The Application of Relevance Theory in the Practice of Chinese Translation of English News

Qian Xu[1] & Li Liu[2]

[1] Xi'an Polytechnic University

[2] Associate Professor, Xi'an Polytechnic University

Correspondence: Qian Xu, Xi'an Polytechnic University.

Abstract

Since the proposal of Relevance Theory by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, the application of Relevance Theory in a variety of fields has flourished. In the study of English news translation, the optimal relevance principles can guide translators' translation behaviors and decisions to achieve successful translation and communication.

Keywords: relevance theory, Chinese translation of English news, optimal relevance

1. Introduction

In the context of global informationization, English news translation has been showing an increasingly important role. As a critical means of interlanguage communication, it provides an important channel for the exchange of information among different countries. The Relevance Theory offers a unified standard and basis for English news translation, allowing people to seek the optimal relevance in language communication according to a certain principle of relevance, so as to make the intention of the source language consistent with the perception of the readers, and finally ensure the objectivity, truthfulness and accuracy of the English news.

2. Relevance Theory: Explicit—Reasoning Model

Relevance Theory is a kind of Communication Theory, advocating that communication is the process of explicit to reasoning. To realize the communicative intention and complete the communicative task, the key to success depends on relevance, and the process from explicit to reasoning is closer to the nature of the human cognitive subject, which is in line with the universal cognitive psychology and the basic facts of human cognition. Relevance theory proposes to explain the understanding and comprehension of discourse in communication according to the general cognitive theory of information processing, which not merely defines language as the role of conveying information, but gives another task, i.e., to constrain the various contexts required for information processing.

Sperber and Wilson concluded from human cognitive characteristics that cognition tends to strive for maximum cognitive effect with minimum mental input. Thus, it is easy to find that when communication occurs, the listener's attention tends to be focused on sufficiently relevant discourse and tends to process the information acquired in the brain in the context of maximum relevance and construct mental representations that are sufficiently relevant to these discourses (Gutt, 2004). This is also a process of inference, where the listener guesses the speaker's implied communicative intentions based on the information explicitly provided by the speaker. The success of communication is highly dependent on the reasoning process, which therefore can be identified as the core of the Relevance Theory. According to the Relevance Theory, contextual assumptions are a prerequisite for reasoning. In the process of explicit, the speaker's main goal is to change the hearer's cognitive environment, i.e., a set of facts that are perceived as correct for the hearer to respond to in his or her brain.

Relevance Theory has strong explanatory power for different forms and levels of communication such as literary works, advertising media, and translation, among which the most obvious achievements have been made in the study of translation.

3. Application of Relevance Theory in Translation

Relevance Theory sprouted from cognitive science, and its initial research intention has nothing to do with translation. However, in the course of continuous exploration and development, it gradually came to the fore as having a strong explanatory power for translation, "the most complex phenomenon in the evolutionary history of the universe" (Richards, 1953). This aroused Gutt's research interest, and finally in 1991, his doctoral dissertation *Translation and Relevance: Cognition and Context*, which integrated Gutt's findings, was published, and the translation theory based on Relevance Theory emerged. Gutt thus became the first person to apply the theory of Relevance Theory to translation, providing a complete and coherent theoretical framework for the ontological and methodological exploration of translation, which has aroused extensive discussions in the translation community (Yanchun Zhao, 1999: 278).

Gutt advocates applying the Relevance Theory to study translation because "Relevance Theory views communication in terms of competence rather than behavior, attempting to show in concrete terms the role that information processing mechanisms in people's brains play in interpersonal communication. Thus, the scope of the study is the brain mechanism rather than the segment itself or the process of its production". Given the differences in region, culture and thinking model between Chinese and foreign readers, sometimes it is difficult to agree on contextual cognition, and translators can adopt some translation strategies and methods to achieve the optimal relevance of information. In the practice of English-Chinese news translation, translators can choose the following translation methods such as amplification and omission, conversion and semantic extension to achieve optimal relevance, and all these translation methods can be strongly explained in the framework of Relevance Theory.

4. Application of Relevance Theory in English News Translation

In the practice of Chinese translation of English news, in order to make readers achieve sufficient contextual effects without spending a lot of processing efforts and seek the optimal relevance of the translated information, the following will specify the translation strategies in the process of the Chinese translation of English news from the features of English news and under the guidance of Relevance Theory.

4.1 Features of English News

News is a report of what is happening around us, and it covers current affairs, politics, economy, social humanities and other topics. In modern society, English news has become an essential part of people's lives. Reading English news is not only a window to know the outside world, but also a useful way for us to learn English. The features of English news can be summarized as follows.

4.1.1 Accuracy

One of the most important features of the English news language is accuracy. News is a true reflection of objective facts, which should put truthfulness as the top priority. In other words, the content of a news report should neither be exaggerated nor reduced. If the usage of language is not accurate, the news content may be distorted and misunderstood. Generally, the accuracy lies in the use of a large number of nouns, such as divorce New York style (纽约市离婚), corruption reports against police rise (指控警方受贿，呼声四起), the GOP shakedown cruise (共和党的竞选试航) and so on. In addition, various quotes are often used to show that the news reports are true and can be traced. There are direct quotations, indirect quotations and partial quotations. When a direct quote is used, it means that the quotation is so important that it cannot be modified or deleted. When indirect quotes are used, it means that the news content was reorganized by the news reporter according to the original meaning. Partial quotes are also widely used, meaning that the reporter has rewritten or embellished part of the original text, so as to convey the ideas of the interviewee and make the news clearer to the reader.

4.1.2 Concreteness

Concreteness is another distinctive feature of news language. The news should convey real information to people but cannot be abstract. News constitutes of many factors: the time of the event, the people involved, the cause and effect, and so on. That is to say, the news language must be very specific in order to show the reader exactly what the event is about. This brings us to the "inverted pyramid" sentence often used in English news, which is characterized by stating the most important information firstly, the secondary information next, and the supplementary information finally in the order of the news report, with the climax of the event as the essence of the news, and background information appearing at the end of the sentence as supplementary information. In the various forms of news broadcast and communication that we come across in our daily life, the structure of the text is mostly made of inverted pyramid sentences. There are some examples shown in the following:

Sample 1: A 16-year-old West High School sophomore is in critical condition today at River City Hospital after being treated for smoke inhalation at his home last night.

Translation 1: 一名 16 岁的西部高中二年级学生昨晚在家中因吸入烟雾接受治疗后，今天在河城医院情况危急。

Sample 2: Joe Smith, son of Bob and Carol Smith of 116 Travis Lane, was overcome by smoke in the family garage about 8 p.m. after pouring carbon solvent into the carburetor intake of his car, according to a hospital spokesman.

Translation 2: 据医院发言人说，晚上 8 点左右特拉维斯巷 116 号的鲍勃和卡罗尔·史密斯的儿子乔·史密斯在家庭车库里被烟熏倒，理由是将碳溶剂倒入了汽车化油器进气口。

4.1.3 Readability

Readability is also necessary for English news. News is real, and news readers are diverse, engaged in different occupations in society and with different understanding abilities. Therefore, the language used in the news should preferably be close to the spoken language and understandable for common people. The figure of speech is thought to be a good way to make English news easy to read. In order to convey some very important and valuable news to readers and make them interested in these news, journalists often make the news attractive by using rhetorical devices. Take the headline of the news for example, a good headline is like a person's eyes, through which we can see the soul of the news. For example, "After the Boom Everything is Gloom" （繁荣过后，尽是萧条), "Soccer Kicks Off With Violence"(篮球开赛，大展拳脚), "Middle East: Cradle of Terror" (中东：恐怖的摇篮), etc.

Additionally, abbreviations and midget words are often found in English news, making it clearer and easier to understand and avoiding lengthy expressions that impede reading fluency. Abbreviations include acronyms and clipped words. Acronyms are used such as NPC, Nasa, CPPCC, and clipped words like Pro (professional), Pix (pictures), Copter (helicopter), and Biz (business). And the midget words mainly refer to monosyllabic words, such as commonly used "help", "car", "row", "probe", "ease", "compact" rather than "assistance", "vehicle", "conflict", "investigate", "facilitate", "agreement", etc.

4.2 Application of Relevance Theory in English News Translation

In the process of the Chinese translation of English news, the author will analyze the translation methods that can be applied under the guidance of Relevance Theory with the aim of finding the optimal relevance and realizing the accuracy, correctness and readability of English news to a maximum extent.

4.2.1 Amplification and Omission

Amplification and Omission is a translation technique that will enhance the readability and coherence of a translation by adding or reducing words, thus providing the optimal cognitive context and achieving the optimal relevance. Try the following examples.

Sample 3: Exercise benefits more than just metabolism, the chronic diseases, the memory, the sleep.

Translation 3: 运动的益处不仅限于提高新陈代谢、降低慢性疾病风险、改善记忆力、提高睡眠质量。

News language is often concise, seeking to use the shortest sentence to carry the most information. Here, the predicate verb "benefit" is followed by several nouns as parallel objects like "metabolism", "the chronic diseases", "the memory" and "the sleep". However, in Chinese, various verbs can be paired with different objects, and to make the Chinese expression smoother, the translator has added the predicate verbs "提高", "降低" and "降低" respectively to pair each object according to different habits of verb-object pairing, aiming to avoid the translationese caused by sticking to one predicate verb and thus reduce the readers' efforts in information processing.

Sample 4: "If we cluster the almshouses and have various almshouses in a country, we can see the old people come out of loneliness and into a world of love."

Translation 4: "如果养老院数量增加，国家开设各种主题类型的养老院，我们就会看到老人们从孤独的阴霾中走出来，接受爱的沐浴。"

Due to the difference between English and Chinese expression habits, the prepositions "out" and "into" in English tend to contain and convey enough information, but in Chinese, in order to achieve optimal relevance, the translation device of amplification is needed to realize the communicative intent. In this case, "阴霾" and "沐浴" are added to improve the literary and readability of the translation. In fact, no semantic information is added, and the removal of these added words does not cause any semantic loss.

Sample 5: "As the odds of a Clinton victory rose, at least as recorded in the polls, we saw the market rally, and if the odds of a Clinton victory receded, we saw the market retreat."

Translation 5: "希拉里竞选胜算增大时，至少从民意调查来看，能够发现股市止跌回升；而希拉里胜算机会萎缩时，股价下跌。"

Unlike Chinese, English often has a large number of function words, such as "the", "a", "but" etc. These words generally do not have actual meaning and can be omitted or reduced in translation according to the actual situation. In order to improve the fluency and acceptability of the translation, a range of conjunctions, prepositions and pronouns appearing in English news can be considered to be omitted from the translation, provided that they do not cause errors in information transmission, to realize the concise and clear of the news language.

4.2.2 Conversion

Conversion here means that converts one word class in English into another in Chinese in the process of translation, aiming to produce a translation that conforms to the expression habits of the target language and minimizes the processing effort of the reader. Lexical conversion can be performed between almost all lexical forms, such as nouns to verbs, verbs to nouns, prepositions to verbs, nouns to adjectives, etc. Consider the following examples:

Sample 6: Despite the suggestion that much of the heating up of the earth's surface is attributable to human activities.

Translation 6: 尽管有人认为地球表面的升温主要是由人类活动造成的。

The difference between Chinese and Western expression habits is also reflected in the preference for word class. English uses nouns to form sentences more often, while Chinese prefers verbs. In order to make the translation conform to the standard of the translated language, the noun "suggestions" is translated into the verb "有人认为", realizing the conversion of the noun to verb, so as to reduce the reader's processing effort when reading.

Sample 7: Amid this twisted wreckage live an estimated 350,000 people at constant risk of annihilation as the bombs continue to fall.

Translation 7: 大约有 35 万民众居住在这片满是残骸的土地上，炸弹不时落下，他们甚至时刻面临被毁灭的厄运。

This sentence reflects the expansion of simple sentences often used in journalistic style. For example, "twisted", "estimated" and "constant" here are used as determiners to modify the original object, subject and adverbial modifier respectively. To achieve optimal relevance, the translator translates "estimated" and "constant" as "大约" and "时刻" respectively, converting the attribute to the adverbial modifier.

4.2.3 Semantic Extension

The semantic extension refers to further extending the meaning of a word on the basis of the basic meaning and selecting a more appropriate word in Chinese to express so that the original idea is more accurately expressed and the translation is more fluent.

Sample 8: "Generally speaking, we consider the alignment of new restrictions which we consider illegal with the Salisbury case absolutely unacceptable."

Translation 8: "总而言之，我们认为美方将新一轮制裁与索尔兹伯里中毒案挂钩的做法是俄方坚决不可接受的，且制裁不合法。"

The background of the example is about a poisoning coma on the street in Britain. The British investigation stated that the poisoning was caused by the nerve agent A234, which was developed by the former Soviet Union in the mid-1980s. As a result of the investigation, the British side put the blame on Russia and attempted to speculate on the role Russia played in the incident, about which Russia said it didn't know anything about it.

In August of the same year, the United States joined the silent battle by announcing political sanctions against Russia. The Russian side refused to accept all unreasonable accusations, and unilateral and unjustified sanctions. The word "alignment" in this sentence is explained as "结盟；队列，排成直线" in the Oxford dictionary. In order to emphasize the relevance of the two events (Poison gate and Russian sanctions) and put the readers of the translated language in a cognitive context equal to or similar to that of the readers of the original language, the translator needs to serve as a bridge by transferring to the readers the information he/she has obtained in the original language. Therefore, "alignment" is translated here as "将……与……挂钩", seeking to achieve the optimal relevance and the smoothest communication between the author and the reader.

Sample 9: In America, two incomes are a necessity for many families.

Translation 9: 在美国的众多家庭中，夫妻两人都去上班赚钱是迫不得已的。

Literally, "two incomes" means "两份工资", but in the Western cultural context, it means "夫妻两人工作所得的两份工资". If we adopt the direct translation method and translated it to "两份工资是迫不得已的", it will

cause confusion to the readers to a certain extent. Hence, the translator finally translates it as "夫妻两人都去上班赚钱是迫不得已的" to defuse the cultural difference and give the target language readers a clear cognitive context.

Sample 10: The statesman contemplates retiring with a hand on the helm.

Translation 10: 这位政治家虽打算退位让贤但依然准备垂帘听政。

The noun "helm" originally means "船舵", and the common fixed expressions are "at the helm" or "take over the helm", which means "身居要位或领导地位". In the sentence, the politician intends to give up the throne "but still has a hand on the helm", indicating that he still wants to maintain his position of control over the whole situation, and thus extend to translate as "垂帘听政". The purpose of this translation is to create the best understanding of context and to achieve the same reading response for the target language readers as for the original language readers.

5. Conclusion

In the practice of Chinese translation of English news, translators can choose the following translation methods, such as Amplification and Omission, Conversion and Semantic Extension in order to achieve optimal relevance and convey the source language information to the greatest extent. However, no matter which translation technique is used, the principle to be followed is always to find the optimal relevance between the best cognitive context and the information in the original language, and the optimal relevance is an important guiding principle to help translators succeed in the Chinese translation of English news. As a whole, Relevance Theory has strong explanatory power for translation practice and provides a strong theoretical guiding perspective for the translation of English news into Chinese.

References

Gutt, Ernst-August, (2004). *Translation and Relevance: Cognition and Context*. Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.

Yan Lai, (2006). Discourse Narrative Structure and Stylistic Paradigm of English News Reporting. *Journal of Zhejiang Media College*, (05), 34-37.

Zinan Ye, (2013). *Advanced English-Chinese Translation Theory and Practice*. Beijing: Tsinghua University Press.

Yige Zhu, (2008). *Linguistic Features and Translation of English News*. Shanghai: Shanghai Jiao Tong University Press.

Yanchun Zhao, (2003). Relevance Theory and the Essence of Translation--A Relevance Theory Explanation of Translation Default. *Journal of Sichuan University of Foreign Languages*, (03), 117-121.

Yanchun Zhao, (1999). The Explanatory Power of Relevance Theory to Translation. *Modern Foreign Languages*, (03), 276-295.

Kenan Lin, (1994). A Brief Introduction to Relevance Translation Theory. *Translation in China*, (4), 6-9.

Yu Sun, (2012). Application of Relevance Theory in English News Translation. Northeast Forestry University.

Wei Wang, (2006). A Study on the Application of Relevance Theory in Translation. Central China Normal University.

Xiaorui Wang, (2020). Realization of Successful Translation under Relevance Theory. *International Public Relations*, 263-265.

Yanjing Huo, (2017). Analysis of News Translation Methods Based on Relevance Theory. *Journal of Liaoning Communications College, 19*(06), 34-37.

Shuting Cao, Haiyuan Liu, Pingping Cao, (2019). Analysis of Translation Skills in the Process of Chinese Translation of English News. *Education and Teaching Forum*, (41), 136-137.