

# Relevance Theory Perspective in Translating Media Implicit Meaning from English into Arabic

**Nathume Younis Salih**

**Al-Noor University College.**

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## Abstract

This research focuses on translating implicit meaning conveyed through media news reports within the framework of relevance theory.

Relevance theory focuses on a core concept which dictates that speakers and listeners are interested and pay more attention to information that is relevant to their basic beliefs, thoughts, ideas, etc. In other words, a message will be optimally relevant if it is closely related to the audience points of interest, inclinations, preferences, etc.

Implicit meaning is the meaning intended by the speaker when making an utterance. Therefore, implicit meaning shows the difference between what is said and what is meant. The significance of this study stems from the fact that misunderstanding might sometimes occur in the communication process particularly when the hearer does not understand the meaning intended by the speaker. To convey the implicit meaning properly, translators should render this intended meaning accurately, thus hearers would be able to easily comprehend the targeted meaning.

Most media broadcast materials are intended to convey certain messages to their viewers and listeners. Those messages are implicitly expressed to achieve the required impact on the targeted audience. This targeted impact might be aimed to create a public opinion or certain collective tendencies towards supporting or opposing certain issues that could political, social or economic related.

The study aims at exploring various translation options available for the translator when handling the translation of the news reports implicit and intended meaning within the framework of relevance theory.

The study hypothesizes that news reports are loaded with implicit and hidden meaning and this meaning should be conveyed to their respective audience properly and in a way that conforms to the intended targeted original message.

The study also hypothesizes that only competent translators would be able to convey the implicit meaning intended by the message sender.

The third hypothesis is that listeners and text receivers will depend on their background knowledge, beliefs, and ideas to construe and comprehend the intended message in addition to making use of the surrounding context.

Finally, within the framework of relevance theory, the study hypothesizes that the intended message will be optimally relevant for the audience and hence easily received and comprehended if it is related to their interests, ideas, perspectives, inclinations, thoughts etc.

The model adopted in this research is Grice's linguistic model 1975. This model provides an appropriate framework for the analysis of the implicit meaning which represents the core focus of this research.

The procedure adopted throughout this research will focus on translating some English news reports cited from BBC and CNN news agencies. The translation versions provided have been conducted by journalistic translators employed by both news outlets. The analysis will be mainly focused on the implicit intended meaning targeted by the news reports and how this meaning could be conveyed through the renderings of the translators to the audience within the framework of relevance theory.

**Keywords:** Communication, inference, interpretation, relevance , optimal, translation.

## نظرية الغرض في ترجمة المعنى الضمني للتقارير الاخبارية من اللغة الانكليزية الى اللغة العربية

ناظم يونس صالح

كلية النور الجامعة

### المستخلص

تركز الدراسة على ترجمة المعنى الضمني الذي يتم ارساله الى المتلقي من خلال تقارير وسائل الاعلام في اطار نظرية العلاقة . تركز النظرية على المفهوم الاساسي الذي يؤكد على ان المتكلم والمستمع يكونوا مهتمين بالمعلومات ذات الصلة بأرائهم وافكارهم او بمعنى اخر فان الرسالة ستكون وثيقة الصلة اذا كانت ذات علاقة باهتمامات وميول الجمهور المتلقي.

المعنى الضمني هو المعنى المستهدف من قبل المتكلم ولهذا فان المعنى الضمني يبين الفرق بين ما يقوله المتكلم وبين ما يعنيه. تكمن اهمية هذه الدراسة بان سوء الفهم قد يحدث احيانا اثناء عملية التواصل خاصة عندما لا يفهم المستمع المعنى المستهدف من المتكلم.

من اجل اوصول المعنى الضمني الى المتلقي فان على المترجم ان يقوم بترجمة المعنى المستهدف بصورة دقيقة بحيث يستطيع المتلقي ان يفهم المعنى المستهدف بسهولة.

تستهدف الكثير من التقارير الاخبارية عملية نقل رسائل معينة وهذه الرسائل تحمل الكثير من المعاني الضمنية من اجل التأثير بالجمهور المتلقي عن طريق تغيير الراي العام او خلق توجهات معينة من اجل دعم او معارضة قضايا معينة قد تكون ذات طابع سياسي او اجتماعي او اقتصادي الخ.

تهدف الدراسة الى استكشاف خيارات الترجمة المتاحة للمترجم عندما يقوم بترجمة المعنى الضمني للتقارير الصحفية في اطار نظرية العلاقة . تفترض الدراسة بأن التقارير الاخبارية تحمل في طياتها المعاني الضمنية التي يجب ان يتم اوصولها الى الجمهور المستهدف بكفاءة عالية. كما تفترض ايضا بان عملية اوصول المعنى المستهدف تتم فقط من خلال وجود المترجمين المؤهلين للقيام بمهمة الترجمة حسب رؤية النص الاصلي.

واخير تفترض الدراسة بان متلقي النص المترجم سيعتمدون على معلوماتهم وافكارهم لتفسير وفهم المعنى المستهدف اضافة الى الاستفادة من السياق للتوصل الى المعنى.

وقد تم اعتماد نموذج كرايس اللغوي لعام ١٩٧٥ لهذه الدراسة لأنه يوفر الاطار الملائم لتحليل المعنى الضمني . وبالنسبة للإجراءات المتبعة فسيكون هناك ترجمة للعديد من التقارير الاخبارية الانكليزية المأخوذة من وكالتي سي ان ان وبي بي سي الاخبارية وقد تمت عملية الترجمة من قبل المترجمين الصحفيين التابعين للوكالتين.

وسيتركز التحليل على المعنى الضمني المستهدف وكيف يمكن اوصول هذا المعنى الى الجمهور المتلقي في اطار نظرية العلاقة.

## 1- Definition of translation

Translation has been viewed and portrayed differently by different scholars based on their own perspectives and views.

Catford (1965:20) argues that translation is “The replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL)”. Also, he refers to equivalence importance as he says “A central task of translation theory is that of defining the nature and conditions of translation equivalence” (ibid.: 21).

As for Nida and Taber (1974: 12), they agree with Catford’s definition and asserts that “translation consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message first in terms of meaning and second in terms of style”.

Bassnett (1980:2) on the other hand clarifies that “equivalence should operate on the surface features of the translated text”. According to Bassnett's and Catford's views, equivalence is absolutely essential in the process of translation.

Whereas Newmark (1982:7) states that translation is “A craft that attempts to replace a written message and/or statement in another language”.

Venuti (1995:343) asserts that “translation is a dual act of communication. It presupposes the existence, not of a single code, but of two distinct codes, the source language and the target language .

Another definition by Isadore Pinchuck who confirms that translation is “a process of finding a TL equivalent for an SL utterance”.

Xiao Geng (2013:977) stresses that translation is a process in which ideas and traditions can be communicated through different nations. In addition to the three factors that affect the translation of lexical items and phrases such as, fidelity, expressiveness, and elegance.

Finally, Nord (1997:44) defines translation as “a kind of target-culture representation or substitute for a source-culture text . As such, it may carry out quite different functions with regard to the source ”.

## **2- Relevance theory**

In 1986, D. Sperber & D. Wilson published their book, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*, in which they proposed relevance theory which represents a cognitive-pragmatic approach to communication. This theory represents a further development for Grice’s maxim of relevance and considered a highly significant pragmatic theory.

"Relevance theory provides us with a new approach to pragmatics, which attempts to answer not only philosophical questions about the nature of communication but also psychological questions about how the interpretation process unfolds in the hearer’s mind. RT focuses on both human communication and cognition" (Sperber and Wilson: 65).

According to Relevance Theory, communication is built on “the ability to draw inferences from people’s behavior ” (Gutt 2000: 24), that is , the communicator passes meaning on to the audience in a verbal or a non-verbal way through “informative intention” (cf. Sperber and Wilson: 54-60) . It is a subtype of a speaker’s intentions, which stands in contrast to Grice’s belief of a general intention that the communicator expresses .

The concept of 'relevance' is defined according to Sperber and Wilson as a "property of inputs to cognitive processes" " it's a cost-benefit notion ; the greater the cognitive effects, the greater the relevance; the smaller the processing effort required to derive these effects, the greater the relevance ". (Sperber and Wilson : 1986: 35)

According to relevance theory, comprehension of an utterance is not a process that involves automatic decoding mechanisms, but a reasoning activity based on imagination and critical thinking.

With regard to the communicator's perspective, to start a communication process is to get the attention of an individual implying that the communicated information is relevant.

With regard to the hearer's perspective, to comprehend an utterance is to attain the targeted interpretation through an inference making process.

### **3- Grice maxim of relevance**

The maxim of relevance, originally called the 'maxim of relation' by Grice is one of his four proposed conversational maxims.

This maxim states as follows:

***Be relevant, Make sure that all the information you provide is relevant to the current exchange; omit irrelevant information.***

The four maxims constitute what Grice calls, the cooperative principle which describes the way people can attain effective conversational communication in common social situations, that is how listeners and speakers act cooperatively and mutually accept one another properly. Grice (1975:55).

Grice's four maxims are: ( maxim of quantity, maxim of quality, maxim of manner, maxim of relation or relevance). These maxims define certain rational standards upheld by those who adhere to the cooperation principle in their quest for efficient communication. The relationship between utterances and what is understood from them can be explained by using the Gricean maxims.

Grice (1975: 47) comments on the maxim of relevance as:

***"I expect a partner's contribution to be appropriate to immediate needs at each stage of the transaction"***.

Leech (1983: 94) provides the following definition of the notion of relevance: "An utterance U is relevant to a speech situation if U can be interpreted as contributing to the conversational goal(s) of speaker or hearer". Leech states that the speaker strives for a certain goal by stating his question and that the hearer adopts this goal when giving an answer.

Grice uses the following analogy to illustrate the importance of this maxim:

***"I expect a partner's contribution to be appropriate to the immediate needs at each stage of the transaction. If I am mixing ingredients for a cake, I do not expect to be handed a good book, or even an oven cloth (though this might be an appropriate contribution at a later stage)."***

#### **4- Optimal relevance**

According to relevance theory "human cognition is geared to the maximization of relevance". Sperber and Wilson (1986: 35).

"It is claimed that the pursuit of optimal relevance from the side of both the communicator and the recipient is deemed the crucial factor that makes communication successful " (Sperber & Wilson, 1986; 1995).

" A particular utterance is optimally relevant when it allows the recipient to comprehend the intended meaning of the message with no unnecessary effort, while this very meaning, at the same time, provides the recipient with the appropriate benefits sought therefrom . Such benefits are naturally psychological as they are composed of specific knowledge pertaining to a particular person, and are known as ‘positive contextual effects " (Gutt, 1998: 43) .

Optimal relevance in relevance theory is so significant to the implementation of the communication process. According to Gutt, "It is a hearer’s expectation that his attempt at interpretation will yield adequate contextual effects at minimal processing cost", Gutt (2000: 32).

consequently, an utterance would be relevant optimally, when the meaning is effortlessly recovered by the hearer "thus the intention of the speaker being led by the presumption that his utterance is worth the audience’s effort” (Gutt 1998: 43).

### **5- Relevance theory and translation**

In 1991, Gutt was able to develop his well-known relevance-theoretic translation technique by successfully integrating translation studies with relevance theory. Despite not being designed for translation, RT is effective at accounting for translation. Gutt discusses the interpretation of translation and provides us with a new understanding of it in his book, *Translation and Relevance: Cognition and Context* (Zhao Yanchun, 1999:273,).



According to Gutt (1991) "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).

The main objective of the translation task 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", Kliffer and Stoiriska (2004: 166).

The process of translation is dynamic from the viewpoint of RT. Therefore, it is impossible to simply state one translation method is superior to another. The translator should employ a variety of techniques depending on the individual translation goal, the text typology, and the unique situation. The approach the translator adopts in a particular situation must, however, be in line with the optimal relevance, that is, it must be able to accomplish the desired contextual effects on the part of the target language text reader without requiring excessive processing effort.

## **6- Relevance theory and the translation of news reports**

According to relevance theory perspective, translation of media reports can be viewed as a communication process. In other words, it is a process of communication that is context based and ostensive-inferential oriented.

In translating news reports, the ostensive message is conveyed to the translator who makes inferences from the message, the message is passed on by the translator to the readership in another language. The recipients of the message on their part will make other inferences from the related message, thus the communication or the ostensive-inferential process is completed.

According to this theoretical framework, the relationship between a translation and its source text is based on interpretive resemblance rather than equivalence, and the translator would strive for optimal relevance by using various techniques to recreate the cognitive effects intended by the source communicator with the least amount of processing effort on the target addressee's part, according to Guttman (2000: 240).

"RT is concerned with language communication, translation as a special form of communication, involves three parts: the original author, the translator and the target language text reader, thus it should follow the general rule of communication. Therefore in the framework of RT, translation is also a process of ostensive-inferential communication, because translation is concerned with two languages and cultures as well as the author, translator, and reader, this ostensive-inferential process constitutes two processes of communication". Gutt (2000: 245).

"In translation, the translator must make inferences according to the ostensive behavior of the original author to get the efficient contextual effect on the one hand, and on the other, he has to convey his understanding of the original author's intention to the target language text reader so that the reader can make inferences and get the targeted contextual effect, the two communication processes are not static but

dynamic, inevitably being affected by the cognitive psychology of the three parts" *ibid.*

Gutt (1991) made the premise that the ultimate purpose of translation is to have it be as relevant as possible to both the target cultural environment and the source language text, which is the foundation for contextual assumptions. The translator's responsibility as a communicator is to align the reader's expectations for the target language text with the communicator's intention in the source language text.

### **7- Implicit meaning**

According to Gutt (1996), contextual effects must be implicit since they are by definition outside the scope of the information that is expressively communicated in an utterance. Any speech in any human communication must carry some implicit information in order to be relevant at all. Therefore, the implicit information in human communication assumes relevance. The text and context are combined inferentially to process the implicit information, which is then recovered during the relevance search. The reader must put forth greater effort to absorb this information because the author can convey a wide range of ideas using the presumption of implicit information. For a translation to be considered relevant, it must contain sufficient contextual effects that readers can understand. Moreover, comprehension of the implicit information is only possible when readers process sufficient contextual effects.

According to Verschueren (1999: 50), "what can be meant or communicated beyond what is clearly or literally spoken, by means of presuppositions, implications, and implicatures is what is meant or conveyed implicitly".

Thus, implied meaning is defined as "meaning that is conveyed implicitly without ever being formally stated, whether directly or through hints" (Grundy 222: 73).

## 8- Inferences

"The elements of encoding, transferring and decoding are crucial in all processes of communication, however , drawing the appropriate inference from the current context is equally important in communication in accordance with relevance theory " (Gutt, 1998 : 41). Gutt goes on to say that "Semantic content is not always sufficient to fully comprehend the exact meaning of a particular utterance inasmuch as the meaning of that utterance may hinge upon the contextual detail with which it is inferentially associated", *ibid* .

Gutt (1991: 28) perceives translation "as an inferential process which is involved in brain mechanism, thus, deemed an ostensive-inferential activity".

"To get a successful communication, reasonable interpretation should be made in order to achieve optimal relevance. This process involves a dynamic inference of a dynamic context, thus people's inferences are based on relevance instead of other standards or principles" (Gutt, 30: 1991).

In this inferential framework we might assert that within relevance theory perspective, translation is deemed a form of communication, and the process of comprehending the source material and how to select codes during translation should be grounded in the idea of relevance. As a result, finding relevance becomes the aim that translators pursue. In other words, a competent translator may create the best possible connection

between the author and the readers so that the readers can understand the author's intention. This is a demanding requirement for translators since they must not only completely understand the author's goal but also take into account the reader's cognitive environment in order to effectively communicate the author's intention to the readers.

### **9- Practical part:**

In this part of the research a thorough analysis of the translation for several excerpts cited from multiple news outlets reports such as CNN and BBC news networks will be implemented.

The excerpts have been translated by the news agencies for Arabic readers. The analysis will be focused mainly on detecting the embedded meaning that these news fragments are aiming to convey to their audience. Issues related to the accuracy of translation will not be tackled in the analysis based on the fact that these news outlets offer high quality translation versions for their respective audience in different languages across the world.

The objective behind this analysis is to show the implicit or intended meaning in the cited excerpts and how this embedded meaning can be conveyed and transmitted to the targeted audience.

#### ***ST 1:***

***President Joe Biden was confused, “turned around and shook hands with thin air” after a speech at the white house.***

#### ***TT 1:***

***كان الرئيس بايدن مضطربا عندما استدار وصافح الهواء بعد الانتهاء من القاء كلمته.***

### ***CNN news report***

This news excerpt sheds light on the health condition of the US president Joe Biden to convey the fact that the president is in not qualified enough to handle the burdens and responsibilities of his position as a president of the United States.

The implicit meaning targeted by the news excerpt centers around the conception that the president is incapacitated and to some extent unable to handle his task in a proper way.

The translator within the framework of relevance theory will infer this implied meaning and will try to create the cognitive effects through focusing on the optimally relevant message (weakness of the president) in his translation and thus, the target audience will easily infer the most relevant meaning targeted by the message with minimum processing efforts.

***ST 2: our nation has been brought down to its knees, inflation is the highest in 49 years, we are becoming a beggar nation crawling to other countries for energy, the American dream has been torn to shreds.***

***Former president Donald Trump (CNN report)***

***TT 2:***

***لقد تم تركيع امتنا, التضخم في أعلى مستوياته خلال ٤٩ عاما, لقد تحولنا الى أمة متسولة***

The former president in his remarks is trying to shed light on the deteriorating political and economic situation through conveying the

perception that the republicans are the optimal choice for the American people in the next presidential elections.

The abovementioned news excerpt focuses on the economic and political situation in the united states by stressing the fact that the US economy has faced a lot of difficulties such as, low employment rates and rising consumer commodities prices as a result of a higher than ever inflation and the ensuing slower economy.

The implicit meaning targeted by this news excerpt is that the present US democratic government is not functioning properly. This inappropriate performance has resulted in several political and economic misconducts and thus, putting the former republican government in a better position and giving it superiority to rein the next US government.

The translator task within the perspective of relevance theory would be to make inferences about the targeted implied meaning and to create the cognitive effects for the audience represented by the additional information about the economic slowdown and the fragile US political standing in the world and thus, reaching the optimal relevant message (The democrats are illegible to run the United States).

***St 3: China made a big fuss of my visit to Taiwan.***

***TT 3:***

أحدثت الصين جلبة كبيرة حول زيارتي لتايوان

***Nancy Pelosi (BBC news report).***

Speaker of the United States house of representatives in this news report is hinting to the fact that china stands firmly against her visit to Taiwan which china deems part of its homeland.

This report sheds light on the growing tensions between China and the United States over the issue of Taiwan. The united states is supporting democratic regime ruling the island of Taiwan while china views that as a violation of its sovereignty and denies any rights for any other nation to intervene in any Chinese domestic issues.

The implicit meaning conveyed by this news report, is that the disagreement between both china and the United States is on the rise and that the Chinese government is not willing to alleviate its strong opposition for an US unilateral step towards endorsing Taiwan as a free independent nation.

Within the perspective of relevance theory the translator will make inferences on the implicit targeted meaning and will try to create the cognitive effects for the targeted audience represented by the additional information about the stance of both China and the United States on the dispute of Taiwan.

***St 4: Ukrainian nuclear plant facing 'grave hour,' UN watchdog says.***

***CNN news report.***

***TT 4:***

***وكالة رصد الانشطة النووية التابعة للأمم المتحدة تقول بأن المفاعلات النووية الأوكرانية تواجه مخاطر حقيقية.***

**Analysis**



This news report sheds light on the hazards and risks that Ukrainian nuclear reactors are encountering as a result of the ongoing military confrontations between Ukraine and Russia. These military operations are taking place in zones adjacent to areas where these nuclear plants are located.

The implicit meaning conveyed by this news report is that any bombardment against any of these nuclear sites will cause multiple devastating repercussions and will have a carryover effect that would seriously impact not only Ukraine but will extend to most of its neighboring countries, not to mention the excessive humanitarian cost afflicted as a result of the expected nuclear pollution.

Within the perspective of relevance theory the translator will make inferences about the targeted implicit meaning and will try to create the cognitive effects for the TT readers represented by the additional information pertinent to the imminent risks that Europe is facing as a result of any potential nuclear leakage from the impacted Ukrainian nuclear reactors.

***ST 5: Rollercoaster crash at a resort in Germany causes 31 injuries.***

***BBC news report.***

***TT 5:***

***حادث أفعوانيه في منتجع سياحي في المانيا يؤدي الى جرح ٣١ شخصا.***

**Analysis**

This news report focuses on the potential hazards posed by some of the risky rides and games offered for people in tourist resorts and amusement

parks. Many of these games and rides are offered for people from different ages. Some of them might accidentally cause harm to users especially rides like rollercoasters, bumper cars, Ferris wheels, etc.

The implicit meaning intended by this news excerpt is that individuals should be cautious when using rides that might be dangerous for them and for their families, so that they might be able to avoid any potential accidents that may occur especially to children who might put themselves in risky situations if were not escorted by adults.

Within the framework of relevance theory the translator will make inferences about the intended implicit meaning and will try to create the cognitive effects on to the additional collateral information related to the hazards of using rides and games at amusement parks. These information will be optimally relevant since it responds to readers background knowledge, ideas and perspectives consistent with amusement park rides risk factor.

### ***ST 6: Increased alcohol use linked with higher risk of cancer in new study***

#### ***TT 6:***

طبقاً لدراسة جديدة فقد تم التوصل الى وجود ارتباط بين زيادة تعاطي المشروبات الكحولية مع زيادة مخاطر السرطان

### **Analysis**

This news report sheds light on the health risks stemming from using alcohol and the potential threats of developing other collateral dangerous

diseases that could occur as a secondary by-product for ingesting alcohol and alcohol based drinks as well.

The implicit meaning conveyed in this news report is that alcohol poses serious threats to human health condition and that refraining from using alcohol might represent the first step towards enjoying a healthy and risk free life.

In accordance with relevance theory perspective, the translator will infer the ultimate relevant meaning (alcohol use is a health risk factor) and will try to create the cognitive effect for the text receivers represented by the additional relevant information related to the collateral health results stemming from using alcohol such as developing cancer or other fatal diseases.

### **Conclusions and main findings:**

The study arrives at the following conclusions:

- 1- Media news reports are loaded with certain messages intended to be conveyed to the targeted audience.
- 2- These messages carry the intended Implicit meaning required to be delivered to the targeted audience.
- 3- Within the framework of relevance theory, news reports implicit meaning will be optimally relevant if it is related to the targeted audience beliefs, thoughts, perspectives, etc.
- 4- Conversely, the targeted audience will receive and comprehend the intended message if it is relevant to their background knowledge, beliefs, thoughts, etc.

5- Only competent translators will be able to handle the task of translating the news reports implicit meaning properly.

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