

# An Analysis of the Use of Domestication and Foreignization Strategies in the Subtitle Translation of the Film “Moon Man”

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**Abstract:** *In recent years, the film industry has been booming, producing many popular films. In order to comply with the development of the times and cultural exchanges, domestic films are gradually going out of the country and flooding into overseas markets, and many excellent films are loved and recognized by people all over the world, so the subtitle translation of film and TV is also getting more and more attention. We can see that many excellent subtitles with national characteristics appearing in films. However, the phenomenon of domestication and foreignization is caused by the limited translation skills of translators, different language habits and inability to communicate across cultures. In this paper, analyze the use of Domestication and Foreignization Strategies in the subtitles translation of the film “Moon Man”, by means of an illustrative method under the guidance of the theory of functional equivalence theory.*

**Keywords:** *“Moon man”, Functional equivalence theory, Domestication and Foreignization Strategies, Subtitle translation*

## 1. Introduction

With the development of economic globalisation and information networking, cinema has become an integral part of the cultural industry. The flourishing development of the film market has promoted the mutual exchange of Chinese and foreign films, and also brought dynamism to the translation of film subtitles. As an important medium of cultural communication, subtitle translation plays an important role in enabling audiences from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds to understand the plot and emotions of the film. Subtitles are an important part of cinema and play a vital role in the development of Chinese cinema, as well as an important factor in influencing audiences to watch films. It is important to pay attention to the use of domestication and foreignization strategies when communicating effectively and appropriately between Chinese and foreign films.

Adapted from the comic book of the same name by cartoonist Zhao Shi, China's summer 2022 hit “Moon Man”, a science fiction comedy film, tells the story of Yue, an equipment maintenance worker who is accidentally left on the Moon, and in the process of trying to return to Earth, inspires the hopeless survivors of post-disaster depression with his resilience and wisdom, and successfully prevents the impact of planetary debris. The story of self-sacrifice to successfully prevent the impact of planetary debris on Earth. There are no heroes falling from the sky, only mortals stepping up to the plate. The film is enriched by the story of Yue's decision to sacrifice himself, and the mixture of tragedy and joy shows that even the smallest person has a 'sense of family'. A line from the film reads: "There is a kind of person in this world, ordinary is their persona, nothing is their daily routine, but in critical moments they can always stand up and go against the grain". It is a true portrayal of ordinary heroes.

## 2. A Brief Description of Film Subtitle Translation

Film subtitle translation plays an extremely important role in the cultural exchange between China and the West, but due to such factors as the different standards of translators, different language habits and the inability to communicate across cultures, the quality of translated works varies, resulting in great obstacles in the process of cultural exchange. In the work of subtitle translation, it is essential for the translator to grasp the overall content of the film, study the relevant materials carefully, and find

and solve the problems in time, so that the film can be more smoothly disseminated abroad. Chinese translation scholar Qian Shaochang (2000: 61-62) has explained in detail that the language of film and television has five characteristics: listening, comprehensiveness, immediacy, colloquialism and no commentary.<sup>[1]</sup> Subtitle translation is different from other forms of literature in that the audience needs to understand the main plot in a short time, for the film "Moon Man", this paper summarises the following characteristics of film subtitle translation.

### **2.1. Popularity**

Film is different from traditional paper media and has its own characteristics. Paper media has a targeted audience, and its information is authoritative and requires careful attention to detail. In contrast, as a mass media, film uses a lot of dialogue to develop the plot and introduce characters, and in cultural exchanges, foreign audiences often use subtitles to access information. Film audiences are large, with diverse knowledge backgrounds and limited understanding of certain words. In Chinese, there are a large number of run-on sentences and loose sentences with little correlation between sentences, while in English there are many subordinate sentences with compact relationships. Therefore, when translating subtitles, it is necessary to pay attention to the characteristics of different national languages, make changes in sentence patterns and syntax, and also pay attention to the colloquialisms of the language, so as not to blindly pursue advanced vocabulary at the expense of the audience's ability to understand.

### **2.2. Timeliness**

Subtitles for films have a limited time on screen and should be synchronized with the sound of the images. The viewer cannot rewind and revisit the action while watching the film, so subtitle translations need to be highly summarised and condensed in order to achieve an immediate understanding of the film's content. Simple words can be used to illustrate the original text, but the semantics should be as close to the original as possible. The viewer should be able to understand the subtitles and get the message of the film in a short time.

### **2.3. Accuracy**

The translation of any literary form requires accuracy, just as Yan Fu's "Faithfulness, Expressiveness and Elegance", although not the only translation standard in the translation world, has had a great influence on the theory and practice of translation in later generations. Faithfulness requires the translator to interpret the original text faithfully and accurately. Translation is not a word-by-word Chinese-English conversion, but also takes into account many factors, such as cultural background, the context of the language material, the connection between contexts, and so on. Before translating subtitles, the translator must have a general understanding of the content of the film, put himself in the shoes of the characters in the film, become familiar with the relationship between the characters in the film, translate the dialogue and communication between the characters in the film completely and accurately, and strive to make the subtitles match the image of the main character. For example, the film "Moon Man" is a science fiction comedy with many laughs and hot scenes in the film, which are not easy for foreign audiences to understand. When translating, the translator needs to apply translation skills to handle the translation so that the translation can convey the meaning without losing the laughs and truly achieve cross-cultural communication.

## **3. Overview of Translation Strategies**

The American linguist Eugene A. Nida proposed the theory of functional equivalence in 1969, which requires translators not to simply pursue one-to-one textual correspondence when translating, but to respect the cultural features of the source language and to achieve functional equivalence between the source and the target language. In other words, the translator must express the content of the source language as clearly as possible and within the reader's reach, while preserving the cultural characteristics of the source language (Nida, 1964).<sup>[2]</sup>

The strategies of domestication and foreignisation in translation were developed by the renowned translation theorist Lawrence Venuti in 1995 in his masterpiece, "The Invisibility of the Translator." The two strategies of domestication and foreignization are both opposing and complementary. Absolute domestication and foreignization do not exist; they are dialectically united. Accurately weighing and

choosing between the two strategies is a reflection of a good translator's ability.

Both domestication and foreignization strategies aim to provide a better subtitle translation for film viewers, so that they can fully experience the message and emotional expressions conveyed by the film (Li Yun Xing, 2001).<sup>[3]</sup>This paper analyses the subtitle translation of the film "Moon Man" by means of an illustrative method, using both domestication and foreignization strategies to deal with the cognitive errors arising from cultural differences between China and foreign countries.<sup>[4]</sup>

#### **4. Application of Domestication and Foreignization Strategies in the Subtitles Translation of Moon Man**

"Planet Earth is a cliché in science fiction, and science fiction films revolving around the moon and Earth are commonplace, mostly in the style of hardcore science-fiction disaster films, such as "Wandering Earth" and "Moon Man", which are full of cool technological scenes and explosive scenes, and feature top-notch casts of actors. If "Wandering Earth" opens a chapter in the history of Chinese science fiction cinema in 2019, then "Moon Man" is a localized development of Chinese science fiction cinema in 2020, opening up avenues of development that can be explored in depth. The science fiction genre has a technological, coldness, but the comedy gives warmth. The various episodes in the film are touching and deeply moving, creating a strong contrast, with technology and comedy combining in a complementary way. For some of the colloquial expressions in the film, the translator uses Domestication and dissimilation strategies in his translation to deal with them appropriately.

##### ***4.1. The application of Domestication strategies in subtitle translation***

Domestication strategy is to localize the source language and eventually point to the target language or the readers in the translation, using expressions that the target language readers are accustomed to and can easily understand to convey the content of the original text, the translator should speak like a native author to make the translation an authentic native language, Domestication translation helps the target language readers to better understand the translation and enhance the readability and appreciation of the translation. Subtitle translation is characterized by colloquialism, and Chinese proverbs, colloquialisms and idioms have localized expressions. For example, "black sheep" is a metaphor for someone who endangers society and collective interests in Chinese, which cannot be directly translated as "an evil member of the herd". The idiom should be translated as "black sheep" to avoid misunderstanding by foreign audiences.

Example 1: The tall poppy gets to chop.

This line appears in the opening interview, where Yue explains the meaning of 'middle man' in his CV, explaining that he does not want to stand out too much in the crowd, and even deliberately answers the wrong questions in the exam in order to fit in and achieve an intermediate level of performance. The phrase "The tall poppy gets to chop" is from the "Chinese Sage Sutra" and means that one should not be too conspicuous or one will get into trouble. The phrase is often used to remind people that they should be discreet and that they will be taught a lesson if they are too conspicuous. It is this meaning that is used in the film, translated here as "The tall poppy gets to chop", echoing the Chinese phrase, a vivid choice of words to describe. The choice of words vividly describes the psychological characteristics of the 'middle man'. The translator concisely conveys the main character's state of mind, and the foreign audience can fully understand the plot of the film.

Example 2: If you'll accept me, please take these two figurines.

Yue wants to confess his love for Xing holding two astronaut-shaped figurines in his hands, as he rehearses the confession scene. "Gadget" is a colloquial term used in northern China, referring to toys and small ornaments, and such colloquial words often cannot be translated directly, but must be translated according to the understanding of the dialogue. "willing" means to agree, to promise, to be willing, and in connection with the preceding and following statements, it refers to Xing's acceptance of his confession. The translator has translated these two words as "figurines" and "accept", which is a liberal translation that does not detract from the context of the original text and the plot of the film, making it easier for foreign audiences to understand and accept.

Example 3: An opportunity presents itself to make up for it.

The Chinese idiom "make amends" comes from Xun Yue's Han Ji - Yuan Di Ji in the Han Dynasty, and means to make up for a mistake with merit. In modern Chinese, the phrase is often used to describe

someone who has done something wrong and wants to make up for it in some other way. The translator does not use the Chinese-English equivalent to express the phrase "make amends", but deepens the meaning of making up for it, and therefore translates it as "make up for". The word 'make up for' is cleverly used to show that the base director wants to make up for the mistake of accidentally leaving Yue in the moon.

Example 4: Now if I take care of myself, I'm taking care of all of humanity.

Due to the effects of the solar storm, the centre of the Cosmic Hammer's explosion deviates from its intended target, causing some of the debris to fail to reach lunar orbit. As a result, the "Lunar Shield Project" fails and the base is hit by a meteorite, forcing the emergency evacuation of all program personnel. When debris from the shattered asteroid hits Earth, the Earth-Moon communication system is destroyed, and Yue believes he is alone in the destruction of the planet. Confronted with the base's well-stocked stores, he laments. The phrase is derived from the saying "if one person has enough to eat, the whole family will not go hungry", meaning that if you live alone and have enough to eat, you do not have to worry about others. However, the translation of 'look after' and 'not go hungry' better conveys the connotation of the original language.

Example 5: The young will always overtake the old.

After the asteroid impact, the Earth's atmosphere was severely damaged and the survivors were left in a poor state, living in difficult conditions, suffering from disease and only the most basic necessities of life, with widespread depression and a surge in depression. In order to provide spiritual encouragement, a lone hero needed to be created to dispel the uncertainty. Remembering Yue on the moon, the director of the Moon Shield Base asked for a global live broadcast of Yue's behavior on the moon, and the sentiment that came from seeing Ma Lansing putting things in order. The metaphor of phrase is that things are constantly advancing and developing, new things always push the old things forward, and new things will eventually replace the old ones. By using the Domestication strategy to translate the phrase as "young will always overtake the old." the metaphorical meaning of the phrase can be more easily understood and accepted by the target audience.

Example 6: I take a punch better than I take compliments.

The phrase "yielding to force but rejecting a soft approach" comes from Li Baojia's "A Book of Officials", and means not listening to good advice but giving in to people with a tough attitude. It is often used to describe people who bully softly, who are afraid of toughness, and who are strong on the outside. This line in the film expresses Yue's embarrassment at King Kong Roo's intimate gestures. The translator uses the strategy of domestication to translate it as "I can take a beating better than I can take compliments", meaning that I am more willing to take a beating than to hear compliments. The foreign audience does not understand this idiom and adopts the method of paraphrasing, which uses clever words and intuitive expressions. The idiom is expressed in a clever and intuitive way so that the audience can quickly understand the meaning that Yue wants to convey.

#### ***4.2. The application of Foreignization strategies in subtitle translation***

The foreignisation strategy is the opposite of the domestication strategy, which refers to the process of translation in which the characteristics of the foreign language and culture are accommodated and foreign expressions are absorbed, taking the source language as home, taking into account the differences between different cultures, taking into account the differences in national cultures, preserving foreign national characteristics and language styles, and transferring the characteristics of the source language to the target language or the readers of the translation. For example, the phrase "break the iron bowl" means to get rid of the mechanism of "never losing one's job", so the translation is "break the iron bowl" using the strategy of foreignisation. "This translates the original sentence, preserving the characteristics of the foreign language and making it easy for the audience to understand the meaning.

Example 7: Head of waiting, why not go on the offensive.

The Earth is threatened by an asteroid from the orbit of Mars, and in order to prevent the destruction of all mankind, the nations have united in a motion to stop the asteroid from striking the Earth. The phrase originates from a strategy used by Zhuge Liang in the late Shu Han Dynasty to secure his country: "To attack instead of defend, it is better to take the initiative than to sit and wait for death", meaning "Instead of cowardly waiting for something you don't want to happen, it is better to take the initiative and turn fear into motivation to overcome setbacks and fight a good battle. "This line in the

film is the Earth is facing a crisis, the people of the world to make the decision to take the initiative, to meet the difficulties. The direct translation of the lines is "Instead of waiting, why not go on the offensive." The translation of "waiting" and "go on the offensive" is an intuitive translation of "sitting on the sidelines and going on the offensive", which directly shows the audience the characteristics of the source language and expresses people's determination to overcome difficulties.

Example 8: stiff neck!

The dialogue between the two men on their way back to the ship, after the failure of the Moon Shield project and the forced evacuation of all personnel, is a prelude to the plot of the film, as Falling Pillow does not notice the absence of Yue next to him. The main subject is omitted from this sentence, highlighting the central word "Falling Pillow". "Stiff neck" is a common illness. The original meaning of the word is the pain and stiffness of the neck caused by sleeping in the wrong position. In the film, the returning crew did not notice that Yue was not there because he had "fallen off his pillow", leaving him behind on the moon. The translator translates it directly as "stiff neck", meaning a stiff neck, which fits the word "stiff neck", using the strategy of foreignization, simple and clear, in line with the transient nature of subtitle translation.

Example 9: The firework with the greatest power is right on the moon.

The spacecraft that Yue uses to return needs a new power system, and Yue plans to retrieve the power system and repair and build a new spacecraft. The "double-bang firecracker" is a traditional folk object commonly used in festivals, weddings, ceremonies and many other occasions. It is a type of firework and can be used as a substitute for firecrackers. The film compares the propulsion system of a spaceship to a firework, which has a similar meaning. The translator here translates directly as "fireworks", which is accurate and intuitive, fits the original text, retains Chinese characteristics, and is easy for the audience to understand and accept.

Example 10: wow that is a lot of Photoshop.

The base members sighed when they saw how different the photo on Yue's resume was from her real life appearance. The word here means to manipulate a picture, and is an internet term. It means to apply some retouching software to a picture in order to make it more beautiful. In everyday life, there are also expressions for "photoshop", and Photoshop refers to the use of computer software to process pictures, which corresponds to the Chinese word. "The word "a lot of" is used here to refer to the great extent of retouching, which means to the extreme. The application of foreignization strategy retains the characteristics of the source language, so that the audience can understand the meaning of "Photoshop" and "a lot of" through the context, and retains the exotic style.

Example 11: You are so cold-blooded.

Before returning to Earth, Yue talks to Ma Lansing about being left behind on the Moon, and Ma Lansing says that the situation was so urgent that she had to choose to evacuate with the people, and that she would do the same thing if she had to do it all over again. "Cold-blooded" is a metaphor for someone who lacks emotion and is indifferent to people and things. Here the translator has translated it directly as "cold-blooded". This fits the original expression without ambiguity, and the viewer can appreciate the inner meaning.

## 5. Summary

Film is not only a form of entertainment and recreation, but also an effective way of spreading culture. Nowadays, as society progresses and economic standards take a quantum leap, film has become an irreplaceable part of people's lives. The presentation of a film requires many considerations, including the choice of script, teamwork, post-production, etc. With the exchange of cultures from different countries, the translation of subtitles has also become an important condition to be examined. In order to better spread the excellent Chinese culture, great importance is attached to the quality of subtitle translation, but China's research on subtitle translation is relatively late, and the quality of film subtitle translation outside the country is uneven. The author believes that translations should show the characteristics of one's own language as much as possible without losing the original meaning, so as to better spread and transmit culture.

With a large number of outstanding domestic films flooding overseas markets, they are loved and appreciated by people all over the world. Subtitle translation plays an important role in cultural exchange. By introducing the characteristics of film subtitle translation, analysing the subtitle

translation of the film "Moon Man", and examining the use of domestication and foreignization strategies in film subtitling, this paper is able to conclude that subtitle translation is an artistic translation activity, which is not only a literal one-to-one correspondence, but also focuses on the external form while grasping its internal meaning. By adopting the strategy of domestication and dissimilation, it can break the boundaries of cultural differences, solve the problem of cognitive differences between Chinese and foreign audiences, and better spread Chinese culture and national spirit.

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