

Cross-cultural study on film subtitle translation based on domestication and foreignization ——a case study of the harry potter films

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the subtitle translation of the series of films Harry Potter, discusses the use of translation methods in the subtitle translation under the foreignization and domestication strategy, aims at analyzing the respective effects of the two strategies with the method of literature collection and exemplification.

KEYWORDS

Foreignization; Domestication; subtitle translation

1 Introduction

Since the 21st century, the communication and exchanges between people from different countries have been gradually deepened, and so are the cross-cultural exchanges. When people's material living standards continually improve, the level of their spiritual life requirements is constantly raising as well. Because of their novel ideas and humorous languages, many American movies and TV series, on the one hand, are increasingly attracting people's attention. They enrich people's daily life, becoming one of the main recreational activities for them, as well as an important part of their spiritual life. On the other hand, the dissemination of films not only broadens people's vision and enables people from different countries to better understand each other, but also serves as an important means of media, playing a pivotal role in cultural exchanges. Therefore, they have become the carriers of the culture and have promoted cultural and civilization exchanges. In view of that, it may come to the conclusion that the fact that American TV series are in vogue not only lies in their wonderful plot designs, exquisite picture quality or sound effects, the subtitle translation in boosting the popularity of subtitles also matters.

2 Related Theories

2.1 Domestication

The American translation theorist Lawrence Venuti, in his book *The Translator's Invisibility* (Venuti, 1995: 20), formally named the two strategies as "foreignizing" and "domesticating" respectively, which developed and deepened the theory in subsequent studies.

His answer to the definition of domestication in short is that the translator should follow the current mainstream values of the target language culture, deliberately adopt the conservative domesticating strategy to the original text to cater to the local canon publishing trend and political needs.

2.2 Foreignization

From the previous content in the domestication part, we know that it is the Lawrence Venuti who formally proposes both the domestication and foreignization theories. Actually, he is the representative of the school of foreignization. He puts forward the concept of "reverse translation", which is to deliberately highlight the "differences" in style and other aspects of the original text from the text of the target language.

3 A Case Study of Subtitle Translation of Harry Potter Films

3.1 A Case Study of Translation under Foreignization

3.1.1 Literal Translation

Literal translation is a translation method that maintains both the original content and the original form.

The following is the embodiment of literal translation under the strategy of foreignization in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*: at that time, Porter's godfather Sirius Black was talking with Porter.

(1) Black: fourteen years ago, he had huge numbers at his command. And not just witches and wizards, but all manners of dark creatures.

布莱克:十四年前,他有一大批人听他指挥。不只是男女巫师,还有各种各样的黑暗生灵。

Potter: if Voldemort's raising an army, then I want to fight.

波特:如果伏地魔在组建军队,那我也想作战。

In this dialogue, no matter Blake or Porter, the translator achieves almost one-to-one correspondence between both the language and the form when translating. For example, the adverbial of time "Fourteen years ago" is simply translated into "十四年前"; and the final line in which Harry responds to Black's line "If Voldemort's raising an army, then I want to fight," translated as "如果伏地魔在组建军队 那我也想作战"。

The translation perfectly meets the requirements of literal translation under the foreignization strategy and carries on the sentence-driven processing, that is, it conforms to the sequence of the text of the target language and readers' reading habits, especially under the circumstances of limited viewing time and compact plot.

By the same token, here's how it works in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*:

(2) Voldemort: Harry, I'd almost forgotten you were here.

伏地魔:哈利,我差点忘了你还在这里。

It can be seen from the translation that the application of literal translation not only makes the translation concise and easy to understand, but also achieves a one-to-one correspondence with the source text.

Here's the literal translation from *Harry Potter and the Betrayal of the Half-Blood Prince*:

(3) Bellatrix: make the unbreakable vow.

贝拉特里克斯:立一个牢不可破的誓言。

(4) Snape: I can't change the Dark Lord's mind.

斯内普:我不能改变黑魔王的意志。

To sum up, the prominent feature of literal translation under the category of foreignizing translation strategy is that the source text and the translated text can achieve a good correspondence in content and form, so that when viewing the works, we can appreciate the similarities and differences between the two works. In particular, it can optimize viewers' understanding and viewing experiences when the rhythm of watching movies is tense.

3.1.2 Transliteration

Transliteration is the greatest foreignization. Transliteration, as the name implies, is a method to translate the sound of the source language into the similar language.

The Harry Potter films feature proper nouns such as spells, names and special words. Therefore, how to construct each proper noun can reflect the translator's choice and tendency in foreignization and domestication to a large extent.

The followings are the embodiments of transliteration under the foreignization strategy in the translation of proper nouns in the Harry Potter films.

The first one is the special word. The films use a lot of Latin or newly invented words. In *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, for example, people in the wizarding world who don't have magical abilities are called "muggle". muggle is derived from the English slang for "mug". This word cannot be found in the English dictionary, the translator adopted the transliteration method to translate it into Chinese "麻瓜", so the translation under this transliteration method is the foreignized translation for the Chinese readers.

The second one is the name. In the Harry Potter series, most of the names belong to the category of foreignizing translation, and more specifically to the transliteration method under the foreignizing translation strategy. Examples include Voldemort (伏地魔), Cedric Diggory (塞德里克·迪戈里), Ron Weasley (罗恩·韦斯莱), Severus Snape (西弗勒斯·斯内普), Lucius Malfoy (卢修斯·马尔福), etc. It can be seen that the translation of names under the transliteration is relatively easy to understand.

Although most of the names in the Harry Potter films are translated by transliteration under the strategy of foreignization, sometimes simply using transliteration or free translation cannot interpret the image of the original name to the best, in this case, the perfect combination of transliteration and free translation may produce unexpected results.

In the subtitle translation of the films, there are some perfect combinations of transliteration and free translation, such as: Fleur Delacour (芙蓉·德拉库尔). The original meaning of fleur is not "芙蓉", but "powdery filler", which means "flower" in French. Here, the translator chooses "fleur" to show that the character is as beautiful as a flower, and its pronunciation is quite similar to that of the word. The translation of "fleur" not only achieves "sound beauty" but also "divine beauty".

3.2 A Case Study of Translation under Domestication

3.2.1 Sequential Adjustment

Sequential Adjustment means the necessary or even inevitable change of the word order in a sentence according to the usage of the language to be translated into.

In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, Professor Snape confronts Harry angrily because he thinks Harry has stolen something from him.

Snape: the use of it on a student is, regrettably, forbidden, however should you ever steal from my personal stores again, my hand might just slip over your morning pumpkin juice.

斯内普:很遗憾,不能在学生身上用。但是你要再敢从我的私人储备里偷东西,我就不小心(把药品)倒进你的南瓜汁里。

In fact, if we do not carefully compare the source text with the translation, it is difficult to find that the adverbs "regrettably" and "again" in the source sentence have been adjusted in order when they are translated into Chinese. On the one hand, these adjustments are made to clearly show Professor Snape's extreme anger at that time. On the other hand, the passive voice in the sentence is another major reason why the sentence pattern has to be adjusted. We all know that English has more passive sentences, but Chinese is the opposite. Therefore, the sentence "The use of it is

forbidden" is translated by the translator as “禁止使用” or “不能用”, without adding “被”。

3.2.2 Amplification

Amplification refers to the addition of some words or sentences in translation according to different ways of thinking, language habits and the expressions of English and Chinese, so as to more accurately express the meaning contained in the original text.

The following case is from *Harry Potter and the Betrayal of the Half-Blood Prince*. The amplification is reflected in the conversation between the headmaster Dumbledore and Harry.

(1) Dumbledore: well, I notice you spend a great deal of time with Miss Granger. I can't help wondering.

邓布利多: 嗯, 我发现你课外大部分时间都和格兰杰小姐在一起, 我不得不好奇。

Potter: oh, no, no. I mean, she's brilliant, and we're friends, but, no.

波特: 不。不。我是说她很优秀, 我们的确是朋友, 但不是那种关系。

At the end of the conversation, Porter simply ends with the word "NO" to express his rejection of the principal's views. However, the translator took the context into consideration when translating. What's more, the meaning of "No" in the context of the translation was clearly pointed out. It is translated as “不是那种关系”, rather than simply “不是”。Therefore, the author used the amplification method under the domestication strategy.

Similarly, in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (Part 1), the amplification method under the domestication strategy is also reflected.

(2) Potter: how long did you say this batch of Polyjuice would last, Hermione?

波特: 赫敏, 你觉得这一次的变形药水能坚持多久?

Hermione: I didn't.

赫敏: 我不知道。

At that time, Hermione, Ron, and Potter attempt to enter the Ministry of Magic, but because they are wanted, then they decide to take the risk of disguising themselves as Ministry insiders. It is obvious that Hermione does not have finished her speeches in this dialogue, the verb after the auxiliary verb "didn't" is omitted, and the sentence is very short, which are combined to successfully illustrate Hermione's nervousness and everyone's fear.

However, in view of the reading habits of the readers, the translator adopted the amplification method in the translation, and added the verb “知道” instead of following the order of the source language and translating it as “我不”。

In addition, in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (Part 1), after Potter, Ron and Hermione are attacked in a restaurant, the following conversation between Ron and Potter about how to deal with the attacker also reflects the method of amplification under the domestication strategy.

(3) Ron: suppose he did kill Mad-Eye. How would you feel then?

罗恩: 如果是他杀了疯眼汉呢? 你还会怜悯他吗?

Potter: it's better we wipe their memories.

波特: 最好只抹去他们的记忆。

Ron: you're the boss.

罗恩: 你说了算。

In fact, it is only after careful comparison of the source language and the target language that the translator's translation of Potter's speech "It's better we wipe their memories" actually adds the meaning of "only" to the context, suggesting that Harry did not want to cut off the lives of the attackers, while the word "only" does not exist in the source text.

By looking at the two languages, we know that the addition of the subtle detail of "only" is unobtrusive and easy to miss, on the one hand, gives us a deeper understanding of Potter's attitude,

on the other hand, presents us the very details of the plot as a whole. This is also one of the embodiment and advantages of the domestication strategy aimed to provide the better understanding for the target readers.

3.2.3 Free Translation

Free translation, is a translation method that only maintains the content of the original text, but not the form of the original text. That is to say, the free translation method is translated in the language of the target language country. This is due to the different cultural and social backgrounds. If the expressions commonly used in foreign countries are translated directly according to the literal meaning, it will be relatively difficult for the audience of the target language country to understand, so it is necessary to adopt the free translation under the domestication strategy to translate. The following is the specific presentation of this method in the series of films.

In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, the free translation is reflected in the speech of Alastor who is talking to Harry Potter.

(1) Alastor Moody: as for Krum, his head may be filled with sawdust, but Karkaroff's is not.

阿拉斯托·穆迪:至于克鲁姆,也许他满脑子都是浆糊,但是卡卡洛夫不是。

The English meaning of the word "sawdust" is "fine particles of wood made by sawing wood". In Chinese, the word refers to “木屑”。However, instead of adopting literal translation, the translator cleverly translated it into “浆糊”。It is precisely because the translator adopts the free translation under the domestication strategy that we immediately feel the derogatory connotation of the word in this scene. Because in Chinese, when the word “浆糊” is used to describe a person, it is a sarcastic expression intended to show that a person is not intelligent, or does things in an unwitting manner.

In addition, there are several other embodiments of the free translation in the film.

(2) Minerva McGonagall: I expect each and every one of you to put your best foot forward.

米勒娃·麦格:我希望大家能够展现出翩翩风度。

(3) Snape: look, we've just gotta grit our teeth and do it.

斯内普:听着,我们一定要加把劲。

"Put your best foot forward" in the second sentence and "grit our teeth" in the third sentence are American idioms which reflect the culture and characteristics of the United States. And the translator has also done a good job of translating them. The word "put" means “放” in Chinese and "foot" means “脚”。So, “put one's best foot forward” literally translates to “try to make a very good first impression on others.” In addition, for the phrase “grit one's teeth”, it means not only “gnash one's teeth” because of anger, but also “people are determined to accept difficulties when they encounter difficulties or troubles.” Therefore, when we look back at the translated text, we find that the translators have translated them as “展现出翩翩风度” and “要加把劲” respectively. It is not difficult to see that the translator used the free translation under the domestication strategy so as to effectively deal with these two idiomatic expressions and make the translation in line with the situation at that time.

In addition, it is also worth mentioning that in most cases, the translators used free translation for the incantations. Incantations in movies are usually four-word structures. For example: "Accio", translated as: (summoning charm) “飞来咒”; on the one hand, it not only visually shows the meaning of the incantation, but on the other hand, it makes the spell catchy.

The words "expecto" come from Latin, meaning "to expect," and "patro-num," is also from Latin, meaning "guardian, protector." So, with the meaning of these two parts combined, the literal meaning of the incantation is "to expect a guardian" On top of that because this spell belongs to high-level magic in the plot setting, so it is relatively difficult to master. In order to reflect this plot setting, the translator adopts the free translation under the domestication strategy in the

translation. Finally, it was translated into “呼神护卫”, which to some extent increased the difficulty of Chinese reading.

Also, the "Imperio" and "Crucio", among the three unforgivable curses, are translated into “魂魄出窍” and “钻心剜骨” respectively under the domestication strategy, without using the traditional transliteration method. In addition, there is a special spell called Avada Kedavra, which uses a combination of transliteration and free translation, and is translated as “阿瓦达索命”。

From many of the above cases, we can know that based on the domestication translation strategy, translators choose the free translation method for dealing with the native American culture and for the feature words in the series of movies, so that the translation can be very authentic. In a word, after the translator converts the native words in the specific context into vivid sentences into the language of the target country, the audience can understand the plot, subtitle content and watch the work more easily, so this is the charm and also the core of the domesticating translation strategy.

4 Conclusion

After finishing the paper, it is found that both in terms of the length and the number of the cases mentioned, the domestication strategy of taking care of target language readers, compared with the foreignization strategy, plays a dominant role in the series, which can be seen from the box office of the movies and the popularity from the Chinese people as well. Of course, all of these are mainly based on my own personal understanding which is just at the tip of the iceberg. And the followings are the problems I meet and countermeasures I propose. Initially, the research on relevant issues based on domestication and foreignization theory is not mature enough, and there are few related research literatures, so there must be difficulties in obtaining related materials and data. Secondly, when reading foreign literature and analyzing the subtitle of series movies, due to the lack of proficiency in the second foreign language, it will lead to reading difficulties and thus lead to misunderstanding of the translated text. Finally, my sensitivity to the theory of domestication and foreignization needs to be improved, and my grasp of basic knowledge is not that deep. The followings are the countermeasures to the above problems. First of all, it is conducive to reduce the impacts of the factors by optimizing the search path of online literature, consulting relevant personnel, increasing the access to information, or consulting the instructors and experts of the Teaching and Research Department in time. Secondly, we can query words with the help of translation software, especially cross-query some sentences or paragraphs that cannot fully understand by using multiple translation software in order to reduce the semantic error.

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