

Cultural Default and Reconstruction in Publicity Texts from the Perspective of Relevance Translation Theory

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Abstract

Due to significant differences in cognitive assumptions, cultural backgrounds, and other factors between the source language authors and the target language readers, cultural default inevitably arises. This article argues that translators should make full use of the Relevance Translation Theory to analyze the causes and patterns of cultural defaults, and adopt ostensive stimulus, appropriate reconstruction, and acculturation strategies to reconstruct them in a coherent manner, aiming to enhance the understanding of the cultural connotations by the target language readers.

Keywords

Relevance Translation Theory, overseas-targeted publicity, cultural default, reconstruction.

1. Introduction

With the accelerated development of economic globalization and the increasing acceptance of the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind, international cultural exchange has become an essential means for countries around the world to understand and adapt to each other. As one of the important carriers for spreading a country's voices and conveying its unique cultural concepts, publicity texts are an essential part of international cultural exchange. However, due to the fact that the original authors are oriented towards source language readers and often neglect the cultural cognitive background of target language readers, cultural defaults inevitably occur, posing a major challenge in the translation of foreign propaganda texts. This article aims to explore the phenomenon of cultural default in publicity texts under the guidance of Relevance Translation Theory, and conduct in-depth analysis of reconstruction strategies in translations.

2. Introduction to Relevance Translation Theory

Relevance Translation Theory, a cognitive-pragmatic translation theory that focuses on the study of translation proposed in 1991 in *Translation and Relevance: Cognition and Context*, is Ernst August Gutt's research on translation based on the Relevance Theory of Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson.

Gutt regards translation as an ostensive-inferential cognitive process, focusing on human brain mechanisms. This translation process involves dual inference. On the one hand, the translator must understand the original author's intention from the source language texts or so-called communicative clues. On the other hand, translators must understand the cognitive environment of the target language readers. Relevance Translation Theory seeks to achieve optimal relevance rather than maximal relevance in the process of language communication. This depends on two determining factors: processing efforts and contextual effects. Processing efforts refer to the effort expended for inference, and not all information can be obtained

through the same level of processing efforts. For example, when reading *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China*, you can quickly access information about China's political situation, but find it difficult to access information about the college entrance examination. In contrast, at your high school reunion, it is easier to access information about the "college entrance examination". Contextual effects refer to the expectation that the effort expended in understanding can improve the contextual assumptions used for communicative behavior. The improvement includes three aspects: deriving contextual implicatures, strengthening or confirming existing assumptions, and eliminating contradictory assumptions (K.N. Lin, 1994). For example, when a friend says to you, "Why are you always like Lin Daiyu all day?", this sentence instantly activates the contextual assumption in the mind of a Chinese speaker, associating it with the character Lin Daiyu who is known for her melancholy in the novel *Dream of the Red Chamber*, and easily inferring the implicit meaning of this sentence. However, for foreign listeners, they lack such contextual assumptions relatively, making it difficult to produce the same contextual effect. Gutt believes that under the same conditions, the smaller the processing efforts, the stronger the relevance, and the greater the contextual effects, the stronger the relevance. This relationship can be explained by the following formula (Y.C. Zhao, 1999):

$$\text{Relevance } (R) = \frac{\text{Contextual Effects } (C)}{\text{Process Efforts } (P)}$$

3. Interpretation of Cultural Default

Default can be divided into situational defaults, contextual defaults, and cultural defaults (D.F. Wang, 1997). Cultural default refers to the omission of shared cultural background knowledge between the author and intended readers during communication, which is a communicative phenomenon with distinct cultural characteristics and a result of internal movements within a specific culture (D.F. Wang, 2003). Specifically, people living in the same socio-cultural environment share a common cognitive and cultural background, which constitutes the background knowledge or pragmatic premise in the communication process. Therefore, in real communication, speakers do not explicitly present all the graphic information based on this shared background knowledge. Instead, they subconsciously omit information that is self-evident to both parties, thus improving the efficiency of communication. This is the result of the economy principle of human communicative behavior.

Relevance Theory, as a theory of discourse and cognition, provides a certain theoretical basis and explanatory power in dealing with cultural default and its translation issues (X.J. Li, 2013). On the one hand, when dealing with translation, Relevance Theory not only requires the translator to derive the implicit meaning behind the explicit meaning, so that the target readers can understand the original author's intention, but also requires the translator to make the best relevance of the explicit information based on the target readers' cognitive cultural background and expectations for the original content, creating the best context for the readers. On the other hand, cultural default also requires translators to first identify the phenomenon of cultural default, then reconstruct its relevance, express the communicative intention of the original author to the target readers, and analyze the cognitive context of the target readers. While accurately matching the information intention and communicative intention of the original text, translators need to compensate for cultural default appropriately and reconstruct a suitable cultural context. Therefore, this article believes that Relevance Translation Theory has similarities with the reconstruction of cultural defaults in dealing with the relationship between the translator, the source language texts, and the target language readers.

4. Cultural Default and Reconstruction Strategies in Translation of Publicity Texts

Publicity texts are typical language materials for foreign cultural propaganda, and cultural default may greatly reduce the effectiveness of foreign propaganda in some cases. Therefore, it is important to study the strategies for reconstructing the relevance of cultural default. During the translation process, there are significant differences in the cognitive domains between the original author and the target language readers. The separation of information intention and communication intention, the absence of contextual assumptions, and the loss of contextual meaning are prone to occur in the translation, resulting in a lack of relevance in the translation and ultimately making it difficult to achieve successful communication. Therefore, in the translation process, the translator needs to adopt corresponding strategies to reconstruct relevance in the translation (D.L. Wu and J.H. Wu, 2017). This article attempts to analyze how to reconstruct the cultural default in publicity texts translation through ostensive stimulus, appropriate reconstruction, and acculturation strategies.

4.1. Ostensive stimulus strategy

The principle of relevance proposed by Sperber and Wilson (1986) is that "every explicit communicative act should be assumed to have the best relevance in itself." In the cognitive domain of a translation, the original author and the target reader often lack a common cultural background, and cultural default often occurs, leading to a deviation in the target reader's understanding of the original communicative intention. Therefore, it is necessary for the translator to clarify the implied meaning of the original text and express the communicative intention of the original author to the target readers, in order to achieve reconstruction. For example:

ST

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如果奉行你输我赢、赢者通吃的老一套逻辑，如果采取尔虞我诈、以邻为壑的老一套办法，结果必然是封上了别人的门，也堵上了自己的路，侵蚀的是自己发展的根基，损害的是全人类的未来。

TT1 If you follow the old-fashioned logic of winner-takes-all, or beggar-thy-neighbour, you will shut the door on others and only end up blocking your own way.

In this sentence, the term "以邻为壑" belongs to a four character Chinese idiom, derived from the allusion in *The Writings of Mencius*, which metaphorically refers to the act of shifting difficulties or disasters to others solely for the benefit of one's own side. Literally translating the word, treating neighboring countries as a big puddle, ignores the cultural default, resulting readers who do not understand ancient Chinese history cannot grasp the emotional color of the word, nor can they appreciate the implicit meaning that the original author truly wants to express. In order to achieve optimal relevance, the translator directly expresses the meaning of the idiom in the target language, achieving stronger relevance with less processing effort, allowing the translated readers to quickly grasp the meaning of the text.

4.2. Appropriate reconstruction strategy

In the cognitive domain of the original text, the information of the original text can stimulate the cognitive assumptions of the original readers, while the translated readers are unable to make corresponding assumptions, and insufficient assumptions lead to insufficient relevance. Therefore, there is a discrepancy between the cognitive domain of the original text and the cognitive domain of the translated text, and translators need to enrich their cognitive assumptions in order to enhance their relevance. However, if the enrichment of cognitive

assumptions is appropriate, cultural default can also increase the reading interest of translated readers and their thirst for knowledge about foreign cultures. For example:

ST2 相对于“远在天边”的“老虎”，群众对“近在眼前”嗡嗡乱飞的“蝇贪”感受更为真切。

TT2 The interests of ordinary people are hurt more by the "flies" that buzz around than the "tigers" that are far away.

In Chinese culture, "tiger" is a symbol of power and power, while in the West, "tiger" lacks such symbolic meaning. However, adding "The interests of ordinary people" in the translation, coupled with a strong contrast between "tigers" and "flies", even readers of the translation with different cognitive backgrounds from the original text can generate corresponding cognitive hypotheses. But if the translation maximizes the cognitive assumption, that is, the original meaning of the word is interpreted locally, but it cannot achieve the best relevance of the literal translation of the words "tigers" and "flies". This is because the literal translation preserves the vivid original language image, without spending too much processing effort, and maintains the implicit contextual effect of the original text, while maintaining the original meaning, achieving the best relevance rather than the maximum relevance.

4.3. Acculturation strategy

In the cognitive domain of the translation, although the target readers do not have the same historical and cultural background, some cultural concepts may easily cause meaning loss, there may be corresponding concepts in the target language culture. Therefore, when literal translation cannot effectively explain the concept of the source language, the translator can seek to replace it with images from the target language culture. For example:

ST3 但这并不意味着我们就可以高枕无忧了。

TT3 However, this doesn't mean we can rest on our laurels.

In ST3, the term "高枕无忧" originates from *Intrigues of the Warring States* and implies a derogatory meaning in the text, referring to being unwary and carefree. However, in Western culture, "pillow" does not have such a meaning, so the translator cleverly uses "laurel" to replace "高枕", indicating complacency. Therefore, the translation enables the target language readers to quickly mobilize cultural cognition, put in less processing effort, and better fit the cultural context of the target language, thus generating the best correlation between the original text and the translation.

ST4 不能让繁文缛节把科学家的手脚捆死了，不能让无穷的报表和审批把科学家的精力耽误了。

TT4 Our scientists should not get mired in red tape or waste their precious time on redundant reports and applications.

In ST 4, the term "繁文缛节" refers to cumbersome and unnecessary etiquette, and it is clever for the translator to choose the image of "red tape" as a substitute in Western culture. The term 'red tape' comes from the UK and originally referred to the British government's habit of using red ribbons to bind official government documents, implying strict and cumbersome procedures, which coincides with the term "繁文缛节". Compared to simply explaining the meaning of the word, using the image of "red tape" can better activate the cognitive hypothesis of the target language reader, which is similar to proceeding example.

5. Conclusion

Cultural defaults pose significant challenges in the translation of publicity texts due to the differences in cognitive assumptions and cultural backgrounds between the source language authors and the target language readers. Relevance Translation Theory provides valuable insights and strategies for addressing these challenges. By analyzing the patterns of cultural defaults and implementing ostensive stimulus, appropriate reconstruction, and acculturation strategies, translators can reconstruct the cultural nuances and bridge the cultural gaps, enabling target language readers to better grasp the cultural connotations conveyed in the source text. This not only facilitates effective communication but also contributes to the success of international cultural exchange and mutual understanding among nations.

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