Studies of Subjectivity in Language

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Abstract
The study of subjectivity in language lasts for a long time. But it is not until the construal theory put forward by Langacker appears that the study is equipped with a unified dimension. The theory classifies construal into concrete dimensions. The theory exerts great influence on the study of subjectivity, including the linguistics study itself and the translation study.

Key words: Subjectivity; Construal; Intersubjectivity

INTRODUCTION
Linguistics based on objectivism holds that languages are the literal mirroring of the world. There lie correspondences between languages and the world. The truth and falsity of proposition in language can be determined in term of the objective world. Linguistics which is based on objectivism has been ignoring or even rejecting the subjective role of human beings in language studies. And the studies of subjectivity of humans have long been paid undue attention and even have been suppressed or shackled. Hermeneutics originating from the West in the 18th century focuses its attention on the readers, emphasizing the acceptance and reading of the readers, which results in the rising status of the readers. The rising of deconstructionism in the 1960's leads to the complete subversion of the traditional structuralism theory. And the reader's subjectivity gets unprecedented demonstration.

1. THE THEORY OF SUBJECTIVITY
The pioneering researchers in the fields of subjectivity in language are as the following:

Benveniste (1971, p.224) takes subjectivity as a synchronic concept, and gives the most comprehensive and initial interpretation. He defines the concept of subjectivity as the following:

The "subjectivity" we are discussing here is the capacity of the speaker to posit himself as "subject". It is defined not by the feeling which everyone experiences of being himself (this feeling, to the degree that it can be taken note of, is only a reflection) but as the psychic unity that transcends the totality of the actual experiences it assembles and that make the permanence of the consciousness. Now we hold that that "subjectivity", whether it is placed in phenomenology or in psychology, as one may wish, is only the emergence in the being of a fundamental property of language. "Ego" is he who says "ego". That is where we see the foundation of "subjectivity," which is determined by the linguistic status of "person".

Benveniste (1971, p.225) also marks, "Language is marked so deeply by the expression of subjectivity that one might ask if it could still function and be called language if it were constructed otherwise."

Succeeding Benveniste, it is Lyons who gives further exploration of subjectivity. He expounds the definition of subjectivity as the following:

Lyons (1977, p.739) gives definition of subjectivity "as devices whereby the speaker, in making an utterance, simultaneously comments upon that utterance and expresses his attitude to what he is saying."

Lyons (1995, p.337) gives the further definition of subjectivity as "denotes the property (or set of properties) of being either a subject of consciousness (i.e. of cognition, feeling and perception) or a subject of action (an agent). It denotes the property of being what Descartes himself called a 'thinking entity'and identified, as others have done, with the self or the ego. What is of concern to the linguist is, more specifically, locutionary subjectivity: the subjectivity of utterance."

From the above definitions, it can be discerned that Lyons classifies subjectivity at two levels: subjectivity about the subject's property and subjectivity about utterance. And what Lyons focuses on is the latter.

In the succeeding studies on subjectivity of language, two mainstreams can be detected: the research orientation of synchrony with the pioneering figure of Langacker and that of diachrony with the leading figure of Traugott.

In the theoretical frame of Cognitive Grammar founded by Langacker, he explores subjectivity from the synchronic perspective. In the construal relationship, he puts forwards the optimal viewing arrangement and the egocentric viewing arrangement.
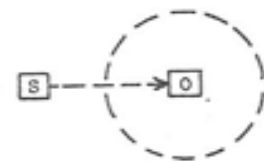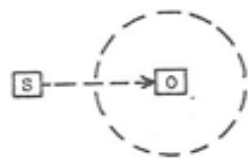

Optimal Viewing Arrangement (Langacker, 1987, p.129)
S=S=Viewer/Self
O=Object being observed/Other

Langacker (1987, p.129) holds that in optimal cases, the objective scene coincides with the region of maximal acuity. Optimal perception requires that the attention of S be focused solely on O, to the extent that S loses all awareness of his own role as perceiver. Otherwise phrased, what S observes is O, not S observing O. When these conditions are met, the asymmetry in the roles of S and O—as observer and object of observation respectively—is maximized. The role of S in the perceptual relationship is then said to be maximally subjective, and that of O maximally objective.

Egocentric Viewing Arrangement（Langacker，1987, p.129）
S=S=Viewer/Self   O=Object being observed/Other

The egocentric viewing arrangement is characterized by an expansion of the objective scene beyond the region of perceptual optimality to include the observer and his immediate surroundings.

Traugott (2001) lays emphasis on an important distinction between –ity (synchronic state) and –ation (diachronic process). On her view, one may organize expressions along a cline of "non-/less subjective—subjective—intersubjective". Traugott regards subjectivity of language from the perspective of language change through time. Traugott has devoted to studying the semanticization over time of subjectivity, understood as relationship to the speaker and the speaker's beliefs and attitudes, and of intersubjectivity, understood as relationship to the addressee and addressee's face.

Traugott (2010, p.32) holds that these expressions of subjectivity and intersubjectivity are expressions the prime semantic or pragmatic meaning of which is to index speaker attitude or viewpoint (subjectivity) and speaker's attention to addressee self-image (intersubjectivity).

Langacker and Traugott define subjectivity from different perspectives. Traugott defines subjectivity from the relevance to the speaker, i.e. the more relevant to the speaker, the more subjectivity demonstrated. Langacker defines subjectivity from the perspective of the existence of the speaker. The more inconspicious the existence of the speaker is, the more subjective an expression is. According to Traugott, the subjective as well as objective application of language by Langacker are relevant to the speaker, which are thus subjective.

Verhagen (2007, p.28) distinguishes two senses of the term "subjectivity". One is complementary to objectivity, and consists in the recognition that the meaning of many linguistics items does not relate directly to (a model of) the world, but to a person's assessment, or construal, of a situation. The other consists in the recognition that one may have "thoughts and beliefs that may differ from those of other people". The latter in particular is the basis for intersubjectivity: the mutual coordination of cognitive systems.

As to the studies concerning the conceptualizer's subjectivity, it is usually the case that it lacks the concrete, operable dimensions. The studies inevitably lie on the superficial level, calling for further and deeper exploration. It is not until Cognitive Linguistics based on embodied philosophy appears that such a case comes to an end.

2. CONSTRUAL

Cognitive Linguistics holds that the cognition of human being bridges the languages and the world. Languages are not the literal mirroring of the objective world, but rather ones undergone the cognitive operation of humans and marked so deeply by the subjectivity of humans. The application of languages demonstrates subjectivity of humans.

The theory of construal put forward by Langacker (1987, 2008) boasts itself as the core concept of Cognitive Linguistics. The dimensions of construal make possible the further exploration of conceptualizer's subjectivity.

3. CONSTRUAL DIMENSIONS OF LANGACKER

Langacker (1987, p.117) firstly classifies imagerys (i.e. construal) with the title of focal adjustment into the category of selection, perspective and abstraction. Selection (which includes cognitive domain, scale and scope) determines which facets of a scene are being dealt with. Perspective (which includes figure/ground alignment, viewpoint, deixis and subjectivity/objectivity) relates to the position from which a scene is viewed, with consequences for the relative prominence of its participants. And abstraction pertains to the level of specificity at which a situation is portrayed. Here imagery is defined as the ability to construe a situation in alternate ways for purposes of thought or expression, e.g. by effecting various types of focal adjustment. (Langacker, 1987, p.490)

Langacker (1991, p.4) again defines imagery as: our capacity to construe the same content in alternate ways. And he further classifies dimensions of construal as: specificity, scope, prominence, background and perspective. As to the reason of such a classification, Langacker (1993, p.448) touches upon as: "if only for expository purposes".

Langacker (2008) further develops his theory of construal and defines the dimensions of construal. He classifies construal into specificity, focusing, prominence, and perspective. Specificity is the level of precision and detail at which a situation is characterized. Focusing can be further classified into: foreground vs. background, composition and scope. Prominence includes: profiling, trajector/landmark alignment. And perspective consists of viewing arrangement and dynamicity.

Although the form of organization of Langacker's construal theory has changed gradually, the core contents remain the same, which read as "specificity, scope, prominence, background and perspective".

4. ITS SIGNIFICANCE TO LANGUAGE STUDY AND TRANSLATION STUDY

The theory of construal put forward by Langacker has epoch-making significance to the study of subjectivity of the conceptualizer. For the first time, he offers the relatively unified (Although Langacker himself has been developing and revising his theory constantly), operable dimensions for the study of subjectivity of the conceptualizer. The theory of construal puts the arbitrary,

casual paradigm of the study of subjectivity of former time into an end, which will facilitate the canonical and unified study of subjectivity. The theory of construal will equip the study of language itself as well as translation with unified paradigm.

For example:
(a) The clock is on the table.
(b) The clock is lying on the table.
(c) The clock is resting on the table.
(d) The table is supporting the clock.

(Langacker, 1987, p.110)

The above four sentences all portray the same objective scene. Different kinds of construal will lead to different images. The first sentence is the most usual expression. The other three choose some facet of the scene for further exploration. The second sentence emphasizes the alignment of the clock along the horizontal axis. The third sentence focuses the static character of the locative relationship. The fourth sentence highlights the resistance of the table to the gravitational force exerted on the clock.

The theory of construal also has its significance on translation. It furnishes a brand-new perspective to the study of translator's subjectivity. Translation theory based on the structuralism holds that translation is mere the transference of two sets of linguistic symbols, and the meaning of the target language text can be approached by the linguistic symbols themselves. For example:

a. Something happened.

b. An alert little girl wearing glasses caught a brief glimpse of a ferocious porcupine with sharp quills.

c. The lamp is above the table.

d. The table is below the lamp.

e. A hand has five fingers.

f. An arm has five fingers.

g. A scar extends from his hand to his elbow.

h. A scar extends from his elbow to his hand.

The meaning of the above sentences can be approached by linguistic symbols themselves. And they are the correspondences of the following Chinese expressions:

a. 有事情发生。

b. 戴眼镜的小女孩很警惕，瞥见一只长着锋利刚毛的凶狠的箭猪。

c. 灯在桌子上面。

d. 桌子在灯下面。

e. 一只手上长着五个指头。

f. 一只胳膊上长着五个指头。

g. 一条疤从他的手延伸到肘。

h. 一条疤从他的肘延伸到手。

But from the construal theory, the four pairs of the source language sentences represent the four kinds of construal by the source language author. The first and second sentences refer to the same event, but there lie great differences in specificity between them. The first is more schematic and the second is more concrete. The third and the fourth sentences have the same proposition.

But there lie difference in prominence between them. In the third sentence, the "lamp" serving as the figure is more prominent than the "table" with the status of ground. On the contrary, in the fourth sentence, the "table" functioning as the figure takes more prominence than the "lamp" which is the ground. The fifth and sixth sentences enjoy different scopes. The fifth sentence, which seems natural and logical, characterizes the fingers in the immediate scope. The sixth sentence describes the fingers in the scope which is beyond the immediate scope. So it looks illogical and rather weird. Although the seventh sentence and the eighth sentence portray the same contents, they choose different perspectives. The seventh sentence is from the hand to the elbow, while the eighth one starts from the other direction.

From the above source language sentences, it can be drawn that translation is not merely the transference of source language symbols, but the transference of the dimensions and ways of construal of the source language author. The transference of linguistic symbols is only the superficial manifestation of translation. The essence of translation is the construction of dimensions and ways of construal of the source language text in the target language.

CONCLUSION

The theory of construal by Langacker offers a new perspective to the study of subjectivity of the conceptualizer. It provides a unified dimension to the study, which puts the arbitrary, casual study of subjectivity of previous time into an end. The theory of construal furthers the subjectivity study in linguistics itself as well as translation.

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