

# Culture Communication in the Translation of Shaanxi Intangible Cultural Heritage from the Perspective of Relevance Theory

Wenting Duan<sup>1,\*</sup> Pengkee Chang<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Humanities, Shangluo University, Shangluo 726000, Shannxi, China; Infrastructure University Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

<sup>2</sup> Infrastructure University Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

\*Corresponding author. Email: 597113558@qq.com

## ABSTRACT

Shaanxi intangible cultural heritage (Shaanxi ICH) with its variety and large quantity takes a great position in China, and represents Shaanxi people's wisdom and creativity. Therefore, the translation of Shaanxi intangible cultural heritage can promote the spread of Chinese culture to the outside world. However, translation is not a simple transformation between Languages, but the communication of different culture. Achieving culture communication in translation has become the difficulty because translators can't find the complete equivalence in target language. Based on this, the study applies relevance theory to the translation of Shaanxi ICH to analyze culture communication in the translation of Shaanxi ICH, to propose principles guiding the culture communication from relevance theory, so as to really spread Shaanxi culture worldwide and promote local people's culture confidence.

**Keywords:** Culture communication, translation, Shaanxi intangible cultural heritage, relevance theory, optimal relevance

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH), as a kind of special culture, is transmitted by generations using oral, performing arts, and other practice<sup>[1]</sup>. China with more than 5000 years' glorious history and different dynasties gives birth to colorful intangible culture heritage, among which Shaanxi ICH takes up an important position. And the translation of Shaanxi ICH can promote the spread of Chinese culture. Therefore, scholars have done researches on Shaanxi ICH. But few scholars have done researches on culture translation of Shaanxi ICH. Tian Ya-ya mentions translation strategies, including transliteration and explanation, literal translation, literal translation with description and omission, make translations understood and accepted by target readers<sup>[2]</sup>. However, the researches neglect the communication of relevant to audience and optimal relevance in the culture translation of Shaanxi ICH.

Translation is a kind of special communication. According to Gutt, in translation communication, "the target language hearers and readers can derive proposition from semantic representation based on the

relevant context of hearers or readers."<sup>[3]26</sup> So relevance theory can guide effective culture communication in translation, and the optimal relevance and contextual effect can be used as standard to criticize if translation strategies achieve the effective communication of culture translation, therefore, the thesis applies relevance theory, especially the optimal relevance to the culture communication in the translation of Shaanxi ICH.

## 2. RELEVANCE THEORY

Relevance theory is a communication theory proposed by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson in their published book *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* 2nd Edition in 1996. According to Sperber and Wilson, communication is based on the ostensive-inferential model, which holds that the communicative activity is the process of the speaker's ostension and the hearer's inference. "The speaker expresses his intention through ostension (both linguistic and non-linguistic), while the hearer infers through the speaker's ostension and the context in order

to know the speaker's intention.”<sup>[4]</sup> And the optimal relevance is the sufficient contextual effect obtained after the effective effort in utterance comprehension<sup>[5]29</sup>.

Gutt applied Relevance Theory to the field of translation studies. “Translation is a kind of communication in which the target language hearers can derive proposition from semantic representation based on the relevant context of hears”<sup>[6]24</sup>. In the communication of translation, the translator infers about the author's intercommunication intention and obtains the contextual hypothesis that the author wants to convey to the reader in combination with the express information of the original text and its own cognitive context. And then he takes full account of the cognitive context and reading expectation of the target readers, chooses appropriate translation strategies to accurately convey the communicative intention of the original author to the target readers. And he proposed two kinds of translation: direct translation and indirect translation.

Relevance theory is a guide of successful communication in translation. Wang Guan and Zeng Xiaoshan note the optimal relevance and contextual effect are the standard to criticize translation strategies<sup>[7]</sup>. Therefore, relevance theory and the optimal relevance can be used to explore the culture communication in the translation of Shaanxi ICH.

### **3. THE CULTURE COMMUNICATION IN SHAANXI ICH TRANSLATION**

Shaanxi, as one of the birthplaces of Chinese nation and provinces, has established four representative lists of ICH at the national, provincial and county levels (districts and cities). Therefore its translation can promote the inheritance and development of China's cultural heritage in the global scope. The study chooses some significant Shaanxi ICH and applies relevance theory to the culture communication of them in translation.

#### **(1) 西安鼓乐 (Xi'an Guyue)**

Xi'an Guyue is a big form of ensemble spread in Xi'an city and regions around it played for local performance and temple fair with wind and percussion instruments. As for Guyue, there is the equivalent drum music in English readers' cognitive context which can be misunderstood as a music with drums only, so translators should find a similar wind and percussion ensemble. However, translators can't find utterance completely resembling Xi'an, they should make an adequate Xi'an to resemble it. Therefore, Xi'an Guyue can be translated as Xi'an wind and percussion ensemble or the wind and percussion ensemble in Xi'an. Comparing the two translations with target readers' cognitive context, It can be found that the first one needs target readers' efforts to be understood, if they are

not familiar with Xi'an. In order to achieves the optimal relevance and the effective communication, translators should translate it as the wind and percussion ensemble in Xi'an.

#### **(2) 陕北民歌 (Shanbei Minge)**

Shanbei Minge is a kind of regional folk song spread in northern Shaanxi and regions around. As for Minge, there is the equivalent folk song in English readers' cognitive context. However, translators can't find utterance completely resembling Shanbei, they should make an adequate one to resemble it by using Shanbei or northern Shaanxi. So Shanbei Minge can be translated as Shanbei folk song or the folk song in northern Shaanxi. However, translation one makes target readers misunderstand Shanbei as a name of a place instead of a region in Shaanxi. On the contrary, the folk song in northern Shaanxi, makes English readers understand without unnecessary effort, that optimal relevance and effective communication are achieved.

#### **(3) 华县皮影戏 (Huaxian Pi Yingxi)**

Huaxian Pi Yingxi is a kind of folk opera in Weinan city, Shaanxi province in which the figures are made of animal skins or cardboard. The entertainers manipulate the actors behind a white curtain while telling stories with popular local tunes. When translating, translators can't find the equivalence but to find the similar shadow puppet in English readers' cognitive context, and they can make an adequate Huaxian for the original text. Compared with Huaxian shadow puppet, the shadow puppet in Huaxian makes it easy to be understood and achieves the effective communication.

#### **(4) 黄陵面花 (Huangling Mianhua)**

Huangling Mianhua is an art in Huangling county with flour into animals or flowers. As for Mianhua, translators can find the equivalence flour-flower in target readers' cognitive context, but they need to make an adequate one for Huangling for no equivalence. However, compared Huangling flour-flower, the flour-flower in Huangling, can be easily understood by target readers without unnecessary efforts, which show its material, shape and place achieving the optimal relevance and the effective communication.

#### **(5) 商洛花鼓戏 (Shangluo Hua Guxi)**

Shangluo Hua Guxi is a traditional opera in Shangluo city. As for Xiqu, there is the equivalent opera in English readers' cognitive context, however, translators can't find utterance completely resembling Shangluo Huagu, they should make adequate ones like Shangluo Huagu or Huagu in Shangluo to resemble them. So Shangluo Hua Guxi can be translated as Shangluo Huagu opera or Huagu opera in Shangluo. Compared with Shangluo Huagu opera, the Huagu opera

in Shangluo, can be easily understood with effective effort, that optimal relevance and effective communication are achieved.

(6) 木兰传说 (Mulan Chuanshuo)

Mulan Chuanshuo is a folk oral literature in Yan'an city, Shaanxi province. And it is reproduced into films Mulan twice with reputation in the world, which is in target readers' cognitive context. And translators can find the equivalent legend to Chuanshuo. Therefore, the translation the legend of Mulan obtains the optimal relevance and effective communication.

(7) 红拳 (Hongquan)

Hongquan is a martial art in Shaanxi with the name Hongquan. Translators need to make an adequate one for it. In order to be easily understood by English readers without unnecessary effort, martial arts should be added to show what it really is. So Hongquan martial arts achieves the optimal relevance and effective communication.

(8) 洛川蹩鼓 (Luochuan Biegu)

Luochuan Biegu is a drum dance spread in Luochuan. And Bie, a local words, means jump. Translators can find the equivalent jump drum for Biegu. But they need make an adequate one for Luochuan. Luochuan bie gu can be translated as Luochuan jump drum or the jump drum in Luochuan. In order to make English readers understand easily without unnecessary effort and achieve the optimal relevance and effective communication, translators should add dance and translate it as the jump drum dance in Luochuan.

(9) 朱氏正骨术 (Zhushi Zheng Gushu)

Zhushi Zheng Gushu is spread in Fuping county, Weinan city, Shaanxi province. Zhushi is a big family with reputation. And the Zheng Gushu is a traditional Chinese medicine treatment, including resetting, massage, Chinese medicine, etc. When translating, translators cannot find the equivalence in English readers' cognitive context, but need to make adequate ones for Zheng gushu and Zhushi. Zhu is a family name in China, and Zheng Gushu is a Chinese medicine treatment of people's fracture. Because Chinese traditional medicine is well known, so Zhushi Zheng Gushu can be translated as The Zhus' fracture treatment with Chinese medicine to achieve the optimal relevance and effective communication.

(10) 太白酒酿造技艺 (Tai Baijiu Niangzao Ji)

Tai Baijiu is a famous Chinese traditional liquor made with traditional methods in Mei county, Shaanxi province. It is named from the Tarbai mountain. There is the equivalent brewing technique to Niangzao, but translators need to make an adequate one for Tai Baijiu. Because Tai Baijiu is a liquor, Tai Baijiu Niangzao Ji

can be translated as brewing technique of Taibai liquor, which achieves the optimal relevance and effective communication.

#### **4. PRINCIPLES OF CULTURE COMMUNICATION IN TRANSLATION OF SHAANXI ICH FROM RELEVANCE THEORY**

Based on relevance theory, translation of Shaanxi ICH is a communication among authors, translators and target readers. In the process of translation communication, translators should infer to know the meaning, after that, they choose proper translation strategies for Shaanxi ICH in combination with target reader's cognitive context, which achieves the optimal relevance and effective communication. According to these, translators play a significant role in the effective communication in Shaanxi ICH translation. So translators should focus on the relationship of translators and the original text, translators and target readers, translators and translation strategies.

##### ***4.1. Deeply Inferring about the Original Text***

In the process of translation, translators translate the original text into the target language. Their inferring should be the essential precondition of translation. In addition, the result of inferring has a strong influence on the quality of translation. Because of the close relationship between language and culture, translation is a transformation of the original culture into target language. When translating, translators need infer about the original text completely to obtain literal meaning but also the deep culture meaning, which will be affected by translators cognitive context. Therefore, translators should respect culture and understand the differences of cultures, preserve the features of original languages<sup>[9]</sup>. In addition, they need to broaden his knowledge and cognitive context, especially the original culture.

##### ***4.2. Taking Full Account of Target Readers' Cognitive Context***

According to relevance theory, target readers are the receivers of the original text and culture. The purpose of translating the original text and culture into target language is to make them to be understood and accepted by target readers. So their cognitive context as the core factor influence the process of translation. When translating, translators should take full account of target readers' cognitive context. In addition translators seek the relevance of target reader's cognitive environment and source content to achieve communication with the lowest processing efforts<sup>[10]</sup>. And they also need to learn culture and language of target readers before translation, which will make the translation meet target readers' cognitive expectation.

### 4.3. Properly choosing translation strategies

The translation strategy is a method of translating the original text and culture into the target language, so different translation strategies can be proposed to guide translation. Based on relevance theory, the option of translation strategies is related to the original text and culture, target readers' cognitive context. Direct translation should be used when there is an equivalence between the original text and target readers' cognitive context. However, translators should use indirect translation to make an adequate one of the original text or culture in target readers' cognitive context. Translation is a communication, so communication is the purpose of translation. In order to obtain the effective communication, translators should obtain the optimal relevance between the original text or culture and target readers' cognitive context. In other words, they should make the translation easily understood by target readers without any unnecessary efforts.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Shaanxi intangible cultural heritage as significant culture with variety and quantity takes an important position in China. The translation of Shaanxi ICH can promote the spread of Chinese culture. Because of the big culture difference and cognitive context, the effective culture communication becomes the difficulty and core of the translation research.

The study has applied the relevance theory, especially the optimal relevance to the culture communication in the translation of Shaanxi ICH and found in translation translators should pay attention to the relationship between translators and the original text, translators and target readers, translators and translation strategies, and choose direct or indirect translation strategies based on the original text and culture, target readers' cognitive context to achieve the optimal relevance and effective communication.

## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Duan conceived the idea of the study and wrote the paper. Chang. gave suggestions and help.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The research is under the major theoretical and practical research project of Philosophy and social Sciences in Shaanxi Province (Project No.2021ND0104) which is sponsored by Social Science Association of Shaanxi Province. All the members made great contribution to the research.

## REFERENCES

- [1] M. Vecco. A definition of cultural heritage: From the tangible to the intangible - ScienceDirect, in: *Journal of Cultural Heritage*, vol. 11, Paris, France, 2010, pp. 321-324. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.culher.2010.01.006>
- [2] Y.Y. Tian. On the C-E Translation of Culture-specific Items in Publicity Texts of Shaanxi Intangible Cultural Heritage, in: *Journal of Hubei University of Education*, vol. 35, Shangluo, Shaanxi, 2018, pp. 120-123. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1674-344X.2018.07.027>
- [3] E.A. Gutt. *Translation and Relevance*. Shanghai: Foreign Language Education, 2004.
- [4] G. Cheng. A Study on Wang Rongpei's English Translation of Chinese Poetry: A Perspective of Relevance Theory, in: *Proceedings of the 2019 Northeast Asia International Symposium on Linguistic, s,Literature and Teaching (2019 NALLTS)*, Volume B, New Vision Press, 2019, pp. 259-265. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26914/c.cnkihy.2019.035660>
- [5] D. Sperber, D. Wilson. *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2001.
- [6] E.A. Gutt. *Relevance Theory: A Guide to Successful Communication in Translation*. SIL International, Global Publishing, 1992.
- [7] G. Wang, X.S. Zeng. English Translation of Shaanxi Dialect from the Perspective of Relevance Translation Theory: A Case Study of Turbulence, in: *Journal of Shaanxi University of Technology (Social Sciences)*, vol. 38, 2020, pp. 46-52. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1673-2936.2020.06.008>
- [8] J. Zhong, L.H. Yang. On Concepts of Culture and Its Links with Translation, in: *Canadian Social Science*, vol. 15, 2019, pp. 66-70. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3968/11334>
- [9] I. Szymanska. The Treatment of Geographical Dialect in Literary Translation from the Perspective of Relevance Theory, in: *Research in Language*, vol. 15, 2017, pp. 61-77. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/rela-2017-0004>