

Analysis of the Subtitle Translation Strategy of the Film Confucius

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Abstract: Subtitle translation is an important part of cross-cultural communication in films. This paper attempts to explore the subtitle translation of the film *Confucius* from a teleological perspective. The translator uses a combination of translation strategies and methods such as dissimilation, naturalization, reduction and addition to achieve the function of cultural communication and dissemination according to the characteristics and purposes of film subtitle translation.

Keywords: The film Confucius, Subtitle translation, Strategies and methods.

1. Introduction

In the context of globalization, great changes have taken place in the global communication. American culture is at the center of global culture, and it is eager to expand its culture to other countries in the world in foreign exchanges. Therefore, the weak culture is overwhelmed by the torrent of this strong culture, and it cannot share the essence and connotation of its own culture with all countries in the world. Under the trend of globalization, Chinese films are exposed to the torrent of cross-cultural communication worldwide. Film art does not simply appear in the form of art. The way of social existence determines the diversity and multiple attributes of film art. As an image language and a machine of national ideology, film spreads the country's culture and image by means of media. The movie *Confucius* is not only a movie that makes people remember the storyline, but also leaves a deep impression on people, an impression about the Chinese spirit and cultural connotation. The film *Confucius* is distinguished by its richness in traditional Chinese history and culture, which is fully reflected in its subtitled text. Chinese films spread Chinese traditional culture in foreign exchanges, becoming better known to more foreign friends and allowing foreign fans to continue to learn about traditional Chinese culture.

2. The Film Confucius and Its Linguistic and Cultural Characteristics

As a representative of traditional Chinese culture, Confucius has played a very important role in China's cultural development for thousands of years, and has had a profound impact on Chinese from all over the world. As a representative of traditional Chinese Confucian culture, Confucius also has great influence abroad. For example, international cultural festivals, cultural festivals named after Confucius, etc. All of these contain the rich cultural connotations of China and demonstrate the breadth and depth of Chinese culture, and make people continue to accept the baptism of traditional Chinese culture in the process of participating in the cultural ceremony, enriching the national emotion and national identity of the Chinese people, and showing the broad and profound Chinese culture of China to the world. The appearance of the movie *Confucius* made people all over the world recognize the great image of

Confucian representatives in traditional Chinese culture.

In 2010, *Confucius*, directed by Hu Mei and starring Chow Yun-fat, was released, which focuses on the life of Confucius from the age of 51 to 73. Throughout the film, Confucius' career changes, with the desire to enter the civil service in the early years of his life, until the age of 51, when Confucius takes up the post of Grand Secretary of the State of Lu on his own merit, and since then Confucius has been implementing his political ideals of ruling the state with propriety. Since its release, the film *Confucius* has gained good economic and social benefits in the film market, and these benefits have contributed to the spread of popular culture and the dissemination of traditional Chinese Confucian culture in the film (Guo Yang, 2012).

Costume dramas, especially those about historical themes, also have a heavier connotation of traditional Chinese culture carried by the language due to their complex historical background. The film *Confucius*, as a contextualized Chinese classic, has classical and elegant lines with a strong philosophical flavor. The expressions are mostly reflected in the use of ancient titles, four-character phrases, idioms and abbreviations (Wu Yiqing, 2021).

3. Features of Subtitle Translation

Film subtitle translation is different from literary translation or non-literary translation. It has more uniqueness than the commonality of general literary translation (Lin Lixia & Song Tiehua, 2010). Film and television translation is a part of literary translation, which has the common characteristics of literary translation, and also has the characteristics of listening, comprehensive, instantaneous, popular and unannotated. There are two types of subtitle translation: intra-lingual subtitles and inter-lingual subtitles. Intra-lingual translation refers to the conversion of speech into a text in the same language, while inter-lingual subtitles refer to the translation of the source language into the target language with the original sound of the film and television being preserved and overprinted on the bottom of the screen (Zhang, 2005). Subtitling is not only a translation of two languages, but also a process of cultural transmission. Subtitling ensures that the most effective message is delivered to the audience in a specific cultural context within a limited time and language (Gong Jihui, 2014).

While subtitling is essentially a literary translation, functionally it is a practical translation, a purposeful act

whose ultimate aim is to enable the target audience to understand the meaning of the film through translation across both linguistic and cultural barriers and to achieve the purpose of cross-cultural communication (Gao Jiankun, 2011). In order to achieve this purpose, it is crucial to seek for a suitable translation theory as a guide. On the whole, the subtitle translators of *Confucius* did not stick to a particular translation strategy, but used a variety of translation strategies such as alienation, naturalization, reduction and supplementation according to the differences between Chinese and English cultural backgrounds and taking into full consideration the differences between English and Chinese thinking and language habits.

4. Analysis of the Subtitle Translation Strategy of the Film *Confucius*

According to the Relevance Theory, subtitles should convey the semantic information and cultural connotation of the source language to the greatest extent within the limited time and space of the film, helping the audience to overcome the communication barriers between different languages and understand the plot of the story. Therefore, the translator must fully consider the time and space limitations of the subtitles and the cultural and cognitive gaps between the film's producers and the audience, and make reasonable choices and adjustments to the source text information, expression and writing layout. The translator should take the Relevance Theory as the principle, provide concise, vivid, clear and smooth subtitles that are easy to understand, and guide the audience to obtain the greatest contextual effect with the least effort.

4.1. Alienation

Alienation refers to the acceptance of linguistic and cultural differences in a foreign language text under the pressure of cultural value deviationism, bringing the reader into a foreign context.

Example 1

Source Text: 其实我什么也不像，就像一只丧家之犬，给他们说准了。

Target Text: The old farmer got it just right when he said of a stray dog though.

“丧家之犬 (a stray dog)” is derived from Historical Records • The Family of Confucius, that is, a homeless dog, a metaphor for a person who has nowhere to go, and is a typical word with rich Chinese cultural flavor. The translator has used the strategy of dissimulation without any modification to translate it directly as “a stray dog”. This is a good way of introducing and spreading Chinese culture.

Example 2

Source Text: 朽木不可雕也，让他睡吧。

Target Text: Rotten wood is hard to be carved, let him sleep.

These words appeared when Confucius hurried to go to the palace overnight. He asked Gongboliao to prepare the car, but Gongboliao was sleeping, and Confucius reluctantly described him as a rotten wood. That is, rotten wood cannot be carved, which means that people cannot be created or things and situations are corrupted and cannot be saved. Here, the translator adopts the method of alienation, and directly translates this cultural word with national characteristics into “Rotten wood is hard to be carved”, which is expressive, making the wonderful part of alienation translation stand out.

4.2. Naturalization

Naturalization is to make the foreign language conform to the cultural values and expression habits of the native language as far as possible.

Example 3

Source text: 如果今天不交出小奴来，只怕日后见了大司徒，你不好交待吧？

Target Text: If you don't show him over to us now, it may damage the relation with Minister.

General Gongshan Niu of (the City of) Biyi angrily broke into the Confucius' institute to search for the escaped burial slave Qi Sigong. “不好交待 (It's hard to explain)” is also a unique cultural term in Chinese. The translator properly adopted the expression that conforms to the expression habits of the target language, and translated it into “damage the relation with Minister” according to the needs of the context, which is in line with the expression in the English language. The way of thinking and the thinking habits of British and American people make the target audience accept the context naturally and easily.

Example 4

Source text: 寡人支持你。让你和你的弟子重整鲁国推行礼制，改变现在你所说的君不君、臣不臣的现状。

Target Text: I support you. You and your disciples could civilize the kingdom of Lu. You could challenge those you've called unworthy in the past.

“君不君、臣不臣 (the ruler is not the ruler and the minister is not the minister)” comes from Analects - Yan Yuan XII. Confucius, a great thinker in Chinese history, advocated the consistency between name and reality, and used such a standard to demand and measure the ruling class of his times, demanding that their speech, behavior, virtue and talent be in line with their “identity”. Here, the translator has appropriately naturalized this cultural word with Chinese characteristics, adopting an Italian translation, and cleverly applying the word unworthy to convey the chaotic situation of “those who were in power were neither like kings nor ministers” in the state of Lu at that time, eliminating the unfamiliarity that may be brought to the audience of the target language by alienated translation. If the translator had translated the phrase “君不君、臣不臣” word by word, the target language audience would not have understood the cultural connotations.

Lu Dinggong, the ruler of Lu, said, “让你和你的弟子重整鲁国推行礼制，改变现在你所说的君不君、臣不臣的现状”. The meaning of “重整鲁国推行礼制 (reorganizing the state of Lu and implementing the ritual system)” overlaps. It is the meaning of governing the state of Lu. The implementation of the ritual system is only an administrative method, and the “ritual system” is obviously an element of Chinese culture. Ordinary Western audiences generally do not understand this Confucian political concept, so it is not necessary to translate it so as not to increase the reasoning burden of the audience and make it hard to understand. This can be directly translated into “civilize the kingdom of Lu”. In addition, “君不君、臣不臣 (the ruler is not the ruler and the minister is not the minister)” is also a Chinese saying. When translating, it should follow the previous text and translate it into “those you've called unworthy”, which corresponds to Confucius' self-proclaimed unworthy, so that the translation can be well understood by the audience. By doing so, the best

correlation effect can be achieved.

4.3. Reduction

Reduction refers to the translation of the original text by omitting information that is irrelevant and does not affect the audience's cognitive environment, while keeping the most important information in order to meet the technical requirements of film subtitling. Due to the special nature of film subtitle translation, its translated subtitles must not be too drawn out and lengthy, but must "provide the most relevant information in the limited time and space most effectively" (Li Yunxing, 2001).

Example 5

Source Text: 君子无戏言，言必信，行必果。

Target Text: A gentleman's word is golden.

In this sentence, "言必信，行必果(word must be believed, deed must be fruitful)" is actually a supplement to the previous sentence, a repetition of the meaning, so it is also omitted. In this way, the sentence is very concise, and at the same time conveys the true meaning. And it is clear at a glance.

Example 6

Source Text: 丘德薄才浅愧难胜任。

Target Text: I cannot presume to be worthy.

This dialogue took place when Confucius had an audience with Duke Lu, the ruler of the state of Lu. The Duke had heard that Confucius wanted to implement the rituals of the Zhou dynasty, and was so active in the administration of the capital of Lu that within a year he had transformed the capital into a place with safe streets and secure homes. The film begins with a subtitled account of the times when power in the state of Lu was slipping away and the actual power of the state was in the hands of the great aristocracy of the times, the Three Huan, so Duke Ding of Lu wanted to appoint Confucius as the Minister of Law to help him regain supreme power. This is a way of constructing the audience's cognitive environment by giving an account of the plot. Confucius' response to this appointment is to humble himself, "I cannot presume to be worthy" is very much in keeping with his image as an advocate of Confucianism. If translated directly into "My morality is low and my capacity is shallow, so I am afraid I am afraid that I am not worthy of it", the translation will be cumbersome and does not meet the technical requirements of film subtitling. This is Confucius' self-effacement, so the specific details of virtue and talent can be omitted and the result can be directly stated as "I cannot presume to be worthy", so that the audience can make a connection and understand the film without extra cognitive effort.

4.4. Supplementary

Supplementary refers to the translation strategy of adding some words, phrases or clauses during translation according to the different thinking modes, language habits and expressions of English and Chinese in order to better express the meaning of the source text. Of course, the information that need to be supplemented often play a key role in the development of the film's plot, and are highly relevant information. Some cultural words in the subtitles of the film Confucius cannot be avoided in translation, and often contain important information related to Confucianism. And such information requires additional clarification in translation.

Example 7

Source Text: 这样老百姓才能安居乐业，才是天下大同

啊！

Target Text: Then the people will live and work cheerfully. Universal peace and harmony will reign!

The idiom "天下大同(Great Harmony under Heaven)" is the political ideal of Confucianism. "天下(under Heaven)" refers to the whole world and all human beings, and "大同(Great Harmony)" refers to a harmonious and unified order. The whole idiom reflects the Chinese nation's way of thinking of seeking common ground. Here, the translator treats it as "Universal peace and harmony will reign" (peace and harmony will unify the whole world), which is the main idea of the source text.

Example 8

Source Text: 大司徒，仁者爱人，以礼杀人则非礼也！

Target Text: Minister, benevolence is love for our fellow human! A ritual murder is still a murder even if they comply with our tradition!

Confucius exonerated a child who had been buried in sacrifice in the scene of "The Argument of Release of Slaves". The purpose was to abolish the vulgar custom of burial of living people. He refuted the Minister's statement that the so-called burial system was an "ancient ritual". Confucius interpreted it as the thought of kindness and benevolence. "Benevolence" is the core of Confucianism, which covers a wide range and spreads to all human beings. "仁者爱人" emphasizes the idea of altruism. The translation "benevolence is love for our fellow human" is an interpretation of this sentence, showing that Confucian benevolence is caring for ordinary people. Although a few words cannot fully explain the broad connotation of Confucianism, it is also commendable that the interpretation of this translation can provide a reasonable explanation around the theme of "仁者爱人".

5. Conclusion

Film subtitling is a highly purposeful activity, so translators should choose appropriate translation strategies and methods. Translators should not only consider the receptiveness and comprehension of the target language audience, but also realize the function of cultural transmission and communication. It is under the guidance of the above purposes that the subtitle translation of the film *Confucius* employs methods such as alienation, naturalization, reduction and supplementary to achieve accurate and reasonable transmission of information.

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