

On the Situation of Theoretical Study of the Interpretation

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Abstract

As one of the two basic forms of translation, interpretation is an effective way of extracting the meaning of the speech in one language and conveying it to the target one. With the increasingly developed economic and cultural integration of the world, interpretation has played a significant role in the international stage. The studies and researches on interpretation have been in progress for years, which are of vital importance to explore the natures, principles and methods of interpretation so that its overall quality has been enhanced to a great extent. This essay is to recall and summarize the process of theoretical study of interpretation to enlighten and stimulate the elaborate and practical study of interpretation in the future.

Keywords

Theoretical Study, Interpretation.

As Seleskovitch puts it, interpretation means the transfer of meaning from one language into another for the purpose of oral communication among people who do not share the same language. Interpreting is communication, i.e., analysis of original and its conversion into a form accessible to the listener. Like any other scientific branches in the world, interpretation studies undergo several stages in the course of history and the recall and summary of the development of its study can serve as guidance to the trend of future researches on it.

Four stages of the Interpretation Research in the west can be concluded, which are the Pre-research Period (1950s-1960s), the Experimental Psychology Period (1960s-1970s), the Practitioner's Period (1970s-1980s) and the Renewal Period (from 1980s until now). In the Pre-research Period refers to the time after World War II, the development of the research on interpretation theory came into being as a new trend in the field of translation. The focus of this kind of newly-developed study is the practical situation of interpreters such as their experiences and working conditions as well as the observation of the interpreting performances. The requirements for interpreters' language competence and scope of knowledge, difficulties encountered in the real-time interpretation, quality of interpretation influenced by fatigue and relation with clients have also been paid attention to in the process of research. An important event regarded as the milestone in the interpretation field happened in 1957, when ESIT-Ecole Supérieure D'interpretes Et De Traducteurs was established. The professional interpreters with abundant working experience and proficient skills were invited to be the teachers of the school, who were of great help to impart the students interpreting knowledge and techniques. The product of researches on the related field have not yet flourished on a large scale, but two classic and precious works written by Rozen (1956) and Herbert (1952) aroused striking reaction in the circle. The basic principles and approaches of note-taking in consecutive interpretation presented in the books set a firm foundation of interpretation, which still play a vital part in the theory study as well as practical performance of interpretation today. The well-known saying "know something of everything and everything of something" was put forward by Herbert at the time, influencing tremendous amount of interpreters generation by generation.

In the Experimental Psychology Period, some psychologists and linguists made the researches from the cognitive perspectives on the basis of psychology and linguistics. Hypotheses of interpreting process, analyses of the influences by source language, noise, delivery speed, EVS (Ear-Voice Span) and interpreters' techniques to cope with them were proposed in this period. However, the researches

products were doubted by some people who held the view that they could not provide much assistance for the interpreting to understand the source language information in a more effective way. In the Practitioners' Period, it was the professionals (mainly teachers) who worked on the interpreting theories, which has made a considerable progress in the field. One of the classic and significant theory was pointed out by ESIT (Ecole Supérieure d'Interprètes et de Traducteurs), who has found the essence of the nature of interpretation--to extract the underlying connotations of the message rather than focus on the language forms. The interpretation is a process of re-expressing the communicative message and connotations of the original speech including the speaker's emotions, mood, and affection. The interpreter gets the transient memory from the message of the source language, which should be turned into the knowledge acquisition that is easier to memorize and comprehend so that he could master the main idea of the source language and drop the shell and restraint of the original speech. This point of view is so worthwhile to elaborate on and attach great importance to, which is the foundation of imperative theory of interpretation.

As the first set of systematic interpretation theories, the Theory of Sense was proposed in the 1980s. Having been gradually acknowledged from the 1960s to the present, its principle and perspectives have also been widely accepted in the international interpretation field, keeping people in mind that the fundamental purpose of interpretation is not to transcode the language material in word-to-word pattern from the source language to the target language but to re-express and convey the original and underlying connotations.

Interpretation study in the Renewal Period has undergone tremendous development since the latter half of 1980s, which was featured by a significant interpreting conference held in Trieste in 1986. Interpretation research has entered a brand new period since then and the researchers put an end to the isolated study of theories. They began to cooperate with each other in face of disagreement and challenges thrown down by other experts in the circle, working out more plausible and reasonable advancement in theories through continuous studies conducted on the basis of empirical and interdisciplinary researches.

In all, interpreting studies lag behind compared with written translation studies, yet undoubtedly it develops comparatively rapidly. It has attracted and will continue to draw more and more attention of scholars, researchers as well as interpreters globally to make enormous strides in the interpreting field.

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