On Practical Translation From the Perspective of Memetics: A Case Study of the Chinese Translation of *Convict Conditioning*

HU Wandi[a],*; LI Yuying[a]

[a]Foreign Language College, Jiangxi Normal University, Nanchang, China.
*Corresponding author.

Abstract

With the improvement of life quality, the pursuit of health and longevity has become a growing consensus, fitness exercises being integrated into people's daily life and calisthenics, because of its freedom from the restraints of time and space, has won particular favor among bodybuilders. Chinese fitness enthusiasts are not content with mere directions at home, they even crave for the guide abroad. Under the circumstances, *Convict Conditioning* by Paul Wade, an ex-convict, is looked up to as a treasured book in the calisthenics circles, its translated versions in various languages coming out one after another, benefiting fitness enthusiasts from all the countries. This paper takes the Chinese Version of *Convict Conditioning* translated by Gu Hongyan as an example to discuss the replication and transmission of memes from semantic, syntactic and cultural levels under Memetics, in the hope to shed some light on translation in the calisthenics field, thus improving the quality of practical translation at large.

Key words: Practical translation; *Convict Conditioning*; Calisthenics; Memetics

INTRODUCTION

In modern society, people have higher demands on life quality, not only in the respect of consumption, but also in physical fitness. Therefore, taking exercises and keeping fit have become part of the daily routine, and Chinese fitness enthusiasts are not content with mere directions at home, they even crave for the guide abroad, which leads to the demand of translation of calisthenics texts from other languages. However, distinct stylistic characteristics and professional expressions are significant in practical texts, which pose ponderous challenges to the translation of the texts in the field. *Convict Conditioning* consists of four volumes—*Convict Conditioning*, *Convict Conditioning II*, *C-Mass* and *Explosive Calisthenics*. The original edition of the first volume was published in the United States in 2011 and its Chinese version was issued by Beijing Science and Technology Press in 2013. Paul Wade, the author, has spent 19 years in prison, in Angola Penitentiary and Marion Penitentiary, known for their grimmest supervision and correction. While serving his long sentence, Paul Wade managed to train himself calisthenics, making himself muscular without any fitness equipment. In *Convict Conditioning*, Paul sums up his own experience of exercises in the jail and develops a unique form of calisthenics—Bodyweight Training that provides various training methods as to how to use strength in a coordinated way. On publication, the book was warmly hailed for it enables the readers to do fitness exercises anywhere at any time, without any limitation of equipment.

In order to benefit more bodybuilding groups, many translators have committed themselves to the introduction of the book to the world. For example, the Chinese version of *Convict Conditioning* translated by Gu Hongyan is well reputed among the public with clear ideas, smooth expressions, etc. Yet, unprofessional expressions, syntactical inflexibilities and other problems still exist in the translations of other texts related to fitness, partly due to the lack of guide of a translating theory. Memetics, a theory that based on Darwinism, can be a good assistant to tackle such matters in replicating strong memes and

transmitting the exuberant memes of the source and target texts. Besides, it can greatly intrigue the mass to keep a perfect physique and develop great strength through ideal translations, although the book was teemed with insipid technical terms and diagrams.Therefore, in hope of reducing errors and escalating translation quality, the paper takes Chinese version of *Convict Conditioning* as an example to explore the guiding effects of Memetics in practical translations from the aspects of meaning, form and culture.

1. INTRODUCTION OF TRANSLATION MEME THEORY

Based on Darwinian laws of natural selection, Memetics was developed and first combined with translatology as "Translation Meme Theory" by Chesterman and Vermeer in 1977, and the core idea of the theory is "memes" which was proposed by Dawkins in *The Selfish Gene* (1976), and then the Chinese scholar He Ziran translated "meme" as "模因". The term "meme", "a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation"(Dawkins, 1976, p.206), derives from "Gene", and the both are replicators, but the difference is that "the replicating way of gene is a kind of vertical transmission from parents to children; yet that of memes is horizontal transmission or multiple parenting between individuals" (Yin, 2006, p.39). In other words, memes always spread "from brain to brain, from brain to book, from book to brain, from brain to computer, from computer to computer" (Dawkins, 1986, p.158).

Francis Heylighen divided the process of memes replication into four stages: assimilation, retention, expression and transmission. Firstly, assimilation means that the memes are understood and accepted by the host and integrated into the host's brain; next, retention means that the memes are memorized by the host and can be extracted in proper time; then, expression means the depicting and copying process of memes by the host through language, text or other forms; and transmission, the last step, means that the memes are spread from one host to another or others. Similarly, Chesterman pointed out that the process of memes duplication is a metaphor to translating progress, and the befitting ways for the new host to describe and disseminate the memes after decoding the source text are the imitation of common sayings, idioms and allusions of the target language, the application of some memes which are formal or semantic equivalent to the target language, and the replication of strong memes from the source language with annotations, footnotes and so on. With the help of these approaches, the meme pool can be enriched. During the process of copying and spreading, vigorous memes have survived while unpopular ones faded away, the latter being regarded as weak memes with fragility. On the contrary,

the former is taken as strong memes with three traits as longevity, fecundity and copying-fidelity.

He Ziran, a Chinese scholar, mentioned two forms of memes, genotypes and phenotypes. The former mainly focus on original information propagation which means that the content of the target text is parallel to that of the source text whereas the latter refers to original form imitation. That is to say, the content of the source expression can be transformed or reproduced in the light of different requirements and purposes so as to spread the memes.

The paper attempts to analyze the features of various memes in *Convict Conditioning* in terms of semantic level, syntactic level and cultural level, discussing how to effectively copy and spread memes of both the source and the target language to explore the positive effects of Memetics on practical translation.

2. CASE ANALYSIS

2.1 On Semantic Level: Focusing on Conveying the Semantic Memes of the SL

2.1.1 Locating Memes Accurately From the Target Language

In general, each kind of practical translation involves a particular subject that contains abundant technical terms. Those specific terminologies are language memes with fixed expressions that can't be translated freely. On the basis of this principle, it's necessary to establish a meme pool which means "the repository of information" (He, 2014, p.9) covering professional knowledge of various fields. The meme library is so large as to be able to accurately extract the information needed during translating. In strength circle, many terms are compound words combining with body parts, training performance and technique, etc. For example, the term "Shoulderstand Squats" is translated into "肩倒立深蹲", and "Hanging Straight Leg Raises" into "悬垂举腿", etc. These terms are concise and comprehensive. However, in practical translation, the same words often have different meanings in different fields. For instance, the term "valve" means "阀门" in industry but "瓣膜" in medicine. Under Memetics, these words and their specialized meanings can be regarded as memes placed in meme pool.

Example 1: Close pullups
Chinese version: 窄距引体向上

Analysis: This is one of Paul's daily movements—"Jump up and grab a bar with an overhand grip. Your hands should be next to each other…Bend at the elbows and shoulders to raise your body, slowly levering yourself up until your chin passes the bar." (Wade, 2011, p.132) In this performance, "close" refers to the narrow distance between the performer's hands, so the term can

be translated into "窄握" or "窄距" in Chinese, and Gu Hongyan, the translator, chose the latter to represent the relative distance between the trainer's hands because "距"manifests "distance, gap" in English. Next, "Pullup" has a variety of meanings in other fields. For example, it may mean "suction", "slowing down and stopping the car", "chinning", "stretching up" and so on. According to the terminology standard in strength circle, Gu Hongyan selected the strong meme "引体向上" that people are familiar with to indicate the body moves, which is conducive to enlarging the number of new "hosts".

2.1.2 Selecting Analogous Memes From the Target Language

As strong memes of genotype, allusions and idioms are the most stable ones in language library. Replicating these strong memes of the target language is a fantastic way to make the translation easier to be accepted by readers with authentic and creative expressions.

Example 2: What strength most bodybuilders do have, they cannot use in a coordinated way; if you asked them to walk on their hands they'd **fall flat on their faces**.

Chinese version: 大多数健身者确实有力量, 但他们不会协调地运用自己的力量. 如果让他们倒立行走, 他们就会摔个嘴啃泥.

Analysis: Paul has low opinion of those who can't use power in perfect union even though they have muscular bodies, so he makes the joke that if those fake brawny men walk on headstands, they will fall over on account of unbalanced limbs and disharmonious strength. If Gu Hongyan literally translated the original expression into "摔得脸朝地" or elliptically rewrote it as "摔倒", it would be a mere description of the falling state or appearance in an objective stance without the original tone of sarcasm or cynicism. In an attempt to solve the problem, Gu Hongyan extracted the idiom "嘴啃泥" from the meme pool of the target language to retain Paul's emotional factors. The sight of "嘴啃泥" will promptly trigger a funny picture in the mind of Chinese readers—a strong man severely falling down with mud in the mouth, meanwhile, the readability of the Chinese version is enhanced through the interesting expression.

2.2 On Syntactic Level: Focusing on Replicating the Grammatical Memes of the TL

There are similarities between languages but differences, too, especially between English and Chinese, the former falling into the category of the Indo-European language family while the latter being a Sino-Tibetan language. The grammatical differences between them are significant. On this account, it's proper to translate English into Chinese in accordance with Chinese syntax rules and pragmatic habits rather than external English forms in order to avoid the deviation of the translation version, otherwise it will increase the difficulty of semantic decoding of the target text.

Example 3: Kneel on the floor with your feet together, and your palms flat on the ground in front of you. The arms should be straight, shoulder width apart, and in line with your chest.

Chinese version: 双腿并拢, 双膝着地. 双臂伸直, 与肩同宽. 双手在胸部的正下方, 两个手掌平放在地面上.

Analysis: This is the start position of Paul's classic movement "kneeling Pushups". Ordinarily, English is static, so each posture combined body spots with prepositions "on", "with" and "in line (with)", etc. In contrast, Chinese is more dynamic, so Gu translated these prepositions into verbs such as "并拢", "着地" and "与……同宽" which conform with Chinese language norms. For another, the words of the first two sentences in translation imitated Chinese four-character structure memes, simplifying the long sentences of the source language into "双腿并拢", "双膝着地", "双臂伸直", and "与肩同宽". When read, such information will be successfully "assimilated" and "retained" by the target audience.

Another distinct difference between English and Chinese is in terms of cohesion and coherence. English is a language that concentrates on its hypotaxis featured by using its form to express its meanings.The original text used the conjunction "and" to connect several sentences coordinately, describing action techniques. When translating, Gu copied Chinese syntactic memes thus omitted "and", then realigned the source expression into three sentences in respect of three body spots—leg, arm, and hand. On the basis of the fact that Chinese is a language that emphasizes the parataxis by using meanings to display its form, readers can realize that the three sentences indicate exercise tips in parallel. The omitted conjunction "和" in translation would have appeared redundant and awkward in Chinese.

2.3 On Cultural Level: Focusing on Transmitting Cultural Memes of SL

Different replicators exist in different cultures, and if they still rely on replacing with similar memes from the target language, they may die soon without replication and transmission, and be totally replaced by the memes of the target culture. In the meantime, the target meme pool will not be enriched and flourished. As a consequence, the cultural diversity will be damaged sooner or later. In today's globalization, more and more people have already had more or less knowledge about foreign cultures, and they do have passion and ability to explore and accept different cultures.

Example 4: You can **gain Herculean strength**—genuine brawn and vitality—with no special equipment at all.

Chinese version: 其实, 在不使用任何特殊器械的情况下你完全可以变得像赫拉克勒斯（Hercules）一样力大无穷, 真正有力量、有活力.

Analysis: Paul scoffs at modern fitness—training with professional equipment which he thinks does not help bodybuilders to use power concordantly and which only results in fake strong men. Calisthenics that can help fitness followers become the master of strength is what he praises highly. In the source culture, the greatest hero Hercules, Zeus's son, who defeated lots of fierce beasts is valiant and powerful. In western culture, he is not only a mythological figure but the synonym of "brave man" and "robust warrior". Yet, the figure does not exist in Chinese culture, so it's a strange information for the target audience. But through Gu's version, the cultural memes of the target language were replicated and disseminated so that Hercules has been known by more people, which contributes to push the proper noun "Hercules" and it's figurative meaning into strong memes. And with the help of the western figure, it's easier for readers to trust Paul's idea of Bodyweight Training and be ready to put it into practice. In Chinese meme pool, there are also quite a few memes signifying "strong men", such as "Yang Jian" and "Hou Yi", but they are more famous for "the third eye" and "the action of shooting suns" respectively. The direct replications of them may not lead to semantic equivalence to the original text.

CONCLUSION

Language is the carrier of memes so the original text of *Convict Conditioning* is a meme-complex. And the Chinese version by Mr. Gu can be taken not only as the "survival machine" for the memes of the source language, but also as a new meme-complex with the memes of the target language. Communication and information is the first function and objective of practical translation and therefore under the guidance of Translation Meme Theory, it's better to use the most fluent and authentic expressions to transmit the author's ideas through replicating the semantic memes of the source text and the syntactic memes of the target language. Besides, translation is a cross-cultural activity by nature, and in this case, it's optimal to convey the culture of the source language and promote exchanges between different cultures. Consequently, in terms of culture, it's a general tendency to replicate the cultural memes of the source language.

Modern people are living an accelerated tempo prone to neglect their health until symptoms of ill health are found. Fortunately, an increasing number of people come to the realization of the importance of a strong and robust body. On these grounds, the paper explores the appropriate translation strategies of fitness texts based on Memetics in the expectation of promoting the researches on practical translation, presenting more translations of high quality, and offering efficient training methods to help fitness enthusiasts remain powerful and fit for a longer time.

REFERENCES

Blackmore, S. (1999). *The meme machine*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Chesterman, A. (2012). *Memes of translation—the spread of ideas in translation theory*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.

Dawkins, R. (1976). *The selfish gene*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

He, Z. R. (2005). Memes in language. *Linguistic Science, 4*(6), 54-64.

He, Z. R. (2014). Memetic understanding of language in fashion. *Shandong Foreign Language Teaching Journal, 35*(2), 7-13.

Li, Q. Y., & Wei, X. H. (2007). *Application of memetics in the translation of Chinese public signs. Journal of Henan University (Social Science), 47*(5), 95-98.

Wade, P. (2011). *Convict conditioning*. The United States: Dragon Door Publications.

Wade, P. (2013). *Convict conditioning.* Beijing: Beijing Science and Technology Press.

Yin, P. A. (2006). *Memetics and the Translation of Domestication and Foreignization. Journal of Xi'an International Studies University, 14*(1), 39-42.

Zhang, H. M. (2010). *Translation strategies based on memetics. Journal of Zhengzhou Institute of Aeronautical Industry Management (Social Science), 29*(4), 141-144.