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An Analysis of Subtitle Translation of Chang 'an from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

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Abstract

Movies are carriers of culture and have become an indispensable means of cultural dissemination in today's society. The demand for subtitle translation is also constantly increasing. Subtitle translation in films is constrained by time, space, and culture; therefore, subtitles should be concise and easy to understand. This article analyzed and evaluated the subtitle translation of the Chinese film "Chang 'an" based on three rules of Skopos theory: skopos rules, intratextual coherence and fidelity rule. The translation purpose of the translator is to help the audience have a better viewing experience and accurately convey the information of Chinese subtitles through a concise English translation. When translating Chinese to English subtitles, translators should omit repetitive or plot-irrelevant information, add conjunctions to make the translation smooth and coherent and transform cultural differences.

Keywords

Subtitle translation, Skopos theory, English and Chinese Translation

1. Introduction

As a medium of cross-cultural communication, the film plays a role as a bridge to promote mutual understanding and communication among countries, nations, and cultures. In the process of film transmission, subtitle translation plays a very important role. An excellent subtitle translation work can not only eliminate the communication barriers caused by cultural differences but also greatly improve the audience's viewing experience and make them more deeply understand and feel the connotation conveyed by the film. Through accurate translation, the audience can cross the language barrier and directly touch the cultural essence contained in the film, to appreciate the charm of the film art more comprehensively. Chinese film "Chang 'an " is such a good work worthy of our in-depth exploration. After three years of careful production, the film has won the love of a vast audience with its exquisite

skills and profound cultural heritage. Its total box office is as high as 1.78 billion, not only in the history of Chinese film left a strong mark, but also ranked second in the box office of animated films, enough to see its wide influence. The film is told from the perspective of poet Gao Shi, through whose eyes we get a glimpse into the history of the Tang Dynasty. Gao Shi and Li Bai, two great poets, insisted on pursuing their ideals and beliefs in the flood of history. Through animation, the film presents the culture and history of the Tang Dynasty in a poetic, magnificent, and romantic way, so that the audience can feel the elegance and charm of that era. It is worth mentioning that the subtitle translation of the film was completed by Australian writer Linda Jaivin. Her translation is concise and smooth and accurately conveys the artistic conception and emotion of the original film. However, there are still some challenges and deficiencies in the translation of subtitles that contain rich Chinese culture. Therefore, it is necessary for us to further explore and study the translation of these subtitles to better convey the essence and charm of Chinese culture.

2. Characteristics of Subtitle Translation

Film subtitle translation refers to the text that is translated from the original language into the target language and displayed at the bottom of the screen while maintaining the original sound of the film. The key to subtitle translation is refinement, which needs to accurately convey the complete meaning within the limited subtitle space while ensuring that the audience can understand its meaning in a very short time (Xiao, 2017).

Film subtitle is a kind of audio-visual translation, and its translation has its characteristics. Qian Shaoyang (2000) summarized the characteristics of film and television translation as "listening, comprehensiveness, instantness, popularity, and non-annotation". According to Li Yunxing (2001), the difference between subtitle translation and other types of translation is that "subtitle translation is characterized by intralingual information transmission, text simplification or enrichment, and spoken language transformation. Subtitle translation is called "the art of maintaining balance", and its evaluation criterion is whether it can provide the most relevant information most effectively with pictures and sounds in a limited space and time. Subtitle translation is limited by time, space, and culture (He, 2009). In terms of time design, film and television subtitles are different from the words in books, which only float on the static page. Because the time of appearance and disappearance of film and television subtitles must be consistent with the speed of movie characters' dialogues, the sound of film and television subtitles and the picture should also achieve fluidity and unity. In terms of space design, subtitles usually roll in the limited space at the bottom of the film, which requires that the number of characters should not be too large, and the font should not be too large, otherwise it will crowd the screen space and affect the overall visual effect of the film picture. The communicative language displayed in film subtitle translation also belongs to cross-cultural communication activities, which is not only the collision of Eastern and Western cultures but also the process of cultural integration. Language cannot exist independently from culture, and culture is the synthesis of the

customs and beliefs left over. Therefore, subtitle translators should not only accurately convey the literal information of the film, but also understand and master the material and immaterial differences between the source language culture and the target language culture in religious beliefs, social customs, geographical environment, and other aspects.

It can be seen that film subtitle translation should not only conform to the customs and habits of the target language but also pay attention to the restrictive characteristics of time and space in film subtitle translation, to effectively convey the basic content, cultural connotation, and information conveyed by the film and television to the audience within a limited time.

3. Introduction to Skopos Theory

The term "Skopos" is derived from the Greek. Skopos theory of translation advocates that the purpose of translation should be considered first and taken as the dominant rule in the process of translation (Nord, 2001). In this theory, German scholar Hans Vermeer is an important representative. He emphasized that "the final goal of translation determines the whole process of translation, that is, the result determines the method". For different purposes, translators will adopt different translation methods and strategies to produce different translated texts and communicative effects. Skopos theory mainly follows three rules: skopos rules, intratextual coherence and fidelity rules (intertextual coherence). Among them, the skopos rule is at the core, while the other two rules serve the skopos rule. The intratextual coherence requires the translation to be linguistically and logically coherent so that the translation can be meaningful in the communicative environment of the target language and can be quickly understood by the reader. The fidelity rule emphasizes that the translated text should be faithful to the original text to ensure that the ideological content of the translated text is consistent with the original text. This is not only the fidelity of the content, but also the true presentation of the original author's thoughts, feelings, and writing intentions (Liu, 2009). Intertextual coherence is considered subordinate to intratextual coherence, and both are subordinate to the Skopos rule. If the Skopos requires a change of function, the standard will no longer be intertextual coherence with the source text but adequacy or appropriateness with regard to the Skopos. And if the Skopos demands intratextual incoherence (as in the theatre of the absurd), the standard of intratextual coherence is no longer valid (Nord, 2001).

In this paper, the purpose of subtitle translation is to help the audience enjoy the film better. Subtitle translation should be concise and easy to understand, and the translator should accurately convey the information of Chinese subtitles in short English translation.

4. Case analysis of subtitle translation of Chang 'an

Among the three rules of Skopos theory, skopos rule is in the first place, intratextual coherence and fidelity rule serve the skopos rule. Subtitle translation is limited by time, space, and culture. Time and space constraints require that subtitles be concise, and cultural constraints require that some culturally

distinctive words and linguistic expressions in the original film be transformed so that the audience can understand them and enjoy the film better.

4.1 Skopos Rule

The ultimate goal of translation determines the direction of the whole translation work, that is to say, what kind of results you want to achieve, and what kind of methods you will choose. With different purposes, the translator will adopt different methods and strategies in translation, which will affect the final translation and its communicative effect. Especially in subtitle translation, the translator's main purpose is to help the audience enjoy the film better, so they will choose the most appropriate translation according to the specific context, and ensure that the subtitle conveys the core message of Chinese subtitles succinctly and clearly. Take "Chang 'an" as an example, the dialogue between the characters in this film is full of the charm of Chinese culture. In the process of translation, translators should follow the skopos rule and strive to eliminate the understanding barriers caused by cultural differences, to ensure that the audience can clearly understand the content of the film. In this way, the audience can feel the charm of Chinese culture while enjoying the film.

Example 1

Chinese subtitles: 高适，多亏你借我马匹，否则我追不上他们，我万死难辞其咎。

Translation: Gao Shi, lucky you lent me your horse. If I didn't catch them, I'd never forgive myself.

The Chinese word "万死难辞其咎" literally means "it is difficult to escape its fault even after 10,000 deaths", which is used to refer to a person who has committed a major fault and cannot escape the blame and cannot be easily forgiven. In order to make the subtitles simple and easy for the audience to understand, the translation is translated as "I'd never forgive myself", which faithfully conveys the core meaning of Chinese subtitles, and at the same time makes the translation of subtitles very concise. According to the technical indicators of European subtitle translation, English, which is a Romanized language, is limited to 37 characters per line (He, 2009). If the translator translates it literally as "die ten thousand times but not get away with it", the translation has a total of 47 characters, which is far beyond the prescribed standard, and will cause the audience to be unable to successfully watch the subtitles in a short time, missing important information and unable to enjoy the movie better. Therefore, due to the limitations of time and space, in order to enable the audience to quickly capture the important information, the translator should omit some Chinese subtitles on the premise of retaining the key information.

Example 2

Chinese subtitles: 我扶灵从广东回到广陵，下葬之后，家中已然四壁空空。

Translation: I took his ashes from Guangdong back to Guangling. After her burial, I came to an empty house.

In ancient China, people used to bury the body of the dead, while in the West, cremation is more common. This difference in funeral culture has led to the mistranslation of the word "扶灵". The "扶灵

" in Example 2 is a traditional Chinese funeral custom, which means that during the transport of the coffin of the deceased, the close person of the deceased will carry the coffin forward and escort the last journey of the deceased. According to the movie screen, when Gao Shi said this monologue, he escorted his father's coffin, not a box of ashes. Here, to help the target language audience accurately understand the meaning of "扶灵" in Chinese culture, it should be translated as "took his coffin", rather than "took his ashes". In addition, the text of "四壁空空" means that the furnishings in the room are simple, which is used to describe the poor family. The translation misinterprets this idiom as "I came to an empty house." This does not mean that the room is empty, but used to describe Gao Shi's family as poor and not rich. Here, "四壁空空" can be translated into the English proverb "I was as poor as a church mouse", which is consistent with the meaning expressed by "四壁空空". This translation is helpful for foreign audiences to accurately understand the plot content and watch the movie.

4.2 Intratextual Coherence

The Intratextual Coherence requires the translation to maintain coherence both in content and logic. Since Chinese and English have significant differences in expression habits, for example, Chinese emphasizes the prominence of the theme while English emphasizes the clarity of the subject, it is necessary to pay attention to this difference in translation. In the Chinese text, if the theme is clear, it does not need to be clearly reflected in the form, and can be dealt with by the zero pronoun reference. However, in the corresponding English text, it is usually necessary to repeat the pronoun as the subject of the sentence to ensure the coherence of the expression (Xu Yulong, 2003). In order to follow the Intratextual Coherence, translators can adopt various translation techniques in the process of film subtitle translation. For example, additions can be used to increase the coherence of the translation by adding expressions or logical connectives that are helpful to understanding. Omitting can be used to remove redundant expressions that are not informative and make the translation more concise and clear. In addition, shift is also crucial, which requires the translator to adjust the word order of the target language according to the semantics and logic, and add the necessary subjects, so as to conform to the language habits of the target language audience and ensure that they can quickly understand the meaning of the translation.

Example 3

Chinese subtitles: 你年纪轻轻的规矩还不少。多谢了，在下李白。

Translation: So young, and yet so formal. Thank you. Li Bai, at your service.

The language features of Chinese emphasize parataxis, so Chinese clauses seldom use connectives between clauses, and only casually use commas to connect them, while English uses connectives to express complex semantic relations, and the connectives often cannot be reduced (Cai, 2003). Therefore, when translating from Chinese to English, the hidden logical relations in Chinese need to be reflected by explicit connectives in order to achieve intralingual coherence in English. In Example 3, the Chinese clause "你年纪轻轻的规矩还不少" implies the transition relationship, and the explicit conjunctive can be understood as "你虽然年纪轻轻的，但是规矩还不少", and the content after the

transition is the focus of emphasis. In Example 3, the English translation uses the conjunctive "yet" to translate the implied transition relationship in Chinese, ensuring the intralingual coherence of the English translation and emphasizing the content after "yet", which is consistent with the Chinese version.

Example 4

Chinese subtitles: 我不知道的是行路难呐, 从广陵出发西行, 不到一个月, 眼看将到洞庭湖, 我已经行囊见紧了。

Translation: What I didn't expect how difficult the journey was. I started west from Guangling.

After almost a month, I approached Dongting Lake, and my money was running out.

Run-on sentences are an important feature of Chinese. The information capacity of sentences is not limited by grammatical form and can be expanded without limitation. However, English is a form language, which constructs sentences with subject-predicate as the sentence center. If you must express other meanings in a sentence, you can use conjunctions and relative pronouns, and add clauses to express them. However, it cannot be extended indefinitely, and a sentence can only express one relevant meaning (Cai, 2003). Example 4 is a typical Chinese run-on sentence in which the personal subject is omitted. By adding the subject "I", the target text is well adjusted into three sentences, and the connective words are added to reflect the logical relationship, so that the target text is coherent and in line with English language expression habits.

4.3 Fidelity Rule

The fidelity rule requires the translator to synthesize the intention and purpose of the original text author, and to be faithful and respectful to the original text in order to achieve interlingual coherence between the target text and the original text. Under the guidance of Skopos theory, the degree and form of fidelity are not invariable, but are determined according to the specific purpose of translation and the translator's understanding of the original text. This makes the translation work more flexible and better able to meet different translation needs. Subtitle translation is special and needs to combine picture and sound. If the translator translates apart from the two, the comprehensive meaning of the picture cannot be conveyed. Specifically in this film, most of the content of the film is character dialogue, and fidelity to the original is to be faithful to the characters' words. The translator should fully understand and translate the meaning of the speaker, and express the meaning of the words and the feelings of the characters.

Example 5

Chinese subtitles:

李白: 律-律令什么的, 你背的还挺熟啊!

高适: 这位兄-兄台, 休要取笑。

Translation:

Li Bai: Y-you know a lot about the law!

Gao Shi: B-brother, don't mock me.

In this dialogue, Li Bai makes fun of Gao Shi's stutter and imitates Gao Shi's speech with his stammering spoken language, which can bring humor to the audience. To make the target language audience better understand this plot of the film and obtain a better viewing experience, the translator should not directly ignore this plot and omit the repeated content in the translation, but should faithfully retain the humor as much as possible. Translation in example 1 reproduces the humor of stuttering in the Chinese film by using the repetition of the initial letters "Y-you" and "B-brother", which well shows the plot and expresses this sense of humor.

Example 6

Chinese subtitles: 虽然读书不成, 但我还有武艺在身。

Translation: I didn't read well but I had martial skills.

"读书" here does not refer to reading through the visual reception of information, such as reading newspapers, or reading articles, but refers to the ability to learn. Chinese often say "读书认真", "读书上进", both refer to having good learning ability, good at learning. Here, "读书不成" is Gao Shi's statement that he is not good at learning, cannot get fame through literature text, but relies on his martial arts, not cannot read. The translation of "读书不成" does not faithfully reproduce the original meaning, and will cause audiences to misunderstand it as Gao Shi is a poor text reader. Therefore, it should be faithfully translated as "didn't learn well", and in this way, the meaning of "读书" in the original Chinese subtitles should be succinctly translated.

5. Conclusion

This paper uses the three rules of Skopos theory to analyze the subtitle translation of Chang 'an. Linda Jaivin's translation has some merits, but it also has some shortcomings, mainly reflected in the transformation of cultural differences between Chinese and Western. Subtitle translation is limited by time, space, and culture. To help the audience enjoy the film better, the translator needs to accurately convey the information of Chinese subtitles in a short translation. Therefore, in Chinese-to-English subtitle translation, it is usually necessary to reduce repetitive information and information unrelated to understanding the plot, add conjunctions to make the translation smooth and coherent and convert cultural differences. As an indispensable part of film communication, the quality and level of subtitle translation directly affect the audience's understanding of the film. Therefore, we should pay more attention to subtitle translation and continuously improve its professional level and cultural accomplishment in order to better spread the art and cultural connotation of film.

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