

A Teaching Exploration on Translation in TEM-8 from the Perspective of Relevance Theory

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ABSTRACT

Translation, one of the abilities that has to be mastered in English learning, has always been a significant part in TEM-8 (Test for English Majors-Band 8). However, the translation part is always an obstacle for students of English major, which is an indication that effective teaching methods should be proposed. This article provides a perspective of relevance theory to translation teaching for TEM-8, which is illustrated in four parts, namely ostensive-inferential communication, relevance and context, the maximal relevance and the optimal relevance, cultural translation.

Keywords: Translation teaching, TEM-8, Relevance theory.

1. INTRODUCTION

TEM-8, Test for English Majors-Band 8, is sponsored by the National Foreign Languages Teaching Advisory Board, which is an English proficiency test for the senior students of English major. It has been the grade examination reflecting the highest English level in China so far. The contents of TEM-8 include five aspects, namely listening comprehension, reading comprehension, language usage, translation, and writing. According to the author's interview with the senior students of English major, the translation part is considered to be one of the most difficult parts in the test. Consequently, the translation teaching about TEM 8 becomes more and more significant and efficient teaching methods are eager to be put forward.

Since the reform of TEM-8 in 2015, the Chinese-English translation has retained while the English-Chinese translation has been removed, which is an indication that the output ability of English is paid more attention to. Throughout the last decade, the translation parts are almost literary translation. Literary translation is a kind of linguistic symbol transformation of literary texts and the study of literary translation is naturally closely related to linguistics (Xu Shiyan & Zhang Jie, p.161). Therefore, the author of this article proposes a pragmatic perspective, namely relevance theory, to the teaching of TEM-8 translation.

2. RELEVANCE THEORY AND TRANSLATION

According to relevance theory, communication is an ostensive-inferential process, in which the speaker expresses the informative intentions ostensively to the hearer and the hearer infers the communicative intentions of the speaker (Sperber & Wilson, 1986). In other words, communication is a cognitive process between the speaker and the hearer.

In literary translation studies, not only the mutual transformation between language texts is paid attention to, but also the cognition of translator and reader is attached importance to (Xu Shiyan & Zhang Jie, p.161). Gutt, Wilson's student, has been devoting to this research for decades. He holds that translation is an inferential process concerning the brain mechanisms, an ostensive-inferential activity to interpret the source language and a cognitive process to find the optimal relevance (Gutt, 1989). From Gutt's research, it can be seen that relevance theory is available for translation.

Given all of that, the next part will combine several translation examples in TEM-8 for teaching analysis basing on relevance theory. Since the students can be regarded as translators when they do the translation tests in TEM-8, the author will

use the word, students, to refer to translators in the following discussion at times.

3. THE ANALYSIS OF TRANSLATION TEACHING IN TEM-8

3.1 Ostensive-inferential Communication

From the perspective of relevance theory, translation is a kind of communication by which the author of the source text, the translator, and the reader of the target text conducted. To be specific, it is a two-round communication. The first round is the process of interpreting the source text, in which the author conveys his informative intentions to the

translator in the ostensive communication act and the translator infers the communicative intentions of the author in the inferential action. The second round is the process of producing the target text, in which the translator conveys his informative intentions to the reader in the ostensive communication act and the reader infers the communicative intentions of the translator in the inferential action. (Yao Shuyang, 2021, p.23) The following picture drawn by the author of this article in the previous translation research shows the process of tripartite communication in detail. Example 1 will be analyzed to indicate how to have students enter this tripartite communication and coordinate the relationship between all parties.

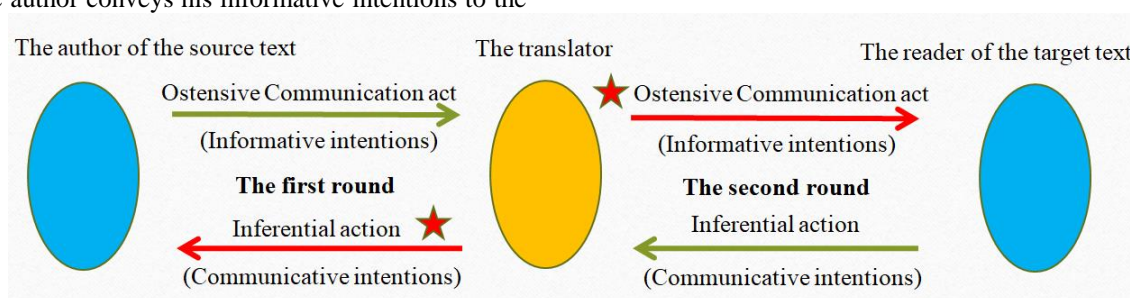


Figure 1 The Two-round Communication.

a (Yao Shuyang, 2021, p. 23)

Example 1:

- ST: 他们发现无论是潺潺小溪，还是浩荡大河，都一去不复返，流逝之际青年变成了老翁而绿草转眼就枯黄，很自然有错阴的紧迫感。流逝也许是缓慢的，但无论如何缓慢，对流逝的恐惧使人们必须用“流逝”这个词来时时警戒后人，必须急匆匆地行动，给这个词灌注一种紧张感。(Chinese-English translation part of TEM-8 in 2016)
- TT: They have found that the flowing water, whether a murmuring stream or a mighty river, passes by and never returns. With the passage of time, the young will become old and the green grass will soon turn yellow. People naturally have a sense of urgency that they may idle away their time. Maybe the elapse of time is slow. But no matter how slow it is, the fear of it makes people use the word “elapse” to constantly warn their descendants to act in a rush, which adds a sense of tension to the word. (Reference translation)

The translation test in 2016 is selected from *Maqiao Dictionary* (《马桥词典》), a novel published by Han Shaogong, a Chinese writer, in 1996. In the form of a dictionary, the novel contains

115 entries from a fictional village, Maqiao Town, in Hunan province. The selected text belongs to literature.

In the first round of communication, the author, Han Shaogong, conveyed the informative intentions to the students through the ostensive communication act. The students should learn to infer the communicative intentions basing on the information given by the author. First of all, the students need to infer according to the informative intentions, “潺潺小溪” and “浩荡大河”, and conclude that both of the two expressions refer to the running water. At the same time, the word, “潺潺” is easy to be ignored, which expresses the sound of the flowing water. The students should also notice that there is no subject in the sentence, “很自然有错阴的紧迫感”. In particular, the word, “错阴”, is quite difficult to understand. The students have to infer the implicit meaning of the word, namely a waste of time. After the inference by the students, the next step is to enter the second round of communication with the target reader.

In the second round of communication, the students will convey information to the target

reader in the ostensive communication act. Basing on the inference in the first round of communication, the students will use the translation technique, addition, to add the expression, “the flowing water”, to the beginning of this sentence, which summarizes “潺潺小溪” and “浩荡大河”. As for the word, “潺潺”, the students can use “murmuring”, the present participle form of the verb murmur, to translate. The word, “murmuring”, can vividly reflect the soft sound of the stream. When translating the sentence, “很自然有错阴的紧迫感”, the students could add the subject, “people”, to the sentence by using addition again. The word, “错阴”, can be translated into “idle away their time” or “waste their time”, and be processed as an attributive clause of “urgency”. In this way, the whole sentence, “很自然有错阴的紧迫感”, is translated into “people naturally have a sense of urgency that they may idle away their time”.

Therefore, the important role of the translator must be emphasized in translation teaching, that is, the translator is the core person to coordinate the relationship between the author of the source language and the reader of target language. In the first round of communication, the students should infer the author’s communicative intentions as much as possible without missing any information. And then the students try to convey the information to the reader in the second round of communication, so as to reduce the reader’s cognitive efforts.

3.2 Relevance and Context

The hearer obtains the communicative intentions through inference, of which the premise is contextual assumption. Sperber & Wilson (1986, p.119) argue that the notion of a contextual effect is essential to a characterisation of relevance and having contextual effects is a necessary condition for relevance. According to their research, Gutt (2006, p.416) emphasizes the importance of context in translation, “The investigation of the influence of context on translation plays a prominent role. Context is seen as a major factor in determining what can or cannot be achieved in translation.” Example 2 is applied to help students establish the view of context towards translation.

Example 2:

- ST: 生活就像一杯红酒, 热爱生活的人会从其中品出无穷无尽的美妙。将它握在手中仔细观察, 它的暗红色中有血的感觉, 那正是生命的痕迹。抿一口留在口中回味, 它的甘甜中有一丝苦涩, 如人生一般复杂迷离。喝一口下肚, 余香沁人心脾, 让人终身受益。红酒越陈越美味, 生活越丰

富越美好。当人生走向晚年, 就如一瓶待开封的好酒, 其色彩是沉静的, 味道中充满慷慨与智慧。(Chinese-English Translation of TEM-8 in 2013)

- TT: Life is like a glass of red wine, from which life’s passionate lovers will discover inexhaustible charm. If one holds the wine in his hand and observes it carefully, its dark red color gives the feeling of blood, which is the sign of life. If one takes a sip of the wine, its bittersweet flavor will linger in his mouth, just as complex and mysterious as people’s life. Once the sip is swallowed, its lingering fragrance will gladden the heart and refresh the mind, giving a person lifelong benefit. There is a remarkable resemblance between life and wine: The taste becomes more delicious as the wine mellows, just as life gets better as it is more enriched. When one approaches his old age, his life is just like a bottle of wine to be savored. Its color is tranquil, while its taste brims with generosity and wisdom. (Reference translation)

This paragraph in 2013 is taken from a prose entitled *Life* (《生活》) written by Guan Jian in the 8th issue of *Reader* in 2005. The author, Guan Jian, compares all aspects of life to red wine. According to the informative intentions given by the author, the students can perceive that the process of experiencing life becomes several steps of tasting the red wine, such as holding the wine in hand and observing it carefully, taking a sip of the wine, and swallowing the sip.

Context and relevance are closely related to each other. When other conditions are equal, the greater the contextual effects are, the greater the relevance is (Sperber & Wilson, 1986, p.119). Consequently, it is necessary to guide the students to make contextual assumptions and obtain the contextual effects that are the premise of inference. The students will make a contextual assumption of tasting wine and they can infer the implicit meaning of similarities between life and red wine according to the sentence, “红酒越陈越美味, 生活越丰富越美好”. Then the students could use the translation technique, addition, to add a sentence, “there is a remarkable resemblance between life and wine”, to the beginning of the sentence, which increases the locality of the target text.

As maintained by Gutt (2004, p.199), the context is the key to translation and the translator should focus on the interaction among the context, the source text and the interpretation, rather than the translation principles or theories he abides by.

Therefore, the view of context must be paid more attention to in translation teaching.

3.3 The Maximal Relevance and the Optimal Relevance

Sperber and Wilson (2001, p.29) divide relevance into two aspects, namely the maximal relevance and the optimal relevance. Maximal relevance refers to the maximal contextual effects obtained by making as little effort as possible in utterance interpretation while the optimal relevance means the sufficient contextual effects achieved by making effective efforts in utterance interpretation. In the process of communication, the optimal relevance is usually what people search for. Significantly, as for literary translation, the maximal relevance is not necessarily the optimal relevance and the optimal relevance does not need to be the maximal relevance (Qiu Yunlong & Cheng Gang, 2018, p.48). The following example is used to guide the students to find the optimal relevance in translation.

Example 3:

- ST: 生活不如意时，文学书籍给我们提供了可以达到一种比现实更美好的境界——书里面的水可能比我们现实生活中的水要清，天比我们现实中的天要蓝；现实中没有完美的爱情，但在书里有永恒的《梁山伯与祝英台》和《罗密欧与朱丽叶》。读书，会弥补我们现实生活中所存在的不堪和粗糙。(Chinese-English Translation of TEM-8 in 2018)
- TT: When life gives us lemons, literature books provide us with an achievable realm that is better than reality. The water described in books may be clearer than that in our real life and the sky is bluer than what it is like in the real world. Perfect love is impossible in reality. However, the love in *Butterfly Lovers* and *Romeo and Juliet* is eternal. Therefore, reading books will smooth over the nastiness and roughness in real life. (Reference translation)

This source text is selected from *Three Senses of Reading* (《读书三感》) written by Xiao Fuxing, an active Chinese writer with rich achievements since the 1980s. The genre of this text belongs to literary report. By comparing the images of the beautiful world in literature books and real life, this paragraph shows the inner feelings acquired by reading.

When the students infer the communicative intentions basing on the sentence, “生活不如意时”，

they can easily find the maximal relevance, namely “when life is tough”, and convey it to the target reader. However, if the students try their best to mobilize their linguistic and cultural knowledge when they make contextual assumptions, they will come up with an idiom, “when life gives you a lemon, make lemonade”. Then they can use the idiom flexibly to translate the sentence, “生活不如意时”，into “when life gives us lemons”，which is the optimal relevance.

The next informative intention that needs to be paid attention to is the title of a book, “梁山伯与祝英台”，one of the four folk love stories in ancient China. The students tend to imitate *Romeo and Juliet* and translate “梁山伯与祝英台” into *Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai* which is the maximal relevance. But this kind of translation is equal to no translation because *Romeo and Juliet* is William Shakespeare’s famous play while *Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai* is quite unfamiliar for people who have little knowledge about Chinese literature and culture from English speaking countries. The target reader will take much cognitive efforts to understand the title. The better translation is to claim the main contents of the book. Consequently, “梁山伯与祝英台” can be translated into *Butterfly Lovers* which is the optimal relevance. Similarly, there are many excellent translation examples about English film titles which could be present to the students.

Example 4:

Table 1. The titles of English films and their Chinese translations

ST	TT
<i>Frozen</i>	《冰雪奇缘》
<i>Up</i>	《飞屋环游记》
<i>The Croods</i>	《疯狂原始人》
<i>Encanto</i>	《魔法满屋》
<i>Wreck-It Ralph</i>	《无敌破坏王》
<i>Zootopia</i>	《疯狂动物城》
<i>Coco</i>	《寻梦环游记》
<i>Soul</i>	《心灵奇旅》

The above translation examples in “Table 1” are all the optimal relevance, which effectively highlights the stories of the films and contributes a lot to the introduction to these films in China. However, there is a film called *Rango* which is translated into “兰戈” with the translation method, transliteration. Because it is difficult to infer the

communicative intentions, namely the content, from the title, the film is not well-known in China.

“The central claim of relevance theory is that the expectations of relevance raised by an utterance are precise enough, and predictable enough, to guide the hearer towards the speaker’s meaning (Sperber & Wilson, 2002, p.2).” Therefore, the students should try to find the optimal relevance when communicating with the target reader in order to reduce reader’s cognitive efforts.

3.4 Cultural Translation

Translation is a kind of intercultural communication. Literary translation involves a large number of cultural factors in particular. Relevance theory has a strong explanatory power on cultural translation. From this perspective, the students need to construct a corresponding cultural context of the target language to achieve the relevance with the source text. In terms of TEM-8, because the translation test is Chinese-English translation, students should possess basic Chinese cultural background knowledge, which is implied through example 5.

Example 5:

- ST: 白洋淀曾有“北国江南”的说法，但村舍的形制自具特色，与江南截然不同。南方多雨，屋顶是坡顶；这里的村舍则不同，屋顶是晒粮食的地方，而且历史上每逢水大洪泛，村民就得把屋里的东西搬到屋顶上。房屋彼此挨得很近，有些屋顶几乎相连。(Chinese-English Translation of TEM-8 in 2019)
- TT: Baiyang Lake used to be known as “Jiangnan in the north of China”, but the shape and structure of the cottages has its own features, which is fundamentally different from that of Jiangnan. In the south there is a lot of rain, so the roof is sloping. However, the cottages here are different, and the roof is a place to dry the grain. Every time there is a flood in history, villagers have to move things from the house to the roof. The houses are so close to each other that some roofs are almost connected. (Reference translation)

The translation test in 2019 is selected from *The Worry of Baiyang Lake* (《白洋淀之忧》) by contemporary writer Feng Jicai, of which the genre belongs to prose. The author expresses his feelings after seeing the destruction of history and culture in Baiyang Lake due to the development of tourism.

In the selected paragraph, Feng Jicai describes the characteristics and style of the original houses

in Baiyang Lake and compares with the houses in Jiangnan, the south of the Yangtze River. To infer the author’s communicative intentions of this paragraph, students need to have certain cultural background knowledge about Baiyang Lake. How to translate “白洋淀” (Baiyangdian) is the first issue to be considered in this paragraph.

In geography, lake refers to the waters of which the depth is more than 10 meters and the swamp is called when the water depth is less than 3 meters. The normal water level of “白洋淀” (Baiyangdian) is about 7 meters, which is between lake and swamp, so it is called “淀” (Dian), namely a shallow lake. There is no corresponding English word about “淀” (Dian) so that it is better to be translated into “lake” according to its depth.

Besides, students need to know that Baiyang Lake is located between Baoding and Cangzhou in Hebei Province, which is in the north of China. Therefore the word “北国” in the first sentence can be understood reasonably and translated into “the north of China” in order to reduce the reader’s cognitive efforts.

4. CONCLUSION

Through the above translation examples, it can be seen that the four aspects of relevance theory, namely ostensive-inferential communication, relevance and context, the maximal relevance and the optimal relevance, cultural translation, provide effective ways for the teaching of TEM-8 translation. Besides, the teachers should have the students pay attention to the following points: 1. Make sure that the meanings of the translation are complete and the information of the original text cannot be omitted; 2. Avoid using the same words, phrases or expressions again and again; 3. Add connectives appropriately to enhance the logic of English translation; 4. Try to ensure that there are no grammatical and spelling errors and the sentence structures are complete. All in all, pragmatics brings a different perspective to translation teaching so that students should be cultivated to establish pragmatic view towards translation, which can be a significant way to improve students’ translation ability for TEM-8.

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