that “everything may be an instrument if it has potential instrumentality, although this instrumentality may be relatively permanent or temporary [6]”.

Xu summarizes the characteristics of instrument category: (measure; agent: controlling relationship; behavior: aiding relationship; patient: affecting relationship) [7].

2.3.2. Classification

In terms of the physical world and the conceptual world as well as its relationship with verbs, instrument can be classified into typical instrument and untypical instrument. The former exist as instrument in the physical world; in semantic and syntactic structures, it often collocates with verbs that are adapted to instruments, for example, farm tools, cookware, fishing gears, cutting tools, measuring tools and hunting tackles. Those objects which do not exist as instruments in the physical or conceptual world, and only serve as an instrument in semantic and syntactic structures when necessary for expressing, are called untypical instrument. The instrument of this type has relatively loose relation with verbs.

2.3.3. Instrument Verb

Instrument verb is defined through different semantic limits, which are regulated by verb semantic framework. Wu defines instrument verb from a new angle: they are those verbs that contain instrumental morphemes, for example, “scissor” includes the morpheme “with the scissors,” and “lick” contains the instrumental morpheme “with the tongue.” Instrumental morphemes can be further divided into three kinds:

1) Single instrumental morpheme: verbs contain a single and certain instrument, such as “scissor” and “fork.”

2) Specific-part instrumental morpheme: verbs include specific parts, mainly referring to human body. “Bite” involves “teeth” while the action “catch” is performed with “hands.”

3) Category instrumental morpheme: verbs contain instrumental morphemes of a certain category. For example, “write” concerns the category of “pens” and “pencils” while “chop” and “cut” contain the category of knives, axes. [8]

2.3.4. Semantic and Syntactic Features of the Instrument Case

English and Chinese adopt functional prepositions to express the Instrument case, but it does not mean the two languages share the same syntactic structures to transfer this case.

(1) Semantic Features

Instrument appears together with the agent since it is the facility with which the agent performs the action.

Utilizability. An instrument is neither the agent nor the patient of an action, nor the object of commenting and describing. It is the very tool to reach a particular goal.

Transitivity. Instruments transfer the agent’s energy and help to finish a certain action.

Constancy. In the process of an event performed with an instrument, the nature, state, shape and number of the instrument concerned are constant.

(2) Syntactic Features

Markedness and serving as a prepositional object are the two typical syntactic features of the Instrument case both in Chinese and English. The instrument, together with the preposition, plays the adverbial. *yong*, *yi*, *ping* and the like mark the Instrument case in Chinese while “with” in English. Apart from that, Chinese and English enjoy other syntactic performances and they share some differences.

In Chinese, instrument in its syntactic position can play: the subject (*da wan he bai jiu*), the object (*he da wan*; *xi leng shui*), the adverbial (*tu zang*; *xue cang*) and the attributive (*zu qiu*; *shou qiu*). In English, instrument can play the syntactic roles of the subject, the object, the attributive, the adverbial and the Absolute Nominative Construction. The following five examples display the roles respectively.

- (1) *The key* opened the door. (2) Chen trained *his telescope* on the spot.
 (3) “A tragedy, no less,” his *easy* voice continued. (4) He broke the window with a stone.
 (5) He smiled, *a segment of lotus root caked with mud in his hand*, and gestured toward the interior of the air-raid shelter.

3. Data Source

This study takes *Wolf Totem* (《狼图腾》), originally authored by Jiang Rong and translated by Howard Goldblatt, as data source. Data are collected with the criterion that the translation from the source text to the target text involves the instrument case, including typical and untypical ones. All the examples in this research are analyzed according to the three levels—semantic content, syntactic structure and pragmatic function. The source text to the target text are compared and analyzed according to the translation of the instrument case.

4. Three Degrees of Reproduction

All translations of the instrument case are categorized into three degrees of reproduction according to the changes in their semantic meaning, syntactic structure and pragmatic function.

4.1. First Degree of Reproduction

First degree of reproduction is the highest level in translating Chinese Instrument case into English in that semantic content, syntactic form and pragmatic function are all gained. In the following part, collected data of the Instrument case in *Wolf Totem* are grouped and analyzed in terms of the presence and absence of the preposition “with.”

4.1.1. “With” Present

Markedness and the adverbial are the two typical syntactic features of the Instrument case. *yong*, *yi*, *ping*, *na* and the like mark the Instrument case in Chinese while “with” in English. The following examples make this point clear. In addition to that, translations of these examples, from semantic, syntactic and pragmatic levels, are congruent with the source sentences.

Example 1: *xun bu si, zan jiu yong shui guan dong.....*[9]

Since we didn’t smoke them out, let’s see how we do *with water*. [10]

Analysis: “Water” is a natural object, usually regarded as material. In this example, “water” is used to drive the cubs out. It is a typical instrument. The Chinese and English sentences take the Instrument case as the object of the preposition; this target sentence does not arrange the translation into “pour the water into the cave,” instead, adopting “do” to cover the pragmatic meaning—whether “water” can serve the purpose. Then the semantic, syntactic and pragmatic levels are all retained, so it is a first degree of reproduction.

Example 2: *Chen Zhen gan dao lao ren yong ge bo qing qing peng le peng ta, you zhi le zhi shan po.*[9]

Chen Zhen felt the old man nudge him *with his elbow* and saw him *point* to the snow-overed slope. [10]

Analysis: The Chinese version contains two Instrument cases: an overt one *yong ge bo* and a covert one (*yong shou zhi*) *zhi le zhi*. This translation has kept the exact form with the source text, for human cognition is the same in some aspects. The English explanation of the word “nudge” is *to push something or someone gently, especially to push someone with your elbow (= the middle part of your arm where it bends) to attract their attention*; then the translation still highlights “with his elbow” to specify the old man’s careful action. It is a first degree reproduction.

Example 3: *Chen Zhen yong hou hou de yang pi ma ti xiu long zhu kou bi, di sheng wen dao.....*[9]

Chen Zhen covered his mouth *with the horseshoe-shaped sleeve of his heavy fur deel* and said softly... [10]

Analysis: In Chinese, the Instrument case is a long phrase followed by the preposition “of,” and it describes two events: *long zhu kou bi* and *di sheng wen dao*. The English has the same long “with” structure and the two events, thus falling into the first degree reproduction.

4.1.2. “With” Absent

In spite of “with” or *yong* serving the typical mark of the Instrument case, English and Chinese enjoy a large amount of the Instrument case without such syntactic mark. The method to determine the Instrument case is to judge the semantic role since there is a lack of one-to-one correspondence between semantic roles and syntactic expressions.

Example 4: *liang wei tou tou zou le yi hou*, Chen Zhen *zhu zhe muxian* fa leng. [9]

After the two leaders rode off, Chen Zhen leaned on *his shovel* and stared into space. [10]

Analysis: This example exhibits the first degree reproduction. The syntactic position of the Instrument case is the object: (*zhu zhe*)*mu xian*, but its semantic role is still instrument. The English version is played by a phrasal verb “lean on” to translate *zhu zhe*. The two events in the original are expressed completely in the translation. The pragmatic function is reference. The semantic meaning, the syntactic structure and the pragmatic function of this translation are congruent with the original, so it is a first degree reproduction.

Example 5: *hu ran lao ren gan liang de sang yin hou qi lai*: “wu.....he.....” [9]

Then the old man’s dry, shrill voice broke the silence: “Wu-hu-” [10]

Analysis: The Instrument case in this example is voice. Syntactically the translation plays the subject and pragmatically serves the reference function. One difference lies in the expression of the adverb *hu ran* and the predicate *hou qi lai*, which is assumed by the predicate phrase “broke the silence.” It acquires the pragmatic effect: suddenness. This change does not involve the Instrument case, so it is still regarded as the first degree reproduction.

4.2. Second Degree of Reproduction

Second degree of reproduction is the middle level reproduction in translating Chinese Instrument case into English in that semantic and syntactic or pragmatic levels are regained. According to the semantic plane and one of the other two planes is recovered, the second degree is further classified into two types.

4.2.1. Semantic and Syntactic Reproduction

By recovering the semantic and syntactic levels, the translation fails to achieve the pragmatic level, either changing the pragmatic function or not succeeding in conveying the pragmatic effect. The basic semantic meaning is retained while the syntactic performance is similar to the original.

Example 6: *zhu yi da guo ma rou tang*, *zai yong rou tang zhu lang jia zi*. [9]

First I cooked a pot of horsemeat in water, and then cooked the traps in the soup. [10]

Analysis: Both Chinese and English sentences share the same syntactic structure, that is, the adverbial; and semantic meaning is fully transferred. Only the pragmatic aspect needs arguing. The Instrument case in the original is special, untypical and like a container. Still, it performs the reference function; after translated into English, the Instrument case becomes a modification to illustrate the place of the “cooking” event. So, it has only recovered the semantic and syntactic levels.

Example 7: *ta tuo le yi kuai jiao shi le de da zhan*, *chong jing huo chang*, *yong da zhan guo zhu zi ji*..... [9]

She ran out with a large piece of wet felt straight into the flames, wrapped herself in it... [10]

Analysis: This man-made instrument “felt” is very typical. The usage of “wrap,” meaning “to cover someone with material in order to protect them,” contains the “covering” meaning, so the instrument serves a container, employing the preposition “in.” This translation ends up with the semantic and syntactic reproduction where the reproduction of the pragmatic level fails.

4.2.2. Semantic and Pragmatic Reproduction

This type of second degree reproduction involves the syntactic difference between the source sentence and the translated one, the effects of semantic and pragmatic levels being fulfilled.

Example 8: ta zhan qi lai, yong wang yuan jing xiang xi bei bian de wei di wang qu..... [9]

He stood up and trained his telescope on the reeds in the northwest... [10]

Analysis: In this example, semantic and pragmatic levels achieved while the syntactic level lost. The Instrument case in Chinese is used as the adverbial, but the English version has been transferred into the object. In *Wolf Totem*, there are many data concerning *wang yuan jing*, for example, Chen Zhen *yong wang yuan jing sou suo zhe lie chang*. Chen surveyed the area *through his telescope*. [9] Most of these examples are translated into “through the telescope,” but this translation is adopting the instrument as the object. The reason is that after he stood up, Chen Zhen needs to adjust the telescope to fix on a certain location. So, the pragmatic effect is at the same time communicated.

Example 9: ta zai zhai xia shou tao, you yong shou jie le yi dian xue ca le yi ba lian..... [9]

Taking off a glove, he *caught* a bit more snow and rubbed *it* all over his face. [10]

Analysis: In Chinese, there are two Instrument cases, *shou* is explicit while the other *xue* is implicit. The verb “catch” itself implies the instrumental meaning, so the English version does not convey the meaning of “with hand.” *xue* in the source sentence performs two semantic roles: the patient of catching and the instrument with which rubbing is performed. The translation applies “it” to refer to “snow.” The complete meaning should be *yong shou jie le yi dian xue (yong xue) ca le yi ba lian*, so it plays the adverbial; in English, “it” serves the object. The syntactic level fails to achieve, so it belongs to the second degree reproduction.

4.3. Third Degree of Reproduction

The third degree reproduction of the Instrument case is the most incomplete reproduction in C-E translation where only the semantic content is recovered. In the following part, collected data of the Instrument case in C-E translation are grouped and analyzed.

Example 10: Ba Tu huang mang yong dian tong xiang sha ci leng meng yao le ji ge quan..... [9]

He flashed a signal for Laasurung to catch up... [10]

Analysis: This translation is an evident third degree reproduction. *yong dian tong* is a standard Instrument case, playing the adverbial and marked with *yong*. The English uses another part of speech, i.e., the verb “flash,” to serve the predicate. Difference in syntactic category leads to different pragmatic function: from reference to predicate. Syntactic structure and pragmatic effect are both lost.

Example 11: shou jing de ma wei le shuai diao lang, hui fa feng di yong hou ti deng ti langde xia ban shen, yi dan ti zhong, lang bi ran gu duan pi kai, du po chang liu.[9]

As the panicky victim tried to throw the tormenter off, its powerful hooves could shatter the attacker’s bones and tear her hide, even disembowel her. [10]

Analysis: This translation is a third degree reproduction, in spite of its success in expressing the pragmatic effect due to the vivid and various descriptive words. The instrument *hou ti* belongs to the category of body parts, taking the adverbial position to modify the tool horses rely on. English version is converted into the subject, functioning as reference. Apart from the Instrument case, other elements are transformed. The adverb *fa feng di* is translated into the adjective “powerful,” both modifying the instrument. Such change ends up in the syntactic structure.

Example 12: Chen Zhen tang zai zhan zi shang, rang Huang Huang pa xia dang ta de zhen tou.[9]

Chen lay back on the felt mat, his head pillowed by the dog Yellow. [10]

Analysis: This example employs the third degree reproduction of the Chinese instrument. *Huang Huang* in the original sentence is the object of *rang* and the syntactic structure of the latter clause is an independent event predicted by *dang* while its English counterpart has taken an Absolute Nominative Construction with the Instrument case “the dog Yellow” being the agent of the action “pillow” and “his head” being the patient. Thus we have the incongruence between ST and TT on the syntactic level. Different pragmatic function occur: in Chinese, *Huang Huang pa xia* plays the modifier to describe *dang zhen tou* while the English version plays the referential function. Then this example ends up with the semantic reproduction where the reproduction on both semantic and syntactic levels has failed to be achieved.

4.4. Special Instances of the Instrument Case

The Instrument case is a very complex linguistic concept and grammatical phenomenon besides the instances mentioned above. To expand the information, this section shows four special instances.

4.4.1. Instrument Verbs

Shi Youwei has defined instrument verbs as those containing instrumental morphemes. Chinese and English have many instrument verbs and following examples present them and their translations [8].

Example 13: *shui ye bu yuan yi zai ling chen san dian jiu pa qi lai, ji si wu ge xiao shi de niu nai, ran hou bu jian duan di yong dao bang man man di dao suan nai tong li de fa jiao suan nai.....* [9]

None of them like the idea of getting up at three or four in the morning to milk cows for four or five hours, followed by churning until the milk curdled. [10]

Analysis: The English version is short but transforming the whole meaning due to the two verbs “churn” and “curdle.” The Instrument case is transferred by the instrument verb, at the expense of not recovering syntactic structure and pragmatic function. The pragmatic effect is achieved. Furthermore, the translation reduces the number of the predicate, from four in Chinese to one in English.

4.4.2. Instrumental Passive Voice Sentence

The object of *bei* is a typical agent, and the instrument usually appears here, which demonstrate its agent and active feature. The instrument is an object with which the agent does something, a means by which the agent attains the end. In this sense, the instrument acquires the character of being the agent and active. In such passive voice, the instrument does not claim semantic requirements for patients. The instrumental passive voice can be exchanged with the instrumental subject sentences.

Example 14: *Yang Ke ji mang jie kai sheng suo, cheng fa qing qing tui xiang he dao. Ta jiang bei fa zi ya dao ya wan de lu wei yi yi fu qi, bing yong tie qiu bo kai shui mian shang piao fu de wei gan wei ye.* [9]

Yang quickly untied the rope and quickly rowed the raft into the waterway. He straightened the reeds flattened by the raft and pushed away the floating stalks with his spade... [10]

Analysis: This example shows three instances to translating the Instrument case: instrument verb “row,” passive voice *bei fa zi ya dao ya wan* and a first degree reproduction *yong qie qiu. bei fa zi ya dao ya wan de lu wei* presents the instrument *fa zi* and the patient *lu wei*, and the target language applies the same passive voice only at the expense of different syntactic structures. The instrument is placed at the end of the sentence.

4.4.3. Material Category

Material category and means category can be regarded as untypical instrument category. Translations of these two types require special attention.

Material is the object of action and it becomes the component of action result, which is changeable in shape, state and number. It is an untypical type of the Instrument case, so its translation shows the untypical character. Most are rendered into passive voice.

Example 15: zhe fa zi yuan lai shi yong liu ge da che lun tai de nei tai he ji kuai men ban bang zha cheng de.[9]

It was actually constructed of six inner tubes and several door planks. [10]

Analysis: This example is easily mixed up with the Instrument case. Actually, it belongs to the material category. “Inner tubes” and “door planks” are not tools relied on when constructing the craft; instead, they are the component of the craft. Their existent state has changed.

5. Conclusion

The semantics-syntax interface theory sheds light on translating instrument case. The prototypical character of *yong* in terms of instrumental characteristics influences the syntactic performance in English translation. For those typical Instrument cases, English translation shares the same or similar syntactic structures with Chinese ones, serving as adverbial frequently; otherwise, syntactic structures in English are different. In addition, the strength of performing an action is another element affecting the syntactic structure. Some instruments are the tool that the core action of the sentence relies on, and they tend to be translated as adverbial. The more distant the Instrument case is from the prototypical one, the lower the reproduction degree is.

The Instrument cases include many instances, so translators must take into account semantic and syntactic features of the Instrument case and clarify its semantic role. The ideal translation for the Instrument case is to achieve the semantic content and pragmatic effect with the suitable syntactic performance. In addition, the context of the source text plays an important part in determining the syntactic structure.

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