

# A STUDY OF INTERSUBJECTIVITY IN TRANSLATION FROM A COGNITIVE PERSPECTIVE<sup>i</sup>

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**Abstract:** With the emergence of a “cultural turn” in western translation researches since the 1970s, translators’ subjectivity has been highlighted, and some researchers have also been aware of the existence of intersubjectivity in translation activities; however, the views on the connotation and origin of intersubjectivity in translation are still controversial. This paper attempts to probe into the root causes for the existence of “intersubjectivity in translation” from a cognitive perspective, based on the fundamental “reality-cognition-language” principle in the Embodied Philosophy and cognitive linguistics. According to this principle, “cognition” mediates between “reality” and “language”. Language is formed on the basis of bodily experience and through the processing of human cognitive mechanism. Language is not a self-contained system, but closely related to the external world and human cognition. Furthermore, the author analyzes in depth Prof. Wang Yin’s viewpoint of “weakening phenomena” on “reality-cognition-language”, which sheds light on the study of intersubjectivity in translation. Qualitative research methods (including interviews and translation tests, etc.) have been adopted to collect relevant research data from carefully chosen respondents with different cultural backgrounds and bilingual competence, showing the manifestations of intersubjectivity in translation and the rationality of the kernel “reality-cognition-language” principle in cognitive linguistics. In conclusion, fundamentally, it is the

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“commonness” and “differences” of individual subjects involved in translation activities (including the original author, the translator, the reader of the target text, and the translation initiator, etc.) together with the complicated interrelations among “reality”, “cognition” and “language” that cause intersubjectivity in translation. Intersubjectivity and subjectivity are interdependent, coexisting in the holistic field of translation.

**Keywords:** Intersubjectivity in translation; cognitive linguistics; the embodied philosophy; “reality-cognition-language”.

## **1. Introduction**

When retrospectively on the long history of translation studies, we can see that the traditional translation studies focus mainly on the analysis of linguistic transformation and put the principle of “faithfulness to the original” in the first place. In the static text-centered studies, the translator’s subjectivity in translation activities has long been obscured. With the emergence of the “cultural turn” in western translation studies since the 1970s, proper and increasing attention has been paid to the subjectivity of the translator.

From the status quo of studies on subjectivity and intersubjectivity in translation, it is delightful to know that the subjectivity of the translator and the necessity of communicating among the author, the translator, and the reader have already been recognized by translation researchers; some scholars have been aware of the existence of intersubjectivity in translation activities. However, there are still divergent viewpoints on some basic concepts, such as “Who is the subject of translation?”, “What is the subjectivity of the translator?”, “What is the connotation of intersubjectivity in translation?”, etc. What are the root causes for the existence of intersubjectivity in translation? All these questions need to be answered. Translation studies involve many factors such as the original author, the source text, the translator, the target language reader, the translation initiator, the target text, the times and the society in which the author or the translator lives, the translator’s bilingual competence, aesthetic abilities, outlook on life and the world, etc. In the final analysis, such factors are closely related to “reality”, “cognition” and “language”. Therefore, this thesis attempts to further study intersubjectivity in translation from a cognitive perspective based on the fundamental “reality-cognition-language” principle of the Embodied Philosophy and cognitive linguistics.

## **2. Literature review: retrospection and reflection on previous translation studies**

Translation activities are rather complicated. To quote Richards' words, translation process "may be the most complex type of event yet produced in the evolution of the cosmos" (Richards 1953, 250). In retrospect, due to the complexity of translation, there are many different paradigms prevailing in translation studies. Here we will just list some of the most popular ones in translation circles: Edwin Gentzler introduces five approaches to translation studies that began in the mid-sixties and are still influential today: 1) the North American translation workshop; 2) the "science" of translation; 3) early translation studies; 4) polysystem theory; 5) deconstruction (Gentzler 1993, 2). Eugene A Nida formulates three types of translation theories, namely, philology; linguistics, especially socio-linguistics; semiotics, particularly socio-semiotics (Nida 2001, 10, 242). These paradigms mentioned above are typical of classification in the western translation theories. In China, the widely accepted paradigm is represented by the Chinese scholar Professor Lü Jun (Lü, 2001, 8–11), who puts forward three stages of translation studies: philological studies, structuralist studies, and deconstructive studies. Later Professor Lü Jun put forward a new paradigm, a constructivist perspective of translation study (Lü, 2007). Another translation researcher Chen Daliang has advanced three paradigms from a new perspective based on three key literary elements, the author, the text, and the reader. In his view, translation studies can fall into three categories: 1) author-oriented paradigm; 2) source text-oriented paradigm; 3) translator-oriented paradigm (Chen 2005, 3–9). Besides, some other Chinese scholars such as Fu Yonglin (1999), Chen Dehong & Zhang Nanfeng (2000) in Hongkong, have expressed their views on translation paradigms, etc.

By synthesizing these varying paradigms of translation at home and abroad, we can have a general idea of the evolution of translation theories. The lack of a universally acceptable paradigm in translation shows that translation is rather complicated, and translation theorists carry out translation studies from different perspectives.

### **2.1. The three stages of translation studies**

In this thesis, we will review the history of translation studies from three stages respectively relating to the three key links in the process of communication (mainly referring to written language) "the author – the text – the reader". Here, the three stages refer to "the philological stage", "the stage of structuralism", and "the stage of post-structuralism", which will be discussed in detail as follows:

### **2.1.1. The Philological Stage**

According to the well-known Chinese translation researcher Professor Lü Jun (Lü 2001, 8–11), the development of translation studies in China before the middle 1980s can be termed the Philological Stage, which is also called “traditional era” by some scholars (Toury 1980, 16–17). During this period, the nature of translation studies is “pre-scientific”, with “early enthusiasm for freedom in translating” (Nida 1993, 2–3, 159), lacking of the guidance of any systematic theory, whether of modern linguistic theories or of modern artistic theories. The attitudes towards translation at this stage were more subjective rather than objective. Understanding the source text mainly relies on the translator’s “intuition”. “Inspiration” and “power of understanding” of human beings are overemphasized. Translation studies focus on the inborn qualities of the translator, attaching no importance to systematic researches and discussion. In this stage, the methods adopted by translators mostly reflect their own understanding of translation process, which comes from their translation practice. As the Chinese scholar Wang Dongfeng (1999) says, in Chinese and Western translation history, it is clear that translation theories were originally put forward not by translation theorists but translators. The translator’s experience constitutes the initial theoretical form of translation study (Wang 1999, 7). For example, Yan Fu’s three-word translation principle of “faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance”, Fu Lei’s view of “likeness in spirit” and Qian Zhongshu’s idea of “sublimation” in translation, all typically embody the primary criterion of evaluating translation and the main characteristics of translation studies in this stage. Such kinds of viewpoints on translation are characterized by “subjectivism” and “mysticism”, lacking of theoretical principles and philosophical foundation, which fail to solve the basic and profound problems in translation studies.

### **2.1.2. The Stage of Structuralism**

The 20th century has been called “the age of translation”. During this period, translation theories flourished with the development of linguistics. In general, almost all the important linguistic theories were adopted by translation studies to some extent. Based on the theories of modern linguistics, especially structural linguistics, more scientific and systematic translation theories came into being.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the publication of Ferdinand de Saussure’s *Course in General Linguistics* (1916) (Saussure, 1999) which was written by Saussure’s colleagues after his death and based on his students’ notes, exerted a far-reaching impact on various academic fields, including translation

theories. Saussure, as the founder of structural linguistics, focuses not on the use of language (*parole*, or speech), but rather on the underlying system of language (*langue*) and calls his theory “semiology”. This approach focuses on examining how the elements of language relate to each other in the present, that is, “synchronically” rather than “diachronically”. Saussure holds that language is a self-contained system of signs. He argues that linguistic signs are composed of two parts, a “signifier” (the “sound pattern” of a word, either in mental projection – as when we silently recite lines from a poem to ourselves – or in actual and physical realization as part of a speech act) and a “signified” (the “concept” or “meaning” of the word). One important characteristic of the linguistic sign is that the bond between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary. This also means that the linguistic sign is arbitrary. That is, there is no intrinsic connection between the signifier and the signified. Saussure says that the signifier appears to be freely chosen with respect to the linguistic community that uses it. Members of the community have choice in the pattern. Language is a product inherited from preceding generations. Accordingly, the meaning of language does not relate to the external world. The meaning of signs is the result of the interaction of linguistic elements occupying different positions within language. Such concept of meaning is revolutionary. This is quite different from previous approaches which focus on the relationship between words on the one hand and things in the world that they designate, on the other hand. Saussure’s stress on the arbitrary relation between sign and referent, word and thing, helps to detach the text from its surroundings and make it an autonomous object.

Saussure’s linguistic theories influenced many linguists between World War I and World War II. As a result, structural linguistics, an important school of linguistics, was developed in the United States from the 1930s to the 1950s, which advocated and adopted the method of synchronic linguistic analysis employing structuralism, especially in contrasting those formal structures, such as phonemes or sentences, which make up systems, such as phonology or syntax. Structural linguistics understands language as a self-contained system of signs, whereby meaning is derived from the opposition of elements within that system. Structural linguists hold that it is precisely the differences that exist between the concrete entities of language, rather than some internal or a prior meaning, that provides intelligibility. Structural linguistics highlights the common properties of languages and holds that all languages can be mutually substituted or changed on the basis of certain principles. The development of structural linguistics had great impact on the rise of structuralism.

Structuralism is a European critical movement, which appeared in academia for the first time in the 19th century and then reappeared in the second half of the 20th century, when it grew to become one of the most popular approaches in academic fields concerned with analyzing language, culture, and society. Structuralism is based on the linguistic theories of Ferdinand de Saussure, which hold that language is a self-contained system of signs, and the cultural theories of Claude Lévi-Strauss (“Father of Structuralism”), which hold that cultures, like languages, can be viewed as systems of signs and analyzed in terms of the structural relations among their elements. Furthermore, the theoretical approach offered by structuralism emphasizes that elements of culture must be understood in terms of their relationship to the entire system (Rosman 1995). This notion, that the whole is greater than its parts, appeals to the Gestalt school of psychology. Essentially, elements of culture are not explanatory in and of themselves, but rather form part of a meaningful system. As an analytical model, structuralism assumes the universality of human thought processes in an effort to explain the “deep structure” or underlying meaning existing in cultural phenomena. Central to structuralism is the notion that binary oppositions (e.g., male/female, public/private, cooked/raw) reveal the unconscious logic or “grammar” of a system. Literary structuralism views literary texts as systems of interrelated signs and seeks to make their hidden logic explicit. Areas of study that have adopted and developed structuralist premises and methodologies include semiotics and narratology.

The viewpoints on language and culture mentioned above, put forward by structural linguistics and structuralism, have exerted great influence on the progress of translation studies. Since the middle 1980s, a great number of western translation works have been introduced into China, such as *Toward a Science of Translating* written by Eugene A. Nida, *A Linguistic Theory of Translation* by J. C. Catford, *A Textbook of Translation* by Peter Newmark, and *The Science of Translation* by Wolfram Wilss. They began to focus on the study of language transformation between the source language and the target language, the rules of language transformation, and the model of semantic equivalence. Among these western translation theorists, Eugene A. Nida is one of the most influential representatives. His outstanding contribution to translation studies in China is that he introduced translation research under the guidance of systematic linguistic theories. During this period, other linguistic theories were also applied to translation studies. As a result, from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, there appeared an upsurge in translation studies linguistically oriented and the translation study of structural linguistic paradigm became mainstream.

In this stage, influenced by linguistic theories, especially structural linguistic theories, many translation theorists hold new views on linguistically oriented translation. For example, Roman Jakobson draws his inspiration from Saussure's structural linguistics, and he breaks the field of contemporary translation theory down into three areas: intralingual translation, a rewording of signs in one language with signs from the same language; interlingual translation, or the interpretation of signs in one language with signs from another language (translation "proper"); and intersemiotic translation, or the transfer ("transmutation") of the signs in one language to nonverbal sign systems (from language into art or music) (Gentzler 2004, 1). Nevertheless, Jakobson's translation theory is confined in the equivalence at lexical and grammatical levels. In England, based on the systemic grammar concept of M.A.K. Halliday, J.C. Catford thinks that the theory of translation is a branch of Comparative Linguistics, the object of which is to set up translation equivalence. Catford argues: "Translation is an operation performed on language: a process of substituting a text in another. Clearly, then, any theory of translation must draw upon a theory of language – a general linguistic theory" (Catford 1965, 21). He maintains that "the central problem of translation practice is that of finding TL translation equivalents. A central task of translation theory is that of defining the nature and conditions of translation equivalence" (Catford 1965, 21). The famous American translation theorist Eugene Nida states his new attitudes towards the source language and the receptor language involved in translation as follows, which embodies his typical translation theories of structural linguistic paradigm:

- (1) Each language has its own genius, and to communicate effectively one must respect the genius of each language;
- (2) Anything that can be said in one language can be said in another, unless the form is the essential element of the message;
- (3) To preserve the content of the message, the form must be changed (Nida 1969, 3 – 5, 483).

According to Nida, every language has the same expressive capacity. This implies that there is translatability between languages. As Nida says, languages do not differ essentially in what they can say, but in how they say it (Nida 1993, 2 – 3, 159). In his article "*Science of Translation*", Nida argues that the impression that interlingual communication is always possible is based upon two "fundamental" factors: 1) semantic similarities in language are due to "the common core of human experience"; and 2) fundamental similarities exist in the "syntactic structures of languages, especially at the so-called kernel, or core, level" (Nida 1969, 3 – 5, 483). Nida assumes that there exists a deep, coherent, and unified entity behind whatever manifestation language takes. The "core", the

“kernel”, the “deep structure”, the “essence”, and the “spirit” are all terms used by Nida, many of which derive from Chomsky. Nida’s translation theory, evolving from “dynamic equivalence” to “functional equivalence”, stresses equivalence between the source text and the target text. The dynamic equivalence refers to the most natural representation of the information of the original text, closest to the original expressions both in meaning and in style. And by functional equivalence, he means that the target text must keep the communicative function of the source text so that the same reactions will occur both in the source text readers and the target text readers.

In structural translation studies, besides the well-known translation theorists mentioned above, there are still other famous ones, such as Peter Newmark, Wolfram Wilss etc. Peter Newmark in his book *A Textbook of Translation* defines translation as “rendering the meaning of a text into another language in the way that the author intended the text.” (Newmark 2001, 5) This definition means that any translation should concentrate on the original text. Newmark’s major achievement in translation studies is his theory of semantic and communicative translation, about which he says that “only semantic and communicative translation fulfill the two main aims of translation, which are first, accuracy, and second, economy. In general, a semantic translation is written at the author’s linguistic level, a communicative at the readerships. Semantic translation is used for “expressive” texts, communicative for “informative” and “vocative” texts.” (Newmark 1988, 45–47) It can be seen from what Newmark says that his theory still concentrates on the texts in translation, without considering the role of the translator.

As noted above, in the stage of structural translation study, translation theorists focus on the universal features of languages, conceiving translation as the mechanical language transfer. The text is treated as an autonomous and closed entity that can be subjected to scientific and objective analysis. Translation research of this stage aims at establishing the “science” of translation. The central role of source text is overemphasized and the translator’s subjectivity is completely neglected. As Professor Lü Jun comments in his essay *Structuralism, Deconstruction, Reconstruction*, “Structuralists of translation aggravate the thinking model of binary opposition by polarizing one aspect: In terms of subject-object relation, they highlight the objectivity of language, neglecting the subjectivity of man as well as the social constraints over language, the result of which leads to logocentrism. With regard to the relation between the source text and the target text, they overemphasize the central role of source text, assuming anybody can render what is expressed in one language into another so long as he conforms to language regularities. Thus, the subjective initiative is overlooked” (Lü 2001, 8–11).



### ***2.1.3. The Stage of Post-structuralism***

Post-structuralism is, as the name suggests, is related to Structuralism. It emerged as a reaction against the claims of 1960s' French structuralism to scientific rigor, objectivity, and universal validity. Post-structural thought significantly influenced literary and cultural theory in the 1970s and the 1980s. This countermovement denied the objectivity of linguistic and cultural codes, language, and categories of conceptualization. It emphasized the instability of meanings, categories, and the inability of any universal system of rules to explain reality. The result was a radically non-hierarchical plurality of indeterminate meanings. Philosophical Hermeneutics, Reception Aesthetics and Deconstructuralism are the chief representatives of post-structuralism. Under the influence of these literary criticism theories, translation researchers start to reflect on the problems in the translation study of structural paradigm. The scope of translation studies has "moved beyond the linguistic approach, beginning to consider broader issues of context, history and convention" (Bassnett & Lefvere 2001, 123).

#### ***2.1.3.1. The translator's subjectivity in Philosophical Hermeneutics***

Etymologically, the term hermeneutics originates from Greek, which means interpretation, clarification and translation. Later it was regarded as a general theory of interpretation that could be applied to all types of texts, and above all, to literary theory and translation practice. The traditional hermeneutics began with the interpretation of the Bible. The ontological hermeneutics practiced by Martin Heidegger (1927) marked the beginning of modern hermeneutics. In the 1960s, a more systematic modern philosophical hermeneutics was brought into existence by Hans-Georg Gadamer. Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutic views were greatly influenced by Edmund Husserl's Phenomenology and Martin Heidegger's hermeneutic thoughts.

Phenomenology, which originated in the philosophical reflections of Edmund Husserl in Germany during the mid-1890s, is a philosophical school that aims to describe events and actions, as they appear and reconstruct the universe in all of its diversity and fullness, with all of its qualities, and opposes a one-dimensional standardization based on scientific philosophy. On the basis of his phenomenological view, Husserl advanced a historic philosophical concept — intersubjectivity, which challenged epistemological conflict between subjects and objects and understood consciousness as a unified intentional act wherein the subject intended and the object was intended. Therefore, literary activity ought to be regarded as the interaction between different subjects, the

dialogue and communication between self-subject and world-subject. Hence, their relationship is inter-subjective. Husserl opens a new way of thinking for the humanities – a paradigm of phenomenal thinking, which is different from the dichotomy thinking of traditional Epistemology. In Husserl's view, the source text is not made up of lifeless words but of the writer's thoughts, expressing the writer's emotion and intention. In other words, the source text is composed of personal discourses that are subjectivized language. Translation study and practice, influenced by such a way of thinking, go in a new direction, in which the translator is no longer opposite to the text as it was considered, but is a part in the dialogue with the source text (the hidden writer). Therefore, the translator's subjectivity can be brought vividly into the translation.

Later, Heidegger, the student of Husserl, and Gadamer, the student of Heidegger, develop the theory of Phenomenology, and bring the "temporality" and "historicity" into the interpretation of the text. In his book *Sein und Zeit* (*Being and Time*) (1927), Heidegger applied the methods of phenomenology to ontology, in an effort to comprehend the meaning of "Being" both in general and as it appears concretely. This led Heidegger to a conception of human existence as active participation in the world, "being-there". Every individual is a particular "Being", which is unique to the particular historical environment and culture that he lives in. Heidegger's hermeneutic thoughts affirm that the interpreter himself plays a great role in the whole process of understanding. Pre-understanding, put forward by Heidegger, is a basic concept in hermeneutics. According to him, "whenever something is interpreted as something, the interpretation will be founded essentially upon fore-having, fore-sight and fore-conception." (Heidegger 1999, 191) It is precisely our being-in-the-world with its presuppositions and prejudices that makes understanding possible and feasible. Influenced by Heidegger's hermeneutic thoughts, Gadamer argues that the historical and temporal situation of an interpreter can never be excluded from hermeneutics and insists that the perceiver is not passive but active in the process of understanding. In Gadamer's words, "All understanding inevitably involves some 'prejudice,'" and "'prejudice' means a judgment that is given before all the elements that determine a situation have been finally examined." Thus, "Prejudice certainly does not mean a false judgment, but is part of the idea that it can have a positive and a negative value." What is more, "the concept of 'prejudice' is where we can make a beginning." "Have the courage to make use of your own understanding." (Gadamer 2000, 239–240) So far, the subjectivity of the interpreter has been firmly founded in the process of understanding.

### ***2.1.3.2. The translator's subjectivity in Reception Aesthetics***

On the basis of Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics, Hans Robert Jauss, the student of Gadamer, formulated his thought of Reception Aesthetics in the late 1960s. It is a form of reader-response theory that focuses on the reception of a text, both on an individual and on a historical basis. Reception aesthetics emphasizes the reader's reception of a literary text, examining how readers realize the potentials of a text and how readings change over the course of time. This approach to textual analysis focuses on the scope for "negotiation" and "opposition" on part of the audience. This means that a "text" – be it a book, movie, or other creative work – is not simply passively accepted by the audience, but that the reader or viewer interprets the meanings of the text based on their individual cultural background and life experiences. In essence, the meaning of a text is not inherent within the text itself, but is created within the relationship between the text and the reader. Therefore, a basic acceptance of the meaning of a specific text tends to occur when a group of readers have a shared cultural background and interpret the text in similar ways. It is likely that the less shared heritage a reader has with the artist, the less she will be able to recognize the artist's intended meaning, and it follows that if two readers have vastly different cultural and personal experiences, their reading of a text will vary greatly.

Influenced by Reception Aesthetics, translation studies highlight the subjective role of the translator who is regarded as the receptor of information, and stress the participation of the translator. It argues that the target-language text should consider the effect of a reader's response. The translator's subjectivity is affirmed once again.

### ***2.1.3.3. The translator's subjectivity in Deconstruction***

In the 1960s, a new school of thought – deconstructionism – made a considerable impact in the field of western critical theory. The leading figures of deconstruction are Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Julia Kristeva.

Central to post-structuralist thought is Jacques Derrida's deconstructionism. Influential among literary critics at YALE University in the 1970s and 1980s, deconstructionism indicts the Western tradition of thought for ignoring the limitless instability and incoherence of language. Jacques Derrida (1930 – 2004) developed deconstruction as a technique for uncovering the multiple interpretations of texts. Influenced by Heidegger and Nietzsche, Derrida suggests that all texts have ambiguity and because of this, the possibility of a final and complete interpretation is impossible. For Derrida, language or "texts"

are not a natural reflection of the world. Text structures our interpretation of the world. Following Heidegger, Derrida thinks that language shapes us: texts create a clearing that we understand as reality. Derrida sees the history of western thought as based on opposition: good vs. evil, mind vs. matter, man vs. woman, speech vs. writing. These oppositions are defined hierarchically: the second term is seen as a corruption of the first, and the terms are not equal opposites. Derrida thought that all text contained a legacy of these assumptions, and as a result of this, these texts could be re-interpreted with an awareness of the hierarchies implicit in language. Derrida does not think that we can reach an end point of interpretation, a truth. For Derrida, all texts exhibit “difference”: they allow multiple interpretations. Meaning is diffuse, not settled. Textuality always gives us a surplus of possibilities, yet we cannot stand outside of textuality in an attempt to find objectivity.

Another key figure of deconstruction in the early post-structuralist movement was Roland Barthes. Though originally a structuralist, Barthes’ work during the 1960s grew increasingly favorable to post-structural views. In 1968, Barthes published “*The Death of the Author*” in which he declared a metaphorical event: the “death” of the author as an authentic source of meaning for a given text. Barthes argued that the meaning of any literary text was multiplicitous and that the author was not the prime source of the semantic content of the work. The “Death of the Author”, Barthes maintained, was the “Birth of the Reader”, i.e. of the proliferation of meanings of the text.

Originally labelled a structuralist, the French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault came to be seen as the most important representative of the post-structuralist movement. He agreed that language and society were shaped by rule-governed systems, but he disagreed with the structuralists on two counts. Firstly, he did not think that there were definite underlying structures that could explain the human condition and secondly he thought that it was impossible to step outside of discourse and survey the situation objectively.

Besides, the representative of deconstruction Julia Kristina coined the term “intertextuality”, which is used to indicate the mutual compensation and communication between texts with the purpose to break the authority of the author.

One consequence of deconstruction is that certainty in textual analysis becomes impossible. Rather than basing our philosophical understanding on undeniable truths, the deconstructionist turns the settled bedrock of rationalism into the shifting sands of a multiplicity of interpretations. Deconstruction reverses the direction of thought and suggests that the original text is dependent upon the translation. Though deconstructionists do not propose either a better model for translation theory or how to translate, their scintillating insights about the

nature of translation and the redefinition of the original and translation promote the status of translation and deepen our understanding about translation.

#### ***2.1.3.4 The cultural turn in translation studies and its impact on the translator's subjectivity***

Influenced by the trends of thought in western philosophy, especially deconstructionism, translation researchers turned their attention to cultural problems in the 1970s. According to Gentzler, a real breakthrough for the field of translation studies came in the 1990s with the publication of *Translation, History, and Culture*, co-edited by Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere, two outstanding translation studies scholars. In 1990, Bassnett and Lefevere announced what had been under way for some time: the “cultural turn” in translation studies. In brief, they envisaged that “neither the word, nor the text, but the culture becomes the operational ‘unit’ of translation” (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990, 8). In the 1990s translation studies have in many ways been informed by this cultural turn, which, as Bassnett (Bassnett & Lefevere 1998, 132–133) has shown, includes a rapprochement between cultural studies and translation studies, due to their related efforts to understand the process and status of globalization and national identities. The cultural turn is a revolution having far-reaching significance in translation history because it breaks the boundary set by traditional paradigms, liberating the translator from an inferior and subordinate status to a more independent position, and expanding translation to a broader cultural scope. The cultural turn in translation studies has caused a series of shifts in emphasis: from a normative and prescriptive approach to a descriptive one, from source text-oriented to target text-oriented, from translation process to result, and from internal to external factors. Many target culture-oriented translation theories and schools are formed during the “cultural turn”, such as the cultural school, the Polysystem School, manipulation school, functionalist school and so on. Among them the most influential are the Polysystem School represented by Itamar Even-Zohar and Gideon Toury and the manipulation school represented by André Lefevere, Lawrence Venuti, Susan Bassnett and Theo Hermans. Polysystem theories provide the theoretical framework for Target Culture-oriented translation studies, while manipulation theories offer a new perspective for the cognition of translation, viewing translation as rewriting. These two translation schools both emphasized the role of the translator in the translation process and visibility of the translator. The characteristics of these new translation theories can be concluded in two points: firstly, translators are active participants; secondly, the focus has moved from the “meaning” itself to the meaning – producing field.

With the “cultural turn” in translation studies, increasing attention has been paid to the subjectivity of the translator, who not only influences translation by his or her visual field, choice and thinking, but also participates in and contributes to the construction of national culture. As a result, the subject of translation and the subjectivity of the translator have become hot topics of translation studies.

To sum up, at the stage of post-structuralism, under the influence of Philosophical Hermeneutics, Reception Aesthetics and Deconstructuralism as well as the overwhelming power of “Cultural Turn”, the subjectivity of the translator is overemphasized. The role of translator has been elevated to the position much higher than the author of the original text. The translator is regarded as “rewriter”, “betrayer”, or “conqueror”. As a consequence, translation studies are apt to translator-centricism.

## **2.2. A reflection on the three stages of translation studies from a cognitive perspective**

As discussed above, in the three stages of translation studies, translation theorists put forward distinct views on translation based on different philosophical bases. Since each of these viewpoints lays emphasis on just one of the key elements of communication, namely, author, text and reader, they all suffer from partiality and one-sidedness, not reflecting the dialectic relations among “language”, “thought”, and “the external world”.

The translation studies in the philological paradigm overemphasize the translator’s subjective intuition and inspiration. In this stage, although those famous translators’ wise remarks have their own historical values, they can’t help us form the systematic translation theories. Actually, the authorial intention is regarded as the basis for the meaning of a text, which implies that traditional translation theorists hold the view that “language” can absolutely express human beings’ “thoughts”. In the translating process, only by understanding the language of the source text can the translator grasp the transcendental meaning of the text and the authorial intention completely. This kind of viewpoint overstates the expressive function of language, and neglects the complexity, limitation and difference of human “cognition”, as well as the impacts of “cognition” on “language”.

Translation theorists in the structural paradigm, however, lay too much stress on the regularity of language. The translation is studied without thinking about the outside world, and the translator must be loyal to the source text, which fundamentally rejects the existence of translator’s subjectivity. In the stage of structuralism, the text is considered as a self-contained entity. Translation

aims at trying to find equivalence in the target language according to the source text. Such kind of translation theory isolates “language” from human “cognition” and “the real world”.

Concerning the translation study in the post-structural paradigm, the free will of the individual personality is excessively displayed and translation activities are performed without any restriction, which, therefore, causes the arbitrary creation of meaning. As a result, the translator’s subjectivity reaches the acme of its development. In other words, translation theorists have begun to realize the importance of human “cognition”, the creativity and subjective initiative of human beings. These views are progressive to some extent; however, the subjectivity of the translator is overemphasized.

According to the analysis above, all these attitudes toward the problem of translator’s subjectivity are not impartial and normative. The controversial translation theories in different stages of translation studies actually reflect translation theorists’ divergent views on the relations among “reality”, “cognition” and “language”. Therefore, it is quite necessary to study the relations among “reality”, “cognition” and “language”. Therefore, this thesis attempts to probe into the intersubjectivity in translation from a cognitive perspective, discussing the relations among “reality”, “cognition” and “language” in detail based on some basic views of the Embodied Philosophy and Cognitive Linguistics.

### **3. Theoretical analysis**

This research has been conducted on the theoretical bases of the kernel principle of “Reality-Cognition-Language” of the Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics (ECL for short) (Lakoff & Johnson 1999; Wang 1998, 2005, 2014, 2019, 2021), and the Model of Cognitive Functional Context in Translation (He 2016).

#### **3.1 “Reality-Cognition-Language”, the kernel principle of Embodied-Cognitive Linguistics (ECL)**

Cognitive linguists is interested in the relation between language and mind. It argues that language is not an autonomous system, and it does not refer directly to things. Language is based on our bodily experience of the world and the way we perceive and conceptualize it. “Concepts arise from, and are understood through, the body, the brain, and experience in the world. Concepts get their meaning through embodiment, especially via perceptual and motor capacities” (Lakoff & Johnson 1999, 497). Based on the embodied philosophy, cognitive linguists propose that the mind and the experience of the language user me-

diate between the real world and language. This principle can be expressed as “Reality-Cognition-Language”, which indicates that both human cognition and language are embodied.

Based on the kernel principle of “Reality-Cognition-Language” of the embodied philosophy and cognitive linguistics, Prof. Wang Yin (1998), a well-known Chinese scholar, has further probed into the relations among “reality”, “cognition” and “language”. In Wang Yin’s view, things and phenomena in the real world are unlimited, while people’s cognitive faculty is relatively limited compared with the unlimited external world, though the cognitive faculty of human beings has been developing continually. The unceasing development of human cognition actually indicates that human beings’ recognition of some problems or phenomena in the real world is still imperfect or incorrect at a certain static stage of time, which shows a weakening phenomenon from “reality” to “cognition”. Moreover, according to the basic views of cognitive linguistics, all human bodily experience from the external world is filtered by perception. Language is a description of human perception of reality. Due to the limited expressive function of language for human cognition, there is another weakening phenomenon from “cognition” to “language”. Therefore, the principle of “Reality-Cognition-Language” reflects a gradual weakening phenomenon. Professor Wang Yin respectively call such two phenomena “the Horizontal Weakening Phenomenon of Reflection” in intralingual communication and “the Longitudinal Weakening Phenomenon of Correspondence” in interlingual communication, which can be shown in Figure 1 as below:

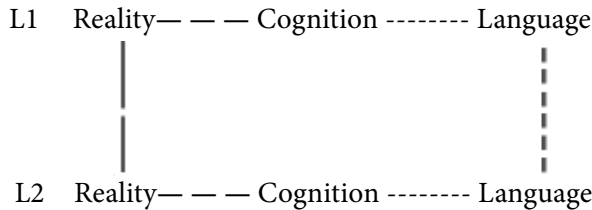


Figure 1. The weakening phenomenon of “Reality-Cognition-Language” in intralingual and interlingual communications (Wang, 1998, 72)

Regarding the relations among “reality”, “cognition” and “language”, as the above “Figure 2.1” shows, in intralingual communication, such as in L1 (Language 1) or L2 (Language 2), there is a “horizontal weakening phenomenon of reflection”. It is expressed as “Reality -----Cognition ----- Language”. In this figure, the green dashed lines show the horizontal weakening phenomenon from “reality” to “cognition”. That means human beings’ cognition is the



reflection of reality, coming from the embodiment in the real world. However, due to the limitations of human cognition, human beings' "cognition" is probably not the completely correct reflection of "reality" in a certain static stage during the course of human cognitive development. Human cognition is constantly pursuing a more complete, correct, objective and perfect understanding of the real world. The deficiency of cognition reflects a weakening phenomenon of the absolutely correct understanding of reality.

In Figure 1, the blue dotted lines show the horizontal weakening phenomenon from "Cognition" to "Language". That means "Language" is the reflection of "Cognition". In fact, linguistic expression is always unable to catch up with the cognitive progress, and it is impossible to meet our expressing needs sometimes. The things and phenomena in the real world are infinite, while the cognition of human beings is constantly developing. However, relative to the infinite real world, human cognition is limited. These three aspects show a gradual weakening phenomenon in the horizontal reflection. As there is an "intermediary" factor of "cognition" between "reality" and "language", it seems to be filtered from reality to language. The Chinese Scholar Prof. Wang Yin (1998) calls this phenomenon "the Horizontal Weakening Phenomenon of Reflection" in intralingual communication.

In interlingual communication, with the development of transportation and communication, and with the increasing interaction between peoples, reality is getting closer and closer. The reality of L1 users is different from that of L2 users to some extent, which is shown with an almost straight black line between these two realities in Figure 1. However, there may be differences in the way of thinking between the two nationalities who speak different languages, and the cognitive results will also be different, which is greater than the difference between the two "realities". Since "cognition" mediates between "reality" and "language", still more differences are manifested in the language of L1 and L2. This larger correspondence difference between the two languages is shown as a more virtual dotted black lines in Figure 1. Professor Wang Yin calls this phenomenon "the Longitudinal Weakening Phenomenon of Correspondence" in interlingual communication. Wang Yin's views are enlightening with regard to understanding the complexity of translation.

The kernel "Reality-Cognition-Language" principle of ECL sheds light on this research, which is helpful for finding out what factors influence the decision-making of the translator in the cognitive process of translation. Due to the limitation of a translator's bilingual competence, cognitive competence, socio-cultural competence, personal experience and knowledge about the real world, the personal cognition of the subjects involved in translation is different.

Therefore, communications among different subjects involved in translation activities are necessary.

Translation is a process in which the translator constantly makes choices. The translator tries to reproduce the original text in the target language based on the source language culture, the source text context, and the target language culture. The constructed situational and semantic information thus plays an important role as a cognitive interface between socio-cultural, communicative situations and discourse.

Wang Yin (2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2019, 2021) believes that translation, like language, comes from practice and is the result of experience and cognition. On this basis, he puts forward a cognitive view of translation and constructs a Cognitive Translation Model (as shown below in Figure 2):

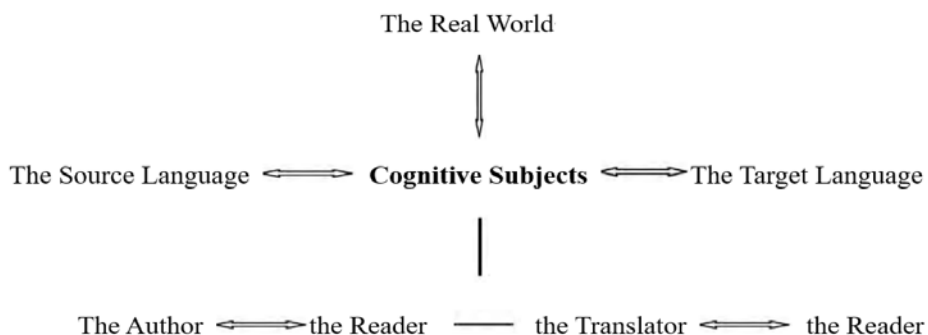


Figure 2. The cognitive translation model (Wang, 2005, 17)

As shown above, the Cognitive Translation Model (Wang 2005, 17) focuses on the cognitive subjects and illustrates the interaction among the cognitive subjects, the real world, the source language and the target language. However, it does not discuss the elements of the real world and the mechanism of the cognitive subjects, nor does it describe the specific translation process. Later, based on the Functional Theory of Context (Halliday and Hasan 1985, 2012; Hasan 1999; Martin 1992.) and the Cognitive Translation Model (Wang 2005), a Chinese Scholar Prof. He Wei (2016) further developed “The Model of Cognitive Functional Context in Translation” as follows. It shows that the culture, situation, co-text, social cognition and personal cognition factors are of great importance for a translator in the translation process.

### 3.2. The Model of Cognitive Functional Context in Translation

The translation process is an interactive process between subjects and objects; therefore, the context theory of translation studies should be a product of the thorough exploration of subjects and objects and their interaction. Based on the Functional Theory of Context and the Cognitive Translation Model (Wang 2005), the Chinese Scholar Prof. He Wei (2016) assumes that the context theory of translation studies should have the culture, situation, co-text, social cognition and personal cognition factors in its scope, and that the personal and social cognition factors function as an interface which interacts with the culture, situation and discourse factors. The translated versions are the consequence of the interaction and mutual constraint between these five factors (See Figure 3).

In accordance with “the Model of Cognitive Functional Context in Translation” put forward by Prof. He Wei as mentioned above, we can realize that linguistic competence, socio-cultural competence, and cognitive competence are very essential for a translator, which can be regarded as the core sub-competences of translator competence theoretically. This hypothesis will be verified through empirical study with the method based on Hermeneutic Phenomenology. The above-mentioned theories based on Embodied Cognitive Linguistics are very enlightening on the studies of translator competence.

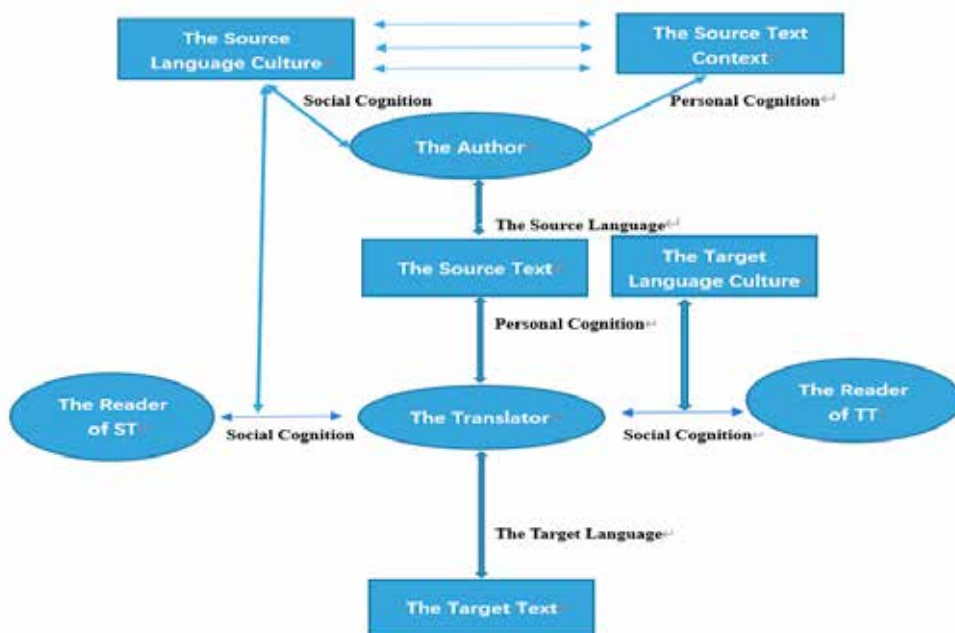


Figure 3. The model of cognitive functional context in translation (He 2016, 114)

In this research, the core sub-competences of translator competence will be proposed according to the relevant data to be collected by surveys of professional translators and comprehensive literature review, based on the kernel principle of “Reality-Cognition-Language” of ECL (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Wang, 1998, 2005, 2019, 2014, 2021) and “the Model of Cognitive Functional Context in Translation” (He 2016, 114).

## **4. Methodology**

### **4.1. Research methods**

In this research, qualitative research methods (including translation tests and interviews) have been adopted to collect relevant research data from carefully chosen respondents with different cultural backgrounds, bilingual competence and translating experience, showing the manifestations of intersubjectivity in translation and the rationality of the fundamental “reality-cognition-language” principle in cognitive linguistics.

By translation tests, this research compares the differences in the quality of the translation texts rendered by different respondents. Through interviews, the researcher tries to know more about the cognitive process of the respondents, analysing the influence of the translators’ personal experience in the real world and bilingual competence on the quality of translation texts.

### **4.2. Data collection**

30 respondents were invited to participate in this research, who have different cultural backgrounds, bilingual competence and translating experience. They were asked to translate “涓涓细流，终成大海” from Chinese into English. Then several typical respondents were interviewed by the popular chatting software WeChat, to collect detailed description about their translating process.

#### ***4.2.1. Data collected from Respondent 1 by an interview***

Respondent 1 is an English major who has passed TEM 8, with good bilingual competence, Chinese cultural background, very responsible attitudes in doing translation work and 3 years of translating experience. She described the whole translating process as follows:

Step 1: She translated “涓涓细流，终成大海” literally into “Small brooks gather to form the ocean.”

Step 2: The word “gather” has been replaced with “converge”, since she thought that “gather” is too superficial and not appropriate, based on her seeking of the meanings and usages of the word “converge” from English dictionaries: 1). If roads or lines converge, they meet or join at a particular place.

2). If different ideas or societies converge, they stop being different and become similar to each other.

Combining the two meanings, she revised the translated version and it is translated into “Small brooks converge to form the ocean”

Step 3: By further seeking information about the understanding of the source text “涓涓细流” from a newspaper “*Maoming Evening Paper*” (《茂名晚报》), the respondent has found that “Small brooks” cannot express the dynamic states of the brooks while they are flowing slowly. Then “Small brooks” has been replaced with “Trickles”. The explanation on “trickle” in English dictionaries is “a small amount of liquid, flowing in drops or flowing slowly”. Therefore, “涓涓细流，终成大海” is translated into “Trickles of water converge to form the ocean”.

Step 4: By further seeking the usages of “trickle”, the respondent has found an example about “trickle”:

First a trickle, then a flood.

Considering the form and style of the source text, she improved the translated version as follows:

“First a trickle, later the ocean”.

The respondent summarizes that the two translation versions mentioned above can be adopted under different contexts. If in essays, the translated version “Trickles of water converge to form the ocean” is acceptable. If is used as the title or warning signs, the translated version “First a trickle, later the ocean” is appropriate.

#### **4.2.2. Data collected from Respondent 2 by an interviewer:**

Respondent 2 is a senior student majoring in Business English at Taizhou University, who hasn't passed TEM 8 yet, also with good bilingual competence, Chinese cultural backgrounds, but without translating experience. She described her translating process as follows:

“涓涓细流，终成大海” is translated into “One drop of water makes no ocean.”

She takes the English saying “One swallow does not make a (the) summer.” for reference. She holds the view that in the translating process, the translator should take the linguistic features of the target language and the expectation of the target readers into consideration.

### **4.3. Brief summary of the data collected**

From the information collected through interviews mentioned above, it is obvious that a translator should not only have a good command of the source language and the target language, but also have abundant cultural knowledge. The translator should take many factors into consideration during the course of translation, such as the linguistic norms, cultural differences, the style of the source text, the context, etc. The various translated versions of the same source text show different translators' personal cognition, linguistic competence, socio-cultural knowledge, knowledge about translation, etc. Translators should be aware of the intersubjectivity in translation, taking the background and intention of the author, the text, the reader and the socio-cultural context, and the linguistic norms of the target language into consideration.

## **5. Findings and discussion**

### **5.1. The connotation of intersubjectivity in translation**

Currently, in the field of translation, most scholars simply regard "intersubjectivity in translation" as interrelations among "the author", "the translator" and "the reader". Systematic and in-depth theoretical research on this issue is still lacking. This part will further probe into the connotation of intersubjectivity in translation by analyzing "Who is the subject of translation?" and the root causes for the existence of intersubjectivity in translation.

#### **5.1.1. The subject of translation**

Guided by the notion of the subject in a philosophical sense, we will analyze the issue of subject in translation. According to Karl Marx's principle of "subject", man is always a subject, and here the "man" in the Marxian sense is not just a natural abstract being, but a social being. That's to say, not all men are subjects; only those who possess social and practical features can be entitled subjects. The essential characteristics of the subject are its practicalness and sociality. Theoretically speaking, a subject refers to the active, cognizing individual or social group with consciousness and/ or will carry out an action. When applying this principle of subject to translation studies, and combining it with the definition of "translation", we will have a better understanding on "Who is the subject of translation?". According to Bell (1991), the word translation can refer to 1) translating: the process (to translate; the activity rather than the tangible object); 2) a translation: the product of the process of translating (i.e.

the translated text); 3) translation: the abstract concept which encompasses both the process of translating and the product of that process. The author of this thesis believes that when “translation” is used in a narrow sense, referring to “translating process” or “the product of translating process”, undoubtedly, the translator is the sole subject of translation, who is termed as “the translating subject” (Venuti 1992, 11) in Lawrence Venuti’s words and “the translator-subject” (Robinson 2001, 157) in Douglas Robinson’s; when “translation” is used in a broad and abstract sense, referring to the whole translation process from the production of the source text to the reception of the translated text, “the author of the source text (STA)”, “the reader of the target text (TTR)” and even “the translation initiator” are all subjects involved in translation activities, in addition to the translating subject – “the translator”.

### ***5.1.2. The root causes for the existence of intersubjectivity in translation***

Translation, as a kind of intercultural communication, is actually an intricate cognitive activity with many subjects involved (including the original author, the translator, the reader of the target text, and the translation initiator, etc.). Fundamentally, it is the “commonness” and “differences” of individual subjects involved in translation activities as well as the complicated interrelations among “reality”, “cognition” and “language” that cause intersubjectivity in translation. Intersubjectivity and subjectivity are interdependent, coexisting in the holistic field of translation.

### ***5.1.3. Intersubjectivity in translation***

This thesis holds that “intersubjectivity in translation” is based on the relative “subjectivity” of each “subject” involved in translation activities. The difference and commonness between individual subjects are the premise and basis of intersubjectivity. Here, “relative subjectivity” means that every subject has not only “subjective initiative” and “creativity”, but also “objectivity”. Due to the sociality of man as a subject, on the one hand, theoretically, “intersubjectivity in translation” means there is no absolute subjectivity in translation, and the “subjectivity” of each “subject” involved in translation is always intersubjective; on the other hand, practically, “intersubjectivity in translation” refers not only to the interwoven relations among “the original author”, “the translator” and “the reader of the target text”, but also the interrelationship between “the translator” and “the translation initiator”, based on each subject’s limited “subjectivity”.

## **5.2. Manifestations of intersubjectivity in translation**

With the research data collected through interviews, and translation tests, the manifestations of intersubjectivity in translation will be further discussed from the following aspects:

### ***5.2.1. Intersubjectivity between the translator and the author***

In the most abstract sense, translation has three levels: (1) the external world → the author → the source text; (2) the source text → the translator → the translated text; (3) the translated text → the reader. At the first level, the author's role as the creative subject of the source text serves as the precondition for the existence of a translation process, because no cultural product (i.e. the original) will ever come into being without the author's creative labor; hence no possibility and necessity for translating. According to the fundamental principle of "reality-cognition-language" put forward by the embodied philosophy and cognitive linguistics, language does not directly refer to things in the external world. There is a medium process of "cognition" between "the world" and "language". The author's creation of the source text is based on his bodily experience from the world and through the conceptualization of his cognitive faculty. The creation of the source text is actually a complicated cognitive process from "bodily experience of the world" → "cognition" → "expressions with language". The reality depicted in the source text is inevitably influenced by the author's subjective factors, including his previous experiences and background, aesthetic attitudes and beliefs, motivation and purposes, personal linguistic and stylistic preference, language competence, etc. Language is not a kind of transparent instrument to represent the individual intention. In the course of creating the source text, unavoidably the author will be confronted with obstacles to exactly express his intention with language. As for literary creation, the relationship between "reality" and "language" is more complicated. A text will leave some blanks, gaps and indeterminacies of meaning for readers, which makes translation rather difficult. However, we should notice that the creation of the source text is based on the author's careful choices and elaborate arrangements of words or sentences. In other words, while creating a text, the author must have taken "the reader's expectation" into consideration, with the purpose of making the text acceptable and understandable for most target readers; otherwise, the creation of the text would be of little social value. Regarding this aspect, we can be enlightened from the famous German philosopher Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action. The universal pragmatics is the prerequisite of Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action whose framework is built out of the speech-act philosophy of Austin and Searle.



According to this, Habermas points out “validity” claims of speech act, namely, truthfulness, sincerity, correctness and comprehensibility (Habermas 1989, 29). Translation can be regarded as a speech act. In the whole translation process, from the author’s creation of the source text to the reception of the translated text by the target language reader, all the subjects involved are supposed to abide by the validity claims mentioned above. Only in this way can a dialogue or communication proceed rationally. Communicative Action Theory is the theoretical basis of “recognizability” and “translatability” of the text. As we know, due to the complexity and limitation of human “cognition” and “language”, the source text is not completely equal to the author’s intention. That’s to say, the source text leaves some blanks, gaps and indeterminacies of meaning for readers to some extent. The meaning of the source text needs to be interpreted and reconstructed by the translator through his subjective initiative and creativity. Besides, as the translating subject, the translator is constrained by many factors, including his personal experiences, cognitive faculty, language competence, ideology, historical and cultural contexts, the principle of “reality-cognition-language”, etc. In the translating process, the translator plays double roles, acting as not only a purposeful reader of the source text, but also the creator of the translated text. In the stage of “the source text → the translator”, the translator’s “pre-understanding” will inevitably influence his comprehension of the source text. Such factors mentioned above make translation activities very complicated, which requires the translator’s great efforts and effective communication with the original author through the medium – “the source text”. The interaction model between the author and the translator is indeed a subject-subject mode, and it manifests the intersubjectivity between these two subjects clearly.

### ***5.2.2. Intersubjectivity between the translator and the reader of the target text***

In the process of translation, on the basis of understanding the source text, the translator needs to transfer the source text into the target text. On the one hand, the translator’s personal language competence and cognition, which are based on his bodily experience, exert influence on his creation of the target text. On the other hand, the target reader is another important factor that the translator has to bear in mind. The translator’s practice and product will be futile without the accomplishment of the reading of the target text on the reader’s part. “No translator should begin to work without first knowing who is the intended audience (Nida 2001, 10)”. The intersubjectivity between the translator and the intended reader starts not from the reader’s reading, but from the initiation of the translation activity, i.e. from selecting source texts to translate, from adopting

appropriate translation techniques and strategies, etc. The interaction between the translator and the reader plays a very crucial role in the choice of translating methods and appropriate linguistic forms in the target text, so as to satisfy the intended readers' horizon of expectations.

### ***5.2.3. Intersubjectivity between the translator and the translation initiator***

Concerning the translation initiator, generally speaking, there are two possible cases: in one case, the translation behavior is the personal choice of the translator. These kinds of translators usually hope to introduce a work created in a certain language to people in another language environment. Once the translation is completed, the translator will seek opportunities for publication or publicity of his or her translated work. In this case, the translator will adopt certain translation strategies mainly according to his own understanding of the source text, the original author's creative intention, the target reader's horizon of expectations, ideology, cultural and historical contexts, etc. Comparatively, these translators have more freedom in choosing the source text and translation strategies than those who work for other translation initiators. In other cases, the translator should have more communications with the translation initiators.

## **6. Conclusion**

Based on the kernel "reality-cognition-language" principle of the embodied philosophy and cognitive linguistics, the following conclusion can be drawn: Fundamentally, it is the "commonness" and "differences" of individual subjects involved in translation together with the complicated relations among "reality", "cognition" and "language" that cause intersubjectivity in translation. Intersubjectivity and subjectivity are interdependent, coexisting in the holistic field of translation. This thesis points out the significance of the cognitive study on "intersubjectivity in translation" for translation studies and practice, as well as for translation teaching. In translation teaching, it is necessary to enhance students' awareness of "intersubjectivity in translation". More attention should be paid to the development of students' cognitive faculty.

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