

Study on the Translation of Verbal Humor in *Bridget Jones's Diary* from the Perspective of Relevance Theory

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Abstract: Humor is a common phenomenon in daily life. Essentially, it is a special form of verbal communication. Since humor bears special language and cultural characteristics, the difficulty of translation is self-evident for translators. For many years, the translatability and untranslatability of humor have been the focus of the argument among scholars. Relevance theory attempts to explain the mechanism of humor generation and its translation from the perspective of cognition. Under the framework of relevance theory, this paper takes *Bridget Jones's Diary* and its Chinese version as the research object to explore the translation strategies of verbal humor, and evaluate whether the Chinese translation can represent the same humorous effect as the original. The results show that the translator adopts direct and indirect translation strategies when translating verbal humor, and the translation strategies have effectively achieved the same humorous effect as the original to some extent if the target language readers share the similar cognitive environment with the source language readers in some situations. Nevertheless, the humorous effects may not be fully conveyed in the target texts, especially when translating culturally loaded words and idiomatic expressions. In such cases, the author puts forward some tentative suggestions for improving the translated texts. The study makes an attempt to provide a feasibility analysis for the studies on translation of verbal humor in diary novels.

Keywords: Relevance theory; humor translation; translation strategies; *Bridget Jones's Diary*.

1. Introduction

Humor, as a kind of language communication in culture, may be easy to appreciate but difficult to define. Over the centuries, though many researches on humor have been carried out, there is no unilateral theory that can explain it thoroughly. It is universally shared by all people in societies regardless of their status, genders, races and nationalities; thus humor might be regarded as a cultural-bound item in some cases, requiring readers possess certain related background knowledge. It seems that it is becoming more and more important to translate humor because it has increasingly played a vital role in inter-cultural communication. However, as Chiaro (1992) claims that “partly universal, partly culturally or linguistically bound, partly individual, humor has various levels of applicability, which often makes it a tangible problem for translators”.

The translatability of humor has been widely debated for a long time. Many researches have been carried out to explore to what extent the source text with humorous effects can be adequately translated into the target text. Nevertheless, the difficulty of translation increases in those cases where the humorous utterances are loaded with culture-bound words. The translation of humor relates to two different languages and cultures, which is a great challenge for translator to make the target text

equivalent to the source text with the same humorous effects accepted by the target language readers naturally.

In addition to the translation of humor, the mechanism of humor is also pivotal; however, a number of pragmatic theories, such as speech act theory, politeness principle, cooperative principle, etc., may not give an accurate explanation on this issue. Relevance theory, as the foundation of cognitive pragmatics, gives a convincing and reasonable explanation about the communicative mechanism of humor, which attempts to explain this phenomenon from cognitive aspects because the generation of humorous effects largely

depend on the cognitive environment of the target language readers. However, this field is not thoroughly studied especially in China. Therefore, this thesis will focus on two aspects, including exploring the mechanism of humor and the translation strategies adopted in interpreting the humorous utterances of the source text under the guidance of relevance theory. And a well-known comedy novel *Bridget Jones's Diary* written by Helen Fielding and its Chinese translated version written by Zhuang Jingjun will be selected as the source data because the novel is full of humorous utterances.

2. Previous Studies on Verbal Humor of *Bridget Jones's Diary* and its translation

This section will review previous studies on verbal humor of *Bridget Jones's Diary* and its translation at home and abroad. Vilija (2005) examined how humor is translated from English into Lithuanian in *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *Bridget Jones's Diary: The Edge of Reason*. Nevertheless, the author just analyzed the same kind of examples in general rather than a particular example in detail. Nieves (2009) first examined the main factors that result in humorous features in the novel *Bridget Jones's Diary* and then carried out a study to comment on the translation strategies adopted in the Spanish dubbed version of the film that was distributed on DVD. Kenneth (2017) compared the inter-textual parody of two novels, namely, *Bridget Jones's Diary* (BJD) and *Pride and Prejudice* (P&P), arguing that the author of BJD created humor by regarding P&P as a referential material. However, the analysis of Kenneth's just stays around superficial of the characteristics of the protagonists other than making deep analysis of the examples of humor in both novels. Besides, there are several scholars focused on the study of the feminism and the translation strategies in its translated versions (Furukawa, 2009 & 2010; Nicha, 2014; Bakker, 2015; Ilaria, 2015).

Compared with studies on *Bridget Jones's Diary* abroad, studies at home are much fewer. Kao and Wu (2004) performed a study to investigate the translation methods employed in translating the humorous utterance of *Bridget Jones's Diary* in Taiwan and four types of humor were proposed and analyzed. Although some translation strategies are put forward, the mechanism of humor and theory applied in this thesis is not mentioned as well. Shen Weiju & Chen Liyun (2015) investigated the translation methods adopted by the translator to transfer nonverbal information into verbal information during the process of subtitle translation based on the analysis of non-verbal symbols in the film of *Bridget Jones's Diary*.

As mentioned above, it can be seen that few scholars refer to the mechanism of verbal humor in *Bridget Jones's Diary* and do researches on exploring the translation strategies in the Chinese translated version in spite of the novel is very popular among Chinese people. Hence, the mechanism of verbal humor and researches on the translation strategies of verbal humor in Chinese translated version of *Bridget Jones's Diary* need to be further explored compared with the researches on verbal humor abroad.

In this paper, the author mainly focuses on verbal humor and both Chinese and English versions of *Bridget Jones's Diary* are chosen as the source data. Examples in this thesis are chosen from the original English version—*Bridget Jones's Diary*, written by Helen Fielding and published by Penguin books in 1996. The tone of the novel is modern and colloquial, which is full of humorous utterance and expressions. Moreover, the intriguing way of depiction of the lives of Bridget and the description of other characters in humorous tones successfully attract people's interests, making it a bestseller around the world. It has been translated into more than thirty languages and over two million copies are sold out worldwide.

As for the Chinese versions, the author will select its corresponding Chinese version translated by Zhuang Jingjun, published by Tianjin People's Publishing House in 2007 because it is a professional literary publishing institution and enjoys a high reputation in China. Besides, the translation by Zhuang Jingjun may be the most circulated edition accepted among Chinese people for it has been published for about twelve years. Given that there are many humorous utterances in this novel, it is feasible and practical for the author to do further data analysis. Therefore, in light of the data mentioned above, it is practicable and reasonable to use them in this research.

3. The Application of Relevance Theory to the Translation of Verbal Humor

As a pragmatic theory of human communication, relevance theory is applied to study translation. This theory provides a unified theoretical framework for translation and it can effectively explain the process of translation, which argues that translation is also a kind of communication between the translator and target language readers. In the case of translating verbal humor, there are gaps between the source language author's intended meaning and the coded source language humor, and between the source language humor and the translator's interpretation, and also between the translated humor and the target language reader's interpretation (Yus, 2016), so it is more difficult for translator to manage to

generate the similar humorous effects preserved for the source language readers. Therefore, the translator has to search for the optimal relevance in translation to reproduce the humorous effects in target texts.

3.1. Translation as the Means of a Dual Ostensive-inferential Communication

According to relevance theory, communication is a kind of ostensive-inferential process. Translation, as a special form of communication, is composed by two ostensive-inferential processes among the source text author, the translator and the target text reader. Humor translation is a kind of communicative activity, which complies with the rule of communication, thus the translation of humor is also a process of ostensive-inferential communication.

In the first ostensive-inferential process, the source text author manifests both informational intention and communicative intention to the translator, who needs to make efforts to perceive the intentions of the source text author according to the communicative clues and find out the original humorous utterance. Then the translator seeks the optimal relevance between humorous utterance and the contextual assumptions according to the contextual information of the source text and the principle of relevance. During this process, the source text author serves as a communicator while translator acts as an audience, whose main responsibility is to engage in the inferential communication because merely depending on the decoding process is insufficient.

In the second ostensive-inferential process, the role of the translator changes from the audience to a communicator and the target reader can be regarded as the audience. To convey the informative and the communicative intention of the source text author, the translator is supposed to manifest the key information by utilizing the ostensive stimuli and take the cognitive environment, the reading expectation and the cognitive ability of the target text readers into consideration to search for the optimal relevance between the source text and the target text. In other words, if the context assumptions conveyed by the original author to the source language readers exist in the potential cognitive context of the target language readers, the translator should take into account whether it needs great processing efforts to search for the required contextual assumptions and whether the processing efforts and the contextual effects are matched (Lin Kenan, 1994). When it refers to the translation of humorous utterance, the humorous utterance of the source text should be translated into the target text with the translator's own informative intention. Meanwhile, target text readers make inferences from the translation to grasp the communicative intention which the source text author wants to express. It can be seen that relevant theoretical translation puts emphasis on the role of the translator in translating the humorous utterance of source text into the target text. The translator perhaps should regard himself clearly as a communicator when interpreting source text and the success of translation depends on whether it is consistent with the principle of relevance.

3.2. Translation as an act of Interlingual Interpretive Use

Relevance theory assumes that there are two models of language use to process information in human's mind: the descriptive use and the interpretive use. According to relevance theory, when it is used descriptively, a language

utterance can be taken as a description of a state of affairs in the actual world or it can be a description of a desirable state of affairs. When it is used interpretively, a language utterance is intended to interpret some attributed thoughts or utterances. (Sperber & Wilson, 1995).

Accordingly, translation is an act of interpretive use of language which crosses language boundaries, namely, it would be a receptor language text that interpretively resembled the original (Gutt, 1996). To be more specific, what the translator intends to convey is expected to resemble that of the intentions of the original author in relevant respects, and the translator has to make assumption about the cognitive environment of the target language readers to be in accordance with the principle of optimal relevance, that is, to produce adequate contextual effects without making the audience to make gratuitous processing effort. Humor translation, is also an interlingual interpretive use of language, the translator should make efforts to reproduce almost identical humorous effects, shifting from the source language to the target language, which is more important than just faithfulness in reproducing the content of the source text.

4. On Translation of Verbal Humor in *Bridget Jones's Diary*

4.1. A Study of Translation of Verbal Humor as the Means of a Dual Ostensive-inferential Communication

Under the guidance of relevance theory, the translation of verbal humor can be regarded as two rounds of ostensive-inferential communication processes involving three communicators: the original author, the translator and the target language readers. In this section, the mechanism of the generation of verbal humor will be first illustrated and then the Chinese translation will be testified whether it has conveyed the information as authentic as the source text.

4.1.1. From the Perspective of Maximal Relevance Expectation and Optimal Relevance

According to relevance theory, human cognition tends to be geared to maximization of relevance and readers have the maximal relevance expectation of humorous utterance, which means that readers expect to pay the least processing efforts to obtain the most humorous contextual effects. Besides, the original author needs to offer the most relevant information to the readers, which should be compatible with their abilities. In general, the maximal relevance expectation of readers complies with their usual way of thinking because they have formed some contextual assumptions in their cognitive environment. Nevertheless, if the humorous utterance is exactly in accordance with the readers' maximal expectation, it seems that there may be less psychological stimuli to them, so the humorous contextual effects would not be created to a large extent. In some cases, there is a gap between maximal relevance expectation and the optimal relevance, needing readers to pay extra processing efforts to process the intention the original author wants to convey and find out the reasons for the accidental irrelevance of the sentences. After paying the additional processing efforts, the incongruity or inconsistency of the sentences can be resolved and these processing efforts are not redundant but are used to help readers to obtain the communicative intention of the original author and achieve humorous effects. The following examples will be analyzed from this perspective.

Example 1: Context: (Bridget will participate in a "Smug Married dinner party" held by her married friend tonight.....)

But when they are together with their married friends I feel as if I have turned into Miss Havisham.

(Fielding, 1996, p. 35)

但是他们一跟那些已婚的朋友在一起的时候,我就觉得自己变成了哈维莎小姐。

(Zhuang Jingjun, 2007, p. 36)

Reasoning: Miss Havisham is depicted as a wealthy spinster in the Charles Dickens novel *Great Expectations*. In the novel, she lives in a ruined and decaying mansion with her adopted daughter after she is abandoned by her fiancé at the altar and she is lonely and miserable for the rest of her life.

Analysis: Self-deprecating humor will be found in this paragraph. In *Bridget Jones's Diary*, Bridget is depicted as an unmarried woman living alone in her thirties, whose friends are married. In this case, Bridget describes herself as Miss Havisham, which is a kind of mockery of her, implying that she is an old, unmarried and obnoxious woman. The incongruity lies in the fact that it is one of the happiest times with friends in a cheerful dinner party; however, Bridget compares herself to Miss Havisham, and this kind of description breaks the maximal relevance expectation the source language readers have formed.

It is not difficult for source language readers to perceive the humorous effect of the source text when they input the assumption of "Bridget laughs at herself" in such context. However, the unfamiliarity with "Miss Havisham" might hinder the target language readers to understand the humorous effect in source text. As a communicator in the second ostensive-inferential communication process, it is obvious that the translator does not perceive this humorous utterance, let alone consider the target language readers' cognitive environment. Then "Miss Havisham" is directly translated into "哈维莎小姐" in the Chinese translation, thus who is "哈维莎小姐" is not ostensive to the target language readers. Although the target language readers attempt to make extra processing efforts to understand the intended meaning hidden in the sentence, they cannot obtain the maximal relevance expectation because the incongruity of the occurrence of "Miss Havisham" in this context cannot be resolved in their cognitive environment. Hence, the humorous effect in source text is not successfully represented in target text.

4.1.2. From the Perspective of inferring the implicatures

In actual communication, the original author can convey more than what is literally expressed. An implicature refers to the intentions that the original author implies or suggests without directly saying, which cannot be grasped through the simple syntactic pattern of the sentence and needed to be inferred from the utterance. The utterance sometimes seems to be incongruous in the whole paragraph which contains humorous effects, so the readers need to figure out the implicature on the basis of their most relevant contextual assumptions. After the implicature can be inferred of the sentence, the humorous effect can be obtained. Consider the following examples:

Example 2: Context: (Bridget's birthday is coming and she has some ideas about how to hold a birthday party. Instead of fantasizing about going on a date with a handsome man at a luxury restaurant, she would like to hold birthday party at home and invite nineteen friends though her flat may not accommodate so many people.....)

Instead am going to think of my friends as a huge, warm,

African, or possibly Turkish family.

(Fielding, 1996, p. 71)

相反，开始想象我和我的朋友们就像一个庞大温馨的非洲家庭或是一个土耳其家庭。

(Zhuang Jingjun, 2007, p. 76)

Reasoning: In people's traditional ideals, family members usually sit together and eat with their hands in a small room in African or Turkish family, which gives an impression of people getting along well with each other.

Implicated: All Bridget's friends love her.

Analysis: An euphemistic satire humor will be found in this paragraph. In source text, Bridget likens the scene of many friends attending dinner at her house to that of an African or Turkish family, which implies the fact that all her friends love her. However, the simile "the friends as an African or Turkish family" is a bit exaggerated, seeming to be incongruous with the current harmonious atmosphere. Besides, the traditional British table manners are to use a set of knife and fork to eat rather than eat with hands.

The literal meaning of this sentence does not achieve any humorous effects or create any adequate contextual effects. In source text, the source language readers firstly need to perceive the intentions of the original author and then derive possible implicated premises to understand the implicatures of this sentence. The contextual assumptions about the African or Turkish family have already stored in the source language readers' mind, which makes the explicit interpretation of this utterance accessible and relevant. Apparently it is not difficult for the source language readers to make sense of the incongruity of this sentence. After inferring the implicature of the utterance, the humorous effect can be achieved.

As for target language readers, the contextual assumptions about the image of "the African or Turkish family" are familiar to them as well, so the translator can literally translate this sentence into "非洲家庭或是一个土耳其家庭" in which the incongruity can be realized and the implicature of this sentence can be inferred. Therefore, in this case, the humorous effect can be perceived by the target language readers.

4.2. A Study of Translation of Verbal Humor as an act of Interlingual Interpretive Use

According to relevance theory, translation can be regarded as a kind of interlingual interpretive use, involving resemblance in semantic structure or logical form. Humor translation is a process that the translator interprets the verbal humor in the source text and reproduces the utmost resemblance of the humorous effect to the target text in order to convey both informative and communicative intentions of the original author. The successful translation of verbal humor is the transmission of the optimal relevance from the source text to the target text. As Gutt (2014) argues that, the intended interpretation of target text should resemble the source text in which the translator needs to make the intentions adequately relevant to the target language readers' expectations, and the translator needs to choose proper translation strategies to make sure it can yield the optimal relevance to understand the verbal humor without making the target language readers pay unnecessary processing efforts.

To study whether the humorous effects are reproduced in the target text, the translation methods adopted by the translator should be examined in this thesis. Guided by the framework of relevance theory, Gutt (2014) proposes two

kinds of translation methods, which are direct translation and indirect translation. The main distinction between the two translation methods is that direct translation means to preserve the complete interpretive resemblance in linguistic properties of the source text, while indirect translation needs to resemble the source text only in some related aspects, which seeks to achieve the same cognitive effects as the source text. Therefore, the translator has the responsibility to choose appropriate translation strategies to convey the communicative and informative intentions of the original author to target language readers. Based on the previous researches, examples of translation of verbal humor in *Bridget Jones's Diary* are analyzed and the two kinds of translation methods are illustrated in detail in this part.

4.2.1. Translation to Convey Both Informative and Communicative Intentions

There are two levels of intentions involved in ostensive-inferential communication: the informative intention and the communicative intention. The informative intention is to inform the audience of something and the communicative intention is to make the informative intention recognized. Unless the translator correctly recognizes the communicative intention of the original author, otherwise the humorous effects of the source text cannot be fully transmitted to target language readers. It seems that direct translation, covered in the relevance theory as an instance of interpretive use, may convey obviously both informative and communicative intentions of the original author. Gutt (1990) explains the definition of direct translation 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". In other words, the intended interpretation of the source text cannot be conveyed to the target language readers if the translator does not take the cognitive environment of the original author into consideration. Moreover, direct translation needs the target language readers to get familiar with the cognitive environment of the source text to make it possible for them to obtain the intended interpretation of the source text.

In addition, direct translation depends on the similarity of the language characteristics, which makes efforts to preserve the linguistic properties; however, linguistic features vary from different languages, so the most important thing in direct translation is not to maintain the same linguistic structure of the source text, but to retain the communicative clues of the source text, that is, the purpose of the direct translation is to achieve a completely similar intended interpretation. It relies on such devices, including introduction and annotation, providing the important information which is considered to be vital for target language readers to understand the source text instead of adding any explanatory words in the translated text. As for verbal humor translation, direct translation may be the favored method applied by the translator because few changes can ensure that the original author's intentions are consistent with target language readers' expectation. In this part, the author will analyze just one direct translation method—literal translation in the target text.

4.2.1.1 Literal Translation

Literal translation is a typical translation strategy of direct translation. In the target text, there are some sentence structures may be adjusted; however, the information of the source text is not supplemented or amended. In verbal humor translation, the humorous effects of the source text can be easily retrieved since the literal translation can remain both

the contents and the communicative clues of the source text. Some literal translation examples from *Bridget Jones's Diary* will be analyzed in this section to evaluate whether this kind of translation method reproduces the same humorous effect as the source text.

Example 3: Context: (Bridget has cooked for her friends for two days and she complained that.....)

Have had to slave for two days, and now they will all swarm in, demanding food like cuckoos. Feel like opening door and shouting, "Oh, go fuck yourselves."

(Fielding, 1996, p. 73)

已经做了两天的奴隶，现在他们会一个个优哉游哉地走进来，像杜鹃鸟一样跟我要吃的。好想打开门大吼：“噢，通通给我滚回去吃自己的！”

(Zhuang Jingjun, 2007, p. 79)

Reasoning: The cuckoos are generally medium-sized birds, feeding on insects or fruits. Some species of this kind of birds often migrate from one place to another, laying their eggs in the nests of other species and expecting their offspring can be raised by other birds.

Analysis: An euphemistic satire humor will be found in this paragraph. The rhetoric device—simile is applied in this sentence, making a comparison between Bridget's friends and cuckoos. Besides, the act of laying eggs in other birds' nests symbolizes desire and longing. The context forces a first or salient reading along the lines of “demanding food like cuckoos”. What properly happens is that the item “cuckoos” are salient in this sentence and any source text readers are going to pay more attention to this proper noun. In source text, Bridget's friends are described as cuckoos, which can be regarded as a humorous description because of her friends demanding food just like cuckoos laying eggs in other bird's nests. It implies that Bridget is a bit annoyed because her friends do not help her to prepare the meal on her birthday. In addition, it can be noted that such description is beyond the source language readers' expectation because the company of friends is the happiest moment on one's birthday. However, the symbolic meaning of cuckoo in this sentence can change people's existing contextual assumption of birthday. The humorous effect is obtained by the source language readers by realizing that the intention of the original author is to euphemistically satirize Bridget's birthday.

In the target language culture, there is also such kind of implied meaning of cuckoo, so both source language and target language readers share the same image of cuckoos. The literal translation is a feasible translation strategy that can be adopted in such case. Thus, the translator literally translates “demanding food like cuckoos” into “像杜鹃鸟一样跟我要吃的” in the target text. On the one hand, the translator maintains the intended meaning of the original author in the target text. On the other hand, target language readers are able to obtain humorous effect as source language readers in light of the mutual cognitive environment.

4.2.2. Translation to Make the Intentions Adequately Relevant

Knowing that there are obvious cultural differences between Chinese and English, and the addressee is likely to pick out the most relevant interpretation of the humorous texts; however, the translation of some humorous utterances with cultural-bound item cannot achieve the complete resemblance of the source text. Indirect translation strategy may be adopted in such situation, whose aim is to transmit the basic meaning

of the source text by making some proper changes of the linguistic features of the source text rather than keep the linguistic properties. Under this circumstance, when the cognitive environment of the target text readers is different from that of the source language readers, the translator has to adopt the indirect translation method to make some related aspects of the target text similar to the source text in order to preserve the cognitive effects, including adding or deleting some contents and replacing some expressions with which the target language readers are familiar. According to relevance theory, no matter what translation methods are adopted, the translated text is successful as long as the translation can convey the intentions of the source text and meet the expectations of the target language readers. Indirect translation method can be classified into two subcategories in this paper, consisting of paraphrase and substitution.

4.2.2.1 Paraphrase

When some words or expressions in source language do not have complete equivalence in target language, the translator needs to transmit the essential meaning through different expressions to make the associative meaning manifest and obtain the optimal relevance in translation, which accordingly preserves the humorous effect. Paraphrase is a restatement of the meaning of a text, explaining or clarifying the context in which it appeared, so it is a common translation method adopted by the translator.

Example 4: Context: (Bridget is invited by her parents to join a New Year's turkey party where most of her parents' friends will attend, but she's been late for a long time. When Bridget's father sees her, says.....)

Your mother has the entire Northampton shire constabulary poised to comb the county with toothbrushes for your dismembered remains. Come and demonstrate your presence so I can start enjoying myself.

(Fielding, 1996, p. 11)

为了要找到你，你妈已经出动了北安普敦郡所有的警力，准备把整个郡都翻一遍。赶快过来证明你的出现，我才可以享受这一切。

(Zhuang Jingjun, 2007, p. 10)

Reasoning: The phrase “comb the country with toothbrushes” is a bit modified idiom stemming from the original idiom “fine-tooth comb”, whose literal meaning is a comb with teeth setting close together and the metaphoric usage is “to make a thorough and painstaking search”.

Analysis: Hyperbolic humor will be found in this paragraph. It may be explained in the way that Bridget's father thought that she did not come to the New Year turkey party, in which the figure of speech—hyperbole was used, implying Bridget's mother wants to find her urgently. In this sentence, the idiomatic interpretation of this phrase is normally accessed by source language readers in preference to its literal meaning by considering the context of the whole paragraph. It is not difficult for the source language readers to understand the connotative meaning of this phrase and then appreciate the humorous effect of this sentence because the original author has indicated the intention explicitly through the exaggerated figure of speech.

Nevertheless, this phrase cannot be translated directly because its literal meaning will confuse the target language readers. If the translator literally translates this idiom, it will definitely cause the target readers to make more extra processing efforts to understand it; however, this kind of processing efforts cannot result in obtaining adequate contextual effects because the target language readers lack

such kind of contextual assumptions. Therefore, the translator applies indirect translation method—paraphrase to transmit the connotation of the idiom so that the target language readers can easily understand the original author's intention without paying unnecessary processing efforts. It can be said that paraphrase is a good choice adopted by the translator in this example.

4.2.2.2 Substitution

Substitution is a translation strategy by replacing the words or expressions in source text with words similar in meaning in target text. This kind of translation method preserves the contextual effects to a great extent although the replacement destroys the linguistic properties of the source language. The following examples show how substitution is adopted in the translation of verbal humor in *Bridget Jones's Diary*.

Example 5: Context: (Bridget thought that she was perhaps pregnant prior marriage, so she was not in a mood for work. When Perpetua, a colleague of Bridget, asked her what happened.....)

After forty-five minutes of staring blankly at the computer trying to pretend Perpetua was a Mexican cheese plant whenever she asked me what the matter was, I bolted and went out to a phone booth to ring Sharon.

(Fielding, 1996, p. 102)

对着计算机发呆了四十五分钟，试着假装帕佩嘉是一个仙人掌盆栽，她问我发生什么事，我情绪化地冲了出去，跑到电话亭去打电话给沙伦。

(Zhuang Jingjun, 2007, p. 109)

Reasoning: In source language culture, "Mexican cheese plant" refers to one of species of flowering plants, growing in the tropical forests of southern Mexico. It has been introduced to some tropical areas, which gradually destroys the local ecological environment because it has become a mildly invasive species.

Analysis: Linguistic humor will be found in this paragraph. In this example, Perpetua is a female colleague of Bridget, who strictly observes the traditional British etiquette. If Perpetua had a pregnancy scare, she would wear wedding dress in ten minutes. On this occasion, Bridget thinks that Perpetua maybe hurts her with words if Perpetua knows that she is pregnant. It is like the Mexican cheese-plant, which will do harm to the local ecological environment being as the alien species. Source language readers can easily interpret the implicated meaning instead of the literal meaning because the knowledge about the Mexican cheese-plant has been stored in their cognitive environment. What the original author conveys to them can be regarded as the most relevant information, so they will understand the intention of the original author and the humorous effect can be achieved.

If the translator directly translates this sentence, target language readers will not understand its implicated meaning because it is out of their cognitive ability and reading expectations. Thus, in target text, the Mexican cheese-plant is translated into "仙人掌盆栽", which is also a kind of plant and is familiar to target language readers in target language culture. The interpretive resemblance between these two words restores the contextual effect of the source text and the target language readers obtain reading expectations.

5. Conclusion

This paper applies relevance theory to analyze the translation of verbal humor with a case study on *Bridget Jones's Diary*, which explores the mechanism of generating

verbal humor and the translation strategies of interpreting it. This part will summarize major findings of the present study, indicate its limitations, and offer some possible suggestions for further researches in this field.

5.1. Major Findings

From the above examples, the direct and indirect translation methods of interpreting verbal humor are analyzed in the Chinese version of *Bridget Jones's Diary*. In view of the linguistic and cultural differences between English and Chinese, the translation of verbal humor is known as a challenge for translators and it seems as a paradigm case of untranslatability of verbal humor; however, it may not imply that verbal humor cannot be fully translated from one language to the other. Relevance theory, serving as a powerful and unarguable proof, demonstrates that the translator can adopt direct or indirect translation method to transmit humorous effects of the source text to a certain extent.

Literal translation is a common translation strategy of direct translation method, which is widely used in the Chinese translation of *Bridget Jones's Diary*, and it can faithfully represent the style of the source text. In *Bridget Jones's Diary*, there are many rhetorical devices with humorous effects and the translator sometimes translates those sentences literally because the target language readers share the similar cognitive environment with the source language readers in some situations. Nevertheless, the literal translation sometimes cannot reproduce same humorous effects of the source text when it comes to translate humorous utterance with idioms of source language. Compared with direct translation, indirect translation is more flexible. Paraphrase and substitution are adopted to interpret the humorous utterance of the source text, which are used to translate idioms or cultural-bound items in *Bridget Jones's Diary*. Depending on the translation strategies of paraphrase and substitution, the translator selects similar words, expressions or idioms based on the target language readers' cognitive environment in order to convey the intentions of the original author and transmit the humorous effects of the source text. However, the indirect translation method has its own disadvantages. On the one hand, it maybe restates the information at a cost of destroying the linguistic properties of the source text. On the other hand, it maybe results in misunderstanding if the translator fails to grasp the intentions of the original author.

In sum, this paper attempts to explore to what extent the humorous effects of the source text can be transferred into its Chinese translation, which hopes that it can give some implications theoretically both for the study of verbal humor and the research on the framework of relevance theory. The translation of verbal humor is not a unilateral communication between the original author and the translator, but a communication between the original author, the translator and the target language readers. If the source text is not comprehended correctly by the translator and the essence of communication is also ignored, it may be impossible to translate the humorous utterances of the source text into the target text. Hence, when translating verbal humor, the translator should adopt appropriate translation strategies by taking consideration of the cognitive environment of the target language readers and the cultural elements of the source language in order to obtain the optimal relevance between intentions of the original author and the expectations of the target language readers.

5.2. Limitations and Suggestions for further Study

Except for the research findings, this thesis inevitably exists some limitations which still needs improvement for further study.

First, relevance theory is applied in various fields because it has a powerful explanatory; however, there still exists some problems in which the relevance theory cannot solve. For example, the translator sometimes need to adopt some translation methods to convey the communicative intentions of the original author, but it seems that the translated version may lose the humorous effects to some degree in the target text because the cultural and background information of the source text cannot be constructed in the cognitive environment of the target language readers.

Second, the data in this thesis are excerpted from only *Bridget Jones's Diary* and its Chinese translation. The results may not be comprehensive due to the insufficient data coverage. In other words, the translation strategies summarized in this paper are may not be applicable to other cases of translation of verbal humor.

On account of above limitations, the author proposes some tentative suggestions. First of all, the data of the research need to be expanded in order to make the study more convincing and accurate. Secondly, studies on the translation of verbal humor can be conducted out to test the explanatory of the theory, which deserves a thorough inquiry in this field. At last, the author hopes that more progresses and achievements will be made in the field of exploring the translation of verbal humor.

6. Funding Statement

This paper is supported by University-level General Research Projects of Chaohu University (XWY-202210; XWY-202209)

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