

# Study on the Subtitle Translation of Anime Film *Goodbye Monster* from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

Zhenfan Qi, Dengpan Hu

School of Foreign Languages, Southwest Petroleum University, Chengdu, China

---

**Abstract:** In recent years, China's film and television industry has flourished, and domestic cinemas have released a variety of high-quality movies with different themes. Among them, anime films adapted from Chinese mythological stories are particularly popular with overseas audiences, with *Goodbye Monster* being one of them. The major feature of these anime films is their rich Chinese cultural elements and distinct national characteristics. Through these film and television works, traditional Chinese culture can be spread overseas, making it an important channel for China's external promotion. For these expressions of the films rich in Chinese cultural characteristics, translators need to handle them appropriately in order to help overseas audiences understand the cultural connotations and achieve cultural exchange between China and foreign countries. This paper employs Vermeer's Skopos theory to study and analyze the subtitle translation of the anime film *Goodbye Monster*, aiming to provide a reference for future translations of Chinese anime films.

**Keywords:** Subtitle Translation; *Goodbye Monster*; Skopos Theory; Translation Methods.

---

## 1. Introduction

With the vigorous development of China's film and television industry in recent years, anime films with Chinese cultural elements and distinctive ethnic characteristics have been released one by one, which have been welcomed by audiences both at home and abroad. The film and television industry serves as a significant medium for disseminating culture, a crucial platform for effectively telling Chinese stories, thus playing a pivotal role in the publicity of Chinese culture. If a vast international audiences want to understand and immerse themselves in Chinese culture through Chinese film and television, it is necessary to provide accurate subtitle translations which effectively convey information, capture the charm of visual storytelling, and reflect traditional Chinese culture. Subtitle translators need to consider key issues such as how to handle subtitles rich in Chinese cultural elements, how to assist overseas audiences in comprehending the cultural connotations in movies, and how to promote cultural exchange between China and foreign countries. Based on the characteristics of movie subtitles, this paper selects Vermeer's Skopos theory to analyze the subtitles of the anime film *Goodbye Monster*.

## 2. Skopos Theory

### 2.1. The Definition and Evolution of Skopos Theory

Skopos theory is a theory that applies the concept of "Skopos" to translation, with its core concept being that the purpose of overall translation behavior is the leading factor during translation. As a translation theory of the German functionalist school, Skopos theory has undergone four stages of development: in 1971, Katharina Reiss first proposed translation functionalism in her publication *Translation Criticism-The Potentials and Limitations*, introducing the concept of "functional types" into translation theory and evaluating the translation from the perspective of the

relationship between the functions of the original text and its translation. Hans J. Vermeer conducted in-depth research on the theory of translation equivalence, emphasizing the purposeful nature of translation activities. He then established the foundational theory of functionalism known as Skopos theory, proposed its three guiding principles, and promoted the progress and development of Skopos theory. Vermeer borrowed the Greek word "SKOPOS" to indicate the purpose or behavior of translation, and its core concept is that "translation methods and strategies should be determined by the intended purpose or function of the translation". Subsequently, Justa Holz Mantari proposed the "Theory of translational action" based on Vermeer's skopos theory, and she coined the term "translational action" to replace the traditional term "translation". Finally, Christiane Nord further enriched and improved the theory. In 1998, in response to the shortcomings of functional translation theory, she also proposed the theoretical model of "functionality plus Loyalty" in her book *Text Analysis Translation*. The framework of Skopos theory has changed the evaluation criterion for translation from "equivalence" to "whether the translation purpose is achieved", which becomes the criterion for evaluating translation quality.

### 2.2. Three Rules of Skopos Theory

There are three fundamental rules of skopos theory, namely the skopos rule, coherence rule, and fidelity rule. The skopos rule, the first rule of the skopos theory, stipulates that during the translation process, the translator should fully consider the emotional impact conveyed to the reader by the translated work as well as its intended effect on the translator themselves. The translation process is determined by the purpose of translation activities, which is requested by the initiator and determined through consultation with the translator. The coherence rule is the second rule of skopos theory, which means that the translation should comply with intra-textual coherence, requiring it to be understandable to the recipient and meaningful in the target language culture and the

communicative environment where it is used. In addition, the third rule of skopos theory is the fidelity rule, that is, the target text should be faithful to the source text. The fidelity rule requires that the information conveyed in the target text be faithful to the source text, also the source text and the target text should adhere to inter-textual coherence. The degree of faithfulness of the target text depends on the translator's understanding of the source text and the purpose for which it is being translated. Among these three rules, the skopos rule plays a decisive role and is the primary rule followed in translation activities. Both the coherence rule and the fidelity rule are subordinate to the skopos rule. The skopos theory represents an innovative approach to translation theory and a significant advancement in functionalist translation theory, as it turns the focus of translation from the source text to the target text.

### 3. Subtitle Translation

#### 3.1. Importance of Subtitle Translation

With the rapid development of the domestic film and television industry, the cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries are increasingly expanding and deepening. The scope of foreign audiences is no longer limited to their domestic film and television works. They are increasingly searching online for diverse and innovative film and television works that are different from their own culture. Overseas audiences are gradually attracted by Chinese film and television works in this process. Therefore, the subtitle translation plays a pivotal role in advancing China's film, television, and cultural industries.

#### 3.2. Characteristics of Subtitle Translation

Subtitle translation, compared to other types of text translation, is to somewhat limited by time and space, which is its most distinctive feature. Due to the need for subtitles to closely follow the character's image, their duration on the screen is generally very short. After the character's dialogue or background music ends, the subtitles also disappear, so there is limited space available for them. The film is filled with an abundance of character dialogues, which serve to advance the plots. Consequently, in comparison to the written style, the movie subtitles tend to adopt a more informal tone.

Furthermore, the film viewers are diverse, encompassing individuals from various social classes and age groups, so the movie subtitles should be understandable, and obscure language subtitles should only be used in specific situations or themes. The sourcing of movies involves a wide range of fields, which necessitates translators to accurately translate the specialized terminology used. Therefore, translators need to carefully review relevant materials prior to translation in order to ensure the utmost accuracy of subtitles. Chinese movies typically contain a large amount of cultural information, necessitating translators to diligently preserve the cultural characteristics of our nation and contribute to cultural promotion during translation. At the same time, it is also imperative to consider the level of acceptance for subtitle translations by target language readers, in order to prevent any inadvertent offense towards the domestic culture of overseas audiences arising from translation issues.

In general, the characteristics of subtitles include synchronicity, instantaneity, colloquialism, and popularity. Consequently, the subtitle translation should strive for conciseness, popularity, and faithfulness while endeavoring to

preserve cultural information to the greatest extent.

### 3.3. The Guiding Role of Skopos Theory in Subtitle Translation

With the guidance of Vermeer's Skopos theory, subtitle translators should assist overseas audiences in overcoming cultural and linguistic barriers while catering to their viewing needs. In subtitle translation, translators should employ appropriate translation methods and techniques based on audiences of different types and cultural backgrounds. In this way, subtitle translations can achieve their intended communicative function and the purpose of translation. In addition to following the Skopos rule, the translator also needs to consider whether the target text meets the standards of intra-textual coherence and inter-textual coherence between the source text and its target text, ensuring that cultural connotations and content are effectively conveyed in a manner readily accepted by the target language audience, thus achieving optimal dissemination outcomes. Before conducting subtitle translation, translators must clarify the purpose of the translation, which is to minimize language differences and cultural barriers as much as possible. This will enable foreign audiences to understand the film and appreciate the charm of Chinese culture.

## 4. The Anime Film *Goodbye Monster* from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

The anime film *Goodbye Monster*, adapted by Wu Xiaoyu and directed by Huang Jianming, was domestically released nationwide on August 13, 2022. The film is an adaptation of *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*, a literary work that showcases numerous mythological archetypes and possesses a profound cultural heritage. The filmmakers attempted to integrate the imagery of ancient mythical beasts into the modern spiritual core and created this anime film. The narrative of the story revolves around the contrasting perspectives of the public and Bai Ze regarding the Black Spirit—a disease that has plagued society for thousands of years. As a movie based on traditional Chinese culture, *Goodbye Monster* contains dialogue and narration that include many words and phrases unique to Chinese culture, such as four-character idioms, colloquialisms, slang, etc. In this regard, translators need to consider how to help foreign audiences understand the content expressed in a movie and which translation methods, techniques, or strategies to use in order to achieve their translation purpose. In the following case studies, the author analyzes the translation methods used by the translator in subtitling this movie *Goodbye Monster* from the perspective of Skopos theory, including transliteration, literal translation, and free translation.

### 4.1. Transliteration

Transliteration is mostly employed in the English subtitles of *Goodbye Monster* to translate people's names and place names, which is a technique of translating words from one language into another, aiming to maintain the same or similar pronunciation.

Example 1

Source text (ST): 白泽、火烛、昆仑

Target text (TT): Bai Ze, Huo Zhu, Kunlun

The characters "Bai Ze" and "Huo Zhu" in the movie are mythical creatures derived from *the Classic of Mountains and*

*Seas*, while the place name "Kunlun" also originates from this classic. "Kunlun" is the most important sacred mountain in ancient Chinese mythology and legend, representing the mountain of thousands of ancestors and the birthplace of Chinese civilization. Many legendary mythological stories in China are associated to Kunlun, serving as their origin and background. These names of people and places with rich Chinese culture do not have corresponding expressions in English, so the translator uses transliteration to maximize the preservation of the language characteristics of the source text, making the content and form of the target text consistent with the source text, thus achieving the fidelity rule of Skopos theory. Compared to free translation, transliteration may not fully capture the traditional cultural connotations of China; however, it can significantly improve translation efficiency. Short translations are also more easily remembered by the audience, leaving a deep impression on them, thus serving as a minimalist way to spread Chinese culture.

## 4.2. Literal Translation

Literal translation is the most fundamental translation method, which refers to the use of the source expressions and similar sentence structures in the process of translation. This method can simultaneously preserve the content and form of the source text, especially its local color, allowing foreign audiences to appreciate the language and culture of other countries through the translation. However, some expressions in the subtitles are translated literally and fail to achieve the desired effect, such as the literal translation of certain incantations in the film, including Hundred Poison Mist(百毒散), Heavenly Thunder Mantra(天雷咒), and Five Element Mantra(五行咒). These Chinese incantations read concise and powerful, but when the translation uses literal translation methods, they lack fluency in reading and fail to create a sense of immersion for the audience, although they can help the audience understand the source content. Therefore, translators should consider its applicability when applying literal translation.

### Example 2

ST: 君子动口不动手。

TT: A gentleman talks with his mouth, not his fists.

For idioms without rhetorical features, translators usually choose the primary translation method, that is, literal translation. This method does not make any adjustments to the expression and meaning of the original idiom, reducing the likelihood of causing erroneous associations while maintaining the characteristics and habits of the translation. The source sentence of example 2 originates from Liu Bang, indicating that a gentleman should use reason to persuade others instead of resorting to force to solve problems. The original saying is "I prefer to fight wits, not strength(吾宁斗智, 不能斗力)". The translator employs a literal translation method to convey the original meaning without any special rhetorical devices. This approach fully expresses the content of the source sentence while preserving its form, thereby achieving fidelity rule of Skopos theory.

### Example 3

ST: 你弄个破竹筒跟这胡说八道!

TT: You just yap and yap with that stupid scroll of yours.

The underlined phrase, as a Chinese idiom, refers to the act of uttering nonsensical statements lacking in logical or factual foundation. The source sentence is a conversation between Bai Ze and the last disciple of the former director of Kunlun

Medical Center. Bai Ze did not know the little disciple before, because he had been kicked out of the Kunlun Medical Center by his master, the former director. At that time, he held a grudge against his master, so not display a positive attitude towards this young disciple. In addition, Bai Ze's innate distrust of strangers caused him to a hint of mockery, which is consistent with his proud and arrogant personality. The original meaning of "yap" refers to the barking of a dog and also denotes loud and noisy nonsense. And by continuously using two "yap", the translator effectively highlights Bai Ze's satirical feelings towards the young disciple. Combined with the cute and short image of the young disciple, the word "yap" vividly conveys the meaning of the underlined phrase, thus foreign audiences can feel the emotions of film and television characters.

### Example 4

ST: 良药祛病, 良医治人。

TT: Good medicine cures illnesses, while good doctors treat the soul.

The source sentence is a commonly used four-character structure in Chinese expressions, and its meaning can be analyzed literally. The translator, therefore, adopts a literal translation method for this sentence. There is no logical conjunction before or after the source sentence, but there is an implicit contrast and comparison between "good medicine" and "good doctor". When "while" is used to represent the adversative relation, it often connects the symmetrical parts of the content and structure to express a sharp contrast. The translator, therefore, uses "while" to connect the two sentences before and after the source text, transforming the source Chinese sentence without surface logic to a logically manifested English sentence in accordance with the coherence rule.

### Example 5

ST: 不过这个咒用了龟甲, 对我们龟族大不敬。

TT: But this mantra is an insult to us tortoises, for its use of tortoise shells.

Due to significant differences in thinking and expression patterns between Chinese and English, translators often employ conversion methods to ensure a smooth translation that aligns with the target language's expression habits. Chinese sentences typically contain a large number of verb-object structures and multiple predicate verbs due to its dynamic nature, while English sentences use fewer verb-object structures as it is a static language. Therefore, the excess verbs are usually converted into nouns by translators in the process of translating from Chinese to English. For the source sentence of example 5, if the translator does not convert the part of speech of the verb, two verbs will appear in the sentence, "uses" and "is". The translator retained "is" and converted the "uses" of the verb part of speech in the source sentence to the noun part of speech "its uses". Additionally, the preposition "for" is used to indicate the causal relationship between the two short sentences, making them coherent. The translator also adjusted the order of the sentences before and after in order to make the target text more in line with English expression habits, highlighting the key content of the sentences. This target sentence conforms to the coherence rule and fidelity rule of Skopos theory.

## 4.3. Free Translation

The process of free translation, in contrast to literal translation, is based on capturing the essence of the source text rather than adhering strictly to a word-for-word approach.

The application of this approach is commonly seen in situations characterized by significant cultural disparities between the source language and the target language. The use of literal translation is not suitable when there is a contradiction between the content of the source text and the expressive form of the target text; instead, free translation should be employed. Free translation requires accurately expressing the content of the source text, but it can be unrestricted by its form.

#### Example 6

ST: 天外弱水, 万物皆沉。

TT: The all - submerging Weak Water, I hereby summon you!

This sentence comes from the master of Bai Ze and is a spell to summon weak waters in the movie. The structure of Chinese spells often consists of four characters, which are characterized by a rhythmic and melodic quality, as well as a strong expressive power. Foreign spells are generally more straightforward and convey a stronger intention. To align the translation more accurately with the reading habits of foreign audiences, the translator translated the four-character spell in a free translation, using an adjective "all submitting" to briefly summarize the characteristics and functions of the Weak Water in the movie, directly expressing the purpose of master's spell, so that the audience can understand the function of the spell during the viewing process and have a greater sense of immersion. This target sentence conforms to the skopos rule of Skopos theory.

#### Example 7

ST:

要不是当年奇迹般的天降弱水, 你我都不知道在哪凉快呢!

TT: If it weren't for the Weak Water magically falling from the sky, we would've been goners back there.

#### Example 8

ST: 你个姥姥不疼舅舅不爱的家伙, 你还有脸活?

TT: No one likes you, why don't you just kill yourself already?

The underlined phrase in Example 7 is a Chinese folk saying, which means that if there were no conditions described in the first half of the sentence, one's own or others' current situation would become worse. The four elders lamented that when the Black Spirit broke out, the appearance of Weak Water saved everyone's lives, otherwise everyone would be buried in the Black Spirit. Therefore, the translator accurately translated the underlined phrase into "we would've been goners back there", in keeping with the context at that time. In accordance with the skopos rule, the sentence is enhanced to ensure comprehension by the audience in accordance with the skopos rule.

The underlined phrase in Example 8 is also a common Chinese folk saying. The initial meaning of the phrase referred to a person who was so terrible that he was hated by his most compassionate grandparents and uncles. Later, it evolves to describe a person who is so awful that no one loves him. If the sentence is translated literally, foreign audiences may not understand why the speaker mentions grandparents and uncles, so the translator takes the key point of "no one likes you" to briefly express the meaning of this sentence. The second half of the source sentence is a negative rhetorical question, which the translator converts it into an affirmative rhetorical question. The sentence not only conveys the speaker's tone of reproach and discontent, but also guides the Black Spirit to die. Because in this context, the speaker's

purpose is to guide the Black Spirit to commit suicide through this scolding statement, in order to win the competition for selecting a new director, which is in line with the Skopos rule.

#### Example 9

ST: 不过, 有一种病千百年来却无药可医, 黑灵。

TT: However, there's one disease that has haunted the masses for centuries. The Dark Spirit.

The source sentence is a narration introducing the "Black Spirit". The setting of "Black Spirit" in the movie portrays a prevalent psychological disorder capable of eliciting an array of peculiar and abnormal manifestations among individuals. It serves as a reflection of the prevailing societal anxiety, encompassing frustration, suffering, and obsession experienced by the general populace. The underlined phrase in example 9 refers to the extent to which the disease has become so severe that it cannot be treated with medication. It is extended to mean that the situation has reached an irreparable point. This phrase has no metaphorical meaning in this sentence, it only needs expressing its surface meaning as "no cure for the disease". But the translator did not adopt this translation method, but instead translated it as "one disease that has haunted the masses". The word "haunt" in it has the meaning of "lingering in the heart; (long-term) troubled", which better reflects the stubborn and difficult to cure characteristics of "Black Spirit" as a psychological disease, which continuously entangles people for a long time, making troublesome things lingering in the heart and unforgettable. The translator also adds the word "the masses" to express the popularity of "Black Spirit", which is in line with the skopos rule.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper is written from the perspective of Skopos theory and analyzes whether the translation strategies and methods adopted in the Chinese-English translation cases in animation film *Goodbye Monster* comply with the skopos rule, coherence rule, and fidelity rule in functional skopos theory. The aim is to provide some reference for the English translation of other domestic anime. With the rapid development of China's film and television industry, subtitle translation plays a crucial role in promoting the dissemination of film and television culture. During the translation process, subtitle translators should fully consider the spatial limitations of subtitles and the cultural differences between Chinese and English, respect foreign audiences, and accurately convey the original meaning. The success of subtitle translation depends on the foreign audience's viewing experience.

Therefore, translators should appropriate translation theories and methods based on the specific context of each sentence to ensure that the audience can clearly understand the film content and have the same sense of immersion as the source language audience. To convey expressions with Chinese culture and local Chinese flavor effectively, the translator must first comprehend the meaning conveyed in the movie scene and then employ appropriate translation strategies or methods to achieve the cultural dissemination. Skopos theory, being a relatively mature translation theory, can guide film and television translation to minimize the subjective errors made by translators. Translation is an essential factor that cannot be ignored in order for a film or television work to achieve good dissemination results. Currently, there is still significant room for development in

film and television translation, and the quality of translation varies. Therefore, future subtitle translators should delve into the methods and strategies of subtitle translation based on existing foundations, further enhance translation quality, promote Chinese cultural publicity, and facilitate cultural exchange both domestically and internationally.

## References

- [1] NIDA E. A. Language, culture and translating[M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 1997.
- [2] Nord, Christiane. Translating as a Purposeful Activity, Functionalist Approaches Explairted. [M] Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2001.
- [3] Vermeer, H. Skopos and Translation Commission. [J] Heidelberg: Heidelberg University, 1989.
- [4] Cao Yixing. Subtitle translation research methods in the Internet age: status quo, reflection and prospect[J]. Shanghai Journal of Translators, 2017(05):27-31.
- [5] Wang sun, Jiayan. Study on Goodbye Monster from the Perspective of Media Science [J]. Movie Literature, 2022 (21): 144-147.
- [6] Wu Qiong. On Domestication and Foreignization in Film Subtitle Translation[J].Modern Communication, 2016(07):48-50.
- [7] Yang Ming. An Analysis of the Translation of Domestic Anime Movies from the Perspective of Skopos Theory: Taking "Ne Zha" as an Example[J]. English Square: Academic Research, 2020 (35):25-27.
- [8] Zhong Weihe, Zhong Yu. German Functionalist Translation Theory[J]. Chinese Translators Journal, 1999(03):48-50.