



DIFFICULTIES IN INTERPRETING AND TRANSLATING CHINESE FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES

TEŠKOĆE U USMENOM I PISMENOM PREVOĐENJU U KINESKOM KAO JEZIKU STRUKE

Biljana Simić Veličković

Singidunum University, Faculty of Business, 32 Danijelova St., Belgrade, Serbia

Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to present the difficulties and challenges in translating and interpreting Chinese for specific purposes, as well as other Asian languages for specific purposes. Having considered the characteristics of Chinese and Serbian, the paper analyses specific elements that affect the quality of translating and interpreting, as well as the translator's overall work. Furthermore, it investigates the cultural elements that pose a great challenge to the translator in his/her work. Finally, the paper offers possible solutions and suggestions that can be useful for the process of translating and interpreting Chinese for specific purposes.

Key words:

Chinese language, Serbian language, Language for specific purposes, interpreting, translating.

Apstrakt:

Cilj ovog rada jeste predstavljati teškoća sa kojima se suočavaju prevodioci kineskog kao jezika struke, a samim tim i prevodioci drugih azijskih jezika. S obzirom na brojne specifičnosti kineskog u odnosu na srpski jezik, u radu se analiziraju različiti elementi koji utiču na kvalitet usmenog i pismenog stručnog prevoda, kao i na rad prevodioca. Kulturološki elementi u velikoj meri predstavljaju izazov koji prevodilac treba da premosti u toku usmenog i pismenog prevođenja. U radu se iznose moguća rešenja koja mogu biti korisna za sam proces prevođenja i za sveukupni rad prevodioca.

Ključne reči:

kineski jezik, srpski jezik, jezik struke, usmeno prevođenje, pismeno prevođenje.

1. INTRODUCTION

Interpreting and translation are among those professions and activities that require a lot of patience and a high level of concentration. This is particularly the case with the languages that belong to different language families such as Asian and non-Asian languages, which do not have much in common considering the nature of language, geographical distance, peoples' cultural background, way of thinking. In this paper, we will analyze the case of the Chinese and Serbian language, and investigate the difficulties that exist in the process of translation and interpreting of these two languages. This paper is based on the experience in Chinese and Serbian LSP translating and interpreting, and it attempts to classify these difficulties in a clear way in order to offer practical and hopefully useful solutions to interpretation and translation in general.

The Serbian Nobel prize winner Ivo Andrić said that the translators were given a double-work to do, *i.e.*, to understand the way of thinking and describe it so as to be understandable and clear in other language. So, as our great writer explains, the instruction is very short and simple, but its realization is very difficult and sometimes one can hardly do it.

2. DIFFICULTIES IN INTERPRETING AND TRANSLATING

Since Chinese differs in numerous aspects from Serbian, interpreters and translators face numerous specific difficulties at work. Such difficulties are also the challenge for the translators to find an adequate solution and a way to improve the process and the results of translation. According to our experience, we can classify these difficulties as follows:

2.1 DIFFICULTIES DUE TO DIFFERENCES IN THE NATURE OF THE LANGUAGE

2.1.1 Difficulties due to different lexicon

As previously mentioned, Chinese and Serbian belong to a different language family, so the lexicon of these two languages is completely different. We cannot find almost any similar lexeme or at least the morpheme; the two languages have no common characteristic in terms of lexical or morphological aspect. Even the most common English words that are often used in other languages such as: computer, telephone, mobile phone, marketing, economy, university *etc.* are not the same or even similar in Chinese. We can illustrate this difference below:

| English: | Serbian: | Chinese: |
|-------------|-----------------|---------------|
| computer | kompjuter | 电脑 (diannaoh) |
| telephone | telefon | 电话 (dianhua) |
| mobilephone | mobilni telefon | 手机 (shouji) |
| marketing | marketing | 市场 (shichang) |
| economy | ekonomija | 经济 (jingji) |
| university | univerzitet | 大学 (daxue) |

Apart from these commonly used words, there are terms in LSP that are not widely known and if we do not know the specific subject of the scientific field, it is difficult to know the exact meaning of the word. For example, the meaning of the term "zbirna rekapitulacija" ("total/collected data/material") in Serbian is not completely clear. An interpreter will have a vague understanding of the two lexemes separately, but most probably it is not the term which the interpreter without experience will understand without an additional explanation. The translation of this term in Chinese is 汇总 (huizong), which literally means



(“total/collected data/material”), but if the interpreter uses more free interpretation of this term, the two communicating parties would most probably fail to understand the given term.

2.1.2 Difficulties due to different syntax

The syntax of Chinese and Serbian is different, especially from the aspect of the sentence elements' flexibility. The most common sentence structure type in Serbian is SPO, while in Chinese the Object is very often placed at the beginning of the sentence. The reason for this lies in the fact that Chinese is a topic prominent language, so very often the topic of the sentence is placed at the beginning of the sentence. Therefore, the translator has to read the whole sentence first and then start to translate. This is especially noticeable in simultaneous interpreting when the interpreter has to wait to hear the whole sentence and then start interpreting. This is much easier when the syntactic characteristics of two languages - word order, are the same so the interpretation can be simultaneous *i.e.* - word by word.

In addition, the position of syntactic element in Serbian is more flexible than in Chinese where each element has a fixed position, including the adverbials. We can illustrate this with the same sentence in Chinese and Serbian: “We will meet tomorrow in the afternoon at 4 o'clock at the university.”

It is possible to say in Chinese:

- 1) 我们明天下午四点在大学见面。
(We) (tomorrow) (in the afternoon) (at 4 o'clock) (at the university) (meet)
- 2) 明天下午四点我们在大学见面。
(tomorrow) (in the afternoon) (at 4 o'clock) (We) (at the university) (meet)

It is possible to say in Serbian:

- 1) Videćemo se sutra popodne u četiri sata na univerzitetu.
(meet) (tomorrow) (in the afternoon) (at 4 o'clock) (at the university)
- 2) Videćemo se na univerzitetu sutra popodne u četiri sata.
(meet) (at the university) (tomorrow) (in the afternoon) (at 4 o'clock)
- 3) Sutra popodne u četiri sata ćemo se videti na univerzitetu.
(tomorrow) (in the afternoon) (at 4 o'clock) (meet) (at the university)
- 4) Sutra u četiri sata popodne ćemo se videti na univerzitetu.
(tomorrow) (at 4 o'clock) (in the afternoon) (meet) (at the university)
- 5) Na univerzitetu ćemo se videti sutra popodne u četiri sata.
(at the university) (meet) (tomorrow) (in the afternoon) (at 4 o'clock)

As can be seen from the aforementioned examples, the same sentence can be written and said in Chinese in two ways and in Serbian in five ways. This is a sentence that includes only common words and no terminology, because when the sentence contains terminology, the translation process is much more difficult.

2.2 DIFFICULTIES DUE TO THE LACK OF SPECIFIC SUBJECT KNOWLEDGE

2.2.1 Lack of specific subject reference books

One of the difficulties considering specific subject knowledge for the translation and especially interpretation is the lack of the reference books for LSP. There is only one edition of the

Chinese-Serbian dictionary which was published in 1997, so most of the interpreters, professors and students use Chinese-English dictionary. There is no Chinese-Serbian dictionary for specific purposes or any other Chinese for specific purposes reference book. Thus, the only and the best way to acquire the terminology and make a good translation or interpretation is by learning from the experts in the specific field.

2.2.2 Lack of specific subject understanding

Translators are mostly philologists and they are mostly humanities-oriented persons. It is very difficult to understand other technical fields and sciences and master the vocabulary in other specific field such as: engineering, chemistry, physics, geology *etc.* Therefore, the translator ought to learn and get additional training very often. The best way is to have a lot of practical experience in order to become familiar with the specific vocabulary and the terminology used.

2.3 DIFFICULTIES DUE TO CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

2.3.1 Verbal and non-verbal behaviour

Besides language skills, the interpreter needs to be able to understand the foreign culture of the people involved in the translation. The mentality of the people coming from different countries is also very important and can greatly influence the communication process. Sometimes, verbal and non-verbal behavior is the consequence of the cultural characteristics. For example, in China and Asian countries in general, people have the habit of drinking tea or only hot water, so when Western people offer coffee or juice to Eastern people at the business meeting, they would accept it only because it is polite. Conversely, if someone from Serbia or other European country would be offered a glass of plain hot water, he would be definitely confused. So, the interpreter's role is much wider than only the interpreting of the words and meaning. The interpreter is actually helping the communication to be fluent and without obstacles, especially when different cultural elements are expressed, either intentionally or not. He has to explain and interpret the behavioural habits or gesticulation of the two or more different cultures in order to minimize the differences and gaps, as well as to make the people involved in the communication process closer.

Kico (2008) says that more serious difficulties occur when the cultures are further and more different, for example „house“ in English is much easier to translate than in the language of Eskimo peoples. Culture is inseparable part of the language and two of them are constantly mutually permeated.

2.3.2 DIFFERENT PROFESSIONAL PRAXIS

With the influence of their culture, people from different countries can have different approach to work. Thus, the same job can be done in different ways or have different regulations in different countries. This can produce misunderstandings in communication if the two sides are not familiar with that, so the interpreter needs to understand the terminology and be able to balance between the two sides, because they also need to understand the new information and process it. We will use the previously mentioned English term “total/collected data/costs” (Serbian “zbirna rekapitulacija”, Chinese “huizong”) as an example. Although this term means the same in these three languages, but the way people understand it and use it in the



Chinese company and Serbian company is different. The activity that is meant by this term can be done in a more or less precise way, so when interpreting, the interpreter also needs to understand the differences in the way of comprehension of the same word in the different cultures.

For instance, the terminology for infrastructure in China and Serbia is not the same because the real situation about infrastructure is not the same. In China, some specific terminology could be more developed than in Serbia, the reason for this lies in the development of infrastructure. In such circumstances, the interpreter has to be conversant with the overall situation while interpreting.

2.4 DIFFICULTIES FROM THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECT

2.4.1 Interpreter's psychological state

Having in mind that the translation and interpretation is the process where the translator has to be familiar with and understand the speaker's way of thinking and in some way try to anticipate it, the translator has to be highly concentrated during the translation process, especially interpreting. There are different psychological obstructions that influence the quality of interpretation, such as: nervousness, eye-contact with the audience, looking at the speakers at the roundtable, interpreting with or without showing emotions, emphasizing the important parts of the speech *etc.* Nevertheless, interpreting in front of the audience can also have some advantages, since the interpreter can see the reaction of the audience, while during the simultaneous interpreting in the cabin, the interpreter can't see the audience nor they see him, which demands certain psychological preparation, and above all training and hands-on experience.

2.4.2 Outer influence on the interpretation/translation

Interpreters can encounter different situations and provide interpreting services to different people. Sometimes, when there is a group of speakers, they speak at the same time without paying attention to the interpreter, often making comments for themselves or while the interpreter is speaking-interpreting. This kind of behavior influences the interpreter's state of mind, psychological state and concentration. It is not a rare phenomenon that the interpreter is being accused of the incorrect or unclear interpretation, which is why the interpreter has to be prepared for such inconvenient and unexpected situations that may happen, but at the same time should remain calm and concentrated in his/her workplace.

3. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHINESE LSP TRANSLATING/INTERPRETING AND TEACHING

Translating and interpreting for specific purposes is closely related to teaching language for specific purposes, as is the case with the Chinese language. In order to convey knowledge to students, we need to prepare and master the specific terminology in order to be able to explain it properly to students. It often happens that students understand the terminology in their

native language, but are not conversant with the terminology in Chinese. It is very helpful if the teacher already has certain interpreting experience in this specific field, as then he/she can teach this terminology more easily, otherwise it is very difficult to convey this particular knowledge.

We agree with Kico (2008) that in the translating and interpreting process, knowledge of the grammar of the given foreign language and the usage of dictionary is not enough. It is necessary to have certain experience in translating, as it is necessary for successfully teaching Chinese or some other language for specific purposes.

4. SUMMARY

Considering all the difficulties we mentioned and analyzed in this paper, we can conclude that the praxis (hands-on experience) is among the most important elements in interpreting and translation. Chinese and Serbian are two very different languages in terms of lexicon, syntax, morphology, cultural background, everyday life behaviour, peoples' mentality *etc.*, which is why the interpreter needs to bear in mind all these differences in order to achieve high-quality of interpretation and translation.

It is also important that the interpreter is aware of the significance of his/her activity and how much it is helpful to individuals and the overall society. Certainly, the others should also be aware of this fact.

Even though translating may limit one's creativeness, it enables the philologists to keep in touch with the language and it represents an excellent exercise for developing vocabulary and cognitive skills in general.

REFERENCES

- Andrić, I. *Sa magijom ponekad graniči i na prave podvige liči rad dobrog prevodioca*. Retrieved 31.03.2015. from http://www.pravoslovo.net/tekstovi/lingvistika/Andric_o_prevodiocima.pdf
- Dimković Telebaković, G. (1998). Kultura jezika struke i nauke. *Zbornik Matice srpske za filologiju i lingvistiku* XLI/1, 129-135.
- Kico, M. (2008). O teškoćama u prevođenju. *Glasnik Rijaseta Islamske zajednice u Bosni i Hercegovini. O L . L X X , broj 1-2*, Sarajevo, 101-115.
- Rogers, M. (2011). LSP Translation and Creativity. *SYNAPS – A Journal of Professional Communication* 26, 42-47.
- Simić Veličković, B. (碧莲娜). (2011). Unpublished Ph.D Thesis in Chinese: 汉语、塞尔维亚语含有身体部位词的情感固定语对比研究. (*A Comparison between Chinese and Serbian Somatic Idioms that express Emotions*). Beijing Language and Culture University, Beijing, PR China
- Vidić, J. (2013). Prevod stručnog i naučnog teksta u svetlu interpretativne teorije prevođenja. *Komunikacija i kultura online, Godina IV, broj 4*, 109-123. Xing, J. Z. (2006). Teaching and learning Chinese as a foreign language: A pedagogical grammar. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- 萧鼎章. 郝长福. 徐士劳. (1997). 塞尔维亚语克罗地亚语汉语词典. (*Srpskohrvatsko-kineski rečnik*). 商务印书馆. 北京.