

A CORPUS-BASED APPROACH ON THE RELEVANCE OF TRANSLATING INTERJECTIONS

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Abstract: Usually defined as an atypical class of linguistic signals, within Relevance Theory interjections take on the function of communicative clues. The purpose of this paper is to attest whether translation guidelines set up within the framework of relevance theoretic approach are of help in transferring the analytical and contextual values of interjections from English to Romanian in layered texts. The research is illustrated with examples from a corpus of children's literature considered by means of software tools involved in terminological research.

Keywords: relevance theory, interjections, children's literature, layered texts, translation

1. Introduction

The relevance-based theoretical approach tries to give an overt account of how the information-processing abilities of our mind allow us to communicate with one another. Consequently, its research concerns mental faculties and their causal efficacy, rather than texts or processes of text production. Signalling a powerful stimulus, interjections have different communicative values (e.g. referential, expressive, conative, phatic, etc.) or can function as pragmatic markers. In this paper I want to examine how a relevance theoretic (RT) approach on translation can be of help in determining the meaning conveyed through interjections. Firstly I will focus on a number of significant aspects of RT, emphasising the importance of context (for both RT viewpoints and interjections) and the significance of the principle of relevance. Considered as RT communicative clues that carry an important explanatory baggage of the communicative situation, interjections are also reflected upon from a translation perspective in order to see if and to what extent this 'baggage' is conveyed in the TL.

2. A relevance theoretic framework in the study of interjections

According to Sperber and Wilson, understanding an utterance involves more than simply identifying the assumption which is explicitly expressed. It also involves another crucial aspect, namely, working out the consequences of adding this assumption to a set of expectations that have themselves already been processed. In other words, it consists of interpreting the contextual effects of the assumption in a context determined by previous acts of comprehension (1996, 113). In fact, the authors argue that relevance is a matter of degree. On the one hand, an essential condition for an assumption to be relevant is for it to have contextual effects. The greater the contextual effects, the greater the relevance. On the other hand, the effort required to process the assumption must be small. Relevance theory is not an approach that offers descriptive classifications of linguistic phenomena. As an alternative, it tries to understand the complexities of communication in terms of cause-effect relations, which, "applied to our mental life, are taken to mean computational, and particularly inferential relationships" (Gutt 1991, 21).

Generally speaking, relevance theory applies to all information transfer, but more specifically to ostensive-inferential communication. "Ostensive-inferential

communication consists in making manifest to an audience one's intention to make manifest a basic layer of information", where the 'basic layer of information' is the communicator's informative intention (Sperber and Wilson 1986, 54). Communication is therefore *inferential* in its nature. Sperber and Wilson assert that the crucial mental faculty that enables human beings to communicate with one another is the ability to draw inferences from people's behaviour. From the communicator's perspective, this means that the communicator's / translator's task is to produce a verbal or non-verbal *stimulus* from which the audience can infer his informative intention. Verbal stimuli convey the clearest form of communication, as linguistic communication "introduces an element of explicitness where non-verbal communication can never be more than implicit" (Sperber and Wilson 1986, 175, in Gutt, 1991, 24). Gutt argues that "this extraordinary explicitness is due to a range of *properties of language* (my italics), but foremost among these is the fact that verbal expressions are assigned semantic representations" (Gutt, 1991, 24).

The linguistic <i>input</i> - the <i>stimuli</i> - are linguistic expressions that have some meaning depending on the occasion (i.e. context) OSTENSIVE STIMULI the communicator wants to convey	explained by a mind module that specializes in processing language data (a de/coding mental device) INFERENCE (logical deduction)	<i>output</i> i.e. mental formulae , or semantic representations (of the audience) that mean something:
		a) Semantic representations are mental representations, the output of the language module of the mind
		b) Thoughts with propositional forms derived from the output of (a), by further processing.

Table 1. RT cognitive framework

As we can see in the above chart that summarises the cognitive framework assumed by RT, the verbal communication process shifts semantic representations into propositional forms that utterly depend on the context. Accordingly, the linguistic input – the stimulus – is explained by a mind module, a coding device that processes language data. Semantic representations, i.e. mental formulae that represent something, result as the linguistic output. By further processing, the output of semantic representations are thoughts with propositional forms. The understanding of the speaker-intended communication depends on both correct decoding and precise speaker-intended contextual information (Gutt 1991, 73).

More specifically, to illustrate with a thematic example, imagine a boy - named David - who is showing a swollen finger to his mother, saying "*ouch!*". There is a pair of tongs in his close vicinity. He therefore transmits a mental / semantic representation of pain, which, by further processing, results in the correct interpretation of facts:

Stimuli: <i>Ouch!</i> Context: - David says... - [a pair of tongs] - [swollen finger]	Mind processing, depending on the cognitive environment: David says <i>Ouch!</i> , [+ a pair of tongs], [+swollen finger]	a) Mental (semantic) representation of pain b) David cries of pain for having hurt his finger with a pair of tongs
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Table 2. RT cognitive framework illustrated with interjections

2.1. Context and the Principle of Relevance

“The context of an utterance is ‘the set of premises used in interpreting [it]’, (...) ‘a psychological construct, a subset of the hearer’s assumptions about the world’ (Sperber and Wilson 1986, 15; Gutt 1991, 25). Hence, context in RT does not refer to the outside environment of the communication partners, but it discusses participants’ assumptions about the world, meaning their cognitive environment. According to Sperber and Wilson a cognitive environment of an individual is a set of facts which he is capable of representing mentally, accepting their representation as true or probably true (1986, 39; and Gutt 1991, 193). Due to the need for resource optimization specific to all human activities, communication is also subject to the desire of keeping to a minimum the spent effort. Applied to context selection this signifies that auditors will logically opt for the most accessible contextual assumption. Optimization is also related to obtaining benefits, thus “(...) the outcome of an act of communication has to modify some previously held assumptions in order to be found rewarding” and “context modification is [therefore] important for communicative success” (Gutt 1991, 27-30). According to Gutt, context modifications, or contextual effects can be of three kinds:

1. *Derivation of contextual implications.*

In what follows, contextual implications (3) are inferences that follow from the inferential combination of (1) and (2):

- (1) Although the propositional content of an utterance is clear in semantic content, the auditor cannot grab what the speaker implies:

e.g. “*Oh, my poor little feet (...)*” (Carroll 2000, 16)

Oh is used here to express – strong – pain and discomfort. Its meaning is unclear: do those ‘little feet’ hurt? Is the pain caused by too long a walk or by constricted shoes?

- (2) Contextual assumptions, more specifically knowledge of the contextual conditions of the utterance, clarify this presumed complaint:

a. The fragment belongs to ‘nonsense literature’ which usually defies logical reasoning

b. Preceding and following bits of text:

➤ Preceding text:

“So she set to work, and very soon finished off the cake” (...) “after when she looked down at her feet, they seemed to be almost out of sight, they were getting so far off” (Carroll 2000, 14-5)

➤ Following text:

“(...) I wonder who will put on your shoes and stockings for you now, dears? I’m sure I shan’t be able! (Carroll 2000, 16)

- (3) Combination of these assumptions:

None of the first assumptions proves correct. It appears that in nonsense literature for children it may be quite conceivable to grow so much as to think of saying farewell to one’s own personal feet that are no longer perceivable.

2. *Strengthening or confirmations of assumptions already held.*

In RT terms, assumptions can have varying degrees of strength. The strength of an assumption increases when it is implied by additional assumptions likely to be true.

e.g. “I am the Witch of the North.”

“*Oh, gracious!*” cried Dorothy. “Are you a real witch?”

"Yes, indeed," answered the little woman. "But I am a good witch, and the people love me."
(Baum 2000, 25)

"*Oh, gracious!*" implies here that, as surprising as it may seem, someone affirming being a witch is probably a witch.

3. *Elimination of previously held assumptions can result when contradictions arise.*

"When two assumptions are found to contradict each other, if it is possible to compare their strengths, and if one is found to be stronger than the other, then the device automatically erases the weaker assumption. (Sperber and Wilson 1996, 110)

e.g. "'But I thought all witches were wicked," said the girl, who was half frightened at facing a real witch.

"*Oh, no*, that is a great mistake. There were only four witches in all the Land of Oz, and two of them, those who live in the North and the South, are good witches. I know this is true, for I am one of them myself, and cannot be mistaken."
(Baum 2000, 25-6)

The essential prerogative of relevance theory is that human communication creates an expectation of optimal relevance, that is, an expectation on the part of the hearer that his attempt at interpretation will yield suitable contextual effects at minimal processing cost. This fact is believed to be part of our human psychology, and is expressed in relevance theory as the principle of relevance: "Every act of ostensive communication communicates the presumption of its own optimal relevance" (Sperber and Wilson 1996, 150).

Optimal relevance implies extremely available information and the use of contextual effects suitable to the occasion. The communicator (or translator) is responsible to make correct assumptions about the codes and contextual information accessible to the audience likely to be used in the comprehension process. The responsibility for avoiding misunderstanding belongs to the speaker, whereas the hearer has to use the most accessible code and contextual information. The solution would be to increase the relevance of utterances in order to "guide the hearer in searching his memory for the intended referent and hence considerably ease his processing load. To be consistent with the principle of relevance, an utterance must achieve adequate contextual effects and put the hearer to no unjustifiable effort in achieving them." (Gutt 1991, 33).

It is also stated in RT that humans deal with thoughts in two different ways, either descriptively – depending on the truthfulness of some state of affairs – or interpretatively – depending on their interpretative resemblance to other thoughts. These are noticeable in communication as well, and utterances that have propositional forms can also be used either descriptively or interpretatively (Gutt 1991, 37, 56-7). Although interjections lack propositional forms we argue that they can be used both descriptively and interpretatively. The examples considered above at (1) & (3) are occurrences of descriptive use, where the contextual uses of the interjection "*oh*" help the receptor achieve relevance in considering a state of affairs. On the other hand, the contextual use of (2), "*oh, gracious!*", interpretatively comments on the previous utterance.

2.2. Procedural semantics of use in the study of interjections

Important aspects related to relevance theory refer firstly to descriptive and interpretative uses and, secondly, to interpretative resemblance. Gutt's approach is relevant to our reasoning: "We do not necessarily say what we think, but more often (...) what we say interpretatively resembles what we intend to communicate" (1991, 33).

Considering interjections, expletives such as the English "*Holy Moses*" or the Romanian "*Doamne Dumnezeule*" do not actually denote divine 'authorities', but from

hearing them the listener interprets some of the speaker's emotions. Sperber and Wilson emphasise that within the 'cost-sensitive' framework of relevance theory (...) "such non-literary language allows for very economical communication" (ibid.). In fact, all representations / utterances with propositional forms, are used to represent things in two ways: either descriptively, if some state of affairs are presented as true, or interpretively – if the utterance represents some other representation. Secondary communication situations (communication challenges) occur when in interpreting a text an "audience fails to use the contextual assumptions intended by the communicator" (Gutt 1991, 73) and, therefore, misinterpretations appear. Nonetheless, there are subtle methods – that typically belong to natural language expressions - in which communicators can exploit linguistic means to change the interpretation of an utterance, without varying its propositional form. Interpretative resemblance between utterances becomes clearer if communicative clues are reflected upon. Blackmore concurs to this viewpoint when stating that within RT the meanings of a subset of expressions labelled *discourse markers*, should be considered according to the way they limit or direct pragmatic inference rather than the way they contribute to the conceptual content of the utterances that contain them (2010, 575). Our further thematic examples illustrate the above and are in line with Gutt's theoretical approaches:

Firstly, Gutt sets that there are *communicative indices* that convey information non-representationally, that is, independently of the conceptual content usually conveyed through a semantic representation. For instance, in our previous example, "ouch!" doesn't represent any concept. Consequently, it does not have a propositional form, and this is a general feature of pragmatic markers. As Gutt puts it, "the way that such an utterance communicates information is through an appropriate description of it". More specifically, in my previous example, David says "ouch!" and his mother can "construct the description" "David said *ouch* to me". This description engenders additional assumptions. For example, an English speaker's *encyclopaedic knowledge* about his language includes the information that the word "ouch!" is used informally to express pain. Using this knowledge David's mother could derive from the description "David said *ouch* to me" the contextual implication "David complained to me about having a pain". "What description the audience constructs, and which set of assumptions it assumes to be communicated by the [interjection] (in this specific case) would, as always, be determined by consistency with the principle of relevance" (Gutt 1991, 39-40).

Secondly, utterances that lack propositional forms – such as interjections - can nevertheless resemble each other in their interpretations. For example, whether '*ouch*' or '*ah!*, or *oh!*' is uttered to someone, our intuition mainly communicates the same idea: that is, the complain of a pain.

Thirdly, these types of utterances are verbal ostensive stimuli that can resemble non-verbal ostensive stimuli, such as crying, finger pointing, or head nodding. Although similar to verbal stimuli, the interpretation conveyed by non-verbal ostensive stimuli is intuitively felt as deficient, for the reason that non-verbal gestures lack propositional forms.

However, two similar utterances (in Gutt's terms, 'with identical propositional forms') may differ significantly when interpreted, "precisely because the form of the utterance imposes different constraints on how the propositional form is to be *related to the context*, and hence on what contextual effects it is to have" (id., 41). For example, in the case of the above mentioned interjections, the contextual difference imposed by the choice of interjectional form (that, of course, includes voice tonality) could elucidate more on the intensity of the pain. In RT terms, the speaker's intention is therefore to convey additional

implicatures, in order to keep the hearer's processing *effort as minimum as possible* in his endeavour to derive the correct interpretation.

Utterances inherently depend on the communication situation, their primary purpose is to convey interpretations. Interpretations need to be relevant, whereas relevance is context-dependent. Consequently the interpretation of utterances is context-dependent. Resemblance between utterances is also context-dependent: utterances that resemble one another in one context may not resemble each other in a different context. The following examples will illustrate context-dependence for variants of the interjection of onomatopoeic origin *grr*.

(1) Original utterance:

'*Augrh!*' said Father Wolf.

Original context:

"Mother Wolf lay with her big gray nose dropped across her four tumbling, squealing cubs, and the moon shone into the mouth of the cave where they all lived. '*Augrh!*' said Father Wolf. 'It is time to hunt again.'" (Kipling 2012, 2)

Intended implicature

Considered in this particular context, *Augrh*, a variant of *grr*, is here an exclamation that expresses ferocity, and in this case paternal power and responsibility (i.e. care), as 'he' is the one responsible with pack's sustenance.

(2) Suppose another context:

[Mother Wolf lay with her big gray nose dropped across her four tumbling, squealing cubs (...). '*Augrh!*' said Father Wolf. 'It is time to kill the cubs'.]

It is well-known that wolves are extremely protective over their young and would not kill their cubs unless there is not enough food. Still, it obvious that in this context the exclamation would imply male obnoxious, perilous authority.

(3) Suppose a third context, with other phonetic and graphic variants of *grr*, which signal here, besides anger, noisy tumult and fuss:

"Somebody's load has tipped off in the road—

Cheer for a halt and a row!

Urrr! Yarrh! Grr! Arrh!

Somebody's catching it now!" (Kipling 2012, 189)

In these new contexts the analytic implications of *grr* variants will be the same as those of the original – i.e. a growl of ferocious anger - , but, as shown, the contextual implications will be very different.

According to Gutt, these situations are common when utterances are used to represent other utterances. Thus it is necessary to make a comparison between the assumptions communicated by each utterance in its own context. Using RT terminology, this means that two ostensive stimuli (two utterances) interpretatively resemble one another to the extent that they share their assumptions, namely their analytic and contextual implications, their explicatures (descriptive features) and implicatures (interpretative features). It is also thematically important to our approach that the concept of interpretative resemblance is "independent of whether or not the utterance in question has a propositional form, but at the same time it is context-dependent, since the explicatures and implicatures of utterances are context dependent" (1991, 44).

Blackmore (2010, 575) distinguishes between procedural and conceptual meanings that reflect the representational/computational approach to utterance interpretation proposed by Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory (1996). She also argues that this distinction is also justified in terms of the pragmatic principle which, according to relevance theory, is essential for the explanation of how human communication is

achieved. In line with this principle, “every act of ostensive communication communicates a guarantee of optimal relevance so that it may be assumed that the communicator has aimed to achieve the highest level of relevance he is capable of within the parameters of his abilities and interests” (id., 576).

As we have seen above, two parameters are to be attained for a high degree of relevance: numerous resulting cognitive effects and little processing effort necessary for their derivation. Discourse markers - interjections included - are among language expressions that encode procedures used in identifying the intended cognitive effects with a minimum processing effort. More precisely, expressions that function as markers of expressivity or subjectivity encode more procedures than concepts and are intrinsically linked to communication, as they reduce the effort which the auditor is to invest in gathering the intended interpretation of an utterance. Blackmore also specifies that these expressions include a ‘heterogeneous class of items, usually called interjections, some of which are considered to be marginal to language’ (ibid.). Our own examples, chosen randomly from a corpus of children’s literature prove as highly pertinent the view that interjections convey acts of thought more than acts of communication, pushing forward bits of the speaker’s inner self. The following examples include *oh* in (1) – (a), (b) & (c) -, *ah* in (2) - (a), (b) & (c) -, and *well* in (3):

- (1)
- (a) There was nothing so very remarkable in that; nor did Alice think it so very much out of the way to hear the Rabbit say to itself, “*Oh dear! Oh dear!* I shall be too late!” (When she thought it over afterwards, it occurred to her that she ought to have wondered at this, but at the time it all seemed quite natural. (Carroll 2000, 2)
 - (b) (...) and was just in time to hear it say, as it turned a corner, “*Oh my ears and whiskers, how late it’s getting!*” She was close behind it when she turned the corner, but the Rabbit was no longer to be seen (Carroll 2000, 7)
 - (c) “*Oh dear, what nonsense I’m talking!*” (Carroll 2000, 16)
- (2)
- (a) “*Ah, cruel Three! In such an hour, / Beneath such dreamy weather, / To beg a tale of breath too weak / to stir the tiniest feather! / Yet what can one poor voice avail / Against three tongues together?* (Carroll 2000, i)
 - (b) “But if I ‘m not the same, the next question is, Who in the world am I? *Ah*, that’s the great puzzle!” (Carroll 2000, 19)
 - (c) “(...) and an old crab took the opportunity of saying to her daughter, “*Ah, my dear ! Let this be a lesson to you never to lose your temper!*” (Carroll 2000, 39)
- (3) “*Well!*” thought Alice to herself, “after such a fall as this, I shall think nothing of tumbling down stairs !” (Carroll 2000, 4)

All above interjections do not contain conceptual content, but encode contextual information about the speaker. Therefore, in line with the theoretical aspects mentioned above, I go for the view that interjections require a semantics of use rather than a semantics of meaning. In conclusion, although linguistically peripheral, interjections encode procedural components in (1) acts of communication and in (2) acts of thought – “in the sense that they are used by speakers in order to encourage the hearer to construct conceptual representations of the emotions and attitudes they wish to communicate” (ib., 578). By means of interjections auditors are able to “witness” either a real-life speaker (“represented speech”) or a fictional character (“represented thoughts”) constructing utterances as public representations of personal thoughts.

2.3. Brief analyses of S & T interjections

My personal hypothesis is that by cumulating meanings conveyed through a character's represented thoughts by means of interjections it is possible to seize more than surface meaning in layered texts. Together with Gutt, who paraphrases France, we consider that literature for children comprises both a surface meaning and "bonus meanings, accessible to those who are more 'sharp-eyed' or better instructed". Innocent audience is captured by surface meaning,

"while at the same time a whole world of more esoteric pleasure is in store for those who share the author's private adult viewpoint and erudition. It is a poor author who aims to communicate only with the lowest common denominator of his potential readership." In addition, "the more fully a reader share[s] the (...) traditions and (...) erudition of the author, the more he [is] likely to derive [implications] from his reading, while at the same time there [is] a surface meaning sufficiently uncomplicated for even the most naïve reader to follow it." (1981, 241, in Gutt 1991, 71).

In order to briefly exemplify layered texts, the surface meaning of Bond's *A Bear Called Paddington* tells the story and the domestic adventures of a kind and likeable little bear who arrives in London from the 'darkest Peru'. Deeper layers of meaning bring about issues related to immigration and 'otherness' that show how the dominant culture never ceases to preserve its superior status. Consequently, my questions are whether in the representation of characters' personal thoughts, the meaning conveyed through interjections is relevant in hinting towards those deeper layers of meaning, and, if so, whether these clues are transmittable in a target language through translation.

Succinctly considering the affective interjection "humph", at a micro level it is observable that its three occurrences in *A Bear Called Paddington* appear when a character clearly considers Paddington a stranger and manifests certain feelings of discomfort towards the little Peruvian bear.

<p>The linguistic input, the stimuli: <i>Humph!</i></p> <p>Contextual knowledge (the collocations)</p> <p>Darkest Peru "ideas about being good" "an understandable mistake"</p>	<p>Explained by a mind module As an interjectional utterance, 'humph!' implies: A locution Linguistic knowledge: Variable graphic representation: [humph], [umph], [unh], etc. Phonetic transcription /hɒmf/</p> <p>Encyclopedic knowledge: Semantic representation: "exclamation of the way of writing the sound /hɒmf/ that people use to show they do not believe sth or do not approve of it" (OALD 2010, 735)</p> <p>INFERENCE (logical deduction):</p>	<p>Output, i.e. mental formulae, or semantic representations (of the audience) that mean something: a) Semantic representations / fully contextual illocutions astonished, but constructive distrust suspicion a cautious acceptance of one's possible mistake b) Thoughts with prepositional forms derived from the output of (a), by further processing / effects on the addressee: (1) & (2) : happiness: questions about being accepted in a community (3) bewilderment: questions about the outcomes of a tense situation / state of mind caused by an outsider</p>
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Table 3. The "humph" example explained in RT terms

Considering the RT framework, the ST *humph* can be seen as linguistic stimuli. Its textual collocations also highlight the manifestation of others' discomfort towards Paddington's origin and foreignness. This stimuli can be explained linguistically and encyclopaedically, as it is shown in the table below. Out of all these considerations, semantic representations regarding others' reactions are implied as outputs.

	ST	TT
1	(1) "Where was it you said you'd come from? Peru?" 'That's right,' said Paddington. 'Darkest Peru.' ' Humph! Mrs Bird looked thoughtful for a moment. 'Then I expect you like marmalade. I'd better get some more from the grocer.'" (Bond 1992, 24)	— De unde spuneai că vii? Din Peru? — Exact, zise Paddington. Din întunecatul Peru. — Hmm... Doamna Bird rămase puțin pe gânduri. — Înseamnă că îți place marmelada de portocale. Trebuie să-i cer băcanului mai multă. (Bond 2012, 22)
2	"Please! I'm sure he'll be very good.' ' Humph! Mrs Bird put the tray down on the table. 'That remains to be seen. Different people have different ideas about being good. All the same,' she hesitated at the door. 'He looks the sort of bear that means well.'" (Bond 1992, 28)	2) Vă rugăm! Sunt sigură că va fi cuminte. — Hm , zise doamna Bird, punând tava pe masa. Rămâne de văzut. Oamenii au păreri diferite despre ce înseamnă să fii cuminte. Cu toate acestea, șovăi ea în dreptul ușii, pare genul de ursuleț manierat. (Bond 2012, 26)
3) "But darling, don't you see?" she said. 'It's a great compliment. Paddington really believes you were throwing me out into the world without a penny. It shows what a great actor you are!' Sir Sealy thought for a moment. ' Humph! he said, gruffly. 'Quite an understandable mistake, I suppose. He looks a remarkably intelligent bear, come to think of it.'" (Bond 1992, 94)	3) Sir Sealy stătu puțin pe gânduri. — Hm! zise el țâfnos. Atunci, greșeala este de înțeles. Pare un urs remarcabil de deștept, dacă stai să te gândești. (Bond 2012, 90)

Table 4. The "humph" example in *A Bear Called Paddington*

This degree of distrust is transferred literally in the Romanian translation as well, by means of a Romanian equivalent, the interjection "*hm*". In this case, the interjection '*hm*' has both expressive and phatic pragmatic functions. Generally it expresses annoyance, dissatisfaction, doubt, mistrust and suspicion. In the above particular cases, the feelings of caution (1), reservation and wariness (2), and irritation (3) towards / caused by the presence of a stranger are perspicuously conveyed in the target source.

3. Conclusion

It has been demonstrated and illustrated in this paper that interjections convey procedural, interpersonal and contextual meanings in a text. Their presence proves creativity and vitality of expression and brings about deeper levels of meaning in children's literature. Therefore, interjections are best analysed according to pragmatic guidelines.

Considering interjections within the RT framework, it has been confirmed that a detailed reflection upon linguistic input and output helps to better determine the meaning conveyed through interjections, in both source and target languages.

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