Original Paper

A Research of Subtitle Translation and International Communication of Chinese Cultural Documentary from the Perspective of Eco-Translatology

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Abstract

With the acceleration of globalization, the internationalization of film and television works has become a powerful tool to enhance Chinese culture's international influence. As an important carrier for telling Chinese stories, subtitle translation of Chinese cultural documentaries is very favorable to cultural dissemination. The documentary "China Bouquet" shows the colorful history, folk customs, and humanities of China and is widely disseminated on overseas media platforms. Based on eco-translatology, this paper interprets the subtitle translation skills and international communication effects of it. It finds that translators adapt to translation ecological elements in linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions to enhance the acceptance of overseas audience. With domestication as the main strategy and foreignization as the auxiliary strategy, translators adopt free translation, conversion, transliteration, omission etc. to demonstrate the charm of Chinese culture and promote effective cultural communication.

Keywords

eco-translatology, subtitle translation, three-dimensional conversion

1. Introduction

The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China stressed the importance of upholding Chinese culture, deepening mutual exchanges among civilizations and promoting Chinese culture. Under the initiative of "going global strategy", many Chinese film and television works have successfully "sailed out to sea" with popular formats, attractive plots and exquisite subtitles to win the favor of overseas audience.

Excellent translation of traditional culture, as a window for the world to understand China, has attracted the attention of officials as well as film and television industry. Documentary truly reproduces Chinese culture elements such as geography, customs, humanities and crafts, so subtitle translation of it is very crucial for foreigners to perceive Chinese culture. "China Bouquet" is a traditional culture documentary, in which each episode concentrates a representative symbol of Chinese material or spiritual civilization, such as the Mystery of Liangzhu, Maiji Shengjing, super rice paper, and Chinese shadow play. "China Bouquet" consists of 20 episodes, each lasting about five minutes. The form of micro-documentary is more suitable for modern people's fast-paced life and fragmented viewing time. The bilingual subtitles of it meet the needs of domestic and foreign audience to appreciate Chinese culture, so this program has been widely disseminated on overseas media such as *YouTube*, *Facebook*, and *Twitter* and won the praise from foreigners.

2. Eco-Translatology and Subtitle Translation

Eco-translatology is proposed by Professor Hu Gengshen of Tsinghua University. He employs natural ecology as a metaphor for translation ecology because they have the commonality that various elements are interconnected, influence each other and operate as a whole. Hu Gengshen (2011) defines "translation ecological environment" as a world formed by original text, source language and target language. This world is a whole composed of language, communication, culture, society, authors, readers, clients, etc. Under different cultural backgrounds, the two languages of English and Chinese have formed unique vocabulary, sentence patterns and rhetorical characteristics. In corresponding translation practices, they also produce different communicative purposes. Hu Gengshen (2013) believes that translator should select and adapt to various elements in source text and target text in translation. Three-dimensional transformation strategy is an important concept, which means that the translator should conduct adaptive transformation of elements in linguistic dimension, cultural dimension and communicative dimension (Hu Gengshen, 2013).

With the deepening of globalization, some high-quality movies and TV series broadcast on media platforms of many countries. The translator builds a bridge between cultures and the subtitle translation becomes the carrier for target language audience to understand the connotation of source language. Subtitle translation belongs to audiovisual translation. Suratno & Wijaya (2018) believe that audiovisual translation means that the translator translates spoken and auditory information of source

text into target text and displays it on a digital screen. Cintas & Remael (2014) point out that the screen space and time limitation of subtitle translation have a great impact on the readability of text. Two lines of text are the norm and the time should be balanced with the reading speed of the viewer.

In addition to time and space constraints of subtitle translation, the translation ecology of "China Bouquet" becomes more complicated due to the influence of many factors. First of all, each episode integrates the representative elements of material or spiritual civilizations of the Chinese nation into five minutes, forming a complex internal translation ecology. Secondly, the unique tone, personality and language characteristics of different storytellers also bring challenges to translation. Finally, translation initiators, translators, readers, economic and political environments constitute the external translation ecology. Initiated by China's official department, this documentary undertakes the mission of spreading Chinese culture to foreign audience. The quality of its subtitle translation is significant for accurately presenting Chinese culture and stimulating foreigners' curiosity and interest of it. The writer applies eco-translatology to interpret translator's adaptation and selection of numerous factors in linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions of this documentary.

3. Adaptive Transformation of Linguistic Dimension

In terms of linguistic dimension, English belongs to Indo-European languages, while Chinese belongs to Sino-Tibetan languages. There are many differences in vocabulary, sentence patterns and structures between the two languages. Hu Gengshen (2011) believes that translators should make adaptive selection or conversion of various aspects of language during translation. The writer will interpret translators' adaptation and selection of language factors from three aspects of vocabulary, sentence pattern and rhetoric.

3.1 Lexical Level

(1)神秘良渚

<u>Mystery</u> of Liangzhu.

(2)麦积山见证了无数僧侣和工匠创作的艺术作品和他们的信仰

Majishan is a <u>beautiful and graceful testament</u> to the work and faith of countless monks and artisans.

(3)被称为"敦煌的守护神"

And he is known as "<u>the Guardian of Dunhuang</u>".

(4)神头戴羽冠

The discovery of this god-like figure <u>with</u> a feather crown.

At the lexical level, the translator mainly adopts translation skills of conversion and amplification. In example (1), the translator employs method of adjective nominalization. The source language "神秘良渚" is equivalent to a modifier-head structure, that is, the adjective "Mysterious" modifies the noun "Liangzhu". The translator transforms the adjective "Mysterious" into the noun "Mystery". In example (2), Maijishan is the subject and the verb is "见证", so the corresponding English word is "witness".

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However, the translator adopts verb nominalization method by choosing the noun form "testament" and he also adds "beautiful and graceful" to show his praise of it. The nominalization skill makes the narration more objective and adapts to the static feature of English.

In example (3), according to western mythology, "god in charge of protection" refers to "Patron Saint" or "Tutorem" from Latin. However, the translator translates "敦煌的守护神" as "the guardian of Dunhuang", because "the guardian" here highlights the meaning of "safeguard" and "care", vividly illustrating Chang Shuhong's contribution of taking root in Dunhuang and protecting Dunhuang culture. In Example (4), the translator transforms the verb "wear" into preposition "with", weakening the action and strengthening the state of the action recipient, which conforms to the feature that Chinese is a dynamic language while English is more static.

3.2 Sentence Level

Chinese and English sentences have distinct differences, such as hypotactic and paratactic, opening at the beginning of a sentence and opening at the end of a sentence, topic sentence as well as subject-predicate sentence, so translators need to make dynamic transformations based on text meanings (Chen Shuping, 2002). The writer selects typical examples to illustrate translator's selection and transformation of factors in sentences' structure, order and voice.

(5)这座太和塔的形象来源于云冈第 6 窟的墙上

The image of the Taihe Pagoda <u>is copied from</u> the relief in Yungang's Grotto No. 6.

(6)直到二十世纪早期，还有数以百计的虔诚僧侣一直在这些石窟中修行

<u>Hundreds of pious monks lived and worked</u> in these caves, <u>until the early twentieth century.</u>

(7)经过张金彪的表演，仿佛真的是一只鹰在天空盘旋

<u>When</u> Zhang Jinbiao flies <u>it</u>, <u>it</u> looks as if a real eagle is actually hovering in the sky.

Chinese mainly employs active voice, while English is dominated by passive voice. In example (5), the source language takes active voice when describing "太和塔的形象" and "云冈第 6 窟的墙壁". However, the translator employs passive voice by translating "来源于" as "is copied from" to explain that the Taihe Pagoda built by craftsmen is very similar to the reliefs of Yungang Grottoes. It shows the translator's praise for the superb craftsmanship and the pursuit of perfection of the builders, which also conforms to the habit of using passive voice to express objective facts in English.

Chinese is a topic-focused language with the emphasis of the sentence at the end, while English is a subject-focused language with the key information generally placed at the beginning of the sentence. Therefore, in example (6), the translator adjusts sentence order by putting the key information which contains subject-verb components "Hundreds of pious monks lived and worked in these caves" from back to the front of the text. Moreover, the adverbial of time "until the early twentieth century" is moved to the back of sentence as secondary information.

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The religious word "修行" has rich meanings in different context and there's no corresponding expression in English. The translator gives a free translation "lived and worked" according to its meaning in current context, which greatly improves its comprehensibility. Chinese is a paratactic language, while English is a hypotactic language (Lian Shuneng, 2010), which means that sentence structures of Chinese is loose and the sentence relationship of it is connected by context and meaning. However, English is tightly structured by grammar and usually employs conjunctions and prepositions to strengthen the coherence of sentences. In example (7), the translator applies amplification skills several times. There is no time mark "当……的时候" in source language. However, the translator adds the conjunctive "when" to make two clauses into a compound sentence. It not only adapts to the limitation of subtitle space but also enhances the coherence of meanings.

There are a large number of sentences without subject in Chinese, while the subject is a necessary component in English. When translating example (7), the translator adds two "it" to refer to the "kite". The first "it" is the object of "flies" and the second "it" is the subject of the main sentence, which can be omitted as implied information in Chinese. The amplification method makes the sentence more complete in component and clearer in meaning, which is easier for foreign audience to understand.

3.3 Rhetoric Level

(8)药剂师的手就如同一杆秤

<u>Here,</u> the pharmacist's hand <u>is</u> the scale.

(9)紫砂泥将开启全新的生命

The purple clay <u>comes to life.</u>

(10)捞纸工人们正在如火如荼的忙碌着

<u>Paper fishers</u> are busy working, seething with enthusiasm.

In example (8), the translator first adds the topic guiding mark "here" to remind the audience to pay attention to the action of the pharmacist taking the medicine on screen. Then he converts rhetorical device of simile in source language into metaphor in target language. Simile is a figure of speech using figurative words such as "like, as", while metaphor is achieved by describing A is B directly. The translator transforms "as" into "is" and the target language becomes "the pharmacist's hand is the scale". The rhetorical effect of metaphor is more intuitive and stronger, powerfully conveying the pharmacist's skill of taking accurate quantity of medicinal materials.

Example (9) takes personification rhetoric to compare "purple clay" to "a living person". The translator doesn't use the word "start" or "begin" to translate "开启" in source language. Instead, he applies authentic English phrase "come to life" to indicate the vibrant change of purple clay, which echoes the word "生命" in source language and vividly conveys the process of purple clay becoming a pot under the subtle carving of the master. The original meaning of the word "fisher" in example (10) is "fisherman". Considering that the action of workers taking out paper from the water is the same as that of fishermen catching fish, he translates "捞纸工人们" into "paper fishers", which humorously

reproduces the working scene of the craftsmen.

4. Adaptive Transformation of Cultural Dimensions

Hu Gengshen (2011) believes that translators should pay attention to differences of feature and content between source language culture and target language culture and conform to elements in cultural systems. In the long history and cultural accumulation, the Chinese nation has formed many unique cultural images. Chinese and English develops under different geographical, historical and humanistic conditions, and some Chinese culture elements have no corresponding expression in English. Therefore, culture-loaded words are difficult to translate in micro-documentaries. Translators should fully understand the connotation of Chinese culture, simplify difficult concepts, and find a balance between highlighting cultural characteristics and promoting cultural communication.

4.1 Material Culture Loaded Words

(11)青铜盘是礼器中的盥器，在祭祀典礼中用来进行"沃盥之礼"

The bronze plate is a <u>ceremonial container</u> used in <u>hand washing ceremonies</u> for worshiping heaven and earth.

(12)这座胡同博物馆记录着四合院的历史

This <u>hutong</u> museum stores the history of <u>siheyuan courtyards.</u>

(13)绍兴人汪明中为自己刚出生的女儿酿制了数坛黄酒

Shaoxing native Wang Mingzhong brewed several jars of <u>Huangjiu (yellow rice wine)</u> for his newborn daughter.

The term "material culture loaded words" refers to some artifacts with unique Chinese history and cultural origin. The word "盥器" in Example (11) is commonly used in ancient China, meaning "A vessel for holding water". The concept "沃盥之礼" refers to a ritual in Western Zhou Dynasty of China, in which people's body is cleaned with water to show respect for gods and others. The translator adopts domestication strategy, translating "盥器" into "ceremonial container" and "沃盥之礼" into "hand washing ceremonies", which makes obscure material culture loaded words easy to understand and conducive to the spread of Chinese culture.

"四合院" and "胡同" in example (12) are both architectures handed down from the long history of Beijing, the capital of China, showing the unique style of ancient Chinese architecture and the Chinese value of neighborliness.

Transliteration is the application of similar sounds in target language to translate concepts in source language. The translator transliterates "四合院" and "胡同" into "siheyuan courtyards" and "hutong" respectively. In particular, he adds "courtyards" after "siheyuan" because "courtyards" is familiar to foreigners and can arouse their association with this kind of Chinese architecture. The word "黄酒" in Example (13) is also a typical material culture loaded word. "黄酒" is brewed from the yellow rice produced in China, which has a history of 2,000 years. It is one of the representatives of the

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hard-working and intelligent Chinese people. The translator doesn't translate "黄酒" literally as "yellow wine". Instead, he adopts the skill of transliteration + interpretation, transliterating it as "Huangjiu", and then interpreting it as "yellow rice wine". He not only conveys the original Chinese culture, but also helps foreign readers understand raw materials of "Huangjiu".

In addition, translator adopts the method of transliteration + literal translation frequently. For example, he translates "饕餮纹", "泰山皮影", "桂枝汤", "宣纸" into "Taotie pattern", "Tai Shan shadow puppetry", "Guizhi soup", "Xuan paper". This kind of translation not only retains the charm of Chinese culture but also promotes the understanding of the audience, which has a strong cultural communication effect.

4.2 Language Culture Loaded Words

(14)这笔丰饶的历史遗存也必然昭示着中国文化将兼容并蓄，海纳百川

This rich historical legacy shows that Chinese culture is <u>inclusive broad, and open.</u>

(15)"三山二水五分田"的格局，适宜人们居住

<u>With the surrounding hills, rivers, and fields,</u> Yixing is perfectly habitable.

(16)中国人常说"靠山吃山，靠海吃海"

The Chinese often say <u>"One has to make use of local resources available".</u>

Language culture loaded words are idioms, sayings, four-character words that are full of Chinese cultural characteristics (Wang Yang, 2023). They are the condensation and inheritance of Chinese people's wisdom and are often highly concise and rich in meanings. According to the explanation of the Idiom Dictionary, the expression "兼容并蓄" in example (14) comes from a classic article called "复郑好义书" in Ming Dynasty of China, which means preserving things with different contents and properties. The term "海纳百川" comes from another classic article in Jin Dynasty of China, which means that the main body can accommodate a wide range of content. The translator gives a free translation of "inclusive, broad and open", faithfully conveying the connotation of source language. Then he omits "必然" in translation to adapt to subtitle space on screen, reducing the reading burden of the audience.

The translator conducts a free translation based on the connotation of Chinese idioms in example (15). When he translates people's settlement environment of "三山二水五分田", he doesn't translate the quantifiers such as two, three, and five, but translates it macroscopically as "With the surrounding hills, rivers, and fields". This is because the quantifiers here are general and omitting them can make the target text more concise and easier to understand. Moreover, if unimportant words are translated, the audience can not understand meaning comprehensively in a limited time span and the screen will be blocked, affecting audience' aesthetic experience.

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Idioms embody the collective wisdom of Chinese ancestors, and literal translation will make them obscure and difficult to understand. For example, if the author translates Example (16) as "Relying on the mountains to eat the mountains, relying on the sea to eat the sea". It will make the meaning abstract and ambiguous, hindering cross-cultural communication. Based on its meaning of "making reasonable use of the resources around us", he translates it into "One has to make use of local resources available", which is both faithful to original text and clearly conveys the life philosophy of Chinese ancestors.

5. Adaptive Transformation of Communication Dimensions

From the communicative dimension, an important purpose of translation is to convey certain communicative intentions to receiver. Therefore, the translator needs to consider audience's reception habits and cognitive psychology. Adaptive transformation of communicative dimension means that the translator should accurately convey the original language information and achieve communicative purpose of different conditions (Hu Gengshen, 2011).

(17)这些在良渚制作的精美雕刻物具有象征意义

These intricately carved objects <u>excavated</u> in Liangzhu are symbolically significant.

(18)王有亮就是其中之一，他已经在这条路上行走了三十余年

One of them is Wang Youliang and he has been <u>restoring historic artifacts</u> for over 30 years.

(19)简简单单几片干叶，开水冲之，此中激发的滋味

<u>Add</u> a few dry leaves, pour boiled water into the cup and <u>you</u> will have the fragrance of tea.

(20)买田阳羡吾将老，从此只为溪山好

"Bought a house here in Yangxian, I will have my <u>retired life wandering</u> in the mountains".

In example (17), the translator does not literally translate "制作" as "made". Instead, he translates it as "excavated", which means digging out items buried in the ground with tools. The word "excavated" more vividly shows that Liangzhu culture is not a product of modern times, but a history that was once sealed underground, meeting the communication purposes of showing the feature of China's long history and culture to foreign audience.

In example (18), the translator adopts paraphrase method when translating "这条路". He interprets it as "restore historic artifacts" to concretely explain its meaning, satisfying the communicative intention of showing Chinese cultural relic restorers' love, persistence, and dedication to their work. The translator uses the amplification method in example (19). He adds the verb "add" and personal pronoun "you" to refer to foreign audience, shortening the psychological distance of audience and attracting them to participate in interaction. It makes them feel as if they are personally involved in making tea, which is conducive to achieving the purpose of stimulating foreigners' yearning for Chinese tea culture.

Example (20) is a poem by ancient Chinese poet Su Shi. The translator applies the translation skills of conversion and amplification. Firstly, he doesn't translate "田" in source language literally as "land" or "field". He translates it into "house" according to the poet's idea. Moreover, considering the creation background of the poem, he supplements the missing information, such as "retirement life" and "wandering". In particular, the word "wandering" is very poetic, conveying the idyllic and free pastoral life that the poet longs for. It helps to arouse the viewers' beautiful fantasy, which is conducive to stimulating their interest in the charm of Chinese poetry.

6. Conclusion

This paper applies eco-translatology to study subtitle translation of Chinese culture documentary "China Bouquet" and its cultural communication effect. Research shows that translators make comprehensive selection and adaptation to different dimensions of translation ecology. In terms of linguistic dimension, in order to adapt to differences of vocabulary, syntax, rhetoric in Chinese and English, translators mainly apply domestication strategy to convey information. In terms of cultural dimension, for culture-loaded words, translators employ skills such as interpretation, transliteration and omission to make Chinese cultural elements more comprehensible, which reduces the cognitive burden of audience and satisfies the purpose of cultural promotion. In terms of communication, translators adopt conversion and amplification methods to supplement the vacant information and stimulate the audience' sense of participation.

Improving the quality of documentary subtitle translation is a necessary condition for telling Chinese stories and spreading Chinese voices well. Translators play a leading role in translation process, so they should fully understand the connotations and cultural characteristics of both Chinese and English. It is significant to improve the comprehensibility of translation so that the audience can catch the meaning of subtitles quickly. Therefore, they need to consider the time and space limitations of subtitle and make the translation fit character's personality, which will help Chinese culture to better "go global" in the future.

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