

A Review of Translating Film Subtitle of Monkey King: Journey to the West by Relevance Theory

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ABSTRACT. Translating Film subtitles occupies an important position at the film market in the globalized world. An excellent film subtitle is necessary for the development of Chinese film to the overseas market. It still has much room for the research on translating film subtitle. The thesis of Translating Film Subtitle of Monkey King: Journey to The West by Relevance Theory provides a new method for translating film subtitle. A review of it is given in this thesis.

KEYWORDS: Film subtitles translation, Monkey king: journey to the west, Relevance theory

1. Introduction

Margaret Sayers Peden indicates that, in the process of translation, the original work likes an ice cube. During the process of translation of the cube is melted. While in its liquid state, every molecule changes place; none remains in its original relationship to the others. Then begins the process of forming work in a second language. Molecules eacapes, new molecules are poured in to fill in the spaces, but the lines of molding and mending are virtually invisible. The work exists in the second language as a new ice cube--different, but to all appearances the same^[1]. Qian Zhongshu once also suggested that translation, as a strenuous journey, with bumps and dangers and thus damages and missings, always has something to be deformed or lost in the process of it. Therefore, it may make the translation astray away from the original in meaning or in style. No matter at home or abroad, the defination of translation all suggests that translation is not an easy task. Nowadays translation has played more and more important role in people's reading, learning, communication as well as entertainment. Therefore, attentions also need to be paid to film subtitles translation.

1.1 Characteristics of Film Subtitles

When films are shown to audiences in language environments that differ from the language spoken in the film, then some form of translation is required. The film is a synthetic art with the using of visual image, music and sculpture combined with other special Chinese elements. It will bring a synthetic and aesthetic pleasure to the audience. The film not only can give people a visual enjoyment, more important is that it also is an important way for cultural communication, for people to enjoy exotic culture. The film subtitle translation usually refers to interlingual translation. Namely, the dialogue among characters and the visual information in the film are translated into the target language. And it's a very effective way for culture communication which can also determine the film's success. On one hand, its main purpose is to convey the information in this film to the greatest extent. On the other hand, it also helps the audience to have a further understanding of the story in this film without too much language barrier. In film subtitle translation, the sound and image of the film subtitle are required to be synchronized. Therefore, the translator should analyze the original information well in the process of film subtitle translation. In the process of film subtitle translation, translators should try their best to create a sufficient contextual effect for the audience. Film subtitle translation contains interlingual and intralingual translation.

Film subtitles translation are usually built according to the conventions of film language, a complex language that overcomes linguistic communication and has its own rules and conventions. Film subtitle translation as an effective way for cross-culture communication can help people with different language and culture background to broaden their horizon and to know each other better. Qian shaochang, a famous Chinese translator, once pointed out that film and television translation is a part of literary translation^[2]. Film subtitle is an important way of cross-cultural communication because of its vivid purpose and style. The translator should consider the needs of the target language audience so that the translation can be equivalent to the original text. An excellent translation of its film subtitle also helps its development at overseas market. It also can help to introduce a interesting story to foreigners well. Accordingly, it can help Chinese film to seek an access to overseas market. To some extent, film translation also plays an important

role in our society just like literature translation.

1.2 The Film *Monkey King: Journey to the West*

The film *Monkey King: Journey to The West* is a domestic animation which took eight years to make. It has won a very successful box office record at home and abroad. Many movies and TV programs have displayed the story--*The Journey to The West* in China. The most amazing is that the film *Monkey King: Journey to The West* has made a new attempt to display this story. The story has applied a narrative model of a hero. The physical and mental development of the hero in this film has been displayed vividly in this film. What's more, this film has integrated Chinese elements and foreign factors together. It not only includes Chinese traditional culture, but also has displayed a special narrative style of Hollywood. Besides, its fabulous Japanese animation painting style also connects with excellent production technology skillfully.

The main reasons for its success also are its animation content of family carnival, skillful advertisement and its development of creative industry chain^[3]. The factors that contributing to *Monkey King: Journey to The West*'s success have been discussed in many different aspects. For example, researchers such as Chen cheng, Pujian, Han meiyang, Zhang lei and Diao ying have already discussed the factors of success in this film from various aspects. Namely, the content of family carnival, the universal of Chinese elements, well-made animation and successful marketing strategy, but few have given much thought to its effective translation^[4]. The thesis of *Translating Film Subtitle of Monkey King: Journey to The West By Relevance Theory* written by Cheng Mengping provides a new method for translating film subtitle. A systematic discussion about the utilization of Relevance Theory has been given in it, which has a certain instructive meaning for film subtitle translation. A review is given in the following for promoting the application of Relevance Theory in film translation.

1.3 The Relevance Theory

Relevance theory may be seen as an attempt to work out in detail one of Grice's central claims: that an essential feature of most human communication, both verbal and non-verbal, is the expression and recognition of intentions (Grice 1989: Essays 1-7, 14, 18; Retrospective Epilogue)^[5]. The Relevance Theory is proposed in the book *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* published by French scholar Sperber and British scholar Wilson in 1986. It suggests that language communication is an ostensive-inferential process, a cognitive process. When it comes to film subtitle translation, the translator must search for the optimal relevance so as to provide the best experience of watching a film for the audience. Besides, film subtitle translation is not only a language transformation, but also a process of cultural communication. The translator should have proper understanding of film subtitle and a comprehensive grasp of the language difference, because it is more complicated than other plain text translation. It not only concerns with the language and culture differences between source version and target version, but also refers to audio and video information and also has the limitation of time and space. Therefore, the translator must find an effective way to optimal relevance so as to provide viewers with the greatest contextual cognitive.

2. Introduction of the Thesis Written by Cheng Mengping

This thesis has been divided into two parts. In the first part, an introduction of relevance theory and film subtitle is given. Relevance theory was applied into translation research by Gutt in 1991. According to the relevance translation theory proposed by Gutt, translation involves the relationship of the original author and the translator as well as the receiver. Gutt's relevance translation theory emphasizes the importance of context in translation. He believes that the words are meaningless without a certain context. There are various images and performance of the actors' action and expression in the film. To some extent, it may also increase the difficulty of its translation. According to this method, a successful translation must be skillful in searching for the optimal relevance in its translation. And it's said that, in the translation process, the translator must pay much attention to the target language reader's cognitive context and reading expectation. In Cheng Mengping's thesis, the writer believes that the information given by the speaker can change the context hypothesis made by the hearer and create contextual effects. The best way for cognitive communication is to seek for optimal relevance. In the process of language communication, the hearer can understand language well based on the context and his original knowledge. Then, an optimal relevance can be made based on its context hypothesis. And efforts in making inferences and contextual effects in achieving optimal relevance are two core concepts in relevance theory. Besides, it reflects that the cognitive communication is always connected to the greatest contextual effects for the smallest effort in relevance theory.

In the second part of the thesis, the writer has made a simple introduction of the film--*Monkey King: Journey to The West* as well as a detailed discussion about the relevance translation theory used in it. The major concern for the translation of this film is how to shorten the distance between Chinese film and foreign audience. There are many

aspects need to be emphasized. The writer has analyzed it from three aspects, namely, methods of addition and omission, free translation and substitution method. The substitution method also plays a very effective role in film subtitle translation. Because the limitation of time and space as well as culture and background, the film subtitle can't be translated properly by direct translation. It suggests that the translator must do the film subtitle translation well by virtue of substitution method. The translator must seek a way for optimal translation based on the relevance theory. As for substitution method, the author also divided it into three aspects: play with words in translation, illustrate the features of different role and reduce the difficulty of foreign audience's understanding.

When it comes to the method of addition, the author refers to Chinese audience and foreign audience may have different understanding of the film because of their different background and culture. Therefore, the translator should have a good master of the two languages as well as their culture. Only if they understand the culture default well, the translator can provide appropriate compensation for its information based on relevance theory. And in this part, the author also gives some examples to prove that it can help foreign audience to enjoy the film well and know much about Chinese culture. When it refers to free translation, the writer suggests that the method of adding should not applied too frequently in film subtitle translation because of film subtitle's limitation in time and space. Thus, the translator can also use the method of free translation which can also have an appropriate contextual effect. To some extent, the free translation is a very acceptable way for foreign audience.

Some researchers have proposed that fidelity is neither refers to the semantic meaning of the original text, nor talks about the expression of the original language, but a fidelity to the ostensive-inference process of the original communication^[6]. The writer points out that the application of substitution method may cause the infidelity of the film subtitle's language expression, but this kind of infidelity is not its disadvantage. To some extent, it's a fidelity based on the ostensive-inference process which can be understood well by the foreign audience. There are many examples of substitution method in the film--*Monkey King: Journey to The West*. All these methods used in this film subtitle translation are mostly based on the relevance theory. After the whole thesis's discussion, the author suggests that relevance theory has much advantage for the film subtitle translation. A good master of relevance theory has very positive meaning for translator's discussion in film subtitle translation.

3. A Review of the Thesis

In this thesis, it indicates that many researchers have made some discussion about the film--*Monkey King: Journey to The West* from many different aspects. The author already has found a new way for its translation study. In general, this thesis has provided a new research method for the film--*Monkey King: Journey to The West* and also given a new way of the film subtitle's translation by connecting the relevance theory with it.

3.1 A Brief Review of Its Content

Translation is a kind of cognitive communication activity according to relevance theory. The author has connected film subtitle translation with the relevance theory. Accordingly, relevance theory is a powerful strategy to explain the most complex phenomenon of translation, though it's not created for translation. Relevance theory provides a new interpretation for the study of film subtitle translation. Under the framework of relevance theory, film subtitle translation is an interlingual dynamic interpretation. The translator should take the advantage of relevance theory so as to correctly understand the intention of the film maker. Besides, it must make an appropriate judgment of the audience's cognitive ability, adopt a proper translation strategy. The translation of film subtitle needs to be concise, vivid, easy to be understood, clear and smooth so as to catch the audience's interests. A good film subtitle translation should guide the foreign audience to understand and appreciate the film with the least effort and obtain enough contextual effect of the film.

To some degree, the relevance theory has provided a united theoretical framework for translation. There didn't have very strict equity between the original text and the target text. Since the cognitive of human beings in language structure is dynamic, the translator can only understand the intention of the original information according to its language. And then convert it to the target language receiver. When it refers to film translation, it may also contain its audio and video information. And the receiver's acceptance of the information also is based on his own dynamic context. From all the discussion of this thesis, it's easily to accept that the relevance theory has very positive meaning to film subtitle translation. It is still worth for the further study in translation field. And the author also gives us many examples to prove the relevance theory's efficiency in the film subtitle translation. However, it doesn't mean that the relevance theory can instead all kinds of translation principle or can be applied in all different translation field. A successful subtitle translation is not only determined by applying of relevance theory, but also relies on the cognitive context of the audience for the discourse depending on the context. From some certain perspective, the application of relevance theory in the film--*Monkey King: Journey to The West*'s film subtitle translation can't convert all the original information well. Film subtitle translation is more complicated than other textual translation. To some point, the relevance theory has

some limitation in transfer the audio and video information of the film subtitle translation. The deficiency of the film's translation is its shortage in connecting the text information with the audio and video message. And it also has limitation in its time and space. Though the translator may transfer the original informational concerning with the film subtitle translation's limitation in its time and space, it still exists some deficiency in its expression. Under the guidance of the relevance theory, this thesis will analyze and study the film subtitle translation of *the Monkey King: Journey to The West* from the perspective of relevance theory written by Cheng Mengpin. In the following, a further discussion is made to analyze the application of relevance theory the author discussed in the thesis.

3.2 A Detailed Discussion of Its Analysis

Example 1, (孙悟空:)你刚才差点被吃掉!知道吗!

Translation: That was a White Dragon, okay? You see one of those and it's the last thing you'll EVER see!

In this part, White Dragon horse is a very familiar role for Chinese audience so that they can understand it well without too much efforts. While it's a stranger thing for the foreign audience who has a few information about its related Chinese culture, the author believes that the translator has skillfully applied the method of addition based on the relevance theory. Therefore, the translator has added the phrase "That was a White Dragon horse" so as to help the foreign audience enjoy the film without unnecessary efforts. Besides, the author also points out that the using of "Sun Wukong" and "Huaguo shan" also is an example of amplification. The translator has converted these into "Sun Wukong-The Great Sage Equalling Heavens" and "Huaguo Shan-Mountain of Flowers and Fruits". This translation can help the foreign audience to enjoy this film without too much difficulty to some certain degree.

Compared with another culture, the characteristics of one special culture is its uniqueness.^[7] Actually, all the examples the author given us are all culture-loaded words. In many occasions, its translation is not necessary to use the corresponding words in English all the time. Firstly, the totally corresponding idioms is seldom existed in English. It's no doubt that culture translation especially in the film subtitle translation is a great challenge for the translator. Therefore, the culture-loaded words' translation of the film--*the Monkey King: Journey to The West* is worth for the translator's further discussion. The translation method of application or omission doesn't always refer to the relevance theory. The thesis written by Cheng Mengping has described the translation of the culture-loaded words in this film as the applying of the relevance theory. However, the culture-loaded words' translation use in this film is not necessarily to be called the using of relevance theory. The "compression strategy" is the only way for Chinese-English translation. The translator must rewrite the original information in English in the process of translation which is also the process of the application for the "Compression strategy"^[7].

Example 2, 一花一世界,一叶一菩提.

Translation: World is within the petal of a flower, Wisdom is within the leaves.

Chinese people advocate fuzzy beauty. Its content can be realized through the process of compression in Chinese-English translation. To some extent, essentially the application of "Compression Strategy" in Chinese-English translation is also the needs for the difference of their way of thinking and aesthetic method. The process of compression is also a transfer process from ambiguity to accurate^[6]. In this part, "菩提", a vague word, is the word for Buddhist in Chinese. While it has been translated into "wisdom" which is its connotative meaning, the translator has used the method of free translation. In the thesis written by Cheng Mengpin, she believes that the translator has applied the method of free translation based on the relevance theory, rather than translated it into its literal translation--Bodhi. To some extent, it is acceptable to explain this phenomenon, but it turns out to be ineffective when examined more closely. Actually, the translation of this is free translation, but it's not for relevance theory. In a fundamental way, it's determined by the different thinking-mode between Chinese and English. Therefore, a better explanation for this translation phenomenon can be found. Namely, obscure content in Chinese can be realized through the process of compression in Chinese-English translation, because Chinese people calls for fuzzy beauty while people in English advocates accurate^[7]. "菩提" is an ambiguity word in Chinese, while "wisdom", to some degree, is a specific word.

Example 3, 一个筋斗云啊,就是十万八千里.

Translation: Your Somersault Cloud takes you a hundred thousand miles.

Example 4, 话说那金箍棒,重一万三千六百斤.

Translation: That mighty pole weighs ten thousand pounds.

In this part, the author also uses this as examples to show its translation based on relevance theory. Both "十万八千里" and "一万三千六百斤" are phrases to show degree. The author suggests that the two phrases has no relation with real distance or weight. These have been translated into "a hundred thousand miles" and "ten thousand pounds" so as to

achieve its core content and communication purpose. According to free translation, it can help the audience to have a better understanding of the film without too much difficulty. The author believes that its a process of searching for optimal relevance. Actually, it's a far-fetched explanation for this which is similar as that we have discussed in the above. As a matter of fact, the meaning of these words in Chinese are largely influenced by their context. Besides, Chinese numerals are different with English numerals. Therefore, the translation of Chinese numerals also needs to be considered from the perspective of subjectivity and objectivity, and its translation must be based on the real situation^[7]. In the two examples the author given us, both "十万八千里" and "一万三千六百两" are empty reference. Its connotative meaning also only exists in Chinese culture. Therefore, the translator uses free translation in order to provide the foreign audience a more acceptable film subtitle translation. It is determined by the difference of Chinese-English phrases. To some extent, it's easier to be understood in such explain. However, a simple question may become more complex if we explain it according to relevance theory.

The author has given some of examples in the rest of her thesis. It is made to prove the method of substitution based on the relevance theory used in the film subtitle translation. In this part, the author indicates that literal translation is not appropriate in some film subtitle translation because of the limitation of culture background and historical elements. Therefore, the author advocates that the translator can seek for the optimal relevance according to the method of substitution. The translator adopts the method of substitution to combine the context with the culture and background of the foreign audience. The author believes that the using of substitution is very common in this film substitution translation, which are also going to be discussed in the following.

Example 5, 出来,快点,怎么又是你?

Translation: Come on out. You looking for a fight? Oh. Or maybe a babysitter.

Sun Wukong is searching for a way to get rid of Jiang Liuer after his seal happening to be releaved by Jiang Liuer. However, he wants to return to Huaguo shan--the mountain of flowers and fruit, but Jiang Liuer runs after him with persistence. Hearing the noise, Sun Wukong said these words, then he found it should be Jiang Liuer. The author points out it's a using of substitution here. In this part, it's obvious that the translator has applied the method of substitution without changing its cognitive meaning. The translation also has expressed Sun Wukong's attitudes towards Jiang Liuer. "Fight" and "Babysister" also is a play of words. Due to the difference in subject and object consciousness between Chinese and English, a large number of original texts are deleted or transformed by the translator in chinese-english translation according to the object consciousness of the English readers.^[8]

In perceptual events, Chinese and English speakers have a slightly difference of their concerns. The pragmatic phenomenon in Chinese emphasize on the process while pragmatic phenomenon in English focus on results^[9]. Many vocabulary for process are frequently used in Chinese. On the contrary, English is mostly indicated the meaning of the result. In this part, "出" and "怎么又是你" are indicates the meaning of process. Its English translation "fight" or "babysister" is intend to express a meaning of result, which also transfer the meaning of humorous. Thus, this translation is influenced by the principle of Chinese pragmatics.

Example 6, 没,没什么.

Translation: Well I'm not too good at "Hide and Seek", I guess.

From the perspective of communicators, communication is an explicit-process. Communicators provide information of their own intentions, while on the other hand, communication is an inference process based on explicit evidence and the communicators' intentions.^[9] This is similar with the example 5 which has been discussed in the above. Sun Wukong is hiding behind a tree for geting rid of Jiang Liuer. While he has found Sun Wukong, Jiang Liuer aksed innocently why Sun Wukong is here. Then, Sun Wukng answered "没,没什么." The translator translated it into "Well. I'm not too good at 'Hide and Seek' ". It's also a free translation to indicate its connotive meaning. In perceptual events, English speakers pay more attention to the result. Through it reflects various degree in different sentences, the information of process is often implied in the sentence and the focus of the conversation is on the result. The author holds the view that it's a play of words. To some extent, this explanation is not very acceptable. This translation is not a play of words, but determined by the difference of Chinese-English pragmatics.

Example 7, 小孩,来帮本帅拿着.

Translation: Hold this for me, I'm not finished. Find some salt, okay?

Example 8, 看招!

Translation: I'll put some barbecue sauce on it. Huh! Ha! Spicy Pork! Wahh!

In this part, the author indicates that it's a using of substitution based on the relevance theory. Zhu Ba-jie didn't believe that Sun Wukong has come back. Therefore, he is going to prove that this isn't the real Sun Wukong. He let Jiang Liuer take his food and he is going to fight with this Sun Wukong. "Find some salt", "barbecue sauce" and "Spicy

Pork” reflect Zhu Ba-jie’s characteristic--greedy for food. But it is not a method of substitution. Actually, this translation is due to the Chinese-English language difference. Besides, the word “Finished” indicates the meaning of result. It is also a method of amplification to correspond with English pragmatic principle. In addition, when he fights with the enemy, Zhu Ba-jie shouts “how do you bite bottom!” This is a joke for Chinese audience which may be difficult for the foreign audience. In its translation, the translator transfers it as “Get your hands off my bacon”. Chinese-English language has slightly difference in their pragmatics. Compared with English, Chinese speakers pay more attention to the process in their expression, because they prefer to implement the preceding procedure when process information”咬”in Chinese is a word for process while “Get your hands off my bacon” in English indicates the meaning of results. Therefore, the method of substitution is obscure in its explanation of translation. The film is easy for Chinese audience to understand, but it’s difficult for foreign audience without relevant cultural background to enjoy. It takes a lot of efforts to understand it. Translators need to understand the pragmatic principle that Chinese is a process-oriented language and English is result-oriented, so as to pay attention to the effective transformation of thinking mode in the process of translation and to achieve effective expression^[10].

Example 9,(江流儿:)二郎神真的有三只眼睛吗?

Translation:Is it true that you have the strength of a hundred men?

Example 10,(江流儿:)巨灵神是不是力气很大?

Translation:Does God Juling really have the strength of a giant?

Example 11:(孙悟空:)很大.

Translation:What does it take to get rid of you?

Example 12:(江流儿:)四大天王是兄弟吗?

Translation:Tell me about your greatest battles!

Example 13:(孙悟空:)是姐妹.

Translation:Well, there was this kid who never left me alone.

As a matter of fact, the communicative purpose of these dialogues is to express that Jiang Liuer feels very curious and wants to confirm whether the legend story is true. However, Sun Wukong is impatient and wants to get rid of him, so he answers that question with perfunctory interests. The author believes that the translator has used the method of substitution. The culture-loaded words “二郎神” “巨灵神” and “四大天王”are hard for the foreign audience to understand. The author suggests that it’s an ostensive-reference process to obtain the optimal relevance. However, such explanation is very abstract to be understood. Besides, the method of substitution can’t describe all translation phenomenon. The essence is influenced by language difference. Compared with English, Chinese has an integral planar structure while English sentence has more clear structure. From the point of aesthetics, English is specific and concise while Chinese is redundancy and concise. It can be reflected not only in it using of pragmatics, but also in its words, phrases and sentences. The examples given by the author are not only contains culture-loaded words, but also has numerals. The translator has translated its vague meaning in Chinese into specific English so that the foreign audience can understand it appropriately. It’s also determined by the different aesthetics in Chinese and English. Besides, “三只眼睛” and “四大天王”can be understood easily by Chinese, but it’s meaningless in English if translated by literal translation. The translator translates it properly according to Chinese-English difference.

4. Conclusion

After all the discussion in the above, we found that the Chinese-English translation always worth for the long-term study since the translator must have a good master of the two language as well as their culture. Knowing the difference of Chinese and English language well is helpful for our Chinese-English translation. For example, Chinese is a process-oriented language and English is mostly a result-oriented language. Long sentence and passive sentence are widely used in English correspondence. Besides, the study on hypotaxis and parataxis is one of the most important research subjects in Chinese-English translation. Under this circumstance, it also suggests that Chinese verbs can be translated into English verb, English noun, English adjective as well as English gerund, while sometimes it can also be omitted in its English text. It depends on the whole context to decide whether it’s suitable for substitution, addition or deletion.

Chinese-English language has slightly difference in their pragmatics, thinking-mode and aesthetics. Compared with English, Chinese speakers pay more attention to the process in their expression, because they prefer to implement the preceding procedure when deal with new information. From a comprehensive perspective, the thesis of *Translating*

Film Subtitle of Monkey King: Journey to The West by Relevance Theory provides a new method for translating film subtitle. Relevance Theory has much advantage for the film subtitle translation. A good master of relevance theory has very positive meaning for translator's discussion in film subtitle translation. However, the relevance theory is not available in all translation phenomenon. And it's very complicated and obscure for people to understand, which also can make a simple question become more complex. Besides, from the perspective of "Compress strategy" and the method of "process-result", translation phenomenon can have a more specific and effective way to be understood.

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