

## A Translation Analysis of Nursery Rhymes in the English Version of *The Straw House* Based on Relevance Theory: A Cognitive Approach

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### Abstract

*The Straw House* (草房子) written by Cao Wenxuan (曹文轩) had encountered overseas coldness before the writer won the Hans Christian Andersen Award in 2016. Such a phenomenon has been attributed to three main reasons: copyright agents, translation challenges, promotion and review of social media.

Taking the translation of five nursery rhymes as the research object which play a vital role in the English version of *The Straw House*, this study analyzed and explored the translation approaches of those nursery rhymes adopted by Sylvia Yu, Julian Chen and Christopher Malone. Through case analysis, a concrete analysis was made of the translation methods of the nursery rhymes, contrasted with the *Chinese Mother Goose Rhymes* by Isaac Taylor Headland, a book of similar genre. Based on Relevance Theory, a discussion of advantages and disadvantages of the translations was made before solutions were put forward to the translation problems which led to the failure to communicate the author's intention to the target readers. It was found out that despite the attention to the reproduction of the original content by using literal strategy, the translation ignored the individual characteristics, contextual functions and the role in emotional expression that nursery rhymes play. In this process, the separation of the original information intention and communication intention, the loss of contextual presupposition and implication all resulted in the absence of relevancy which fails the communication. Based on the identified translation problems, some

solutions were proposed. It is hoped that these solutions will bring inspirations to the translation of nursery rhymes in children's literature.

**Key words:** *The Straw House*; Nursery rhymes; Relevance theory; Information intention; Communication intention

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### INTRODUCTION

Cao Wenxuan is a famous writer of children's literature in China. His works such as *The Straw House*, *Bronze and Sunflower* and other novels, which are well received in China, have exerted profound influence on Chinese children. In 2016, Cao Wenxuan won the Hans Christian Andersen Award, the first Chinese writer who gained such honor. However, *The Straw House* (草房子), which was finished in 1997 and released in the United States in 2006, has met with overseas coldness (Hui, 2019).

In *The Straw House*, a piece of children's literature with pastoral background and primary school children as the main characters, nursery rhymes play a vital role in emphasizing mental profile of the characters. Different contents and forms of nursery rhymes show characters' personalities, add childish delight, reproduce children's vitality, and express the nature of the true, the good and the beautiful as well.

A number of factors contribute to the overseas coldness of *The Straw House*. Hui (2019, p.42) pointed out three reasons: copyright agents, translation challenges, and promotion and review of social media. Therefore, this paper, under the guidance of Relevance

Theory, analyzed the English translation of nursery rhymes in *The Straw House* published by Long River Press in order to propose feasible translation strategies for translation challenges.

In this English translation version, the translation challenges are reflected in the lack of attention paid on the lexical characteristics, contextual functions and the role that nursery rhymes play in emotional expression. In this process, the separation of the original information intention and communication intention, the loss of contextual presupposition and implication all resulted in the absence of relevancy which fails the communication. The possible solution to all these is to combine the characteristics of nursery rhymes from words, sentences, rhyme and rhetoric levels and the contextual function into account under the guidance of Relevance Theory.

This paper will first introduce the general content of the original and the basic information of *The Straw House*; second, analyze the language features and contextual functions of nursery rhymes in the book; third, introduce Relevance Theory and summarize the principles and general means of nursery rhyme translation, and how is Relevance Theory related and employed in this case. At last, the translation of nursery rhymes used in this English version are analyzed and its applicability is discussed. The purpose of this study is to analyze the translations of nursery rhymes employed by different translators, with an aim to identify the translation means, problems and solutions.

## 1. THE STRAW HOUSE

*The Straw House* (草房子), a novel written by Cao Wenxuan—a Chinese writer of children's literature, won many awards at home. The novel was so aesthetically educational that it was added to the required extracurricular reading list for primary school students. With Youmadi as the background, the book tells the painful and touching growth of five children—Bald Crane, Zhi Yue, Sang Sang, Du Xiaokang and Xi Ma, as well as the emotional entwining between teacher Jiang Yilun and young girl Bai Que.

*The Straw House* was published In 2006 in the United States in two editions: the English translation by Long River Press and the English translation by University of Hawaii Press. Neither is a mainstream publisher in America. Candlewick Company introduced the translation of *Bronze and Sunflower* (another work of Cao's) as Cao Wenxuan's first English translated work, but actually it wasn't (Hui, 2019, p.42). *The Straw House* was translated and published 11 years earlier than that, and from this case it can be noticed that the influence of *The Straw House* was so limited. The translation selected in this paper is published by Long River Press and translated by Sylvia Yu, Julian Chen and Christopher Malone.

The nursery rhymes are of much concern in the book by virtue of the role in the contextual function they play, but the lack of emphasis on it, reflected on the translation strategies adopted, can typically show the translation problems, and thus the analysis of its translation can give a hint to translation challenges behind the chill English market. In this case, nursery rhymes are selected for specific analysis, and solutions proposed should make sense, to some extent, to the translation of Chinese nursery rhymes, or even the translation of children's literature.

## 2. NURSERY RHYMES IN THE ORIGINAL VERSION

### 2.1 Definition of Nursery Rhymes

In *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (2019), "nursery rhyme" is defined as a short traditional poem or song for children.

According to Wang Juan (2002, p.113), who followed the famous folklorist A. Dundes to learn folklore systematically, rhymes and songs should be separated due to their striking differences in the form of expression and the focus in reflecting life. Thus, nursery rhymes and nursery songs are different, in terms of the context of Chinese folk customs.

In Wang's work of *An Introduction to Folklore Studies* (Wang, 2002, p.49), nursery rhymes and nursery songs are both branches of phonological folklore while the former refers to the verses mainly used to reflect children's life or to be inherited by them (Wang, 2002, p.113), and the latter refers to songs which are sung for and by children (Wang, 2002, p.111). Notwithstanding nursery rhymes are just children's verbal games, they are significant information for scholars to study and understand children's life and mentality. Since most of the nursery rhymes involve cultural values, they play vital roles in provoking thinking and hinting the plot, etc (Wang, 2002, p.115).

Despite the importance of nursery rhymes, the understanding of nursery songs and nursery rhymes remains less sufficient, and different opinions are held accordingly. Qin (2008, p.23) pointed out that children have the final say on whether a piece of verse can be called nursery rhyme or not. Although some authors have written many nursery rhymes for educational purposes, only those verses spread spontaneously by children can be called nursery rhymes.

Pan (2015, pp.64-66) summarized that there were six pieces of nursery rhymes in the book, but the first piece located in the first chapter in the original version of *The Straw House* wasn't taken into account in this paper. According to Wang Juan (Wang, 2000, p.115), this verse should be deemed as a political rhyme, whose acute insight and sharp lexical items are used to criticize social phenomenon and systems.

Therefore, on the basis of verse created for and spread by children and mainly reflecting children's life, the rest five pieces of nursery rhymes are sorted out to be analyzed in this paper.

## 2.2 Characteristics of Nursery Rhymes in the Original Version

In *An Introduction to Folklore Studies* (2002), Wang (2002) considered four major topics of nursery rhymes, including rhymes for games, rhymes for amusement, rhymes for knowledge and rhymes for enjoyment of life. In the original Chinese version, there were five pieces of nursery rhymes, classified into three types on the basis of their contents: rhymes for amusement, rhymes for knowledge and rhymes for enjoyment of life. In addition, their language features could be divided into four characteristics on the basis of Ren's (1993) analysis of words, sentences, rhyme and rhetoric, listed as follows.

### (1) Simple and easy words

The words are simple and easy to be understood. The audience of nursery rhymes are children, which means the used words should be simple and plain. They are deemed not too advanced or obscure.

#### Example 1

姐姐十五我十六， 妈生姐姐我煮粥。  
爸爸睡在摇篮里， 没有奶吃向我哭。  
记得外公娶外婆， 我在桥前放爆竹。 (Cao, 2003, p.34)

No matter *sister* (姐姐), *I* (我), *mum* (妈), *papa* (爸爸), *grandpa* (外公) or *grandma* (外婆), they are all popular lexical items in baby talk. These addresses are extremely common in the very stage at which a child acquires language.

### (2) Diverse sentence patterns and flexible structures

The sentence patterns are diverse and the structures are flexible. The sentence patterns show the diversity of nursery rhymes with lengths ranging from two to seven sentences, and punctuations are unconstrained to fully show the sensations.

#### Example 2

##### Declarative statements

一树黄梅个个青， 打雷落雨满天星。 (Cao, 2003, p.41)

十一月水仙供上岸， 十二月腊梅雪里香。 (Cao, 2003, p.41)

没人换， 没人架， 刚一蹠腿就跌了个大趴叉。 (Cao, 2003, p.52)

##### Exclamatory statement

一颗星， 挂油瓶！ 油瓶漏， 炒黑豆！ (Cao, 2003, p.88)

The proficiency for the use of different lengths, tones, objects, characters and punctuation have different effects on different contexts, which makes them full of wit and humor.

### (3) Pleasant and catchy rhyme

The rhyme is pleasant and catchy. Rhyme is one of

requirements of nursery rhymes since it's called "nursery rhyme". For the purpose of being easily memorized and recited as well as adding some flavor of musicality, it is more or less rhythmical but not limited to be rhymed at the end of the sentences. A typical example is:

#### Example 3

正月梅花香又香， 二月兰花盆里装。  
三月桃花红十里， 四月蔷薇靠短墙。  
五月石榴红似火， 六月荷花满池塘。  
七月栀子头上戴， 八月桂花满树黄。  
九月菊花出开放， 十月芙蓉正上妆。

十一月水仙供上岸， 十二月腊梅雪里香。 (Cao, 2003, p.41)

The end of every sentences is "ang" in pronunciation, which makes the verse cadent for the education.

Another less typical example is:

#### Example 4

姐姐十五我十六， 妈生姐姐我煮粥。  
爸爸睡在摇篮里， 没有奶吃向我哭。  
记得外公娶外婆， 我在桥前放爆竹。 (Cao, 2003, p.34)

In the first sentence, two hemistiches are rhymed, while the second and the third are rhymed "u", which is different from above. In this case, although the rhymes are not the same and are irregular, it is also hardly weird and obscure to speak out.

An extreme example is:

#### Example 5

呀呀呀， 呀呀呀，  
脚趾缝里漏出一小丫。  
没人换， 没人架，  
刚一蹠腿就跌了个大趴叉。  
这小丫， 找不到家，  
抹着眼泪胡哇哇…… (Cao, 2003, p.52)

Three sentences are embodied in nine hemistiches, and eight of them are rhymed in "a". When speaking out "a", people need to open their mouths, full and round, as if they are complaining and crying, which creates a vivid picture of a little girl, lost and helpless.

#### (4) Rhetoric

The diction is vivid and the images are lively. In this part, rhetoric plays an important role in a better memorization, since children's education should be funny and vivid enough. In the following sentences:

#### Example 6

五月石榴红似火  
十月芙蓉正上妆 (Cao, 2003, p.41)

In May, pomegranate flowers are in full blossom as if they were dancing flame in the air. It's a simile. In October, cotton roses have lovely luster like a lady making up her face. It's a personification.

## 2.3 Functions of Nursery Rhymes in the Original Chinese Version

Beyond doubt, nursery rhymes play a cultural function as they are conceived and developed in a unique regional

cultural environment. It combines local conditions and customs, and expresses thoughts and emotions, moral judgment, values and aesthetic interest, which has many benefits for children, such as education, understanding, entertainment and aesthetic appreciation (Li, 2016, p.30).

In the certain context of the original *The Straw House*, they play a crucial role, in highlighting characters' personality, revealing characters' mind and heightening atmosphere. Thus the functions of nursery rhymes can be divided into two parts—contextual function and cultural function, as illustrated below.

### 2.3.1 Contextual Function

There are three types of nursery rhymes chosen by the author, each type reflecting distinct text effects.

In addition to the function played by nursery rhymes outside the context, the condition and the position to apply different types of nursery rhymes also play a joint role in enhancing the readability of the text, which is known as contextual function.

#### (1) To highlight personal characters

When Sang Sang was bathed in the river in the late autumn to get ready for the new clothes, he shouted in the cold, “姐姐十五我十六， 妈生姐姐我煮粥...”。 As a typical funny rhyme, it deliberately inverts the real fact, thus causing a paradox which arouses people's interest. It shows that Sang Sang possesses a boy's nature to be naughty but cute at the same time, not willing to follow the rules.

#### (2) To reveal character's mind and heighten atmosphere

Sang Sang waited anxiously for Bai Que to wake up, singing back and forth in the alley while there's no sign of her coming out. Finally, he decided to shout loudly the long rhyme:

##### Example 7

一颗星，  
挂油瓶！  
.....  
天哎天，  
地哎地，  
三拜城隍和土地！  
土地公公不吃荤，  
两个鸭子圆圈吞！ (Cao, 2003, p.88)

This is a seemingly illogical nursery rhyme, full of absurdity, farce and imagination, which shows that Sang Sang' heart is restless and his mind is in turmoil. In addition to the three lines at the end, the whole rhyme is three-word lined, short and strong, which has a vocative effect on catching Bai Que's attention, the frequent three-word lines make people nervous and agitated.

### 2.3.2 Cultural Function

Except for textual functions, nursery rhymes also have the indoctrination and cognitive functions, which play a highly important part in children's socialization (Cai & Li, 2012, p.88). The cultural functions of nursery rhymes are

divided into three points based on Hu's (2011) analysis of children's interest, cognition and imagination, as listed below.

#### (1) To raise children's interest

One of the natures of nursery rhymes is that children make them for fun. Children understand each other best, and thus nursery rhymes, which are created for amusement, can arouse their interest to a large extent. All the nursery rhymes in the book are spoken up aloud by characters who are all children with rich musical rhyme, grabbing their attention as fast as possible.

#### (2) To develop children's cognition

Taking children's cognition into account, all the words used in nursery rhymes used are simple and the images they illustrated are common in people's life. If the sensations the author tries to show is too profound, or the word he wants to use are too obscure and elegant, children may not have patience to continue.

#### (3) To release children's imagination

Rhetoric is used in nursery rhymes to express vivid concrete images, to give readers a bright and deep impression for the specific, the simple and the mundane, like pomegranate flowers are in full blossom as if they were dancing flame in the air, and cotton roses have lovely luster as a lady making up her face. Such usages release children's imagination, and function as an inducer of thinking.

## 2.4 Principles of Translating Nursery Rhymes

Xu (1988, p. 15) claimed that children's literature has both the commonness of general literature and the characteristic of their own. Despite the argument “translating children's literature is not essentially different from translating other forms of literature”, which is akin to the one above proposed by Millan and Bartrina (2013, p. 451) in *The Routledge Handbook of Translation Studies*, “there are elements peculiar to this domain which call for special theoretical and methodological consideration”, and main principles of translating nursery rhymes should be guided under the basic translation principles raised by Yan Fu in 1898 in Chinese context, namely, “faithfulness, expressivity and elegance”.

Taking characteristics and functions of nursery rhymes into account, Huang (2011, p. 7) believed that “as an integral part of the whole literature, the translation of children's literature, including nursery rhymes, should follow the basic principles of literary translation: faithfulness, expressivity and elegance.”

There are four main features of nursery rhymes (Ren, 1993) as explained: simple and easy words; diverse patterns of sentences and flexible structures; pleasant and catchy rhyme; vivid diction and the lively images.

Strictly following the features listed above, principles raised by Huang (2011) can efficiently guide the translation of nursery rhymes.

Faithfulness means “keeping the original text vivid

and interesting, and restoring the fascinate imagination” (Huang, 2011, p. 7).

Expressivity requires the translator “to choose the words and sentences in accordance with children’s reading ability and characteristics of the age, and to maintain the features of rhyme, beats and conciseness” (Huang, 2011, p. 7), which is corresponding to the remaining three features of nursery rhymes.

Last but not least, elegance is “the surface form of the text could be sacrificed for text style when necessary on the basis of a full understanding of the original text of nursery rhymes, then creating the greatest possible reproduction of the verve of the original nursery rhymes (Huang, 2011, p. 7).” Meanwhile, taking the role of contextual functions played by nursery rhymes into consideration, there’s something more than “elegance” in other contexts: combined with the text and based on the full research towards the function that nursery rhymes play, the fittest form is chosen to reproduce the meaning of nursery rhymes to attain the textual function. If necessary, form and meaning should be sacrificed for the reproduction of function.

Therefore, principles for translating nursery rhymes which guide this essay are faithfulness, expressivity and elegance.

### 3. RELEVANCE THEORY (RT) HAS IN NURSERY RHYMES

Relevance Theory (RT), which broadened the vision of translation, providing a novel and cognitive way to clarify the position and obligation among the author, the translator and the reader. It helps to find the orientation of translation activity and build the relationship among the three as fore-mentioned, combining them into a relevant sequence to arrive at the optimal effect. In this case, it’s reasonable and necessary to apply this theory into the translation of nursery rhymes to guide the translation and introduction of Chinese literature works.

#### 3.1 RT in Translation

RT integrates cognition and pragmatics studies, pointing out that verbal communication is a dynamic process of ostension— inference. The understanding of discourse is a cognitive activity (Sperber & Wilson, 1986/1995). In 1911, Gutt published his work *Translation and Relevance: Cognition and Context*, which found out a new study perspective for translation.

Translation, a cross-language activity, is intercultural. There are significant differences between two cultures in cognitive contexts (Wen & Xiao, 2019, p. 174). Zhu (2007, p. 8-11) proposed that translation is a kind of reasoning communicative behavior, which emphasizes the explicit nature of translation. As a receiver, the main task of the translator is to infer the communicative intention of the

original author to the readers of original text, and then, playing the role of addresser to show that intention to the translation readers. In this case, a translator has both the role of receiver and addresser in the translation process.

In this process, the separation of the original information intention and communication intention, the loss of context presupposition and implication will all result in the absence of relevancy which may fail the communication since the original cultural environment and the post-translational one are poles apart (Wen & Xiao, 2019, p. 182). The lack of relevancy in the translation brings obstacles to readers’ inference.

This process involves three communicators: author, translator and reader. In an ideal situation, the translator spends little cognitive effort gaining enough communication effects, before arriving at optimal relevance. However, things don’t always go as expected. As in the cultural environments, the author, the translator and readers are different, the full performance of being equivalent in both the content and the form can hardly succeed. What translators can do is to put the best of their effort to seek for a counterbalance which shows the original intention of the author to the translation readers.

#### 3.2 Application of RT in Translating Nursery Rhymes

Isaac Taylor Headland (1900), the author of *Chinese Mother Goose Rhymes* (孺子歌图), proposed that “our desire has been to make a translation fairly true to the original, and to please English-speaking children.” Since in nursery rhymes, it is “the child, not the critic” that “has always been kept in view” (Headland, 1900).

In his idea, translator plays the role as a bridge. First, he should fully understand author’s intention, before being able to put those intentions into target language to communicate with the English-speaking children. His practice gained success and coincidentally met the principle raised in RT. Thus, Headland’s translation can provide some referential value for analyzing the translation in *The Straw House*.

In consideration of two intentions mentioned by Headland, different approaches should be adopted in accordance with different contextual requirements. In previous studies, techniques of translating nursery rhymes such as addition, deletion, replacement, repetition, transformation of part of speech and sentence patterns, subversion of word order, sentence split and combination (Huang, 2011, p. 8), filling-up and interpretation (Yu & Ding, 2019, p. 101) were adopted according to different contexts and purposes.

In the original *The Straw House*, nursery rhymes not only have simple words, diverse patterns, flexible structures, pleasant rhyme, vivid diction and lively images, but also have contextual function and cultural function. According to RT, author’s intentions are contained under the structure, and what translators need to do is to dig

them out and try their best to communicate with the target readers. Thus, the contextual function of nursery rhymes in the novel must be accentuated.

In this case, RT can be embodied as language features in words, sentences, rhyme and rhetoric levels, together with the contextual functions the nursery rhymes played, to investigate whether the translators reconstruct the information both in nursery rhymes and in context, and hit the mark of communicating the target readers, i.e., the English-speaking children, as Headland said.

## 4. ANALYSIS OF NURSERY RHYMES IN THE STRAW HOUSE

According to Wang (2002), nursery rhymes in the original Chinese version were classified into three types based on their functions. They are rhymes for amusement, rhymes for knowledge and rhymes for enjoyment of life. Typical nursery rhymes of each type selected in this part were used to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the strategies the translators used, and then the reasons behind them were analyzed. In addition, the solution to the disadvantages will be proposed. Chinese and English versions of nursery rhymes will be listed in hereunder for contrast.

The following part has such points to be discussed in each type of nursery rhymes: classification of the type; language features and contextual functions of selected nursery rhyme, the strategies, methods or techniques adopted, the advantage of the translation, the disadvantage of the translation, and the possible solutions.

### 4.1 Rhymes for Amusement

Rhymes for amusement are funny and illogical, which turn things upside down deliberately to create a sense of humor (Wang, 2002). This is often the way in which the reverse song paints a vivid picture which is impossible or the incomprehensible in nature or in real life. It tells a fake truth in a serious way so that children will have a strange feeling when they hear about it, and after simple reasoning, they will finally find it illogical, thus creates an effect of amusement.

#### Example 8

(C)姐姐十五我十六，妈生姐姐我煮粥。  
爸爸睡在摇篮里，没有奶吃向我哭。  
记得外公娶外婆，我在桥前放爆竹。(Cao, 2003, p. 34)

(E) *Sister* is 15 and I'm 16, *Mum* gave birth to sister, but *I* was cooking congee.

*Papa* slept in the cradle, He cried because there was no milk.

When *grandpa* married *grandma*, I was lighting the firecrackers.

(Sylvia Yu et al., 2006, p. 39)  
(C for Chinese and E for English)

For linguistic features of the selected nursery rhyme, the words used are quite simple. “姐姐 (sister)”, “妈 (mum)”, “爸爸 (dad)”, “外公 (grandpa)” and “外婆 (grandma)” are daily addresses. The images the nursery rhyme created such as milk, porridge and firecrackers along with the actions like marriage are also common in people's life, which create a familiar context for children. The pattern of sentences is regular. The word count is evenly distributed in each line. For the rhyme, the first and second lines are rhymed “ou”, while the fourth and the sixth lines are rhymed “u”. In this case, although the rhymes are different and irregular, it feels hardly weird and obscure because the distribution of each rhyme in its own part is even. There's no rhetoric here, but the nursery rhyme itself shows a huge absurdity.

Context goes like this: Sang Sang bathed in the river in the late autumn to wear new clothes, shouted out aloud and neighborhoods went outside to see what he was doing. Both the neighborhood and his mother laughed. It shows that Sang Sang is so lively.

In this nursery rhyme, method of literal translation is applied, since almost all the original Chinese words were translated into their corresponding English version. Techniques adopted are sentence split and deletion, because in the second line, the original text is one sentence while the English version is split into two sentences. Information of “向我”, “记得” and “桥前” in the original content are deleted.

The advantage of the translation is that translators fully take children's perceiving perspective into consideration since the addresses like *mom*, *papa*, *grandma* and *grandpa* are appropriate to reveal children's cognitive stage and to cater for children's taste.

However, in the translation, there's no rhyme to follow, which completely runs opposite to the original text. The original text is seven words evened in each line while the word counts of each line in the translation are 6, 10, 5, 7, 4, 5, which results in the loss of balance beauty of the original text and breaks the regularity into chaos. According to the principles of translating nursery rhymes, it achieves faithfulness and expressivity, but fitness is lost. The sacrifice of form and rhyme for meaning doesn't make sense.

To solve the problems, a similar funny rhyme which is translated by Headland in *Chinese Mother Goose Rhymes* published in 1900 called *Mixed* may provide some ideas.

#### Example 9

(C) 忽听门外人咬狗，拿起门来开开手，  
抬起狗来打砖头，又怕砖头咬我手；  
骑了轿子抬了马，吹了鼓，打喇叭。(Headland, 1900, p. 46)

(E) Just outside my door, I heard someone say,  
A man bit a dog in a dangerous way;  
Such a message I n'er for a moment could stand,  
So I took up the door and I opened my hand,

I snatched up the dog with I could say double-*quick*,  
And threw him with all of my force at a *brick*;  
The brick—I'm afraid you will not *understand*—  
I found in a moment had bitten my *hand*;  
I mounted a chair, on a horse I was *borne*,  
I blew on a drum, and I beat on a *horn*. (Headland, 1900, p. 46)

(1) The original verse is rhymed every two lines and the translation follows such a rule strictly but flexibly. The first and the second lines of the original text which are ended with “狗(gǒu)” and “手(shǒu)” rhymed “ou”, and translations which are ended with *say* and *way* rhymed /eɪ/, with *stand* and *hand* rhymed /ænd/. The third and the fourth line which are ended with “头(tóu)” and “手(shǒu)” rhymed “ou”, and translations are ended with *quick* and *brick* rhymed /ɪk/, with *stand* and *hand* rhymed /ænd/. The fifth and the sixth lines which are ended with “马(mǎ)” and “叭(ba)” rhymed “a”, and the translations which are ended with *borne* and *horn* rhymed /ɔ:n/. All the aforementioned translation of the rhyme contrasted with the original rhyme is even and full, which means that Headland fully understood the importance of rhyme and reproduced it in the translation.

(2) It added nifty whispering and murmuring, which makes the verse alive and full of musical beauty. It tells that a young man who just experienced a series of weird things can't wait to tell his fortuitous adventure to passersby, and you, the reader, happened to be the passerby he was holding, so he was talking with you face to face. His experience sounds like impossible and eccentric, but his description sounds serious, which is so logical with conjunction and corresponds with the way ordinary people talk—it adds details and explanation freely just after the description, slurs word and frequently uses punctuation. It's hard to figure out whether he is just amusing or telling a true story.

The whole translation sounds comfortable, rhythmic and witty, successfully creating a humorous absurdity like a stream that flows, while the translation above in *The Straw House* is like a pool of stagnant water.

In this case, a few suggestions to the translation of *The Straw House* are proposed accordingly.

(1) To severely accord with the rhyme regularity in the original text, creating a corresponding rhythmic structure in English.

(2) To take advantage of punctuation and colloquial words, forming a natural and comfortable conversation environment.

(3) To reconstruct the sentence pattern, reproducing the content ordered and harmonious in the new context.

## 4.2 Rhymes for Knowledge

Rhymes for knowledge are usually used to broaden children's horizon and teach them common knowledge (Wang, 2002), mainly to enhance their cognitive ability and to expand the scope of knowledge.

### Example 10

(C) 正月梅花香又香，二月兰花盆里装。  
三月桃花红十里，四月蔷薇靠短墙。  
五月石榴红似火，六月荷花满池塘。  
七月栀子头上戴，八月桂花满树黄。  
九月菊花初开放，十月芙蓉正上妆。  
十一月水仙供上案，十二月腊梅雪里香。 (Cao, 2003, p. 41)

(E) *In the first month of lunar year*, plum flowers smell good,

*In February*, orchids are plenty in pans.

*In March*, peach blossoms are red for 10 li,

*In April*, roses lean against short walls.

*In May*, pomegranates are red as fire,

*In June*, lotuses fill the pond.

*In July*, gardenias are worn in the hair,

*In August*, yellow osmanthus flowers blossom on trees.

*In September*, chrysanthemums begin to blossom,

*In October*, cotton hibiscus is flourishing.

*In November*, narcissus is put on the table,

*In December*, wintersweet diffuses aroma in snow.

(Sylvia Yu et al., 2006, p. 45)

For the language features, the words used also are also less difficult. Flowers like “梅花(plum flowers)”, “兰花(orchids)”, “桃花 (peach blossoms)”, “蔷薇 (roses)” are common flowers which can be seen almost everywhere with the seasons. Chinese children are not strange to their names, shapes, colors and smells. The pattern of sentences is regular. The word count is almost evenly distributed in each line except the last two lines, whose expression of months is actually the same as the above, thus the little change of lengths doesn't matter. Eight lines are rhymed “ang” while the remaining four lines are not, which creates a cadent condition for common sense education of the seasons of flowers without humdrum it brings if one rhyme is used all through. The rhetorics used are hyperbole, simile and personification. In “三月桃花红十里”, the expression of “ten lis” are overstatement, which shouldn't be deemed as a specific number. In “五月石榴红似火”, the expression of “as red as fire” is obviously a simile. In “十月芙蓉正上妆”, cotton rose has lovely luster as a lady making up her face. It's a personification. The use of several rhetorics make the whole verse alive, which significantly reduces the tedium of commonsense education.

The context goes like this: this verse was taught by Zhi Yue to Liu Liu, the junior sister of Sang Sang who is curious about everything in her age. Taking her age into account, education like pure preaching and listing are not appropriate to achieve the goal of civilizing. Prominent rhyme and vivid rhetoric create a world full of aesthetic music and tender feelings, which is proper for education.

In this nursery rhyme, method of literal translation is applied, since almost all the original Chinese words are translated into its corresponding English version.

However, taking technique adopted into account, since partial paraphrase is used, domestication is shown in some place. In the third line from the bottom, the original text is “十月芙蓉正上妆” while the translation is “in October, cotton hibiscus is flourishing”, which translates the real meaning which originated from the personification.

The advantage of the translation is that readers can understand the concept of months easily. This verse adopts Chinese lunar year, and translators process it into representation of the number of months in the Gregorian calendar. It's a good idea for comprehension. Another possible translation could refer to Headland's translation, that is, making January, February and March into the 1st month, the 2nd month and the 3rd month, as shown in the example selected from Headland's *Chinese Mother Goose Rhymes* presented in the possible solution to the question arisen as below.

The disadvantages of the treatment are listed as follows:

(1) Singular and plural forms are not uniform in the translation. From the first month of lunar year to September, orchids, peach blossoms, roses, pomegranates, lotuses, gardenias, osmanthus flowers and chrysanthemums are all in plural form, while from October to December, cotton hibiscus, narcissus and wintersweet are all in singular form, which is unbalanced and irregular.

(2) There's no rhyme at all. The source text is rhymed almost from top to bottom, while the translation isn't in the whole text.

(3) The content is almost literally translated, dull and plain. For example, “In March, peach blossoms are red for 10 li”, it's impossible and ridiculous to make 10 lis as a concrete distance, and there's no further explanation for what is *li* (里)—a Chinses unit of length, approximately equal to 590 yards.

(4) Static sentence structures and repetitive words make it insipid. There are 6 sentences whose structure are static “*be+adjective*” (Pan, 2015, p.30), and one word in the same part of speech—verb appear twice, that is *blossom* (开花).

According to the principles of translating nursery rhymes, it achieves faithfulness, but fitness and expressivity are lost.

To seek for possible solutions to the question arisen, it happens that there's a similar case in *Chinese Mother Goose Rhymes* too, which could offer some references.

#### Example 11

(C) 正月里，正月正，天将黑了点上灯。  
二月半，人若饿了就吃饭。  
三月长，人要盖房就垒墙。 (Headland, 1900, p.96)  
(E) **In the first month**, when it is night,  
If you are wise, your lamp you'll light;  
And when **the second month** you meet,  
If you are hungry you should eat;  
And **in the third month** most of all,

To build a house you must lay a wall. (Headland, 1900, p. 96)

To avoid ambiguity, it uses a quite simple way to make discrimination between Chinese lunar year and Gregorian calendar. Headland abandoned the specific name of months in Chinese lunar year, and used ordinal numbers instead. It is suitable when there are only three months involved, but in the case of whole twelve months, translator's treatment of using Gregorian calendar is also a good idea.

In the second, fourth and the last line, truths that people need to follow are told. Headland uses the adverbial clauses in the former two ones to show the natural state of them, while changing the sentence structure in the latter one line to avoid boredom.

Aimed at these disadvantages, suggestions are made as follows:

(1) To keep the singular and plural forms uniform to gain orderliness.

(2) To use flexible sentence patterns and diverse words, not just static structure which describes the state.

(3) To make the translation rhymed at the end of each line, creating a dynamic and vivid image representation.

(4) To retain the figure of speech to show vividness and delight.

### 4.3 Rhymes for Enjoyment of Life

The definition of the type is that most of such rhymes represent the lives of children or adults from a child's perspective, which are full of children's delights (Wang, 2002).

#### Example 12

(C) 呀呀呀，呀呀呀，  
脚趾缝里漏出一小丫。  
没人搀，没人架，  
刚一蹠腿就跌了个大趴叉。  
这小丫，找不到家，  
抹着眼泪胡哇哇……(Cao, 2003, p. 52)  
(E) Ya Ya Ya, Ya Ya Ya,  
A little girl dropped from between the toes,  
Nobody supported or helped her,  
She fell upside-down.  
The little girl couldn't find home,  
She wiped her tears and cried... (Sylvia Yu et al., 2006, p.52)

For language features, the words it used are colloquial like “蹠腿”, “大趴叉” and “小丫”. Onomatopoeic words are widely used in this verse, for example, “抹眼泪”, “呀呀呀” and “胡哇哇”. The patterns of sentences are diverse and the structures are flexible. Meanwhile, punctuations are unconstrained to fully show the sensations. There are six lines embodied nine hemistiches, and eight of the nine are rhymed “a”. When speaking out “a”, people need to open their mouths full and round, as if they are complaining and crying, which creates a vivid picture of a helpless little girl who is lost. Rhetoric used are rhyming

and onomatopoeia, creating a lively bustle picture.

The context is going like this: Liu Yishui and his fellows always bully Zhi Yue, and one day they block Zhi Yue's way home. She has no choice but to stumble along in the cratered wheat field, thus Liu Yishui and the other two participants yell out this nursery rhyme for amusement.

In this nursery rhyme, method of paraphrase is applied. Technique adopted is deletion, because all the folk expressions are deleted, like “刚一蹽腿就跌了个大趴叉” and “胡哇哇”.

The merit of this version is that it's easy to be understood for English-speaking children, while the disadvantages of the translation are:

(1) Plain and flat tone. In view of it's a sarcastic verse to make fun of Zhi Yue and to amuse those three boys, those insipid, neutral and well-behaved words are unsuitable. If this verse is viewed in isolation, then the tone is just less alive. However, combined with the original context, the emotion hidden in the tone in translation is far from enough.

(2) Rough treatment towards onomatopoeic words is . Like in the first line, the Chinese is “呀呀呀, 呀呀呀”, and the English version is also mimic—“Ya Ya Ya, Ya Ya Ya”. It's an oversimplified and crude way to treat such quintessence into quantity. *Ya* (呀) has no meaning in English, and can't represent the playful attempt of those three boys. Meanwhile, “胡哇哇” is translated in to *cried* (哭泣), which largely loses the delight of music.

(3) Lack of rhyme. As analyzed in Chapter 3, three sentences embodied nine hemistiches, and eight of the nine are rhymed “a”. The translation is faithful to the content, while losing the romantic charm at the same time.

According to the principles of translating nursery rhymes, it achieves faithfulness and expressivity, but elegance is lost. A large number of deletions of folk expressions and onomatopoetic words lose its delight and the hero's bad image.

Accordingly, for possible solution to the question arisen, suggestions are offered:

(1) To use different lexical terms to show the tone of taunt instead of being limited to the content and structure.

(2) To show ironic sensation, the first line could be translated into “well—well—well, What've we found?” The onomatopoeia should be treated depending on the effect of the presentation.

(3) To give the priority to Rhyme, for nursery rhymes are characterized rhythmical.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

From the above analysis, it can be seen that translators of *The Straw House* mostly use literal translation in the translation of nursery rhymes, supplemented by various techniques, such as deletion, replacement, transformation

of sentences, sentence splitting, etc. Such treatment can truly reflect the content of the original nursery rhymes. However, literal translation is far from enough in the translation of nursery rhymes. Not only does it need to be faithful and smooth, but the most important thing is to retain the charm and childish delight of the original nursery rhyme, to help the context go smoothly and profoundly, to communicate the English-speaking children. As Huang (2011, p. 7) says, it is also advisable to sacrifice the surface form of the text for style and reproduce the charm of nursery rhymes of the source text to the greatest extent on the basis of a full understanding of the nursery rhymes of the source text, which means the characteristics of nursery rhymes and the contextual function should be considered in the first place.

In sum, Relevance Theory is effective to follow in the translation of nursery rhymes in the works of children's literature. The translation should function the communication role strictly from author's intention to target readers, taking the language and structure characteristics into account concerning word, sentence, rhyme and rhetoric aspects, and represent the original contextual intention, like character personality, atmosphere highlighting and emotion expression to the largest extent. The content and original text form can even sacrifice for better textual effect.

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## APPENDICES

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### Appendix 1: Nursery Rhymes in the original and in *The Straw House*

Source Text 1	English Translation
姐姐十五我十六， 妈生姐姐我煮粥。 爸爸睡在摇篮里， 没有奶吃向我哭。 记得外公娶外婆， 我在桥前放爆竹。 (Cao, 2003, p. 34)	Sister is 15 and I'm 16, Mum gave birth to sister, but I was cooking congee. Papa slept in the cradle, He cried because there was no milk. When grandpa married grandma, I was lighting the firecrackers. (Sylvia Yu et al., 2006, p. 39)
Source Text 2	English Translation
一树黄梅个个青， 打雷落雨满天星。 三个和尚四方坐， 不言不语口念经。 (Cao, 2003, p. 41)	There was a tree of green plums, each very green, When it was thundering and raining, stars filled the sky. Three monks sat in a square, In silence, they recite their sutra. (Sylvia Yu et al., 2006, p. 44)
Source Text 3	English Translation
正月梅花香又香， 二月兰花盆里装。 三月桃花红十里， 四月蔷薇靠短墙。 五月石榴红似火， 六月荷花满池塘。 七月栀子头上戴， 八月桂花满树黄。 九月菊花初开放， 十月芙蓉正上妆。 十一月水仙供上案， 十二月腊梅雪里香。 (Cao, 2003, p. 41)	In the first month of lunar year, plum flowers smell good, In February, orchids are plenty in pans. In March, peach blossoms are red for 10 li, In April, roses lean against short walls. In May, pomegranates are red as fire, In June, lotuses fill the pond. In July, gardenias are worn in the hair, In August, yellow osmanthus flowers blossom on trees. In September, chrysanthemums begin to blossom, In October, cotton hibiscus is flourishing. In November, narcissus is put on the table, In December, wintersweet diffuses aroma in snow. (Sylvia Yu et al., 2006, p. 45)
Source Text 4	English Translation
呀呀呀， 呀呀呀，	Ya Ya Ya, Ya Ya Ya,

脚趾缝里漏出一小丫。  
没人换，没人架，  
刚一蹽腿就跌了个大趴叉。  
这小丫，找不到家，  
抹着眼泪胡哇哇……  
(Cao, 2003, p. 52)

A little girl dropped from between the toes,  
Nobody supported or helped her,  
She fell upside-down.  
The little girl couldn't find home  
She wiped her tears and cried...  
(Sylvia Yu et al., 2006, p. 52)

#### Source Text 5

一颗星，  
挂油瓶！  
油瓶漏，  
炒黑豆！  
黑豆香，  
卖生姜！  
生姜辣，  
叠宝塔！  
宝塔尖，  
戳破天！  
天哎天，  
地哎地，  
三拜城隍和土地！  
土地公公不吃荤，  
两个鸭子囫囵吞！  
(Cao, 2003, p. 88)

#### English Translation

A star,  
Hung on the oil bottle!  
The oil bottle leaked,  
Fry the black bean!  
The black bean smelled good,  
Sell the ginger!  
The ginger is spicy,  
Pile the pagoda!  
The pagoda is pointed,  
Pierced the sky!  
The sky,  
The earth!  
Worship the town god and earth tree times!  
The god of earth didn't eat meat,  
He swallowed two ducks!  
(Sylvia Yu et al., 2006, p. 88)

### Appendix 2: Rhymes referred to in Chinese Mother Goose Rhymes

#### Mixed

Source Text 1  
忽听门外人咬狗，  
拿起门来开开手，  
抬起狗来打砖头，  
又怕砖头咬我手。  
骑了轿子抬了马，  
吹了鼓，打喇叭。  
(Headland, 1900, p. 46)

#### English Translation

Just outside my door, I heard someone say,  
A man bit a dog in a dangerous way;  
Such a message I n'er for a moment could stand,  
So I took up the door and I opened my hand,  
I snatched up the dog with I could say double-quick  
And threw him with all of my force at a brick;  
The brick—I'm afraid you will not understand—  
I found in a moment had bitten my hand;  
I mounted a chair, on a horse I was borne,  
I blew on a drum, and I beat on a horn.

#### Do As You Ought

Source Text 2  
正月里，正月正，  
天将黑了点上灯。  
二月半，  
人若饿了就吃饭。  
三月长，  
人要盖房就垒墙。  
(Headland, 1900, p.96)

#### English Translation

In the first month, when it is night,  
If you are wise, your lamp you'll light;  
And when the second month you meet,  
If you are hungry you should eat;  
And in the third month most of all,  
To build a house you must lay a wall.