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# Research on E-C Translation of Sci-Tech Texts from the Perspective of Relevance Theory —A Case Study on Translation of *Co-Intelligence: Living and Working with AI*(Excerpt)

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***Abstract***

*Sci-tech texts contain a large number of professional terms and specific expressions, and cultural and cognitive differences pose numerous challenges to the E-C translation. Relevance Theory, as a cognitive pragmatic theory, provides strong theoretical support for the E-C translation of sci-tech texts. From the perspective of relevance theory, this study examines the translation of Co-Intelligence: Living and Working with AI(excerpt), analyzes how the translator, by aligning the cognitive environments of source and target language readers, employs strategies such as free translation, omission, and voice shift. The aim is to achieve optimal relevance between the original text and its translation, ensure faithful transmission of the original information, and enhance accuracy and communicative efficacy in E-C translation of sci-tech texts.*

***Keywords***

*relevance theory, sci-tech text, E-C translation*

## 1. Introduction

With AI entering production and daily life, cross-language dissemination of sci-tech texts has become the most crucial bond for global knowledge sharing and technological collaboration. Sci-tech translation, being a bridge between cutting-edge research and popular comprehension, must convey expertise precisely while establishing effective cognitive connections in the target environment to reduce cross-cultural processing costs. Relevance theory can be regarded as the key cognitive-pragmatic theory offering a dynamic, context-based approach to science translation by explaining cognitive context,

ostensive-inferential communication, and optimal relevance. Its basic hypothesis is that successful communication depends on a mutual quest for optimal relevance: maximal contextual effect for minimal cognitive effort (Sperber & Wilson, 1995). This hypothesis exactly falls into the aims of sci-tech translation. Driven by the increasing momentum of AI development, three features characterize today's texts: technical terms; syntactic complexity with nesting of reason in long sentences; and discordant Sino-Western cognitive spaces (Fan & Liu, 2025). These features combined have a twin requirement: translators are unable to allow free translation to deceive meaning nor literalism to hinder comprehension. On the basis of Using *Co-Intelligence: Living and Working with AI*(excerpt) as the corpus, this paper probes into E-C translation strategies for sci-tech texts on AI in relevance theory and attempts to offer new reference directions for practice and study.

## 2. Literature Review

As specialized knowledge carriers, sci-tech texts display distinct linguistic traits, and the crux of translation lies in faithfully reproducing the original information after precise understanding, restructuring the discourse to preserve logical coherence in the target language, and handling specific expressions in Chinese—all of which demand creativity (Cai, 2023). Diverse translation theories offer multiple pathways to solving translation problems. Existing studies mainly draw on the following perspectives:

Focusing on strategy and readability, Ren Chaoying (2017) adopted the Functional Sentence Perspective to enhance the readability of C-E sci-tech translation. Guided by this theory, the study shows that the translator should begin each sentence with given or previously mentioned information and then progress to newer, less predictable or unfamiliar details. This information arrangement is conducive to the translator producing clear, highly readable English versions of sci-tech texts. In the research on sci-tech translation across different fields, Aronson (2022) examined how pharmacovigilance terminology is rendered in other languages to gauge the communicative barriers posed by linguistic differences. Yang Zhiting (2023) argued that viewing sci-tech translation through narrative stylistics dissolves the old narrative-vs-science dichotomy, integrating the two to illuminate the translational nature of scientific discourse. Relevance theory has also been widely applied in translation studies. Francisco (2014) linked it to pun translation, showing its power to explicate complex meanings. Wearing (2015) combined it with pragmatics, offering a framework for analyzing how interlocutors exchange information. Al-Jarrah Rasheed (2018) applied relevance theory to strategic ambiguity in translation, arguing that the process is fundamentally lexical-pragmatic adjustment, that is, sentence operators concern the pragmatic value of a word or phrase, not its encoded linguistic sense. Zhang Chenxiang and Wang Jie (2018) applied relevance theory to the translation of traditional Chinese instruments, promoting the global reach of Chinese music. Cao Xiao'an (2019) linked the theory to poetry translation, realizing its pragmatic and communicative value. Chen Jiaxu and Chen Yanhui (2019) took the translations of Dream of the Red Chamber by Yang Xianyi and Hawkes as corpus, in order to explore puns and their translation issues

from the perspective of relevance theory.

Wharton et al. (2022) noted that relevance theory has spread to disciplines beyond its original scope, demonstrating strong interdisciplinary potential, but how to tailor the theory precisely to each field's characteristics remains to be explored. Existing research on sci-tech translation, however, centers on isolated domains, such as pharmacovigilance, traditional music, etc., lacking a systematic cross-field analysis that could yield broadly applicable theories and methods. Besides, emerging fields such as AI have generated urgent translation needs yet received scant scholarly attention. Moreover, while relevance theory is highly interdisciplinary, its application in translation studies has focused mainly on literary texts; its use in sci-tech translation remains limited. Based on it, this study takes AI-themed sci-tech texts as its corpus and systematically examines E-C translation strategies from the perspective of relevance theory.

## 3. Overview of Relevance Theory

### *3.1 Its Origin*

Research on relevance in translation originates from the 1986 book *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* by French scholar Sperber and British scholar Wilson, and its subsequent development owes much to the foundational contributions of American philosopher and pragmatist H. Paul Grice. He authored numerous papers on relevance, notably the 1975 essay Logic and Conversation, in which he subsumed "relevance" under his Cooperative Principle of communication (Long & Cai, 2020).

In 1986, Sperber and Wilson formally introduced relevance theory in *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*, superseding Grice's Cooperative Principle and aiming to uncover the cognitive mechanisms underlying human communication (Wu Liangbing et al., 2023). Moving beyond static analyses of linguistic rules, the theory recasts communication as a dynamic ostensive-inferential process: the speaker ostensively conveys information; while the hearer, drawing on cognitive context, infers the intended meaning by seeking optimal relevance. In the 1995 second edition of *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*, Sperber and Wilson distinguished "maximal relevance" from "optimal relevance". They pointed out that in the initial stage of human communication, people usually pursue optimal relevance, that is, achieving sufficient contextual effects with minimal cognitive effort, while the ultimate goal is to attain maximal relevance that aligns with the speaker's intention (Sperber & Wilson, 1995). This framework has supplied pragmatics, translation studies, and artificial intelligence with a new research paradigm, marking a new phase in the exploration of the cognitive mechanisms of linguistic communication.

### *3.2 Major Concepts*

Relevance theory is centered on three main concepts: ostensive-inferential principle, cognitive context, and optimal relevance.

First, the ostensive-inferential principle. The speaker ostensively conveys informatve and communicative intention by linguistic or non-linguistic means, while the hearer, via cognitive context, construes the ostension and infers the intended meaning of the speaker. The principle emphasizes dynamic context

construction: hearers participate, select, or adjust contextual assumptions in light of new information in a bid to maximize contextual effects at low cognitive cost (Sperber & Wilson, 1995). Through this differential processing, the hearer selects the speaker's intended meaning and maximizes the rate of successful communication. Natural language comprehension involves relevance on a context-to-context basis and inference. Since every utterance is open to a plurality of readings, the hearer must first uncover contextual links and then infer on the basis of the interaction between utterance and context.

Second, the cognitive context. Rather than being static, context is a dynamic mental structure composed of logical, encyclopedic, and lexical information in the hearer's mind (Sperber & Wilson, 1995). Due to cultural and linguistic differences between the source text and the target text, it cannot be assumed that contextual effects on the author of the two readers are absolutely identical. Therefore, in the process of translation, the translator must make the target cognitive environment equal to that of readers of the source language. That not only means interpreting the communicator's intention, but also to estimate as much as possible the contextual impact and target readers' expectations.

Third, the optimal relevance. Sperber and Wilson state that an utterance is optimally relevant under an interpretation if and only if two conditions are met: it yields adequate contextual effects to merit the addressee's attention, and it achieves these effects without demanding unnecessary processing effort (Sperber & Wilson, 1995). Generally, the greater the cognitive impact of newly introduced information, the more relevant it is to the receiver; yet processing that information demands effort and time. All else being equal, if the processing cost tied to the new information is high, its relevance declines; if the cost is low, its relevance rises. Therefore, the translator should ensure the translation carries sufficient relevance so that it resonates with the target readers and yields contextual effects.

*3.3 Its Application in Sci-Tech Translation Practice*

Given the specialized nature of sci-tech translation, translators must embrace the principle of "achieve mastery through comprehensive understanding and apply knowledge to practice" and continually enhance their comprehensive competence (Gu, 2017). Zhang Yifan and Xu Mingwu (2012) built a corpus of 517 neologisms from China Public Science, analyzed the cultural traits reflected by shifts in English word-formation patterns, and then conducted a quantitative study of translation strategies for these terms, integrating Relevance Translation Theory. Bao Wen and Luo Jiqin (2022) analyze the E-C translation of logistics terminology by examining how context and the principle of optimal relevance guide the rendering of specialized terms.

Sci-tech texts introduce or report on scientific and technological phenomena and activities, and theories, and locate specialized knowledge in a specific context, and are logical, objective, and accurate. Sci-tech translation, while having its own features, is essentially an interface between the target reader's purpose and the author's communicative intention. The ostensive-inferential model, cognitive context, and optimal relevance framework of relevance theory is suitable for such texts.

In translating, the translator must convey the intention of the author in the cognitive context in light of the target audience's own context. According to the theory, the translator uses contextual assumptions to

select versions that are closest to the source intention and most readily acceptable to readers, with optimal information transfer and maximal relevance. This prevents over- and under-translation, giving clear guidelines for texts of this kind. These texts abound with technical terms, the majority of which are polysemous. Relevance theory guides the translator to infer in the source context, check every term's domain knowledge and referent, and determine its precise sense. Also, the theory's application to sci-tech translation enhances readability, aligns the text with the cognitive context of the target readership, and offers the target readers an experience and communicative effect close to that of the source readership. In brief, relevance theory provides an effective framework for optimizing sci-tech translation and achieving high-quality results.

## 4. Case Analysis

### *4.1 Optimal Relevance at Lexical Level*

#### 4.1.1 Translation of Terminology

The translation of terminology in sci-tech texts can lead to semantic deviations due to differences in professional fields, technological stages, and audience backgrounds. Therefore, to ensure precise translation of concepts, it is essential to dynamically adjust the translation approach based on the professional context, avoiding both excessive domestication and over-literal translation.

Example 1:

ST: Bloom called this the two sigma problem, because he challenged researchers and teachers to find methods of group instruction that could achieve the same effect as one-to-one tutoring, which is often too costly and impractical to implement on a large scale.

TT: 布鲁姆将此现象命名为"两个标准差问题"，意在向教育研究者和教师发起挑战，激励他们探寻能够达到一对一辅导效果的集体教学模式。毕竟，一对一辅导成本高昂，且在实际操作中难以大规模推广。

According to the Oxford Dictionary, sigma is the eighteenth letter of the Greek alphabet, and its usage varies across disciplines. In the text provided, the writer employed the phrase "two sigma problem" to highlight the major difference in performance between one-to-one tutoring and conventional learning. Therefore, the term has a particular statistical implication and is used to describe a given research context. Sigma represents the standard deviation, a measure of spread, in statistics. Putting the phrase to use to translate to "两个标准差问题" (the problem of two standard deviations) places this size of effect center stage. And target readers, applying their own cognitive context, can immediately comprehend the gist and relate it directly to the source meaning, thereby fulfilling the communicative function of the translation.

Example 2:

ST: So it is a blow that the first impact of Large Language Models at scale was to usher in the Homework Apocalypse.

TT: 因此，大规模应用大型语言模型所带来的首个影响，便是引发了"家庭作业启示录"这一现象。

The word “apocalypse” literally refers to global destruction or cataclysm, and suggests a sense of calamitous conclusion. In the source text, the word suggests that the use of enormous language models will completely change and reorganize homework. Amongst Chinese cultural audiences, “启示录” (Revelation) has a powerful suggestion of colossal change and interior revelation, readily evoking these in readers. From reference books, the translator learnt that movie titles containing “apocalypse” are uniformly translated as “启示录”: Apocalypse Now (1979) into “现代启示录”, and Quantum Apocalypse (2010) into “量子启示录”. Furthermore, the Oxford Dictionary renders “usher in” as “mark the beginning of something new or to start a new development in something”. According to this, the translator translated “the Homework Apocalypse” as “家庭作业启示录”, so that target readers could make a cognitive connection in the same manner as the original text based on their own understanding of the meaning of the term, thus accurately comprehending the original author’s intention.

4.1.2 Choice of Polysemous Words

Words may have many connotations depending on context. To determine exactly what the connotation of a word is, one must consider the specific situation to ensure that the target version is fluent and accurate for target readers. The translator therefore has to know the context perfectly, strive for optimal equivalence between source and translation, and convey the original intended meaning reliably. Only in this way will target readers experience practically the same fluency as source readers.

Example 3:

ST: As education researcher Sarah J. Banks writes, in the early days of their popularity in the mid-1970s, many teachers were eager to incorporate calculators into their classrooms, recognizing the potential for increased student motivation and engagement.

TT: 教育研究者萨拉·J·班克斯在在文中提到，20 世纪 70 年代中期，计算器刚刚崭露头角，便有众多教师迫不及待地想要将其引入课堂。他们察觉到，计算器的引入有望激发学生的学习动力，提高他们的课堂参与度。

“Popularity” literally means “being well-liked”. However, the translator rendered it into words as “崭露头角”, because this idiom means “to conspicuously display one’s abilities and talents”. This translation strongly suits the context, when calculators were beginning to be popular among teachers. “Incorporate” actually means “to include, join, or absorb”, but the translator rendered it into words as “引入” (introduce). This choice facilitates readers easily to read about teachers’ positive adoption of calculators and make the connection between the original and translation natural and explicit. In the phrase “increase student motivation”, “increase” does not indicate mere quantitative increase; rather, it means the qualitative enhancement of students’ inner motivation that was previously under-stimulated. Thus, the translator translated the sentence into “激发学生的学习动力”, that is, “stimulate student motivation”. This expression enables target readers to immediately comprehend the calculator’s beneficial impact on motivation and realizes optimal relevance in their cognitive environment.

Example 4:

ST: So it is not surprising that a powerful, adaptable, and cheap personalized tutor is the holy grail of

education.

TT: 因此，人们追求一位功能强大、适应力强且成本低廉的个性化辅导师，将其奉为教育领域的终极理想，也就显得合情合理了。

"Holy grail" literally means "Holy Cup". This is the cup used by Jesus at the Last Supper in Western tradition, of miraculous power, and many knights ventured at risk to uncover it, so if treated literally, target-language readers would not be able to directly grasp the profound underlying implications from their own lack of corresponding Western cultural knowledge. Sensitive to the cognitive background of Chinese readers, the translator rendered "Holy Grail" as "终极理想" (ultimate ideal). The expression expresses the human desire for a personalized tutor, reflects the source context, and bridges the cultural gap. It plays the communicative role of the translation and prepares the ground for later discussion on artificial intelligence.

*4.2 Optimal Relevance at Syntactic Level*

4.2.1 Translation of Passive Sentence

Passive voice is often used in sci-tech writing to highlight the recipient or object of the action, or to emphasize process and result rather than the actor, thereby enhancing objectivity and precision. Chinese, however, favors the active voice. For the purposes of fluency and idiomatic expression, the translator may convert passive voice to the active voice for emphasis on the agent, or rephrase the sentence for the sake of natural flow.

Example 5:

ST: Some teachers were hesitant to adopt calculators, as their effects had not been thoroughly researched, and they believed that curriculum should be adapted before introducing new technology.

TT: 部分教师对引入计算器持谨慎观望态度，原因在于其实际效果尚未经过全面且深入的研究。他们认为在引入新技术之前，应当先对课程内容作出相应调整。

For "had not been researched", the preposition "被"(by) was not employed; instead, the phrase "未经过研究" (had not undergone study) was used, which sounds more idiomatic and is more acceptable to target readers. For "should be adapted", the passive voice was converted to the active one, i.e., that is "教师应当对课程内容作出相应调整". The passive voice in English serves to place stress on the action of "adapt", but in Chinese, an agent and object of action are expressed more clearly and directly by means of active voice. In particular, "teachers" are explicitly given as an agent and "curriculum" as the object. Such a solution can be considered consistent with Chinese pragmatic conventions in the sense that target readers' cognitive loads are lightened and the translation is constructed to closely match their cognitive context. The word "先" was also added, highlighting the sequence of time and conforming to the original rationality. This reduces comprehension barriers, increases optimal relevance between the text and the reader, and enhances communicative efficiency.

Example 6:

ST: A year or two later, another study revealed that 84 percent of teachers wanted to use calculators in their classrooms, but only 3 percent were employed by schools that provided calculators.

TT: 仅隔一两年，另一项研究显示，84%的教师希望在课堂上使用计算器，但仅有 3%的教师所在的学校配备了这一教学工具。

In the last sentence, “only 3 percent” is the subject and “were employed” is the passive predicate to indicate the action of being hired. “By schools” is a prepositional phrase working as an adverbial, specifies that schools are the doers of hiring; whereas the relative clause “that provided calculators” modifies the antecedent “schools” and describes their quality. The sentence “were employed” is in passive voice. If translated literally, it semantically emphasizes the work relationship between schools and teachers, which varies from the original focus. However, the original text primarily concentrates on whether schools provide teachers with calculators or not. Therefore, the translator used the word “配备” (to equip) to convey the relationship between teachers and schools. This approach avoids comprehension obstacles caused by word-for-word translation, adheres to informational and communicative intentions of the source text, and achieves optimal relevance.

4.2.2 Translation of Long and Complex Sentence

In E-C translation of long and complex sentences, difficult structure and rich semantics can be disentangled by relevance theory, which compels the translator to clarify the logic and find the kernel meaning. With inference, the translator fills in the cognitive gaps between Chinese and English contexts, comprehend the original intention and locate the maximally relevant expression in the target language. The translation is in line with Chinese usage and syntax, properly conveys the original meaning and style, and enables target readers to generate equivalent contextual effects with similar mental effort, thereby making effective cross-cultural communication possible.

Example 7:

ST: One concern was the inability to help students understand and identify their errors, for the calculators did not log the buttons that students pressed, making it difficult for teachers to see and correct mistakes.

TT: 其中一个担忧在于，计算器无法记录学生按下的按键，这使得教师难以帮助学生理解并找出他们在计算过程中出现的错误，也就难以进行纠正。

The “for” clause is a causal adverbial in the original sentence that explains why the condition in the main clause is the case, and the present-participle phrase “making...mistakes” is a resultative adverbial that explains the resultant effect of that previous condition. Therefore, the translator put the causal clause at the beginning and pairs “在于” with “无法”, clearly showing the reason why the concern arises and making readers get to know the reason easily with low cognitive effort. By using conjunctions such as “这使得” and “也就”, the translator clearly linked cause and effect and describes the specific result. The piecemeal progression fits Chinese logic convention, making it easy for target readers to easily get the whole meaning of the sentence. The noun “inability” (无能力) was translated with the adverbial phrase “can’t” (无法). This change is consistent with Chinese usage and enhances the translation’s optimal relevance to the reader’s cognitive context.

Example 8:

ST: Further, taking this shortcut may lower the degree to which the student cares about their interpretation

of a reading, making in-class discussions less intellectually useful because the stakes are lower.

TT: 再者，学生若选择这种走捷径的方式，可能会降低对自身阅读理解的重视程度。毕竟，当风险降低时，课堂讨论在启迪思维方面的作用也会大打折扣。

The original sentence is a complex structure containing a gerund phrase as subject, a relative clause, a present-participle phrase as resultative adverbial, and a causal adverbial clause. The translator shifted the subject to "学生" (student), aligning with the common Chinese expression habit of using people as the subject, which enabled readers to quickly identify the agent of the action and reduces the difficulty of comprehension. Meanwhile, by adding the conjunction "毕竟" (after all), the translator naturally introduced the reason and places the adverbial clause of cause at the beginning, ensuring logical coherence in the sentence. In addition, the translator rendered "degree" as "重视程度" (degree of emphasis) to make the idea concrete. By translating "because" as "当...时" (when) and restructuring the overall sentence into patterns like "若...会..." (if...then...) and "毕竟，当...时...也会..." (after all, when..., it will also...), with clear cause-and-effect expressions, target readers will be able to grasp the inherent relationships between sentences with minimal cognitive effort.

*4.3 Optimal Relevance at Contextual Level*

Relevance theory allows the translator to understand the source meaning within its specific context. Connectives show logical relations, and the theory informs the translator to make inferences from context and select the proper Chinese version so as to give coherent flow. It also instructs the translator to construct a cognitive context from the context text, correctly identify pronoun referents, and avoid mistranslation. With this guidance, the translator can better apply more accurate strategies, produce natural translations, improve overall quality, and effectively convey the original intent.

Example 9:

ST: Essays are ubiquitous in education, where <u>they</u> serve many purposes, <u>from</u> demonstrating how students think <u>to</u> providing an opportunity for reflection.

TT: 论文在教育领域可谓无处不在，发挥着多重作用，既能展现学生的思维方式，又能为他们提供反思的契机。

The prepositional phrase "from...to..." is translated into "既能...又能..." (both...and...), a Chinese pattern that links two parallel elements to indicate simultaneous presence or possession. This version accurately conveys that the two functions are equally important and mutually reinforcing, aligning with the target audience's linguistic habits and cognitive expectations. In the source, "they" refers to "essays". The translator omitted the pronoun, because translating it as "它们" (they) would be redundant and increase the reader's cognitive load to readers. Besides, in Chinese, when the topic is clear and the following content is tightly linked to it, repeating the pronoun is unnecessary. Omitting it yields a concise version that conveys maximum meaning with minimal form.

Example 10:

ST: Math education did not fall apart, <u>though</u> debate and research continues today, a half century after the calculator appeared in classrooms.

TT: 半个世纪以来，计算器早已在课堂中占据一席之地，而数学教育体系非但未因此分崩离析，反而在不断的辩论与研究中持续发展，至今仍充满生机。

"Though" literally is "despite" and marks a concessive clause. Seeing this ostensive cue, the translator translated it as "而...非但...反而..." (and...not...but...). The conjunction "而" (and) signals the transition, and the pair "非但...反而..." (not...but...) enhances the concession, directing readers to the real point of the author: AI can be used in education without excessive worry. By translating "continues today" literally as "至今仍充满生机" (continues to thrive today), the translator emphasized the vigor of AI in education today. With this option, contextual effects are enhanced to optimize the correspondence between the source and translation in sense and pragmatic force, and thus optimal relevance.

## 5. Conclusion

This study conducts an in-depth exploration on E-C translation of sci-tech texts based on relevance theory. Among them, the case analysis is carried out from three aspects: lexical level, syntactic level and contextual level. At the lexical level, the translator addresses how relevance theory guides the selection of the most appropriate expressions for specialized and polysemous terms, ensuring faithful transmission of the original meaning. At the syntactic level, the translator examines strategies for translating passive voice and long, complex sentences, stressing the need to respect target-language usage while preserving the logical relations of the source. At the contextual level, it reflects the significance of relevance theory in comprehensively assessing the quality of a translation. During the whole process, translators need to fully take into account various contextual factors to achieve optimal relevance. Thus, the translator maintains that relevance theory offers comprehensive and effective guidance for E-C translation of sci-tech texts and it enables translators to grasp the original intent more accurately, to fully consider the cognitive context of target-language readers, and to select the most appropriate strategies to achieve optimal relevance. In this way, the translation faithfully conveys the source information while conforming to the reading habits of the target readers. Future research can further extend the application of relevance theory to other domains of sci-tech translation, thereby advancing both theory and practice.

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