

Manipulating Communication in Translation

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It is widely recognised that translation is an act of communication (Hatim & Mason 1997) and a form of intercultural communication (House 2009). So it can be argued that translation then essentially lies in the domain of communication, the ultimate goal of which is to achieve communication by transmitting the intended message to the target audience. Before we can illuminate the translation process, we need first of all to understand how human beings communicate and how we convey and comprehend intentions above and beyond linguistic texts. A translator as a communicator has a dual role which involves interpreting utterances in the source language according to its comprehension roadmap, then re-constructing the comprehended message and communicating it to target language audiences according to their comprehension and cognition structure. Translation therefore is a double act of communication, which is further compounded by the proposition that sameness in two languages does not exist (Mary Snell-Hornby 1988, Barnstone 1993).

In communication, a key role is played by the audience. The concept of audience design was first introduced by the sociolinguist Allan Bell in 1984 in his seminal article "Language Style as Audience Design". Bell, through his research, finds that speakers shift their language style based on their knowledge of their audience and concludes that "speakers design their style for their audience". Bell divides the audience into four categories of hearers who impose different levels of impact on the speaker's language style, depending on their direct or indirect relationship with the speaker. When applying audience design in translation, it means that the translator needs to identify who his audience is and respond to his audience accordingly.

In late 1980s, Sperber and Wilson (1986, 1995) developed the influential communication theory the relevance theory. According to the relevance theory, human communication involves two elements: expression which is what is said and cognition of intentions which is what is meant. The former does not automatically lead to the latter. There is always a gap between the linguistic meanings of expressions and what speakers intend to communicate. Such a gap is filled by inference (Clark 2013). Utterance comprehension is not a linear encoding-decoding process but an inferential process which draws on contextual implications or assumptions.

So what does this double act of communication in translation involve and how does manipulation work to ensure the success of such communication? Dr Jing Han who has had over 20 years' experience in translation practice and teaching will illustrate with publicly tested examples from the Chinese TV shows and films that she has subtitled for Australian audiences.

