

Translation of Shaanxi Intangible Cultural Heritage Based on Optimal Relevance

Wenting Duan^{1,2*}, Pengkee Chang²

¹Faculty of Humanities, Shangluo University, Shangluo 726000, Shaanxi Province, China

²Infrastructure University Kuala Lumpur, Kajang 43000, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia

*Corresponding author: Wenting Duan, dwtlgj520@163.com

Copyright: © 2022 Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited.

Abstract: The intangible cultural heritage in Shaanxi, which reflects the life and culture of the people in Shaanxi, contains rich cultural connotations with Shaanxi characteristics. Therefore, the translation of Shaanxi intangible cultural heritage (Shaanxi ICH) plays a significant role in the spread of Chinese culture. Translation is seen as a communication activity among different cultures, and the quality of translation has a great influence on communication effect. The optimal relevance between the original text and target readers' cognitive context, as the core of relevance theory, can be used as a standard to criticize translation. Based on these understandings, this study applies optimal relevance to the translation of Shaanxi ICH in order to explore its translation and propose several Shaanxi ICH translation strategies that achieve optimal relevance and effective communication, so as to improve the spread of Shaanxi ICH to the outside world.

Keywords: Translation; Shaanxi intangible cultural heritage; Optimal relevance; Translation strategies

Online publication: April 28, 2022

1. Introduction

Shaanxi, as a province in China, has various kinds of intangible cultural heritage, including 87 national ICH. The abundance of its ICH brings significance to Shaanxi intangible cultural heritage (Shaanxi ICH) in China. In order to spread Shaanxi ICH to the outside world and promote cultural communication, translation plays a vital role. However, the research on the translation of Shaanxi ICH is in its infancy. Several scholars have conducted research on it from its cultural translation, research status, problems, translators' subjectivity, etc. However, translation is not a simple transformation of languages, but it involves cultural communication. The translation quality has an impact on the effect of cultural communication. There is no research on the translation quality and communication effect of Shaanxi ICH thus far, based on CNKI data.

Optimal relevance refers to the optimal contextual effect. In processing a text, it is only when the audience acquires adequate contextual effects without making any unnecessary effort that optimal relevance can be achieved^[1]. Hence, in translation, when target readers infer about translation to grasp the meaning of the original text with effective efforts, optimal relevance is achieved. In other words, in the process of translation, translators tend to make the translations optimally relevant to the target readers' cognitive environment^[2]. Therefore, optimal relevance can be used as a standard to criticize the translation of Shaanxi ICH^[3].

2. Literature review

2.1. Optimal relevance

Optimal relevance is an important principle of relevance theory, which was proposed by Dan Sperber and Dierdre Wilson in their book – *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* [4]. Relevance theory proposes two principles: the cognitive relevance principle and the communicative relevance principle. Sperber and Wilson defined the communicative principle as follows [4]: “Every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance” and “the optimal relevance is the sufficient contextual effect obtained after the effective effort in utterance comprehension.” As Wilson has pointed out, “An utterance, being interpreted is consistent with the principle of relevance if and only if the speaker might rationally have expected it to be optimally relevant to the audience [5].”

Gutt applied relevance theory to the field of translation studies. He defined translation as a communicative act and proposed that the core criterion of translation is optimal relevance, in which the inference process depends on the context. He further asserted that in ostensive communication, the information a person offers is not only relevant to the audience, but it is optimally relevant [6]. Therefore, in the process of translation, translators try to achieve optimal relevance by implementing various strategies based on the communicative principle of relevance theory. The translator’s cognitive environment, which includes the source addressers and target addressers, has an impact on translation options available [7]. In other words, translators try to gauge the target reader’s cognitive environment and source content to achieve communication with the least amount of processing effort [8].

2.2. Research on the translation of Shaanxi ICH

Shaanxi, being one of China’s provinces with a 5,000-year history, has a diverse collection of intangible cultural heritage (ICH), which assumes significance in China. Shaanxi ICH reflects the local culture as well as the wisdom and creativity of its people. Under the background of intangible cultural heritage, scholars have conducted research on Shaanxi ICH, including its inheritance, protection, development, innovation, and translation, but most studies are concerning the protection and inheritance of Shaanxi ICH. In the process of protecting and inheriting, local governments play a significant role [9]. Fan Ping mentioned that the local government should implement better policies for ICH [10]. The policies and regulations should be improved [11], along with their supervision [12]. Several scholars have carried out researches on the innovation and development of Shaanxi ICH. With the development of economy and society, ICH should be innovated from content to skill. The importance of ICH innovation by combining modern design and beauty has been emphasized in a study [13].

The research on the translation of Shaanxi ICH is a new field of study. Researchers have studied the problems of public translation in regard to the intangible cultural heritage in Shaanxi. According to these researchers, the research on the translation of Shaanxi ICH is insufficient [14], and in order to improve its foreign publication translation, they suggested that the government should take the responsibility to provide more funds, human and material resources, as well as promote the cultivation of excellent translators [15]. Other than that, several scholars have also studied the cultural translation of Shanxi intangible cultural heritage. Tian mentioned that translation strategies, such as transliteration and explanation, literal translation, as well as literal translation with description and omission, help target readers understand translations better [16]. Similarly, Sun and Lian proposed using explanation, comments, omission, and amplification to elude culture shock and make translations understandable for target readers [17]. Third, Tian and Fu have studied the subjectivity of translators in the translation of Shaanxi ICH and proposed that translators should give full play to their subjectivity in the process of understanding and editing the original text [18]. However, there are no studies on the translation quality and communication effect of Shaanxi ICH. This is the reason why this study applies optimal relevance to analyze the translations and original texts of

3. Analyzing the translation of Shaanxi ICH based on optimal relevance

Shaanxi ICH plays a crucial role in China. Its translation promotes the inheritance and development of China's cultural heritage on a global scale. This study has selected several Shaanxi ICH translations to carry out research based on optimal relevance.

(1) The Legend of Emperor Huangdi ^[19]

“Huang Di Chuan Shuo Gu Shi” is a folk literature, popular in Huangling County, Yan'an City, Shaanxi Province. Huangdi was a brilliant and brave leader of a tribe 5,000 years ago. According to the legend, he is said to be diligent, intelligent, objective, and kind; moreover, he has made many historical contributions. In its translation process, the translators use literal translation to present “Chuan Shuo Gu Shi” for the equivalency of a legend in the target readers' cognitive context, which can be easily understood by target readers without any needless effort. While in the translation of Huangdi, the translators chose the transliteration of Huangdi for no equivalent word. However, the translation of Huangdi only depicts a person's name without his position in China, thus losing the optimal relevance of the original text and the target readers' cognitive context. Effort is required for it to be understood by target readers. Therefore, a word should be added before Huangdi to reflect his position and greatness. The term “emperor” refers to a person with high position and power. Hence, translating it as Emperor Huangdi can achieve optimal relevance and effective communication.

(2) Huangdi Mausoleum Sacrificial Ceremony ^[19]

“Huang Di Ling Ji Si” is a sacrificial activity carried out in Huangdi mausoleum to honor Huangdi. Literal translation is used to translate Ling into mausoleum and Ji Si into sacrificial ceremony, and transliteration is used to translate Huangdi. Although the target readers may appreciate the sacrifice of Huangdi in his burial place, there is no further information about him, thus losing the optimal relevance of the original text and the target readers' cognitive context. Hence, the word “emperor” should be added before Huangdi to ensure that the target readers are aware of who he is and why people offer sacrifices to him. The “Sacrificial Ceremony in Emperor Huangdi's Mausoleum” translation achieves optimal relevance and is easily understood by target readers with effective efforts.

(3) Daoqing in Shanbei ^[19]

“Shan Bei Dao Qing” is an old folk song and art, which is popular in Northern Shaanxi. It originates from the rhyme of Taoist chanting. Based on the translation, the translators use the transliteration of Daoqing in Shanbei to represent “Shan Bei Dao Qing.” However, it does not realize the optimal relevance between the source content and target readers' cognitive context, requiring effort from the target readers to understand the phrase. In that case, translators should use the free translation of Northern Shaanxi to reflect Shanbei and add the word “singing” after Daoqing to reflect what it really is. “Daoqing Singing in Northern Shaanxi” can be easily understood by target readers without effort, thus achieving optimal relevance and effective communication.

(4) Suona in Zichang ^[19]

“Zi Chang Suo Na” is popular in Zichang County, Yan'an City, Shaanxi Province. Suona is an instrument introduced in China between the Jin and Yuan Dynasties. Therefore, “Zi Chang Suo Na” refers to music played with suona. According to the translation, the translators use transliteration to translate suona and Zichang for no equivalence in the target readers' cognitive context, which fails to convey to target readers that the music is performed using a suona, thus losing the optimal relevance of the original text and the target readers' cognitive context. In order to achieve optimal relevance and effective communication, the word music should be added after suona to clarify the meaning.

(5) Waist drum in Ansai ^[19]

“An Sai Yao Gu” is a folk drum dance, popular in Ansai County, Yan’an City, Shaanxi Province. It evolved from the war drum dance for encouragement, martial arts, gymnastics, etc. The translators chose the literal translation of “waist drum” to depict “Yao Gu” for the equivalence to the target readers’ cognitive context, but there is no equivalent translation for “An Sai.” Therefore, the transliteration of Ansai is used, which merely creates awareness of a drum on the waist in Ansai among target readers, without achieving optimal relevance of the original text and the target readers’ cognitive context. Hence, the word “dance” should be added to indicate that it is a drum dance.

(6) Paper cuts in Ansai ^[19]

“An Sai Jian Zhi” is an art of cutting papers into different shapes, which is popular in Ansai County. The translators use literal translation of “paper cuts” to help target readers understand. However, there is no equivalent translation for Ansai; thus, they chose the transliteration of Ansai to represent the name of the place. The target readers can develop an understanding of “paper cuts in Ansai” with necessary effort, thus achieving optimal relevance of the source content, the target readers’ cognitive context, and effective communication.

(7) The Old Yangge in Luochuan ^[19]

“Luo Chuan Lao Yang Ge” is a dance and music combination with regional peculiarities and a distinct artistic style. The translators employ the transliteration of “Yangge” and “Luochuan” as well as the literal translation of “old” in the translation. Therefore, the target readers do not really understand what it is. In order to achieve optimal relevance of the source content, the target readers’ cognitive context, and effective communication, the word “dance” should be added after “Yangge.”

(8) Paint painting in Wuqi ^[19]

“Wu Qi You Qi Hua” is popular in Wuqi County, Yan’an City, Shaanxi Province. It carries a strong north painting feature that reflects kindness, strength, and braveness. The translators use the literal translation of “paint painting” to represent “You Qi Hua” for the equivalency to the target readers’ cognitive context, and transliteration is used for “Wuqi” to indicate the place, which helps target readers understand easily. In that way, the translation achieves optimal relevance of the original text and the target readers’ cognitive context.

(9) Handmade dried bean curd in Ganquan ^[19]

“Gan Quan Dou Fu Gan,” with more than 1,400 years’ history, is one of the famous food brands in Shaanxi Province. It is famous for its handmade bean curd after being dried. There is an equivalent word for “Dou Fu” in the target readers’ cognitive context, which is tofu, but there is no equivalent translation for “Dou Fu Gan.” The translators chose free translation to depict its making, material, and shape. In addition, transliteration is used to translate “Ganquan.” In that way, the target readers are able to understand the meaning easily, thus achieving optimal relevance and effective communication.

(10) Minian painting in Wuqi ^[19]

“Wu Qi Mi Nian Hua” is popular in Wuqi County, Yan’an City, Shaanxi Province. It is made of glued grains. Transliteration is used to translate “Wuqi” and “Mi Nian,” while literal translation is used to depict “Hua.” This informs target readers that the painting is called Minian and is located in Wuqi. However, the optimal relevance of the original text and the target readers’ cognitive context is lost. In order to make it easily understood, the translators should use free translation to reflect how it is made and translate it as “glued grain painting in Wuqi.”

Based on the analysis above, when there is an equivalence to the original text in the target readers’ cognitive context, translators should choose literal translation; on the contrary, translators should use transliteration or free translation to resemble the original text. In order to help target readers understand the translation easily without unnecessary efforts, translators should choose amplification to depict what it

really is. The four translation strategies should be integrated and used flexibly based on the original text and the target readers' cognitive context, in order to achieve optimal relevance and effective communication. Several researchers have suggested that translators should flexibly select translation strategies to obtain optimal relevance ^[20].

4. Conclusion

Shaanxi ICH plays a key significance in China as a substantial culture with variety and abundance. The translation of Shaanxi ICH promotes the spread of Chinese culture. Translation refers to communication among different cultures. Communication is the purpose of translation, while translation is the means of communication among different cultures. Therefore, the quality of translation has great influence on communication. This study has applied optimal relevance to the translation of Shaanxi ICH since it can promote successful communication through translation and can be used as a standard for translation. The study also found that in order to achieve optimal relevance and effective communication, translators should flexibly integrate and use the four translation strategies – literal translation, transliteration, amplification, and free translation – based on the original text and the target readers' cognitive context.

Funding

Culture Translation and Functional Equivalence of Shaanxi Intangible Cultural Heritage (Project Number: 2021ND0104) by the Social Science Association of Shaanxi Province.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Author contributions

W.D. conceived the idea of the study and wrote the manuscript; P.C. provided assistance and suggestions for the study.

References

- [1] Sang ZG, 2006, A Relevance Theory Perspective on Translating the Implicit Information in Literary Texts. *Journal of Translation*, 2(2): 43-60. <https://doi.org/10.54395/jot-xdhen>
- [2] Wang G, Zeng XS, 2020, English Translation of Shaanxi Dialect from the Perspective of Relevance Translation Theory: A Case Study of Turbulence. *Journal of Shaanxi University of Technology (Social Sciences)*, 38(6): 46-52. <https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1673-2936.2020.06.008>
- [3] Cheng G, 2019, Proceedings of the 2019 Northeast Asia International Symposium on Linguistics, Literature and Teaching (2019 NALLTS), November 16, 2019: A Study on Wang Rongpei's English Translation of Chinese Poetry: A Perspective of Relevance Theory. Shenyang Dongshrip Education Technology Co., Ltd., Chongqing, China, 259-265. <https://doi.org/10.26914/c.cnkihy.2019.035660>
- [4] Sperber D, Wilson D, 1996, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford and Cambridge.
- [5] Wilson D, 1994, *Language and Understanding*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- [6] Gutt EA, 1992, *Relevance Theory: A Guide to Successful Communication in Translation*, Summer Institute of Linguistics, Texas.

- [7] Diaz-Perez FJ, 2014, Relevance Theory and Translation: Translating Puns in Spanish Film Titles into English. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 70: 108-129. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2014.06.007>
- [8] Szymanska I, 2017, The Treatment of Geographical Dialect in Literary Translation from the Perspective of Relevance Theory. *Research in Language*, 15(1): 61-77. <https://doi.org/10.1515/rela-2017-0004>
- [9] Cui CY, Mu RK, 2021, Protection and Inheritance of Intangible Cultural Heritage of “Shaanxi Red Fist” in Yulin. *Journal of Yulin College*, 31(4): 60-63. <https://doi.org/10.16752/j.cnki.jylu.2021.04.014>
- [10] Fan P, 2017, Research on the Development of Intangible Cultural Heritage Folk Songs in Northern Shaanxi from Multiple Perspectives. *Modern Music*, 2017(7): 11-12, 15. <https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1007-2233.2017.07.006>
- [11] Zhan SW, Wu SY, 2019, The Protection and Inheritance of Local Intangible Cultural Heritage Taking the Protection of Qinqiang Opera as an Example. *Popular Literature*, 2019(22): 2-3.
- [12] He MJ, Chen YY, Xiao W, 2021, Protection and Inheritance of Intangible Cultural Heritage from the Perspective of Six Dimensions – Taking Shaanxi Xianbanqiang Shadow Play as an Example. *Comparative Study of Cultural Innovation*, 5(10): 111-114. <https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.2096-4110.2021.10.029>
- [13] Ding Q, Zhou D, Zhang XW, 2020, Research on the Protection and Market Development of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Shaanxi Province. *China Business & Trade*, 2020(12): 82-83. <https://doi.org/10.19699/j.cnki.issn2096-0298.2020.12.082>
- [14] He CC, Wang XJ, 2019, Research on the Status and Countermeasures of Communication Translation of Xi’an Intangible Cultural Heritage. *New West*, 2019: 30-31.
- [15] Xia HX, 2019, Research on the Translation of Xi’an Intangible Cultural Heritage. *Modern Society*, 2019(17): 94-96.
- [16] Tian YY, 2018, On the C-E Translation of Culture-specific Items in Publicity Texts of Shaanxi Intangible Cultural Heritage. *Journal of Hubei University of Education*, 35(7): 120-123. <https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1674-344X.2018.07.027>
- [17] Sun XE, Lian J, 2017, A Study on Translation of Culture-Loaded Expressions in Local Opera from the Perspective of Relevance Theories – A Case Study of Shangluo Huagu Opera Dai Deng. *Journal of Shangluo University*, 31(5): 44-47. <https://doi.org/10.13440/j.slxy.1674-0033.2017.05.009>
- [18] Tian YY, Fu DY, 2018, English Translation of Shaanxi Intangible Cultural Heritage from the Perspective of Translators’ Subjectivity. *Cultural Journal*, 2018: 169-178.
- [19] Cao ZQ, 2011, *The List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Yan’an City*, Shaanxi People’s Art Publisher, Shaanxi.
- [20] Sun XE, Lian J, Tian YY, 2020, A Study on C-E Translation of Dialects and Common Sayings in Shangluo Huagu Opera from a Butcher to Zhuangyuan – Based on the Relevance Translation Theories. *Journal of Shangluo University*, 34(3): 33-37. <https://doi.org/10.13440/j.slxy.1674-0033.2020.03.006>

Publisher’s note

Bio-Byword Scientific Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.