On Translation Strategies of Wang Zuoliang's Version of Thunderstorm from the Perspective of Relevance Theory

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Abstract

Thunderstorm **is one of the representative classic works of Chinese drama culture. In order for foreign readers to understand the connotation of this work, translation must be a very important part, building a bridge of communication between the author Cao Yu and foreign audiences. This paper, grounded on the framework of Relevance Theory, finds the important guiding role of RT in translation through example analysis in Wang Zuoliang's version of Thunderstorm. Translators must take into account the different cognitive environment of Chinese and foreign readers and adopt different translation strategies, making foreign readers obtain the maximum context effect with the minimum processing efforts so as to achieve the optimal relevance and identify the intention of the original author better.**

Keywords

Relevance Theory; *Thunderstorm*; Translation strategies.

1. Introduction

As a typical representative of Chinese theater culture, With concise language and distinctive characterization, *Thunderstorm* not only shows the social and historical reality of the time, but also reflects the traditional Chinese culture. The work describes the social period of semi-feudalism and semi-colonialism in China. The development of the plot is mainly reflected in the dialogue between various characters, and these spoken dialogues are closer to the real life of Chinese people at that time, which are both popular, succinct and profound with great practical significance. The language of each character corresponds to their respective identities and personalities, implying Cao Yu's creative intentions. It is these words with Chinese native characteristics and the subtext of dialogues that bring great challenges to translation. How to overcome the differences between Chinese and foreign cultures, as well as different cognitive environments and cognitive abilities, and to make the target readers feel the explanatory power similar to the original text, are all the issues that translators must consider. Therefore, from the perspective of Relevance Theory, this paper takes the English version co-translated by Wang Zuoliang and A. C. Barnes as an example to explore how translators flexibly use different translation strategies to make the translation more relevant, so as to achieve the optimal relevance between the intention of the original author and the target readers, hoping to provide some reference for the translation of drama literature and further promote the spread of traditional Chinese culture.

2. Relevance Theory and Translation

In 1986, Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson first proposed Relevance Theory in their book *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*. This theory holds that human language communication is an ostensive-inferential process, and the cognitive context of both sides mutually manifest, making the preceding and following discourse relevant, so that the hearer can recognize the speaker's intention. Human beings always perceive things according to a

principle of relevance—"Every act of ostensive communication communicates the presumption of its own optimal relevance[1]". Sperber and Wilson believe that the degree of relevance depends on the contextual effect and the processing effort. The discourse is optimally relevant if it produces enough contextual effect and the minimal effort is required to process it. The more successful people's assumptions, speculations, and inference about utterances and context are, the clearer the intrinsic relevance of utterances is, and the better contextual effects can be achieved without too much effort, so as to correctly understand the discourse and achieve communicative success[2].

Relevance Theory is not a translation theory, but it can effectively explain and guide translation activities, and lay the foundations for translation ontology and methodology[3]. Ernst August Gutt, Wilson's student, first applied this theory to translation in his book *Translation and Relevance: Cognition and Context*, and put forward Relevance-Theoretic Translation Theory. He believes that translation is a verbal communication act, an inferential process closely related to brain mechanisms, which involves not only language code, but more importantly, dynamic inference based on relevance according to a dynamic context[4]. To communicate successfully, the translator must ensure that his intentions are consistent with the expectations of the target reader[5]. Under the guidance of this theory, the translator should give the target reader enough contextual effect so that they do not have to make unnecessary efforts, and what the translation really pursues is the optimal relevance between the two.

3. Analysis on Translation Strategies of the English Version of *Thunderstorm* Based on Relevance Theory

Although *Thunderstorm* is a literary work, different from poetry, novel, etc, it is a drama that can be performed. The play is a unique literary genre, which can be read as a literary work alone, and also a blueprint for the stage performance[6]. Therefore, the translation of drama should not only consider the differences in cultural background, but also make the translation show the stage charm. If the performance is needed, the translation can also make the target readers understand how to use the appropriate tone and action to present the character. Under the guidance of Relevance Theory, the translator should convey the informative intention and communicative intention of the original author to the target readers. If it is transmitted just superficially, the cultural connotation will be distorted, not to mention that the performance must be based on understanding, so the translator needs to adopt different translation strategies to try to make the intention of the original author coincide with the expectations of the target readers.

3.1. Literal Translation and Free Translation

3.1.1. Literal Translation

Literal translation is called as direct translation in Gutt's Relevance-Theoretic Translation Theory, which is defined that "a receptor language utterance is a direct translation of a source language utterance if and only if it purports to interpretively resemble the original completely in the context envisaged for the original[5]." It creates a presumption of complete interpretive resemblance[5]. In other words, direct translation has its prerequisite that the translator must consider whether the cognitive context of the original text exists in the brain of the target reader. If it is similar to the cognitive context of the target reader, direct translation must be the best choice. Gutt argues that direct translation not only preserves the stylistic features of the original text, but also provides communicative clues that guide the reader to understand the communicator's intentions. In literary translation, if the translator's communicative intention is to allow the reader to fully enjoy the aesthetic characteristics of the original text, not just the basic meaning, he should strive to retain all the communicative clues and reproduce the stylistic

characteristics of the original text[7]. This is especially true for drama translation. Colloquial dialogues, detailed stage sets and action descriptions are actually communicative clues that indicate the intentions of the characters and the author. Here are a few examples:

(1) the original text: 现在他的眼睛欣喜地闪动(blink)着，脸色通红[8](27).

the translated text: Just now his face is flushed and his eyes are dancing merrily[9](13).

This sentence was a character description given by the author Cao Yu when the second young master of the Chou family, Chou Chung, first appeared in *Thunderstorm*. It shows Chou Chung's innocence and liveliness, and the word "闪动(blink)" vividly shows his joy that this character conveys to the audience. The translator directly translates it as "his eyes are dancing merrily", which not only retains the characteristics of the original wording, but also allows the target readers to easily understand the author's intention. The translation uses "dance" to directly express the word "闪动(blink)" of the original text, which also takes advantage of interpretive resemblance. There is such a close concept in the cognitive context of the target reader, so the use of literal translation can achieve the optimal relevance.

(2) the original text: (听一下)别是太太吧？(走到通饭厅的门前，由锁眼窥视，忙回来)[8] (34).

the translated text: (listening) It's not the mistress, is it? (He goes across to the door leading to the dining-room, peeps through the keyhole, and hurries back to her[9].)(20)

This sentence was a description of actions when Lu Kuei and his daughter Lu Ssu-feng were talking about Mrs. Chou, suddenly hearing something. Cao Yu made a brief and clear description to reveal Lu Kuei's wretched image in light of the Chinese language habits and the sequence of actions. According to the English way of thinking, the key points are usually introduced first, not necessarily arranged in chronological order, but the translator translates directly in line with the original text. Obviously, it is believed that literal translation can better reflect the style of the original, because this does not affect the target readers' understanding of its original meaning. Literal translation has provided adequate contextual effects, and it does not require them to spend extra efforts.

(3) the original text: 你以为我是真没有心肝，跟她开开心就完了么[8](154)?

the translated text: You really think I'm a heartless creature who only wants her for the amusement he can get out of her[9](132)?

Chou Ping showed Lu Ta-hai his sincerity for Ssu-feng in this sentence. He wants to express his idea that he does not just play with Ssu-feng. The translator directly translates the word "开开心" into "amusement", which is not only easy to understand but also clearly shows the intention of the original work. Whether it is "开开心" or "amusement", the readers of the original and the target readers all can understand its deep meaning that refers to flirting and playing with the girl's emotions rather than the pleasure in the superficial sense. Their cognitive context is similar in this word, which makes them get the similar interpretation, so literal translation is the most suitable strategy here.

3.1.2. Free Translation

Although free translation is faithful to the original text, it does not stick to the form of the original, and pays more attention to the smooth translation form. Gutt also mentions a concept of indirect translation as opposed to direct translation in his theory, somewhat similar to what we usually call free translation. Gutt sees indirect translation as a way of interlingual interpretive use[5]. The main difference between direct translation and indirect translation is that direct translation strives for complete interpretive resemblance, while indirect translation only seeks to achieve adequate resemblance in relevant aspects[7]. The same is true of free translation. When the cognitive context of the original text is different from that of the target reader, if the literal translation is adopted, although the translation is similar to the original in

form, it obviously loses its communicative intention, and the target reader cannot perceive its relevance and the author's true intention, only knowing the literal meaning. Therefore, the translator must complement the relevant context of the original text according to the cognitive context of the target reader or use analogy between their similar parts or substitution of them. For example:

(4) the original text: 我就<u>硬着头皮</u>从这窗缝里，向里一望[8](30).

the translated text: Finally, I <u>plucked up courage</u> and peeped in through this window here[9](16).

"硬着头皮" often appears in the daily conversation of Chinese people, meaning that someone is forced to do something . If it is just translated literally into "harden the scalp", the target reader will be confused and not understand what it actually means, because this concept does not exist in their cognitive environment. If the translation is unable to make it mutual manifest to the communicator and the audience, it can not achieve successful communication. Therefore, we can adopt free translation that this phrase can be replaced by a phrase with similar meaning in English. The translator chooses the phrase "pluck up courage" to present the original meaning, which not only expresses the internal meaning of "硬着头皮", but also meets the contextual requirements. In this way, the target reader can easily perceive the image of this character and recognize the author's intention.

(5) the original text: 一个人敢做一件事就要当一件事[8](57).

the translated text: If a man takes a risk, he must be prepared to accept the consequences[9](40). The original sentence is relatively simple in form, connected by the logical relationship, which is easy for Chinese people to understand. However, when it is translated into English, the target reader will spend too much effort due to the unclear context without adding the conjunction "if". Moreover, the cognitive habits and abilities of the target readers should also be taken into account when translating specific words. "敢做一件事" and "当一件事" are more in line with the way of speaking for Chinese people, implicative and concise, but if directly translated into "to dare to do something" and "to undertake something", it will obviously confuse the target reader because they do not know what exactly "something" means. This expression is not ostensive, and the target reader is unable to infer. Therefore, the context must be complemented to conform to the way of understanding of the target readers. The translator uses "take a risk"and "accept the consequences" to replace " dare to do something" and " undertake something". Although this translation seems to change a lot, the strategy of free translation here allows them to further understand the cultural connotation of China.

3.1.3. Combination of Literal and Free Translation

The first principle of literal or free translation is to be faithful to the original text. Considering the cognitive environment and acceptance ability of the target readers, sometimes adopting free translation on the basis of literal translation can enhance the contextual effect and make the target readers take less effort. For instance:

(6) the original text: 怎么，你要我陪着你，<u>在这样的家庭</u>，每天想着过去的罪恶，这样活活地闷死么[8](68)?

the translated text: Eh? You mean you want me to stay here with you, <u>in this god-forsaken place</u>? So that every day we're reminded of our past sins, until they gradually suffocate us[9](51)? This sentence is Chou Ping's rhetorical question to Chou Fan-yi. Except for the underlined part, the rest are translated in a literal way. The translator adopts the strategy of free translation to translate the underlined part into "in this god-forsaken family" instead of translating directly into "in this family".This translation not only makes the depressing and ugly image of the Chou family more specific, but also makes the target readers more deeply feel Chou Ping's dislike of this family. The literal translation of the whole form, combined with the complement of free

translation, realizes the principle of optimal relevance of the translated text.

(7) the original text: 这次，她自己要对你妈说，叫她带着你卷铺盖，滚蛋[8](33)!

the translated text: So this time she's going to speak to your mother direct and get her to take you away, bag and baggage[9](18)!

The final part of the sentence is very colloquial, and neither "卷铺盖(to pack up)" nor "滚蛋(to go away)" can be translated directly, so the translator translates it into "take you away, bag and baggage" under the condition of keeping the form as consistent as possible. The phrase "bag and baggage" is used as an adverb in English, usually at the end of a sentence, meaning "with all your possessions", which is just similar to the implied meaning of "卷铺盖" and fits the cognitive context of the target reader. Maintaining much of the original form with subtle adjustment by free translation provides a greater contextual effect and also makes the processing effort of the target reader smaller.

3.2. Domestication and Foreignization

3.2.1. Domestication

Due to the cultural differences between China and West, there are many common sayings or slang that cannot be simply translated literally, so the translator must take into account the cultural environment of the target readers. This is where domestication strategy is needed to bring the translator closer to the target readers. In terms of the Englishi version of *Thunderstorm*, domestication strategy is to use English cultural traditions to replace or describe the expressions of Chinese unique culture. From a familiar cultural perspective, the target readers can more accurately identify the intention of the original author. Here are some examples:

(8) the original text: 你看你这点穷骨头[8](26)。

the translated text: Come down off your high horse[9](12)!

(9) the original text: 我记得我在德国念书的时候，对于这方面，我自命比你这种半瓶醋的社会思想要彻底的多[8](52)!

the translated text: I remember how I used to have the same sort of ideas when I was a student in Germany -- except that my ideas were much more thorough than your half-baked notions[9](35)!

(10) the original text: 大兵，拉包月车，干机器匠，念书上学，哪一行他是好好地干过[8](20)?

the translated text: He's tried his hand at being a soldier, a rickshaw boy, a mechanic, a student -- he's been a Jack of all trades, but hasn't stuck to any of them for long[9](6).

As a drama, *Thunderstorm* has a lot of slang in characters' spoken dialogues, such as "穷骨头(poor bones)" in Example 8 and "半瓶醋(half bottle of vinegar)" in Example 9, which are characteristic expressions of Chinese traditional culture. These lexical information with Chinese folk culture does not exist in the cognitive environment of foreign readers. The translator needs to express the original meaning of the text and make the target readers understand the cultural connotation of these words, so the translator selects the corresponding English slang "Come down off your high horse" and "half-baked" with similar meanings to the Chinese slang. Using the lexical forms familiar to the target reader and making them perceive the similar cultural meanings not only bring the translation closer to the reader, but are also more in line with the expression of dramatic colloquial speech.

There is another situation with domesticating translation that some cultural vocabulary will be added in the translated text as a supplement, which does not deviate from the meaning of the original, but also makes a more idiomatic English expression. For instance, there is not Chinese slang in Example 10, but the translator adds an English slang term "a Jack of all trades" in the

English version. The use of the slang makes the meaning of the original text more vivid and provides more adequate context effect to make the translation more relevant.

3.2.2. Foreignization

Foreignization is a strategy in which a target text is produced which deliberately breaks target conventions by retaining something of the foreignness of the original[10]. Although the cultural differences between China and West are inevitable, there are always some cultural images that are homologous . At this time, the strategy of foreignization can not only retain the original style, but also better convey the author's intention. For example:

(11) the original text: 姓周的，你发的是绝子绝孙的昧心财[8](97)!

the translated text: I tell you, creature, you've made your money by killing people, and you and your sons stand accursed for ever[9](78)!

(12) the original text: 你的母亲早死了，早叫你父亲压死了，闷死了[8](169).

the translated text: Your mother died long ago. She was crushed and smothered by your father[9](145).

In Example 11, "绝子绝孙(without posterity)" is a phrase with strong hatred and curse, and the translator adopts the strategy of foreignization, translating it into "you and your sons stand accursed for ever", which not only fully expresses the original meaning of the phrase, but also makes the target readers feel Lu Ta-hai's anger and hatred towards Chou Pu-yuan without much processing effort because of Chinese and Western people's similar feelings .

Another example is the translation of "压死了，闷死了(to be crushed and suffocated to death)" in Example 12. Actually Chou Fan-yi is not really dead, and this sentence is a outlet to vent her feelings that she is about to suffocate under the oppression of Chou Pu-yuan, not physically unable to breathe, but psychologically depressing. The translator also uses the expression of the original text to present Chou Fan-yi's sense of suffocation with "crushed and smothered". On the one hand, it shows the wording of the original text, and on the other hand, it allows the target readers to feel the lexical and cultural charm of the original text while recognizing the intention.

3.2.3. Combination of Domestication and Foreignization

Domestication and foreignization in translation are not contradictory, but complementary[11]. In order for the target readers to identify the intention of the original author with less processing efforts, it is necessary to combine these two strategies to keep the commonalities and adjust cultural differences, so as to allow people from different cultural backgrounds to communicate successfully. For instance:

(13) the original text: 她会爱你如一只饿了三天的狗咬着它最喜欢的骨头，她恨起你来也会像只恶狗狺狺地，不，多不声不响地恨恨地吃了你的[8](35).

the translated text: When she loves, she loves with a fiery passion, and when she hates, she hates as fiercely, with a hatred which can destroy[9](21).

(14) the original text: 你是个少爷，你心地混帐[8](154).

the translated text：You may be a young gentleman, but you act like a rat[9](131).

(15) the original text: 四凤，你怎么不把那一两四块八的龙井彻上，尽叫爸爸生气[8](108).

the translated text: Upsetting Father like that! You should have made him a pot of best-quality Lungching -- it's only four dollars eighty an ounce[9](90).

We can find that all the metaphors about dogs in the original text of Example 13 have disappeared in the translation. Both "爱你如饿了三天的狗(to love you like a dog that has been hungry for three days)" and "恨你如恶狗(to hate you like a vicious dog" have been deleted by the translator, while the rest of the content is kept in form with the original text. The reason why the translator translates the sentence this way is that the cultural connotation of "dog" is

quite different between China and the West. In Chinese traditional culture, the culture meaning of "dog" is mainly derogatory, and there are also a large number of cases in which the dog is an object of ridicule in folk allegorical sayings and proverbs, while the cultural connotation of "dog" is mainly commendatory in the English proverbs, such as a lucky dog[12]. Therefore, when translating the word "dog", the translator must take into account the different cultural image of the "dog" in the cognitive context of the target readers. It is inappropriate for this part to be translated with a foreignizing strategy like other parts of this sentence, and the domesticating strategy should be adopted to conform to the cultural cognition of the target readers.

On the contrary，an animal word is added in the translation of Example 14. The translator translates "你心地混账(you bastard)" into "you act like a rat", drawing an analogy between Chou Ping's misbehavior and the animal rat. If the latter part of the sentence is translated with the strategy of foreignization like the former part, it is not only difficult to show the specific image of Chou Ping in the eyes of Lu Ta-hai, but also unable to make the target readers understand its true meaning. The translator uses the vivid metaphor of "rat" to achieve the optimal relevance between the translated text and the target reader, so that they can know the author's communicative intention easily, because the animal word "rat" in western culture refers to "a despicable person" [13], and this cultural implication is just in line with the implicit meaning of "你心地混账" in the original text. On the whole, The combination of domestication and foreignization not only makes the writing smooth, but also makes the contextual effect of the translation larger.

Another example is the translation of "龙井(the name of a kind of tea)" in Example 15. As good tea known to Chinese, "龙井" is not necessarily known by foreigners. Their cognitive environment may not contain the encyclopedia of this kind of tea, so the translator here adopts the strategy of foreignization combined with domestication, keeping the full name of the tea "Lungching" and adding "best-quality" in front of it to introduce it, which not only makes the target readers know the superior quality tea in China, but also makes them understand Lu Ta-hai's intention of the irony at this time.

4. Conclusion

Thunderstorm is a classic drama that contains Chinese traditional culture. It has now been performed on the Western stage for many years, and translation has contributed a lot to its promotion. From the above analysis, it can be seen that Relevance Theory has an important guiding role in the translation of drama. In order for the target reader and the original author to communicate successfully through the work, the translator must take into account their different cognitive environment and cognitive ability, and adopt different translation strategies to make the translated text give appropriate ostension and adequate contextual effect, so that the target reader can identify the intention of the original author with less processing effort, and finally achieve the optimal relevance.

Acknowledgments

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