

An Analysis of Domestication and Foreignization in Subtitle Translation of the Green Book from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

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Abstract: Subtitles are an indispensable component of modern movies, which plays a crucial role in the process of transmitting plot information. Therefore, excellent subtitle translation is the finishing touch of a movie. In the process of subtitle translation, translators usually need to choose between two basic translation strategies, namely domestication and foreignization. From the perspective of Skopos Theory, this article studies the application of domestication and foreignization translation strategies through a case study of subtitle translation in the film *The Green Book*. Through analysis, it can be found that there are significant differences between different cultures. Taking cultural differences into consideration, under the guidance of Skopos Theory, applying domestication and foreignization translation strategies flexibly can maximize the advantages of these two translation strategies. Only by making full use of the advantages of these two translation strategies and presenting complete and appropriate subtitles can cross-cultural communication be achieved through the dissemination of films.

Keywords: Skopos Theory; Domestication; Foreignization; Subtitle translation

1. Introduction

The study of film subtitle translation in Western countries is earlier than that in China, so Western scholars, especially some European scholars, occupy a very important position in the field of subtitle translation. Jan Ivarson's *Practical Translation*, published in 1992, analyzes the development of subtitle translation technology, and proposes a theory that is more practical and instructive^[5]. This is also the first comprehensive study of subtitle translation in Europe, and has a relatively important position in the history of subtitle translation theory.

In China, some scholars have pointed out the importance of practical and theoretical research on subtitle translation in film and television. The number of audiences for translated films far exceeds the number of audiences (readers) for translated literary works, but on the contrary, the translation community pays far less attention to film and television translation than to literary translation. Chinese scholars have also given the definition of subtitles, subtitles are scripts of dialogue that appear on the screen simultaneously with film or television dialogue, and are a process of providing synchronous explanations for film and television drama dialogue. Interlingual subtitles are commonly referred to as subtitle translation, which translates the source language into the target language and superimposes it on the bottom of the screen while retaining the original sound of the film and television. Characteristics of subtitle translation are that subtitle translation belongs to literary translation. In the words of Qian Shaochang, a famous translator who studied film and television translation earlier in China, film and television language not only contains elements of general literary language, but also has its own characteristics, namely, listening, comprehensiveness, instantaneity, popularity, and inattention.



Figure 1: *Green Book* (1).

The Green Book is an American film released in 2018. The film won the Academy Awards for Best Picture, Best Supporting Actor and Best Original Screenplay in 2019 (Figure 1). Set in 20th-century New York, the film tells the story of Tony who has to work for Dr. Shelley in order to make a living, driving and escorting pianist Dr. Shelley all the way south to perform on tour. The film not only tells a series of events that happened on their way south, but also tells the friendship between two people in different situations.

2. Literature Review

Skopos theory is a new translation theory developed in Germany in the 1970s. The representative character is Hans J. Vermeer. Vermeer emphasizes that goals, objectives, functions, and intentions are “attributed” to behavior. Any form of translation, even translation itself, is an act. All actions have a purpose^[1]. The purpose of translation determines the methods and strategies of translation. Teleology has many advantages. As Munday (2006) said, one of its advantages is that it can translate the same text in different ways based on different purposes of the target text and different tasks of the translator, making the same text different^[2]. Skopos theory can effectively guide translation practice and help target readers better understand the original text.

2.1. Three basic rules of the Skopos Theory

The main idea of Skopos Theory is that translation should be purpose-oriented rather than target-language-oriented. For instance, if a translator is intended to present the structures of the source language, an interlineal or word-for-word translation would be chosen. Nevertheless, if the purpose of the target text is to fulfill an analogous or similar function in the target culture, accordingly, the translator will attempt to adjust his texts to the conventions and norms in the target language and culture. The Skopos Theory of Vermeer includes three rules: the skopos rule, the coherence rule and the fidelity rule.

The Skopos rule is the top-ranking rule of the Skopos Theory. According to Vermeer, there are three possible types of purposes in translation. The first purpose is the general one that is aimed at by the translator in the process of translation (perhaps ‘to earn a living’). The second purpose is the communicative purpose that is aimed at by the target text in the target situation (perhaps ‘to instruct the reader’). The third purpose is the purpose that is aimed at by a particular translation strategy or procedure (for example, ‘to translate literally in order to show the structural particularities of the source language’)^[3].

In the framework of Skopos Theory, the process of a certain translation is seen as a kind of human action. Since any action can show its purpose or intention, translation is a kind of purposeful behavior and usually occurs in a given situation. What is more, the primary principle determining any process of translation is the purpose (Skopos) of the whole translational action. Vermeer makes an explanation that the production of each text has a specific purpose and ought to serve this purpose. Accordingly the Skopos rule is to translate/interpret/speak/write in a way that enables the text/ translation to function in the way people intend to function^[3].

The skopos rule is used to solve such permanent dilemmas between free translation and faithful translation, between dynamic equivalence and formal equivalence, as well as between good interpreters and slavish translators. It means that the Skopos of a given translation task may have a requirement of a ‘free’ or ‘faithful’ translation, or the combination of the two. That is, different purposes of the text can explain the employment and the choice of different methods in the process of translation.

The coherence rule, also known as the standard of intratextual coherence, is another important rule of the Skopos Theory. That is to say, the target text ought to be meaningful in the communicative situation as well as at the cultural level. Not only the understanding of the communicative situation and culture of the target text but also the acceptability of the target receiver ought to be taken into consideration from the facet of the coherence rule. The meaning of being ‘coherent with’ is analogous to the meaning of being part of the situation of the receiver^[3]. And coherence should be an agreement between a text and its situation in the process of translation.

The fidelity rule is also called intertextual coherence. It is about the relationship between an offer of information (target language text) and a preceding offer of information (corresponding source language text) in a translation. A significant view is that fidelity rule needs to take place between the source text and the target text. Also, the Skopos of the translation and the translators understanding of the source text have a great effect on the application of the fidelity rule. The translational Skopos determines the extent

or degree of the fidelity in the target text. The interpretation of the fidelity can touch upon different levels of language and culture in the process of translation. The content and culture can reach the maximum or the minimum of the fidelity. Translation should occur in the way that the receiver expects in the situation of the source language.

That is, under the guidance of the Skopos rule, appropriate translation strategies are adopted to extract effective information from the source text in order to achieve the translation purpose. Under the guidance of the rule of coherence, utilize styles and vocabulary that are consistent with the cultural habits and expressions of the target audience to make the film coherent and enable the audience to understand the plot of the film. Under the guidance of the rule of fidelity, grasping the meaning of the original text and faithfully translating it can accurately convey the speaker's original meaning and emotions through subtitles, thereby maintaining the equivalence of linguistic features and meanings.

2.2. Domestication and Foreignization in the framework of Skopos Theory

According to Venuti, domestication is “a translation strategy that uses a transparent and fluent style to minimize the strangeness of the target audience”^[4]. Domestication is a translation strategy aimed at the target language. The translator will convert the source language into the target language according to the language habits and cultural background of the target language, thereby adapting to the target audience. Foreignization translation is “intentionally breaking the norms of the target culture by retaining certain elements of the original text”^[4]. Foreignization translation is a translation strategy aimed at the source language. The translator will do his best to maintain its “original flavor” so that its unique culture can be preserved.

In the Skopos Theory, each action has a purpose^[6]. As part of human activities, the action of translating also has a purpose. The main principle is the purpose of translational action, which determines the whole process of translation. In addition, the initiator of translational action normally gives the translator the translation brief in order to specify the type of translation. Accordingly in the light of the translation brief the translator ought to select translation strategies and produce a translation that is sufficient enough to bear its predetermined functions. If the requirements and the predetermined purposes in translation are satisfied, the translated text can be considered as an adequate translation in framework of the Skopos Theory with the skopos rule as its core principle. What is more, the Skopos determines the selection of translation strategies in Skopos Theory. Once the Skopos of a translation is fulfilled, the translation can be thought of as a successful one.

The Skopos rule decides the specific Skopos, which conversely helps the translator to determine which strategy to choose^[7]. That is to say, the Skopos of a specific translation task may have a requirement of a free or literal translation or the combination of the two strategies, relying on the demanded purpose in the process of translation^[3].

There are some reasons for those who adopt foreignization strategy. Firstly, it is necessary to make the reader of the translated text know about foreign cultures, which is often the aim of the reader in his reading. Secondly, the translator ought to believe that the reader has adequate intelligence to understand the foreignness of the exotic culture. Thirdly, the introduction of the original culture to the target culture can enrich the culture and linguistic expressions of the target language. Fourthly, the main purpose of translation should have the function of cultural communication. Finally, if the translated text cannot clearly convey the phenomenon in the source language, it will not be “faithful to the original text”. Besides, there are also some reasons for those who prefer domestication strategy. Firstly, it is impossible to impose the system of source-language culture upon the target-language culture. Thus, the translation needs to overcome the barriers of the two language and the two culture. Secondly, translation is a way of communication so the translator is responsible for prevent cultural conflicts, which may lead to misunderstanding. And the translator needs to balance the connotation of the ideology in different cultures when introducing one culture to another. Thirdly, if the content and form of the translated text are within the understanding of the reader toward the real world, the reader can better understand the translated text. So it is necessary to transform the source-language culture into the target-language culture. Simultaneously, the translator as a “transmitter” needs to remove the misunderstanding and to convey the real meaning of the source-language culture to the reader of the target-language culture. Fourthly, the translator should not have a rather high demanding for the intelligence and imagination of the reader to understand the source-language culture. Actually, the translator needs to make the original text get close to the target text as much as possible. Finally, from the angle of the communication, an efficient way of communication in one culture may be not the same as in another. Usually, it cannot ensure to produce a target text with the same or analogous effect as the original text by using the method of the word-for-

word translation. In a way, the task of the translator is to find certain equivalence between the source-language culture and target-language culture.

Therefore, when translating movie subtitles, translators should first understand the purpose of translation. Then, according to Skopos Theory and its following rules, choose a translation strategy. In this way, the translator can translate subtitles that meet the needs of the movie.

2.3. Previous studies on *The Green Book*



Figure 2: *Green Book* (2).

Since the film (Figure 2) was released in 2018, it is a new film and there is relatively little research on the film. Huang analyzes the film from the perspective of cultural sociology. He believes that the *Green Book* will guide audience's attention back to the dark age of apartheid and reflects the ethnic disputes still hidden in the current society by touching the historical memory, which is of profound reflection and critical significance. Wang believes that although the situation of ethnic minorities such as blacks has improved greatly in the United States today, discrimination against ethnic minorities such as blacks still exists widely in the American society. However, some scholars believe that the film uses the tenderness of the "black elite identity" and the "white bottom identity" to sew the rifts of race and class, and treats people of different ethnicities and classes with equal eyes as well as depicts vivid and realistic paintings of social customs. Different scholars have different interpretations of the film. Obviously, equality among different races is still an ideal vision in American society today. Since film theories are interdisciplinary and there is currently little research on *The Green Book*, this paper intends to analyze the film from the perspective of the Skopos Theory.

3. Domestication and Foreignization in the translation of subtitles in *The Green Book*

The following section provides some examples which adopt Domestication and Foreignization strategy respectively.

3.1. Domestication in Subtitle Translation of the *Green Book*

Example 1: Of course I don't want you to miss a show, you ungrateful started!

Dr. Sherry was caught shopping, and then Tony went to rescue Dr. Sherry. They couldn't fight the police, and Dr. Sherry had a performance at night. In order not to let him miss the performance, Tony successfully rescued Dr. Sherry by offering bribes to the police. Dr. Sherry didn't understand why he wanted to bribe the person who wronged him, and he had a dispute with Tony. During the dispute, Tony called Dr. Sherry a "White eyed wolf". "Ungrateful Bastard", if translated directly, will be translated as "a person who is not grateful", which is relatively bland and cannot be well understood by the audience. Therefore, under the guidance of Skopos Theory, the translator adopts a domestication strategy to translate "ungrateful bastard" into a familiar word "white eyed wolf" for Chinese audiences. "White eyed wolf" refers to people who are ungrateful and bite the hand that feeds them. This translation is very consistent with the cognitive habits of Chinese audiences, instantly narrowing the distance between the audience and the film. At the same time, it also enables the audience to accurately experience Tony's

anger and helplessness at this moment, and well conveys the film plot to the audience, making the film plot compact and coherent, achieving the principle of purpose and coherence.

Example 2: You think I'm doing this for my health?

Dr. Shirley believed that Tony was only helping him for his own benefit, and Tony spoke out helplessly. If this sentence is translated literally, it will be translated into "Do you think I am doing this for my health?" This translation will not only confuse the audience, but also convey a wrong message to the audience, making it difficult for the audience to understand. Therefore, it is not possible to translate directly here. Therefore, under the guidance of Skopos Theory, the translator adopts a domestication translation strategy, translating it into "Do you think I only do this for myself?" The advantage of this translation is that it can make the audience have empathy in the process of watching the movie, feel the same as Tony, and understand the development of the plot. This translation also makes the plot of the film coherent, and achieves the purpose of wanting to convey the plot content to the audience, and realizes the principle of purpose and coherence.

Example 3: When I think of you... I'm reminded of the beautiful plains of Iowa. (Synonymous with "plane")

Dr. Sherry taught Tony to write this sentence when he asked him to write to his wife. Due to Tony's limited level of cultural knowledge, he thought Dr. Shelley was talking about airplanes, and then asked, "What airplane?" Then Dr. Shelley explained that it was plains. When translating this sentence, the translator, under the guidance of Skopos Theory, translated it into "the beautiful plains of Iowa" in order to faithfully convey the content of the original sentence. However, considering that the audience may be confused as to why Dr. Shirley spoke of the plain, while Tony believed it was an airplane, the translator adopted a domestication translation strategy, adding annotations to explain that the plain and the airplane sound similar, solving the audience's confusion, and also making the above and below closely connected, achieving the coherence principle in Skopos Theory, enabling the audience to have a deeper understanding of the movie plot.

Example 4: Who has the balls to clip Gio's hat?

Gio gave his beloved hat to the waiter to help place it, but Tony bribed the waiter to take away Gio's hat. Gio was very angry when he could not find his hat, and then Tony pretended to find Gio's hat and returned it to him. In order to thank Tony for giving him a sum of money, Gio's good friend asked who had the audacity to steal Gio's hat. Under the guidance of Skopos Theory, the translator has adopted a domestication strategy to translate "the balls" into a four-character idiom known to Chinese audiences as "Dan Da Bao Tian". "Dan Da Bao Tian" describes being very bold and daring to act recklessly. This translation not only allows the audience to feel the surprise of the characters in the film, but also reflects Tony's bold and calm personality. At the same time, it also makes the plot of the film closely connected, realizing the principle of purpose and coherence.

3.2. Foreignization in Subtitle Translation of the Green Book

Example 1: From that country, through Christ our Lord, Amen.

The scene of this sentence appears during a dinner with the Tony family. Some Western families would say this sentence before dinner to thank the food for its hard work. Under the guidance of Skopos Theory, the translator has chosen a strategy of foreignization and translated it into "Zhu A", which not only does not cause difficulties for the audience to understand, but also makes the translation very suitable for the current context. The translation is very appropriate, not only faithfully translating the original text, achieving the principle of faithfulness, but also allowing the Chinese audience to understand foreign culture.

Example 2: Louisville Thank you for your warm hospitality!

The scene of this sentence occurs when Dr. Shelley has an important performance the next night. He is asking Tony to practice speaking before the performance starts, so Tony said this sentence. In the process of translation, under the guidance of Skopos Theory, the translator adopted a foreignizing translation strategy, using a transliteration method, and translated "Louisville" into "Lu Yi Si Wei Er", which is the transliteration of "Louisville". Louisville is a city in Kentucky, USA. Don came here to perform. In order to thank the enthusiastic audience, Tony said this sentence. By adopting a foreignizing translation strategy to translate this place name, also known as a proper noun, the audience can better experience and understand foreign culture, thereby achieving the goal of promoting cultural exchange

and realizing the skopos principle in Skopos theory.

Example 3: That's Tony!

In the movie, there is a scene where Tony's family gets together for dinner. During the meal, Tony's wife wants everyone to help him introduce another temporary job. One of his relatives expresses their incomprehension and believes that Tony's current job is very good. It was because Tony beat the foreman that he lost his job. Tony retorted that it was the foreman who interrupted his sleep. The relative euphemistically expressed his frustration with Tony's hot temper with the phrase "That's Tony!" The sentence pattern "That's ..." means "Na Shi ..." in Chinese. Therefore, a foreignizing translation strategy is adopted here to translate the original sentence into "Na Zheng Shi Tony!", which is not only more appropriate in sentence structure, but also allows the audience to experience Tony's irascible personality and emphasize this characteristic of Tony's personality to the audience, and also realizes the principle of faithfulness in Skopos Theory.

Example 4: Tony, the first thing I'd like you to do, when we arrive in the city, is check the piano where I'm playing, make sure it's a Steinway as per my contract.

From the film, we learn that Tang is a famous black pianist with a pursuit of excellence in art, so he only plays the best piano. At the time, the best piano was the Steinway brand. That's why Don asked Tony to check whether the piano was a Steinway before each performance because he wanted to present the perfect performance. In translating, the translator did not adapt to the audience's translation of "Steinway" into "a piano brand", but instead adopted a strategy of alienation, using transliteration to translate "Steinway" into "Si Tan Wei" (transliteration). This translation is because we can learn from the clause that the "Steinway" mentioned here is a piano brand, and the translation will not cause difficulties for the audience to understand. Such translation not only realizes the principle of faithfulness in skopos theory, but also broadens the audience's knowledge.

4. Conclusion

In modern society, movies have become a part of people's daily life entertainment. In particular, the dissemination of films is an important medium for cultural communication in various countries. Excellent subtitle translation can not only bring a good viewing experience to the audience, but also spread the local culture of the film. By analyzing the subtitle translation of the film *The Green Book*, it can be seen that when translating subtitles of foreign films, under the guidance of Skopos Theory, the strategy of domestication or foreignization is determined based on the specific situation. When the language used in a movie has a unique culture, the character dialogue may contain cultural vocabulary that is unfamiliar to the audience. Some specific expressions may be considered incomprehensible by the audience, and translators can choose a translation strategy that is easy for them to understand and it is recommended to choose a domestication strategy to deal with them. In order to let the audience better understand foreign culture, it is advisable for the translator to adopt a strategy of foreignization in the actual translation process of some words with cultural connotations appearing in the film. Adopting appropriate domestication or foreignization translation strategies to convey all the linguistic activities of the characters will make the audience feel empathy and willing to accept, while explaining the culture, retaining the original cultural characteristics so that the audience can obtain emotional resonance when searching for the same part of their own culture.

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