

# On the Translation of Film and TV Drama from Bassnett's Cultural Translation Theory

Liuling Long, Yu Li

Southwest Petroleum University, Chengdu, China

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**Abstract:** Susan Bassnett's cultural translation theory holds that translation is not only a form of discourse transmission, but also a form of cross-cultural communication, and the core of translation is cultural implantation and integration. As an integral part of modern art forms, the translation of film and television works also promotes the spread of culture. This paper consists of five parts. The first part is the introduction; The second part gives a brief introduction to Bassnett's cultural translation theory; The third part briefly introduces the translation of English film and television works; The fourth part introduces the application of English film and television translation from the perspective of cultural translation. Finally, the fifth part is the conclusion.

**Keywords:** Susan Bassnett, Cultural translation theory, Cross-culture.

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## 1. Introduction

With the increasing frequency of cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries, the forms of cultural exchanges show a diversified trend. The popularity and spread of a large number of film and television work in English-speaking countries have set off an upsurge in pursuing English dramas and American dramas in China. Pursuing its root, on the one hand, the novelty of themes and forms in film and television works forms a visual impact and caters to the taste of the audience; On the other hand, a large number of English lovers and English talents fully and accurately translate the lines of film and television works, which improves the audience's understanding and cultural identity of foreign language film and television works. Among them, the language difference caused by cultural concept differences is more difficult to solve in the translation process. If the translation is wrong, it will not only distort the expression of the original work but also cause misunderstanding in the audience. Therefore, the language differences caused by the cultural background in film and television works must be paid attention to by translators.

Since 2012, the number and types of foreign film and television works imported by China have been increasing. While introducing movies and TV plays, excellent documentaries produced by media giants such as BBC and CNN have also been introduced. The total amount of film and television works imported each year exceeds 60. Because of the growing influence of film and television works of this scale and quantity, many translation researchers begin to pay attention to the subtitle translation of these film and television works. Only through a good translation process can excellently film and television work effectively promote cultural exchanges and enable audiences to appreciate exotic customs. In this field, western countries have gradually formed a complete system from translation methods to curriculum training, and specialized research institutions are also increasing. Relatively speaking, China started late in the field of film and television translation, and the complete translation and research system is not perfect. There are some problems, such as uneven quality of translated works, weak systematizations, and consistency of translation.

## 2. An Introduction to Cultural Translation Theory

### 2.1. An Introduction to Bassnett

Susan Bassnett(1945- ) is the emeritus professor at the University of Warwick, whose studies cover a wide range of interests, such as Comparative Literature, Translation Studies, English culture, Latin American Literature, dramatic works, feminist literary works, translation phenomena in the post-colonial period and so on. Bassnett has produced more than 30 monographs, compilations, and translation works, and 100 essays. All of these are both popular and influential.

### 2.2. An Introduction to Cultural Translation Theory

#### 2.2.1. Production

Since the 1970s, the study of translation from a cross-cultural perspective has been paid attention to by all parties. Until 1985, Bassnett opened up a new research perspective in her article *The Path Around the Maze-Strategies and Methods of Script Translation*. She believes that culture is the key factor that determines the core of information. Translation is not a simple process of semantic transformation, nor should it be limited to the description of the original text, but lies in the functional equivalence of the text in the target culture. In the 1980s, translation studies began to move towards a new stage of translation culture theory.

As a world-famous translator and writer, Bassnett put forward the "cultural translation theory", which has a great influence on contemporary translation studies. She believes that the translation unit should be changed to culture, and culture should be regarded as the basic unit of translation. Translation cannot separate the translation process from the cultural scope. In *Translation Studies*, Bassnett points out the symbolism of language and the conventionality between reference and meaning. Among them, the conventionality of language cannot be directly transformed into the semantic relationship of the target language through equivalent translation. Besides the reasons such as different grammatical structures and default semantic structures, cultural differences between the source text and the target text cannot be ignored. In the process of decoding and re-encoding the original text,

translators should not only pay attention to syntactic and semantic relations but also pay attention to the implication caused by cultural differences. Translation, History, Culture was published in 1990, in which Basnett formally put forward a new research theory of cultural turn in translation studies, which is mainly reflected in the power relations in translation and the mode of production of translated texts. "The historical and cultural paradigm of translation studies has been replaced by the paradigm of cultural studies, and the description of translation studies has been replaced by the interpretation of cultural interaction." Basnett's translation view holds that culture is the key factor that determines the core of information. She discusses the specific meaning of the cultural translation view: first, unlike previous discourse studies, culture should be regarded as the basic unit of translation; Secondly, a translation should be an act of cultural exchange, not just a simple process of decoding and reorganizing; Third, a translation should pay attention to the equivalence of the text in the cultural function of the target language, and is no longer limited to the description of the source text; Fourthly, different translation rules should be followed in different translation periods. Generally speaking, cultural translation is the communication within and between cultures, and translation is the cultural functional equivalence between the source language and the target language.

### 2.2.2. Cognition of Cultural Translation Theory

According to the theory of cultural translation, the core intention of translation is to promote cultural exchange, and culture is the primary consideration in the process of translation, while the translation of the source text is in a secondary position.

The selection and application of translation methods should be closely related to the characteristics of the source texts, and the methods should be optimized according to the unique characteristics of different source texts. If we are faced with the descriptive source text, or if the idea to be expressed in the text is to convey a certain cultural belief or custom, we should translate literally from the perspective of being close to culture. If the original text does not involve cultural beliefs and other contents but is more inclined to the scope of literary works, then the translator can flexibly choose and deal with literal translation and free translation according to different contexts.

The difference factor of translation audience is an important factor to be considered in the process of translation. Therefore, in translation, it is necessary to adjust the translation strategy according to the object subdivision of the target text; If it is necessary to translate Journey to the West to children, the translator needs to adopt a colloquial way and tell stories to meet the needs of children; If it is necessary to translate to readers with certain literary skills, the translator needs to carefully consider the translation to meet the requirements of high-level literary works. This kind of translation pays more attention to the needs of the cultural level, which requires the translator to be able to skillfully transform according to cultural differences.

### 2.2.3. Cultural Turn

Basnett's view of cultural functional equivalence emphasizes that cultural factors must be considered in the process of translation. "Equivalence" has different levels, involving vocabulary, grammar, function, and so on. Language has an inseparable relationship with the social culture it carries, so it is the best solution to consider cultural factors and pursue functional equivalence when translating.

She believes that in order to make the translated text play the same function as the source text in the original culture in the target cultural context, cultural transformation should be carried out in translation. She believes that under the specific time and cultural background, the functional equivalence between the translated text and the original text should be ensured by means of cultural transformation.

Antoine Bernan, a French scholar, has long discussed ethical issues in translation studies from a theoretical perspective. Berman believes that modern translation and translatology studies should start from three aspects: translation history, translation ethics, and translation analysis. Berman disagrees with the expression of meaning as the highest standard of translation because it will encourage western cultural hegemony and reflect the feminist hegemonic tendency in translation practice. Any culture will resist translation, although they do need a translation. The ethical goal of translation is to connect with other cultures in written form. On the other hand, translation ethics will be enriched by spreading and introducing other cultures. However, this process will conflict with ethnocentrism that exists in all cultures or narcissism that every society tries to keep its purity and integrity. Therefore, translators should respect the linguistic and cultural differences of the original text.

The translator is the executor of translation activities, not only the reader and interpreter of the original text but also the producer of the translation. Therefore, translators are very important in translation, and they can be the research objects of translation studies. Although the term "translator's turn" was put forward more than 20 years ago, there are many discussions about translators in western countries and China. In 1991, Douglas Robinson, a western translation theorist, published a monograph on translation studies, Translator's Turn. In the preface of this book, he explained that "turning" in the title has two meanings. First of all, the conversion from the source language to the target language is a complicated process, because the translator needs to consider the recipients of the source language text and the target language text in the translation process; Secondly, "turn" means that translation theory should become a tool for translators. The translation theory of translation theorists should provide tools for translators, rather than treating them as rules of translators.

It is worth noting that there are some connections or overlaps in the perspectives and models of translation studies, such as the redefinition of the translator's identity and the study of the translator's subjectivity. More specifically, the study of the translator's subjectivity must arouse our attention to the translator's subjective initiative and creativity in translation practice. After all, translation is rewriting rather than copying, and the creativity of translation is redefined and considered by others. The redefinition of the translator's identity provides a new perspective for the study of the translator's responsibility. Under the social and cultural background, these responsibilities are related to ethics, so they are restricted by social and cultural factors. Therefore, power relations will also appear in translation practice, such as resistance and construction, manipulation, anti-manipulation, etc. These power relations are closely related to ethics, power, ideology, and sociology in translation studies. To some extent, the contents and perspectives of these translation studies overlap. For example, these translation studies are the results of translation studies since the cultural

turn in the 1990s.

### 3. An Introduction to the Translation of Film and TV Drama

#### 3.1. Features

The translation of film and television plays an important role in attracting the audience's interest. Generally speaking, the translated name should not only conform to the language rules and be full of artistic flavor, but also be faithful to the content of the original film and reflect the language features, with the characteristics of popularization, colloquial, popularization, and artistry. These requirements fully reflect the translation principles that translators should follow in the process of name translation. Foreign films like to use human names or place names as titles to highlight the main characters and the place where the story takes place. If the literal translation is adopted, the original meaning will be lost because the audience is not familiar with the names and place names. Therefore, it is necessary to summarize the theme and content of film and television works from the audience's point of view, and translate artistic and practical translated names.

Film translation is similar to other types of literary translation, they all express the artistic realm higher than life through visual language, but film translation has its particularity. The focus of film translation lies in the dialogue between characters, taking into account the psychological activities of characters, the effect of pictures and the different functions of the same sentence in different contexts. If we want to form a translation with fluent language and appropriate expression, and make the visual effects of words and films perfectly integrated, we need the translator to make hard efforts and constantly condense the language of the translation. At the same time, the translator needs to make appropriate adjustments to the original text without affecting the basic content of the film, reasonably delete, supplement, or adjust the word order of the sentences, and ensure the equivalence of the language effect between the translated text and the original text.

In the theory of cultural translation, the cultural factors in film translation are important and difficult to master. Whether the translation can correctly convey the cultural intention of the original film depends to a great extent on whether the audience can correctly understand the cultural factors of the original film. The translator needs to give a brief explanation of the original film in the form of a voice-over. For example, when the names of foreign myths and legends, historical allusions, or scenes involving cultural differences appear in the works, the translator is required to explain them.

Also, subtitle translation is a kind of text translation, but it has its own unique formal characteristics. From the perspective of space, subtitles generally occupy up to two lines of space under the lines; If there are too many words, the decoding speed of the viewer will be affected; From the time point of view, subtitle translation should start and end at the same time as the speaker of the lines to ensure effective cohesion. As far as text translation is concerned, film and television dramas in Britain and America involve comprehensive factors such as society, gender, race, culture, religion, and language. Among them, cultural differences increase the difficulty of translation, and the root cause is the difference in thinking. Just as American linguists Sapir and Wolfe put forward this famous theory: Sapir Wolfe Hypothesis. Its main idea is: language determines the form of

thinking, every language leads to a specific culture, cultural differences are determined by language differences, and all high-level thinking depends on the language. Therefore, the thinking differences between the two cultures should be considered in translation.

For example, in the American TV series *Boston Legal*, an agency case with little chance of winning troubled Allen, so Allen had such a conversation with Denny:

Allen: I'm afraid not. There's no state action. We've asked for specific performance with no clear evidence of discrimination. I don't like losing, especially when there is a wager involved.

Denny: Well, don't, soldier. Pull a rabbit out of your hat.

Allen: Rabbits?

Denny: Oh, yeah.

How to translate "pull a rabbit out of your hat"? The original meaning of this phrase is to find a sudden solution to the problem, but in this situation, it is beneath the plot to give it directly. Therefore, it can be translated as "出奇制胜", so there is no shadow of rabbit in the original text. However, in the later trial, the sudden attendance of a priest reversed the trial result. Finally, the priest said, "That's what you call a rabbit, son." At this time, if the literal translation of "这就是所谓的兔子" will confuse the audience, because the rabbit has nothing to do with this case, therefore, the translation of the previous fragment can be used here, "我就是那个奇兵".

On the other hand, a considerable number of English film and television works reflect the living conditions of the middle and lower classes in society, so the lines in such works are mostly colloquial and a large number of colloquial sayings. In this case, the translation of lines should be adjusted accordingly. If the translation is more formal, the literary style in the original works will be lost.

For example, there is a sentence in the American TV series *Bankrupt Sisters*: "Look, eventually you will learn to do that on the inside." In the play, this sentence means, "最终你会知道眼泪要流在心里" In this way, the audience can certainly understand the implication of this sentence. On the other hand, "Bankruptcy Sisters" is an indoor sitcom based on American civilian life. Although the two protagonists come from different backgrounds, they both use slang, spoken English, witticisms, puns, and other linguistic means in the play, and their language is often humorous. Therefore, this sentence can be translated into slang or colloquial expressions with similar semantics in our Chinese. It is more in line with the language style of the play and the popular and down-to-earth expressions of the two protagonists to replace it with "最终你会明白牙打掉了要往肚里吞".

### 4. The Application of Cultural Translation Theory in the Translation of Film and Television works

The conversion of parts of speech has a good effect on the complex cultural factors in the works. As a cultural element, the cultural image has a relatively fixed cultural meaning in the national culture that forms this element, and audiences at different levels have the same cultural cognition for the same cultural image. Therefore, in the conversion of parts of speech, translators can replace them with cultural images expressing the same meaning. For example, the word "Pollyanna" appearing in the movie *Chicago* is a household name in the

source language, which comes from the image of an optimistic and cheerful girl who can bring happiness to others in the fairy tale Pollyanna. The translator can translate this word into “开心果小姐” in translation, and achieve the purpose of weakening cultural differences and conveying the ideas of the works through the familiar image of Pistachio.

According to the theory of cultural translation, translation is a process to meet the needs of different audiences in different cultural groups. Film and television works are rich in artistic flavor, fluent and vivid language, exaggerated expression and cultural communication characteristics. In the process of translation, the translator should grasp the mood characteristics of the characters and make the characters vivid and lifelike through translation skills. For example, the word "nigger", which frequently appears in the movie 12 Years a Slave, is an insulting term for blacks by white Americans. In the era set by the movie, slave trading prevailed for a while, and blacks lost their dignity and status as human beings and become commodities that can be bought and sold at will. The word "nigger" spoken by different characters in the film has different translation strategies. The first slave owner who worked for Solomon was ruthless to blacks. His "nigger" was translated as "黑鬼", while the second slave owner was relatively kind, and his "nigger" was translated as "黑奴". When slaves address each other, it is not insulting. It can be translated directly as "黑人". It is the analysis of different moods of the same word of different characters and the adoption of different translation methods that will make each character different, thus highlighting the characteristics of the characters.

In addition, according to the theory of cultural translation, the emotions in people's hearts are aroused by oral and written words, which either satisfy people's desires or inspire them to do something. In the vocative expression, the speaker hopes to call on the translator to respond according to his own will, but also needs the translator's desire, because there are great differences in personality, age, education background, and gender. Taking the translated names of movies as an example, only by following the translation concept of cultural translation can the audience be effectively called into cinemas. Because the audience has accepted the title, which can be accepted in the audience's culture. There are some examples. Generally speaking, in movies with the theme of adventure, words related to “xia(侠), long(龙), die(谍), xiong(雄)” often appear in the Chinese translation of movie titles, sometimes even the English title does not appear with the same meaning of the above words of English words. For example, X-man《X战警》, Eragon《龙骑士》, Mission: Impossible《碟中谍》, and other movies are translated in the pursuit of higher box office, and translators often think about people's visual perception. For example, some movies with the theme of expressing emotions, such as romantic movies and family-themed movies, often use words such as “beautiful, charming, emotional, soul, sweetheart”, etc., because these kinds of words are usually used to express meanings related to love in Chinese. For example, Ghost is translated into《人鬼情未了》 and Waterloo Bridge is translated into《魂断蓝桥》. Such translated titles can arouse people's yearning for love at the first time and make people (especially female audiences) pay more attention to this movie. For example, some comedy movies, such as The mask《变相怪杰》, Cheap by the Dozen《儿女一箩筐》, Home Alone《小鬼当家》, etc., have nothing to do with comedy movies at all and the titles themselves are

not very attractive. The Chinese translation is not only full of joy but also in the eyes of the audience one of the highlights, can effectively attract the audience. In addition, the translation of the title of the cartoon must comply with the interests and curiosity of the majority of children, in order to meet the taste of children, and the recognition both of children and parents. For example, Garfield is translated as《加菲猫》, Toy Story is translated as《玩具总动员》, and Ice Age is translated as《冰河世纪》, which makes the Chinese translation more lively and interesting. After the above introduction, people can know how important the translation of English movies is to the box office. If the translation is not good, it will not attract the audience to buy tickets, and the box office will be greatly affected. Here are some examples of which viewers might choose. In Taiwan, Dangal《摔跤吧爸爸》is translated as《我和我的冠军女儿》, the well-known Fast and Furious series《速度与激情》is translated as《玩命关头》, and The Revenant《荒野猎人》is translated as《神鬼猎人》... To sum up, it can be said that the translation of film titles is a complex science, and the most important thing is to adapt to the audience's psychology, so as to play a good role in the call of movie titles.

## 5. Conclusion

Cultural translation theory is the most influential in Basnett's translation theory, that is, the essence of translation is regarded as cross-cultural information transcoding, which is the cultural activity of translators to reproduce the original works through language. Based on the theory of cultural translation, this paper discusses the importance of paying attention to the translation of cultural factors in film and television works, which can arouse people's attention to the cultural level in film and television translation. When translators translate, they often use the translation strategy of "domestication". As a translator, I certainly understand the importance of readability. However, translation does not cater to the audience or readers blindly, and "alienation" will only make it lose its own color. Basnett's view of cultural translation enlightens translators to inherit Chinese culture and achieve cultural confidence with the principle of "cultural turn" and translation as a means.

Different texts have different translation principles and norms, and their ultimate goal is to overcome language barriers and realize free translation equivalence. Therefore, the essence of translation can also be regarded as cross-cultural information transmission, cultural transplantation, and cultural blending. As a branch of literary translation, film and television translation is responsible for taking the audience as the center, meeting the needs of the target audience in the target language, while preserving the connotation and stylistic style of the source language work, paying attention to the cultural factors in the text, and concisely and effectively transforming it into a translation that meets the cognitive understanding of the target audience. Therefore, this paper is based on Basnett's main viewpoint of cultural translation, combined with the lines of classic American TV series, hoping to attract more English lovers to pay attention to the translation of cultural factors in film and television works.

Due to the limitation of ability and the limitation of my own interest in collecting information, the conclusion cannot cover all aspects. Moreover, the understanding of cultural translation theory is still relatively shallow, and many places

cannot be further investigated. I hope that more people will pay attention to this problem, and more people will participate in the discussion to develop a set of reasonable translation methods and strategies.

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