

C-E Translation of Children's Literature from the Perspective of Relevance Theory

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Abstract—Children's literature is a unique form that adds brilliance to present splendor of the literature. An effective translation is the precondition to restore the essence of Chinese children's literature. The research of history and theory in children's literature is marginalized and excluded. Because of the language barriers and the cultural differences between Chinese and English, it is difficult for target audience to get adequate cognitive context to understand the original correctly. Besides, the particularity of children's cognitive development makes the translation more challenging and tough. The translator of children's literature should adopt the most applicable approaches according to the children's language ability so that they could easily achieve optimal relevance. This paper mainly discusses the application of the relevance theory on the phonetic level, lexical level, rhetorical level and cultural level.

Index Terms—translation, children's literature, relevance theory, contextual assumption

I. INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that the study of children's literature weak in the field of literature translation. Both in the research of history and theory, children's literature is marginalized and excluded. The reasons are as follows: firstly, compared with adult's literature, children's literature plays a less important role in the translation field; secondly, scholars pay little attention to its translation features. In other words, scholars tend to focus on the similarities rather than differences between children's literature and adult's.

Translation of children's literature, particularly C-E translation, plays a more important role in bringing abroad the essence of Chinese literature. As an indispensable part of literature, children's literature reflects the respect for children as an individual. It calls for more academic research to meet the need of large group of readers.

This paper attempts to make an effort to apply relevance theory to the C-E translation of children's literature. It discusses the application of the relevance theory on the phonetic level, lexical level, rhetorical level and cultural level. From the perspective of relevance theory, the paper provides a new angle for the translation of children's literature so that translators can make use of it and put it into practice.

II. RELEVANCE THEORY

Relevance Theory is proposed in *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* by Sperber and Wilson in 1986 on the basis of Grice's Principle of Relevance. In 1991, Ernst-August Gutt, student of Sperber and Wilson, is the first one to apply relevance theory into translation. He points out that translation is an inferential process of verbal communication closely related to the brain mechanism, consisting of code and dynamic inference, and its basis is relevance. Relevance Theory is a branch of pragmatics probing into the laws of language and behavior.

The context of Relevance Theory is different from conventional idea. The context of an utterance is the set of premises adopted in interpreting. As such, it is a psychological concept-- A context is a psychological construct, it is a subset of the listener's assumptions about the world (Sperber and Wilson, 1986). We name the Relevance Theory context as cognitive environment to differentiate it from other contexts. The notion of "cognitive environment" takes various external factors into account, such as situational circumstances, cultural factors, background knowledge and social representation etc. Social representation refers to the collective consciousness. For example, Western people are considered as open and creative among Chinese people even if most of them haven't contacted with them.

The central claim of relevance theory is that human communication crucially creates an expectation of optimal relevance, that is, an expectation on the part of the hearer that his attempt at minimal processing cost.

Maximum relevance and optimal relevance are two relative concepts in the theory. Maximum relevance refers to the acquisition of maximum contextual effects with minimum processing effort. Optimal relevance means the acquisition of enough contextual effect with effective processing effort. One's cognition is in accordance with maximum relevance and expects to create optimal relevance.

The ignorance of either maximum relevance or minimum relevance would lead to failure in communication. To avoid

this mistake, the translator must pay attention to cognitive environment and contextual assumption. The process of translation involves the author, source reader, target reader, cognitive environment of target reader and contextual assumption. The lack of contextual assumption results from three reasons: Firstly, with the development of times, people have little knowledge of certain age. Popular language and culture of that age thus cause barrier to modern people. The second one is ethnic difference. Different races have different history and customs that are embodied in their language. Last but not least, lack of knowledge, such as exotic words and specialized words would lead to lack of contextual assumption.

Relevance Theory is the basis of one's communication skills, and the same is true in translation. The ignorance of readers' cognitive environment may lead to mistakes in translators' understanding. Relevance Theory is a natural norm that objectively exists. Gutt points out that Relevance Theory is the origin of translation principles, while other translational principles are the application of it.

Due to different cognitive environment, target language audience may lack some background information. As a result, the build of contextual assumption should be clarified. Some theorists also provide strategies for translation of word: using a common word, foreign word or alternative culture.

Gutt solved a series of problems based on Relevance Theory, such as rigid translation, clarity of utterance in oral translation, synchronic variations in translation. All the translation principles are results of optimal relevance, but vary according to different texts.

III. FEATURES OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

When it comes to the study of children's literature, its concept must be clearly defined. Different scholars hold totally different views to its concept. From the perspective of attribution, we reach the conclusion that: children's literature is books written for children. With rich artistic and aesthetic value, children's literature is beneficial for children's mind in the combination of education and recreation and inspires children's feelings. (Wang, 2000) Children's fiction rests on the idea that there is a child who is simply there to be addressed and speaking to it might be simple. It is an idea whose innocent generality covers up a multitude of sins. (Rose, 1984) World-known children's literary works, such as *Alice in Wonderland*, *Fairy Tales* by Andersen, *Harry Potter*, stands in culture as a monument, for they represent the child, speak to and for children, address them as a group which is knowable and exists for the book. The difference between adult literature and children's lies in the target reader. Age and cognitive development determine their understanding level and acceptability. Detailed differences can be found in language, content and cultural specificity.

Children's literature is usually understood to comprise books intentionally for children to read. Children's literature deserves a special attention because it plays a fairly important role in children's growing-up process. From the angle of linguistics, children's literature is basically child-centered, dialogue-based and event-oriented. The language of children's literature is featured by accuracy, simplicity, vividness and rhyme. Its educational function suggests that too much language variation and untraditional ways would mislead children. With regard to mental and physical characters, obscure words also deprive them of interest of reading. The rhyme means that the language of children's literature presents a sense of music and beauty. Imaginal thinking, as the primary thinking pattern of children, let them be accustomed to thinking in terms of images concrete, audio-visual language inspire sense of image in children.

The content of children's literature can be generally described as dualism, such as the relationship between hero and villain, beauty and ugliness, truth and lies, conquer and failure, freedom and bondage. Dualism is generally applied in plot, narrative method and perspective.

In addition, the prominent feature of children's literature is cultural specificity. According to its educational function, children's literature is used as an indispensable tool to conveying moral values and ethic identity, which is widely applied in school and family learning. In the process of narration, the author builds a cultural utopia for children to some extent. Children, at the same time, have 'access' to visit imaginary places, adventure with the hero and accomplish achievements they ever dreamed of. Experiencing the sense of achievement, children are unconsciously taught to be what the society wants them to be. The society by this way successfully sets examples for the new generation, cultivating them according to a long-standing tradition. For this reason, children's literature is developing under a clear and designed moral structure. Cultural convention is thus widely applied, which combines the literature and its particular culture.

The features of children's literature above are so important that they distinguish children's literature from other forms of literature, at the same time, provide basis for further research on translation skills.

IV. THE APPLICATION OF RELEVANCE THEORY IN CLT

Based on Relevance Theory discussed in the last chapter, C-E translation of children's literature should keep the relevance between original and contextual assumption to achieve the same processing as source readers. Its application focuses on the phonetic level, lexical level, rhetorical level and cultural level.

A. *Keeping the Relevance between Original Text and Contextual Assumption*

Relevance Theory has a unique understanding of the meaning of utterance. Meaning of utterance includes overt

meaning and covert meaning. Only by activating covert meaning in specific situational use of language can we reach communicative aims of the original text. Based on the analysis of contextual assumption discussed before, we know that the lack of contextual assumption result from that of necessary knowledge, such as foreign exotic word. The following text is a typical example.

e.g.1

Source Text: 老人接着又说: "你造的'重'字, 是说有千里之远, 应该念'出远门'的'出'字, 而你却教人念成'重量'的'重'字。反过来, '出'字本该为'重量'的'重'字, 你倒教成了'出远门'的'出'字"(仓颉造字)

Translated Text: The old man continued: "You made the character for 'Heavy'. It was the character 千 with 里 joined together, meaning a great distance 重, yet you make it sound like and mean 'weight'. '出' was supposed to mean 'heavy' (one mountain heaped on another), yet the character reads like and means 'leaving home'. These two characters are so confusing"(Cang Jie Creates the Words)

For foreigners, Chinese characters are complex and difficult to understand, let alone for foreign children. The annotation in the translated version 'one mountain heaped on another' explicitly explain the covert meaning of Chinese character 出 and creates a contextual assumption. Therefore, the relevance between original text and contextual consumption is well kept so that readers could well understand its meaning.

B. Making the Same Processing Effort as Source Readers

Contextual effect is not only related to the context, but also processing efforts of the readers. According to Relevance Theory, the readers must make processing efforts to get enough contextual efforts, which can be measured in two ways: The first is maximum relevance, which refers to getting greatest contextual effect with least processing efforts. While optimal relevance means taking more effort to get greater contextual effect. The second is taking no unnecessary processing effort, namely the effort taken by the readers must be worthy.

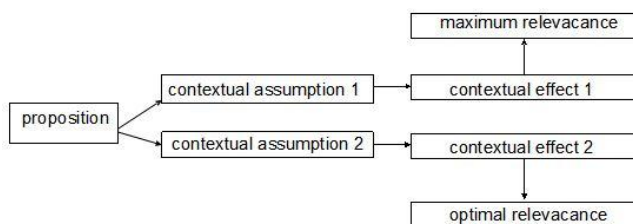


Figure 1

From figure 1, we can see that there are two types of contextual assumption. In the process of C-E translation, the text should be seen as a proposition. If all the conventional translation strategies are regarded as the stimulation of contextual assumption 1, then the recommended principles in section 4.2 should be seen as contextual assumption 2 that stimulates contextual effect 2 leading to optimal relevance.

The translated language of children's literature is featured by accuracy, simplicity, vividness and rhyme. Translator of Chinese children's literature must take the same processing effort as children so that the foreign readers can get similar contextual effects. Therefore, the translated text should also preserve the style of Chinese language.

C. Application of Relevance Theory on Phonetic Level

The phonetic features of Chinese children's literature are embodied in onomatopoeia, rhyme, alliteration and the like. Chinese children are more likely to accept it, but original text is a foreign language to the foreign readers without that strong language sense. In order to preserve the phonetic features, translators shouldn't neglect but restore them in its translation with scientific method.

1. Rhythm and Rhyme

Children usually pay attentions to rhyme and rhythm at first when reading books. In many cases, stories are read aloud by children or told by their parents. Thus the sense of hearing also plays an important role in getting contextual effect. Rhyme and rhythm in children's literature would amuse children in understanding the content. Rhyme is a repetition of arrangement of some vowels and consonants at the end of lines, or sometimes in the middle. Rhythmic sounds are easy to draw children's attention. Therefore, translators of children's literature should take it into account and reach the maximum effect.

e.g.2

各种猛兽、恶禽纷纷窜出来危害人类。(女娲造人与补天)

All kinds of wild beasts and wicked birds ran about in abundance to harm people. (Nv Wa Creates the World)

e.g.3

她一刻不停地从她住的发鸠山上衔了一粒小石子, 或是一段小树枝, 展翅高飞, 一直飞到东海。(精卫填海)

T The little brave bird continued her work, day after day and year in year out, carrying and dropping twigs and stones

into the East Sea and never had a brief moment of rest.

(Jing Wei Determines to Fill up the Sea)

e.g.4

今日东游，明日西荡，云去云来，行踪不定。(西游记第5回)

Today he would wander East, and tomorrow he would go West, coming and going by cloud, and never staying anywhere for long. (Journey to the West Chapter 5)

The version 'wild beasts and wicked birds' in eg.2 is the use of alliteration. Synonyms with the same letter at the beginning of words that are close together create a horrible atmosphere and provide a sense of rhythm. The version 'carrying and dropping' in eg.3 is the use of rhyme, thus emphasizes on Jing Wei's fortitude and unswerving efforts to fill up the sea. Likewise, 'coming and going' by cloud in e.g.4 is a rhyme serving to describe the movement of monkey in detailed and emphasizes on the relaxing life of monkey. All the three examples stimulate contextual assumption for readers. Firstly, lively rhythm pleases children. The meaning of a text stimulates contextual assumption. Secondly, it encourages children's imagination on the atmosphere. Secondly, the use of alliteration and rhyme creates the contextual assumption 2 and stimulates contextual effect 2 leading to optimal relevance.

From the above analysis, we may reach the conclusion that in the C-E translation of children's literature, the translator should put phonetic devices into practice. Other methods include onomatopoeia, rhyme, alliteration and the like.

D. Application of Relevance Theory on Lexical Level

On lexical level, auxiliary words and interjections are commonly used to keep faithfulness to target reader of translated text.

e.g.5

这时，大臣们都纷纷称赞起来：“曹冲真聪明！真是神童啊！”（曹冲称象）

At this time, all the officials praised, "Hurray! How clever Cao Chong is! He is really a wonder child!" (Cao Chong Weighs an elephant)

In the original sentence of e.g.5, there is no interjection "啊！是呀！", but the translator adds 'hurray' in the translated version from which we can feel the admiration and appreciation from the officials. In the original version, the sentence "曹冲真聪明，真是神童啊！" creates contextual assumption 1 and leads to maximum relevance, while the interjection "Hurray" stimulates contextual assumption 2 and creates optimal relevance. The combination of maximum relevance and optimal relevance forms a harmonious relevance. The interjection arouses the cordial feeling of the officials in a colloquial way so that it would draw closer the distance between the story and children, who are more likely willing to listen to the story.

From the perspective of Relevance Theory, the application on lexical level in C-E translation of children's literature can be understood as the addition of auxiliary word and interjection. Besides, the translation of proper noun would also create optimal relevance.

E. Application of Relevance Theory on Rhetorical Level

Generally speaking, rhetoric devices such as metaphor, hyperbole, personification, comparison is widely used in both Chinese and foreign children's literature. Rhetoric with an appeal is indispensable in children's literature. The following examples are typical use of rhetorical devices. The first one is the use of simile and the second is parallel.

e.g.6

这样又过了一万八千年，盘古的身体长得又九万里高，像一根巨大无比的柱子，立在天地中。(盘古开天辟地)

After another 18,000 years, Pan Gu had grown with them and acted as a pillar standing 90,000 Li between them. (Pan Gu Creates the World)

The contextual assumption in readers' cognitive environment: 1. Pan Gu 2. A pillar, the author connects the two different things together and implies the similarity. The translator easily finds equivalence of original version and builds harmonious relevance that makes the description vividly and lively.

On the basis of generality of cognition, the translator should copy the contextual assumption in the translated text. Likewise, e.g.7 of parallel keeps the relevance by using the same structure of sentence. the personification of the source text of '吹' in e.g.8, similarly, is translated into 'ruffle' instead of 'blow', which makes the scenery vivid and graphic. Thus, it is more acceptable to target readers.

e.g.7

沉香翻过白茫茫的雪山，穿越一望无际的大沙漠，途径黑暗恐怖的鬼谷，在荆棘丛中被刺得伤痕累累...(宝莲灯)

Chengxiang climbed over the snow-covered mountains, walked across the endless desert, went through the ghost valley, and was injured in the thorn bushes... (Lotus Lantern)

e.g.8

却又值三春景候，那时节：轻风吹柳绿如丝，佳景最堪题。时催鸟语，暖烘花发，遍地芳菲。(西游记第32回)

A light breeze ruffled the silky green catkins of willow. And the view was splendid. The season encouraged the birds to sing. The flowers bloomed in the warm sun, making the whole world fragrant.

Therefore, the use of rhetoric devices would improve children's understanding on children's literature.

F. Application of Relevance Theory on Cultural Level

Translation is not only a transfer of meaning between two languages, but also involves a cultural background. Since the original Chinese fairytales are put into a different cultural background, some Chinese elements taken for granted by Chinese readers could cause misunderstanding to target readers. What a translator should do is to produce a text with similar meaning to receivers whose native language is English. As a text for child readers that lack life experience, the Chinese-English translation of children's literature asks for even more attention to the cultural problems.

The translation of interjection can be a good example to explain this point.

In the chapter 17 of translated version of *Journey to the West*, when Monkey leapt up with a somersault, the senior and junior monks, the novices, the page-boys all kowtows to him and call him 'Master.' However, the word in the source text is 爷爷啊. To achieve the optimal relevance, it is not advised to translate 爷爷 into 'Grandpa', for it may lead to misunderstanding of children readers. The similar example can be found in e.g.9 in translating the interjection '我儿啊'.

e.g.9

“我儿啊，不禁打，就打得不见了。果是打死，好道也有些脓血，如何没一毫踪影？想是走了。”(西游记第 31 回)

"Wow," exclaimed Monkey in astonishment, "I didn't just hit him—I knocked him out of existence. But if I really killed him there ought at least to be some blood and pus, and there's no sign of any. Perhaps he got away."

Another example can be found in the story of Nian. Nian is a terrible monster that brings disaster on every New Year's Eve. After it was killed by people with fire crackers, Chinese people called celebrating the New Year as Guo Nian. Therefore, the title of this fairy tale should have an annotation: celebrating the New Year. The annotation creates contextual assumption 2 and brings optimal relevance. In this case, foreign readers would have a better understanding of the meaning of Nian. Thus addition of annotation would help clarify the background information in the translation of C-E translation.

V. CONCLUSION

An effective translation is the precondition to restore the essence of Chinese children's literature. The difference of understanding a text between translator, target reader and source reader lies in the context of their cognitive environment. The change of times, cultural difference and knowledge structure would result in lack of context. The search for context mostly depends on understanding communicative clues of original text.

According to Relevance Theory, the author tries to analysis how to use Relevance Theory to keep the similar contextual effect of original text and reaches the following conclusion: Keeping the relevance between original text and context; Target readers making the same processing effort as source readers. Combined with the language features of children's literature, the author puts Relevance Theory into practice from four levels including phonetic level, lexical level, rhetorical level and cultural level. The given examples explain the feasibility of the methods.

Due to the great difference between Chinese and English and the uniqueness of children's literature, it's hard to achieve complete equivalence by using the methods and approaches proposed in this thesis. What the author has done is just a preliminary exploration of Relevance Theory for C-E translation of children's literature, and the author still hopes the paper can contribute a little to translational studies of children's literature.

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