

Commentary on the Subtitling Translation of *Cats V Dogs Which is Best*

Danyang Zhang

Jilin University Lambton College, Changchun, Jilin, 130000, China

ABSTRACT. *It is undeniable that global economy and international trade has driven an increasing demand in cultural intersection especially in film and television. Subtitling translation thus serves as a bridge connecting the source language and culture with the target audience. The commentary is conducted to discuss the problems encountered and strategies employed in subtitling the video *Cats v Dogs Which is Best* from English to Chinese.*

KEYWORDS: *Subtitling translation, Commentary, Problems and strategies*

1. Introduction

The commentary aims to discuss the problems encountered and strategies employed in subtitling the 59-minute video *Cats v Dogs Which is Best* from English to Chinese. For the conveniences of illustration, subtitles are exemplified with number.

2. Source Text (St) & Target Text (Tt) Analysis

The video (ST) is the first episode of a documentary of *Cats v Dogs Which is Best* comparing three aspects which felines and canines are capable of--- senses, physical prowess and brain power. It was broadcast in 2016 through the channel of BBC Two characterised by knowledge-oriented programmes which are intended for a group of well-educated audience aged between 35-55 (冯军, 2016).

The TT in interlingual subtitling is required to be accomplished in DVD format following the specifications and conventions. The TT addressees are assumed as the general audience in China who have similar knowledge of the subject on pets and animals to the ST readership. However, the TT recipients have slight knowledge of the source language (SL) culture.

Documentary in itself aims to convey knowledge and enlighten the readership. The ST has an informative function (Reiss, 2004 (1971): 171) revealing facts and information. Since it is a content-focused documentary on pets and animals, explicitness is required in message transmission; in other words, the TT is supposed to render the content and knowledge about felines and canines faithfully.

The dialogic ST also has an operative function (ibid, 171) and is potentially supposed to engage and attract the readership. To some extent, the appellative-focused ST is expected to inspire the SL recipients and stimulate their passion and interest in knowledge learning on pets and animals. Thus the TT accordingly should achieve the same effect and function to attract the target language (TL) addressees.

3. Macrostrategy Applied in Subtitling

Before dealing with the problems encountered individually, macrostrategy is supposed to be settled for the overall plan of this documentary translation. Schjoldager (2008: 71) comes up with two macrostrategies continent on three factors presented as follows:

Source-text oriented macrostrategy	Target-text oriented macrostrategy
Focus on source-text form and content	Focus on target-text effect
Communication of somebody else's communication	Mediation between primary parties in a communication
Overt translation	Covert translation

Based on Skopos theory, target-text-oriented macrostrategy is employed in the context of the message transmission with three reasons specified as follows. First of all, the documentary is target-text-effect-focused. According to Newmark (1981:39-69), such an informative ST marked as communicative translation is required to render messages correctly comprehensible to the readership. The same function is shared between the ST and the TT. The information conveyed from the documentary is emphasised rather than the lexis and syntax of the ST.

Secondly, the subtitler serves as an information and knowledge transmitter between the SL sender and the TL receivers. Since the informative ST is not culture-oriented, mutual comprehension is not exclusive to the SL sender and SL receivers. Communication between the SL sender and SL receivers is not necessary to be translated in another language, Chinese in this case. Lastly, the subtitling of factual documentary on pets and animals is a covert translation. The ST is characterised as low status in the source culture, cultural presuppositions as a result are not necessary to be transferred though cultural filter which is normally required for the equivalent replacement. Therefore, the factual documentary is supposed to employ target-text-oriented macrostrategy emphasising the importance of target readership.

As Schjoldager states (2008: 73), sticking to one macrostrategy might not guarantee a flawless translation. Microstrategies in this case are employed as a result which are prone to provide specific solutions to the problems encountered and to modify the translation in the end. Microstrategies proposed by Vinay and Darbelnet (1958) are employed to solve the challenges encountered respectively.

4. Problems and Solutions

As above-mentioned analysis examined, four major challenges encountered in the process of subtitling are specified as follows.

4.1 Challenge on Terminology and Proper Noun Interpretation

Terminology tends to prevalently appear in documentaries. Since the documentary is fact-oriented, accuracy remains the top priority. Given that the ST mainly compares and discusses felines and canines, terminology on the subject of zoology and ethology are usually addressed. To prove the results and findings, scientific data are also provided in the ST. The challenge thus appears in the context of the proper interpretation of scientific terms as the informative function of the ST requires faithful equivalence in the TL. Faithful rendition sometimes leads to obscure equivalent to the target audience, which may pose difficulty to lay TL addressees in comprehension. The solution, according to Anna Matamala, may vary case by case which is dependent on “the type, style, function and intended target audience of the documentary” (Díaz-Cintas, 2009:115).

Here shows a circumstance where the challenge presents on terminology interpretation. As Cabre (1999:80) states, the standardised terms proposed by official terminological authorities are normally used in specialists’ speech, posing a difficulty to the general people in comprehension. According to Leon (1999:104), specialised texts and scientific documentaries vary in the degree of specialisation because of the different needs of the target readership.

Example #1	ST: Surgeon Peter Nelison is giving me a guided tour of the olfactory epithelium.
	TT: 外科医生皮特·纳理森在给我简单介绍嗅觉皮膜

Obviously, the ST of “olfactory epithelium” in #1 is a terminology on biology and medicine which is unfamiliar to the SL non-specialist audience. Correspondingly, the TL recipients are also unfamiliar with “嗅觉皮膜”, the equivalent of “olfactory epithelium”. It should be reasonable to amplify an explanation informing the audience of a general clue and impression on this term. In order to balance the high degree of specialisation and comprehension of the TL audience, compensation translation strategy applies. Since the image of “olfactory epithelium” appears on the screen when the speech occurs. Therefore, the audience are informed of a general idea while they are watching the video. Meanwhile space is saved as a result.

A further challenge has been detected where proper noun presents difficulty in the way of its interpretation. Normally, the proper noun in English alphabets is supposed to be transcribed to follow the TL conventions.

Example #2	ST: This is a genuine British long jump competition called “Dash N Splash”.
	TT: 这是英国跳远大赛“一跃成名溅四方”的现场,如假包换

The England-specific proper noun of “Dash N Splash” in #2 has no existed equivalent in the TL. Omission is firstly taken into consideration as a result. However, it is an important information appeared in the video where the slogan is attached on the ramp. Message replacement in TL is inevitable in this case. Since such culture-related term usually requires changing the cultural reference, adaptation translation strategy is taken into consideration. Creation and trans-adaptation are emphasised with regard to translating a competition name. Two features --- long jump competition (“dash”) and water (“splash”) --- are necessary to be highlighted and translated. In this case, “一跃成名” (long jumping will make you renowned) reveals the essence and purpose of the game --- gaining reputation through this long jump competition. “溅四方” (water splashing) highlights the enjoyment and venue of the competition.

4.2 Challenge on Connotation of Words

“Items of lexis have different types of meaning” --- positive/negative/neutral meaning --- “depending on the situation or context they are used in” (Spratt et al., 2011:5). In other words, proper equivalent replacement is contingent on the connotative meaning of the vocabulary. Given that it is a subject on pets, here illustrates the examples of the translation of “dog/canine”.

Example # 3	ST : Never mind feeding the dog	TT: 再也不用愁要喂狗狗了
Example # 4	ST: And the average dog has a brain, this is a medium-sized dog, has a brain for around about 64 cc.	TT: 狗的平均脑容量大约是 64 毫升,这是一只中型狗的脑部模型
Example # 5	ST: But clever canines can do pretty much anything.	TT: 但没什么东西能难倒聪明的犬科动物

Although “狗狗”(puppy), “狗” (dog) and “犬” (canine) share the same denotative meaning, they vary in connotative meaning in the context of pragmatics in Chinese. “狗狗” (puppy) in #3 shows femininity-oriented and young-focused flavour, reflecting a lovely tone with affection. Whereas “狗” (dog) in Chinese with a neutral meaning shows no sentiment which is appropriately employed in the delivery of basic facts exemplified in #4. “犬” (canine) in #5 is a commendatory term in a higher degree of formality. Therefore, translation varies based on different context.

4.3 Difference in Register

Anna Matamala (2009) states that register comprises three elements as follows: mode (the form of communication), field (the subject of the matter) and tenor (the participants and their relationship). Based on Anna Matamala’s theory (Díaz-Cintas, 2009:115), translation modes of documentaries are contingent on different types of speakers reflecting “their relationship to the addressee and the degree of spontaneity in their discourse”. The types of speakers in documentaries determine the register of the speech during the process of message replacement.

Unlike the traditional type of narration in third person, the two speakers in the video argue with each other throughout the storytelling on behalf of two camps supporting each pet respectively. The tenor in this case determines informal register as a result. Their on-screen spontaneous oral presentation in ST reflects the speakers’ attitude and their relationship. As Martin Joos stated (1972:121) that syntactic, lexical and phonological nuances have an impact on different styles of the same language, casual interpersonal relationship is distinguished from their tone of speech and word choices.

Example #6	ST: You can't beat a skate-boarding hound.
	TT1: 会滑板的猎犬独孤求败
	TT2: 没人能打败一只会滑板的猎犬

Clearly, Example #6 shows supportive argument for canines. This is a dispute between the two speakers characterised as vividness and humour. The hilarious image of a skate-boarding hound conveying enjoyment to the SL audience compensates the informal register of the ST. The TT equivalent is supposed to share the same intention with the ST. Literal translation presented as TT2 showing a relatively higher degree of formality as neutral register fails to satisfy the purpose which reveals inappropriateness. In order to keep informal register and meanwhile reflect humour, modulation translation strategy is employed as a result. According to Newmark (1988:89), vice versa is one of the commonly-used modulation procedures which is applied in TT1 to transfer

the original subject “you” to the “skate-boarding hound”. Personification is employed to increase the informal register and humour effect. “独孤求败” is a Chinese fictitious figure who triumphed over any other challengers. It reveals the hound feels lonely at the top and is eager to find a competitive contestant.

4.4 Challenge on Flavour of the Translation

Although it is a factual ST which should have been characterised as professional and specialist language, the translation in a vivid and witty flavour outweighs based on target-text oriented macrostrategy. Two reasons are specified as follows.

First of all, the light-hearted subject of the documentary determines the flavour of the translation. For one thing, pets are discussed in the ST which is a topic connected closely with viewers’ daily life. For another, the documentary is facilitated with adorable images and videos of the pets, thus the translation is supposed to avoid plain language to some extent.

Moreover, the potential target audience has a huge impact on the flavour of the translation. Unlike the well-educated middle-aged SL addressees as mentioned above in the ST & TT analysis, the target readership is assumed as lay audience. Documentaries on canines and felines are favoured watching by the whole family. However, young viewers are emphasised in particular. Although the ST is an informative text type in line with factualness in translation, operative function is emphasised in this case. Documentaries serve the function to enlighten and educate the audience especially the teenagers who have an interest in animals. Since younger audiences are likely to soon tire of the sophisticated scientific content on ethology, TL is supposed to be polished and modified so as to attract the young viewers. TL in a vivid and witty flavour is employed facilitating the documentary taking a light-hearted look at the world of canines and felines so as to attract the young target audience.

5. Conclusion

The factual documentary *Cats v Dogs Which is Best* is subtitled from English to Chinese. Since it combines informative and operative function, it is necessary to render the message faithfully and meanwhile polish the language to engage the TL audience. Unlike the well-educated middle-aged SL viewers, the TL readership is expanded to lay audience. According to Skopos theory, target-text oriented macrostrategy applies and microstrategies are employed to modify the translation and deal with the challenges. Target readership is always taken into consideration.

Four challenges are encountered in translating *Cats v Dogs Which is Best*. The interpretation of terminology and proper noun render it difficult to translate. For one thing, it is necessary to balance the degree of specialisation. For another, the culture-specific proper noun is required to be trans-adapted sticking to the target-text oriented macrostrategy. Also, positive/negative/neutral meaning is usually implied through connotation of words. Difference in register poses another challenge due to the presence of scripted narrations and live interviews. Different types of storytelling techniques determine the degree of formality. This documentary features host and talking heads in line with different register varying from informal to neutral register. Lastly, the translation in vivid and witty flavour outweighs depending on the pet subject of the documentary and the potential target audience, young viewers in particular.

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