A Study on Translation of Metaphors in *Nineteen Eighty-four* from the Perspective of Relevance Theory

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Abstract: *Nineteen Eighty-four* is a representative work of the English writer George Orwell, which is famous for the use of metaphors. Former scholars mainly emphasized on the analysis of metaphorical connotation from the perspective of literature, but seldom studied the translation of metaphors from the perspective of Relevance Theory. According to the theory, two factors influence the relevance, namely, processing effort and contextual effects. In the translation of metaphors, translators should follow the principle of the optimal relevance to choose appropriate translation strategies. The thesis analyzes three Chinese translation versions of *Nineteen Eighty-four* based on Relevance Theory, and discusses four kinds of metaphors in the work, including the light metaphor, container metaphor, weather metaphor and river metaphor. The study shows that the three translators are inclined to adopt free translation to obtain the optimal relevance when dealing with translation of metaphors in *Nineteen Eighty-four*.

1. Introduction

Nineteen Eighty-four is an outstanding political satire novel, which is collectively referred to as the "dystopian trilogy" together with *We* by Zamyatin of Russia and *Brave New World* by Huxley of England. It depicts a totalitarian society, Oceania, where human nature is strangled, freedom denied, ideas restrained, life monotonous and all good things severely destroyed. This works creates the atmosphere of repression and horror everywhere, showing the political satire on totalitarian rule. For *Nineteen Eighty-four*, scholars mainly analyzed the metaphorical connotation from the perspective of literature. In this thesis, three Chinese translation versions will be analyzed based on Relevance Theory, including Sun Zhongxu's, Han Yang and Wang Ji's as well as Lin Min's version, so as to discuss the translation of metaphors, further demonstrate the explanatory power of Relevance Theory in translation and provide some references for translation of metaphors in literary works. In addition, readers will further understand the underlying meaning in the translation of *Nineteen Eighty-four*.

2. Contextual Effects and Processing Effort

Sperber and Wilson define relevance in *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* as follows: Extent condition 1: An assumption is relevant in a context to the extent that its contextual effects in this context are large.

Extent condition 2: An assumption is relevant in a context to the extent that the effort required to process it in this context is small.[1]

From the definition, we can find the connection between relevance and context. Sperber and Wilson believe that contextual effects are brought by mental processes. Mental processes, like all biological processes, involve a certain effort, a certain expenditure of energy. They consider that the processing effort involved in achieving contextual effects is the second factor to be taken into account in assessing degrees of relevance. Processing effort is a negative factor: other things being equal, the greater the processing efforts, the lower the relevance.[1]

Gutt explores the relationship between context and relevance in *Translation and Relevance: Cognition and Context*. He states that "not all the assumptions available from the potential context are equally accessible at any given point in time".[2]

3. Ostensive-inferential Communication

Ostension and inference are two aspects of communication. Sperber and Wilson point out that ostension provides two layers of information: first one refers to the information shown; second layer refers to that the first layer of information has been intentionally pointed out. However, recognizing the intention behind the ostension is necessary for efficient information processing: someone who fails to recognize this intention may fail to notice relevant information.[1] Inferential communication and ostension are one and the same process, but seen from two different points of view: that of the communicator who is involved in ostension and that of the audience who is involved in inference.[1]

4. Maximal Relevance and Optimal Relevance

Sperber and Wilson propose two general principles of relevance. The first principle is that human cognition tends to be feared to the maximization of relevance. The second one is that every act of ostensive communication has presumption of its own optimal relevance. Cognitive activity tend to pursue the maximization of relevance while communications tends to pursue the optimal relevance. From the perspective of interpreting the text, the criterion to understand the discourse for readers is to seek the optimal relevance between the discourse of the text and their own cognitive environment.[3]

5. Definition of Metaphor

For the study of metaphor, we can trace back to Aristotle's study. He defines metaphor in *Poetics* as follows: A metaphor is a carrying over of a word belonging to something else, from genus to species, from species to genus, from species to species, or by analogy. By from genus to species, for instance "here stands my ship" (being tied to a mooring is a sort of standing); by from species to genus "truly ten thousand good things has Odysseus done" (for ten thousand is a many which here is used in place of "many"); by from species to species, for instance "drawing off the soul with bronze" and "cutting with indestructible bronze" (for here drawing has conveyed cutting and cutting drawing, since both are sorts of taking away).[4]

Richards points out the nature of metaphor in *Philosophy of Rhetoric* that fundamentally it is a borrowing between and intercourse of thoughts, a transaction between contexts. Thought is metaphoric, and proceeds by comparison, and the metaphors of language derive there from.[5]

Lakoff and Johnson are masters in researching metaphor and in *Metaphor We Lived By*, they propose that the essence of metaphor is under-standing and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another. They believe that human conceptual system is metaphorically structured and defined. Metaphors as linguistic expressions are possible precisely because there are metaphors in a person's conceptual system.[6] According to the cognitive functions of metaphor, metaphors can be distinguished as structural, ontological and orientational ones.[7]

6. The Translation Strategies of Metaphors

For translation of metaphors, translators can choose literal or free translation. When the social cultures and cognitive environments between target and source readers are consistent, literal translation is more appropriate. Based on accurately conveying the author's intentions, an good contextual environment can minimize the processing effort of target readers so as to achieve the optimal relevance. On the contrary, when the concepts and images in the works cannot be well conveyed by literal translation, translators need to flexibly deal with the translation of metaphors by

free translation, which conveys the implied meaning of metaphors, reproduces the authors' intention and thus conforms to the optimal relevance.

Therefore, when translating metaphors, translators are required to take many factors into account, such as author's intentions, processing effort of target readers, cognitive abilities of target readers, contextual effects, social and cultural background and so on. Finally, translation of metaphors could achieve the optimal relevance by different strategies of translation.

7. Light Metaphor

Light usually refers to the electromagnetic waves that can cause human vision, such as sunlight, lamplight and moonlight. The light varies in brightness. When the light is bright, we can clearly see things; when dim, we can only vaguely see things. In *Nineteen Eighty-four*, a large number of light metaphors appeared. We will discuss this conceptual metaphor——THE CLEARNESS IS LIGHT. And different translators adopted different translation strategies to deal with such metaphor. Then, we take the translations of the following two sentences as examples to discuss which translation strategy is more appropriate.

For example:

Original: He was the commander of a vast shadowy army.(Orwell,1946: 12)

Sun's translation: *tā shì yìzhī jùdàde yǐngzi bùduì de sīlìng.*

Han & Wang's translation: *tā zhǐhuīzhe yìzhī pángdàde jūnduì, cángnì zài ànchù.*

Lin's translation: *tāde shǒuxià yǒu yìzhī pángdà ěr yǐnmìde jūnduì.*

"Shadow" is a dark shape on a surface that is made when something stands between a light and the surface. Shadow is dark. Similarly, The army hides in the dark. Therefore, the author used shadow to express the secrecy of the army. In context, Goldstein used to be one of the leading figures of the Party. Later, he engaged in the counter-revolutionary activities and attacked the big brother. Moreover, he led the underground network of insurgents with a secret army in his hands. Sun translated "shadow" into "*yǐngzi*" by literal translation, which made target readers not recognize the writer's own intentions. Thus, target readers need spend a lot of processing effort and this translation doesn't reach the optimal relevance. In contrast, Han and Wang's, and Lin's versions all adopted free translation strategy and respectively translated "shadow" into "*cángnì zài ànchù*" and "*yǐnmì*". Apparently, these two translations show the secrecy of the army in a direct way and create adequate contextual effects. So targets readers could understand the meaning by making only a little processing effort, the translation reaching the optimal relevance. In conclusion, literal translation is more appropriate for translating this light metaphor.

8. Container Metaphor

Container is something that is used to hold or store things in, such as cans and bottles,etc. Similarly, some organs of human body also have a function of holding things. For example, the brain can store knowledge and the stomach can hold food. Gradually, many container metaphors come into being. The Chinese idioms such as *"mǎnnǎozi jiǎnghǔ"*, *"yídùzi huàishuǐ"* belong to this kind of metaphors. In this novel, many container metaphors occurred, which compared human bodies to containers. So we will discuss this conceptual metaphor——HUMAN BODY IS A CONTAINER. For example:

Original: Curiously, the chiming of the hour seemed to have put new heart into him.(Orwell,1946: 24)

Sun's translation: *qíguài de shì, bàoshí zhōngshēng sìhū ràng tā huànle zhǒng xīnqíng.*

Han & Wang's translation: *bùkěsīyìde shì zhōngshēng sìhū ràng tā yòu zhènfènle qǐlái.*

Lin's translation: *qíguài de shì, zhōngmíngshēng sìhū gěi tā zhùrùle xīnde yǒngqì.*

Lin's version uses literal translation while Sun's, and Han and Wang's version use free translation. Lin translated "put...into..." into "*zhùrù...*". However, the collocation of "*zhùrù....*" in Chinese and

the abstract noun *"xīnde yǒngqì"* in Chinese would cause rigid translation，which isn't consistent with the target readers' habits of language using and thus results in great difficulties for readers in understanding. Therefore, if the translator adopts literal translation here, the target readers will make great effort to understand the text with weak relevance. Although both Han and Wang's, and Lin's version used free translation, the selection of words would also lead to make different degrees of effort from readers. Sun translated *"put...into..."* into *"huàn"* in Chinese，but *"huàn"* means emotion may change in a good direction or in a bad direction. This would puzzle target readers. So *"huànle zhǒng xīnqíng"* would cause semantic ambiguity and poor contextual effects, thus target readers need to make more effort to understand the meaning. For Lin's version, he combined the meanings of *"put...into..."* and *"new heart"*, and finally translated the whole into *"zhènfèn"* in Chinese. Apparently, The semantic expression is clearer, target readers can recognize the informative intentions with a little effort, and thus it follows the optimal relevance. In conclusion, Han and Wang's version is better.

9. Weather Metaphor

Weather is the condition of the atmosphere in one area at a particular time, for example if it is raining, hot or windy. The weather is very changeable and some people are moody. Therefore, there is similarity between weather and mood. In our daily life , we often compare mood to weather, such as *"zhǐ dǎléi, bú xiàyǔ "* in Chinese that means someone cries loudly, but doesn't shed a single tear. There are many weather metaphors in *Nineteen Eighty-four*, which vividly describe characters' moods. And we will discuss this conceptual metaphor——PERSONALITY OR MOOD IS WEATHER.

For example:

Original: He had imagined her a fool like all the rest of them, her head stuffed with lies and hatred, her belly full of ice.(Orwell,1946: 98)

Sun's translation: *tā céng bǎ tā xiǎngxiàng chéng hé biérén yíyàngde chǔnhuò, nǎodailǐ sāimǎnle huǎngyán hé chóuhèn, zhǎngzhe yífù tiěshí xīncháng.*

Han & Wang's translation: *tā yuán yǐwéi tā hé qítārén yíyàng chǔn, tóutǎozhōng chōngchìzhe huǎngyán yǔ chóuhèn, zhǐyǒu yífù tiěshí xīncháng.*

Lin's translation: *tā yuán yǐwéi tā hé qítārén yíyàng dōushì sǎzi, tāde nǎodailǐ jìnshì huǎngyán hé chóuhèn, ěr tāde dùzilǐ zé zhuāngmǎn bīngkuài.*

Ice is frozen water with its features hard and cold. In context, Winston had misunderstood Julia as an orthodox, hard-hearted and cold thought policeman. Lin's version translated "ice" into *"bīngkuài"* in Chinese by literal translation, which doesn't clearly express the author's intentions. So target readers wouldn't be accessible to this description of characters in this poor context, thus Lin's translation doesn't realize the optimal relevance. However, Sun's, and Han and Wang's version translated "ice" into *"tiěshí xīncháng"* in Chinese and this Chinese idiom directly describes the personality of Julia, which expresses the author's intentions explicitly and shapes adequate contextual effects. Thus, target readers can understand without any unnecessary processing effort and this conforms to the optimal relevance.

10. River Metaphor

The river flows form high to low. During the rainy reason, the river rises due to abundant rainfall; During dry season, it falls due to lack of rainfall. In Chinese culture, there are many metaphors about flowing water, for example, *"duìdárúliú"* refers to quick response and good eloquence. *Nineteen Eighty-four* contains many river metaphors, so we will analyze this conceptuaùl metaphor ——MONOLOGUE IS RIVER.

For example:

Original: At this moment, however, even the monologue had dried up.(Orwell,1946: 7)

Sun's translation: *ránǚr zài zhè yíkè, jiùlián zhèzhǒng dúbái yě kūjiéle.*

Han & Wang's translation: *ěr zài cǐkè, jiùlián zìjǐ xīnzhōngde dúbái yě xiāoshīde wúyǐngwú zōng.*

Lin's translation: *ěr zài cǐkè, jíshǐ shì nàxiē dúbái yě yǐjīng kūjiéle.*

"Dry up" originally refers to "(*shuǐyuán, tǐlì* etc) gānhé, *kūjié*" in Chinese. Among the three versions, Sun's and Lin's versions translated "dry up" into "*kūjié*" in Chinese by literal translation. And there are similar expressions in Chinese, for example, "*cáijiézhìpí*" in Chinese means the exhaustion of talent and intellect. Hence, the translations by literal translation is consistent with the cognitive environment. Han and Wang's version translated "dry up" into "*wúyǐngwúzōng*" in Chinese that means something disappears into thin air. However, this Chinese idiom is usually used to describe visible objects, so it is not proper enough to describe the abstract mental activity——monologue. target readers would make great processing effort to achieve the correct interpretation so the translation doesn't achieve the optimal relevance. In conclusion, free translation is more appropriate for translating this metaphor.

11. Conclusion

This thesis selects three Chinese versions of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to analyze the translation of metaphors based on Relevance Theory. It's found that the adoption of free translation with careful choice of wordings are more likely to reach the optimal relevance so that target readers can make little effort under good contexts to understand the underlying meaning. However, when the understanding of some metaphors are limited by target readers' cognition, literal translation is more appropriate.

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