

# From the Perspective of Cultural Turn Theory: An Analysis of Movie Subtitle Translation

-- Taking the film Harry Potter as an example

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**Abstract:** Film is an indispensable entertainment activity in People's Daily life, and it is an important spiritual food for modern people. With the gradual development of China's opening to the outside world and the influence of the domestic and foreign environment, more and more excellent foreign films enter the domestic market, and the demand for film subtitle translation also expands gradually. People's understanding of the film depends on the subtitle translation of the film, so the subtitle translation of the film occupies a very important position. Under the guidance of Susan Bassnet's cultural turn theory, this paper takes the film Harry Potter as the research object and analyzes the subtitle translation.

**Keywords:** Cultural Turn; Subtitle Translation; Communication; Functional Equivalence.

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## 1. Introduction

Movies are an indispensable form of entertainment in people's daily lives today, and are an important source of spiritual sustenance for modern people. With the gradual development of China's opening up to the outside world and the influence of the overall international environment, With the continuous deepening of China's reform and opening up, a large number of foreign films entered the Chinese market, and viewers' requirements for original sound films have become higher and higher. In response to this demand, film subtitle translation was born and has gradually developed into an important translation direction in film translation. It is not exaggerating to say that the authenticity of film subtitle translation directly affects the overall level of the film work. High-quality subtitle translation can be said to be the icing on the cake for a good film, but the difficulty of subtitle translation has greatly increased due to the restrictions of time and space, as well as the existence of cultural differences between the source language and the target language. Therefore, this paper analyzes the methods of film subtitle translation from the perspective of cultural shift theory, taking the film "Harry Potter" as an example.

## 2. A Gist of Harry Potter

"Harry Potter" is a fantasy literary series written by British author J.K. Rowling, consisting of seven books and three derivative sequels. The series depicts the adventures of the main character Harry Potter during his seven years of study at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. To date, the "Harry Potter" series of novels has been translated into seventy-seven languages worldwide, with sales exceeding 450 million copies, and has been adapted into the "Harry Potter" film series by Hollywood. The "Harry Potter" film series is the world's most successful film series, with a total box office revenue of \$7.6 billion. The Cultural Turn Theory of Bussnet After that, the translation research community began to pay more attention to the important role of culture in translation.

## 3. Bussnet's Cultural Turn Theory

Cultural Turn Theory is a translation theory proposed by Bussnet. Susan Bussnet is one of the representatives of the translation cultural school and also a representative of the manipulation school. Bussnet is a renowned translator, poet, and writer, and also a senior professor of comparative literature and translation at the University of Warwick in the United Kingdom.

In 1990, Bussnet proposed and discussed the specific contents of Cultural Turn Theory in the book "Translation, History, and Culture" co-edited with Andre Lefevere:

- 1) Translation should focus on culture as the unit of translation, rather than just the previous text.
- 2) Translation is not just a simple process of decoding and recoding, but more importantly, it is an act of communication.
- 3) Translation should not be limited to describing the source text, but rather should focus on the functional equivalence of the text in the target culture.
- 4) Different historical periods have different principles and norms for translation, but these principles and norms are all aimed at satisfying the same needs. Translation should meet the cultural needs and the needs of different groups within a culture.

The introduction of Cultural Turn Theory marked the entry of translation research into the "cultural turn" era, and a new stage of translation research was opened. New cultural translation theories also emerged accordingly. Since then, the translation research community has begun to pay more attention to the crucial role of culture in translation.

## 4. Analysis of the Application of Cultural Turn Theory in Subtitle Translation of Harry Potter

### 4.1. Translation of People's Names in Movies

The second point in the theory of cultural turn points out that translation is not only a simple process of decoding and restructuring, but more importantly, the purpose of

communication and understanding. Therefore, in the process of film subtitle translation, it is necessary to achieve the commonality of source language and target language.

The film's main character, Harry Potter, is translated as Harry Potter. Harry is referred to in the film as "The Boy who lived", and a closer look reveals that the composition of his name is closely related to his experiences. First of all, Harry was in Old English another form of Henry, a name favored by English monarchs. In addition, the word leadership has a strong connection to Harry's name, as the word Harry is closely associated with the Old High German *Heri*, which means army. In the film, Harry is one of the founders of Dumbledore's Army, and he is the leader of all the people in the fight against Voldemort, and Harry alone leads thousands of troops. From this point of view, the name Harry Potter seems appropriate. However, in the Chinese translation of the film, the method of transliteration is adopted, which only achieves simple decoding and recombination, but does not achieve the commonality of the target language and the source language, so it cannot reflect the implication that the author wants to convey.

The Hogwarts headmaster's full name in the film is Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore. The name Albus is derived from the Alchemical word "white", which represents asceticism, idealization, and detachment, suggesting that Dumbledore was a "spiritual theorist, brilliant, idealized, and somewhat detached", so the name is to some extent a true reflection of Dumbledore as a person. At the same time, "white" also indicates Dumbledore's position in the film, he is the representative of the good wizard. Percival is taken from Dumbledore's father's name, and in addition, the word is meant to Pierce the valance, and the word "valance" has the meaning of life and death in English, which implies that Dumbledore has crossed the line between life and death, whether or not his spirit lives on. "Dumbledore" is an 18th century English word that first appeared in a letter from the English poet Robert Southey and later became "bumblebee," meaning a bumblebee. "Dumbledore was always so busy and so full of energy that I often imagined him alone in the castle humming and chirping like a bee," J.K. Rowling said at the time of the creation. This shows that Dumbledore's name is completely transliterated when translated. In this way, readers of Latin and classical literature are more likely to understand what the author had in mind when he named it. But the Chinese translation cannot express these ideas.

It is worth mentioning that in the translation of Hermione's name, the Chinese translation achieves the commonality of the target language and the source language to a certain extent. Hermione Granger derives its name from Hermes, the ancient Greek god of commerce, travelers, thieves, and pastoralists who served as messenger and messenger of Zeus. Later, he was also mixed with the ancient Egyptian god of wisdom, Thoth, and was considered to be the patron of magic. This coincided with Hermione's image as she was intelligent and brave. Under the transliteration, the translator chose the word "min", which vividly reflected Hermione's cleverness.

## 4.2. Translation of Magical Things in Movies

The term Muggle is used in Harry Potter to refer to ordinary people with no wizarding blood, who can neither use nor believe in magic. In the film, Muggle is translated into Chinese as "Muggle". It is well known that the word muggle does not belong to the official Chinese vocabulary, so the translator based on the functional equivalence of the word in

the target language culture in the translation process, and gave the word a mysterious western color. Besides, in our Sichuan dialect, the word "guwazi" is usually used to refer to stupid and slow people, so the translator translated Muggle into "muggle", which is easy for the audience to think of those stupid and stubborn people, which is equivalent to those stupid muggles who can't magic in the eyes of magicians.

Dementor is a magical creature from the movies Harry Potter. First of all, dement means madman in English. In the original book, this creature is described as wearing a cloak and having a hand like a rotting corpse. Wherever it passes, people will be sucked out of happiness, leaving only the most painful memory. Their mouth under their hood feeds on people's souls, also known as the "Dementor kiss," and it's easy to see that Dementor creatures are crazy and uncontrollable. On the basis of the original text, the translator translated Dementor as "Dementor", which vividly depicted the characteristics of Dementor feeding on people's souls, and also showed that Dementor was a kind of dark creature, which promoted cultural exchanges to a certain extent and made it easier for the audience to understand the characteristics of this creature.

Quidditch is a very popular sport in the wizarding world. As a ball game, Quidditch consists of three different types of balls, namely Quaffle, Bludger, and Golden Snitch. The most important ball was Golden Snitch, which the translator translated into "golden snitch", the "gold" is directly translated from golden, and "snitch" is derived from the word snitch, which means "snitch" in English. From the regular Quidditch game, we can see that Golden Snitch flies very fast and is agile, so the translator translated Snitch into "Snitch", which not only highlights the characteristics of the ball well, but also reads with a sense of rhythm, which is easier to leave a deep impression on readers.

The Knight Bus is a relatively modern invention in the wizarding world, and takes some inspiration from the society of ordinary people. When the translator translated this thing, he directly translated it as "Knight Bus" according to the meaning of the original word, which is not wrong, because the main use of the knight bus in the movie is to provide help to the wizard in trouble, and the translation of "knight" is a good reflection of this point. But the shortcoming is that the pun in the words is not reflected. Knight Bus actually has the meaning of "Night bus". In English, "knight" and "night" are spelled differently but are pronounced the same. In the United Kingdom, a night bus is the only form of transport available to the public after the underground and trains have stopped running.

## 4.3. Translation of Culture-loaded Words in Films

### 4.3.1. Definitions and Meanings of Culture-loaded Words

The meaning of "culture-loaded words" is a kind of words or idioms that are unique to a culture. It is also called lexical gap, which means that the cultural information carried by the original words is not fully expressed in the target language.

The translation of culture-loaded words is a big problem for translation, because it directly affects the effective transmission between cultures. Under the guidance of different translation strategies, the translation meanings of culture-loaded words are different. This is of great significance to the "going out" of Chinese culture and the "bringing in" of Western excellent culture.

### 4.3.2. Examples

[1]

Original article: You-Know-Who  
The Mystery Man

Analysis: "You-Know-Who" is the name given to Lord Voldemort in the original English film, because everyone knows his name but is afraid to mention his name, so almost everyone uses "You-Know-Who" to refer to him. In the Chinese translation, this culture-loaded word is translated into "mysterious man", which vividly reflects the meaning that everyone knows him but is reluctant to mention, and successfully achieves the equivalent transmission of culture.

[2]

Original article: Voldemort.  
Translation: Voldemort

Voldemort is the villain who murdered Harry Potter's parents and scores of decent wizards in the movies. The word "Voldemort" comes from French, a symbol of death and sin. The translator transliterated it as Voldemort to vividly show the essence of this figure, "Fu" has the meaning of floating, that is, like a wandering soul, "earth" means "hell", and "Mo" usually refers to "devil", which is the representative of evil. It can be seen that the translation here divides the word Voldemort into three meanings, and recombines them, so that the source language culture and the target language culture have a good exchange, and better convey the meaning of the source language to express, which is actually a wonderful translation.

[3]

Original: "Hagrid can we have window open? I'm boiling."  
"Hagrid, can we open a window? I'm so hot."

Analysis: The word "boiling" in the original sentence is interesting and creative. Because Harry is so hot that he is described by the boiling state in which he is boiling water. However, the translation only translates it as "heat damaged", but does not show the metaphorical elements in the original text. If it is translated as "like entering a steamer", it can be closer to the original meaning and present the original style.

### 4.4. Translation of Magic Spells in Movies

The Harry Potter story takes place in the wizarding world, so spells are an essential part of it. Rowling majored in classics, so most of the spells she created in the Harry Potter books were derived from Latin. In this case, the Chinese translation of the mantra is very important, so the translator should restore the meaning of the source language as much as possible. Here are a few examples:

Expecto Patronum:

Expecto Patronum is the patronum used by Harry Potter to summon the patronus stag in the films, which translates roughly to 'I expect a guardian' in Latin. Furthermore, the patronus contained in the patronus spell was an ancient Roman word meaning protector, so the translation 'Patronus' is appropriate.

Expelliarmus:

The word Expelliarmus can be divided into two parts, Expel can be traced back to the 13th century in Middle English, its basic meaning is "to expel", and Armus is Latin, meaning the body part of the arm, and later over time, the word arm has the same meaning as the Latin word arma, to fight. It means weapons. On this basis, looking at the whole spell, it is the meaning of the weapon "expulsion", the translator added the Chinese word order, translated into "in addition to your weapon", to achieve the common source

language and target language, very vivid image.

Lumos:

Lumos is one of the most commonly used spells in the Harry Potter series, used to light up a wand in dark environments to illuminate the surroundings. The word "Lumos" originates from the 19th century Latin word "lumen", meaning "light". The suffix "os" indicates "already possessing", combined together it means "having light". The translator translated it into "Flash of Light", where "Flash" vividly depicts the faint light in the movie, and "Flash" also shows the characteristic of the spell, achieving a common understanding between the source language and the translated language.

Avada Kedavra

Avada Kedavra is one of the most powerful dark magic spells in Harry Potter, and without any counter-spell, a flash of green light causes instant death. It is derived from the Latin word avere, meaning "to possess" and symbolizing the deprivation of life. In the process of translation, the translator translated it as "Awada Kedah", "Awada" adopted the method of transliteration, and "Kedah" vividly reflected the meaning and function of this mantra. It connects the source language and the target language together and realizes the commonality of both.

## 5. Discussion and Reflection

### 5.1. Cultural Turn: The Advantages and Disadvantages of Cultural Turn Theory

In Bassnett's cultural turn theory, it is mentioned that culture should be the unit of communication, rather than just staying at the original text. Cultural exchange should be achieved in the translation process, with one culture being transmitted to another in a different form, thereby allowing audiences to understand. It is evident that Bassnett has guided translation away from static word conversion and into a dynamic process, which provides translators with new perspectives and more directions for understanding the source text. However, if we delve deeper into his viewpoint of translating culture as a unit, some questions can be raised. While cultures in different contexts may differ, from a broader perspective, similarities should outweigh differences. If the source language culture is simply eliminated during the translation process and transferred to the context of the target language, it may bring certain obstacles to the fusion and collision of cultures. Therefore, the rationality of this approach still deserves further research and discussion.

### 5.2. Cultural Emphasis: Translation Should Pay Attention to Cultural Differences

When translating, there are many things to consider, including understanding the original text and the cultural differences between the source language and the target language. It is also important to pay attention to relevant expertise and background knowledge. In ensuring correct grammar and vocabulary, the story's coherence is maintained while achieving accurate equivalence and functional equivalence. After studying this article, it was found that the translation of the movie Harry Potter was based on the magical world background in the movie, and the translator translated the movie after fully understanding the related culture. The subtitles in the movie were mostly translated as cultural units, moving the focus of translation away from the original text and combining the source culture with the target

culture for reconstruction, thus achieving a common understanding between the two.

### 5.3. Cultural Development: The Relevance and Development of Translation and Culture

From the long history of translation, it is clear that it has an inseparable relationship with culture, so translation and culture are actually a reciprocal relationship. The original Harry Potter series became wildly popular worldwide, and when it was introduced to China, it introduced an unknown magical world to our young people, with its fantastic plot arousing readers' wild imaginations. The story's plot also closely aligns with the actual life of teenagers growing up. Teenagers are exactly in the stage of learning and growing, and the bravery and confidence of the main character group in the original work will undoubtedly play a role in promoting the growth of teenagers. This is also one of the main reasons why Harry Potter has been popular in China for 20 years since it was introduced. In addition, the translation of the Harry Potter movie adaptation has provided a bridge for the exchange of English culture and Chinese culture. The movie vividly and realistically brings to life the magical world described in the novel, making it more intuitively accessible to a wide audience, satisfying the audience's imagination of the novel and meeting people's spiritual and cultural needs. The translation of Harry Potter has also provided a successful example for domestic external translation, in which the translator combines the meaning created in the book with English culture and finds an equivalent meaning, then transfers it into the Chinese context, finding an equivalent meaning in Chinese culture, achieving a fairly perfect translation, to some extent promoting external cultural translation and playing a positive role.

## 6. Conclusion

Film is a holistic art form that involves many aspects. As the most influential contemporary art among them, film affects our emotional way and way of thinking, and has developed into the most convenient and popular way of cultural communication, which is one of the important parts of life, so it is urgent to do a good job in film translation. Translation not only carries culture but also transmits culture. The translation version, the source text, the subjectivity of the translator, translation and creation all start from the text, but are higher than the text, and finally sublimate to the cultural level. In the theory of cultural turn, culture should be regarded as the unit of translation and cultural elements should be involved in translation in order to translate better works. The story of Harry Potter is based on the magical world, in which the magical culture is complex and brilliant. Therefore, the translator takes into account the cultural factors in the source language world and chooses to translate it on the basis of fidelity and creativity, thus providing readers with a more understandable magical world. When the translation preserves the unique magical culture in the source text, readers are more likely to accept this novel cultural concept. When the translation is properly transformed or connected to the culture in the target language, that is, the functional equivalence in the target language culture, readers are more likely to understand the corresponding magical culture. At

present, Chinese film subtitle translation has not established a relatively sound translation system, and there is still a huge gap between cultures. Therefore, when translating foreign works, in order to cross the cultural barrier, we should not only refer to western cultural theories, but also examine the influence of the translated works on Chinese culture, combine the culture of the target language and the acceptability of the audience, but also consider the entertainment and commercial appeal of the film, and fully analyze the content and style of the film, so as to translate the best film. Participate in the construction of the world's diverse cultures from a new perspective, promote the exchange and communication between different cultures, and gradually grow in the collision with the world's diverse cultures, and finally realize the true value of the film, highlighting the unique charm of Chinese culture.

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