

Exploring Popular Science Translation Strategies from the Perspective of Relevance Theory: A Case Study of *When Panic Attacks: The New, Drug-Free Anxiety Therapy That Can Change Your Life*

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Abstract: With the accelerated pace of society and increasingly fierce competition across various fields, people's daily stress continues to increase, and anxiety disorders have gradually become a prominent issue in the field of public mental health. Using the psychology work *When Panic Attacks: The New, Drug-Free Anxiety Therapy That Can Change Your Life* as an example, this paper explores the application of Relevance Theory in the translation of psychotherapy popular science texts. It summarizes the textual features and translation principles of psychotherapy popular science texts, and analyzes the methods and strategies to achieve optimal relevance between the source text and target text on the lexical and syntactic levels, aiming to provide references for future popular science translation practices.

Keywords: Relevance Theory; Psychotherapy Popular Science Texts; Anxiety Disorders; Translation Analysis

1. Introduction

With the improvement of public scientific literacy, the demand for popular science works is increasing. High-quality translation plays an indispensable role in disseminating professional knowledge across languages. In recent years, academics in China and abroad have extensively explored popular science translation. However, specialized research on the translation of psychotherapy popular science texts remains lacking. Different from purely academic psychology texts, psychotherapy popular science texts have the dual attributes of scientific communication and practicality. The differences between source language and target language in terms of language habits, expression patterns, and cultural backgrounds also pose multiple challenges for translating psychotherapy popular science texts from English. With its emphasis on achieving the communicative goals of translation, Relevance Theory provides an effective guiding principle for smooth translation of psychotherapy popular science texts. Drawing on the textual features of psychotherapy popular science texts, this paper analyzes the application of Relevance Theory in this genre through lexical and syntactic examples from *When Panic Attacks: The New, Drug-Free Anxiety Therapy That Can Change Your Life*.

2. Textual Features of Psychotherapy Popular Science Books

Popular science works belong to the category of scientific writing, situated between science and literature. Therefore, they possess both scientific rigor and literary elegance, popularity, and interest. The primary purpose of popular science writing is to disseminate scientific and technological knowledge to the general public using plain and accessible language, avoiding complex academic jargon (Luo, 2013, p. 113). The same applies to psychotherapy books. For instance, as a practical popular science book tailored for anxiety sufferers, *When Panic Attacks: The New, Drug-Free Anxiety Therapy That Can Change Your Life* demonstrates significant stylistic differences from traditional academic works. From the perspective of language accessibility, based on the characteristics of anxious populations, books of this kind employ simple and clear language, eschew excessive use of specialized terminology, and utilize common vocabulary and sentence patterns to enhance readability and acceptability. In terms of content design, this book emphasizes

both scientific accuracy and practical applicability—it not only delivers relevant theoretical knowledge but also transforms it into techniques and methods that directly serve self-therapy and satisfy readers' needs for utility. Lastly, in terms of interactivity, books of this kind extensively use case studies, exercises, and self-assessments to amplify therapeutic effects. This book also leverages rhetorical devices including metaphors and puns, crafting humor and wit in the language, which gives it an affable and encouraging tone.

3. Basic Concepts of Relevance Theory

Relevance Theory, proposed by western linguists Sperber and Wilson in the 1980s based on Grice's cooperative principle, is a cognitive pragmatics theory. Years later, Wilson's student Gutt applied this theory to translation studies, provoking considerable reactions in academia and refreshing people's perspectives on the essence of translation from a philosophical linguistics lens. Gutt argues in this theory that translation is essentially an inferential process, with human brain mechanisms being the object of inference. On this basis, he deduces the core thesis of optimal relevance—this is not only the fundamental goal of translators but also an important criterion in translation studies. Gutt believes relevance principles significantly regulate what the translated text attempts to convey and how to express it. In other words, the translated text seeks to deliver information that has sufficient contextual effects and relevance to the audience while making sure the expression does not impose unnecessary processing effort on the audience.

Within the framework of Relevance Theory, translation is an interpretive activity of intradomain or interdomain ostension-inference. Grasping the implicatures in communication depends on the audience inferring the optimal relevance between ostensive stimuli and context—that is, figuring out the optimal relevance between the speaker's ostensive behavior and contextual assumptions, making inferences about the implicit meaning, and ultimately deriving contextual effects to achieve successful communication. Relevance Theory has made remarkable contributions by providing an essentialist explanation of the connotations of translation and guidance for the translation process. Currently, Relevance Theory is primarily applied in studies on textual interpretability, while academic literature expounding on this theory itself from practical psychotherapy popular science perspectives remains quite limited.

4. Application of Relevance Theory in Psychotherapy Popular Science Translation

4.1 Applicability of Relevance Theory in Psychotherapy Texts

Under the guidance of Relevance Theory, translation is a communicative act involving two ostension-inference processes and three communicative agents, namely, the original author, translator, and target reader (Liu, 2020). The original author plays the role of communicator while target readers are the recipients of this communicative act. The translator needs to seek relevance in discourse, examine its contextual effects, and assess whether the processing effort required of target readers matches that of source text readers in comprehending the discourse and whether the translation conveys optimal relevance. Per the textual features of psychotherapy popular science writing, popular science texts aim to disseminate academic knowledge to the general public. Hence translation must account for target readers' cognitive environments and reading habits. Specifically, the translator needs to select vocabulary familiar to readers and adopt expressions conforming to readers' linguistic conventions (Liu, 2020), providing necessary background knowledge to help readers better comprehend. This allows maximum relevance between popular science translation and target readers' cognitive contexts, ensuring accurate communication of academic knowledge.

4.2 Translation Principles of Psychotherapy Popular Science Texts under Relevance Theory

Applying different standards and methods based on text types is fundamental in contemporary translation theories. For popular science works, translation should aim to convey information in a way that stirs readers' sentiments to absorb knowledge and participate actively. The standards should also be reader- and content-centered, similar to the original (Guo, 2007). To achieve optimal relevance with readers per Relevance Theory, Guo (2007) proposes three translation principles regarding popular science writing:

1. Faithfulness to the original and accurate communication of knowledge. Pursuing faithful communication of the source text's knowledge content is fundamental for disseminating academic knowledge through translation. In translating psychotherapy popular

science texts, accurately delivering the content has significant impact on readers' self-cognition and health improvement. The translation process must build on precise communication of psychological concepts, theories, and methods in the source text to prevent misunderstanding and incorrect knowledge transfer. Moreover, faithfulness encompasses transferring sentiments and cultural factors to ensure readers acquire cognitive and emotional experiences consistent with the original through reading the translated text.

2. Simplicity, fluency, and conformity to conventions. Psychotherapy popular science aims to popularize academic knowledge to the general public in an appealing way. Hence the translation must be accessible and plain. Fundamentally, the language must be fluent and conform to Chinese writing conventions. In practice, long English sentences sometimes require splitting whereas short sentences may need combining to finally align with Chinese conventions.

3. Overall cohesion and literary elegance. Fluency refers to ensuring smooth readability of the translation and making the ideas clear at first glance, which is a basic requirement in popular science translation. The literary style of the translation should reflect the elegance of the original. If the original is outstanding, the translation should be equally remarkable. Overall it should embody the style of the original and enable readers to experience similar sentiments as the original. Therefore, the translation should attract readers' attention and enhance their reading experience by retaining the artistic charm of the original, on the basis of accurately conveying scientific information and maintaining faithfulness and fluency.

Based on the above principles, translating psychotherapy popular science should note equivalence in translating academic terminology to ensure precision and academic rigor. The language must be accurate without distorting the original meaning. Moreover, popular science translation should cater to target readers by adopting translations methods suited to their cognitive levels and reading habits, instead of being as abstruse as technical translation. Lastly, appropriate elements of playfulness in language or form may be added based on the target audience while fully and faithfully conveying the original to optimize popular science communication.

5. Application of Relevance Theory in Popular Science Translation Practice

5.1 Lexical Translation

Vocabulary translation in psychological texts is characterized by polysemy of terminology, such as academic terms, compound words, and attributive words. "A word or phrase can have multiple meanings and emotional nuances. Only by combining with a specific context and imagery can it manifest the most appropriate and harmonious application" (Yu, 1996). Hence competent translation of academic terms directly affects the accurate communication of scientific knowledge in psychology. Translators need to analyze the domain, context, and knowledge structure of the terminology to grasp its attributes, so as to achieve popular science objectives.

(1) In Burns' Anxiety Self-help Guide, the psychological concept disorder appears frequently. While disorder commonly means "chaos", "malfunction", or "illness", in psychiatry it generally refers to various abnormal psychological or physiological states. Combined with different morphemes, it denotes various mental illnesses. For instance, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is translated as 创伤后应激障碍症, and Body Dysmorphic Disorder as 躯体变形障碍症. Using 障碍 (disorder) as the translation precisely conveys the nature of such diseases and manifests the scientific rigor of popular science writing.

(2) ST: The Biological Model is based on the idea that anxiety and depression result from a chemical imbalance in the brain and that you'll have to take a pill to correct it.

TT: 生物学模型(The Biological Model)认为焦虑与抑郁都是由于脑内化学成分失衡造成,因此我们需要吃药来缓解焦虑或抑郁的情绪。

The source text employs correct, whose English definitions encompass "rectify", "amend" and such. However, in specific medical contexts like mental health, it is used to describe improving emotional problems with medication. In such scenarios, directly translating correct as 改正 or 纠正 cannot accurately communicate the author's intent. Under the guidance of Relevance Theory, the translator must synthesize the context, cultural background, and target readers' cognitive expectations. Hence guided by contextual effects, the translator appropriately renders correct as 缓解 instead of literal translation, in order to retain contextual effects and conform to Chinese expressions, enhancing acceptability and achieving successful communication.

Evidently, Relevance Theory stresses analyzing the textual and academic context of terminology to grasp meanings accurately, necessitating translators' astute linguistic analysis abilities and rich background knowledge in order to generate high-standard and

quality translations.

5.2 Application in Syntactic Translation

5.2.1 Sentence Order Changes

Given the differences in linguistic families and thought patterns between English and Chinese, sentence order changes help process complex sentences by rearranging words, phrases or components to better conform to the expression norms and communication conventions of the target language while retaining the original meaning. This strategy assists translators in overcoming structural differences and achieving more natural and fluent translation.

(1)ST: The Downward Arrow Technique helps you pinpoint the Self-Defeating Beliefs that make you vulnerable to anxiety, depression, and problems in your relationships with other people. The What-If Technique helps you uncover a terrifying fantasy that triggers your anxiety.

TT: 如果说向下箭头法可以帮助你找到那些让你和其他人的关系出现问题并导致你焦虑、抑郁的自我攻击信念,那么如果法就可以帮助你发现引发焦虑的可怕幻想。

The translation employs sentence order changes by fronting the subordinate clause before the main clause. Meanwhile, it fronts the translation of “problems in your relationships with other people”, construing it as the cause and “leading to your anxiety and depression” as the result, conforming to the logical order of cause-effect in Chinese. English sentences often express multiple results or scenarios through parallel structures, while the sentence order adjustment better aligns with Chinese logical expression norms and facilitates comprehension. Meanwhile, adding connectives like 如果.....那么..... makes the sentence structure more cohesive, resulting in a smoother and more natural translation.

5.2.2 Transliteration

Language is essentially a tool for human expression, while rhetoric represents an art form of linguistic expression. Rhetorical devices often enliven language and aid comprehension. Sometimes translators need to consider the cultural backgrounds of both languages to infer the true meaning of the source text, and transform appropriately based on the characteristics of each language. Metaphors and imagery in the original text should be retained as far as possible, or replaced with suitable target language expressions.

ST: Even if you're wrong, this exercise will get your brain circuits fired up.

TT: 即使猜错了,这个练习也能够帮大家更好地理顺自己的现有想法。

Get your brain circuits fired up is a common metaphor in English, meaning to activate your neural circuits to encourage deeper thinking or arouse innovative ideas. The translation transforms it into expressions more readily understood by Chinese readers, accurately conveying the author's intent and enhancing readability.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, under the guidance of Relevance Translation Theory, the translation of psychotherapy popular science texts requires accurately conveying the information from the source text while ensuring the fluency and naturalness of the target text. When dealing with technical terminology and complex sentence structures, the difficulty of comprehension for readers must be fully considered, as well as the challenges presented by cross-linguistic and cross-cultural translation. Translators must possess extensive expertise in psychology as well as profound understanding of cultural backgrounds in order to ensure faithfulness to the source text while conforming to the expression conventions of the target language. Through specific translation analysis of the book *When Panic Attacks: The New, Drug-Free Anxiety Therapy That Can Change Your Life*, this paper explores the practical application of Relevance Translation Theory in translating such texts, and illustrates that Relevance Translation Theory can provide effective guidance for popular science translation from English to other languages, achieving high-quality cross-linguistic translation that holds certain theoretical reference value.

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