

Original Paper

A Study on the Subtitle Translation of *Moon Man* from the Perspective of Eco-Translatology

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Abstract

With the deepening of cultural exchanges among countries, film subtitle translation plays an increasingly important role in cultural exchanges. The quality of subtitle translation will also directly affect the speed of international transmission of Chinese films. The science fiction comedy, Moon Man, contains many humorous language, superb sets and stunning effects to make the film stand out. This paper intends to study Moon Man's subtitle from the perspective of Eco-Translatology, analyze the ecological environment of film translation, and illustrate how the translator adapts and selects translation to adapt to the translation ecological environment from the perspective of three-dimensional transformation, and achieve the maximum multi-dimensional selective adaptation and adaptive selection.

Keywords

Eco-Translatology, Three-dimensional Transformations, Subtitle translation, Moon Man

1. Introduction

The impact of COVID-19 caused the slowdown of movie content output and the shutdown of some cinemas, leading to a sharp decline in box office. After that, during the normalization of epidemic prevention and control, China's national government and local governments at all levels continued to launch supportive policies to relieve the difficulties of the movie industry. Chinese movies are gradually entering a period of recovery, and market vitality and industry momentum are being continuously stimulated.

The summer of 2022 saw the emergence of many films in the Chinese film market, with various genres becoming popular in both domestic and international markets. The film released on July 29th, 2022, *Moon Man* 《独行月球》 blended two elements of science fiction and comedy and became a hot topic in

the Chinese film market. From market box office, word of mouth to the speed of dissemination has been ahead of other films in the Chinese film market. Among the existing films of this kind in China, *Moon Man* has a unique visual language of Chinese cinema, broad creative thinking and a very advanced vision (Quan, 2022). The visual effects of the film are unique in terms of art, comedy, and science fiction.

This popular film contains many colloquialisms, humorous language, traditional elements, culture-loaded words and so on. These languages with Chinese characteristics not only help reflect the personalities of the characters in the film but also reflect Chinese values as well as cultural perceptions and so on. In the subtitle translation, we should pay attention to the uniqueness of the actors' lines, preserve the cultural characteristics of Chinese movies and conform to foreigners' perceptions. Therefore, the study of movie subtitle translation can speed up the pace of Chinese movie culture going abroad and enhance the international communication capabilities and influence of Chinese movie culture. As the first translation theory with a more complete system proposed by a domestic scholar, Hu Gengshen, eco-translatology has attracted widespread attention at home and abroad (Wang, 2022). This theory focuses on the ecological environment of translators' translation, which provides a new perspective and way of thinking for translation research. Based on eco-translatology, this paper analyzes whether the subtitle translation of *Moon Man* achieves multi-dimensional adaptation and adaptive selection from the perspective of linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions.

2. An Overview of Eco-translatology

The concept of Eco-translatology is a reflection on the social civilization and economic transformation in translation studies. Ecology became a familiar and common concept, and especially in 1972, the United Nations issued the famous Declaration on the Human Environment, which brought the protection of the natural environment to the attention of all mankind in the world. China also began to pay attention to ecological environmental issues, and the academic field also introduced ecology into translation studies, forming the preliminary concept of translation ecology. Chinese scholars in the translation field also advocate the concept of ecological translation because China has an abundant wealth of ancient ecological wisdom to draw on. These ecological ideas, which include the classical forms of nature, life, the Doctrine of Mean and so on, have become the basis for nurturing and forming ecological translation.

Professor Hu Gengshen (2008) proposes that Eco-translatology studies are both a metaphor and a real reference. In other words, Eco-translatology focuses on the wholeness of the translation ecosystem and provides new descriptions and explanations of the nature, process, standards, principles and methods of translation and translation phenomena from the perspective of Eco-translatology.

Eco-translatology involves nine research focuses and theoretical perspectives (Hu, 2011). First, ecological paradigm, which involves the general direction and principles of a specific research field. Secondly, the sequence chain, the main point refers to that translation is the transformation of language,

and language is a part of culture; culture is the accumulation of human activities, and human is a part of nature, in this way, it forms a very meaningful intrinsic connection. Thirdly, ecological rationality, which professor Hu Gengshen (2010) summarizes as follows: focusing on the whole and relationship of different ecological systems, seeking dynamic balance, reflecting ecological aesthetics, caring for the translation community, and advocating diversity and unity, which are the five major ecological rationality. Fourthly, translation as a purposeful activity, which, from the perspective of connotation, mainly manifests in two aspects: firstly, translators have their specific motives for engaging in translation (focusing on subjective motives); secondly, what translated can do something (focusing on objective effects). Fifthly, the translation ecological environment, which is the core and primary concept of ecological translation science. Sixthly, translator-centeredness, which is the core concept of ecological translation science, believes that the translator is the sum of all contradictions in the translation process. The concept of translator-centered translation helps to extend the research radius of translator research in translation studies and raises its theoretical level. Seventhly, adaptation and choice. Adaptation refers to the translator's adaptation to the translation ecological environment and selection refers to the translator's choice of the translation in the identity of the translation ecological environment. Eighthly, three-dimensional Transformations, under the principle of multi-dimensional adaptation and adaptive selection, we should focus on the linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions of adaptive selection. Ninthly, post-event penalty, which refers not to specific translation methods or practices, but to the requirements or guiding ideas for translation theories or translators' behaviors.

3. The Ecological Environment of Film Translation

Translation is a selective activity for translators to adapt to the ecological environment of translation (Hu, 2008). The ecological environment of translation is composed of various elements. The translation ecological environment refers to the world constituted by the original text, the source language and the translated language, which is the overall environment for the existence of translators and translated texts. With the deepening of research, the definition of translation ecological environment has become broader in recent years, which refers to the text, cultural context and translation community, as well as the collection of spiritual and material components. For translation, everything other than the translator can be regarded as the ecological environment of translation. The output of translated works cannot be separated from the ecological environment. When analyzing the subtitle translation of films, it is necessary to analyze the ecological environment in which it is located. The following will analyze the translation ecological environment of *Moon Man* from both macro and micro perspectives. The macro level will be from the domestic ecological environment and foreign ecological environment, and the micro level will focus on the language itself to analyze the text features of the film subtitles.

3.1 Macro Perspective: Domestic Ecological Environment and Foreign Ecological Environment

As for the domestic ecological environment, the movie *Moon Man* was released in 2022, when

epidemic prevention and control was in the process of normalization, and the development of the film and television industry is in the rising period, and many different types of films have emerged. In this period, the shooting techniques of domestic films also made great progress compared with before. In addition to *Moon Man*, there are also many excellent Chinese film and television works gradually introduced to the world. Although overseas audiences and domestic audiences have different values and aesthetics, the wonderful plots and visual presentations of the films are expected by both domestic and overseas audiences. The theme of the film *Moon Man* is similar to other foreign films such as *Interstellar* and *The Martian*. The film, *Moon Man*, is about the deployment of the Moon Shield Project on the Moon in 2033 to protect the Earth from asteroid impacts. After witnessing the asteroid π hitting the Earth, Gu Duyue(the hero) thinks that the Earth has been destroyed and starts to live a difficult life with the only one animal left on the Moon, the kangaroo, named King Kong Roo. Later, Gu Duyue finally learns that Ma Lanxing(the heroine) and some of the Earth's humans are still alive and living in underground bunkers, and under their guidance, Gu Duyue builds a spaceship to return to Earth. However, on the way back home, Gu Duyue encounters the remnants of asteroid π , a large meteorite π^+ , which is coming towards Earth. Gu Duyue resolutely chooses to die with π^+ and becomes a real hero. As for the foreign ecological environment, the international online communication of Chinese films shows an obvious trend of audience value recognition, which promotes cultural exchanges and enhances overseas audiences' identification of traditional and modern Chinese culture. The film is an important carrier of the Chinese cultural extension strategy. Chinese films convey our national spirit, cultural heritage and social life to the world through storytelling, and showcase our country's style, culture and values. In the film, Gu Duyue is an ordinary man who is unwittingly packaged as a hero to inspire Earth's survivors. The setting of the hero in the movie is very similar to that of superheroes in Western movies, such as Spiderman and Iron man, which resonates with foreign audiences and drives more Chinese films and television to go international.

3.2 Micro Perspective: Language Environment

This film contains a lot of catchphrases, rhymes, colloquialisms, and other funny elements, and full of Chinese expressions. The translation of film subtitles is also restricted by the artistic form of the film itself. It has the constraints of time and space, and it integrates multiple art forms. As a kind of appreciative art form, the film should not only conform to the cultural level of the ordinary audience, but also be easily accepted by the ordinary audience. Therefore, translators need to adapt to the characteristics of subtitles themselves to choose the appropriate translation. The characteristics of the film subtitles are mainly reflected in the following two aspects.

3.2.1 Popularization

Popularization means that dialogues in movies and TV dramas are basically derived from life and are appreciated by ordinary audiences (Wu, 2013). It requires the translator to use the most familiar expressions of the audience, and to use the language that is common and closely related to people's daily life in the translated language environment so that the translation can be easily understood. This

film contains a lot of sense from life, for example, “之前我的保险都是在齐齐哈尔上的，不知道去了月球还能不能续上”.

3.2.2 Colloquialization

Colloquial language refers to the use of daily terms and easy-to-understand sentences in general movies and TV dramas (Wu, 2013). Except for very few movies, most of them are aimed at the general public. Translators should pay attention to many factors, such as the knowledge, age, and cultural preferences of the audience group, use plain language, and conform to the cultural habits of the target language audience. Sentences like, “难归难，该吃吃，该喝喝，啥事别往心里搁” and “出大事儿了” are structurally incomplete sentence, which appears in the movie *Moon Man*, if the translation of these subtitles is too obscure, it will directly lead to difficulties in the understanding of the audience, thus greatly affecting the viewing effect, so the translator should also use fewer or no complicated sentences in the translation of the actors' line.

4. Research on the Translation of the Subtitles of *Moon Man* from the Perspective of Three-dimensional Transformation

Based on the above analysis of the translation ecological environment, it can be found that translators must consider the translation ecological environment and carry out three-dimensional transformation when carrying out high-quality translation. The quality of translation depends on the translator's adaptability to the ecological environment. Hu Gengshen (2011) believes that there are many subjects involved in translation, and there are multi-dimensional transformations, but what is mainly relevant is the three-dimensional transformation of language, culture and communication. Whether from the perspective of theory, practice or logic, these three dimensions are extremely important. Language is the embodiment and carrier of culture. The purpose of using language is communication, and continuous communication can be accumulated into a new culture in the future. However, it should be pointed out that the consideration in the process of translation practice is not limited to the above three dimensions, but these three dimensions are the most important. In this paper, the subtitle translation of *Moon Man* was studied based on the transformation of the linguistic dimension, cultural dimension and communicative dimension.

4.1 Adaptive Selective Transformation of Language Dimensions

The adaptive selection transformation of language dimensions refers to the translator's adaptive selection conversion of language forms in the process of translation, which is carried out in different aspects and levels (Hu, 2011). As a sci-fi comedy, *Moon Man* contains many humorous language that are easy for Chinese audiences to understand, but not so easy for foreigners. Therefore, it is necessary to adapt to the language habits and norms of the target language, and transform the style, phrasing, sentence structure, writing style, etc., so that the language style of the film can be preserved.

Example 1

Scene: The hero Gu Duyue does not how to get along with King Kong Roo at this time, and is

often bullied by Roo, so he is ready to fight with Roo.

SL: 今天就让你含笑九泉。(The hero Gu Duyue's line)

TL: Today will be your last day.

Here, “含笑九泉” refers to a smile in the underworld. In Chinese culture, “九泉” means a place where a dead person will go. Without context, if we translate it into “smile in the underground”, it would be a curse for a listener, but in this film, this sounds more like a joke, so to maintain its funny effect, it can be rendered into “your last day”. The translator uses an exaggerated way to achieve its language style, which has the same effect on the audience.

Example 2

Scene: Earth is broadcasting live footage of the hero and Roo following the sun as they attempt to return to Earth. It's a narration from the live broadcast.

SL: 让我们大家一起祈祷太阳永远不会下落，因为下落特烦恼。(The supporting actor's line)

TL: Let us all pray that the sun will never set, because sunset means his life would set.

Here, “下落特烦恼” is the difficult translation point. The actor of Gu Duyue is Shen Teng, whose other film named *Goodbye Mr. Loser* 《夏洛特烦恼》. In this subtitle, the word “下落” has a similar pronunciation to the word “夏洛”, it is easy to strike a chord in the Chinese film market. Most of the audience might have seen this film before, so it is not hard for the Chinese audience to understand this joke. As we all know, the length of the subtitle is restricted to a scene, and we can add any annotation, so the translation of the subtitle should be simple and concise. To maintain the style of language, we can translate “下落” into set, and then we can form a rhyme at the end of the sentence. In some sense, it is also a way to preserve the style of language.

Example 3

Scene: The hero thinks that the people on Earth are dead, so he pays tribute to the dead people on Earth.

SL: 哭音相随，野鹤飞，芳流百代，笑九泉。(The hero Gu Duyue's line)

TL: Let the sound of crying follow, the wild crane's flight, let your legacy live on forever as you smell from below.

This line belongs to the elegiac couplet. Chinese elegiac couplets have the characteristics of the same sentence pattern and the same grammatical structure. In the film, *Moon Man*, it sadly shows Gu Duyue's heartbroken feelings toward the dead people on Earth, especially his sweetheart Ma Lanxing, Gu Duyue mistakenly thought Ma Lanxing had died on the way back to the earth. This sentence fully embodies the refinement of the Chinese language. Four-word expressions make translation more difficult. The first two phrases “哭音相随，野鹤飞”，translated into two antithetical sentences, “Let the sound of crying follow, the wild crane's flight”, which can well reflect the language characteristics of Chinese. The last two phrases, “芳流百代，笑九泉”，were combined into one sentence. The word “九泉” appears twice in the article. To ensure the style of the language, the translation is different in these two places. In Example 1, to ensure that the humor of the language is well expressed, “九泉” is

translated into “the last day”. In this example, “九泉” refers to its original meaning, “underground”, so the translation is processed into a prepositional phrase with a similar meaning, “from below”, which well reproduces the language style of the subtitle. If we divide this translation from the second “let”, we will find that their sentence patterns are the same, and the number of words is almost the same, which accords with the characteristics of Chinese elegiac couplets and realizes the adaptive selection of language dimensions to the greatest extent.

4.2 Adaptive Selective Transformation of Cultural Dimensions

The adaptive selection and conversion of this cultural dimension lies in focusing on the differences between the nature and content of the source language culture and the target language culture, avoiding the distortion of the original text from the perspective of the target language culture. While translating the source language, the translator pays attention to adapting to the whole cultural system of the language (Hu, 2011). Therefore, translators should keep a watchful eye on the differences between the culture of the source language and the culture of the target language, rather than only focusing on the translation of the form of the source language, otherwise, the audience will misunderstand the culture of the source language. Translators should be concerned about the whole cultural system to which the language belongs.

Example 1

Scene: The hero is explaining why he describes himself as a middle man on his resume.

SL: 俗话说得好，枪打出头鸟。(The hero Gu Duyue’s line)

TL: You know how the saying goes, tall poppy gets the chop.

“枪打出头鸟” comes from “枪打出头鸟，刀砍地头蛇” in Aphorisms from the Ancient Chinese, which means that one should not show too much and do not be overconfident otherwise it will be suppressed. In the English subtitles of the film, it is translated as “tall poppy gets the chop”, literally meaning that any poppy that grows too tall will be cut first. The term comes from the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle’s book. The use of this term comes from Tall Poppy Syndrome, a popular term in Australia and New Zealand. It refers to the tendency to remove people considered too successful or outstanding from a community, like cutting off a tall poppy to make it look flat. The term has become so common in the Australian English lexicon that translators use it here to make it easier for overseas audiences to understand and retain its cultural connotations.

Example 2

Scene: The hero thinks that the people on Earth are dead, so he pays tribute to the dead people on Earth.

SL: 头七快乐。(The hero Gu Duyue’s line)

TL: rest in peace.

This phrase is to show the hero’s respect for the dead people on Earth. “头七” is a Chinese funeral custom. Traditionally, it is customary to think that “头七” refers to the seventh day after a person dies. On this day, relatives should place trays of pastries around the tomb to pray for the dead to rest in peace.

Here, “头七快乐” is used to express the hope that a deceased person will find peace after death, instead of celebrating the coming of the seventh day. If it simply translates into happy first seven days, it is hard for foreign audiences to understand the deep meaning, and they may be confused about this custom. To achieve the cultural effect, the translator rendered it into rest in peace, which can be easily understood by foreigners with different cultural backgrounds.

4.3 Adaptive Selective Transformation of Communicative Dimensions

It means that translators pay attention to the adaptive selective transformation of bilingual communicative intention in the process of translation. It requires the translator to pay attention to whether the communicative intention in the original text is reflected in the translation (Hu Gengshen, 2011). Therefore, translators should focus on the language characteristics of subtitles, the story background of the film and the target audience to achieve the same communicative effect.

Example 1

Scene: This is a narration explaining why asteroids hit the Earth.

SL: 由于长年累月围着火星转, 火星对它已经失去了吸引力, 所以选择了出轨。(A narration)

TL: After millennia of revolving around Mars, Mars' attraction finally wore off, so it decided to leave.

In Chinese, many words have been given new meanings, such as the word “出轨” in this line, which originally referred to an accident in which a train comes off the track on which it is running, now has been extended to a social phenomenon in marriage. The movie uses personification when it depicts an asteroid derailing and hitting the Earth. In this sentence, “它” refers to the asteroid for whom Mars has lost its attraction, is the subject of “出轨” this behavior, and is treated as a person. To achieve the same communicative purpose in translation, the translator chose the phrase “wear off”, which means a drug, sensation, or feeling disappears slowly until it no longer exists or has any effect. By using this word to express the behavior of an object, the audience can understand how Mars' actions are personified, achieving the same communicative purpose in translation.

Example 2

Scene: The hero is forgotten by everyone on the moon, trying to find a way to return to Earth, at this time the hero says a self-encouraging word to himself

SL: 难归难, 该吃吃, 该喝喝, 啥事别往心里搁。(The hero Gu Duyue's line)

TL: Difficult it may be, but we still gotta eat and live, no use being down about it.

This sentence is very colloquial with obvious linguistic characteristics. It is a structurally incomplete sentence. In traditional Chinese thought, eating, drinking and defecating are very important three things. In fact, “吃吃 和 喝喝” implies our daily life. “啥事别往心里搁” refers to a state of mood that is not affected by trivia thing. The communication purpose of this line is to convey an optimistic attitude towards life and tell the audience to let go of unnecessary worries. Therefore, when translating this sentence, the translator should first supplement the subject and add the conjunction “but” to indicate an adversative relation between two clauses, thus emphasizing playing an emphasis role and reflecting the

audience's emphasis on the latter sentence so as to achieve the adaptive choice of communicative dimension to the greatest extent.

Example 3

Scene: After a live broadcast of the hero's life on the moon for some time, the hero finally makes contact with the people on Earth. At this time, the hero and King Kong Roo have been recognized by people all over the world.

SL: 独孤月你现在已经成为全球次顶流了, 你知道谁是顶流吗? (The supporting actor's line)

TL: You have the second highest number of followers in the world. Do you know who is number one?

“顶流” is an Internet buzzword, which means stars with many fans or celebrities with strong influence. In the context of this film, the reason why the hero and King Kong Roo become “次顶流” and “顶流” is not because they are stars or influential people themselves, but because their lives are watched by the people of the earth, and they become the hope of the people of the earth, in this situation we should focus on the number of people concerned about them rather than their identity. Thus, paraphrasing can well express its connotation. The translator uses “the second highest number of followers” and “number one” to explain “次顶流” and “顶流” to achieve the same communicative effect, which makes it easy for foreign audiences to get the main point of Chinese Internet buzzword.

5. Conclusion

Film is a common form of entertainment in people's lives, which enriches our spiritual world and spreads the cultures of all countries in the world. In this process, subtitle translation plays a huge role. This paper studies the subtitle of the film Moon Man from the perspective of Eco-Translatology. The author believes that the translator should actively adapt to the ecological environment of translation, balance the constraints of film subtitle translation, and make adaptive selections so that the translation has a high degree of adaptability and selectivity. Translators must choose different translation methods according to different contexts, language styles, communicative intention and cultural connotations. In order to promote Chinese films to be better and more prosperous, translators should do more research and summarize common problems, reproduce the same cultural and communicative effects and reproduce language styles in the two languages.

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