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The Translation of English and Chinese Puns from the Perspective of Relevance Theory

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to provide a relevance-theoretic account for the translation of puns between English and Chinese. The rich cultural connotations behind puns and the distinctive features of the puns' form, sound and meanings pose great challenges to the translator. Relevance Theory, as a communication theory on the basis of cognitive science, emphasises on the achievement of communication efficacy or the 'mutual manifestness' between the communicator and the receptor. Based on such a framework, the author ventures to propose several strategies to translate puns, namely punning correspondence, separate explanation, change of the image, sacrifice of secondary information and editorial means. The preconditions for the adoption of each strategy have also been described through in-depth analysis of different translated versions of the selected corpus with the aim of facilitating the translator's actual practice.

KEYWORDS

Puns, Relevance Theory, translation strategy.

1. Puns—Translatable or Not?

Punning is an ingenious use of homophonic and polysemous phenomena of language with an intention to achieve special effects. As a rhetorical device with strong expressive power it is widely employed in all forms of linguistic communication, ranging from daily conversation to literary works, from advertisements to news reports, and from riddles to jokes. Since puns are most common in English and Chinese, both abundant with monosyllables, a convenient medium for punning (Newmark 1988: 217), it is without doubt that a study on the translation of English and Chinese puns is of great significance and affords much pleasure. However, studies on the translation of puns are quite scarce.

Newmark (1988: 217) outlines some general principles for the translation of different types of puns. For example, puns based on Graeco-Latinisms with near-equivalents in SL and TL are the easiest to be translated, especially when they only embody a contrast between the words' literal and figurative meanings. "If the purpose of the pun is merely to raise laughter, it can sometimes be 'compensated' by another pun on a word with a different but associated meaning" out of "exceptional ingenuity" (*ibid.*). Puns in poems have to be sacrificed owing to the conflict between double meanings and the metrical requirement. Puns with more emphasis on the sense rather than the witticism, e.g. a slip of the tongue or spoonerism, have to be explicated in both senses in the TL. These principles, though brief and sketchy, could be of some practical help to translators when dealing with puns. However, it is believed by Newmark

that "[t]he translation of puns is of marginal importance" (*ibid*.), which might explain why he attaches this section to the chapter of "shorter items" of his book.

Among the few scholars committed to the study of puns and their translation, Dirk Delabastita undoubtedly holds a prominent place. Delabastita (1996: 134) proposes nine strategies[1] for the translation of puns and recognises that the significance of puns lies in their intention, i.e. they are meaningful only when intended to be so (1996: 131-132). But the different strategies proposed for the translation of puns are more product-focused than process-oriented.

Crisafulli (1996) also discusses the conditions for the adoption of compensation in pun translation. But instead of providing a systematic account of pun translation, his purpose is mainly to justify H. F. Cary's avoidance policy when translating Dante's puns in the *Divine Comedy*, giving consideration to the translator's ideology.

Comparing sporadic studies of the translation of puns, the voice on the untranslatability of puns seems to be much louder, which could mainly be accounted for by the following reasons.

Firstly, the status of puns is never a secure one. Over the centuries, puns have been struggling "between acceptability and rejection, nonsense and point, decency and obscenity" (Redfern 1984: 1). The use of puns flourished in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries when "direct and formal combats of wit were a favourite pastime of the courtly and accomplished" (Coleridge 1969: 250). The high esteem of puns is fully demonstrated through their prevalence in various plays by Shakespeare, who employs puns to add vividness to his characters and build up dramatic effects. According to Manhood (1957: 164), the average number of puns in a Shakespearean play is seventy-eight. But the status of puns was somewhat lowered in the eighteenth century when the style of writing in England was characterised by plainness. The nineteenth century saw a revival of puns by humorous writers, most noticeably Lewis Carroll, whose famous novel *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* fascinates children and adults worldwide through its witty language, even today. However, despite Coleridge's efforts to justify Shakespeare's puns through psychological analysis, and Byron's attempts to revive Shakespearean wordplay (Manhood 1957: 11), puns continued to enjoy a low status in the nineteenth-century. China, on the other hand, does not boast renowned punsters like Shakespeare and Carroll, and Chinese puns are traditionally hidden in folk riddles and two-part allegorical sayings. As a result, there is even less attention focused on Chinese puns than on English ones. Puns in modern times are often applied in advertisements and news headlines to attract the precious attention of potential customers or readers, instead of being seriously researched. Therefore, the scattered studies on puns, either English or Chinese, and their underlying mechanisms, have never

entered the mainstream of academia.

Secondly, the translation of puns has always been a hard nut to crack, because the double meanings of puns are always the combined effect of phonological and semantic features, which can hardly be kept when transplanted into another language, especially those belonging to different families. The voices advocating the untranslatability of puns are not weak in the field of translation studies. Although Roman Jakobson (1959: 234), a strong supporter of universalism,[2] claims that all cognitive experience can be conveyed in any existing language, and when there was a deficiency "terminology may be qualified and amplified by loanwords or loan-translations, neologisms or semantic shifts, and finally, by circumlocutions", he has to admit that poetry, over which the pun reigns, "by definition is untranslatable" (1959: 238). J. C. Catford holds a more rational view of translatability, which seems to be "a cline rather than a clear-cut dichotomy" (1965: 93). However, when classifying the limits of translatability into linguistic and cultural ones, he also conveniently puts puns under the former category: "Linguistic untranslatability occurs typically in cases where an *ambiguity* peculiar to the SL text is a functionally relevant feature—e.g. in SL puns" (1965: 94). Reiss also states that "In translation, puns and other kinds of play with language will have to be ignored to a great extent so as to keep the content invariant" (2000: 169). Gary Egan (1994: 2 in Veisbergs 1997: 163)[3] is more pronounced when expressing his view on the translation of puns: "being practically untranslatable […] puns effectively scotch the myth of universality." Such attitudes imply that there is no need to undertake thorough research into the translation of puns and that any attempt to translate puns is doomed to failure.

2. From Equivalence to Relevance

A closer look might reveal that traditional adherence to the untranslatability of puns is, to a great extent, the outcome of the unremitting search for equivalence,[4] which has always been a notion full of controversy. Firstly, equivalence enjoys a dual status both as the object of translation studies and as a criterion for defining translation activity. Secondly, although different scholars interpret equivalence from different perspectives to find a way out of the absolute equation implied in the very term, be it dynamic equivalence (Nida 1964), or pragmatic equivalence (Koller 1989), the abstract notion of equivalence or equivalent effect is hard to evaluate, let alone serving as a yardstick in the assessment of translation works and in the decision-making process of translation practitioners.

To solve such a dilemma, one promising way, as perceived by the present author, is to resort to Relevance Theory, developed by Sperber and Wilson in 1986 on the basis of cognitive science and the theory of pragmatics. Relevance Theory could best explain the ostensive inferential

communication, the success of which depends on the audience's recognition of the communicator's intentions[5] based on a shared cognitive environment in accordance with the principle of relevance.[6] The theory was applied to translation by Gutt (1991), who defines translation as "interlingual interpretive use." The role of the translator is to ensure "optimal relevance," i.e. "an expectation on the part of the hearer that his attempt at interpretation will yield adequate contextual effects at minimal processing cost" (1991: 30).

Relevance Theory offers an empirical, cognition-based explanation of translation. It could help us redefine the fundamental relation between a translation and its source text, which is based not on equivalence, but on interpretive resemblance. This promises greater freedom for the translator: there is simply no fixed norm of equivalence underlying 'good' translation. Translation, when viewed from the perspective of communication conditioned by the principle of relevance, becomes a triploid interaction among the writer, the translator and the target reader instead of the traditional dichotomic focus on the producing end (the writer) and the receiving end (the reader) alone. Such openness embodied in Relevance Theory also promises a much larger scope for the translation of puns than that allowed by the ideal notion of equivalence. After the extraction of the writer's assumed intentions and careful assessment of the shared cognitive environment, the translator can then adopt various accommodative ways to recreate the special effects of puns intended by the original writer with the lowest possible processing effort on the reader's side. Thus, Relevance Theory provides a new perspective for viewing puns and their translation.

3. A Relevance-theoretic Account of Pun Translation

Relevance Theory provides a new perspective for viewing puns and their translation. Firstly, it highlights the importance of understanding the intentions of the punsters, which, as argued by the present author, can serve as the dividing line between punning and ambiguity. As mentioned above, there is an asymmetry between language and the objective world it denotes. "The fact that people and trees and elephants and cars all have trunks just proves that there are more things than there are words" (Hughes and Hammond 1978 in Redfern 1984: 7). Such asymmetry is necessary for efficiency in linguistic communication, but it also gives rise to the phenomenon of ambiguity—a word, phrase or sentence having more than one reference, which can result in different misunderstandings or even communication failure, and is thus best. Punning, on the other hand, is an intentional use of the ambiguous nature of language in order to achieve some special effects in specific contexts. The punning word or phrase serves as a pivot to correlate two unrelated meanings into a unified entity and the role of the translator, according to Relevance Theory, is to invoke two interpretations in the cognitive environment of the target reader, whose recognition of the punster's intention and the discovery of

the relevance of the two meanings are essential for the success of communication. Hence, it is of paramount importance to probe into the underlying intentions behind puns in order to form a better understanding of this distinctive linguistic phenomenon.

Secondly, Relevance Theory falsifies the untranslatability of puns. Owing to the unique features of puns, namely, two meanings crowded in homophonic or polysemous words or phrases for some special effects, it is impossible, except on extremely rare occasions, to achieve equivalence or equivalent effects of both the lexical and semantic aspects between the ST and the TT. This is because a polysemous word in the source language might not be polysemous or may entail entirely different emotive or stylistic meanings in the receptor language, and because there are also interlingual differences on the phonological level. However, it does not mean that puns are untranslatable and that the translator could conveniently give up the effort to translate puns. It is emphasised by Relevance Theory that translation is a kind of verbal communication, the success of which depends on the audience's recognition of the communicator's intention through the inferential model rather than the mechanic transplant of the linguistic codes. Since the purpose of the source writer in adopting the rhetoric device of punning is to express some implicit meanings or to provide the reader with some special aesthetic enjoyment through the ingenious use of puns, the faithfulness to the exact wording or the sentence structure is, in comparison, not so important and can be sacrificed to some extent in the case of a conflict of choices. Based on Relevance Theory the central concern of the translator is not to achieve some fixed standard of 'equivalence,' but rather successful communication, or the identification of what the translator intends to communicate to the target reader. To achieve this, the translator can adopt various accommodative means to recreate the intended effects of the source writer that can be appreciated by the target reader.

Finally, Relevance Theory provides us with a new theoretical framework to guide the translation of puns from the perspective of cognitive pragmatics. Notions like optimal relevance, cognitive environment, contextual effects and processing efforts are effective tools for the translator to infer the intention of the source writer and the accessibility of that intention by the target reader. In addition, Relevance Theory can help us evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of different translation strategies and prescribe the conditions for the adoption of each strategy. This would undoubtedly facilitate the decision-making process and the assessment of pun translation.

Based on the above analysis, this paper will illustrate, from the perspective of Relevance Theory, four strategies on the translation of puns by analysing some examples with different translated versions.

4.   Strategies to Translate Puns: a Relevance-theoretic Approach

4.1 Punning Correspondence

Although it is hard to maintain the lexical and phonological features of puns in the target culture, there are still a few examples reflecting punning correspondence between the ST and the TT. Such correspondence occurs when the cognitive environment of the source writer concerning the processing of puns tallies with that of the target reader so that the latter could extract the intended contextual effects with the least possible processing effort. It should be noted that the achievement of punning correspondence is not only based on lucky coincidence, but also the translator's correct assessment of the shared cognitive environment of the source writer and the target reader so as to ensure the efficacy of the translated version.

Generally speaking, there are three kinds of punning correspondence, namely, homophonic correspondence, polysemous correspondence and allusive correspondence.

4.1.1 Homophonic Correspondence

Homophonic correspondence is achieved when the homophones in the ST could be transplanted in the TT without any sacrifice of the original meaning as in "separate pear, separate pair" and its Chinese translation "分梨，分离[7]". Of course, this is a perfect example of homophonic correspondence in the two languages, implying less creativity during the translation process, but in most cases, the translator needs to actively seek the most relevant homophone to the cognitive environment of the target reader so that the latter can realise the punning intention of the source writer without unnecessary processing effort. Let us look at another example from Lewis Carroll's well-known fairy tale *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*:

> **Example 1:**
> "But they were in the **well**," Alice said to the Dormouse…
> "Of course they were," said the Dormouse, — "**well** in."
> （Carroll *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*，chap. 7）
>
> a. 她又对那惰儿鼠问到，"但是她们自己已经在井里头嘞…"
>   那惰儿鼠道，"自然她们在**井**里头—— **尽**尽里头。"
> (translated by Zhao Yuanren）
>
> b. "但是她们在井里面。"爱丽丝对睡鼠说…
>   "她们当然在**井**里头，"睡鼠说，"在**紧**里头。"
> (translated by Shi Xinying）
>
> c. "但是她们在井里呀！"爱丽丝对睡鼠说
>   "当然她们在井里啦，"睡鼠说，"还在很里面呢。"

(translated by Guan Shaochun）

d. "可她们是在井里呀，"爱丽丝对睡鼠说...
　　"她们当然是，"睡鼠说，"在井里边呢。"
(translated by Zhang Xiaolu）

The noun "well" in the phrase "in the well" and the adverb "well" as in "well in" form a pair of horizontal puns.[8] The intention of the writer is simply to play on the word for the amusement of the reader. This is taken fully into consideration by both Zhao and Shi, who adopt corresponding homophones[9] like "井" (well) —— "尽" (to the end of) and "井" (well) —— "紧" (close to the end) to recreate the punning effect. The target reader could retrieve from the lexical entry of his/her cognitive environment the exact meaning of the words "尽" and "紧" under the specific context while appreciating the homophonic punning, which might bring an understanding smile to his face as intended by the source writer. In comparison, although version c (far inside) and d (in the well) convey the literal meaning of the ST, implying less processing effort on the reader, the fun brought by the pun is totally sacrificed, resulting in a failure to reproduce the writer-intended contextual effects.

4.1.2 Polysemous Correspondence

Polysemous correspondence, as its name suggests, refers to the punning effect triggered by corresponding polysemants in the ST and the TT. It happens when the different meanings of a punning word overlap in the cognitive environment of the source writer and the target reader. Look at the following example:

Example 2:
If the man be a bachelor, sir, I can;
but if he be a married man,
he's his wife's **head**,
and I can never cut off a woman's head.
(Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*: IV.ii.2-5)

他要是个光棍汉子，那就好办了，可是他要是有老婆的，那么人家说丈夫是妻子的**头**，叫我杀女人的头，我可下不了手。
(translated by Zhu Shenghao）

The words are uttered from the mouth of Pompey, a clown and servant to a bawd. Like all clowns depicted by Shakespeare, Pompey is glib-tongued and adept in wordplays, bringing laughter to the reader. In this example, the word "head" is a polysemous pun, referring both to the uppermost part of one's body and a person who rules or is in charge. Luckily, both meanings are contained in the lexical entry of the Chinese corresponding word of "head" (头). Therefore the translated version not only preserves the literal meaning of the ST but also the writer-intended punning effect, which can be easily discovered by the target reader according to his

shared cognitive environment with the source writer.

4.1.3 Allusive Correspondence

Allusive correspondence is achieved when the connotations of a punning word or phrase under specific contexts correspond with each other in the ST and the TT. The role of the translator is to render the ST in a literal manner, maintaining the surface meaning of the pun, and leaves the extraction of the implied meaning to the target reader. Although the reader has to invest more processing effort to discover the other meaning of the pun, he could nevertheless obtain a greater amount of contextual effects that are worth the effort. Here are two examples for allusive correspondence in the translation of puns:

> **Example 3:**
> Hamlet: Drink off this potion. Is thy **union** here?
>   Follow my mother.
> (Shakespeare, Hamlet: V.ii.331-332)
>
> a. 哈姆莱特：喝干了这杯毒药——你那颗**珍珠**是在这儿吗？——
>   跟我的母亲一道去吧！
> (translated by Zhu Shenghao）
>
> b. 哈：喝下这杯酒去！你的珍珠在里面罢？跟我母亲去！
> (translated by Liang Shiqiu）
>
> c. 哈：喝干这一杯毒药！收你的珍珠吧！追我的母亲去吧。
> (translated by Bian Zhilin）
>
> d. 汉姆莱特：你把这一半给我喝下去：你的珍珠还在里头吗？
>   跟我的妈妈去吧。
> (translated by Cao Weifeng）

Hamlet puns on the double meanings of "union" when he forces the king to drink the poisoned wine. From the preceding context, the reader may understand the word "union" as the poisoned pearl dissolved in the wine in the chalice that the king has schemed to offer Hamlet but which is accidentally drunk by the queen. However, "union" could also be interpreted as "marriage," alluding to the queen lying dead on the floor. Through the use of a pun, Hamlet achieves his intention of not only satirising the king who digs his own tomb, but also of hastening his reunion with his cherished wife, already in hell. All the four versions translate "union" as "珍珠" (pearl), but with different contextual effects. Hamlet's words are rendered as "isn't your pearl here?" in version a. With the ambiguous adverb "here," the sentence could be interpreted both as "isn't your pearl in the chalice?" and "isn't your cherished wife lying on the ground?," since the Chinese word "珍珠" has the connotation of something precious as apple of one's eye. Therefore the target reader, in his effort to seek optimal relevance between "珍珠" and the next sentence "follow my mother," would understand the alluded meaning of the word as a

reference to the queen and thus obtain the punning effect. In comparison, the punning sentence is translated as "is your pearl (still) inside?" in version b and d, which rules out the possibility of the reader's identification of the pun. Based on the logical entry in the cognitive environment of the target reader, the only interpretation of the sentence is "is your pearl inside the chalice," since nobody would expect to find the queen inside the small chalice. Version c renders the sentence as "Get back your pearl," which indicates that the king is eating the bitter fruit of his own making, but it is slightly different from the original wording and contains no allusive meaning either.

> **Example 4:**
> Antonio: For if the Jew do cut but deep enough,
>   I'll pay it instantly **with all my heart**.
> (Shakespeare, The Merchant of Venice: IV.i.278-279)
>
> a. 安东尼奥：只要那犹太人的刀刺的深一点，我就可以在一刹那的时间把那笔债完全还清。
> (translated by Zhu Shenghao）
>
> b. 安东尼：只要那犹太人一刀子扎得深一点，一刹那，我就**全心全意**，还了债！
> (translated by Fang Ping）
>
> c. 安：因为只消犹太人割得够深，我便情甘意愿的一下子替你偿清。
> (translated by Liang Shiqiu）

Facing the sentence to repay the debt to Shylock with a pound of flesh near the heart, Antonio is ready to die. The punning phrase "with all my heart" has two connotations. On the surface, Antonio tries to comfort Bassanio, the one he borrows the money for, and for whom he is willing to sacrifice himself out of friendship. But the real intention of Antonio is to make a wry jest about the debt, exposing the sinister motives of Shylock to kill him by cutting the entire heart out of his body. Version a (I'll instantly pay off all my debt) unfortunately fails to convey any of the connotations of the ST, resulting in a total loss of the punning effect. Although version c (I'll **willingly** pay off my debt) preserves the surface meaning of the phrase, expressing the willingness of Antonio to die for friendship, it still cannot invoke in the cognitive environment of the target reader the real intention behind the pun, and could not be regarded as an efficacious translation. The ST pun is best maintained in version b, since the Chinese phrase "全心全意" contains both the meaning of "with the entire heart" (全心) and "willingness" (全意). According to the specific context and the principle of relevance, the target reader might realise the punning intention and have a better understanding of Antonio's generosity and optimism as opposed to the malicious nature of Shylock. Another alternative Chinese version suggested by the present author might be "用心(还债)" (with one's heart / earnestly), which happens to convey both meanings of the original pun.

From the above examples, we can see that sometimes, owing to

interlingual coincidence or the ingenuity of the translator, the effect of puns in the ST can be reproduced with corresponding puns in the TT. But it should also be clarified that the identification of the punning intention finally lies in the target reader, whose willingness and capability to infer the underlying connotations with extra processing effort would determine whether he could obtain the writer-intended contextual effects. Therefore the translator has to assess carefully the cognitive environment of the target reader to ensure that the double meanings of a pun could be evoked under the specific context in the process of seeking optimal relevance.

4.2 Separate Explanation

In most cases, it is not possible to achieve punning correspondence in translation. When the pun's equally important double meanings cannot be accommodated in a single word or phrase, the translator can adopt the strategy of separate explanation, namely, explaining separately both the literal meaning and the connotative meanings of the ST pun. Although the explanation of a pun's double meanings naturally reduces the amount of processing effort by the target reader, it also results in a decline in the overall contextual effects. Therefore the translator should exert all possible efforts to make up for the loss of the punning effect through other means and strike a balance between efficacy and fidelity. The following examples might provide some illustrations of the strategy of separate explanation:

> **Example 5**
> 春蚕到死*丝*方尽，蜡炬成灰泪始干。
> (Li Shangyin，《Untitled》〉
>
> The silkworm spins **silk** from **lovesick** heart till its death,
> The candle has no tears to shed only when burnt to its end.
> (My translation)

The two lines are taken from a sentimental poem about unswerving love, which is written by Li Shangyin, a famous poet of late Tang Dynasty. The poet puns on a pair of homophones "*丝*" (silk) and "(情) 思" (lovesickness)[10] to express his passion of love, which will keep on burning inside him until his death, just like a silkworm that does not stop spinning silk until the last moment of its life. Since there is no English word containing both meanings of the original pun, the translator therefore adopts two words "silk" and "lovesick" by way of separate explanation. Although the English version fails to convey the implicit feelings of the poet embodied in the pun, it gives expression to the intended message while keeping the metaphor in the ST. Besides, the similar sound of "silk" and "sick" could, to some extent, compensate the loss of the punning effect.

4.3 Change of Image

Because of linguistic and cultural differences, maintaining the ST's punning image would not always achieve the intended effect in the TT. As suggested by Relevance Theory, when it is impossible to maintain both the form and the flavour of the ST, what matters most is not fidelity but efficacy, or whether the intention of the source writer could be recognised by the target reader. To achieve this goal, the translator can abandon the original image and seek another one whose double meanings could be accessed by the target reader. Let us look at the following examples:

> **Example 6**
> (Mock Turtle)
> "The master was an old Turtle—we used to call him Tortoise—"
> "Why did you call him Tortoise, if he wasn't one?" Alice asked.
> "We called him **Tortoise** because he **taught us**," said the Mock Turtle
> angrily; "really you are very dull!"
> (Carroll *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, chap. 9)

> a. "我们的先生是一个老甲鱼 ——我们总叫他**老忘**。"
>   阿丽思问道，"他是个什么王，你们会叫他**老王**呢？"
>   那素甲鱼怒道，"我们管这老甲鱼叫老忘，因为他老忘记了教我们的工（功）课。你怎么这么笨？"
> (translated by Zhao Yuanren)

> b. "老师是一只老海龟——我们总叫他乌龟 …"
>   "它不是乌龟，你们为什么这样叫呢？"爱丽丝问。
>   "我们叫它乌龟是因为它教我们。"素甲鱼生气地说，"你真笨！"
> (translated by Shi Xinying)

> c. "我们的老师是一只老甲鱼，我们都叫他胶鱼。"
>   "既然他不是胶鱼，为什么要那么叫呢？"爱丽丝问。
>   "我们叫他**胶鱼**，因为他**教**我们呀。"素甲鱼生气地说，"你真笨！"
> (translated by Guan Shaochun)

> d. "校长是一只老海龟——我们总叫他陆龟——"
>   "既然他不是陆龟，你们为什么还这样叫他？"爱丽斯问。
>   "我们叫他陆龟是因为他给我们上课，"假海龟生气地说，"你真是不开窍！"
> (translated by Zhang Xiaolu)

In this example, Carroll adopts a pair of horizontal puns "Tortoise" and its homophone "taught us" to arouse the reader's laughter. Shi and Zhang simply translate them by their literal meanings, making no sense to the target reader. Zhao uses "老王（忘）[11]" (Mr. Wang/ Mr. Forgetful) and "忘记教我们功课" (forget to teach us) to convey the humorous effect of the pun, which is quite intriguing. But a keen reader might notice that the version "forget to teach us" not only differs from the original meaning, but even runs counter to it. In comparison, version c should be applauded for the innovative effort of the translator, who changes the image of "tortoise" into "glue fish" (胶鱼), since "胶" (glue) is a homophone[12] to "教" (teach), thus best conveying the punning intention of the source writer. It should

be admitted that "胶鱼" or "glue fish" is coined by the translator, but with some processing effort, the target readers can, according to their cognitive environment, associate the term with some kind of fish, which also belongs to marine life. Compared with version a that changes the image of a tortoise into "Mr. Wang/Forgetful", "胶鱼" in version c obviously achieves a higher degree of relevance to the ST. Although the image of a tortoise is sacrificed, the additional processing effort of understanding "胶鱼" can be offset by the increased punning effect realised through the Chinese homophones of "胶" and "教".

A change of images is an accommodative way in the translation of puns, which aims to arouse the writer-intended contextual effects in the cognitive environment of the target reader at the expense of a slight sacrifice of fidelity to the ST. Yet the new image the translator adopts must fit into the specific context and caters to the taste of the target reader, who is expected to retrieve the double meanings of puns without gratuitous processing effort.

4.4 Sacrifice Secondary Information

When the above manoeuvres of accommodation could not provide a satisfactory answer to the translation of puns, especially when the two meanings embodied in the puns are not of equal importance or are both indispensable to the conveyance of the writer's intention, the translator could adopt the strategy of sacrificing the secondary information of the pun based on his assessment of the specific context and the accessibility of the preserved information in the cognitive environment of the target reader. In addition, the translator also needs to resort to other creative means to compensate for the loss of the punning effect. Here are some examples:

Example 7
Benvolio: Here comes Romeo, here comes Romeo!
Mercutio: Without his **roe**, like a dried herring. O flesh, flesh, how art thou fishified!
(*Romeo and Juliet*: II.iv.37-39)

a. 班伏里奥：罗密欧来了，罗密欧来了。
茂丘西奥：瞧他孤零零的神气，倒像一条风干的咸鱼。啊，你这块肉呀，你是怎样变成了鱼的！
(translated by Zhu Shenghao）

b. 班：罗密欧来了，罗密欧来了。
　　　墨：除掉了他的鱼子，像是一条干咸鱼[1]。肉呀，肉呀，你怎么变成鱼了！
(translated by Liang Shiqiu）
[注释 1：原文 Without his roe, like a dried
herring，所谓 roe 显然是与 Romeo 一字的第一音节有关，故一般以为此句之意义乃是说罗密欧
颓唐憔悴的样子大异往常，像一条去了鱼卵的干瘪的咸鱼。又有人认为 Romeo 去掉 Ro 便只剩了
meo（哎息自伤语）。]

> c. 班浮柳：来了，柔蜜欧来了，柔蜜欧来了。
> 墨故求：（瞥见，忍不住对他嘻笑）只有公，没有母，柔蜜欧一个人就象一条晒干了的咸鱼。哦，心肝哪，肉啊！你怎么干巴巴地变成一条咸鱼了呢！
> (translated by Cao Yu）
>
> d. 般务利欧：罗米欧来了，罗米欧来了。
> 穆克修：把他的罗字拿掉，倒很象是鱼的名字：啊，人哪，人哪，你怎么变成一条鱼了！
> (translated by Cao Weifeng）

The word "roe" has three senses: (a) the first syllable of Romeo's name; (b) deer (a pun on "dear") and (c) reproductive organs of a male fish. Accordingly, Mercutio's words could be interpreted in the following three ways: (a) with "Ro" reduced from his name, Romeo is left with nothing but "me—O", the cry of a despairing lover; (b) The words could be understood as Mercutio teasing Romeo for his lovesickness—distracted without his "dear" lover; (c) Mercutio develops the third sense of "roe" and compares Romeo to be a dried herring with its reproductive organs removed.

Faced with such rich connotations that cannot be crowded in the limited space of the TT, the translator has to make a choice to prioritise the primary information the speaker intends to convey. To do this, he needs to assess the cognitive environment of Mercutio at the time of the utterance: Mercutio believes that Romeo's mysterious disappearance the previous night must have something to do with Rosaline, who is fancied by Romeo but who takes no interest in him. From the weary expression on Romeo's face, Mercutio probably guesses that his friend is heartbroken by Rosaline's rejection of love. It is of course not in the cognitive environment of Mercutio that Romeo has fallen in love with Juliet at first sight and spent a sleepless night anticipating the latter's response to his proposal of marriage. Therefore, according to the principle of relevance, the chief intention of Mercutio in punning on "roe" is based on the second sense—teasing Romeo for his lovesickness and trying to liven up the atmosphere with a humorous simile. Version a totally abandons the literal meanings of "roe" and simply renders as "solitary manner," failing to convey the writer-intended contextual effect. Versions b[13] and d[14] however preserve the third and the first senses of the pun respectively, which is not quite relevant to the specific context and could not be well appreciated by the target reader. Although version b adds a footnote explaining the punning mechanism, this would not only put an extra burden on the reader, but also lose the humorous effect intended by the writer. Version a and version c focus on the dejected sentiments of Romeo, conveying the primary information of the ST, but the special flavour of the original pun disappears without a trace, depriving the reader of the writer-intended enjoyment.

To improve the above versions, the present author ventures to translate Mercutio's words as "失去了爱情的甜蜜，倒像条风干的咸鱼" [Without the

sweet honey in love, (he's) more like a **salty** dried fish]. The reasons are as follows. Firstly, this version preserves both the primary information of mocking Romeo for lovesickness and the humorous simile of the dried fish. Secondly, the word "蜜" as in "甜蜜" (sweetness) puns with its homophone[15] "密" in "罗密欧" (Romeo), which, to some extent, could also be deemed as a play on Romeo's name. Thirdly, the word "甜" (sweet) in the first half of the sentence and "咸" (salty) in the latter half form a sharp contrast, another wordplay alluding to the sharp difference in Romeo's appearance. Lastly, the two phrases of the sentence are composed of the same number of words, resulting in a poetic effect which is quite appropriate to be spoken out of the mouth of Mercutio who carries the air of a poet. It is admitted that the proposed version might not be the perfect one, but it at least reflects the author's attempt to recreate some of the punning effect lost in the target culture, and the extra processing efforts on the part of the target readers would be worthwhile for the newly-retrieved contextual effects intended by the source writer.

4.5 Editorial Means

Editorial means include footnotes, endnotes, translator's comments in the foreword or afterword, explanations in parentheses, etc. which should be adopted with discretion. Normally, the use of footnotes, endnotes or explanations in parentheses would not only disrupt the smoothness of the TT, increasing the processing effort of the target reader, but also, most importantly, destroy the punning effect and fail to match the writer's intention with the reader's expectation, the key to the success of translation. Therefore it should always be regarded as the last resort for the translation of puns. However, as mentioned in the above analysis, such editorial means might be combined with other strategies, explaining the lost sense of the pun to help the target reader achieve a thorough understanding of the writer's intention.

The translator's comments are also an important means to provide metatextual assistance to the translation of puns. For a literary work characterised by the playful use of language, the translator might explain his overall translation strategy in the foreword or afterword so as to prepare the target reader for the amount of the processing effort he is required to invest and the expectations they could reasonably hold during the reading process. For example, in the foreword of his translation of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Zhao Yuanren clarifies his translation principle: Sometimes, if we keep too closely to the ST in our translation, then the smooth language would become awkward; funny puns, serious non-puns; rhymed poems, unrhymed non-poems and idioms, non-idioms. So to achieve the desired effect of the original work, we'd better slightly sacrifice the criterion of accuracy.

Editorial means, either in the form of footnotes or the translator's

comments, open another channel of communication with the target reader and could serve as the backup strategy for the thorny issue of pun translation.

5. Conclusion

This paper aimed to show that Relevance Theory provides a new perspective for the translation of puns. As suggested by Relevance Theory, translation is a special form of interlingual communication and is by nature imperfect. Therefore, the criterion for translation should not be of any fixed standard of equivalence but interpretive resemblance in accordance with the principle of relevance. Translation, when viewed from the perspective of Relevance Theory, is a triploid interaction among the source writer, the translator and the target reader. When a conflict arises between fidelity and efficacy as in most cases of pun translation, the translator is advised to focus on the efficacy of the TT, i.e. whether the punning intention of the original writer could be identified in the cognitive environment of the target reader. Based on this understanding, the author goes on to propose several strategies for the translation of puns, including punning correspondence, separate explanation, change of images, sacrifice of secondary information and editorial means. An analysis of the conditions for choosing each strategy is also made under the framework of Relevance Theory, which is hoped to be of some practical help to translation practitioners.

However, due to the tentative nature of this paper, the author is also fully aware of the following limitations. Firstly, although Relevance Theory points out a promising direction for the study of puns and their translation, it only provides a macroscopic concept of viewing communication from cognitive-pragmatic perspectives instead of detailed parameters for its application. Therefore it is hard to exclude subjectivity from the process of the inferential analysis. Secondly, it should be admitted that the identification and translation of puns are, to a large extent, decided by many factors including the translator's alertness, language competence, especially creativity and a careful assessment of the cognitive environment of both the source writer and the target reader. Sometimes the translator might have exhausted all kinds of translation strategies without any success and may be at a total loss when suddenly being struck by magical inspiration. Besides, the appreciation of pun translation and the extraction of the punning effect are finally determined by the target reader, whose expectation and the inferential capability are also key to the successful completion of the communication process. Thirdly, because of the limited scope of this paper, the examples included are necessarily limited and not fully elaborated on and thus might not be convincing enough.

All in all, the survey into the kaleidoscope of puns and their translation is not only interesting but also quite promising. Although there are bound to

be unimaginable challenges in the research process, it is firmly believed by the present author that what is to be explored is a gold mine worth the strenuous efforts of ambitious and enterprising miners.

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[1] The nine strategies include: (1) A SL pun translated into a similar TL pun; (2) a pun translated into a non-pun, maintaining both senses of ambiguity; (3) a pun translated into a non-pun, keeping only one sense of ambiguity; (4) a pun translated into a punoid or pseudo-wordplay through the adoption of rhetorical devices such as repetition, alliteration, rhyme, referential vagueness, irony and paradox; (5) omission or 'zero' translation of puns; (6) literal rendering of the pun; (7) a non-pun translated into a pun; (8) a pun created out of thin air in the TT; (9) a pun explained through editorial techniques like footnotes and forward.

[2] Universalists, as opposed to relativists, believe in the existence of a universal language structure based on the universality of human nature and psychology, which guarantees interchangeability or effability of all languages.

[3] Since the original book of Egan neither is listed in the primary sources of Veisbergs's references nor can be found through other means, this paper only includes Veisbergs's article in its references.

[4] The notion of equivalence has a powerful and lasting influence in the field of translation studies. Jakobson (1959: 233) believes that "translation involves two equivalent messages in two different codes" although he recognises that there could not be full equivalence between linguistic codes of different origins. Catford (1965: 98) also attributes linguistic untranslatability to the failure to find a TL equivalent due to differences between SL and TL.

[5] Sperber and Wilson (1986) divide intention into informative intention and communicative intention. The former one refers to the communicator's intention to inform the audience of a set of assumptions, while the latter one means the intention to have one's informative intention recognised by the audience.

[6] According to Sperber and Wilson (1986: 158), the principle of relevance implies that "[e]very act of ostensive communication communicates the presumption of its own optimal relevance". The notion would be further elaborated in the literature review of Relevance Theory in chapter 2.2.

[7] Both pronounced as *fenli* (first tone for *fen* and second tone for *li*) in Chinese.

[8] According to Delabastita (1996: 128-129), horizontal puns entail two or more occurrences of the original word or phrase with a different meaning or words of the same or similar sound, while vertical puns involve a single occurrence of a word or phrase with at least two layers of meaning triggered by the context.

[9] The Chinese pronunciations for homophones of "井", "尽" and "紧" are *jing* (third tone), *jin* (fourth tone) and *jin* (third tone) respectively.

[10] Both are pronounced as *si* (first tone) in Chinese.

[11] Both "王" and "忘" are pronounced as *wang* in
 Chinese, only with different tones (second tone for "王" and fourth tone for "忘").

[12] Both are pronounced as *jiao* (first tone) in Chinese.

[13] Version b explicate "roe" as fish eggs and attaches a footnote explaining the reason for such comparison: Romeo is as depressed as a dried herring, and as some argue, with "Ro" reduced from his name, Romeo is left with nothing but "meo", the cry of a despairing lover.

[14] Version d is literally rendered as "Dropping the first syllable, the name of Romeo sounds like a fish! Oh, man. How come you are turned into a fish?"

[15] Both "蜜" and "密" are pronounced as *mi* (fourth tone) in Chinese.