A Study on Relevance Reconstruction in Xu Yuanchong's English Renditions of Ancient Chinese Poetry From the Perspective of Relevance Theory

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On the pragmatic view, the proper use of pragmatic strategies can help to improve the quality of translation. Sometimes by searching for new relevance, the translator can address to the problem of cultural differences and even translation acceptability. In this paper, the author aims to explore relevance reconstruction in Xu Yuanchong's English renditions of ancient Chinese poetry from the perspective of Relevance Theory to examine the importance of relevance reconstruction while achieving optimal relevance. The author hopes to give reference to the research about the translation of ancient Chinese poetry.

Keywords: Relevance Theory, relevance reconstruction, optimal relevance, poetry translation

Introduction

As a human practice, translation plays a pivotal role in the communication and dissemination of information between different cultures. Translation involves not only word-for-word conversion, but also the translator's creative exploration and transmission of the information in the source text (ST). The translator needs to metarepresent not only the shared cognitive environment between the original communicator and his/her audience, but also the target receptors' cognitive environment (Díaz-Pérez, 2014). On this account, the translator sometimes has to recreate new strategy to deal with a cultural conflict. Pragmatically speaking, the pursuit of relevance in translation may ease the way that the addresses interpret a communicative activity. When it comes to the relevance of an utterance, the translator needs to reconstruct relevance to achieve better communicative effect.

Professor Xu Yuanchong crowned as "the first person to render Chinese, English and French classics", devoted himself to introducing ancient Chinese classics to the world in English and French throughout his life. The legendary figure was thus remembered for his monumental translation works of Chinese ancient poetry and many English literary works.

In this paper, the author will analyse relevance reconstruction in Xu's English renditions of Chinese poetry from the perspective of Relevance Theory so as to examine the importance of relevance reconstruction while achieving the maximization of relevance or optimal relevance. The paper mainly revolves around the match

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between informative intention and communicative intention, the addition to contextual assumptions and the presentation of contextual implications.

Relevance Theory and Translation

Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson firstly put forward the concept of relevance, which can be explained as an assumption that is relevant in a context if and only if it has some contextual effect in that context (Sperber & Wilson, 1995, p. 122). In other words, Relevance Theory is based on the assumption that the speaker states an utterance and then the addressee will try his/her best to process what the speaker said if he/she assumes it to be relevant. It is not enough to understand the literal meaning of an utterance if the speaker wants to fulfil a successful conversation. Therefore, the addressee must presume the contextual effect based on individual cognitive environment so as to seek semantic relevance. A conversation usually carries informative intention and communicative intention, so Sperber and Wilson think that human's daily communication is ostensive-inferential. More specifically, ostensive-inferential communication can be defined as a process in which the communicator produces a stimulus which makes it mutually manifest to communicator and audience that the communicator intends, by means of this stimulus, to make manifest or more manifest to the audience a set of assumptions (Sperber & Wilson, 1995, p. 63). In a word, a successful conversation finally aims to fulfil the optimal relevance of an utterance that is relevant enough to be worth the hearer's processing effort and is the most relevant one compatible with the speaker's abilities and preferences (Wilson & Sperber, 2012, p. 65).

Translation achieves relevance by informing the target audience of what the original author said or wrote in the source text (Gutt, 2010, p. 210). As an acceptance means interpretively resembling the interpretation of source text, translation mainly involves the communication between translator and targeted audience. From the Relevance Theory point of view, Professor Zhao (1999) thinks that the translation is an act of ostensive-inferential intra-lingual or inter-lingual interpretation of ST. That is to say, the translation can be regarded as a dynamic process in which intra-lingual and inter-lingual ostensive-inferential interpretation is carried out under the tri-relationship network consisting of the author of ST, the translator and the audience of targeted text (TT). In this way, against a transcultural background, the translator has to deal with ostensive-inferential two times. The first is that the translator, as an addressee of ST, intralingually understands ostensive intention of ST and then speculates its communicative intention. After finishing the first ostensive-inferential process, the translator shifts to an intralingual one in which the translator must ensure the match between ST information and TT information and the same communicative effect from audience of both ST and TT after translating ST into TT. In a word, the relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure should shed light on how these utterances are understood (Wilson & Sperber, 2012, p. 246).

Relevance Reconstruction in Xu Yuanchong's English Renditions of Ancient Chinese Poetry

Translation, as a communicative activity, aims to recreate the communicative function of ST while transforming the ST information into the information TT readers can accept and recognize. In the course of informative conversion, the translator must seek to reach the optimal relevance between ST and TT. Otherwise, the communication will end up in failure. It is axiomatic that the cross-cultural and cross-linguistic translation practice is accompanied by a big change of cognitive environment. Growing up in different cultures, the author of ST and the reader of TT are also cognitively different. When translated into TT, ST could sometimes lose its

communicative intention, which could finally lead to the loss of the relevance of rendition. Therefore, in the process of translation, the translator can dynamically improve the text or recreate the content of the translation based on his or her own perceptions by the search for relevance. Within certain cultural constraints, the translator is bound to choose appropriate translation strategies and suitable text types.

There are abundant culture-loaded words in the traditional Chinese poetry, which poses a huge challenge to translators. In order to break cultural conflicts, the translator can take some measures to reproduce the communicative intention. In a pragmatic sense, the translator can reach the optimal relevance through relevance reconstruction.

Match Between Informative Intention and Communicative Intention

People speak with a certain amount of purposes, thus realizing his/her communicative effect. A successful conversation should keep a balance between informative intention and communicative intention. In order to make the balance, the translator has to deliver communicative intention of ST on the basis of understanding informative intention correctly and thus fulfils the successful sharing of intended message or implied meaning.

Example 1: 欲别牵郎衣, 郎今到何处? 不恨归来迟, 莫向临邛去。（孟郊《古别离》）

Translation:

I hold your robe lest you should go,

Where are you going, dear, today?

Your late return brings me less woe

Than your heart being stolen away.

The poem depicts a scenario in which a girl bids farewell to her lover and oozes with the girl's worries about her lover's return. The first two lines describe the scene and the last two lines portray the girl's psychological state. In ancient China, 临邛 (Linqiong) was a county during the Tang Dynasty in modern Sichuan Province. But in the poem, 莫向临邛 (you should not go to Linqiong) is used as an allusion denoting a historical event. According to *Records of the Grand Historian*, Zhuo Wenjun, daughter of the wealthy Zhuo Wangsun of Linqiong, was newly widowed and was provoked by Sima Xiangru, so she finally eloped with him. In traditional Chinese poetry, 临邛 (Linqiong) usually refers to a dazzling human world with its countless temptations. Back to the poem, 莫向临邛 means that "you" should not go to such a vanity fair as Linqiong because "I" am afraid that "you" will leave "me" alone and even abandon "me". If the translator takes a literal translation strategy, the rendition only shows informative intention of the poet but fails to show communicative intention of the poet. Furthermore, a literal translation strategy plus notes may be advisable to present the implication of poem but the very translation strategy is rare in Xu's works, because it is not advisable to over-emphasize the maintenance of ST culture but to ignore the smoothness of communicative activity. When dealing with the allusion, Xu explains the real implication behind 莫向临邛 so he translates the last sentence into "Than your heart being stolen away". The last two lines are logically consistent with the assumption of the original poem. In detail, informative intention that you should not go to Linqiong and communicative intention that I will not blame you for coming back late as long as you heart does not change are both shown in the Xu's rendition. The reason why "I" do not agree with you to go to Linqiong is that "I" am really afraid of losing you. In Xu's words, "I" am afraid that "your" heart was stolen away. In this way, the rendition keeps the balance between informative intention and communicative intention, thus achieving the optimal relevance.

Example 2: 中华儿女多奇志，不爱红装爱武装。（毛泽东《为女民兵题照》）

Translation:

Most Chinese daughters have desire so strong

To face the powder and not to powder the face.

When there is a mismatch between ST communicative intention and TT communicative intention, the translator could try to reconstruct a relevance for smooth communication. In this poem, 红装 (hong zhuang) is literally translated into red clothes and 武装 (wu zhuang) into battledress. Obviously, literal translation will result in the mismatch between informative intention and communicative intention. Under this circumstance, the translator can try to recreate a relevance to express the implication of ST. Here, 红装 means that Chinese daughters pay too much attention to dressing themselves up; 武装 means that Chinese daughters commit themselves to fighting for the country in the battlefield. In order to ensure that 红装 is relevant with one's appearance and 武装 with one's enthusiasm for serving the country, Xu recreates a new relevance. In his rendition, 红装 is interpreted as a daughter who often powders her face while 武装 as a daughter who dares to fight in the battle and faces the powder (gunpowder). In this way, free from the constraint of informative intention of ST, Xu recreates informative intention of ST by recreating a new relevance between Chinese daughters and their desire, thus achieving the optimal relevance.

Addition to Contextual Assumptions

There are cultural differences in different languages, which could inevitably lead to differences in people's understanding the same thing or concept. In the course of translation, cultural differences will result in cultural default. More specifically, ostensive information in ST can automatically enable readers of ST to infer communicative intention of the text. Once the original text is translated, ostensive information of its rendition could fail to enable readers of TT to understand its communicative intention, hence the loss of relevance and the eventual failure of communication. In the final analysis, it is because there is a difference in the cultural background of ostensive-inferential processes. In the process of translation and comprehension, the translator must interpret the real meaning of ST by means of communicative context, cultural background, and inferring habits of ST. Therefore, the translator's responsibility is to add contextual assumptions of ST to readers of TT for better comprehension and smooth communication.

Example 3: 清明时节雨纷纷，路上行人欲断魂。借问酒家何处有？牧童遥指杏花村。（杜牧《清明》）

Translation:

The Mourning Day

A drizzling rain falls like tears on the Mourning Day;

The mourner's heart is going to break on his way.

Where can a wine shop be found to drown his sad hours?

A cowherd points to a cot amid apricot flowers.

First, as to the translation of title, Xu translates it into "The Mourning Day". 清明 (The Qingming Festival) is a traditional Chinese festival, universally known Tomb-Sweeping Day. It is a day when people visit the tombs of their ancestors for worship. Anyway, both the Qingming Festival and Tomb-Sweeping Day are internationally accepted as the proper name of this Chinese festival. Xu conveys the essence of 清明, namely mourning the deceased, through which Xu builds the relevance between the festival and its observance. The

addition to contextual assumptions is realized by adding the necessary knowledge to readers of TT. In the process of relevance reconstruction, the translator should pay attention to the cultural background knowledge of TT and its reader's reasoning habits so as to reconstruct the ST author's intention (Zhang & He, 2001). Therefore, the translator needs to do more to help readers of TT to understand the rendition smoothly.

Furthermore, due to cultural conflicts, the translator needs to understand ST and impose influence on it in accordance with the cultural characteristics of TT so that the rendition is easier to be understood by readers. The comprehension of semantic meaning also interacts with readers' ability to be familiar with pragmatic interpretation. 清明时节雨纷纷 means that the rain falls continually as the Qingming Festival comes. In order to strengthen the communicative effect, Xu translates 雨纷纷 into "a drizzling rain falls like tears". Using a simile, the word "tears" not only enhances the aesthetic property of rendition but also sets a sad atmosphere of the festival.

When translating the second line, Xu amplifies the purpose of 借问酒家 (finding a wine shop) which is hidden in the original poem. The contextual assumption of SS is that the author wishes to find a wine shop to release his sad emotion on The Mourning Day. In traditional Chinese culture, people like drowning the sorrows, which is known to all the Chinese readers but not all English readers so the effort demanded from the addressee would be compensated by the addition to contextual assumptions. To break the cultural barrier, Xu adds to the rendition the purpose of finding a wine shop, that is to drown his sad hours. In this way, the readers of TT can learn more about the traditional Chinese festival. The rendition also achieves the relevance between the implication of ST and its communicative intention.

杏花村 literally refers to a countryside full of blossoming apricots. However, according to contextual assumption, the poet asks a cowherd where a wine shop can be found. To facilitate the reader's processing effort, Xu translates the exact location (a cot amid apricot flowers) to the cowherd points, thus achieving the match between informative intention and communicative intention.

Presentation of Contextual Implications

Different texts implicate different meaning in different contexts. To some extent, the implication is context. Translation not only deals with the transformation of literal meaning, especially that of pun. Academically, pun is a rhetorical device that sounds alike but expresses different meaning. A successful translation of it requires the translator to pair phonetic representations with its semantic representations. The basic requirement for a successful communication is that the communicator's informative intention could be recognized by readers of TT. Therefore, trying to be optimally relevant, the translator needs to present the contextual implication of the utterance in order to make clear the meaning behind the words. Otherwise, the communicative intention will be lost in translation. Let us look at the following example:

Example 4: 东边日出西边雨，道是无晴却有晴。（刘禹锡《竹枝词》）

Translation:

The west is veiled in rain, the east enjoys sunshine;

My dear one is as deep in love as day is fine.

The poem describes the love between a young man and a girl in love for the first time who has mixed feelings of joy and doubt when she hears her lover's song. In the long gallery of Chinese classics, ancient Chinese poetry is characterized by lyric expression through scenery, by which poets express their inner feelings. In the poem, 无晴 (not sunny) and 有晴 (sunny) seemingly depict the weather but actually denote 无情

(without love) and 有晴 (love). In other words, 无晴 and 有晴 are the metaphors of 无情 and 有情 respectively. The literal meaning of the poem is projected onto the deeper meaning of the girl's deep love through homophonic pun. So the pun is used to express the girl's mental activities of confusion, hope, and attachment. It is important for a translator to understand not only the literal meaning of ST, but also the real intention of the original author and the effect it has on the readers of TT, which is what the translator is to convey. Within Relevance Theory, the weaker the contextual effects of an assumption are, the harder it is to establish the optimal relevance. If the implication of pun is presented, the readers of ST will enjoy the same aesthetic experience as their counterparts with the lowest possible cognitive efforts and eventually get the optimal relevance needed for understanding. In dealing with poetic effects, the precision of syntactic structure reduces rather than extends the range of possible interpretations (Gutt, 2010, p. 164). From this point of view, the translator sometimes must sacrifice the pun and paraphrase its meaning. Returning to this example, Xu does well in his rendition, translating both the weather over the river and the girl's deep feelings for her lover and successfully presenting the communicative clues behind the pun or surface meaning. In other words, Xu's presentation of contextual implication of the utterance sheds light on the real communicative intention of the poet and provides readers convenience to the interpretation of the poem. From the point of view of relevance construction, he recreates relevance between scenery and feelings, namely "fine weather" and "deep love", to achieve semantic representation consistent with poet's writing intention and properly resolve the cultural conflicts.

Conclusion

It is universally acknowledged that Relevance Theory can throw a new light on the pragmatic study of translation and can be used to facilitate translation practice. Therefore, the paper attempted to analyse the Xu's English renditions of Chinese poetry from the perspective of Relevance Theory. In addition, the paper explored pragmatic strategies facilitating relevance construction from three aspects: the match between informative intention and communicative intention, the addition to contextual assumptions and the presentation of contextual implications. Based on the analysis, it was found that in order for the communication to succeed, the proper use of relevance reconstruction can reinforce not only the relevance between TT and cognitive filed of its readers but also the communicative effect of rendition. It has also been shown that the study of Xu's works and the identification of pragmatic strategies in his translated poems may offer considerable and remarkable insights on the intercultural communication and translation of ancient Chinese classics going globally.

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