

Subtitle Translation of Red Film from the Perspective of Purpose Theory

-- A Case Study on "The Battle at Lake Changjin"

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Abstract. In recent years, as China is opening up more to the outside world, the foreign exchange activities of the film and culture industry are increasing, and a large number of domestic high-quality films have been continuously exported to overseas markets. Based on this background, the translation of Chinese films for foreign promotion is also facing a huge and unprecedented challenge, and both Chinese film circle and translation academics failed to fully realize the importance of subtitle translation for spreading Chinese films abroad. As a popular red-themed movie nowadays, "The Battle at Lake Changjin" see the integration of abundant phrases with Chinese characteristics. Therefore, this paper studies the subtitle translation of specific phrases in this film of 100th anniversary of the founding of CPC celebration, and examines the translation of red films from four aspects, including research background, translation purpose theory, CEA theory explanation and subtitle translation evaluation in a bid to summarize the pattern of red movie subtitle translation, so as to better promote Chinese culture and contribute to the international communication of movies with unique Chinese characteristics.

Keywords: Translating Skopos; Film; Subtitles.

1. Purpose of the Study

1.1 Red Films

Red films refer to those films created in the first seventeen years after the founding of the People's Republic of China, which respond to the requirements of the times with the theme of praising the Party, glorifying heroic deeds, and remembering war life. However, the academic concept of red films has not been strictly defined by the academic community so far. Broadly speaking, it can be regarded as both a unique film genre conceived in China's specific national conditions and a film with progressive or revolutionary ideas as its guiding ideology.

1.2 Subtitle Translation

For subtitle, broadly, there are two types of subtitles, interlingual and intralingual. Interlingual subtitles are texts that are placed at the bottom of the screen in accordance with the intended translation language, while keeping the sound of the original film work intact, being collectively named as subtitle translations [1]. The general principles of text translation can also be applied to the translation of subtitles, a genre with a high readability. It is true that the translation of subtitles is inevitably unusual because of the vast differences between literary works and film works.

For subtitle translation, contextualization is essential. Contextualization means that, with consideration to original context, film and television work subtitle translation needs to take into account the target context and make adaptive adjustments. However, due to the obvious cultural differences among regions, the meaning of the language in works of different source language is difficult to clarify in a concise manner, and most of them are profound, ambiguous, and obscure. Based on the conciseness of the language, simplification is the inevitable process in translating these esoteric languages, and thus adapting to the specific context at that time. In this way, it can greatly improve the audiences' comprehension and guarantee the coherence of film television works content [2].

In addition, conciseness is also crucial. According to the audience's film-watching habits, subtitles are usually set right at the bottom of the screen, and people's perception will be affected with the subtitles. Therefore, a translation of one to two lines is relatively reasonable [3]. At the same time, in order to make the audience understand the film in a short time, most of the dialogues in the film need to be translated in an easy-to-understand way, in line with the characteristics of popularization and colloquialism.

2. Explanation of Translation Purpose Theory

Translation purpose theory is based on the Action theory, and the core of the study is the selection of purpose in the translation process. In this theory, the purpose of translation is, in fact, to produce a type of text for the target recipient in the target language context (Nord, 2001). In the 1970s, German functionalists such as Ferril and Nord proposed the purpose theory, and they found that in most cases, translators are not the same as they guessed—who transform the source language text word by word and sentence by sentence; on the contrary, translators often need to have a strong sense of purpose to carry out translation activities. On the contrary, the translator often needs to have strong adaptability and flexibility, taking measures including substantial additions, deletions or rewriting of the source language. Therefore, they proposed the translation purpose theory to explain this phenomenon.

The theory of translation purpose theory includes three laws, the law of purpose, the law of fidelity and the law of coherence. Among them, the law of purpose is the first and foremost in the translation process, since the whole process of translation is determined by the intended translation purpose. In other words, the result determines the method. Those who support the purpose theory believe that translation is actually a communicative act, and, to a large extent, the purpose of translation determines the strategy of translation. Relatively speaking, the choice of translation strategy should be subordinated to and serve the purpose of translation. In this regard, Prof. Li Changshuan has made the following explanation: the purpose principle holds that whether a translated text needs to be translated directly, paraphrased or both is determined by the purpose of a specific translation task, thus resolving the millennial debate over whether texts should be translated literally or freely [3]. In other words, as the primary principle of translation purpose theory, the fundamental purpose of the law of purpose is to use the translation strategy of naturalized alienation as the basis to shift the orientation to the target source language text and the target source language culture, which makes the target language readers resonate with the source language readers.

Second, the law of coherence. This rule states that the translated text should match the expression habits of the target language, so as to make the translation more fluent and optimize the readability of the translation to help readers can easily understand the text.

Third, the law of fidelity. In other words, the translator cannot arbitrarily impose his or her own ideas on the text, thus leaving aside the real content of the original text. In the process of subtitle translation, the most important thing is information-spreading and cultural output. Therefore, the introduction of the purpose theory has accelerated the transformation of subtitle translation. With good interlingual conversion between the source language and the target language, it achieves the reciprocity of the expression function and information function.

3. Guidance Significance of CEA Theory for Subtitle Translation

CEA framework refers to “Comprehension, Expression and Adaptation.” At the comprehension level, it can be divided into the understanding of “faithfulness”, “fidelity” and “accuracy” and the importance of comprehension methods; at the expression level, it is necessary to take into account the different expressions of Chinese and English, the language habits and even the discourse cohesion; at the adaptation level, the translation purpose theory, language conformity theory, domestication and foreignization, functional equivalence theory and communication theory can be considered as the theoretical basis or support [2].

3.1 Comprehension

"Comprehension" focuses on achieving "faith" and describing the process of translation, including the efforts applied to correct the original translation errors. The comprehension section can be divided into different sections based on different criteria. It is used to match the language used by the readers of the translated text and to precisely convey the most original meaning and preserve the meaning of the original work and the author's ideas.

1). By units, comprehension can be classified as word comprehension (multiple meanings of words), comprehension of structure (structural ambiguity), and comprehension of chapter (logical relation). This is perhaps the main classification used by most students, including the author, when conducting example analysis.

2). By the information clues, comprehension can be classified through analyzing the author's background, writing background, knowledge in the relevant fields and the logic before and after. When choosing materials for translation, you can choose materials from interdisciplinary fields and also analyses examples from this aspect. You can understand the author's background or the author's intention of writing, and search for clues from related fields to choose a suitable translation. If the meaning of a specific word or sentence is hard to be clarified, you can also judge and make trade-offs from the contextual logic.

3). By stage of comprehension, it can be classified as contextual understanding, consulting the internet or experts. This category is the way of comprehension when translating interdisciplinary fields, and this problem-solving process can also be written into the analysis process.

4). By to the object of comprehension, it can be classified as comprehension of content idea and comprehension of language characteristics. In fact, the content idea is related to many factors, such as the above-mentioned background introduction, the author's intention, etc., while the language characteristics are a kind of style of writing, and the consistency of the style of the whole text needs to be taken into account when translating. Therefore, this division can also be used to support the case.

3.2 Expression

"Expression" mainly shows how to achieve "expressiveness", paying attention to the language logic and fluency problem. The classification criteria of expression are mainly two categories, namely, the content of expression and the form of expression. The content of expression is to ensure that the implied meaning is clearly expressed, while the form of expression is to ensure that the translation conforms to Chinese or English conventions.

1). By content, expression can be divided into distortion of original meaning, ambiguity and sequential logic. It means that it is not necessary to write from the perspective of words and sentences when analyzing the translation, such as comparing the first translation with the revised version to decide which is better, whether the revised version can correctly and clearly express the original meaning, whether ambiguity will be created, or whether the logic is smooth.

2). By form, expression can be divided into accurate wording, correct collocation, established sentence structure, deciphering complex sentences, fluent information, correct cohesion device, concise and clear language and avoiding Chinese English and European Chinese.

3.3 Adaptation

"Adaptation" mainly explains how to achieve "omission." By significantly adjusting the expression and the meaning of the original content, it ensures that when the translation cannot be carried out in accordance with the original text, the information of the original text can be further optimized through flexible adaptations and free trade-offs, thus better achieving the translation purpose. Regarding adaptations, there are four categories of classification criteria, as follows.

By the object of adaptation, it can be classified into content adaptation and form adaptation. When analyzing the original text, if there are certain discrepancies between the translation and the form or content of the original text, the translator needs to explain such cases.

By the way of adaptation, there are omission adaptation, simplification adaptation, explanation adaptation, and change of expression. For example, in some political and economic genres, Chinese to English translations are often accompanied by a change of expression or simplification, which should be explained in detail so that readers of the target language can understand what the deeper meaning of the text is and why it needs to be translated in this way.

By influencing factors, it can be classified by translation usage scenarios, viewer background differences, cultural differences, institutional differences and ideological differences. In fact, in the actual analysis of source and target languages, this kind of discussion exists but is not common. This discussion is mostly related to the direction of the selected materials, such as cultural, political, feminist-themed texts, etc., where more consideration needs to be given to the above-mentioned factors when translating.

According to the purpose of adaptation, it can be classified as optimizing the way of conveying information, further realizing the intention of the source work, better improving the communication expression, and avoiding unnecessary results and thus meeting the requirements of the cultural background of the client as well as the target language readers.

4. Overview of the Subtitle Translation of “The Battle at Lake Changjin”

As a mainstream film, "The Battle at Lake Changjin" inevitably bears the important task of promoting Chinese culture. It is a painful history of the War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea, mainly based on the Battle of Lake Changjin, the second battle of the war. It tells the story of Chinese People's Volunteer Army's eastern front troops who, under the difficult conditions of snow and ice and sub-zero temperatures, made a significant contribution to the victory of the Battle of Lake Changjin with their steel-like morale and invincible fighting spirit.

While the national language has long been a cultural convention for Chinese audiences, who are accustomed to it, foreign audiences are often confused by lines in the film. Since there are many culturally specific words in the source language, which are ambiguous and new to the audiences in the target language. And some readers of the translated language may even be rejecting these lines, making it difficult for them to understand and accept the translation. Therefore, there arouses the problem of cultural words translation [4]. In the author's opinion, based on the above aspects, the subtitle translation, for the lines with extremely rich Chinese characteristics, in the movie "The Battle at Lake Changjin" is not sufficient in terms of addition, deletion, reduction and domestication and foreignization, and still has a flaw.

Recently, the figures show that "The Battle at Lake Changjin" has accumulated 5.7 billion dollars at the box office, successfully ranking as the No. 1 in China's film history, which shows that the movie "The Battle at Lake Changjin" is a great success. This precisely shows that a good movie cannot be created without an excellent subtitle translation, and the law of purpose, the law of coherence and the law of fidelity of translation purpose-based theory are fully reflected in the subtitles of the movie "The Battle at Lake Changjin".

5. Subtitle Translation of "The Battle at Lake Changjin" from the Perspective of Translation Purpose Theory

There are many classic lines in "The Battle at Lake Changjin", but the subtitles with Chinese characteristics are especially memorable. If the subtitles are not translated carefully, the foreign audiences' understanding of the film will be greatly hindered. Based on the purpose theory and CEA theory, the author will then analyze the subtitle translation of "The Battle at Lake Changjin" from the perspective of "reduction" and "domestication and foreignization".

5.1 Reduction Method

"Reduction translation" is the process of compression, condensation and deletion of the original language in the translation of movie subtitles. Compressive free translation means translating the same meaning as the original language with shorter phrases; condensation means translating only the refined points of the original information; deletion means complete omission with no translation [5]. Reduced translation can reduce vocabulary as well as phrases. Given the needs of certain specific occasions, red film and television works should also fit into the guidelines of language refinement and gradually improve the readability of subtitles. But again, given the uniqueness of the texts of film and television works, few texts will be translated in reduced form.

Case 1: 打得一拳开，免得百拳来。

Original translation (OT): Throw out one punch now to avoid a hundred punches in the future.

Translation Text 1(TT1): A heavy blow will deter a hundred more

Case 2: 伤亡不值得夸耀，挺住就是一切。

OT: We shouldn't brag about this. The most important thing is to hang on.

TT1: Casualties are nothing to be proud of. Staying alive is what counts.

Case 3: 有些枪必须开，有些枪可以不开

OT: Some shots must be fired. Some shots can be saved.

TT1: Some shots are necessary, but some are not.

From the lines in the movie "The Battle at Lake Changjin" and its English subtitles, it is easy to find that the subtitles are basically translated by omitting the subject of the sentence, and the length of the English sentence is slightly longer than that of the Chinese. In addition, the Chinese language is concerned with the paired phrases, which is difficult to be reproduced perfectly in the English context. Therefore, when translating movie subtitles, it is not only necessary to translate the meaning of the original sentence accurately, but also avoid repetition and redundancy by "reducing" many words. In case 1, the original translation translates "拳" into "punch", but it does not avoid the problem of repetition and redundancy. TT 1 translates "punch" into "blow" and replaces the synonymy of the second half of the Chinese sentence with "a hundred more". In case 2, the original translation uses the obvious and usual Chinese English translation method, which reflects the implied subject in the sentence, but the whole translation is slightly dull and has an obvious translation taste. TT1 uses "Casualties" to refer to the subject in general and adopts the expression "be proud of" to make the sentence more authentic. "The most important thing is to hang on" is replaced by "is what counts", which makes the translation more concise and clearer. In Example 3, the original translation splits "必须开" into two parts, while TT1 uses "necessary" to directly cover the above meaning, making the sentence more concise and simple;and uses "not" to replace "saved", making the whole sentence more authentic.

Case 4: 抗美援朝，保家卫国!

OT: Resist U.S. aggression and aid Korea. Defend our country!

The phrase in Example 4 is a classic slogan in the film, which is the core purpose of fighting the War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea, spoken by Song Shilun, commander of the Ninth Corps of the Volunteer Army, at the mobilization meeting for Chinese troops fighting the War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea. The phrase "保家卫国 (protect our family and defend our country)" is not translated as "protect our family and defend our country", but a reduction of it. Since "protect our family" in this language does not mean protecting "the family" but "the country as a whole", the original translation directly adopts the vague personal pronoun "defend our country" to refer to "保家卫国", which not only conforms to the specific context of Chinese language, but also follows the principle of word usage in translation, making it indeed accurate.

Case 5: 没有冻不死的英雄，更没有打不死的英雄，只有军人的荣耀。

OT: There aren't any heroes who will never freeze to death, let alone ones who will never be killed. A soldier only lives for honor and glory.

In the movie, when Wu Wanli calls the old battalion commander “the hero who never dies” with admiration, the old battalion commander angrily asks him back: “What do we call our comrades who froze to death on the road? What do we call those who were killed by the American bombing? There is no hero who never freeze to death, there is no hero who never die, there is only the glory of a soldier!” Here the phrase “only the glory of the soldiers” is not translated directly as “only the glory of the soldiers”, but translated with some modifications and additions. The original meaning is not that there is glory of the soldiers, but that the soldiers have these glories and they live for these glories. The original meaning is not “the glory of the soldiers”, but “the soldiers have these glories, and they live for these glories.” Therefore, it is translated as “a soldier only lives for honor and glory, showing that soldiers are dying for their glories. We all know that heroes are also mortal and can be terrified, but they eventually overcome their fears and go to the battlefield, which is full of flesh and blood, bloodshed and danger. In the movie, Wu Qianli has a book with the names and numbers of every Seventh Company soldier, however, many names in that book are crossed on the box, meaning they have all sacrificed. And at the end of each battle, he opens that book to see how many people are still alive. But even when they fought in flesh and blood and went head-to-head with enemy tank shells, none of the Chinese fighters backed down.

5.2 Domestication and Foreignization Method

In 1995, The Translator's Invisibility was published, in which Lawrence Venuti, a famous American translation theorist, talked about the translation terms - domestication and foreignization. The strategy of domestication is to localize the source language, and the translation purpose is the target language or the readers of the translation. It adopts the expressions customarily used by the readers of the translated language to better convey the meaning contained in the source language. The domestication method is vastly reflected in the film, which largely strengthens the audience's understanding. Lawrence also says that the “pressure to depart from the nation” is an excellent description of the foreignization strategy, which “incorporates the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text into the translated language, making it appropriate for foreign readers”.

Case 1: 一个蛋从外面被敲开，注定被吃掉。你要是能从里面自己啄开，没准是只鹰。

OT: An egg that's been cracked from the outside is destined to be eaten. If you can crack the egg from the inside, you might be an eagle.

The egg is the most common thing in our daily life, and it symbolizes ordinariness and fragility. Therefore, this characteristic of the egg is also a reflection of the existence condition of the ancestors themselves, which is a good reflection of the Chinese people's good quality of taking their initiative to challenge themselves. For them, being passive only gets the beat, and they need to, like the eagle, be indomitable in the eggshell and fight against the bondage of the eggshell, courageous to challenge the impossible. It is in this way that we can better understand the meaning of the line “an egg that's been cracked open from the outside”. Therefore, in the author's opinion, the translation of the line can use domestication strategy to translate its metaphorical meaning into the Chinese language. From the direction of information transmission, literal translation is more focused on matching the information of the original text, focusing on the form of the original text. However, when we understand the meaning of the imagery in the Chinese context, we can use the technique of revision of the translation to express the meaning of the original text more directly. Therefore, when comparing domestication and foreignization with literal translation and free translation, there is no superiority or inferiority, but the difference of means and methods adopted by the translator.

Case 2: 希望下一代活在一个不再充满硝烟的年代。

OT: I hope our next generation no longer has to live through war.

The phrase “the Age of Smoke” is often used in Chinese to describe a time when wars rages on. For domestic viewers it is easy to understand, but if translated literally as “the Age of Smoke”, foreign viewers may understand it as the age with smoke, which is likely to make them confused. Why should the next generation live in an age where there is no smoke? The translator translated what the film actually tries to convey through domestication- the age of smoke refers to the war, so he translated it

as war, “the next generation no longer has to live through war.” It helps foreign viewers to understand better.

6. Conclusion

In order to better promote and realize the friendly exchange between Chinese and foreign cultures, it is key to translate film subtitles under the guidance of the theory of purpose. The film industry and academia should be aware of the importance of translation purpose theory, and develop a group of competent people with excellent Chinese and Western cultural cultivation and first-class practical and theoretical ability based on film and television culture; and create the most authentic and dynamic Chinese translation concept in the academia. In the process of international spread, we should continue to strengthen subtitle translation quality of red films, so as to better promote Chinese culture to the world. Since the author's research level is limited, there are bound to be some shortcomings in the theoretical and practical research process, and in the future, I hope to further explore the subtitle translation in red movies from other translation theories.

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