

Appreciation of Movie Subtitle Translation in Chinese Animation Film ---- Take Legend of Sealed Book as an Example

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Abstract: Chinese animated films have gradually become an important approach to taking Chinese culture to the global stage with the rise of domestic animation in recent years. As a result the subtitle translation of animated films has attracted more and more translators to focus on. Successful subtitle translation to effectively promote intercultural communication not only enables the target language audience to correctly understand the trait of characters in the film but also helps to grasp the theme. This paper discusses the strategies of subtitle translating in animation movies with the analysis of specific examples in Legend of Sealed Book which can provide references for the study of subtitle translation of Chinese animation movies. The author will analyze the translation of subtitles from following aspects time and space limitation, multidimensional information coordination, language style positioning and cultural load word processing.

Keywords: Subtitle Translation, Animation Movie, Translation Strategy, Cultural Information

1. Introduction

"In order to strengthen the cultural foundation for building a community with a shared future for mankind, we should further enhance the Chinese cultural influence and deepen the cultural communication with other countries, with China's image more credible, lovable and respectable."---- *The cultural development plan for the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-2025)*, released in August 2022. As a big economic power, China is not a great cultural power yet. Film, as an important medium of cross-cultural communication, is one of the significant carriers to build national image.

In 2019, the film *Nezha* has taken 5 billion RMB(about 697 million dollars) at the box office. The development of domestic animation films ushered in an explosive period, with the confidence of Chinese audience generated by a number of animations with good quality. Chinese animated films have gradually become an important approach for Chinese culture communication.

The subtitle translation plays an essential role to help Chinese animated films to go global. High-quality subtitle translation can better lead foreign audiences to comprehend Chinese traditional culture while watching movies. As a result, the translation can achieve ideal communication and help Chinese culture to become one of the mainstreams for the world.

2. Research Significance

Legend of Sealed Book was produced in 1983 by Shanghai Animation Film Studio, scored over 9.0 on Chinese film evaluation platform, such as Maoyan and Douban. The director and designers of this film are almost all the first-class animated film creators in China at that time.

As an animated film perfectly integrated with Chinese traditional culture, the English version of the new edition of the film is concise and clear. The method to address some difficulties in subtitle translation has certain enlightenment for subtitle translators. These difficulties include time and space limitation, multidimensional information coordination, language style positioning and cultural load word processing. Therefore, the author chooses this film to analyse the subtitle translation and wish to provide references for the study of subtitle translation for other domestic animated films.

3. Movie Introduction

3.1 Movie Plot

The story of *Legend of Sealed Book* is about a book from heaven, which is called the heavenly book, guarding by Grandpa Yuan for thousands years. Regardless of the rules of heaven, Grandpa Yuan took the heavenly book to the mortal world and carved it in the cave of Cloudy Dream Mountain for the benefit of mortals. However, three fox spirits accidentally learnt the magic in the book and did harm the people.

After taking as an apprentice to Grandpa Yuan, Eggborn, a little boy coming from a swan egg, studied the spells of the heavenly book under the guidance his master. He helped the people drive away the drought and locust plague and protect people and their livestock, then he eliminated the fox spirits with Grandpa Yuan. In the end, Grandpa Yuan was caught back in heaven because he stole the heavenly book and leaked the secret of the heaven, leaving the Eggborn in the mortal world.

3.2 Artistic Value

On the artistic level, *Legend of Sealed Book* shows the consistent high level of Shanghai Animation Film Studio with spectacular, entertaining and exquisite texture in animation.

The scene drawing in the film shows the essential of Chinese ink painting. In the scene of the film, the mountain, river, trees, flowers, birds, insects, fish and all other landscapes seem to come from traditional Chinese painting. Integrated with the western modern painting style, vivid characters' design with unique style in the film absorbed different art forms, including traditional Chinese toys, opera, door gods paintings, new year paintings, comic books and so on.

On the auditory level, the soundtrack of *Legend of Sealed Book* flexibly uses many traditional Chinese instruments, which is common in the performance of Chinese operas. The music is designed to combine with the story plot, the rhythm of action, the changes of characters' expression and mood, which complements each other. In addition, it also integrates modern electronic instruments into traditional instruments in advance, and creates an atmosphere of fantasy with the feeling of mystery and mystery appropriately.

At the script level, *Legend of Sealed Book* has the characteristics of an ancient Chinese folk legend with an interlocking and fascinating plot about the life of different classes, including the folk, the court, the spirits, the immortals. Each character is vivid and impressive. If Chinese films want to go global, they should "find the connection between Chinese national cultural to the common ultimate proposition of mankind in terms of thematic intention"^[1]. Taking one of the characters Grandpa Yuan as an example, although there are not so many plots about him, he broke the class barrier bravely, sacrificing his life to save the mortals from suffering with such spirit of salvation like Prometheus which can get through to every viewer across time and nationality.

4. Subtitle Translation

Unlike the literary translation, the subtitle translation is restricted by time and space. So the translator needs to realize cross-cultural communication as much as possible. However, there might be problems and difficulties in the progress. In this paper, the author selects four difficulties about time-space constraints, multidimensional information coordination, language style positioning and culture-specific words processing to analyze the methodological strategies of foreign translation of animated movies with specific examples from the movie *Legend of Sealed Book*.

4.1 Time-space Constraints

Subtitles usually appear at the bottom of the movie screen, thus a translation with so many words and additional comments will occupy screen space and impair the viewers' access to the information conveyed by the images. Therefore, translator needs to take into account the word limit and use a limited number of words to convey the information in the source language subtitles as efficiently as possible.

In terms of time, subtitles need to match the sound and picture appearances, and the audience only has a few seconds to get information. It is difficult for the audience to get the complete information in the limited time if the translation is too long to read or too difficult to understand, thus such translation will affect the experience while watching.

Example 1:

-The Nine Heavenly Goddesses please get rid of calamities and bring happiness.

-Oh, Goddess! Please make the plagues go away!

The term "goddess" refers to the female gods in Chinese mythology. The term "goddess" specifically refers to the Nine Heavenly Goddesses. For the sake of simplification, "calamities" and "happiness" are specified as "make the plagues go away" instead of making direct translation, "eliminate calamities and bring happiness".

Example 2:

-I always believe in Buddhism and respect Taoism.

-I have come to pay my respect to Buddha.

This is the excuse which the Governors' said to find the Fairy for his own benefit. "Believing in Buddhism and respecting Taoism", which is simplified as "respecting Buddha". Deleting some information here does not affect the audience to understand the Governor's intention. At the same time, such frivolous words can also show the official's arrogance and superficiality.

4.2 Multidimensional Information Coordination

Film is an art form to combine pictures, sounds and characters. The three levels of information interact and complement with each other. When translating subtitles, translators should pay attention to the corresponding picture and sound information. They also need pay attention to the unity of the target language subtitles, sound and picture.

For example, we should consider the character, demeanor, movement, and psychological state of the characters in the picture during translating, as well as the length, pause, tone, and characteristics of speakers' voice. For example:

Example 3:

-That's weird, he is reading!

-So cute! A little brat that can read.

While translating, the sharp tongue of the old fox spirit is used to highlight the unkind image of it. This translation grasps the features of the characters in the play, making the subtitle translation vivid.

Example 4:

-One bow to the east, two bow to the west, three bow to the west, four bow to the west.

-Pray... one to the east... two... three to the west... four.

This is the old fox spirit who is using magic tricks to cheated out of peoples' money. Since it is a magic formula, "bow" and numbers can be turned out in translation, regardless of language logic. At the same time, the character has several pauses when reading this line. The subtitle translation should also reflect the pause consistent with the original text.

On the other hand, pictures and sounds have provided the author with some extra linguistic messages. Thus, the subtitle translation can be appropriately simplified to help to reduce the burden of understanding of the target language audience.

Example 5:

-As soon as the colored smoke disappears, Duke Yuan will return to the mountain.

-But as soon as the smoke is gone, Grandpa Yuan will return.

The subtitles were not translated word by word. The "colored" was omitted in the translation of "colored smoke", and the "mountain" was omitted in the translation of "back to the mountain". Because the scene of incense burners raising colored cigarettes was successively displayed in the screen, and it was indicated that Yuan Gong lived in the mountain before. The information was appropriately omitted in the subtitles, making the translation more concise, the audience could obtain information more quickly through the translation.

4.3 Language Orientation

"The subtitle translation is subject to various constraints in production, such as the film genre, target language audience, language style and film transmission media characteristics"^[2]. The overall style of subtitle translation is also different in various film categories. For example, literary films emphasize ideology and artistry. Comedies emphasize novelty and humor. Suspense films emphasize tension and suspense. Documentaries emphasize detailed content and rigor cartoons need to consider children voice, psychology and cognitive situation. This difference caused by the position of the film also needs to be reflected in the translation of film subtitles. The translation of animated films, as colloquial as possible, should be closed to children's lives, in order to reduce their reading barriers.

Example 6

-This is where Yuan Gong does his studies.

-This is where grandpa Yuan does his studies.

In Taoist thought, cultivation refers to activities such as cultivating qi and alchemy, and also refers to cultivating the mind and body to make the body stronger and healthier. The translation is "does his studies". Children can associate themselves with doing their homework which is an important part in their lives, and achieve similar language communication effects. The original meaning of the word "Gong" of "Yuan Gong" is who people honored in ancient times. In the Spring and Autumn Period, "Gong" was used to address the governors. As a minister of the heaven, "Gong" is a kind of honorific title for Yuan Gong. In daily life, "Gong" can also be understood as "old man". From the perspective of a child, translating Yuan Gong into Grandpa Yuan is more cordial, which also reflects the close relationship between Grandpa Yuan and Eggborn.

Example 7:

-What delicious food have you sent me?

-What tasty snacks have you come with this time?

The local constable, who has been taking advantage of the civilians for a long time, asked the two restaurant clerks what delicious food they had brought him. From the perspective of the children, the translator translated "delicious food" into "tasty snakes", which is full of childishness and also appropriately conveys information.

Example 8:

-Screw you!

-Out of my way!

This sentence was said by a Yamen Runner when he overtly robbed other people's goods. If translated into "screw you", it can better reflect the image of Yamen Runner with insolence. However, considering that the audience of animated films are most children, it would be more polite to change it to "out of my way". In the subtitle translation of animated films, dirty words should be avoided as much as possible to prevent giving negative guidance to children's audience.

4.4 Culture-loaded Terms

"Culture loaded terms refer to words, phrases and idioms that mark something unique in a certain culture. These words reflect the unique way of activities that a particular nation has gradually accumulated in the long historical process, which is different from other nations"^[3]. Culture loaded words are the path for the target language audience to understand Chinese culture. Therefore, translators should carefully handle such words. How to clearly display Chinese traditional culture in a popular way to the audience under the time and space constraints to achieve the goal of the internationalization of Chinese culture has always been the major difficulty in subtitle translation.

"As far as translation in general is concerned, there are five common modes of dealing with cultural words, namely---literal translation, omission, interpretation, integrative translation and domestication"^[4]. Therefore, the author uses the five models proposed by Professor Li to analyze the translation methods of culture loaded terms in *The Tales of Legend of Sealed Book*.

4.4.1 *Literal Translation*

Literal translation refers to the direct translation or phonetic translation of the source language in literal order or meaning, in order to preserve the original characteristics of the Chinese language and culture. Under such condition, the literal translation is one of the common methods of translating culture loaded terms.

Example 9:

-Today, the Jade Emperor will be going to a grand meeting at Yaochi.

-Today, Jade Emperor will be going to a grand meeting at Yao Pond.

Yaochi refers to the pool on the Kunlun Mountain, which is the living place of Western Mother Goddess in Chinese myth. Yaochi was literally translated as Yao Pond. The translation can avoid presenting unnecessary cultural information and facilitate the audience to quickly obtain information.

The culture loaded words in animated movies are best translated into common words of the target language. When translating similar culture loaded terms, the translator should try to use similar words as much as possible. The diversity of culture loaded terms in English is not conducive to the external dissemination of the Chinese culture. The more translated versions are, the more confused they become. As a result, it will increase the difficulty of understanding the target language audience. In conclusion, the translator uses similar words to translate culture loaded terms in the movie such as:

Example 10:

-Tiandao

-Heaven Laws

The Chinese characters "tian" in all culture loaded terms was translated into "heaven" or "heavenly", such as "Heavenly Book", "Heavenly Laws", and "the Ninth Heavenly Empress". "Tian Book" has appeared many times and was all translated in "Heavenly Book", except "Sealed Book" in the title of the film. On the one hand, the word "Sealed" has set a suspense and aroused the curiosity of the audience. On the other hand, the translator also hopes to convey the central idea of the work in the film title. There are 108 magic spells in the heavenly book, which were written by the ancient gods. However, the book was shelved by the gods in the heaven the translation "Sealed Book" criticizes the selfish and hypocritical image of the ruling class in order to consolidate its monopoly of resources.

4.4.2 *Omission*

"In short, as far as I'm concerned, in film and television translation, the three translation principles of 'faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance' should take 'expressiveness' as the most important. To achieve 'expressiveness', I sometimes have to sacrifice a little 'faithfulness'"^[5]. Some cultural information in the source text has little influence on the plot and the central theme, and the information is lacking in the target audience's inherent cognitive structure at the same time, it is difficult to supplement in limited time. Therefore, translators with such cultural information can directly omit the source language cultural words to highlight more relevant information:

Example 11:

-Alas, Zhanglao, something bad is coming

-Oh no... We're in trouble!

"Zhanglao" here is the honorific title for monks. The translator obviously considers that target language audiences are unfamiliar with the word "Zhanglao", so the translator omits to translate the word to reduce the burden of target language audience while reading subtitle.

It can also be replaced by other cultural information which is easier to understand and reduce the difficulty of understanding:

Example 12:

-Let's go to the Tianting if you have something to say.

-I wonder what the Emperor will have to say.

Tianting is the place dominated by the Jade Emperor and the supreme center of power in Chinese mythology. Going to the Tianting means to communicate with the power group headed by the Jade

Emperor. Translator avoids the new cultural information loaded word "Tianting" and translate it as "communicating with the Jade Emperor" with the same communicative effect.

4.4.3 Interpretation

Interpretation means to provide relevant context while translation. Due to the different cultural backgrounds of domestic and foreign audiences, their cognitive habits are also different. On the one hand, the translator can put the culture loaded words in the specific context and appropriately add some information to compensate, which involves a certain degree of additional translation. On the other hand, the translator could directly interpret the meaning of the culture loaded words and make them concrete, so as to minimize the cognitive impairment of foreign audiences when watching movies, such as:

Example 13:

-I think you should give some Xianghuo money

-I think you should make small donation to the temple.

Xianghuo refers to joss sticks and candles in temple, which are used to worship Buddha statues. Xianghuo money is used to buy these kinds of materials. Generally, it is donated voluntarily by pilgrims who come to the temple to worship Buddha. There is no direct translation of it, but a simple interpretation--donation to the temple, which is easier to understand.

4.4.4 Integrative Translation

The translator combines the source language expression with the target language expression form to create a new language form:

Example 14:

-The Ninth Heavenly Xuannv is up there.

-Her Majesty the Ninth Heavenly Empress

Jiutian Xuannv is a goddess who taught the art of war in ancient Chinese mythology, and she is a woman with a human head but a bird's body. The word "Xuannv" is deleted in the translation here, and the word Empress is used in compliance with the cognitive habits of the target audience. "Up there" is a word to express respect for immortals. Your Majesty is the British honorific title for the king and empress. Therefore, the translator translates "up there" into Your Majesty, integrating the cultural expression forms of the target language, which makes it easier for the audience to understand and accept

4.4.5 Domestication

Domestication refers to the use of cultural words in the target language instead the source language. Due to differences in cultural and linguistic backgrounds, the comprehension ability of audiences is limited by culture and history. Direct translation of some subtitles cannot achieve the communicative purpose of original subtitles. Therefore, the translator can use the substitution translation to replace the culture-loaded words in the source language with those with similar meanings in the target language so that the audience can easily obtain information:

Example 15:

-Amitabha.

-God bless you!

There are many versions of "Amitabha", some of which are translated as "Gracious Buddha" to show the mercy of Buddha, and some are transliterated as "Amitabha". The translator translated it as "god bless you", which expresses blessings, prayers, exclamations. It naturally integrated into the context and express the meaning of Buddha's mercy.

Example 16:

A man cannot be judged by his appearance, and a sea cannot be measured.

You should never judge a book by its cover.

In subtitle translation, while encountering slang translation, the author believes that the best translation method is to find slang expressions with the same meaning in the target language. The target language audience will get the reading experience like the native language environment and achieve information equivalence with the source language audience.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, the subtitle translation faces such difficulties as time and space limitation, multidimensional information coordination, language style positioning and processing of culture loaded terms. Subtitle translation should take multiple factors with consideration and use different strategies, so that the feelings of the target audience on the film are roughly the same as those of the original audience. For example, when dealing with culture loaded words, five translation methods can be used ---- literal translation, omission, interpretation, integrative translation and domestication." The *Legend of Sealed Book*" was restored 38 years later, just like the Heavenly Book left by Chinese animation predecessors to animation practitioners of China in the new era. This animated film inherits and carries forward excellent Chinese culture, tells Chinese stories with animation, and inspires Chinese animation industry workers. Finally, I hope that translators can continue to explore and promote the research and development of film translation, and help Chinese culture go global.

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