

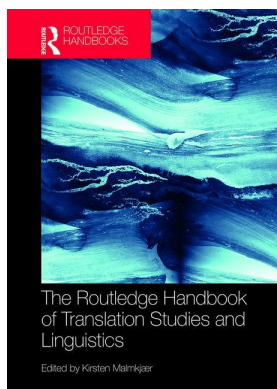
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Relevance Theory, interpreting, and translation

Magda Stroińska and Grażyna Drzazga

Introduction

During his 1977 visit to Poland, American president Jimmy Carter uttered the sentence: “I left the United States this morning”, which was translated into Polish as a somewhat dramatic declaration: *porzucilem Stany Zjednoczone* (“I abandoned the United States”), thus becoming one of best-known cases of misinterpretation in diplomatic relations (Macdonald 2015). While this particular mistranslation may have been accounted for by the interpreter’s limited knowledge of one of the languages, the example illustrates that no type of translation or interpretation is a simple act of finding equivalents. If it were, the target language (TL) sentence could be deemed correct, because *left*, in some contexts, it can indeed be translated as *porzucić* (“abandon”). However, this was not the message that President Carter wanted to communicate to his audience. The interpreter’s choice should have been *opuścilem* (“I left”) or even *wyjechałem* (“I departed”).

The framework of Relevance Theory allows one to pinpoint difficulties that translators and interpreters encounter in identifying the relevant message in the source text. This task appears to be particularly challenging in the context of oral interpretation, where limited time forces the interpreter to choose from a set of possible interpretations of the message very fast. In this chapter, after providing an overview of Relevance Theory, we shall use examples from courtroom interpretation to illustrate a number of problems that *explicatures* and *implicatures* may pose in interpreting and how Relevance Theory may be used in interpreters’ training and work.

Historical perspectives

The simplest model of human communication involves two participants: a sender of a message and a receiver. In order for the communication to take place, the sender has to encode and send their message while the receiver has to receive and decode the message. This simplistic model, referred to as the *code model*, ignores intricate processes which take place during communication and assumes that the received and decoded message is a precise reproduction of the original message, with no distortions.

This obvious simplification of the process of communication has been noted by many scholars, who have proposed improved versions of the model, from Bühler's (1934/1990) Organon model and Shannon and Weaver's (1949) simple transmission model to Jakobson's (1960) model based on the functions of language.

The philosopher H. P. Grice shifted scholarly attention to the relationship between the participants and suggested that for successful communication to take place, both sides have to be aware of a set of maxims that constitute what he referred to as the Cooperative Principle, which governs everyday conversation. Grice formulated his Cooperative Principle as follows: "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose and direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (Grice 1975, 45). The four maxims that fall under this principle are: the maxim of Quality ("tell the truth"), Quantity ("say as much as required"), Relation ("be relevant"), and Manner ("be orderly and avoid ambiguity"). Because conversational participants know that these maxims and the Cooperative Principle generally govern conversation, they will be able to supply information that seems to be lacking or not to conform to the principle in other ways in some cases of conversational interaction. The maxims and the Principle of Cooperation ensure that in the process of decoding the message, the receiver is able to choose from among potentially many interpretations the one that conveys the message most likely intended by the sender. Gricean maxims prove particularly useful in the interpretation of figurative expressions and non-literal communication.

In 1987, Sperber and Wilson used Grice's idea that communication is based on intentions and interpretations to propose a framework for looking at communication from a cognitive perspective, starting with the assumption that people tend to pay most attention to what they perceive as most relevant in a given situation (Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995, 156). Instead of the simple process of encoding and decoding information, Sperber and Wilson postulated that the very act of sending a message implied that the sender assumed that the message was relevant. In other words, when someone says something, they must think that what they have to say is important enough to try to communicate it. The communicative principle of relevance (Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995, 266–78) states that "every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance". This implies that when the message has been received, the recipient should be able, with minimum effort, to choose from the set of possible interpretations the meaning that he or she believes was considered most relevant by the sender.

Sperber and Wilson propose the following definition of relevance: "An assumption is relevant in a context if and only if it has some contextual effect in that context" (Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995, 122), and Wilson (2014, 131) sums up the approach as follows:

Relevance theory [...] treats utterance comprehension as an inferential process which takes as input the production of an utterance by a speaker, together with contextual information, and yields as output an interpretation of the speaker's meaning. Utterance comprehension is seen as essentially an exercise in mind-reading, and the challenge for relevance theorists attempting to build a psychologically plausible, empirically testable pragmatic theory is precisely to explain how the closed formal system of language provides effective pieces of evidence which, combined with contextual information, enable successful comprehension to take place.

It is worth noting that the proposed Relevance Theory-based model of communication is also capable of representing the interpretation of figurative language. While in Grice's

framework, figurative expressions, such as metaphors would be considered a violation of the maxim of truthfulness, thus triggering a conversational implicature, Relevance Theory explains them with reference to weak implicatures (also called poetic effects). The main difference between a strong and a weak implicature is that the latter creates “common impressions rather than common knowledge” (Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995, 224).

Using this Relevance Theory-based model of communication, Ernst-August Gutt (1990) suggests that there is no need for a separate translation theory, because the act of translating or interpreting is just another act of communication (“secondary communication”, c.f. Smith 2002) and, as such, can easily be fitted into the Relevance Theory framework. Gutt sees translation as an action based on the interpretive use of language, and postulates that the only difference between translation and other types of communication is that the original text and the translated text are in two different languages. Thus, the study of the process of translation, as viewed from the perspective of Relevance Theory, focuses “on the comparison of interpretations, not on the reproduction of words, linguistic constructions or textual features” (Gutt 1991/2000, 233). Its goal is to select the interpretation that offers the greatest amount of cognitive effect with a minimum of processing effort. Cognitive effects are understood as enhancements to an individual’s knowledge, whether by adding new assumptions that strengthen existing ones, or by discarding assumptions that conflict with or are weaker than existing ones, or by combining an input stimulus with an existing assumption to yield a new cognitive effect called a contextual implication (Kliffner and Stroińska 2004, 166). As for the mental architecture of their theory, Sperber and Wilson (1986/1995) propose the co-existence of a rule-based linguistic code and an inferencing mechanism that takes the code as input in order to arrive at a full interpretation of an utterance. Understanding an utterance involves the formation of explicatures, i.e. inferences that spell out the additional information required for determining propositional truth value, and implicatures, i.e. inferences that enrich the interpretation by adding extra propositions. The formation of both explicatures and implicatures depends on two principles of relevance: the cognitive principle and the communicative principle. The cognitive principle states that human brains are pre-wired to favour stimuli, thoughts, and ways of reasoning that are most relevant, i.e. produce maximum cognitive effects with the least effort. The communicative principle, on the other hand, states that every ostensive stimulus creates in the hearer an expectation that it is the optimally relevant one in terms of the knowledge, abilities, and preferences of its producer. The notion of “abilities” is important here because the message produced (the ostensive stimulus) does not always match the speaker’s communicative intention in cases where people communicate under various constraints, both physical and psychological.

In courtroom situations, both the speaker and the interpreter have to deal with a number of issues, including the psychological stress of appearing in front of the judge, talking about potentially stressful or traumatic experiences, and, in the case of the interpreter, having to translate utterances on the spot, without the benefit of full knowledge of the context and the speaker’s background. Nevertheless, based on the Presumption of Optimal Relevance (Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995, 270), the hearer (and also the interpreter) may still assume that the ostensive stimulus used by the speaker (the message uttered) is relevant enough for it to be worth the addressee’s effort to process it, and that it is the most relevant one given the communicator’s abilities and preferences.

Core issues and topics

One of the fundamentals of Relevance Theory is the observation that the relationship between semantic representations of sentences and what is in fact communicated is not simple.

Sperber and Wilson suggest that this gap “is filled not by more coding, but by inference” (Sperber and Wilson 1987, 607). An inferential process has to take place, taking into account a context, the knowledge of which should be shared by the sender of the message and the receiver (or the speaker and the hearer). This inferential model, grounded in Grice’s work, suggests that the intended meaning of the message may be inferred by using the context and the evidence of the speaker’s intention to share the message.

In order to explain how information sharing happens, Sperber and Wilson propose two concepts: *manifest* and *cognitive environment*. They provide the following definitions:

A fact is manifest to an individual at a given time if and only if he is capable at that time of representing it mentally and accepting its representation as true or probably true.

A cognitive environment of an individual is a set of facts that are manifest to him.
(Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995, 39)

A person’s cognitive environment is not limited to facts that are part of the person’s knowledge; rather, it represents the capability of a person to become aware of new facts. Therefore, mutual manifestness is crucial for communication to take place. Mutual manifestness, unlike mutual knowledge assumed in the code model, does not restrict communication to two people who know the same information, rather, it assumes that in order for communication to take place, two (or more) cognitive environments of the persons participating in an event of communication have to interact and become shared. Sperber and Wilson explain that “to say that people share a cognitive environment does not imply that they make the same assumptions: merely that they are capable of doing so” (Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995, 41).

Assuming that this *mutual cognitive environment* is already established, in order to decode the message, one has to distinguish between implicatures and explicatures. According to Sperber and Wilson, “The only difference between the explicit content of an utterance and its *implicatures* is supposed to be that the explicit content is decoded, while the *implicatures* are inferred” (Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995, 56). Implicatures are further divided into implicated premises and implicated conclusions (Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995, 195). Implicated premises are built by the hearer on the basis of their own memory, while implicated conclusions are built on explicatures and the context. To understand the text completely, one has to both understand the explicatures, and infer the implicatures.

Sperber and Wilson also offer a new perspective on context. In Relevance Theory, the context is not a stable construct, but rather is understood as “a subset of the individual’s old assumptions, with which the new assumptions combine to yield a variety of contextual effects” (Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995, 132). Therefore, context is dynamic and changing over the course of a communicative event.

From the point of view of translation theory, the greatest achievement of this approach is, according to Gutt (1991/2000), the development of a universal definition of faithfulness, which has always been a problematic issue in Translation Studies. Gutt summarises his account of how to make translation decisions as follows:

Thus if we ask in what respects the intended interpretation of the translation should resemble the original, the answer is: in respects that make it adequately relevant to the audience – that is, that offer adequate contextual effects; if we ask how the translation should be expressed, the answer is: it should be expressed in such a manner that it yields the intended interpretation without putting the audience to unnecessary processing effort.
(Gutt 1991/2000, 107)

Gutt (1991/2000) argues that Relevance Theory is applicable to many types of translation, from travel brochures and rhymes to simultaneous interpretation. For the latter, he suggests that in the act of interpretation “the translator will often settle for renderings that resemble the original less closely but get across easily what he considers to be adequately relevant aspects of the original” (Gutt 1991/2000, 123). The translator’s task is then “to understand at each point what contextual effects were inferred in the original context and thereby form a comprehensive hypothesis of the intended interpretation of the original, consisting of both explicatures and implicatures” (Gutt 1991/2000, 233).

Gutt introduces a distinction between *direct* and *indirect* translation. In indirect translation, there is no need to refer to the context of the source text, while direct translation requires the audience to be familiar with the context of the source text in order to interpret it. Gutt (1990) further explains this distinction as follows: “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” (1990, 154). In other words, direct translation entails complete interpretive resemblance and it results from the assumption that the audience of the translated text has to be familiar with the *cognitive environment* of the source text. Indirect translation, on the other hand, allows the translator to be more flexible, because the target text has to resemble the source text only in its most relevant aspects. This also implies that the product of direct translation may require more effort to process.

Current debates

The applicability of Relevance Theory to the study of communication has been an object of intense discussion. The most prominent point of criticism is the unclear distinction between the notions of mutual knowledge and mutual manifestness. Sperber and Wilson (1986/1995) clearly rejected the appropriateness of the concept of mutual knowledge. However, it can be argued that in their own work Sperber and Wilson actually rely on the assumptions of mutual knowledge while introducing the concept of mutual manifestness. For instance, it appears that mutual manifestness is as recursive as mutual knowledge (as Yus Ramos (1998, 309–310) summarises it: “A knows p; B knows that A knows p; A knows that B knows that A knows p; ad infinitum”). Therefore, it can be argued that mutual knowledge and mutual manifestness are so similar that one cannot properly distinguish between them (for a more detailed discussion, see Yus Ramos 1998). In addition, Levinson (1989, 456), claims that the theory “is obscure and it is not clear how it could be made to have clear empirical application”. He argues that the theory is not “data-driven” and that “the new paradigm offered here exists largely as manifesto” (1989, 469). Relevance Theory no longer attracts the same level of interest or debate in the literature but it continues to serve as a theoretical basis for multiple investigations.

In Translation Studies, the usefulness of Relevance Theory is no longer subject to heated debates. Gutt’s (1990) proposal, even though it starts by emphasising the pointlessness of translation theory *per se*, is referenced in some sources on translation theory, not as a compendium of practical advice but rather for its attempt at defining the notion of equivalence (Pym 2010, 35, even refers to Gutt as “a theorist of equivalence”) or for its discussion of the role of context in translation (Baker 2006). Lack of practical applications of Relevance Theory in translation practice is the strongest criticism in the literature. Most notably, Wendland (1996, 1997) points to many flaws of Relevance Theory as applied to the practice of Bible translation. While acknowledging some contributions made by Gutt, (e.g. the departure from the unrealistic attempt to translate the “full meaning”), Wendland (1996, 91)

states that the approach “appears to be deficient in a number of other areas, particularly in its exclusivistic perspective and its idiosyncratic terminology, which leads to some confusion in its practical application”. Wendland’s criticism starts with the very principle of relevance which he considers impractical, because it “presupposes an *idealized* communicative situation” (Wendland 1996, 94). Malmkjær (1992, 308) adds to that criticism, stating that “an understanding of relevance theory will not by itself enable translators to predict the relevance of any particular turn of phrase to those individuals which they might see as the projected audience for their translations”.

Regardless of this early criticism, Relevance Theory continues to be used as a tool in translation theory, because it seems to capture the complexity of translation and interpretation processes and “it may well prove to be the most reliable tool for handling the interpretive richness evinced by real-life data” (Kliffier and Stroińska 2004, 171).

Future directions

Over the early decades of the 21st century, the field of Translation Studies witnessed a steady departure from theoretical investigations in favour of the implementation of various types of empirical research to gain insights into the translation process. Scholars seem increasingly interested not only in the product of translation, but also in cognitive aspects of the process of translating (Drzazga 2013; Tirkkonen-Condit and Jääskeläinen 2000). Relevance Theory has been used as one of the frameworks in empirical investigations of translation (Alves and Goncalves 2003). The flexibility of the framework allows investigators to apply and adapt it to fit their research methodology. It may therefore be expected that Gutt’s proposal will be used in a variety of future experimental studies on the translation process.

Implications for practice

The following section presents three case studies that illustrate authentic situations from the court interpretation practice of one of the authors of this chapter, who has been working as a certified court interpreter (for Polish and German) for over 25 years. They all took place in the courtrooms of the Province of Ontario, Canada. Canada offers court interpretation services by fully qualified court interpreters to all persons involved in court proceedings if they claim insufficient knowledge of English or French. Since the case studies described in this section reflect personal experience, we have first-hand insight into the decision-making processes that accompanied the translation choices. We have avoided reference to specific cases in order to protect the identities of the individuals involved.

Case study 1: Lexical choices

A man in his thirties, a native speaker of Polish with very limited English, was accused of stealing a packet of cigarettes from a department store. When testifying, he explained that he went into the store in order to purchase something else but decided to also get a packet of cigarettes. He obtained a packet of cigarettes and proceeded to the automobile section to look for *wycieraczki do samochodu* [literally, wipers for the car], which the court interpreter, without any hesitation, translated as “windshield wipers”. The defendant argued that he put the packet of cigarettes into his pocket so that he could use both hands to select the “windshield wipers”. The judge asked with some astonishment why the defendant was not able to handle windshield wipers with one hand. The man responded that he needed both his hands as

the windshield wipers were heavy. The judge then asked whether the defendant purchased any windshield wipers to which the man responded that he could not find a pair in the colour he needed. The judge, with some disbelief, asked whether windshield wipers came in different colours, which the man confirmed. He then added that he wanted *wycieraczki* (“wipers”) that would go with the colour of his car but could not find a matching pair. The court interpreter too was surprised to hear that windshield wipers came in different colours and was contemplating finding some to match her car’s colour, but the disbelief on the part of the judge, along with the obviously inconsistent answers of the defendant (why would a young man find windshield wipers heavy?) triggered some second thoughts and made her reconsider the information assembled thus far. The interpreter realized that she had made a mistake: the defendant was using the term *wycieraczki do* to mean floor mats (i.e. mats on which one can wipe one’s feet; the word *wycieraczka* is in fact used to describe any mat, e.g. a door mat) and not windshield wipers.

The reason why the interpreter selected windshield wipers over floor mats was the relative prominence of windshield wipers within the context of purchasing something for a car. At the initial point, the interpreter did not feel that there was any need to make a choice, as the only item that appeared to be a candidate for an equivalent for *wycieraczki do samochodu* was “windshield wipers”. It was only when evidence of incompatibility between windshield wipers and the discourse developed by the defendant started to accumulate that the interpreter began to look for reasons and began considering whether there was another possible translation. It was at that point, taking into account all the information available – considerable weight, different colours – that the interpreter realized that there was another English candidate to translate *wycieraczki do samochodu*.

This points to the fact that the relevance of an equivalent may be built over time and does not have to be apparent from the onset of an exchange. In this case, at the start, one equivalent seemed to be the most relevant, in fact the only candidate for translation. But when more information was gathered about the object under discussion, i.e. as the context constructed over the course of the conversation expanded, another candidate emerged and took on more relevance in the context of the exchange. In this case, the interpreter had to stop the proceedings and explained to the judge her error in judgement and in interpretation.

In this case, the relevance-guided comprehension heuristic (Wilson and Sperber 2002) made the interpreter follow the path of greatest relevance and least effort in constructing an interpretation and in resolving ambiguity and referential indeterminacy once it became apparent to the interpreter. As the context was enriched by adding more information about the “wipers”, the interpreter was able to adjust interpretation until the expectations of relevance were satisfied. She also had to explain her error.

Case study 2: Pragmatic choices

The following example is mentioned in Stroińska (2001, 13) in the context of translatability of worldviews and in Kliffer and Stroińska (2004, 167–168). A middle-aged Polish-speaking man was accused of murdering his estranged wife. The main argument that the judge quoted was that, when told by a police officer that his wife was dead, the man kept asking “What happened?” instead of asking “How did she die?” The fact that he never asked how his wife had died indicated, in the police officer’s words, that he must have known and so must have been the murderer.

In similar circumstances, in English, the question “What happened?” is a perfectly possible way to make inquiries. However, it is also possible to ask *how* the person had died. In Polish,

the question “How did s/he die?” could only be asked by a coroner or a forensic expert. It would not have been asked by a relative of the deceased, not even by an estranged spouse.

For the police officer, the question “What happened?” triggered an interpretation that went far beyond its actual meaning. Whereas for the accused (or for that matter any Polish speaker), “What happened?” would have meant: “Tell me more”, for the police officer it also provided a piece of evidence against the suspect. The officer’s interpretation was based on the fact that English offers a choice between a casual question “What happened?” and more specific questions, such as “How did they die?” or “What was the cause of death?” Polish and English offer different choices to speakers, and these choices can only be interpreted within the context of the respective languages.

While in any other situation the choice between asking “What happened?” and “How did the person die?” would have been inconsequential, in the police interrogation, the two choices had dramatically different implicatures. The recording of the police interview with the estranged husband was played in court. The interpreter asked to talk to the prosecutor and the judge to explain that the question “What happened?” asked repeatedly by the husband was an unmarked one and carried no implicatures.

Case study 3: Syntactic choices

One of the questions most often asked in Canadian courtrooms is “How do you plead to this charge?”. It is posed by court clerks after they have read the charges to the defendant. The expected answers are either “Guilty” or “Not guilty”. However, as it is a WH-question, other answers may also be logically possible, for example, “I could plead guilty to a lesser charge”. The equivalent questions asked in Polish and German courts are “*Czy przyznaje się Pan/Pani do winy?*” and “*Bekennen Sie sich schuldig?*” (literally “Do you admit your guilt?”). As it is a Yes/No question, the expected answers are “Yes” or “No”. Defendants who try to give any other answer are promptly admonished by the judge or the prosecutor and asked to enter their plea.

There are problematic issues related to the format of this question in Polish and German. For example, it presupposes that an offence had been committed, with no presumption of innocence until proven guilty, common in English and American law. In countries that have had the experience of authoritarian rule, as was the case for both Germany and Poland, people know that being charged does not always imply that an offence had indeed been committed. Based on their experience with the communist system, many Poles who immigrated to Canada before 1989 still show a high level of mistrust of the justice system, and this mistrust may also serve as an excuse for getting angry or emotional, or even for not telling the truth.

Originally, it seemed to the interpreter that using the standard Polish equivalent “Do you admit your guilt?” was the best option when rendering the question “How do you plead to this charge?”. This was, after all, a question that was expected by the defendant. However, when the interpreter asked in Polish whether they admitted their guilt, Polish defendants often answered this crucial question in English themselves, making the exchange confusing. The judge and other English-speaking participants in the proceedings heard the WH-question “How do you plead to this charge?”, followed by the defendant’s answer “Yes” or “No”. A confusing or illogical answer usually reflects poorly on the defendant, not the interpreter, as most of those present can only follow one language side of the exchange. Also, the interpreter should translate as closely to the original text as possible; thus, translating “yes” as “guilty” may seem to be an ethical stretch and translating “*tak*” or “*nie*” as “yes” or “no” would not help either.

In order to avoid the defendant giving an answer that was incongruous with the question, the interpreter switched from the “best” and contextually most relevant Polish and German

equivalents to the second-best versions that were consistent with the syntax of the English question. It had to be a question to which the answers would be “Guilty” or “Not guilty.” Thus the questions that the interpreter asks the defendants now are: “*Przy tak sformułowanych zarzutach, czy oświadcza Pan/Pani, że jest Pan/Pani winny/winna czy niewinny/niewinna?*” (“To the so stated charges, what plea do you wish to enter: guilty or not guilty?”) in Polish, and “*Bekennen Sie sich schuldig oder unschuldig im Sinne dieser Anklage?*” (“Do you plead guilty or not guilty to this charge?”) in German.

In the case described above, the best candidate for translation of the English question (most relevant and arrived at with least effort) had to be abandoned given the accumulated evidence that its use produced undesirable outcomes: incongruous answers and the impression of confusion on either the part of the defendant or the interpreter. The alternative, preferred translation is not literal and is not the formula used in Polish or German courts. However, it serves the purpose better as it evokes the same range of answers as the English question thus fulfilling the audience’s expectation of relevance.

A summary of the case studies

The decision-making processes that the interpreter engages in differ in the three case studies presented above: however, in each situation, the most relevant translation, involving least effort, proved to be deficient. In case study 1, the choice of the right lexical equivalent was delayed because the interpreter initially chose what she considered the only translation of the item in question. It was selected with least effort due to its contextual prominence. When thinking about wipers for a car, floor mats are not the first association. Yet, as the evidence against windshield wipers mounted up, and based on the developing contextual knowledge, the interpreter had to re-evaluate her initial choice and reassign relevance. Within the new context, enriched by the new information (heavy and available in different colours), another object emerged as the best candidate.

In case study 2, the best translation seemed to be the literal translation. After all, the question “What happened?” seems easy to translate. However, the Polish equivalent has a much wider scope of application: it can be both a very casual and also a more neutral (even if not formal) question when inquiring about more details. As such, it corresponds to both the English question “What happened?” and the request “Tell me more” or “Give me more details”. It can be assumed that the latter was the meaning that the husband intended when informed about the death of his estranged wife. In this case, the interpreter was facing a situation where a translation choice had already been made by the Polish-speaking police officer who interrogated the husband. As this interpretation seemed to trigger undesirable implicatures, the interpreter alerted the court to that fact.

However, even if the court interpreter were to translate the interrogation herself, it is most likely that she too would have translated “*Co się stało?*” as “What happened?”. It was only when the prosecution began to argue that the question potentially implicated the husband as the murderer (because not asking about how his wife had died indicated that the accused already knew this fact) that the interpreter realised that this translation had to be re-evaluated. The decision-making process took place in two steps. Initially, literal translation seemed the best or even the sole choice. Only when the literal translation was misinterpreted was an explanation needed in order to show to the English-speaking court officials the different range of implicatures of the Polish question.

In case study 3, the pragmatically equivalent and contextually appropriate but not literal Polish and German translation of “How do you plead to this charge?” had to be dismissed because it produced incongruous answers from the defendants. Again, the decision-making

process involved a gradual discovery of a problem and then a search for a solution: selecting a translation that followed the structure of the original question rather than the culture-specific, pragmatically appropriate equivalent.

In each case, the relevance of the best candidate for translation emerged gradually as the interpreter gathered more information through the clues offered by the speakers (cf. Zhonggang 2006). These clues were used to gradually construct the context and led the interpreter to the translation choices with optimal relevance.

Conclusions

In discussions of translation, the usual focus of attention has been the product rather than the process. One could evaluate the translated text in terms of its faithful rendition of the original's intentions, style, and/or artistic value. Relevance Theory added cognitive impact to this list of evaluation criteria, but it did not necessarily challenge the static approach to translation (Gutt 1990, 1991/2000, 1998, 2005). From the cognitive linguistics point of view, however, translation and interpretation can be viewed as processes of decision-making where solutions are made and then re-examined and modified, as new information is added in the construction of the context (Carston and Powell 2006; Shreve and Angelone 2010). The relative relevance of translation choices is constantly re-evaluated and so those choices are not final and may change. Our examples show that the decision-making processes and changes in translation may be taking place within one "conversation" (case study 1) or over a longer period of time when experience of poor comprehension of the translated text, and/or confusion about its relevance and its contextual effects lead the interpreter to new translation choices in order to keep the translated text relevant.

Viewing translation and interpretation as a clue-based interpretive use of language across language boundaries, as suggested by Zhonggang (2006), is particularly useful in analysing on the spot interpretation practices where interpreters have to navigate their way through text to be translated without the benefit of having knowledge of the context in which the speaker is operating. The clues provided by the speaker over time may lead interpreters to modify their initial choices even if this requires considerable processing effort on their part. The result of the interpreter's work is a text that can be processed by the L2 audience with minimal effort and which can be seen as having optimal relevance.

Further reading

Alves, F. and Goncalves, J. L. 2007. "Modelling translator's competence: Relevance and expertise under scrutiny". In *Doubts and Directions in Translation Studies*, edited by Y. Gambier, M. Shlesinger and R. Stolze, 41–55. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

In this chapter, the authors use Relevance Theory and connectionist principles to propose and assess a model of translator competence. This source provides an example of how Relevance Theory may be used to redefine some key concepts in translation theory.

Edwards, A. B. 1995. *The Practice of Court Interpreting*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins. This book offers insights into the profession of a court interpreter. It provides practical guidelines for prospective interpreters by discussing various stages of the job – from case preparation to testifying as an expert witness.

Gutt, E.-A. 1992. *Relevance Theory: A Guide to Successful Communication in Translation*. Dallas and New York: Summer Institute of Linguistics Inc. and United Bible Societies.

This book provides five lectures which outline Gutt's perspective on Relevance Theory, as well as providing suggestions for how the theory can be applied to the translation of the Bible.

Hatim, B. and Munday, J. 2004. "Translation and relevance". In *Translation: An Advanced Resource Book*, edited by B. Hatim and J. Munday, 57–66. New York: Routledge.

This chapter provides a background for those readers who are unfamiliar with the framework of Relevance Theory in translation. The reader is guided through a number of tasks and questions to gain a deeper understanding of different aspects and key concepts of the theory.

Wałaszewska, E., Kiesielewska-Krysiuk, M., Korzeniowska, A. and Grzegorzewska, M. 2009. *Relevant Worlds: Current Perspectives on Language, Translation and Relevance Theory*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

The first part of this book focuses on Relevance Theory *per se*. In the second part, the theory is applied to translation of various kinds of texts – ranging from official documents to Polish soap operas.

Related topics

Semantics and translation; Implicature and presupposition in translation and interpreting.

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