

A Study on Translator's Subjectivity in the Era of AI Translation

Wanmin Zhang, Yongjuan Yang*

Hainan Vocational University of Science and Technology, Haikou, 571126, China

*Corresponding authorhgcyj@163.com

Abstract: Iterations of artificial intelligence translation technology have changed the technical environment for translation activities to some extent, and now people are paying more attention to the role and connotations of translators' subjectivity. Given the technical foundation of AI translation, this paper will study the problem of translator subjectivity from an academic perspective. At the level of the internal mechanism, this paper will investigate how the translator's intentions, values, aesthetics, etc., are expressed in their decisions during translation, and how their thinking process is affected by technology. At the level of external expression, one can study the style effect of translation, the construction of translator identity in cross-cultural communication, and the harmony of technical constraints and subjective will. Research shows that the translator's subjectivity in the era of AI translation has the two attributes of connotation extension and form reconstruction. The translator will always be at the forefront of creating meaning in human-computer cooperation, and their language sensitivity, cultural knowledge and aesthetic imagination are indispensable professional foundations that cannot be replaced by technology.

Keywords: Era of AI Translation, Subjectivity of Translators, Human-Machine Collaboration, Translation Ethics.

Introduction

With the development of artificial intelligence translation technology, deep neural networks have started to be applied in language conversion. Machine translation is relatively fluent in the generation of text and can therefore increase the translation efficiency of informative materials. However, given that technical systems have statistical predictive properties, it is difficult to know the profound intentions and cultural presuppositions of a text; this nature is fundamentally different from that of human cognition. Changes in the technical environment have shifted the focus of translation studies from the efficiency of tools to the human factor, and now we need to re-examine the role and value of translators. Although the tools are very technical, they do not need to eliminate the professional function of translators; instead, these tools can extend the role of translators from language conversion to controlling the technical system, revising machine output and interpreting the generated meaning. Research on the internal structure of this change can help to achieve the coordination of technical rationality and humanistic values, and it will also offer theoretical support for the field of translation studies.

1. Theoretical Reconstruction of Translator's Subjectivity in the Technical Context

1.1 Technical Principles and Text Generation Features of Artificial Intelligence Translation

At present, the foundation of artificial intelligence translation is based on deep neural networks and large language models. It works by imitating the connection mode of human brain neurons, and through training on a large number of bilingual corpora, it learns the mapping relationships and probability distributions among language units. An encoder-decoder framework and an attention mechanism can be employed to obtain the extended context of the text and carry out contextualised semantic mapping. AI translation has good fluency and regular surface structures for text generation, and it can quickly match syntax. However, the generation logic is essentially prediction and reproduction based on statistical regularity, and it does not have an actual understanding of the deep intentions, implicit meanings and cultural presuppositions of the text. Due to technical reasons, machine output will tend to be the "most

likely" expression rather than the "most suitable" one, and the path of meaning generation for the text is fundamentally different from that in the human brain; thus, there will be little room for further translator intervention.

1.2 Traditional Understanding of Translator's Subjectivity and Its Contemporary Extension

In the past, translator's subjectivity has been generally regarded as the translator's creative interpretation ability based on respect for the original work, and it includes the translator's cultural background, aesthetic preferences and personal style. Therefore, translators have their own objectives for presenting the ideas in the original work. In recent years, with the development of artificial intelligence translation, many technical tools have been introduced to help translate, and translators have gained some freedom in their work. Now, the translator is no longer just a language converter; they have also taken the initiative to develop and improve the technical system. The scope of the domain to which subjectivity has been applied has expanded from text and language to include the design of human-machine collaboration processes, evaluation of machine-generated texts, maintenance of translation ethics, and so on. The traditional binary relationship of translator and author has developed into a tripartite interaction among the translator, the machine and the original text, and thus the translator's subjectivity has acquired new connotations in terms of technology.

1.3 Redefinition of the Translator's Role in Human-Machine Interaction

As a result of the development of human-computer interaction, the function of a translator has changed. Since AI translation will be used for basic generation of text, the function of human translators will shift from word-for-word translation to higher-level modification and quality assurance of the text. The translator is a corrector of machine-translated works who needs to fix problems in meaning, appropriateness and style that have occurred because of the algorithm. At the same time, the translator is also a decision-maker in the translation process, and he or she needs to balance efficiency with quality, be faithful to the original work, and be flexible. More importantly, in the translation of literary works, intellectual works and highly contextualised texts, the translator assumes the role of an interpreter and gives the text life. Given its place in the hierarchy of meaning construction, this function needs to be carried out by people; although machines can handle "information", only translators can communicate "significance". Human-machine collaboration is not the addition of functions; rather, it is a division of labour at the professional level, and the translator remains in charge and has control^[1].

2. Internal Dimensions and Operating Mechanism of Translator's Subjectivity

2.1 Intention Projection and Value Judgment in the Translator's Decision-Making Process

Since there are many languages that can be translated, one needs to be chosen according to the contents of the text. For the translation of routine informative materials, a heuristic method is generally employed; thus, one can quickly obtain the translated text by using the candidate translations provided by artificial intelligence translation. Translators will be organised in their study of complex or high-context texts, and they will conduct all-round studies of the syntax, semantics and pragmatic purposes of the original text. The change in cognitive mode is the basic reason for the translator's decision-making, and it shows that people can flexibly use their cognitive resources in the presence of technology.

The translator's grasp of what the original author intended is not merely the collection of data; rather, it is a process of constructing meaning within the translator's own frame of reference. The translator enters the world of meaning in the text by reading, and then uses their own pre-existing knowledge system to speculate on and reconstruct what the author may have intended. At this time, the translator should be aware of the linguistic expressions in the text and, at the same time, introduce their own cognitive framework and cultural attitude. The Depth and accuracy of the intention projection will determine whether the translated text can achieve the same effect as the original text in the context of the target language.

All the translator's choices are consistently based on values and are made according to all sorts of reasons. At the level of language, one needs to decide whether to use standard expressions or new ones. At the level of textual function, one should know which type of text is more suitable for conveying information directly and which is more focused on aesthetics. The translator should consider the

cognitive level and reception expectations of the target readers in the audience factor. Given that artificial intelligence translation has been developed to address the problem of efficiency, translators now need to make professional judgments on whether to prioritise efficiency or quality, and in doing so, express their own understanding and position of the essential nature of translation work^[2].

2.2 Creative Interpretation and Aesthetic Selection in Language Conversion

The other problem of language conversion is how to adjust the distance of interpretation. If it is too close, the translator will be prone to the error of mechanical translation based on literal equivalence; if it is too far, it will deviate too much from the original work. The translator will judge the nature of the text and the reasons for translation to determine an appropriate interpretative distance, and then weigh how closely the translation should adhere to the spirit of the original work and how easily the target audience can understand it. The adjustment process above helps to achieve the regeneration of meaning in the target language; that is, the implicit information, cultural images and rhetorical effects of the original text are expressed in various linguistic environments through the translator's interpretation.

Aesthetic Judgement is required at all times during the translation of language. At the level of vocabulary, the translator can distinguish between the slight differences in meaning and style of synonyms and select the most suitable word according to the whole situation. At the level of syntax, the translator will adjust the length of sentences and shift the emphasis of information to create a rhythmic effect in line with the aesthetic standards of the target language. The translator should make full use of coherence and consistency in language style among the paragraphs to preserve the artistic quality of the whole translated work. Artificial intelligence translation can achieve the corresponding conversion at the level of words and grammar, but it cannot make such fine adjustments and selections in aesthetics.

The style of the translator is a condensed expression of creative interpretation and aesthetic choice, and it has been formed through the accumulation of linguistic habits and aesthetic orientations during many years of translation practice. When different translators are given the same source text, they will produce various target texts due to differences in culture, language sensitivity and artistic taste. The differences can be seen in the selection of words, syntactic choices, rhetorical methods and changes in cultural images. The style of a translator can be their own expression of ideas, but more importantly, it also shows that translation is a creative process; thus, in the current era of extensive application of artificial intelligence translation, such personalised linguistic marks are gaining increasing attention.

2.3 The Adjustment Path of Translator's Thinking under the Intervention of Technical Tools

Artificial Intelligence translation has changed the kind of cognitive load for translators. The three tasks that need to be carried out by a translator in the traditional mode of translation are source-text comprehension, language conversion and target-text production. In the mode of human-machine collaboration, some of the language conversion tasks are offloaded to technical tools, and thus the translator can focus more cognitive resources on the general control of the text and fine-tuning key nodes. The restructuring of cognitive load requires the translator to redistribute their attention, and a new balance must be struck among the revision of machine output, the identification of problems, and the general improvement of the translated text.

One can add the mastery of technical tools by learning them to one's list of professional qualities. Technical literacy refers to one's knowledge of technology and the ability to apply it effectively; thus, translators need to understand the strengths and weaknesses of artificial intelligence translation, know when to use it, and know when to revise manually. With the accumulation of experience, translators have developed an intuition for the quality of machine-generated output and can promptly find potential semantic deviations and pragmatic mismatches in what appears to be fluent machine-generated text. The first is the technical basis for the translator's professional judgment.

Since many technical tools are used in the process of translation, one of the problems for translators is how to retain their own thoughts. If too many people are reliant on machines for translation, they will lose their sense of language and the ability to think critically. To maintain one's own thinking, the translator should be able to examine the technical tools with a professional critical eye and use artificial intelligence translation as a tool to assist, not to substitute. For texts that are rich in culture, have strong emotional expressions or clear values, the translator will use all their linguistic knowledge and cultural awareness, balance the demand for technical accuracy with professional independence, and ensure that all translation work is supervised by a person^[3].

3. External Manifestations and Textual Presentation of Translator's Subjectivity

3.1 Translator's Imprint and Individual Expression in Translation Style Markers

The words chosen by the translator are the first indications of the type of translation. When there are many choices for translating the same idea in the original language, a person will select one based on their understanding of the type of work to be translated, their knowledge of how to use the target language correctly, and what they believe readers expect to read. Gradually, this selection trend has been accumulated in a series of translated works and a relatively stable style has formed that can be either the solemn elegance of written language or the vivid fluency of spoken language. AI translation can provide standardised word equivalents; therefore, when a translator chooses one that differs from the machine's suggestion, it may be considered that they have expressed their own views on the work.

The translator's arrangement of sentences will affect the speed and readability of the translated work. The alternation of long and short sentences, the combination of simple and complex sentences, and the fronting or postponement of information focus all show that the translator is aware of linguistic rhythm. In the translation of technical texts, the translator is more likely to use regular sentence structures and explicit logic; in the translation of literary works, more attention is paid to sentence variation and the creation of rhythm. The choice of syntactic arrangement is constrained by the syntactic features of the original text, and at the same time, it can also be used to explore and exploit the expressive power of the target language.

The translator has to choose between retaining the diversity of the rhetorical devices and cultural images in the original work or integrating them. Figures of speech such as similes, metaphors, personification and irony take different forms and have various effects in different languages and cultures, so translators need to decide whether to transplant the rhetorical form of the original work or to find a functionally equivalent alternative expression in the target language. How to treat the cultural images is also the translator's own judgement. For pictures with certain cultural connotations, either keep the original colour and add annotations in literal translation, or use domestication conversion to help the readers understand them better. The highest stage of rhetorical and cultural processing is now one of the translator's style^[4].

3.2 The Negotiation and Construction of the Translator's Identity in Cross-cultural Communication

The translator always faces the problem of identity positioning in translation activities; that is to say, whether they act as the representative of the original author, the guide for readers of the target language, or the mediator between the two cultures. Different positions of identity result in different translation directions and text forms. A translator closer to the author's attitude will pay more attention to preserving the expressions and ways of thinking in the original work during translation; a translator closer to the reader will pay more attention to the clarity and acceptance of the translated work; and a cultural mediator will try to find a way to communicate between the two. The position of this identity is not fixed; rather, it will change according to different types of texts, translation goals, and so on.

The degree of mention for the translator in the translated text is either hidden or revealed alternately. For the purpose of presenting information in text, translators generally do not mention themselves; instead, they aim for transparent and fluent translation so that readers can focus on the content without being distracted by the translator. In types of text that require interpretive intervention by the translator, other means can be used, such as footnotes, prefaces and postscripts, to present one's own view and explain to the readers the reasons and choices made in the translation process. Even in the main body of translation, the choice of certain words and how to handle problematic sentence structures are also expressions of the translator's understanding and judgment. The variation of concealment and disclosure here is a way to show the translator's identity in the text.

As a cross-cultural communicator, the translator needs to be a mediator and handle all the differences and conflicts that occur between the culture of origin and that in the destination country. If the original text contains concepts, customs or values particular to a certain culture, the translator needs to decide how acceptable these cultural elements are in the environment of the target language and whether to keep them, alter them or leave them out. If there are cultural differences that may lead to misunderstandings or difficulties in understanding for the readers, the translator can add related explanations and background information to help them better grasp the work. In the process of mediation, one needs to have a good understanding of both cultures and be able to accurately foresee the effects of communication.

3.3 The Tension Balance of Technical Constraints and Subjective Agency

With the spread of artificial intelligence translation technology, some restrictions have been placed on the selection of translators. The logic of the algorithm and the training data in the technical system determine the general direction and possible range of the machine's output. With the long-term use of technical tools, translators may be unconsciously moulded by the expression habits of these machines and develop a kind of language-processing mode that is in harmony with the technical system. The Design of the Interface for the translation platform, the preset options in the terminology database and the matching mechanism of the translation memory also indirectly affect the choices of translators. This technical defect is not an external requirement to be met; rather, it will indirectly affect the final form of the translation work by changing the translator's working environment and way of thinking.

In the face of the output from the technical system, the translator will still step in professionally to review and correct it. Machine translation may not be able to express all the connotations in cases of semantic ambiguity, vague references and cultural specificity; thus, there is a risk of misunderstanding or mistranslation. Translators should use their knowledge of the source text and context to identify and correct such problems. Rhetorical devices, emotional tones and other implicit meanings that are difficult for machine translation to process are added manually in this way. The process of screening and correction is a type of quality assurance for technical writing carried out by translators, and it can also show how far technology falls short and provide an important source of subjective agency in human-computer interaction.

With the help of modern technology in translation, the expression of translator subjectivity has taken on new forms. The translator is no longer only to be viewed through the lens of creativity in language conversion; instead, one should also observe their overall management of translation work by looking at the choice of technical tools, evaluation of machine output, and design of human-machine collaboration processes. In translation tasks that require efficiency, good use is made of technical tools to increase the speed of output; in translation tasks that demand high quality, one is no longer dependent on machine assistance and returns to manual refinement of the translation. One type of advanced subjectivism for translators in the information age is to be able to flexibly switch between different modes of collaboration between people and computers according to the demands of the task, so as to adapt to changes in technology while maintaining professional autonomy.

Conclusion

The three stages of the study on translators' subjectivity in the age of artificial intelligence translation are theoretical reconstruction, internal structure and external expression. The technical basis determines the shape of the output of a machine, so there is still some room for human intervention; thus, the role of the translator has shifted from language conversion to revision and interpretation. At the level of the internal mechanism, the translator's intention projection, aesthetic judgment and thinking adjustment are the main components of the operation of subjectivity. At the level of external expressions, subjectivity takes the form of translation style, identity negotiation and human-machine tension. In the future, research will explore all kinds of applications for multimodal translation, investigate the cognitive foundation of human-computer interaction, rebuild the concept of translation ethics, and develop new models for training translators. Research on the subjectivity of translators in the era of artificial intelligence translation will continue to change with changes in technology and values.

References

- [1] Huang, W. J. "The Transformation of Translator's Identity Subjectivity in the AIGC Era: A Case Study of Technical Text Translation." *Modern and Ancient Literature Creation*, no. 03 (2026): 103-105.
- [2] Chen, W., and Pan, J. Q. "A Study on Translator's Subjectivity in the Era of Digital Intelligence Translation: Post-Editing Reflections Based on Aesthetic Creativity." *Foreign Language Research*, vol. 42, no. 03 (2025): 84-92+113.
- [3] Yang, F. Y. *Translator's Subjectivity and Decision-Making in the AI Era: A Translation Practice Report on Media Innovation and Entrepreneurship (Excerpt)*. 2024. Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, MA thesis.
- [4] Hou, Y. H., and Zhu, Y. "The Translation Advantages of Human Translators in the Era of Large Language Models: A Corpus-Based Comparative Study of Human Translations and ChatGPT

Translations." Translation Research and Teaching, no. 04 (2024): 116-126.