

Relevance-theoretic Interpretation of Soft News Translation and its Implications for Translation Teaching

EXPLICATION DE LA THÉORIE DE LA PERTINENCE DANS LA TRADUCTION DES NOUVELLES LÉGÈRES ET SES IMPLICATIONS DANS L'ENSEIGNEMENT DE TRADUCTION

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Abstract: The author gives a thorough interpretation of the translation process and methods under the framework of relevance theory based on the actual pairs of Chinese soft news and the counterpart English versions well selected from authoritative bilingual magazines. The author attests the explanatory force of relevance theory to soft news translation and also summarizes the implications for teaching.

Key words: Relevance theory; Soft news translation; Teaching; Communication

Résumé: L'auteur donne une explication approfondie du processus de traduction et des méthodes dans le cadre de la théorie de la pertinence sur la base des nouvelles légères chinoises et leurs versions en anglais bien choisies dans des magazines bilingues connus. L'auteur atteste la force explicative de la théorie de la pertinence dans la traduction des nouvelles légères et résume également les implications pour l'enseignement.

Mots clés: Théorie de la pertinence; Traduction des nouvelles légères; Enseignement; Communication

1. INTRODUCTION

News translation is one of the most significant methods to promote cultural communication and enhance mutual understanding. However, it failed to attract enough theory-based research. Most research just touched upon stylistic features of news text or writing techniques. Some books explored news translation by means of traditional translation theories. In fact, news text or journalistic text includes a very complicated variety of language forms in respect of stylistics. In terms of the nature, news stories are basically divided into two types: hard news and soft news. Hard news generally refers to up-to-the-minute news and events that are reported immediately, while soft news is background information or human-interest stories. Although sharing the basic features of news text such as accuracy, authenticity and proximity, soft news impresses people more owing to its rich affection, deep human touch and versatile language. The weakness of explanatory force of traditional equivalence-based translation theories has become more and more obvious, especially dealing with soft news translation due to the shortcomings of the theories and the "soften" of the news text.

Therefore, the author aims to explore C-E soft news translation by means of a new systematic pragmatic approach -- relevance theory. Relevance theory, put forward by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, is a branch of pragmatics (though not written especially for pragmatics), focuses on human communication and cognition. The major function of news is to give information, to achieve communication. In fact, translation is also an activity of language use and communication involving two different languages, namely, an interlingual communication. The purpose of this study is to apply relevance theory into C-E soft news translation to interpret the nature of news translation from English to Chinese.

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2. APPLICATION OF RELEVANCE THEORY TO TRANSLATION STUDIES

Relevance theory was put forward by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson in their co-authored book *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* in 1986. It is pragmatic theory on communication from the cognitive point. Combining communication and cognition, relevance theory not only promoted the development of cognitive pragmatics, but also paved the way for the research on language use and communication from a new perspective. (RAN, 2002, 12-17)

Relevance theory proposes the inferential mode of communication on the basis of encoding-decoding mode constructed on the theory of mutual knowledge. It views the communication as an ostensive-inferential process, as we have mentioned in the previous chapter. The communicator evaluates and assesses the audience/reader's cognitive environment and communication context, and hereby manifests and expresses (explicitly and implicitly) her communicative intention through utterance.

It is worth pointing out that the application of relevance theory entails that translation is being looked as a part of communication, before introducing the relevance-theoretic account of translation in more detail.

In the first stage, the translator engages in inferential communication: perceive the ST writer's intention, which follows by the contextual assumptions of the original. In the second stage, the translator, as a mediator, has to produce a translated version from which the target audience may get the original writer's intention.

To be consistent with the assumption of optimal relevance, the translator theoretically must take the contextual differences of the two languages concerned into account and pay particular attention to the target audience's accessibility to the translated version, so as to guarantee the successful communication of translation. All the translation strategies are to establish optimal relevance between the source language writer and the target language receptor, and hence achieve optimal communicative effects. (ZHANG & HE, 1999, 285-293)

Relevance theory, though not meant for translation, is powerful in accounting for translation -- "the most complex phenomenon in the evolution of the cosmos". It provides translation with a unified coherent framework, which laid the foundation of ontological and methodological considerations. (ZHAO, 1999, 273-295)

3. AN ANALYSIS OF C-E SOFT NEWS TRANSLATION FROM A RELEVANCE-THEORY PERSPECTIVE

The major function of news is the transmission of information, with the characteristics of timeliness, trueness, exactness and vitality. However, soft news is quite different from the other kinds of news due to its feature "soft". It pays more attention to human interest, caring about what people care about. It pays more attention to the feeling and emotion of common people. Therefore, the translation of soft news should take into more factors into consideration, such as the interlingual cultural differences, target readers' expectation, communicative intention of the original author and different styles of expression etc. Then, the method of translation can be decided. Below are listed some translation methods that are frequently used, which seem opposite to the traditional translation criteria. In fact, we can find their motivation and guidance under relevance theory. In the following part, the author will make a complete interpretation of the methods using relevance-theoretic translation theory. All of the examples are taken from *China Today* in 2004.

3.1 Abridgement

In news translation, abridging translation or abridgement is a frequently used method. For the requirement of the second communication, the translator has to abridge, edit and select which part to translate and how to translate in order to meet different readers' requirements. However, the translated version should convey the main idea of the original news. (LIU, 2004, 137)

For instance, see the following examples:

1) ST: "是誰帶來遠古的呼喚，是誰留下千年的祈盼，難道說還有無言的歌。還是那久久不能忘懷的眷戀。哦——我看見一座座山、一座座山川相連……" 李娜的一曲《青藏高原》曾經喚起我們心中對藏地的無盡嚮往

60 多年前，英國作家詹姆斯·希爾頓的小說《失去的地平線》問世，其作品中的香格里拉，把人們帶入了一個充滿夢幻和詩情的桃源仙境。我們至今還記得小說的情節：英國外交官康威和他的朋友被劫機，飛躍世界屋脊時，因汽油燒盡被迫降落在冰天雪地裡。絕望之中，得到了藏民的搭救，並在一個神奇美好的地方度過了一段時光……深受感染的人們紛紛湧入中國、尼泊爾、印度以及相關地區，掀起了半個多世紀的尋找香格里拉熱。

TT: More than 60 years ago, British writer James Hilton's novel *Lost Horizon* described Shangri-la as a dream-like Utopia. Hollywood adapted the novel into a film, and ever since the name Shangri-la has been famous worldwide. Many people come to China, Nepal, India and related areas looking for this paradise.

This passage was selected from a piece of soft news introducing the customs and natural resources in the Shangri-la area in Yunnan district. This kind of articles that introduce Chinese people and sceneries play a very important role in the international cultural communication between China and foreign countries. Beginning with the Chinese folk song "Tibet Plateau", this article brings readers into the beautiful heaven on earth — Tibet Plateau. However, the case is quite different for foreign readers. The well-known Chinese song may achieve little contextual effects for foreign readers. Moreover, they will have to spend more gratuitous processing efforts. Therefore, the translator abridged the lyrics, making the target version more relevant to the target readers. In the following part, the original author introduces British writer James Hilton's novel *Lost Horizon*, which made Shangri-la widely known worldwide. The target text did not include the section that narrates the story, since people from English speaking countries are familiar with it. The translated version abridged the less relevant part and becomes more concise and pertinent.

2) ST: 人說“冰凍三尺，非一日之寒”，而張家界的“三千翠微峰，八百琉璃水”更是大自然 15 億年的孕育。

TT: The formation of Zhangjiajie's landscape occurred over 1.5 billion years of evolutionary change.

Chinese writers usually use literary quotation or ancient poems to make their work tingeing with culture. The sentence above is a representative example. In so short a sentence that depicting the landscape in Zhangjiajie, the author quoted two ancient proverbs. “冰凍三尺，非一日之寒” shows that Rome was not built in a day; “三千翠微峰，八百琉璃水” further tells us that the beautiful scenery in Zhangjiajie occurred over 1.5 billion years of evolutionary change. For Chinese people who have been tingeing with Chinese culture since their birth, this kind of rhetoric devices may deepen the propagandistic effects. For foreigners, they will find it hard to perceive the implicit meaning of “冰凍三尺，非一日之寒”，“翠微” and “琉璃”. This translation clearly shows the original intention in the direct way, without giving extra processing effort. It effectively reached the goal of international communication.

3.2 Amplification

Though not so frequently used as abridgement, amplification is also a necessary translation method in soft news translation.

1) ST: 今日中國：“潮文化”作為一個名詞風行神州，潮文化的魅力究竟表現在那裡

TT: China Today: Chaozhou has a long history and profound culture. Chaoju Opera, music, embroidery, cuisine and Kungfu tea are famous the world over. They are all facets of Chao culture, but what are its origins?

This sentence is selected from the interview with Jiang Hong, the Secretary of Chaozhou Municipal Committee of the CPC, by the journalist of *China Today*. The whole piece of news aims to introduce the economy of Chaozhou and the unique Chao culture to Chinese people and the whole world. Hearing the words “Chao culture”, we may associate it with delicious Chaozhou cuisine, delicate Kungfu tea and traditional Chaoju Opera, which will attract readers to read on. For foreign readers, “Chao culture” alone or even “Chaozhou culture” doesn't mean anything. They cannot work it out what it is. Therefore, the translator first of all pointed out that Chaozhou is a city with a long history. Then, he briefly introduced the main aspects of Chao culture, amplifying the cultural default.

3.3 Reformulation

Reformulation is a translation activity which may make some appropriate adaptations to the form, part of the content or even style of the original work in the light of the special needs of readers. (HUANG, 2002, 149) Chinese and English differ a lot in the way of thinking, which influences discourse and manner of writing. Therefore, we may make some adaptations to the structure of the whole passage according to the English logics or English way of patterning sentences in order to make the translation more acceptable to the audience.

The English paragraph points out the main idea at the very beginning, which is called the mode of deduction; the Chinese paragraph usually use the mode of induction, paying more attention to the chronological order. Therefore, the translation method of reformulation just aims to follow the target readers' reading habits and logics and raise the function of international communication.

1) ST: 迪慶藏族自治州位於雲南省西部滇、川、藏三省區交界處，這裡有冰川雪山、江河峽谷、湖泊草甸，美麗而寧靜。州內以藏族居民為主，還居住著傈僳族、納西族等 20 多個民族，長期以來，這裡各民族和諧相處，創造了獨特而燦爛的文化——山川秀美、民風淳樸、歷史悠久、文化豐富，與詹姆斯·希爾頓筆下的香格里拉極其相似。

TT: Located at the junction of Yunnan and Sichuan Provinces and the Tibet Autonomous Region, the scenery in picturesque Diqing, filled with glaciers, deep canyons, meadows, and lakes, remarkably resembles that of the Shangri-la described in Hilton's novel. Residents here are mainly Tibetans who coexist peacefully with over 20 other ethnic groups, including Lili and Naxi groups, thus creating a rich and unique culture.

This paragraph was selected from *Beijing Review*. The target version reformed the original text into a new order. First, the last sentence in the original text was brought forward; then, the whole passage was reformed into two compound sentences with clear logic levels, emphasizing the thematic information; thirdly, the translator omitted the commentary statement usually used in Chinese “山川秀美、民風淳樸、歷史悠久、文化豐富”，making the structure and meaning more compact and clearer.

4. IMPLICATIONS FOR TRANSLATION TEACHING

This paper, through the analysis of the process of the soft news translation, will also attempt to put forward some revelatory proposals for translation teaching.

First, the comparative study of the two languages is specifically required for translation teaching. The comparative study on English and Chinese is essential for inferring logical relations by analyzing language structure. On the basis of enhancing the proficiency in the two languages by reasonably arranging courses of the Chinese and English respectively, a course on the comparative study should be initiated for language students, especially those specialized in translation. Students are expected to master the differences of the two languages in word use, sentence model and text structure etc., more clearly and systematically.

Second, culture study is equally important in translation teaching. The cognition of the cultural connotation in languages is a crucial part in translation. As we know, beneath the surface of language, there is a huge iceberg of culture, which is language actually rooted from. We should suggest more predicatively that culture study should be highlighted and strengthened in language teaching of most colleges.

Third, one more point is to cultivate intercultural communicative competence. The appropriateness of language seems more important than the correctness of it in the intercultural communication; and the appropriateness is assessed by certain cultural community that uses the language rather than the language itself, for different cultural communities possess distinct communicative anodes and strategies. Thus, for inferring the pragmatic elements in language communication and the relevant education of the implicated meanings, the cognitive competence of the intercultural communication and the communicative competence are expected to be improved. This requires the reformation of the teaching method, from the traditional spoon-feed mode to the heuristic mode assorted by the contextual teaching environment. That is, to simulate a situation of the contextual study for students, by which, the students can efficiently form their own corresponding cognitive mode, and apply it to practice.

All in all, in the aspect of translation teaching, the enlightenment we have got from is that the students' cognitive schemata and the cognitive competence in various aspects should be cultivated and acquired mainly by themselves. Teachers and the curriculum provision systems should take measures to provide them with efficient environment and rational instructions, to guarantee the improvement of their students' cognitive context, one of the cardinal qualities for translation.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The study in this dissertation is not normative—it does not tell the translator what to do. Nor is it descriptive—its focus is not on how different kinds of translation can be characterized. In accordance with relevance theoretic translation theory advanced by Gutt and recent development in cognitive pragmatics, the author attempts to provide a thoroughly theoretic account of soft news translation under the framework of relevance theory, to explore the role of relevance theory in translation process and elucidate how people can communicate via translation, and what the conditions for communicative success are; and then to apply relevance theory to the translation of practical writings (soft news) to attest its explanatory force.

Based on the previous discussion, we may draw to the following findings and conclusions.

Though not meant for translation, nor has been used to account for the translation of practical writings, we can see clearly after the whole thorough discussion that relevance theory and relevance-theoretic translation theory may effectively interpret translation phenomenon, especially the translation of soft news. The various translation methods frequently used in the translation of soft news, such as abridgement, amplification and reformulation etc., are all indeed to establish optimal relevance between the source language writer and the target language receptor and hence achieve optimal communicative effects, realizing the function of E-C soft news translation to promote international

communication and friendship. Soft News translation interpretively resembles the original news in relevant respects. That means in aspects that make it relevant to the TL audience or provide adequate contextual effects. Interpretive resemblance in translation is defined in terms of shared explicatures and implicatures. Thus the translator should only translate the relevant information to the target audience to guarantee the successful communication — the intentions of the communicator and the expectations of the audience meet. Translation teachers should take measures to provide students with efficient environment and rational instructions, to guarantee the improvement of their students' cognitive context.

However, though relevance theory is a powerful approach to the translation studies, it is far from perfect. For example, the measurement of relevance is still regarded as an obstacle in its application to the practical translation activities. Owing to the limited time and other realistic elements, the examples in this thesis are not sufficient either. The author has planned to make an interview on the translators of soft news to find out more about the functioning factors in the translation process, as has not been carried out yet due to time limit and other practical difficulties. Therefore, more research is still needed on the improvement of relevance theory, its application to practical translating and other corresponding areas.

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