

## 摘要

近年来，人们纷纷尝试从不同角度探索翻译，并取得了极为丰硕的成果，对翻译的本质也有了进一步的认识。在这股新潮中，‘信息翻译模式’尤为出众，其成绩也尤为喜人。无论是在理论探索方面还是在具体的翻译实践中，该模式都取得了令人侧目的进展。然而，先前的相关研究无论在深度和广度上存在种种不足，或未能深入探究翻译中‘信息’的属性及表现特征，或未能将某些对翻译信息性影响极为重大的言外因素如‘意识形态’，‘读者期待视野’和‘文化差异’纳入研究，或未能正确看待翻译中的信息传输、信息模式、信息结构，并在译文中给予反映，如此等等，不一而足。

本文基于‘信息理论’，从信息的角度研究翻译，认为翻译本质上是把一种语言的信息传输到另外一种语言中去，期间，其信息结构、信息模式、信息分级、冗余信息等等，都对翻译构成极大影响。首先是信息结构，主要是指主位—述位结构，它反映了原文的框架发展和原作者的写作意图。信息模式一方面也具备该功能，但它更关注的是如何对待信息的新旧问题，以及该问题在翻译中的处理。一般地说，译者应遵从原文的信息结构发展，使译文符合原信息模式，而不应另起炉灶。其次，信息分级和冗余信息都在翻译过程中发挥了重大作用。众所周知，英汉两个民族在语言、文化、历史、风俗、地理等方面差别极大。这种差别也反映在翻译上，它使单纯的‘逐字对应’模式失去了用武之地，因为，单从信息的角度看，一个英语单词所承载的信息肯定和与它‘对应’的汉语词语不相符合，信息量大小有出入。鉴于此，译者只能诉诸于调整信息度的办法，这样更有利于读者理解。此外，冗余信息其实是对传播中信息损失的补救，并不等于‘多余’。最后，必须指出，翻译也往往受制于诸如‘意识形态’、‘读者因素’、‘文化差异’等因素的影响，翻译者不能不给予注意。

在文章结构方面，本文共分六章。其中，第一章是‘引言’，对全文予以概括，介绍了本文研究动机、意义，以及研究视野或实用范围。在第二章，‘文献回顾’部分，本文分别介绍了外国学者和国内学者在该领域的成果及其对本文研究的启发，一并介绍的还有先前研究的不足，而这正是本文研究的目的所在。‘语言信息翻译’是本文的理论基石，放在了第三章。它包括‘理论基础’、‘信息结构’、‘信息模式’和‘冗余信息’，共四小节。分别涉及了‘信息理论’指引下的翻译研究，承前所述，其本质是信息转换；主位—述位结构及其对发展语篇的贡献；新旧信息模式及其对翻译的意义；冗余信息的介绍和价值。第四章讨论了‘翻译的信息标准’，该标准异于以往林林总总的标准之处，不仅在于它是从‘语言信息’的角度提出来的，还在于该标准其实更是一个操作建议，借助于它，翻译者能更好地处理翻译中的转换问题及转换程度，等等。标准从两个方面入手：一方面是‘主述位发展模式’（共四种）；另一方面是新旧信息的转换、交织。本文的主题在于第五章，‘应用’部分。文章从最简单的词汇层面一直上升到句法层面和语篇层面，逐一予以论述，并辅以丰富的例证。此外，本文还贯彻了上述标准，不但涉及到信息调整分级方面，还从‘主述位发展模式’和‘新旧信息模式’入手，探索了翻译如何实现信息转换这一论题，同样辅以丰富的例证。最后，在第六章中，作者对全文予以归纳、概括，并指出了文章不足之处和今后进一步研究的方向。

关键词：信息转换；信息度；主述位结构；新旧信息模式

## Abstract

Translation study has been proceeding from a variety of perspectives, among which the informational approach is especially viable and rewarding in both aspects of theoretical exploration and practical application. Its achievements mainly ensue from the development of the Information Theory which helps to reveal the essence that translation is transferring information from the source text to the target text. However, the pioneer research in this regard is found short of depth and accuracy in its failure to take into consideration the features of information and the bearings of some key parameters upon this transmission, and in the inappropriate assumption of an ideal information flow, among other aspects.

Aiming at a solution to the above, this paper probes into the detailed features of information in terms of theme-rheme structure, given-new information flow, redundancy of information and the division of informativity. The theme-rheme structure reflects the development of the original text as well as the writer's intention in organizing his materials, so is the given-new information flow which especially concerns the treatment of givenness on the part of receivers. It follows that a translator is expected to conform to the pattern of thematic progression in question and reflect the givenness or newness of a certain piece of information in his translation version. Second comes the division of informativity, which goes closely along with redundancy of information in the course of translation. Language differences have it that an item may not assume the same amount of information against its counterpart, so that adjustment of informativity is called for. This adjustment is also motivated in the light of some 'outside' parameters, like ideology, readers' expectations and culture, among other things; the adjustment usually takes the forms of upgrading or downgrading informativity, depending on whether the item in question should be expanded or condensed in terms of information explanation. As for the redundancy of information, it is not necessarily synonymous to verbiage but may turn out to be a subsidiary element that is capable of facilitating comprehension and offsetting the loss incurred by 'noise'.

This paper develops the above notions in altogether six chapters. Chapter one gives an introduction, which makes a brief account of this approach and the scope where it may be applied. The second chapter, *Literature Review*, accounts for the past achievements and the status quo which motivates a further study of this kind. Chapter three is designed to lay the foundation of this approach and then explain in detail its key notions, such as theme-rheme structure, given-new information flow and redundancy. Chapter four is termed after criteria, but is actually more of a suggestion by which a translator may be better guided in two ways: the theme-rheme structure and information flow. My main concern is saved for chapter five, *Applications*, which is demonstrated with ample examples from the simplest level of lexeme up to syntactic level and eventually discoursal level. This demonstration is meanwhile carried out under the guidance of three notions: mediating information (either upgrading or downgrading), the theme-rheme structure, and the given-new information flow. This

chapter, incidentally, also displays the impairment incurred by doing otherwise as well as the incapability of this approach when functioning alone. The last chapter ends with the conclusions and suggestions for further studies in this regard.

**Key words:** information shift; informativity; theme-rheme structure; given-new information flow.

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Justification of this study

The importance of translation is needless to mention, as it is at least an indispensable component of one's ability in acquiring and using a foreign language. However, neither in practice nor in theory is it justifiably treated.

In practice, cases of inaccuracy are ample, either in the form of over-translation, a version which goes beyond what translation permits in its proper sense, or in the form of under-translation, an inadequate version which fails to convey 'full' messages. From a point of view of information<sup>1</sup>, those cases, to a large extent, can be attributed to mal-manipulation of transmitting message from the source text to the target text. This inaccuracy, on the other hand, functions as a fair index to the difficulties on the part of the translator, in particular to the beginner, who is at a loss as to what extent should he carry out the alien information into his target text.

In theory circle, translation is traditionally viewed as a transformed copy of the original, hence a subjection to the latter. This subordinate position, not surprisingly, leads to a rigorous set of measurements in which 'fidelity', among other things, has been unquestionably exercised for a long time to distinguish 'good' translation from 'poor' one. However, things seem different now and this tradition is being called into question (Huang Hanping, 2003: 26; Jiang Xiaohua, 2003: 24; Tu Guoyuan & Zhu Xianlong, 2003: 8; Wang Dongfeng, 2003: 16). Questions mainly arise in the sense that the disparity between the source text and the target text should be broken and that this criterion should be practised with caution. Some activists, Huang Hanping (2003:26) for one, claim that such a criterion of fidelity is nothing but 'an illusion', or 'a utopia' which cannot stand up to real tests.

It seems still too early to hail the significance of this anti-traditional school, nor is it scientific to reject flatly this antagonist without making an objective study. With this consideration in mind, one has every reason to probe into the essence of translation, the final appeal of court, which is authorized to make a verdict on this dispute and to offer guidance for doing translation.

The essence lies probably in the assumption that, in its simplest form, translation is translating information. This assumption differs from others in having introduced the concept of 'information' from the Information Theory. It should be declared in this phase that such an introduction is well based on the remarkable resemblances between translation study and the Information Theory in many respects. A close look at the two may lead one to the following similarities. First and foremost, translation is a cross-language communication in which a certain amount of information is transferred from the source text to the target text. In the case of the Information Theory, it shares the same nature by studying how information is transmitted from the source to the receptor. What's more, both have to take steps to minimize the effects of 'noise' which will otherwise spoil the communicative purpose. The third sameness

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<sup>1</sup> Information and message refer to the contents a text carries, and are indiscriminately used until it is explicitly otherwise. This notion will be further modified as we go along.

lies in both setting language as the common media or channel in study, hence a variety of similar features in the process of communication. This will be discussed in greater depth as we go along.

However, pity is in the paucity of relevant study from the viewpoint of the Information Theory. Research in this regard initiated by foreign experts (Nida 1969: 12; 1983: 31-51; Baker 2000: 119-172; Bell 2001: 149-150), has shed some light on translation but are unfortunately not in particular to the case of English to Chinese translation and thus less instructive. On the part of Chinese scholars, research is also insufficient so far (Fan Zhongying, 1994: 12; Han Zhonghua, 1995: 942-945; Jin Di, 1983:31-51; Lu Jun & Hou Xiangqun, 2001: 25-28; Xiao Liming, 2001:6-12; Zhang Meifang, 2000: 374-375; Zhang Jin, 1998: 210). Inspiring as the available research is, it fails to be in-depth or systemic, or both. The approach of 'informational translation', for want of a better name, is still in bud and the present paper is hoped to be helpful for its growth.

This paper is specially designed in such a way that it probes into translation mainly in terms of information transmission, leaving other factors untouched. As far as information transmission is concerned, it is important to add that such a method is by no means a course of simply copying messages of exactly the same amount from the source to the target, because great differences exist between languages. Following those differences between languages, say, English and Chinese, one may safely claim that an English item, more often than not, assumes a different amount of information compared with its counterpart in the Chinese language, be it more or less in quantity, and vice versa. For practical convenience, 'information' in this paper is used as a general term and divided into three levels according to the amount it loads. In the practice of translation, a translator is often found to make due adjustment of information level accordingly, either in the form of upgrading or downgrading. One more area concerning information is the theme-rheme structure in organizing elements into a meaningful unit, which is closely related with the status of given or new according to whether the information in question is already known or not. As is the case that what will influence such a manipulation of information in translation may not only come from within but also come from without. Among those 'outside' parameters, ideology, reader's factors and culture stand out with prominence and carry much weight in the determination of this manipulation. In short, a translation taking into account these factors is hopefully more accurate in line with the original than it will be otherwise.

## **1.2 Scope of this thesis**

In this thesis, most of the translation cases mentioned are within the range of 'general translation', as these are mostly examples taken from translation textbooks. That is, it generally precludes oral interpretation exercises and texts, which are either very technical (like the translation of quantum physics essays) or very literary (e.g. sonnets), since these are not of the author's research interest. Within the range of text dealt with here there are, for example, translation exercises, newspaper articles, etc., although occasionally, selections of popular literary works are also ventured into. This

thesis does not profess coverage of a wide range of text and the methodology proposed is thus limited in some way.

### **1.3 Structure of the thesis**

While the above part introduces and motives this thesis, the rest of it expands the theme ideas presented in this chapter as follows:

Chapter Two *Literature Review* introduces some pioneering work done by scholars, home and abroad in this regard, followed by their defects at the end of the chapter.

Chapter Three *Language Information in Translation* explores the foundation of this approach in greater depth, and then makes an account of theme-rheme structure, information structure, and redundancy of information.

Chapter Four *Informational Criteria in Translation* is designed as a suggestion, by which the translator may be better guided.

Chapter Five *Applications* is the main concern of this paper. It first introduces the parameters of ideology, readers, and culture, and then exemplifies its application from lexical to discoursal level, and from the perspectives of 'mediating informativity', 'theme-rheme structure' and 'given-new information structure' in translation.

Chapter Six ends with the conclusions and suggestions for further study.



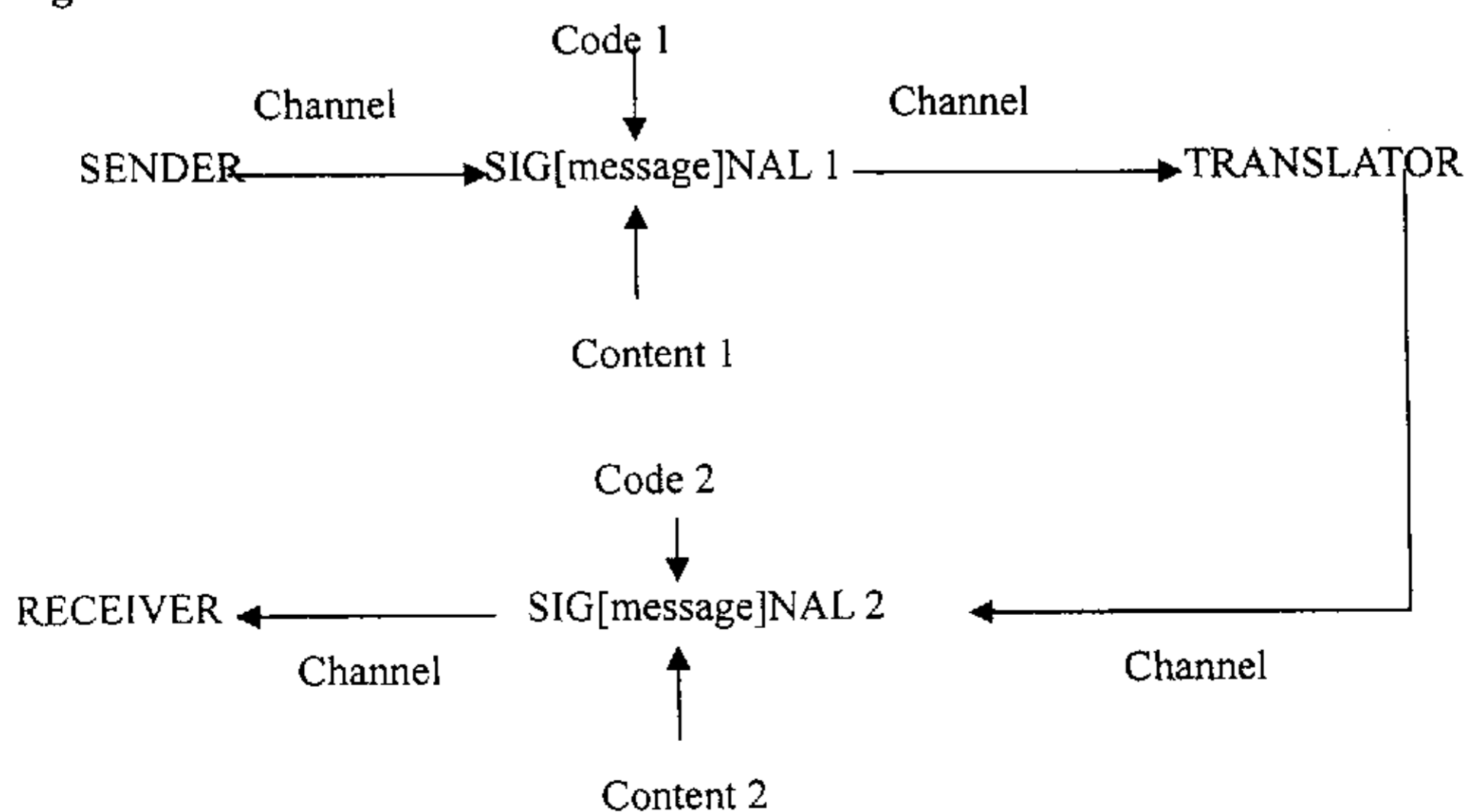
## Chapter 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Foreign scholars' contributions

Where informational translation is concerned, the best-known foreign translation theorist should be Eugene A. Nida. In 1969, Nida began to explore this field from a viewpoint of information transfer, which can be at least shown in his definition of translation: 'translation consists in 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.' (Nida & Taber, 1969:12). The year 1984 witnessed his another publication entitled *On Translation* in which he reiterated the notion that translation is a means of translating information (Jin Di & Nida, 1983:31-51). Moreover, Nida, inspired by Chomsky's Transformation-Generative Grammar, specifies his model of translation in which information contained in the surface structure of the source text is shifted into the surface structure of the target text by way of kernels (Han Zhonghua, 1996: 942). Most relevant is his elaboration on the difficulty of information and the receivability of the reader. When the information is beyond the reader, a translator is justified to put it in an easier way, i.e., that of diluting the difficulty, or to replace an exotic term with a familiar way of expression, altogether for the purpose of smooth and successful communication.

Different from Nida, Roger T. Bell (2001: F35) tries to probe into the 'black box' to see how it works in the process of translation. In his model, the goal of translation should be 'the transformation of a text originally in one language into an equivalent text in a different language retaining, as far as possible, the content of the message and the formal features and functional roles of the original text.' He diagrammatizes this idea as follows (ibid: 19):

Fig 1



With this chart, he divides the process of translation into nine steps:

- 1) translator receives signal 1 containing message
- 2) recognizes code 1
- 3) decodes signal 1
- 4) retrieves message
- 5) comprehends message
- 6) translator selects code 2
- 7) encodes message by means of code 2
- 8) selects channel
- 9) transmits signal 2 containing message

As is indicated above, the translator is placed at the hub of this activity that seizes Bell's attention. In doing so, Bell hopes to picture how a translator processes a message via his 'black box' and then rewrites it in another language retaining its original meaning. Actually, Bell is researching translation not so much with information transfer as with psychological concerns.

## 2.2 Chinese scholars' contributions

In this field, Chinese scholars not only assimilate foreign experts' research findings, but also push this study forward, in particular to E/C and C/E translation, resulting in fruitful achievements.

Among those scholars, Lü Jun and Hou Xiangqun are of prominence. They approach this issue with some insightful notions, taking into consideration the whole set of elements concerned. According to them (2001: 4-9), there are altogether seven aspects involved in the process, namely, 1) who says, 2) say what, 3) in what channel, 4) to whom, 5) why, in other words, the purpose of communication, 6) where, or the situation, and 7) with what effects<sup>2</sup>. Here follows a brief discussion of only three aspects, as the limited space of this thesis does not give sanction to a comprehensive introduction.

First comes the author, or the source in the terms of communication. He controls the contents of information, and meanwhile is controlled by the social constraints, such as the political and economical factors, cultural factors, and so on. These social constraints, on the other hand, function as good hints for the interpretation of some elusive and controversial stretches of text. It naturally follows that more knowledge about the author will lead the translator to a better understanding of the original text and in the long run a better translation version<sup>3</sup>. As for the translator, he can also be

<sup>2</sup> Very much similar to that of Bell, who states this notion with a quotation from Kipling:

I keep six honest servingmen;  
 (They taught me all I knew);  
 Their names were What? and Why? and When?  
 And How? and where? and Who?

Each of these questions defines one (or more) parameters of variation. For a detailed discussion, see Bell (2001: 7-8).

<sup>3</sup> However, in my opinion, sometimes too much knowledge about the author may turn out to be a hindrance for translation, for this knowledge may 'lead' a translator's astray from independent

viewed as an author in the sense that he rewrites a text from one language into another; thus, a study about him seems to be as important, especially for translation criticism. A case in point is Yan Fu, whose translation standard of 'Elegance' was, for a time, dubbed as 'impractical' and 'misleading', but Wang Zuoliang (1989:37-42), after a detailed study, finds out that only in doing so can Yan Fu realize his purpose of enlightening the elites to make reform.

In the second place stand the receptors. An ignorance of them will often result in a failure of translation, or even a conflict. A qualified translator should also bear into mind the general knowledge of his potential readers, about their social status, education, expectation for the reading, to mention just a few. A translation targeted at everybody is actually fit for nobody, and a responsible translator never fails to envisage a general picture of his potential readers before he sets out to translate.

Thirdly, the purpose of translation also has a significant role. When occasion arises, such as in a bilateral contract between two countries, it can be authorized to play such a great role that the translated version will be strictly required to have the 'exact' information as the original. It is also possible that a novel can be translated with deletion of minor details as in simplified versions or with addition of plots for more entertainment.

In the realm of informational translation, another prominent seat should be given to Doctor Zhang Meifang, who advances a step further into the practical manipulation of this approach, making use of discourse analysis and pragmatics. Her idea is to put translation in the light of the principles of informativity, which requires transferring appropriate amount of information to the target text. For this end, she takes a reference from Beaugrande and Dresser to place information into different levels and, at the practical level, adjusts the level of informativity according to the setting in question.

### **2.3 Their shortcomings**

Inspiring and pioneering as they are, their ideas are still to be desired in some ways. First of all, their paradoxical ideas are based on the assumption that the original text contains a certain amount of information that shall and can be faithfully or exactly copied into the target text, in other words, no loss of information. They, on one hand, admit that there exists a great gap between the two language systems, cultures, among other things; on the other hand, they unconsciously slide back into the common assumption of information symmetry between source language and target language in the sense that there is a 'best' translation version which can do the same as its counterpart does. In the second place, they fail to probe into the organization of information and the information structure, without which they cannot obtain a good knowledge of how this organization and structure influence translation. This is especially significant because English and Chinese differ considerably in this regard. Last but not least, their studies on the differences between English and Chinese are insufficient, and thus delimit their application to the translation between English and

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judgment. But in general, this knowledge brings about more benefits than harms.

Chinese. This is especially true on the part of many foreign theorists who are lacking in knowledge about the Chinese language and thus unable to envisage the potential difficulties in the process of translation.

In spite of all these shortcomings, the author of this paper feels indebted to all the forerunners for their sparkling ideas as well as the work they have already done, and is inspired to venture an opinion in compensation for these shortcomings.

## Chapter 3

# Language Information in Translation

This chapter begins with the foundation of this approach by relating the Information Theory to translation studies, and then arrives at the notion that translation means translating information. Then, it carries out the discussion in three aspects, namely, theme-rheme structure, given-new information structure and redundancy of information.

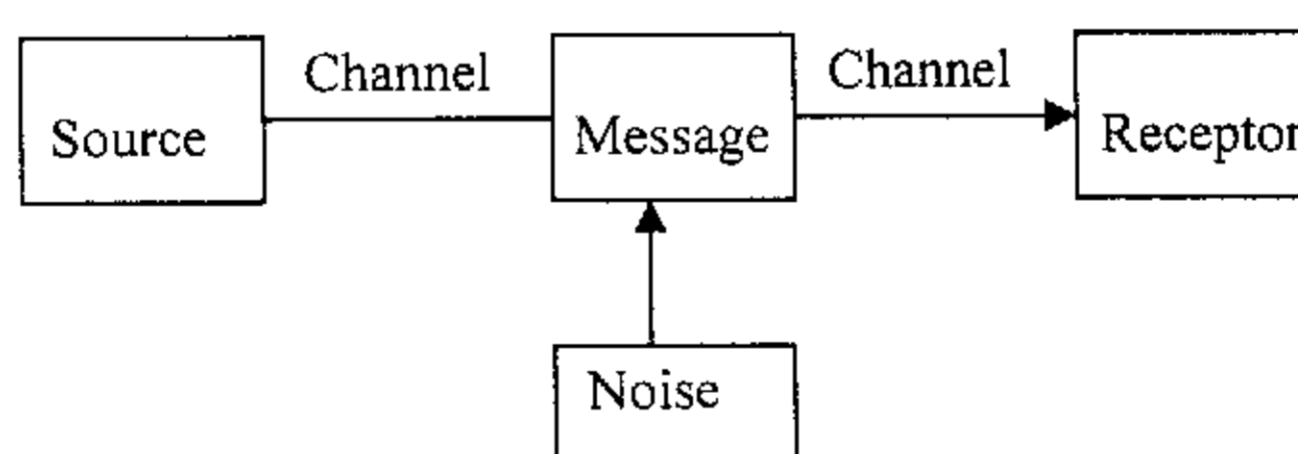
### 3.1 Foundation of the approach

#### 3.1.1 Informational function of language

The functions of language are termed quite differently by linguists, who view language from different perspectives. However different perspectives they adopt, 'for most people the transmission of the information is predominantly the major role of language' (Hu Zhuanglin & Jiang Wangqi, 2002: 22). Brown and Yule (2001:2) also agree with this notion by asserting that 'the most important function (of language) is the communication of information'.

To assume this function, three basic elements (source, message and receptor) must be involved. To be specific, a message is encoded from source and then decoded to receptor, in virtue of language channel. This relationship may be diagrammatically represented as follows:

Fig 2



Such a chart is virtually too simplistic, for communication is far more complicated. Albeit simple, it provides us with a starting point for the explanation of the process of communication within one language community as well as two language communities.

It is obviously true that this communicative process will presumably collapse without resorting to language, which stores and carries information from the source to the target, hence its features being *sharable* and *transmittable*.

Continuing with the chart, the little vertical rising in the center is what is called 'noise'. It was originally conceptualized in the setting of audio communication, but is as valid for any kind of communication, referring to 'any hindrance or obstacle one can encounter while transferring a message from the sender's mind to the receiver's

mind' (Canetti 1993: 13)<sup>4</sup>. In Nida's term, noise is 'anything which disturbs or distorts the communication in the process of transmission.' (Jin Di & Nida, 1983: 34). Noise may appear in any phase of the communication in various forms, but anyhow one point is sure that it turns out to a hindrance to the exchange of information and thus should be controlled. A common deploy is resorting to redundancy of information, which will be discussed later.

### 3.1.2 Information theory

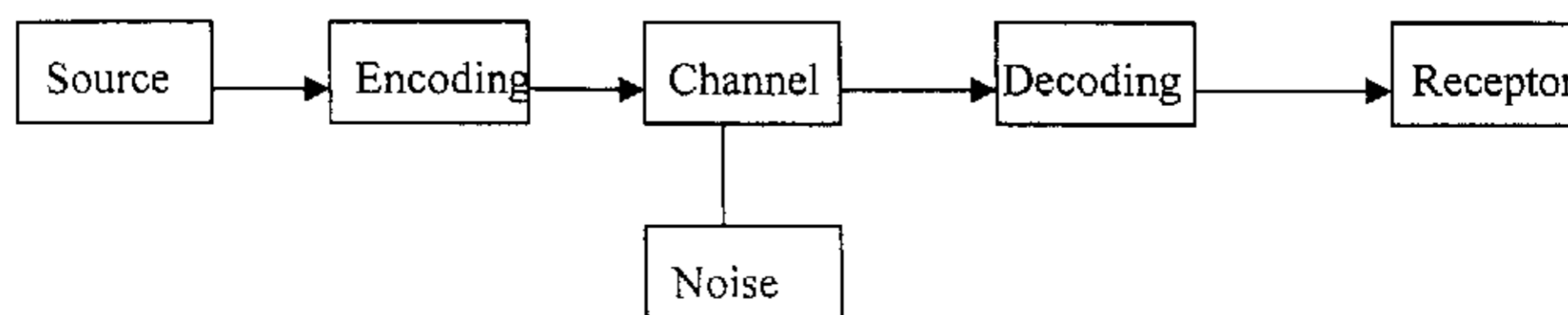
Shannon's landmark paper in 1948 entitled *A Mathematical Theory of Communication* gave birth to the Information Theory that since then has gained growing popularity and wide application in many disciplines, translation studies included.

At the outset, it stands to reason to give a rough description of information features, which draw heavily on Cui Baoguo (2001: 17) and Zhong Yilong (2002: 65):

- 1) Sharable Different from any substance which can only be exclusively used and used with abrasion by a certain individual or group at a given time, information can be shared and used without abrasion by any individual or group either simultaneously or at different time.
- 2) Transmittable Information only exists virtually and cannot be visualized or processed without being attached to such media as language. This enables information to be transmitted regardless of restrictions of time, space or region.
- 3) Relative By the term "relative", it is to say that the value of information is to be decided by a list of factors, such as the receptors' specific needs and abilities to recognize and further utilize it. In other words, a piece of information means differently towards different receptors.

Admittedly, these three features are just a part of the whole story, leaving many others untouched. They, nevertheless, are helpful in the re-examination of language. As has been mentioned earlier, language is shareable and transmittable, and relative in the sense that different people tend to have dissimilar understanding even towards the same language item. So far, information matches language in terms of features. Features aside, their transferring processes are largely identical, and the following is an information flow chart:

Fig 3



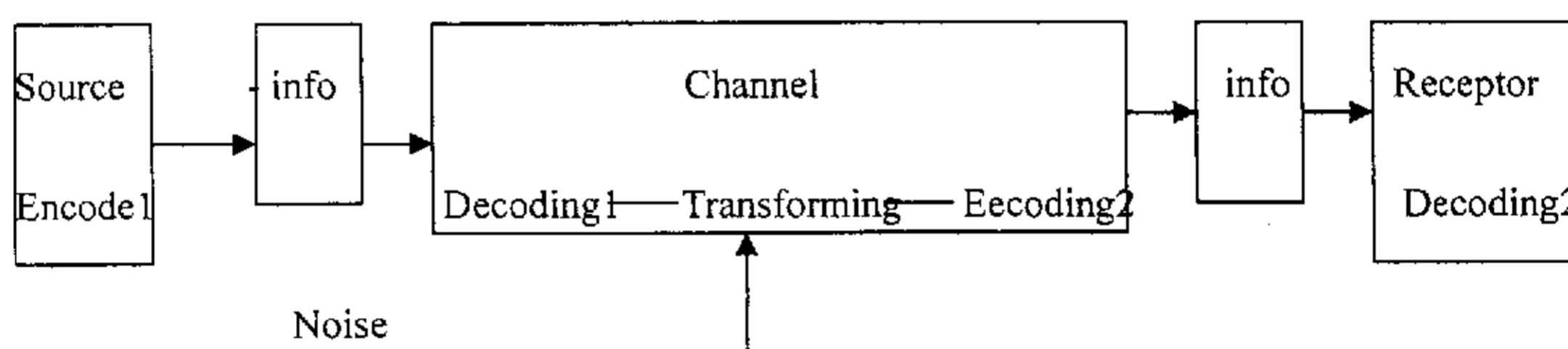
<sup>4</sup> Available from [http://www.logos.it/pls/dictionary/linguistic\\_resources.cap\\_4\\_7?lang=en](http://www.logos.it/pls/dictionary/linguistic_resources.cap_4_7?lang=en)

In fact Fig 3 can be viewed as a duplicate of Fig 2, but with more contents in it, sharing the same nature. Furthermore, the factor of noise, among other things, contributes to one more point of similarity between language communication and Information Theory. So far, these factors altogether lead to a common notion that language communication can be explained by Information Theory as an exchange of information and hence translation is an information flow which crosses two languages.

### 3.1.3 Informational translation

As the name suggests, this approach is intended to focus upon translation informationally. It unshackles itself from the linguistic equivalence, and turns to view translation as an information flow from the source text to target text. Consequently, the problem of translation turns out to be how to decode and convey and adjust the original information to the target text. For this end, a translator is strongly advised to be equipped with some knowledge about how the information is encoded on the part of the original writer, and about the nature of noise and the way to minimize its effect, and about the common mal-manipulations during the process of translation, and about the loss of information and the remedy to save it, and about his potential readers, and so on. All these are illustrated graphically:

Fig 4



(Note: 'info' stands for information.)

(Xiao Liming 2001: 6)

In a sense, it is difficult to conduct such a study from the viewpoint of information, as one is required to have knowledge about both disciplines. Moreover, difficulty in this study is compounded not only by the involvement of two languages and cultures but also by the shortage of knowledge about Information Theory. As a result, the trouble of doing translation becomes the union of the problems in determining language information of each language involved from various aspects, and the ache in making some necessary changes in line with target language and culture and ideology, to mention just a few.

In a translation and information theory combined framework, however, it can be practical to carry out this study if we just focus our attention on the area where translation and Information Theory intersect, with ignorance of any irrelative elements. Thus we can have a firmer theoretical focus and avoid any peripheral

components, and can still gain theoretical insights and practical implications from the limited generalizations.

## 3.2 Theme-rheme structure

### 3.2.1 A historical review of theme and rheme

Mathesius (1882 – 1945) believes that a majority of sentences (he confines his research to declarative sentences) contain two basic elements. One is the element about which something is stated; the other is what is stated about the elements. He called the former ‘the basis of the utterance’ and the latter ‘the nucleus of the utterance’. The terms have come to be replaced with ‘theme’ and ‘rheme’ by Jan Firbas.

Jan Firbas’ contribution lies in his notion of “communicative dynamism” (CD), which is used to measure the amount of information an element carries and its contribution for pushing the communication forward. Firbas makes the following suggestions to identify theme/rheme with the notion of CD in discourse. A clause usually consists of different types of elements, with some elements laying the foundation. These foundation-laying elements are context-dependent and constitute the theme. They bear a low degree of CD because, being context-dependent, they do not play a major role in pushing the communication forward. The remaining elements complete the information and fulfill the communicative purpose of the utterance. These core-constituting elements form the rheme, are context-independent, and carry a higher degree of CD (Hu Zhuanglin & Jiang Wangqi, 2002: 679).

Incidentally, these two scholars are the most prominent members of the Prague School, with Mathesius as its founder and life-long chairman, and the approach they proposed is generally referred to as Functional Sentence Perspective, which is distinct from Hallidayan approach.

When it comes to Halliday, he elaborates a complex account in this regard, but in the simplest sense where the definition of theme is concerned, he opts to view it as the ‘starting-point for the message’ or ‘the ground from which the clause is taking off’ on the ground that the ‘aboutness’ notion of *Theme* makes it hard to distinguish from *Subject* (Halliday, 1994:38).

### 3.2.2 Theme-rheme structure

It follows that a sentence consists of two segments: the left-most is called theme and the rest that follows is rheme. Theme is the starting-point or the ground from which the clause is taking off; rheme is what is about the theme. The value of theme-rheme structure lies not only in explaining the structure of individual sentences but also in shedding light on translation studies.

For one thing, theme and rheme are used to complement acceptability (rather than grammaticality) of a given sequence in a given context. Grammaticality does not necessarily ensure acceptability. For example, the following text is well-formed



grammatically, but ill-formed in terms of thematic structure:

- (1) The Prime Minister stepped off the plane. Journalists instantly surrounded her. The wind immediately buffeted her. Later that day, the President congratulated her on her success.

(*Discourse Analysis*, 2000: 130)

The whole text feels disjointed and lacks orientation, although every individual clause is perfectly grammatical. Reason is that it lacks consistency between the themes of each clause, and between a rheme and the following theme. This hints to a translator that it is necessary to maintain a coherent point of view in translation, provided there is no strong reason for the contrary. Without a great stretch of imagination, a coherent translated version is much more readable than it will be otherwise.

More than acceptability, theme and rheme are employed to organize a text, especially on the part of the former, which is assigned to two functions: '(a) acting as a point of orientation by connecting back to previous stretches of discourse and thereby maintaining a coherent point of view and, (b) acting as a point of departure by connecting forward and contributing to the development of later stretches' (Baker, 2000:121). Deducing from this point, one may feel justified to assert that the selection of an individual theme of a given clause in a given text is not as significant as the overall choice of themes in organizing a text and in providing a point of orientation for the whole stretch of language. It is just predictable to find a proliferation of place adjuncts in theme position in a travel brochure extracted as follows:

- (2). **On some islands** it is best if you...  
**In Greece and Turkey**, you are met at the airport...  
**In all other places** we make bookings...  
**At the centers where we have our own representatives** you...  
**In some centers** we have local agents...  
**On a few islands** you have to collect them yourselves...

(Aegina Club Brochure 1981, 3.)

Similarly, a translation of the above brochure should also adhere to the same thematic structure. A deviated one will not only be dubbed as unfaithful but also suffered from a loss of coherence. In this sense, a translator is expected to follow the pre-determined theme-rheme structure in his translation version unless he has a good reason which motivates him to make another choice.

A further area where this structure has proved to be useful relates to marked and unmarked structures. It involves choosing a clause element in initial position. But not all choices are equally meaningful: some seem to be more salient or marked than others as are illustrated in the following two sentences:

- (3). Her name is Mary.  
 (4). Mary her name is.

'Mary' in (4) looks more impressive than in (3), even if they have the same prepositional meaning. The meaning an element carries is greatly influenced by its selection: the more obligatory an element is, the less marked it will be and the weaker will be its meaning. For example, as a title of a book, *Tender is the Night*, seems much more marked and thus eye-catching than the normal sequence of *The Night is Tender*. Moreover, the degree of markedness will depend on the frequency with which the element in question generally occurs in theme position and the extent to which it is normally mobile within the clause.

The functions of marked theme lie not only in providing a smooth link with the preceding and following discourse, but also in foregrounding<sup>5</sup> a particular element as the topic of the clause or its point of departure. In other words, the foregrounded element is endowed with more prominence. A translator equipped with this notion will be able to perceive the level of markedness of a given structure in the source and target languages, and then make his translation more appropriate than otherwise.

### 3.3 Information structure: given and new

#### 3.3.1 An introduction to given and new information

A serious study of information structure within texts was first instituted by scholars of the Prague School, and later further developed by Halliday, who adopted the Prague School view of information as consisting of two categories: given information and new information. Here again, a message is divided into two segments: one segment conveys information which the speaker regards as already known to the hearer; the other segment conveys the new information that the speaker wishes to convey to the hearer.

Like thematic structure, information structure is a feature of the context rather than of the language system as such. One can only decide what part of a message is new and what part is given within a linguistic or situational context. For example, the same information may be segmented differently in response to different questions:

- |                                    |                                    |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| (5). What's happening tomorrow?    | <u>We're visiting John.</u>        |
|                                    | New                                |
| (6). What are we doing tomorrow?   | <u>We're</u> <u>visiting John.</u> |
|                                    | Given        New                   |
| (7). Who are we visiting tomorrow? | <u>We're visiting</u> <u>John.</u> |
|                                    | Given                New           |

The organization of the message into information units of given and new reflects

<sup>5</sup> Foregrounding here refers to the situation where a particular element is established in the foreground of consciousness while other elements remain in the background.

the speaker's sensitivity to the hearer's state of knowledge in the process of communication. This sensitivity is derived not so much from a pure linguistic analysis as from the speaker's personal judgment on his hearer. Rather than use the arbitrary notion of personal judgment, Chafe (1976: 30) opts for the notion of 'consciousness': Given information is that knowledge which the speaker assumes to be in the consciousness of the addressee at the time of the utterance. So-called new information is what the speaker assumes he is introducing into the addressee's consciousness by what he says.

A brief introduction like this is unable to cover too many topics under it, nor is it capable of carrying them out in greater depth. It is, however, possible to draw one distinction between theme-rheme structure and information structure. To be specific, theme-rheme structure is speaker-oriented, based on what the speaker wants to announce as his starting point and what he goes on to say about it. On the other hand, given-new structure is hearer-oriented, based on what part of the message is known to the hearer and what part is new.

### 3.3.2 Information structure

In the process of communication, the speaker should be sensitive to the hearer's state of knowledge, and then decide what segment should be given and what segment should be new. It is always the case that given information functions as a common ground between the speaker and the hearer and gives the latter a reference point he can relate new information. Extrapolating from this idea, on the part of the speaker, he can draw on it to introduce and expatiate on new information. As for the hearer, he is helped to process and decode new information by way of given information, because this given-before-new order is more compatible with his cognition and thus easier to understand.

The given-before-new order also influences other sequencing decisions in language. Many languages, English for one, tend to place information in a low-high order so as to achieve a forceful ending. This ordering is called *end-focus*, which can be explained in terms of information structure. Since the new information often needs to be stated more fully (it always takes a longer, or a heavier structure), the speaker is motivated to place new information towards the end of a sentence, as in the following examples:

- (8). He visited her that day.
- (9). He visited his girl friend that day.
- (10). He visited that day a charming and much beloved friend.

Parallel to end-focus, a similar principle which also operates in language system is termed after *end-weight*. By end-weight, it means that language tends to place the more complex elements after the less complex to achieve stylistic effect. Otherwise, the sentence will seem to be unnatural and ungainly. According to Huang Guowen (1988: 69), the heaviness of an element is determined by its length, i.e., how many

syllables it has, and by its syntactic complexity, i.e., how many words it has. Furthermore, Huang suggests that an adverbial is heavier than a noun; a phrase is heavier than a single word; preposition is heavier than noun phrase; complex element is heavier than less complex one, etc. This is useful in arranging elements into sentence. Compare the following two sentences:

- (11). I was annoyed by Mary wanting to tell everybody my secret.  
 (12). Mary's wanting to tell everybody my secret annoyed me.

Obviously that (11) is much better than (12), because the latter violates the end-weight principle and seems unnatural with a heavier head but a lighter end.

The principles of end-focus and end-weight are frequently exercised in generating acceptable sentences. As is the case that a stretch of utterance, which follows the subject-before-predicate principle like the following example:

- (13). 'The effects of light, temperature and the presence and absence of the seed coat on limao-cravo seed germination have been studied. The influence of rehydration rate on germination of artificially dried seed has been also verified.'

may seem awkward, and recognizably un-English, but can be improved, in the light of these two principles, into:

- (14). 'This paper examines the effects of light, temperature and the presence or absence of the seed coat on limao-cravo. In addition, it verifies the influence of rehydration rate on germination of artificially dried seed.'

As it appears, grammar is used to ensure correctness while end-focus and end-weight principles are employed for acceptability and readability. In translation, an identification of the status of given and new, together with the information flow guided by these principles, as it is, is necessary and indispensable for a conscientious translator.

### 3.4 Redundancy of information

Redundancy is a term of Information Theory, referring to the amount of information which is more than minimally necessary. It exists in language system as well. Linguists estimate that more than 50 percent of language is redundant<sup>6</sup>. For instance, in sentence '*These translation books are very expensive*', the pronoun 'these' presupposes that its following countable noun must be in a plural form, so the inflection '-s' is redundant, and vice versa. What's more, the copula 'are' is redundant

<sup>6</sup> In English this figure may amount to as high as 60% to 80% , according to Tian Yan (1995: 947).

in the sense that it should follow the plural form of 'books' in present tense in this sentence. Following this analysis, it seems that '*Translation books very expensive*' should be a more desirable expression. Of course, it is not the case in fact.

Brevity is what we are for, but redundancy is not necessarily synonymous to unnecessary. For one thing, as noise is always blocking the transmission and incurring loss of information, the source has to resort to sending out more information than is minimally needed for a successful communication. Secondly, redundancy can avail to construct and reinforce a text in a way which may ease the writer's composition. Thirdly, on the part of the reader, redundancy can 'dilute' difficulty to a lower degree, which might facilitate his comprehension.

When it comes to translation, redundancy is inevitable and helpful. Concerning this issue, Canetti<sup>7</sup> points out 'Any form of communication—and therefore translation—is subject to the law of loss.' He continues this point by quoting Nida's words: 'If one is to insist that translation must involve no loss of information whatsoever, then obviously not only translating but all communication is impossible.' A typical example is given in the follow:

- (15). In April, there was the "ping" heard around the world.  
In July, the Ping "Ponged".

四月里，全世界听到乒的一声；  
七月里，这乒声却又乒了一下。

This is a 'faithful' but puzzling translation because it leaves much unsaid in terms of information and thus is more likely to leave its readers bewildered because of the information gap. To fill in the gap, a translator is advised to resort to redundancy:

四月里，全世界听到中国乒的一声把球打了过去；  
到了七月，美国又乒的一声把球打了回来。

This redundancy should be pardoned on the ground that readers who are in want of this diplomatic affair concerning China and the US shall find the second version easier and more informative to follow, and those readers who have already learned the affair may also appreciate its thoughtfulness in reminding of this anecdote. In this sense, redundancy turns out to be necessary subsidiary knowledge or background information, with which the original messages are finely conveyed and understood.

<sup>7</sup> Available from [http://www.logos.it/pls/dictionary/linguistic\\_resources.cap\\_4\\_7?lang=en](http://www.logos.it/pls/dictionary/linguistic_resources.cap_4_7?lang=en)

## Chapter 4

### Criteria of Informational Translation

Criterion, or standard, or whatever, has been exercised to judge the quality of translation and check to what extent it fulfills the desired expectations or requirements. By 'criterion' in this paper, however, it is, on one hand, restricted to the scope of 'information shift'; on the other hand, it is more of a suggestion with which we can better approach our aim in doing translation, than of a standard that we must follow to the letter.

#### 4.1 A brief review of criteria

Translation studies have been undertaken for a substantial period. The resulting criteria are so many that a brief review must leave more others untouched, unless it is done philosophically, because 'philosophy has a priori quality and all the translation studies made in the history can actually find their philosophical basis' (Lu Jun 2003: 67). According to Lu Jun, translation studies have undergone four periods: traditional philology, structuralism, deconstructionism and constructive translatology.

During the first period, translation is guided by philology, which is based on intuitivism that mystifies the works and regards them as holy words either from god or saints; hence the translation task turns to be conveying those sacred words exactly to the laymen. In practice, translators put the original text far above everything and study how to convey the predetermined meaning from the source to the target text. This gives rise to the notion that translation by nature is an art and the quality of translation is utterly determined by the translator whose talents and inspirations play a crucial role in this process.

Coming next, structuralism lays its basis on epistemology, regarding language as a rational tool with which people can know the world. This school tries to analyze language into details, hopes to uncover the hidden rules and commonness between languages, and then arrives at the conclusion that languages can express everything equally and perfectly. On one hand, this school breaks mysticism and brings about some common natures of languages which are of help for translators; on the other hand, it overemphasizes this commonness but neglects their discrepancies. What's worse, it simplifies translation by assuming that after a set of procedures one language can be mechanically rendered into another language.

Dissatisfied with structuralism, some scholars like Bassnett, Lefevere, Toury and Venuti shift their sight out of language, begin to study translation from cultural, historical and ideological perspectives, and hope to unshackle the bind of language. Translation study afterwards moves from language domain into a vast field. In philosophy they hold Hermeneutics. This school is named after deconstructionism in the sense that it is anti-tradition and views meaning not as a product of language rules but as a product of dialogue. In other words, meaning is not predetermined by language but by the negotiation between the speaker and the hearer. In its extremeness,

meaning is what the reader believes it to be. Instead of viewing language as a tool for cognition, this school holds that language is a mode in which human beings exist, and without which people cannot be self-identified. This school, on one hand, widens the field of translation studies by introducing culture, ideology, and so on. On the other hand, it brings about confusions, despises and demotes the study of language into an appendage of other studies. What's worse, as Ye Zinan (2003:263) puts, this school tends to be over-political but lacks applicability in serious practice. Professor Lü Jun (2003: 69) warns that although it is necessary to study culture, history, etc, it is by no means to say this kind of study is translation studies proper. On the contrary, any research at the cost of language study will lead translation to nowhere.

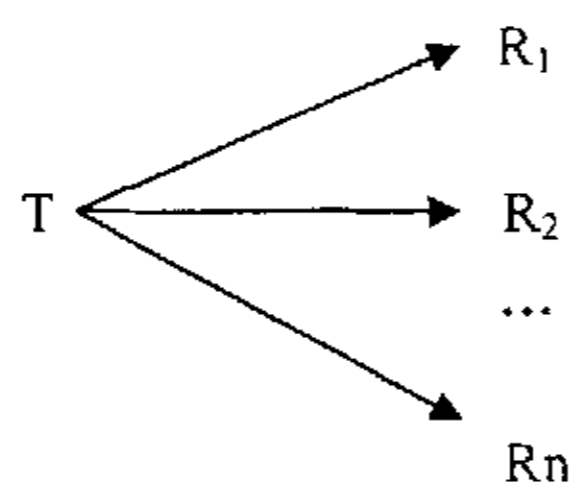
The shortcomings of the above translation studies can be traced to their philosophical bases. These philosophies, as Lü Jun claims, are *theoretical*, and it is time to turn philosophy to *practical*, and he further proposes a new way of study translation, that is, the Constructive Translatology based on the Communicative Theory (ibid: 67). In the eyes of this school, translation is an important social activity with which people share information and knowledge crossing languages and cultures. Their focus of study turns from langue into parole and tries to find out its rules for the guidance of translation.

## 4.2 Thematic structure in translation

Scholars, home and abroad, have explored this issue and conceived different modes to cover the thematic progression, a way of organization in which theme and rheme correlate with each other and develop the utterance into a bigger unit, say, a discourse. In 1977, for instance, the Dutch linguist of van Dijk put forward two basic modes: chain structure and parallel structure. The same year also witnessed Newsham's four modes. In the case of Chinese scholars, after drawing on their foreign counterparts' ideas and considering the differences between Chinese and English, they have proposed their own modes. Among them are Xu Shenghuan (1982), Huang Yan (1985), Hu Zhuanglin (1994), Zhu Yongsheng (1995). For practical convenience, we take Xu's mode for reference. According to Xu (1982: 3-5), there are four basic patterns of thematic progression, each being illustrated with examples:

### 1. A common theme takes different rhemes

Fig 5



(Note: 'T' refers to 'theme' and 'R' 'rheme'.)

Here is an example for illustration:

- (16). It (newspaper) is, in its way, an instrument of government. It plays on the minds and consciences of men. It may educate, simulate, assist, or it may do the opposite. It has, therefore, a moral as well a material existence, and its character and influence are in the main determined by the balance of these two forces. It may make profit or power its first object, or it may conceive itself as fulfilling a higher and more exacting function<sup>8</sup>.

In this example, the underlined 'It' functions as a common theme, followed by a group of rhemes to describe it from different perspectives. Broadly speaking the following two cases are also under this category, despite all that their themes have changed:

- (17). We were discussing where to go for an outing during the spring holidays. Some suggested the Guanting Reservoir. Others wanted to see the Great Wall. Then someone said, "Why not go back to Anchuang for a visit?"

*(Foreign Language Teaching and Research, 1982: 7)*

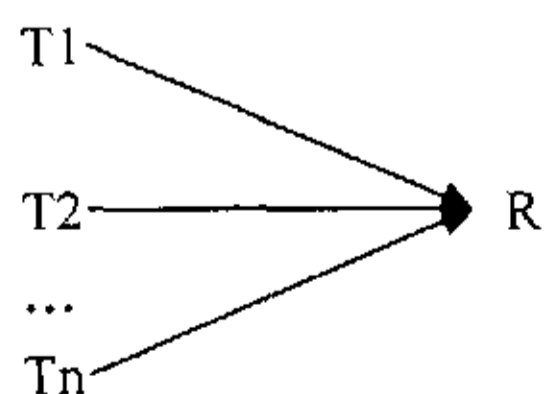
- (18). Dark clouds billowed across the sky. A rumbling could be heard in the distance. Rain came within half an hour. Lightning flashed across the sky, and thunder crashed.

*(Information Structure, 1998: 21)*

(17) falls into this pattern because 'some' and 'other' and 'someone' are under the 'we'-category, while the grouping of (18) is out of the consideration that 'dark clouds', 'a rumbling', etc, are common phenomena happening in a rainy day and are thus assumed to be under a common theme.

## 2. Different themes point to a common rheme

Fig 6



Examples:

<sup>8</sup> Available from: <http://tscn.tongtu.net>



(19). When I go into a bank I get rattled. The clerks rattle me; the wickets rattle me; the sight of the money rattles me; everything rattles me<sup>9</sup>.

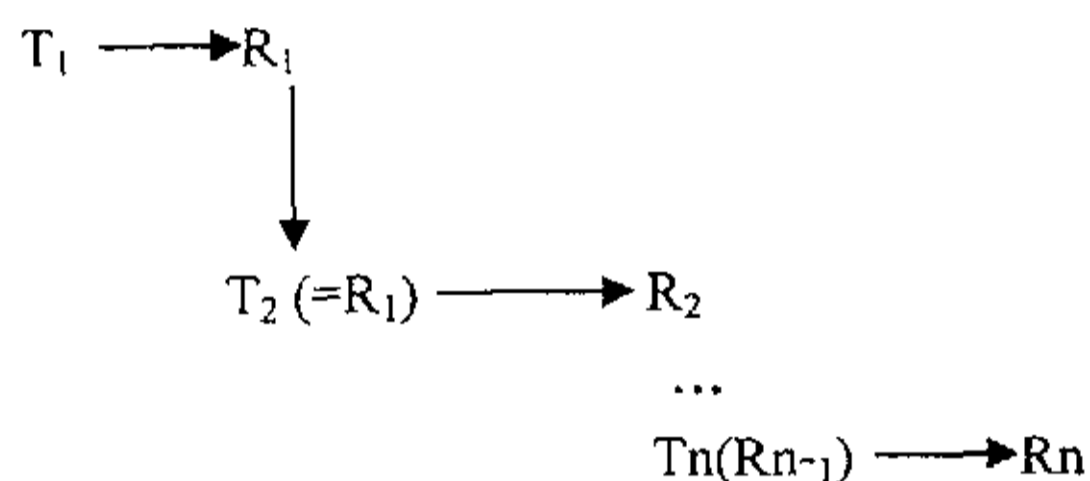
(20). It was a summer afternoon. The sun was blazing hot, just like a furnace. Every face was dripping with sweat. Everybody was soaked to the skin.

(*Information Structure*, 1998:24)

(19) is an obvious example of this pattern, with 'rattle me' as a common theme of nearly every clause. In the case of (20), however, the common theme is less obvious. Hopefully, a closer look may be accessible to it: *hot*, with every clause describing how hot it was from different angles.

### 3. Theme is the previous rheme (or part of it)

Fig 7



Example:

(21). Edison || gave his mother part of the money he made from selling newspapers. The rest || he spent on chemicals for his experiments. One of the chemicals Edison had || was phosphorus. Phosphorus || burns easily.

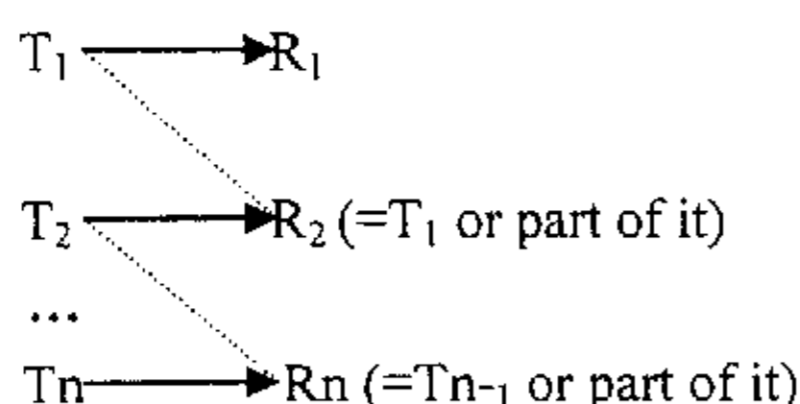
(*Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, 1982: 8)

From 'part of the money' to 'the rest', from 'chemicals' to 'one of the chemicals' and from 'phosphorus' to 'phosphorus', this stretch of utterance falls right in this category: the rheme or part of it in the previous clause assumes the role of theme of the next clause and eventually weaves the whole stretch into a smooth unit.

### 4. Theme (or part of it) becomes rheme of the following clause

Fig 8

<sup>9</sup> Available from: <http://tscn.tongtu.net>



Example:

- (22). The play was interesting, but I didn't enjoy it. A young man and a young woman troubled me. I turned around and looked at them, but they didn't pay any attention to me.

(New Concept English, 2003: 12)

Take the first sentence of (22) for illustration. 'The play' is the theme in 'the play was interesting', and afterwards it becomes rheme in 'but I didn't enjoy it.' The analysis is as workable for the whole stretch of discourse.

It must be pointed out that a text may not just follow one pattern; instead, it often proceeds in a combined way. Zhang Jin and Zhang Keding (1998: 27), after a detailed study and analysis, have found out that these patterns of thematic progression<sup>10</sup> are nearly the same to different languages. We are thus justified and motivated to follow these patterns in our translation versions.

### 4.3 Information structure

#### 4.3.1 Quantity maxim of Cooperative Principle

Neubert & Shreve assert that 'we do not translate words, but texts' (2002)<sup>11</sup>. A text is not merely a string of sentences coming together, but a 'communicative occurrence, which meets seven standards of textuality' (Beaugrande & Dresser)<sup>12</sup>.

Informativity is one of those standards, referring to the extent to which a presentation is new or unexpected for the receivers. The degree of informativity is not chosen at the translator's will; rather, it should be made up appropriately. The appropriateness can be guided by Grice's Quantity Maxim, a component of Co-operative Principle (cited from Li Fuyin & Kuiper 2000: 206-207):

- Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).
- Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

Cooperative Principle is originally designed to account for conversational exchange, but later it proves to have analogues in the sphere of transactions that are

<sup>10</sup> They have made altogether ten patterns of thematic progression.

<sup>11</sup> Available from <http://www.stjerome.co.uk/distribution/text.htm>

<sup>12</sup> Available from <http://beaugrade.bizland.com>

not talk exchange. Since translation is, in a sense, a kind of dialogue between the author (or the source text) and the translator, the maxim is justifiably a touchstone in measuring the exchange of information in the process of translation.

### 4.3.2 Gradation of information

No matter how predictable it is, every text is somewhat informative. It is as true that the degree of informativity varies accordingly. Consider the following two sentences:

(23). The sea is water.

(24). The sea is water only in the sense that water is the dominant substance present. Actually, it is a solution of gases and salts in addition to vast numbers of living organisms...

(Beaugrande & Dressler)<sup>13</sup>

We immediately perceive that (24) is much more informative than (23). This perception derives from the different functions of the same assertion of 'the sea is water': in (23) it is a well known fact to everyone that there seems to be no point in saying it while (24) takes it as a starting point for assuming something more informative—the ensuing correction of a common view is less expected. Here our perception holds water in measuring informativity, but it may not always be as feasible, since perception by nature is arbitrary and varies according to individual receivers. We are certainly in want of a better measurement to account for the degree of informativity.

Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that extremely exact numerical values can be assigned to each occurrence on every precise level. More plausible would be the assumption of a range of general probabilities, that is, measurements of higher or lower on an approximate scale. In response to this notion, informativity is divided into three levels, from level one to level three on the increase of load of information, each sufficiently broad that we might be able to distinguish them during actual communication.

It follows naturally that a normal text will be composed of level two information, seasoned with some level one and level three information. Hence the difficulty of decoding a text falls on the understanding of level three information. This difficulty spurs a reader to make a motivation search, a special case of problem-solving, in order to find out what these pieces of information signify, why they were selected, and how they can be integrated back into the continuity of the whole text. In fact, this search is a way of upgrading or downgrading the degree of informativity, to be decided by the situation in question.

However, as for a translator, what he does is more complicated than a text-reader, because he has to do several things at the same time. First, since a text is more likely to be composed of all types of information, he must judge the level of the information

<sup>13</sup> Available from <http://beaugrade.bizland.com>

in question, and then decides whether to downgrade or upgrade it, and then weaves the adjusted information smoothly into the text to make it a harmonious component instead of an intruder. What's more, a translator has no way to avoid the thorny factor of culture. Culture aside, he has no right to neglect the factors of readers, because his readers are less likely to share exactly the same background knowledge, expectations, etc, with those of the source text. Extrapolating from this point, a piece of level two information, for instance, may turn out to be a level one or level three information. As is the case that a certain information which is extremely important to its source text readers may make no sense in the target language community and thus shall be altered or deleted accordingly. The opposite is as true that some unsaid information, which is well known to its original readers, should be added or expanded for his target readers. In this sense, a translator should be a good information-mediator.

### 4.3.3 Information flow

Information flow refers to the interplay of given and new information: given ushers in new; new turns out to be given. This circle moves on to push communication forward. The materials available so far suggest that the earliest scholar who has noticed this phenomenon is Wallace Chafe. As has been mentioned earlier, Chafe relates givenness to the consciousness on the part of the addressee. More than that, he (1976: 32) stresses that givenness is a transient status: 'one indisputable property of consciousness is that its capacity is very limited. As new ideas come into it, old ones leave. The speaker's treatment of an item as given, therefore, should cease when he judges that item to have left his addressee's consciousnesses'.

One important question with implication for translation concerning successive mentions of a certain item in a text is this: how long can an element be assumed to remain in the addressee's consciousness? In other words, under what circumstances would a previously mentioned item have to be re-introduced as new?

To meet this question, Chafe (*ibid*: 32-33) suggests two variables: 'the number of intervening sentences' and 'a change of scene'. If a second mention is blocked by so large a number of intervening sentences that retrieval to the previous one is difficult or impossible, a conscientious addresser, including a translator, has reason to re-introduce it as new. It holds good in the case of changing of scene.

Information flow has also aroused Chinese scholars' attention, among which, Zan Liansheng's notion (1993: 100) sounds quite dialectic: 'the interplay of New and Old lays the foundation for information exchange. On the part the addresser, he always makes the Old pave way for the New to follow. As for the addressee, he will not be able to take in the New without the basis of the Old.'

Zhang Jin and Zhang Keding (1998:3-4) further point out that information flow is 'dynamic' as well. New information, when received by the addressee, turns out to be old and then it together with the previous old information forms the addressee's basis of knowledge, on which more new information can be flowed in. Also true that old information may be regarded as new if the addresser makes a wrong assumption or

has reasons to re-introduce it, such as for contrast. In addition, this interweaving relationship also endows us with an accessible understanding of new information by dint of the accompanying old ones. However, the old information is, after all, redundant, so the accompanying has a limitation beyond which it will be a hindrance to the transfer of useful new information, and reduce the text to a tedious string of repeated sentences.

To sum up, a translator is expected to maintain a happy match between given and new information, taking into account the level of informativity and making necessary adjustments of the information, all in the process of translation.

## Chapter 5 Applications

The hierarchical organization of this chapter is based on a straightforward principle: it starts at the simplest level of lexeme and develops in complexity by widening its focus in each section. Admittedly, the division of language into seemingly self-contained areas such as words, syntax, and discourse is artificial and open to question. For one thing, the areas are not discrete: it is virtually impossible to say where the concerns of one area end and those of another begin. Moreover, decisions taken at, say, the level of the word category during the course of translation, are influenced by the syntactical and/or discursual categories as well. Therefore, there is no 'pure' translation on its own. But artificial as it is, the division of language into discrete areas is useful for the purposes of analysis and, provided we are aware that it is adopted merely as a measure of convenience, it can help to pinpoint potential areas of difficulty in translation.

Since translation is not done in a vacuum, it is understandable to experience a lot of constraints during this process. Among them three stand out: ideology, readers' factors and culture, which separately or jointly play a significant role in translation. In another scope of inner factors, this paper especially concerns the manipulation of mediating information level and the influences of the theme-rheme structure and given-new status in information flow during the process of translation.

### 5.1 Three parameters in translation

#### 5.1.1 Ideology

According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (1994: 616), ideology forms the basis of an economic or political theory and is held by a particular group or person. It covertly controls all social activities, including translation. This subtle control over translation can be felt at least in two aspects.

For one thing, ideology influences text selection. Cases of the constrained selection of source texts in China are plentiful and can be easily found in the Minguo Period, for instance. Hurt by the aggression of foreign powers, writers like Lu Xun, Mao Dun, Bing Xin and many others, made their efforts to awake and enlighten Chinese people by selecting and translating foreign books. These books were mainly from those countries like Poland, India and Arabic countries, which had once had glorious civilization but, for the time being then, lagged far behind and consequently were bullied by other powers. In doing so, they told Chinese people that more sufferings would come unless they rose to fight. Wang Yougui (2003: 14) calls this meaningful selection 'a covert reflection of their resistance against foreign powers'.

For the other, ideology also affects the strategy of translation. Yan Fu is a case in point. His archaizing translation strategy of 'Elegance', in virtue of Pre-qin Chinese language, is 'a sugarcoated bullet to lure the elites into taking his proposals' (Wang Zuoliang 1989: 42). And eventually history has it that he succeeded.

It should be pointed out that the effect of ideology is not as visible as language changes; hence, Wang Dongfeng (2003: 16) calls it 'an invisible hand'. Invisible as it is, it never ceases affecting translator's conduct in the practical sense.

### 5.1.2 Reader's factors

Putting the source text into target text is not the whole story of translation. A successful translation always speaks of the translator's efforts of taking his readers into consideration. Nida (1999: 116) shows his concern for readers' response in his notion of 'Functional Equivalence'. In like manner, Newmark (2001: 39) displays his care for the intended reader in his definition of Communicative Translation: 'it attempts to produce on its readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained on the readers of the original.'

With reference to the Chinese scholars, we find that Yang Lili's notion is worth notice. Yang (1997: 45) suggests that a careful analysis of readers may amount to an objective knowledge of their expectations, which, to a great extent, determines how successful a translation will be. When it comes to Zhou Zhaoxiang, he (1998: 32) gives a rather commercial remark on this issue, asserting that the key point of translation lies not so much in producing an equivalent text as in making a successful and professional service for his client. In his terms, a reader becomes a client with specific requirements to be served. To meet these requirements, a translator, above all, must make sure of the goal as precisely as possible, and meanwhile develops a sensitivity to the factors of culture and pragmatics. Continuing with this, he proposes that in modern times like this when markets are segmented accordingly, a translator should carefully act on these expectations for his customer, who is accustomed to using the goods that are specifically designed for him.

### 5.1.3 Culture

It has long been recognized that language is an essential and important part of a given culture and that the impact of culture upon a given language is something complex and indispensable. When translation squeezes into the circle, it becomes even more complicated. The relationship between culture and translation is becoming a notorious question but the importance can never be over-emphasized. It is especially the case after Bassnett and Lefevere published the book entitled *Translation, History and Culture*, which for the first time in the real sense puts forward the notion of 'culture turn' (Sun Zhili, 2003: 121). Afterwards, translation study is no longer confined to the linguistic sphere, but steps into a broader realm of social culture, covering the selection of source text, the effect of translated text upon the target community, among other fields. In short, translation study is put against a greater background of context, history and culture.

If translation means transferring language information and culture to the target language community, what should a translator follow when two cultures disagree? Domesticating and foreignizing suggest themselves as the answers, but are sharply

different in directions. The disagreement can be traced back into ancient times, yet it still remains a matter of debate now. For a time, domesticating method took precedence over its counterpart, but the latter never ceased in practice and now seems to force the former to a second seat. Anyhow, by following domestication, a translator can present his readers with natural and readable versions; by following foreignization, he may introduce new expressions and ideas to enrich his target language.

Guo Jianzhong (cited from Zhang Meifang, 2001: 34) puts that the two methods are not contradictory but complimentary because cultural transplant calls for more than one method. A translator has right to choose any one or both, but important is his cultural consciousness of the differences and similarities between the two. In regard to the specifications, Guo continues, a translator may integrate factors such as the intention of the author and the purpose of translation and the type of text and readers' factors, etc., into his consideration before he makes a decision.

## 5.2 Lexical level translation

### 5.2.1 Lexical meaning

Newmark (1991: 66) puts that 'the text is the ultimate court of appeal, the sentence is the basic unit of translating, and most of the cruxes are centered in the lexical units.' To untie these cruxes, one is advised to take a look at lexical unit and its properties.

'The lexical meaning of a word or lexical unit may be thought of as the specific value it has in a particular linguistic system and the "personality" it acquires through usage within that system' (Baker 2001: 12). To specify this 'value' and 'personality', one needs to refer to its four types of meaning: prepositional meaning, expressive meaning, presupposed meaning, and evoked meaning.

First, the prepositional meaning is what a word refers to in a real or imaginary world, and provides the basis with which we can judge an utterance as true or false. Hence, an inaccurate translation is often done wrong on the part of prepositional meaning. Second comes the expressive meaning, which relates to the addresser's feelings or attitude and thus cannot be labeled as true or false. Two or more words can have the same prepositional meaning but differ in their expressive meaning. An instance is the difference between *famous* and '著名'. *Famous* is neutral in English: it has no inherent evaluative meaning or connotation. '著名', on the other hand, is commendatory in Chinese. One derivative warning is that words sharing the same 'meaning' may differ greatly in attitudes and/or degrees of forcefulness, among other things, and thus a careless translation may deviate from its original. In the third place stands the presupposed meaning, which arises from 'co-occurrence restrictions, i.e. restrictions on what other words or expressions we expect to see before or after a particular lexical unit' (Baker 2001: 14). These restrictions are of two types: selectional restrictions and collocational restrictions. Last is the evoked meaning, which derives from dialect and register variation. The dialect concerns region, time and social classes; the register concerns how to make the utterance appropriate to a



specific situation.

Of all the types of lexical meanings, the only one which relates to the truth or falsehood of an utterance is prepositional meaning. All other types of lexical meaning contribute to the overall meaning of an utterance in subtle and complex ways and are often much more difficult to analyze and thus more likely to pose difficulties for translation.

In terms of informational translation approach, a certain word, when unable to be translated to its counterpart at the same level, can be upgraded to a higher level to cover its semantic meaning. Likewise, a heavily loaded word is often downgraded for an easy communication. No matter upgrading or downgrading, it is important first of all to assess its informativity in a given context, and then adjust the information to its target setting.

## 5.2.2 Lexical application

In the following sub-section are examples<sup>14</sup> dealing with the above strategy and, in each example, the source-language word which presents a translation problem is underlined. The strategy used by the translator is highlighted in bold in the translated version. It is also noted that strategy in lexical level are more likely to be upgraded, with the help of extra explanation, than to be downgraded, because the differences usually call for additional explanations to maintain a successful information exchange in the process of translation.

### 5.2.2.1 Cases of upgrading information

Cases in this scope are more likely to be political, cultural, and others, for practical convenience, are discussed under the heading of 'miscellaneous cases', as exemplified in the following instances.

(A). Political cases:

(25). 新中国的成立, 标志着中华民族实现了空前的大团结。

The founding of **the People's Republic of China in 1949** marked an unprecedented great unity of the Chinese nation.

(Translated by Zhuang Yichuan)

(26). 我国先秦思想家早就提出了“亲仁善邻, 国之宝也”的思想, 反映了自古以来中国人民就希望天下太平、同各国人民友好相处。

Chinese thinkers of **the pre-Qin days (over 2000 years ago)** advanced the doctrine “loving people and treating neighbors kindly are most valuable to a country”. This is a reflection of the aspiration of the Chinese people for a peaceful world where people of all countries live in harmony.

(Translated by Zhuang Yichuan)

<sup>14</sup> These examples are mainly taken from translation textbooks or some other publications.

The two examples are taken from the former President Jiang Zemin's speech delivered at Harvard University on October 1<sup>st</sup> 1997 during his state visit to the United States. In allusion to (25), the notion of “新中国” is so well known to Chinese people that it never fails to remind us of Chairman Mao's announcement in 1949, filling us with pride in acquiring independence and the subsequent successes. As for the Americans, however, this notion may not be as clear to them all, who may even still retain the dated idea of the late Qing Dynasty or Minguo Period or may feel confused between China and our Taiwan province, let alone evoking the proud feelings of this independence as we do. The literal translation of ‘The founding of New China ...’ may arouse unnecessary misunderstanding, deviating from our intention. Thus, diction should be carefully made in light of this ultimate purpose. Since the evoked meaning is unavoidably lost, the prepositional meaning is placed to atone for this loss. For this end, the translator follows the expression of ‘the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949’, which is more accurate in meaning and familiar to foreigners. In addition, the supplement of ‘in 1949’ makes the idea clear and exact just as it is intended for the audience. This holds true for (26) where “先秦” is not merely put into ‘the pre-Qin days’(which makes little sense for most Americans), but is additionally attached with ‘over 2000 years ago’ in round brackets, a strategy that not only renders its prepositional meaning but also its evoked meanings, impressing them that long ago Chinese forebears had realized the importance of living harmoniously with their neighbors. In doing so, our intention is well presented.

Likewise, ‘The Four Cardinal Principles’ when first mentioned, is advised to be translated with explanation: to keep to the socialist road and to uphold the people's democratic dictatorship, leadership by the Communist Party, and Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought. This holds true with other terms like ‘Three Represents’, etc.

#### (B). Cultural cases.

(27). 腊月二十三灶王爷上天，后台封上戏箱，要等年初一开戏。

On the twenty-third of the twelfth lunar month **the Kitchen god** went up to heaven, and the theatre shut down until New Year's Day.

(Translated by Gladys Yang)

(28). 嘴里天天说，“唤起民众”，民众起来了又害怕得要死，这和叶公好龙有什么两样？

If one shouts everyday about “arousing the masses of the people”, but is scared to death when the people do rise, what is the difference between that and Lord Ye's love of dragon?

**Notes:** Lord Ye was so fond of dragons that he adorned his whole palace with drawings and carvings of them. But when a real dragon heard of his affection and paid him a visit, he was frightened out of his wits.

(Translated by Zhang Peiji)

Chinese folk legend has it that ‘灶王爷’ is a god in charge of kitchen and will go up to heaven in the twenty-third of the twelfth lunar month. Such a ‘Chinese god’ does not have its counterpart in the west, where they have different gods like Zeus, Cupid, Venus, etc. The translator of (27) is left to render this Chinese god into a Kitchen God, for the sake of keeping the prepositional meaning. Although the original evoked meaning is lost, this version still can evoke the westerners to associate it with a roughly similar image.

In (28), the Chinese “dragon” is a notoriously discussed term and hopefully more and more foreigners are aware of the sharp difference between this magical Chinese animal and their usual perception. Even so, the idiom of *Lord Ye's love of dragon* is still unrecognizable; hence the necessity of explanation. However, an explanation like this kind must tend to be lengthy and inappropriate in its context, so the translator has to postpone it beneath for the sake of readability. Mao Zedong took advantage of this well-known idiom to criticize those who pretend to support revolution but actually are scared of this movement. They are all reflected in the translation, which simultaneously contains prepositional, evoked and aesthetic meanings with the help of this attached supplement.

- (29). Off with an afghan albatross—the Soviets prepare to shed a burden, leaving turbulence behind.

丢开阿富汗这个难以摆脱的难题—苏联人准备卸包袱，把骚乱留在身后。

(Translated by Ke Ping)

- (30). Like a hairshirt or a bed of nails, the more one hates it, the more virtuous it makes one feel.

就象穿刚毛衬衣、睡钉子床一样，你越是不喜欢，就越觉得自己品行高尚。（注：刚毛衬衣、钉子床，系苦行者或忏悔者用来磨难自己的两种工具。）

(Translated by Sun Zhili)

In (29), ‘albatross’ is quoted from a poem entitled *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* by Samuel Taylor Coleridge who depicts that an albatross was killed by a mariner who later had to wear it around his neck as a penance and endure the consequent misfortunes. Hence, albatross is referred to as a constant, worrisome burden or an obstacle to success. The report of (29) employs a metaphor to indicate the severe situation of the Soviet. The translator, on the other hand, conveys this meaning by adding a modifier to show the same impact and produces a rather readable and informative version.

In the case of (30), things are different. If the translator puts the contents of the note into his version, it would be very much awkward or recognizably un-Chinese. If he doesn't add this information, the readers will be confused, unable to decode the implied meaning. With a view of a better understanding for his readers, the translator makes the two meet by first keeping the translation readable and then bracketing this

additional message at the end.

- (31). A great-grandmother of mine, who was a friend of Gibbon, lived to the age of ninety-two, and to her last day remained a terror to all her descendants. (Bertrand Russell, *How to Grow Old*)

我的一位曾祖母，和吉本<sup>15</sup>是朋友，活到九十二岁，她直到临终都使孙儿望而生畏。

(Translated by Zhuang Yichuan)

- (32). We hung on; doing nothing, you know- just hanging on waiting for the next day. Of course, the Boche knew all about that. He had it on us nicely... (Sadly.)

我们守住那个地方；一点儿什么不能做，您懂吧—就只是钉在那儿等明天。我们的计划德国鬼子<sup>16</sup>自然全都知道。他们尽揍，我们尽挨……（伤心地。）

(Translated by Lu Shuxiang)

In UK, Gibbon is a well-known historian who wrote the classical text *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, but he is certainly less known in China. Hence, the translator resorts to this way adding further information in the form of footnote to better inform his reader of this personage, of the time he lived in (1737-1794) to show how long his great-grandmother has lived. Otherwise, the readers will still be unable to figure out the point of stating she is a friend of Gibbon.

*Boche* is a French word, a contemptuous name for the German soldiers, whose meaning is unpacked in Chinese translation. The two expressions, *Boche* and ‘德国鬼子’, not only have the same prepositional meaning, but also the evoked meaning of a disdainfulness. In the case of ‘have it on us nicely’, it is an informal expression, referring to being cheated. Under the circumstance of war, it means that the German soldiers take advantage of this opportunity and inflict heavy losses on ‘us’. In view of the fact that it is put on the stage, the translator also uses a colloquial phrase to represent this meaning.

Sometimes a translator doesn't need to adjust the information and can still make sense in his version, but what he conveys may not be as clear and accurate as others who finely tune the information. The following is an example for comparing the two effects:

- (33). “你的骨头痒了么?” 王胡也站起来，披上衣服说。

- (a). “**Are your bones itching?**” demanded whiskers Wang, standing up too and draping his jacket over his shoulders.

(Translated by Yang Xianyi & Gladys Yang)

<sup>15</sup> 吉本 (Edward Gibbon, 1737-1794) 是英国历史学家，著有《罗马帝国之衰亡》(The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire)。——译注

<sup>16</sup> Boche: 德国兵(轻鄙之称, 法语)。——译注

- (b). **“Do your bones ache for a thrashing?”** queried Wang-hu, also jumping to his feet and throwing on his coat.

(Translated by Hongkong scholars)

A Chinese reader immediately senses that Wang-hu's word is a warning with which he will subsequently give Ah Q a good lesson if the latter does not give in immediately. However, in English, the word of “itch” does not relate to a beating; it may refer to a restless desire or craving for something good, such as a trip. With such a difference, what the author intends is misleading in (a) which does not seem to suggest a warning while (b) nicely conveys this message by using ‘ache for a thrashing’, which not only transfers this information but also warns Ah Q of the oncoming danger in a sarcastic tone, that is, what Ah Q is longing for is certainly not something pleasant; rather, it is a thrashing. With these words, Wang-hu's habitual superiority over Ah Q is vividly depicted. What's more, the following actions of “jumping to his feet and throwing on his coat” in (b) help to reinforce this notion that Wang-hu is ready for a fight.

### (C). Miscellaneous cases.

The term ‘miscellaneous’ is a broad category covering other cases which differ from the above two groups or may deny an easy set of the present system. Here are some examples:

- (34). 路左有巨石，石上原有苏东坡手书“云外流春”四个大字。

To its left is another rock formerly engraved with four big Chinese characters *Yun Wai Liu Chun (Beyond clouds flows spring)* written by **Su Dongpo (1037-1101), the most versatile poet of the northern Song Dynasty (960-1127).**

(Translated by Pu Yuanming )

The differences between China and the West in respect of history, culture, and geography lead to different understanding and viewpoints of the same thing. In the above traveling brochure, some items, *Yun Wai Liu Chun* for one, can only be sensed by Chinese readers that may deny translation in most cases. However, in the case of foreigners, most of them are unfamiliar to but in need of the explanation of these items for a better enjoyment. On this occasion, the translator should adjust the information to the need of his clients. For instance, in (34), the Pinyin of ‘Yun Wai Liu Chun’ means nothing to foreigners, let alone appreciation of this culture-bound stone. A literal translation, however, may mislead them to think that Su wrote it in English. In view of this problem, the translator strikes a balance between the two by first presenting its Pinyin and then bracketing its meaning in English, which, indeed, achieves a nice effect. Another item is Su Dongpo. The translator knows better that if he does not present a brief introduction of Su, provided that the space permits, he will have no good reasons in inviting foreigners to appreciate a stone. So he upgrades the information of Su with the help of an extra explanation: Su's lifetime and talents. The

following are two cases of word play.

- (35). 他笑笑说：“吓，怎么看不起？不过一般地说——”她没等他说完就说：“什么一般二般，我就不信男同志是一般，我们女同志就是二般。”  
With a smile he said: “How can I look down upon you women? However, **generally speaking**”  
“**Generally! Generally!**” She interrupted. “I don’t believe all men **have the makings of a general** and all women are **cowards**.”  
(Translated by Shan Qichang)

- (36). Miss Prism. You should get married. A misanthrope I can understand—a womanthrope, never.  
一个人恨人类而要独善其身，我可以理解；一个人恨女人而要独抱其身，就完全莫名其妙！  
(Translated by Yu Guangzhong)

Word play, a common trick, is a delight for readers but a headache for translators who always feel shackled by the differences between languages and cultures. To unshackle this fetter, a translator, sometimes, may find it worthwhile to add some closely relevant yet succinct information, as is done in (35). To a Chinese reader, ‘一般’ usually refers to ‘ordinary’, but he may immediately sense that it has changed into ‘extraordinary’ in the above context where ‘二般’ is temporarily assigned to the meaning of ‘ordinary’. This contrast is fully demonstrated in the dialogue in which the female speaker retorts and distorts the male speaker’s original meaning of ‘一般’, purposely mingling it with ‘二般’, so as to vent her displeasure of being discriminated. When it comes to the translator, he continues this word play with ‘generally’ and relates it to a ‘general’, somebody extraordinary. And then, he relates the women to ‘cowards’, somebody undesirable. In doing so, the original meaning is finely transferred.

(36) is taken from Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest* and translated by Yu Guangzhong. In the play, Miss Prism is an unmarried heroine who always speaks like a book and on this occasion, mistakes ‘misogynist’ (憎恶女人者) for ‘womanthrope’, a non-word. This mistake happens to share the same prefix of ‘mis-’ with the previous word ‘misanthrope’ (厌恶人类者), posing a challenge to its translator. It will make do to put into this: ‘一个厌世者我可以理解；一个厌女者，决不!’ However, consideration should be taken in the light of the type of the text: it is a play to be staged and therefore the lines should be colloquial. Certainly, the immediately above one is a weaker choice. In view of this, Yu gives an imitation of ‘独善其身’ and gets ‘独抱其身’. When the two phrases fit into the settings, the humor is just right there.

#### 5.2.2.2 Cases of downgrading information

In translation, not every piece of information is equally useful and important. Some may be of significance towards its original reader but of little sense towards the

target readers. Also, what attracts the target readers may well be embedded in the source readers' minds but not explicitly reflected in the text. With this discrepancy in mind, a translator is then required to fine-tune the level of information to meet this need. The following are cases of downgrading information in translation.

(37). 我厂生产的地毯图案新颖、色调雅致、美丽大方、富丽堂皇。

The carpets made in our factory are **beautiful and magnificent** for their **novel designs and elegant colors**.

(Translated by Ding Shude)

(38). 老师是桃花沟的李白、齐白石、钱钟书；老师是桃花沟的杨振宁、钱学森、华罗庚；老师是桃花沟的陶行知、马卡连科……

In the eye of the villagers, he (the teacher) was no less than a **great man of letters, a great artist, a great scientist as well as a great educator**.

(*'Chinese Literature'*, 2000: 40)

Verbiage is a good way to kill an advertisement, so ad-writer is required to make a concise writing to attract viewers and reduce cost as well. A Chinese writer usually takes full advantage of the phrases of four characters as in (37), which, as a whole, appears parallel, symmetrical, and increases its attraction to Chinese buyers who would like to see and hear this arrangement of words. Its translation, on the other hand, would be wordy if it merely resorts to literal rendering. So the translator fine-tunes the advertisement and highlights the feature of being 'beautiful and magnificent' by downgrading the originally paralleled component of 'novel designs' and 'elegant colors' into a subordinate 'for'-clause. What's more, the translator seems to know that not every Chinese phrase should be equally treated in rendering, some being for balance in style or for meaning by repetition. After trimming the redundant parts, he conceives the translation that well serves the same purpose in appealing to customers.

In (38) the underlined personages are renowned masters in their respective realm but are pardonably omitted in translation. An otherwise rendering will produce a long list of annotations or footnotes which are more likely to impair the readability and enjoyment of reading on the part of receivers. A second look at these masters may lead the translator to find the fact that the teacher is, in the eyes of the villagers, as great and versatile as these masters. With this understanding in mind, the translator is freed to downgrade the information into a generalized compliment of '*a great man of letters, a great man of artist, a great scientist as well as a great educator*', in correspondence with those masters.

### 5.3 Syntactic level translation

At syntactic level, cases of downgrading information in translation are on the increase, and the arrangements of theme-rheme structure and given-new information

become salient in the service of translation. These aspects will be discussed with examples in the following.

### 5.3.1 Mediating information at syntactic level

The previous section gives ample examples of upgrading information at lexical level, but when it comes up to syntactic level, cases of downgrading information increase because of syntactic needs in organizing sentence. The following two examples are for upgrading information but space is subsequently given to downgraded cases as we go along.

- (39). In the age of information, we are open books.  
在信息时代，我们每个人的一切情况都没有什么秘密可言了。
- (40). Several million of people have lived near or below the breadline for almost two decades.  
差不多 20 年了，生活在贫困线以下，或温饱问题还没有完全解决的仍有几百万人。

(Translated by He Gangqiang)

'To be an open book' means to be reduced to an undesirable status where one's secret is as easily accessible as a book open to every one. Its evoked meaning is vividly depicted with the help of 'open'. However, the Chinese language does not have this expression, so the translator atones for this loss by a detailed explanation of its meaning. In the case of (40), the translator amplifies on the notion of 'the breadline', possibly because he believes that some readers are still in want of this knowledge that the west people take bread as their staple food, so people who are living near (on or below) this line is living in poverty, this point being reflected in the translation as well. The following is devoted to the cases of downgraded information.

- (41). 现在合同已签了，真是木已成舟，生米煮成了熟饭，只好如此了。  
As the contract has been signed, **what's done is done and can't be undone**.

(Translated by Liu Jichun)

- (42). 今天略备薄礼，不成敬意，望各位笑纳！  
Now we have some presents for you and hope you'll like them.  
(Translated by Jia Wenbo)

The Chinese idiom of “木已成舟” is synonymous with that of “生米煮成了熟饭”，referring to the end result which cannot be restored. The repetition of them in the Chinese language is allowed and employed to reinforce this effect; on the other hand, it is unnecessary and unsuitable to translate this message twice into English, which stylistically does not sanction. Actually, alone as it is, the English phrase of 'what's done is done and can't be undone' will do in its own right. In the case of (42), it is a



typical Chinese way of expression when giving a present: the so called “薄礼” (present) will not be as “薄” (humble) as claimed. However, foreigners generally do not appreciate this self-degrading manner, so the translator has to rule out all the unnecessary information to adjust to the readers’ taste.

### 5.3.2 Theme-rheme structure at syntactic level

The notion of theme and rheme has been introduced in the second chapter and this chapter will focus its discussion on *subject theme* and *topic theme*, leaving other aspects untouched, because a paper with limited space like this is unable to cover everything concerning theme and rheme.

Zhao Yuanren in 1968 first introduced the notion of topic-comment of the Chinese language. In 1970, Li, Charles N. & Sandra Thompson classified English into ‘subject-prominent’ language and Chinese ‘topic-prominent’ language. According to Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching & Applied Linguistics (2002: 454), a subject-prominent language is a language in which the grammatical units of subject and predicate are basic to the structure of sentence and in which sentences usually have subject-predicate structure; a topic-prominent language is one in which the information units of topic and comment are basic to the structure of sentences.

The topic of a clause in topic-prominent language like Chinese always occurs in initial position. In this case, it coincides with theme in Halliday’s model. However, topic also has a control over anaphoric reference so that (a) once an element is announced as topic, this element may be omitted altogether in subsequent clauses, hence the proliferation of subjectless clause in Chinese and (b) an element announced as topic overrides possible co-referential links with other elements in the sentence. Starting from this point, we can draw a difference between subject theme and topic theme as follows:

(43). 那座危房	轰一声倒掉了。
Actor	Action
Subject theme	Rheme
(44). 那座危房	幸亏去年没下雪
Topic	Comment
Topic theme	Rheme

The same starting point leads to two analyses because it functions differently. Logically speaking, in (43), ‘那座危房’ (that dilapidated house) can take the action of ‘倒掉了’ (topple down). Here, ‘that dilapidated house’ is actor and ‘topple down’ action. And ‘that house’ is more of a subject theme to be completed by the rheme. However, it is not the case in (44), where ‘that dilapidated house’ is logically unable to give the action of ‘幸亏去年没下雪’ (luckily, it didn’t snow last year). Actually, this same starting point is more of a topic theme to be commented on by what follows. The above analysis suggests that the function of topic theme is to specify some kind of framework, for instance, time, location, or individual reference, within which the

main statement applied. In Chafe's terms (1976: 51), the 'real' topics are not so much 'what the sentence is about' as 'the frame within which the sentence holds'. Cao Fengfu (1998: 116) also agrees that such a topic takes the function of setting the framework for interpreting the sentence as a whole. Incidentally, topic theme does not just control reference within sentence boundary; its control stretches out of sentence boundary as well. That is why once a topic is announced in Chinese text, the subject(s) of subsequent sentences can be omitted.

This notion has already been applied to the translation between English and Chinese. Sometimes it is almost compulsory to take advantage of Chinese topic theme, which are illustrated in the follow examples:

(45). Do you see the glass as half full rather than half empty?

(a). “你是把杯子看作半满而不是半空吗？”

(Translated by a student)

This student may likely be regarded as having fulfilled his task in the sense that the original meaning seems to be undeniably transplanted in the Chinese version. However, strictly speaking, he has not, because we can at least pick out one problem: it reads awkward. The problem can be remedied with the help of Chinese topic theme, in term of the following considerations. First, in the English version, 'the glass' is a part of the rheme, modified by 'half full' and 'half empty'. It is not an easy matter to smoothly put these modifiers into proper Chinese, least of all in an interrogative statement, which twists tongue in pronouncing. However, if they are viewed as a kind of comment on 'the glass', it makes things easier. Following this idea, we let 'the glass' assume the role of topic theme and put it into '盛有半杯水的杯子', and make the rest a comment, or rheme, to be terminological. And then, the task of translation can be fulfilled as follows:

(b). 盛有半杯水的杯子，你是否只考虑它有水的一半，而不管那没水的一半？

(Translated by Li Yunxing)<sup>17</sup>

The following example is a bit different:

(46). It's easy to overlook the pleasure we get from loving and being loved, the company of friends, the freedom of live where we please, even good heath.

施人以爱，被人所爱，友人相伴，对住所的选择随心所欲，乃至身体健康，这一切所带来的快乐都易为人们所忽略。

(Translated by Xu Lina)

This difference lies in the status of topic theme: it is not a noun but a complete sentence which runs from the beginning and stops before the Chinese character of

<sup>17</sup> Available from <http://tscn.tongtu.net>

‘这’. This character is not included in the topic theme but it goes parallel to and refers back to this theme. Just as the English language conveniently takes the function word of ‘it’ to refer to a clause so as to achieve a stylistic balance, so is the Chinese topic theme which may as conveniently converge at the pronoun of ‘这’, followed by a comment on what it refers to. The following is an example<sup>18</sup> of C/E translation.

- (47). 这以后的路，卢进勇走得特别快。(天黑的时候，他追上了后卫部队。)
- (a) The rest of the journey Lu finished quickly. (He caught up with the rear-guard before dark.)
- (b). Lu finished the rest of the journey quickly. (He caught up with the rear-guard before dark.)

In (a) of (47), ‘*the rest of journey*’ takes the theme position but it is inconsistent with the following theme of ‘He’, resulting in a disjointed version, though, when standing alone, it reads like a stressed English sentence. In contrast, (b) makes ‘Lu’ in line with the following sentence, appearing smooth and connected. This suggests that what is syntactically allowed may not be contextually allowed and that it may be practical to put the Chinese topic theme into a part of English rheme, with the original information retained.

### 5.3.3 Given-new information at syntactic level

It proves insufficient just to convey the contents of the source text into the target text, because the status of information also means a lot in the original text and an ignorance of this feature may result in an incomplete translation. As has been analyzed in Chapter Two, the selection of given-new information is not at random but in accordance with the development of the whole text. An analysis of the given and new information will usually amount to a more precise understanding of the original text, on which translation goes.

- (48). This fundamental and self-evident factor we have not ceased to stress since 1957, when we were able to free ourselves a little from colonial tutelage.

一九五七年，我们从殖民主义统治下获得初步解放。从那时起，我们就不断地强调这个根本的、不说自明的因素。

(Translated by Xu Shenghuan)

Informationwise, it transfers smoothly the original messages into the Chinese text; however, defect appears when viewed from the perspective of the given-new information. In the original text, ‘factor’ is the given information, the starting point, so what follows is about this ‘factor’. But the translated text places ‘我们’ in the initial position to lead the whole sentence, impressing the readers that this is about ‘我们’, instead of the original ‘factor’. This deviation distorts the writer’s intention in which he inverses the object of ‘factor’ in the position of subject in order to emphasize this

<sup>18</sup> Available from <http://tscn.tongtu.net>

point. More examples of this kind are in the following:

(49). The mantle of your high office has been placed on your shoulder at a time when the world at large and this Organization are going through an exceptionally critical phase.

(a). 正当全世界和本组织处于一个非常危险的时期中, 这个崇高职务的重担落在了你的肩上。

(Translated by a student)

(b). 这个崇高职务的重担, 是正当全世界和本组织处于一个非常危险的时期之际, 落在你的肩上的。

(Translated by Chen Yi)

(50). Most indicative, perhaps, of the current trend have been shifts in the Carter administration's posture in Korea.

(a). 卡特政府在朝鲜的姿态度转变, 也许最能说明当前这一动向。

(Translated by a student)

(b) 也许最能说明当前这一动向的, 是卡特政府在朝鲜的姿态度转变。

(Translated by Chen Yi)

In the English sentence of (49), 'the mantle of your high office' is the given information and the following background in which it occurs is new information as well as the focus of the sentence. But the translator in (a) does it reversely by putting the focus of the sentence in the initial position and giving the weight to the already known information, resulting in a distorted arrangement of information. In contrast, the translator of (b) takes this point into account and makes the real focus salient with the help of the Chinese word '是', which gives due emphasis to where it belongs.

(50) is an inverse sentence putting its end in highlight. As for its translation, the first version, though it reads like good Chinese and well conveys the information, fails to reflect this feature. On the other hand, the second adjusts itself to meet the distribution of information by following the inverse sequence too. In doing so, the emphasis of the whole sentence is given to the due part, and complies nicely with the original sentence.

## 5.4 Discoursal level translation

Mediating information at discoursal level is well established in translation, which will be exemplified shortly. Prominence is saved for the application of the distinction between subject theme and topic theme in translation at the same level. After the two points, the function of thematic progression patterns will be discussed with examples at the end.

### 5.4.1 Mediating information at discoursal level

At discoursal level, mediating information, more often than not, takes the form of downgradation, due to the fact that discourse is a semantic unit and contains

self-complete information which does not need to rely on extra-explanation to fulfill the task of communication. In fact, chances are that a discourse needs to lower the intensity of information in the course of translation, as is illustrated in the following example:

- (51). 满树金花，芳香四溢的金桂；花白如雪，香气扑鼻的银桂；红里透黄，花多味浓的紫砂桂；花色似银，季季有花的四季桂，竞相开放，争艳媲美。进入桂花公园，阵阵桂花花香扑鼻而来。

The park of Sweet Osmanthus is noted for its profusion of osmanthus. Flowers from these trees in **different colors** are in **full bloom** which pervade the whole garden **with the fragrance of their blossoms**.

(Translated by Min Dayong)

As seen from the above example, the Chinese and English tend to take different ways in organizing text. In the Chinese version, it is a nice way to write to first introduce these colorful and fragrant osmanthus and then let them lead travelers to the garden, well complying with our spiral thought pattern. On the other hand, the English language is more likely to come to the point directly and then develops it into detail but less likely to follow a roundabout way in organization. Organization aside, the text type, a traveling brochure in its real sense, requires the English version to put the garden's name in initial position as a starting point to usher in further information, whereas Chinese travelers who know well about the name of the garden are more interested in what they will have in the garden. Continuing with this point, the Chinese ad-writer, in order to put it more attractive, resorts to repeating the Chinese phrases consisting of four characters, which are to the liking of Chinese readers but will, on the other hand if they are literally translated, impose bewilderment on the foreigners who may not put up with this redundancy, let alone appreciating the appeal. Actually, the repetition of those phrases is designed to convey the information that in this garden osmanthus are in different colors, in full bloom and with fragrance, etc. With this notion in mind, the translator justifies himself in lowering or deleting unnecessary information to adjust to the needs of his foreign travelers.

#### 5.4.2 Theme-rheme structure at discoursal level

In the chapter of informational translation criterion, I have introduced the four types of generalized thematic patterns and asserted that these patterns are observed with little difference between the two languages so that a translator may rely on this criterion for improving his translation. As it is unnecessary to cite endless examples one by one, here I want to save myself by just selecting a few cases to illustrate its value for translation:

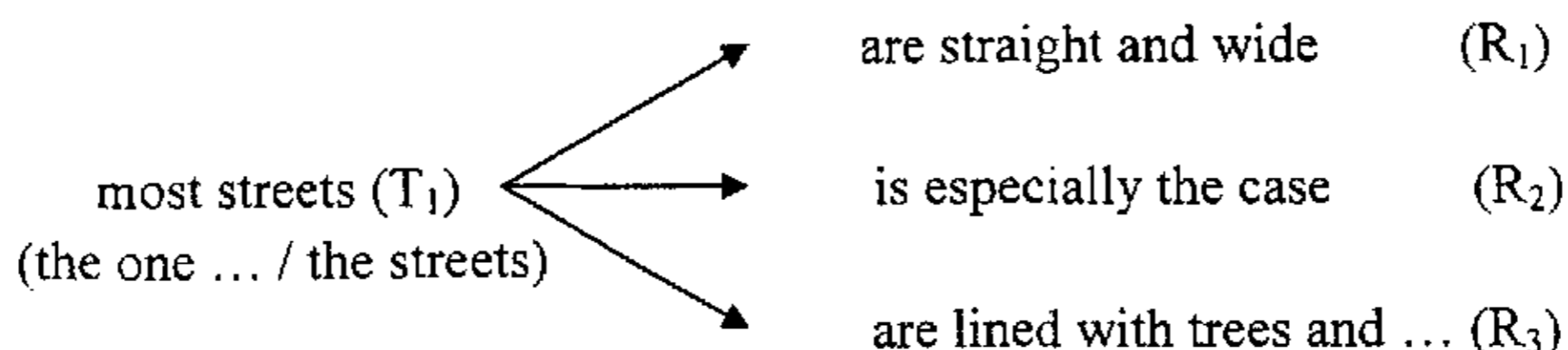
- (52). 长安城内街道宽广笔直，主要大街宽度都在一百米以上，宫门前的一条东西向的大街，足有二百二十米之宽。道路两旁种有青槐和榆树，并有完整的排水系统。

(a). The streets were straight and wide. The avenues were over 100m in

width. The one outside the palace, running from east to west, was fully 220m wide. Ash and elm trees lined the streets, all of which had a sewerage system.

(Translated by Lu Ruichang)

This is an introduction to the streets of Chang-an, which unfolds itself in three directions. This development complies with the first pattern of thematic progression (Fig. 5), in which, a common theme takes several rhemes or is explained from several perspectives. This pattern is especially useful in expository writing like the above one, because it greatly eases its writer who wants to carry out or expatriate on his topic from several angles. In the case of reader, he may, for instance, easily conceive a picture of Chang-an's streets (the common theme) as follows:



However, this coherent thematic progression is replaced by a chaotic pattern, whose themes move from 'the street' (T<sub>1</sub>) to 'the avenues' (T<sub>2</sub>) to 'the one' (T<sub>3</sub> = T<sub>1</sub>) and finally to 'the ash and elm trees' (T<sub>4</sub>), resulting in twisted and disjointed version. One remedy for this chaos is to follow the original thematic progression as in (b):

- (b). **The streets in Chang'an** were straight and wide, with the main streets over 100m in width, and **the one in front of the palace**, running from east to west, even 220ms wide. **All of them** were lined with locust and elm trees on both sides and equipped with drainage system.

(Translated by Lü Jun & Hou Xiangqun)

The high readability and faithfulness of this revised version are mainly out of the observance of the original thematic progression, which lets 'the street' re-assume the position of a common theme, followed by three rhemes. The following is a translation from English to Chinese also in this regard:

- (53). We are met on a great battlefield of the war. We have come to dedicate a portion of the field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.
- (a). 我们在这场战争中的一个伟大战场上集会。烈士们为使这个国家能够生存下去而献出了自己的生命，我们在此集会是为了把这个战场的一部分奉献给他们作为最后的安息之所。我们这样做是完全应该而且非常恰当的。

(Translated by a student)

It really pays to make an analysis of the theme-rheme structure before we set out to do the translation. To begin with, we may easily find that the original takes 'we' as the common theme and expands on this theme in three sentences. In venturing so, meanwhile we have to admit that it may be controversial to make such a claim, as the last sentence may not sanction, whose theme seems to be 'it' that holds the initial position and meets the qualification of being theme according to definition. However, if we approach this sentence at the hint of 'cleft' sentence, we may find that it is rational to regard 'we' as theme in the sentence in question. In a cleft sentence, which takes the form of 'it is ... that', the initial 'it' is more of a function word whose role is to put emphasis on the real theme which, in position, falls between 'is' and 'that'. In a likewise manner, we may go at the last sentence and arrive at a somewhat similar conclusion. It is true that this 'it' is initiated in terms of position and 'we' is postponed in the rear, but this arrangement is more for stylistic sake and the 'real' sequence may be: 'That we should do this is altogether fitting and proper.' So far, we can be sanctioned to assign 'we' in question to theme (along with other components, 'we' takes this role).

Against this analysis, the above translation is found violating the arrangement of theme, making an inappropriate switch between themes. It starts from '我们' (T<sub>1</sub>), and then changes into '烈士们' (T<sub>2</sub>), and then back into '我们' (T<sub>1</sub>), leaving the coherence of the passage and force of the speech partly impaired. To redeem it from impairment, we have to pursue the original theme-rheme structure like the following:

- (b). 今天，我们在这场战争的一个伟大的战场上集会，是为了把战场的一角奉献给那些为捍卫国家生存而在这里英勇牺牲的烈士，作为他们的永久安息之地。我们这样做是完全应该的，是义不容辞的。

(Translated by Lu Jun &amp; Hou Xiangqun)

So far, we have exemplified the importance of adhering to the original theme-rheme structure in translation and displayed the impairment incurred by doing otherwise. This is not to suggest that following this way is a must and panacea, and that any other way should be banned in translation. It is of course not the case. Translation can be done through various approaches which are likely at odds with the proposed one but still guarantee good versions. There are chances where this proposed method must be abandoned and give way to other considerations, when occasion arises. This sophistication of translation cannot be fully demonstrated here but may be hinted to a certain degree by the following example:

- (33). 我的最大爱好是沉思默想。我可以一个人长时间地独处而感到愉快。独享欢乐是一种愉快，独自忧伤也是一种愉快。孤独的时候，精神不会是一片纯粹的空白，它仍然是一个丰富多彩的世界。情绪上的大欢乐和大悲痛往往都在孤独中产生。孤独中，思维可以不依照逻辑进行。孤独更多地产生人生的诗情—激昂的和伤感的。孤独可以使人的思想向更深邃

的地方伸展，也能使你对自己或环境作更透彻的认识和检讨。

- (a) My greatest avocation is musing. I can stay by myself for a long time without feeling disconsolate in the least. Happiness enjoyed alone is a pleasure, so is sorrow tasted privately. In solitude, the mind is not a complete blank; it remains a rich and colorful world. Solitude often induces ecstasy or anguish, and allows thinking to wander in a random way. She inspires the mood for poems, passionate or pathetic. She also enables people to think further and deeper and to have a more thorough understanding and examination of themselves and their environment.

(Translated by a student)

- (b) My favorite thing to do is to indulge myself in meditation. I find it not unpleasant to stay all by myself, even for long. For, to me, it is a treatment to brood over my sadness as well as to enjoy my own happiness all exclusively. Lonely as I am, my inner world is far from being a sheer sheet of blank paper, but a rather colorful cosmos. It's always in loneliness that wild joy or deep sorrow is produced; that thinking proceeds without complying with logic, thus a stronger poetic mood, passionate or sentimental, come into being; that my thoughts are allowed to run farther and deeper into recesses. I'm, therefore, able to get a more thorough knowledge and criticism of myself and the outside world.

(Translated by Lü Jun & Hou Xiangqun)

The two versions follow different thematic progression patterns, possibly resulting from their translators' dissimilar semantic understanding of the original text. The Chinese text in question follows Parataxis<sup>19</sup>, the opposite to English Hypotaxis<sup>20</sup>, in organizing language components into a discourse. Following this way, Chinese language is more in the sense of having covert coherence while English overt cohesion. As for the first translation, its translator also follows the Chinese thematic progress, obtaining a superficial structure. However, he fails to take into account the beneath semantic structure, let alone using an overall pattern to control the seemingly loose sentences, which actually are semantically united; hence an unfastened version, which is less acceptable in English. In the case of the second version, it goes reversely, uniting these loose sentences into a bigger semantic unit and inserting some connectives to joint them together, resulting in a coherent and logical text as a whole in accord with the organization of the English language.

With reference to this discrepancy, Lü and Hou (2001: 153-154) point out that 'the thematic progression along will not be sufficient in doing translation; it is as

<sup>19</sup> The arranging of clauses one after the other without connectives showing their relation.

<sup>20</sup> The dependent or subordinate construction or relationship of clauses with connectives.

(Lian Shuneng 1993: 48)



necessary to take the covert semantic structure into consideration'. Baker (2000: 171) holds a similar viewpoint by admitting that 'the most common strategy by far seems to be to abandon the thematic organization of the source text in favor of adhering to whatever word-order principles may be operating in the target language'. In plain terms, most translators prefer to give priority to the syntactic principles of the target language rather than that of the source text. In spite of this imperfection, an awareness of thematic progression, as is exemplified above, establishes itself as a useful direction in relieving tension between cross-language communications. What's useful is, besides this point, the awareness of the given-new information in translation, which will be immediately discussed.

#### 5.4.3 Given-new information at discoursal level

As far as Halliday and Hasan are concerned, information structure is a feature of spoken rather than written English<sup>21</sup>. If it is really the case, this approach may seem of limited applicability in translation since it appears to rely heavily on phonological evidence. This, however, is not the case. In written language, as in spoken language, one can refer to the context to establish whether a piece of information has or has not been introduced earlier. What's more, many of the devices used to signal information status are common to both spoken and written language. For instance, pronouns are inherently given information, because first and second person pronouns are the items whose givenness is determined contextually. Some syntactic devices, such as cleft sentence, perform a similar function: in cleft sentence, the item in theme position is presented as new and the item in rheme position is presented as given.

Failure to perceive the functions of specific strategies in signaling given and new can result in unnecessary shifts in translation as in the following example:

- (34). The time, of course, was the early 1960s. The dynamic young president was John F. Kennedy. The technological feats that so alarmed the West were the launch of Sputnik and the early Soviet lead in space. And the rapidly growing Eastern economies were those of the Soviet Union and its satellite nations.

时间当然是 20 世纪 60 年代。肯尼迪当时是年轻的精力充沛的总统。东方的技术成就让西方大吃一惊，因为苏联发射了第一颗人造卫星，在航天领域苏联已经领先。东方经济体的经济迅速成长，这些经济体是苏联和它的卫星国的经济体。

(Translated by a student)

Before we come to analyze this passage, two points should be added here that this excerpt is taken from an English fable and that it serves as an ending which unveils one by one the previous truths. It follows that those myths mentioned earlier should

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21 The information systems are those concerned with the organization of the text into units of information. This is expressed in English by the intonation patterns, and it is therefore a feature only of spoken English. (Halliday and Hasan, 1976: 325)

be treated as given information and the truths that arrive finally should be viewed as new information. To be specific, its information flow runs like this:

The time	(Given)	was the early 1960s	(New);
The dynamic young president	(Given)	was John. F. Kennedy	(New);
The technological feats	(Given)	were the launch of Sputnik and ...	(New);
The ... Eastern economies	(Given)	were those of the Soviet Union and ...	(New)

This information flow not only complies with the overall development of the whole story, but also highlights the new information which draws contextual attention. However, where this translation is concerned, things are different. Yet, to its fairness, this version sounds like standard Chinese and can be claimed that it has fulfilled its task if the task is merely to transfer meaning from English text into Chinese text. Nevertheless, as is explained earlier, information is more than the contents of what the original says; actually it often involves the ways of how it is uttered. Information flow, among other things, is inherently one of these ways and thus cannot be neglected in the process of translation. After going through the above translation, however, a careful reader may have the sense that it is out of tone with the whole discourse, that is, it mistakes the given for the new or the new for the given, leaving the original writer's intension unrealized. In view of this problem, a revision is proposed as follows:

时间当然是六十年代早期。那位精力充沛的总统就是肯尼迪。让西方大吃一惊的东方科技成就是苏联第一颗人造卫星的发射和早期苏联在航天领域的领先地位。至于说快速发展的东方经济体则是苏联和它的卫星国的经济体。

(Translated by Ye Zinan)

It is clear that the improved version not only preserves the given-new status in information flow and thus avoids the abruptness in organization, but also keeps it in coherence as a whole. So far, it stands to reason to suggest that translation, in a strict sense, should adhere to the contextually determined information flow.

Context aside, another point to bear in mind is that givenness is assigned by the speaker and, as such, does not necessarily correlate with the reality of the linguistic or extra-linguistic situation. A speaker may decide to present an element as new when there are enough intervening sentences or a change of scene or even when there is no sufficient reason to assume that it is out the addressee's consciousness. Presenting a piece of information as given suggests that it is already established and agreed and is therefore non-negotiable. This may be done for rhetorical reasons and, in a sense, a consideration for the readers, who may, at the time of reading, forget its givenness after processing enough intervening sentences; otherwise, the readers would feel abrupt, being it the same for both the original and target readers. Baker (2000: 155) suggests that an element, which has been mentioned before, may be presented as new because it is unexpected or because the speaker wishes to present it in a contrastive light. Hence, a conscientious translator should not neglect this point.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusions

This paper draws on the Information Theory to conceive the notion that translation is transferring information from the source text to the target text. Its justification lies in the similarities between communication in informational sense and translation in linguistic sense: both are designed to transmit messages to the intended receptors through a similar process, in virtue of language (the main media of communication), and against the distracter of 'noise'. The resulting approach proves viable and rewarding in both aspects of theoretical exploration and practical application.

However, the pioneer research in this regard is found short of depth and accuracy. It fails to take into consideration the features of information and the bearings of some key parameters upon this transmission, and wrongly assumes an ideal information flow.

Aiming at a solution to the above, this paper probes into the detailed features of information in terms of theme-rheme structure, given-new information flow, redundancy of information and the division of informativity. The theme-rheme structure reflects the development of the original text as well as the writer's intention in organizing his materials, so is the given-new information flow, which especially concerns the status of information according to whether it is already known to the hearer in question or not. The two differ in orientations: the notion of theme-rheme is speaker-oriented but that of given-new is hearer-oriented. Anyhow, generally speaking, a translator is expected to comply with the original pattern of thematic progression and reflect the given-new information flow all in his translation. Second comes the division of informativity, followed by the discussion of redundancy of information. Informationwise, an item may not assume the same amount of information, comparing with its counterpart in another language system. What follows naturally is the careful adjustment of informativity during the course of translation in light of a list of factors. The inner factors are mainly in the sense of language system itself and discussed with ample examples in chapter five from lexical level up to syntactic and eventually discursal level. The outside factors are discussed under the heading of 'three parameters', namely, ideology, readers' factor and culture. As for the redundancy of information, they may turn out to be some subsidiary information, which may be capable of facilitating comprehension.

However, it has to be acknowledged that, in spite of being available in theory, some ideas are in fact rarely used in practice, such as the variable of 'intervening sentences' in re-identifying givenness for translation. What's more, sometimes, thematic organization of the source text has to be abandoned for a coherent point of view in the translated version. Moreover, a natural and smooth version may be at the cost of distorting the original information flow. When referring to applications, its limitation can also be felt in the sense that the judgment of the degree of informativity is highly subjective and varies from translator to translator. A scientific and feasible measurement of this kind is still wanted.

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