The Translation of Humor in Animated Feature Film: The Case of *Kung Fu Panda*

Yanning Gan[(✉)]

Department of Western Languages, Heilongjiang International University, Harbin 150025, Heilongjiang, China
1246167682@qq.com

Abstract. This article examines how humor in animated feature films can be translated between two languages and cultures that see huge differences between each other. This article adopted *Kungfu Panda* (2008) for case study and analyzed 11 video clips which reflected the translator's negotiation of the linguistic and cultural humor that appeared in the source text. Conclusions were drawn on the translation strategies used by the Chinese translators in the translation of humor and the different humor features that more frequently appeared in the English and Chinese languages to create a humorous effect.

Keywords: humor translation · animation translation · audiovisual translation · translation strategy · translation assessment

1 Introduction

This research paper concentrates on the translation of linguistic and cultural humor in *Kungfu Panda* (2008). *Kungfu Panda* is a film with Chinese characteristics, with Chinese kung fu as the background, telling the legendary story of the panda Po. The film incorporates kung fu, noodles, Chinese architecture and many other Chinese elements. It uses humorous language and hilarious pictures to create a cute and honest image of Chinese panda. With the increasing demand for watching original foreign films, subtitle translation plays an increasingly important role in people's daily life in helping them to understand information from varied source. Despite its growing importance, the research on the subtitle translation for humor texts in animation still limited in number. Different from other types of translation, humor translation not only need to retain the meaning of the source text, but also have to take into account cultural transformation and the creative recreation of humor in the target language. Thus, there may be defects of accuracy and completeness in humorous translation. How are the humorous words in the film translated? What types of translation strategies are frequently used? To answer these questions, the current research will analyze the humorous texts that appeared in the *Kungfu Panda* movie and assess how they are rendered and created. The research is done with the hope to benefit future practices and research in the relevant field.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Translation Assessment

Translation quality assessment is an important part of translation, which concerns the translated text, the translation standard, the quality of the translation and the translator's level. Translation quality assessment plays an important role in the development of translation theory, though as was claimed by Colina (2009), translation quality assessment may be one of the most controversial and intense topics in the academic discussions as well as translation practices [1]. This was agreed by Al - Qinai (2000), who suggested that the standardization of translation quality is a fuzzy grey area often influenced by impressionism [2]. To reverse the subjectivity, Al – Qinai (2000) suggests the industry to develop a translation quality evaluation model based on objective parameters such as text typology, form corresponding, themes, coherence and pragmatic equivalence and lexical, syntactic properties [2]. For the translation of texts that belong to different genres, there should be different ways to assess the quality of translation. Here below, I will talk about the means to assess the quality of translations of the humorous texts that appear in films.

This paper regards that when the humorous effect in the source text is successfully transferred in the target texts, it can be regarded as a successful translation of humorous text. The translation can involve a certain degree of transcreation and achieve the humorous effect in a different means compared to the source text. The paper further follows Raphaelson-West's (1989) division of the types of humor into verbal humor, cultural humor, and generic humor [3]. However, only the former two categories will be discussed in the current paper because of the limited scope of the research. To discuss whether humor in this two categories has been successfully transferred in the target text, I will further follow Chairina's (2014: 30) framework which has brought out the six elements that helps to achieve a humorous effect: ambiguity, superiority, incongruity, wordplay, relief, surprise or shock [4]. The project will assess whether the humor elements in the source texts is successfully transferred/recreated in the target text to achieve a similar humorous effect.

2.2 Humor Translation Strategies in Audiovisual Translation

Humor is a combination of thought, knowledge, quality, intelligence and wit in language. As was discussed above, the current paper will discuss the linguistic humor and cultural humor in texts. Linguistic humor is also known as verbal humor, and the humor expressed by language or words. Dynel (2009) summarized the viewpoints put forward by other scholars and entered into in-depth discussion of the semantic and practical types of linguistic humor, including jokes, conversational humor, words and phrases, wordplay, sarcasm, puns, allusions, refutations, teasing, banter, overuse, self-denigrating humor and anecdotes [5]. For cultural humor, as is argued by Nida (1993), "for truly successful translation, familiarity with both cultures is even more important than being bilingual, because words only have meaning in the cultural context in which they are intended" [6]. There are many cultural factors that influence humor translation, such as historical culture, religious culture, social environment culture, custom culture and political culture.

As is argued by Vandaele (2002), "humor translation is qualitatively different from other types of translation", so one cannot describe humor translation in the same way as other types of translation, and it is difficult to translate humor in both language and culture [7]. Translators should first identify and appreciate the humor in the source text, and then use appropriate translation strategies to convey the humor in a way that fit the target language and cultural norms to make it more easily understandable for the audiences. Yet, in the study of humor translation strategies, there is no recognized concept or a range of set strategies for humor translation due to the researchers' different backgrounds, theories, research objectives and research methods. This paper will use the humor translation strategies brought up by Abomoati (2018) for analysis, as it is considered to be typical and comprehensive and is suitable for research on the translation of language and cultural humor in subtitling [8].

In general, humor translation in an audiovisual work is not only difficult in the linguistic and cultural aspects but also receive restrictions because of the space limitation of the subtitle itself. Compensation or recreative strategies often need to be used to recreate the humorous effect, though not necessarily through the original means in the source text. This requires effect, translators to not only fully understand the elements of humor, but also have a rich knowledge of the source and target language and culture, and flexibly recreate the text to fit the audiovisual work and become a humorous whole. Through literature review, I found that most scholars borrowed the translation strategy of an expert and combined it with their own point of view for analysis. However, few scholars have analyzed humor translation for animation from the perspectives of language and culture, so I will conduct the analysis from these two aspects.

2.3   Humor in Audiovisual Translation

The study of audiovisual translation has been booming since the 1990s. Perego (2012) pointed out that audiovisual translation is a language conversion technique and a tool to convey ideas, which enables people of different ages, cultures and languages to face new behaviors in different situations [9]. He also believes that dubbing and subtitling are the best-known methods of language conversion. Delabastita (1989) argued that descriptive methods could be used to better investigate and analyze the whole process, considering the complex and multi-faceted background of dubbing and subtitling [10]. This method has been proved to be effective in many existing studies on translation of humor texts in audiovisual works, and my research will also follow this means in my discussion.

Humor in audiovisual translation is limited by film genre, language and writing style. The characteristics and background knowledge of the audience must also be taken into account in film translation. Martinez-sierra (2010) pointed out that the main problem in translation is the dichotomy of form and content. Formal restriction mainly refers to the limitation of time and space [11]. In addition to the synchronization of dialogue, action and picture, there is also the limitation of position and word space of translation subtitles. Therefore, when assessing humor translation in an audiovisual rather than literary context, the above-mentioned limitations need to be carefully considered. My research will also incorporate these two aspects (audience and formal restrictions) in my analysis to evaluate the translator's negotiation of the text.

3 Data and Methodology

Kung Fu Panda (2008) is an animated film that shows typical Chinese martial arts culture. The world of martial arts dramas, Chinese kung fu, architecture and food with Chinese characteristics are all full of thick Chinese elements. The hero "Po" chooses the Chinese national treasure giant panda as the prototype. The film successfully combines China's traditional Chinese differentiation with Western thinking methods, containing rich Chinese diversified culture and Chinese philosophy. *Kung Fu Panda* (2008) not only uses the Chinese cultural elements everywhere, but also uses humorous language, which makes it very suitable for the study of language and cultural humor, so I use this film as my research text. In this paper, the most popular *Kung Fu Panda* (2008) subtitle version translated by the ragged bear subtitle group is selected.

The current research project adopts the means of descriptive qualitative analysis, collecting and analysing data from the original and translated versions of *Kung Fu Panda* to see whether the humorous effects in the source text has been successfully transferred in the target text. Firstly, the movies will be watched for multiple times and the clips demonstrating linguistic and cultural humor will be selected, repeatedly watched and analyzed. Secondly, the humorous elements that appear in the source and target texts will be marked out and labeled according to Charina's (2014) classification of the six humorous elements that help to create a humorous effect in audiovisual texts to see whether the humorous effects in the source text have been transferred/recreated in the target text. [4] Thirdly, the translation strategies used in the translation of the clips will be classified and assessed according to Abomoati's (2018) categorizaton of the translation strategies [8]. Finally, based on my analysis, will mark out the problems and limitations that the translators frequently encounter in the humorous translation of animation and suggest the possible means to better solve the problems.

4 Data Analysis

4.1 Introduction of Data Size

4.1.1 Introduction of Data Size

The current section will focus the discussion on the four kinds of linguistic humor of: sarcasm, wordplay, anecdotes, self-denigrating humor. It adopts the translation assessment method used by Chairina (2014) and see how the humor features (among the six features classified by Chairina) in the ST are transferred in the TT [4]. Based on the analysis, the paper will then follow the translation strategies classified by Abomoati (2018) in the analysis of the methods used in translating the humor texts in *Kongfu Panda* [8]. She/He classified the humorous translation strategies into: paraphrasing, substitution, adaptation. The following table shows the total of seven humorous clips used in the current analysis of linguistic humor. This table shows the classification of the verbal humor, the translators' mediation of the humor features and the translation strategies adopted in each excerpt (Fig. 1).

NO	Time	Source language （English）	Target language （Chinese）	Classification of verbal humor	Change of Humor Features Source language (ST) Target language (TT)	Humor translation strategy
1	15: 59-16: 04	Master shifu : That flabby panda can't possibly be the answer to our problem.	师傅:那只又肥又胖的熊猫怎么能是神龙大侠。	sarcasm	ST: No signs of humor features TT: Incongruity	paraphrasing
2	33: 47-33:49	Zeng : We're dead, so very very dead.	曾: 我们死翘翘了，死得很翘很翘了。	Words and phrases	ST: No signs of humor features TT: Incongruity	adaptation
3	42: 11-42: 14	Master shifu : Would whoever is making that flapping sound quiet down?	师傅:谁在呼扇呼扇的?给我安静!	Words and phrases	ST: No signs of humor features TT: Incongruity	adaptation
4	46: 04-46: 08	Po : If he could read my mind,he d be like, "what"?	阿宝:他要是会读心术的话，一定会说:"大胆	anecdotes	ST: Superiority, Surprise or Shock TT: Superiority, Surprise or Shock	substitution
5	46:57-47:00	Po : You'll never be the Dragon Warrior unless you lose 500 pounds.	阿宝:你永远成不了神龙大侠除非你减500 磅膘 刷干净牙.	self-denigrating humor	ST: Surprise or Shock，Incongruity TT: Surprise or Shock，Incongruity	paraphrasing
6	49:43-49:43	Po : Even if it takes him a hundred years to get here, how are you gonna change this into the Dragon Warrior?	阿宝:就算他要在路上耗上一百年，你又怎么能把眼前这个肥仔训练成神龙大侠?	self-denigrating humor	ST: No signs of humor features TT: Incongruity	paraphrasing

Fig. 1. Language and humorous clip appearing in the *Kung Fu Panda* movie (self-made)

4.1.2   Analysis of Linguistic Humor Data Size

The analysis demonstrates that the paraphrasing translation strategy was adopted in the translation of three humorous segments (No. 1, 5, 6). In all of the three clips, the translator paraphrased the humor of the source text in a means that would seem to be inappropriate in the context. The humor feature of incongruity brought and added to the humorous effect of the ST. For instance, in example No.1, "flabby" in Chinese means "松散的, 肥胖". The translator translated it into "又肥又胖". The Chinese exaggeration more intuitively expressed the feelings of the characters and made the audience understand the development of the characters, using ironic types of humor to highlight Master Shifu's disagreement with Po and dissatisfaction with Master Oogway's choice. The Incongruity was only found in the translation, but not in the ST. The incongruity feature included in the TT made the humor that the ST did not have more humorous, and therefore the these fragments can be regarded to have been translated successfully. The humor in all the three segments was similar and sarcastic, and the translation evaluation also showed that the TTs adopted the same incongruity feature to recreate the humorous effects, which proved that they are connected.

In two of the humorous fragments (Table 1 No. 2, 3), translators used the adaptation strategy and adopted overlapping words to enhance the effect of the humor. For instance, in the source text of Table 1 No. 2, Zeng twice said that two changes of "dead" and "very" can highlight the fear, despair and helplessness. The translator used the Chinese "死翘翘" to highlight Zeng's emotional changes, and used the word "死得很翘很翘"

to express the focus of the two "very". Overlapping words were used to emphasize the humorous effect for a better reception by the audiences. Similarly, Table 1 No. 3 translated "flapping" into "呼扇呼扇". Both humor segments belonged to the category of "Words and phrases" language humor, and both used an "inappropriate" effect to transform the source texts that were not humorous into humorous ones, so I think the translation is successful.

The adaptation strategy was again adopted in another two humorous fragments (No. 2 and 3), both of which used overlapping words to enhance the effect of the humor. For instance, in the ST of example 2, Zeng said "dead" and "very" twice for each, which highlighted the fear, despair and helplessness of the character in the scene. The translator adapted the English language's use of repetitive terms into the Chinese language's use of reduplication to recreate the humorous effects. The Chinese term, "死翘翘", was used to highlight Zeng's emotional changes, and the word, "死得很翘很翘", was adopted to emphasize the two "very". Similarly, example 3 adapted "flapping" into "呼扇呼扇", a reduplication term, which added a linguistic humor which did not exist in the ST. Both examples belonged to the category of "Words and phrases" language humor, and both used reduplication to (re)create an incongruity humor feature and recreated or even transformed the ST that was not humorous into a humor text. The translations were therefore considered successful.

There was also a fragment (No. 4) which used the substitution translation strategy and translated the "What" of the source text into "大胆". The "what" in Chinese had the meaning of "什么, 多少" which would seem too pale if directly translation, and therefore the translator chose to substitute the word into "大胆" [How dare you!] which expressed a much stronger sense of psychological dissatisfaction. The translation as well as the humorous effect became easier to get for Chinese audiences who are used to see such expressions in the Chinese martial art movies. This was classified as anecdotes humor as the translated word itself could raise the audiences' imagination of a complete story / image based on how the word had been commonly used in Chinese films and TV series. The humorous effect brought by the feature of Superiority, Surprise or Shock in the ST was recreated and intensified in the TT, which could thus be regarded as a successful translation.

4.1.3 Summary

In the data analysis, I found that most of the Chinese translations used the feature of Incongruity to recreate the humorous effect in the ST, which was quite different from how humor was created in the English texts, where more varied means of humor features were adopted. The Chinese translators made the choices to add disharmony or inappropriate words in the text to recreate the humor. In the current analysis, in most of the time, the incongruity not only recreated but also strengthened the humor. It is also found that the translators often created humor through the means of self-mockery. This way of humor expression in Chinese is more intuitive and expresses humor without any sense of violation. It can be seen that the audiovisual humor translation brought great difficulty to translators, and creative means of translation needed to be adopted based on a good understanding of both source and target (humorous) language norms.

No	Time	Source language (English)	Target language (Chinese)	Cultural factors that influence humor	Change of Humor Features	Humor translation strategy
1	03:32-03:3 4	Zeng: What were you doing up there? All that noise	你在楼上搞什么名堂，稀里哗啦的。	custom culture	ST: No signs of humor features TT: Incongruity	adaptation
2	04:52-04:5 4	Zeng: Because it was a stupid dream.	因为那是一个黄粱蠢梦。	historical culture	ST: No signs of humor features TT: Incongruity	substitution
3	24:46-24:4 8	Po: I'm coming at you with crazy feet. What you gonna do about do about crazy feet.	看我佛山无影脚，你没辙了吧。	historical culture	ST: Relief TT: Relief	substitution
4	24:46-24:4 9	Po: Come on, I'm a blur.	出手啊，瞧我移形换影。	historical culture	ST: Relief TT: Relief	substitution
5	08:36-08:4 0	Zeng: The whole valley will be there and you'll sell noddles to all of them.	整个山谷的人都会去，你可以大卖特卖。	social environment culture	ST: No signs of humor features TT: Incongruity	adaptation

Fig. 2. Cultural humorous clip appearing in the *Kung Fu Panda* movie (self-made)

4.2 Cultural Humor

4.2.1 Introduction of Data Size

The section will focus the discussion on the three cultural factors that influence the creation of humor: custom culture, historical culture, and social environment culture. Similarly, the paper used Chairina's (2014) translation assessment method and the humorous translation strategy of Abomoati (2018) [4, 8]. The following table shows the total of five humorous clips used in the analysis of cultural humor. This table shows the cultural factors that influence humor, the translators' mediation of the humor features and the translation strategies adopted in each excerpt (Fig. 2).

4.2.2 Analysis of Linguistic Humor Data Size

The analysis demonstrated that the substitution translation strategy was adopted in the translation of three humorous segments (No. 2, 3, 4). In all of the three clips, the translator used idioms or terms for the martial art movements to translate the humor in the ST and used relief and incongruity features to bring and increase the humorous effect of the ST. For instance, in example No. 2, "黄粱蠢梦" was adapted from the idiom "黄粱蠢梦". The word "黄粱蠢梦" itself was an unreal dream, but the translator changed "一梦" to "蠢梦" to add a stupid and clumsy meaning, highlighting the character's characteristics and adding to the effect of humor. The incongruity was only found in the translation, but not in the ST. TT expressed an uncoordinated feature not present in ST to make it

more humorous, and therefore these fragments can be regarded to have been translated successfully. In No. 2 and 3, some martial art movements were called "佛山无影脚" and "移形换影". Po didn't actually use these martial art movements but just pretended to have a strong power to give him all the momentum. The translator used the substitution translation strategy to convey the characters' emotions and strengthened the humorous effect. The ST and TT of both clips expressed the humor feature of "relief", and the translation was also successful.

Another two humorous clips (No.1 and 5) used the adaptation translation strategy. For instance, in the ST of example 1, the translator rendered "What were you doing up there?" into "搞什么名堂". The "搞什么名堂" in TT was a Chinese dialect which meant "what on earth are you doing", and people used it to describe some strange things and ideas. In this way, the translation can better illustrate the emotional color of the film characters and is reflected in the form of dialect to strengthen the effect of humor. The translator translated "All that noise" into "稀里哗啦" which was a sound that described rain or something falling down. Such a translation replaced ST with a more vivid word. In the above-mentioned two examples, the translator adapted the ST which demonstrated no humor into TT which present recreated humorous effects, and thus the translation was successful. The No.5 translator translated "sell noodles to all of them" in ST into "大卖特卖" which was usually used during holiday promotions and demonstrates that the goods are sold in large quantities. The TT not only reflected the meaning of "sell all of them" in ST, but also strengthened the intensity of selling and increases the effect of humor in TT. Incongruity did not appear in the ST but appeared in the TT, and therefore the translation can be regarded to be successful.

4.2.3   Summary

In the data analysis, I found that the Chinese translators often use the feature of incongruity to express/reinforce the humorous effects in ST. The study also found the feature of relief frequently adopted in the Chinese translations to express humor that would be easier to understand and had no sense of disharmony. It could be seen that the cultural humor in audio-visual translation would also encounter many difficulties in translation, and it would be necessary to understand the cultural background of both ST and TT to create understandable translations.

5   Conclusion

Humorous translation in audio-visual translation is a not easy thing, translators must be able to fully understand the background of the ST and TT and be able to convey the relevant content of ST in a way that fits target language norms, so to make the TT easy for the audiences to understand. The current paper conducted analysis on the Chinese translations of two types of humor in the *Kung Fu Panda* movie, including 6 examples on linguistic humor and 5 examples on cultural humor. The study found that the ST and TT both used the three features of Superiority, Surprise/Shock and Relief to convey humor, while the feature of Incongruity is only frequently used or recreated the in TT to reinforce the humorous effect and therefore can be seen as a humor feature that is preferred in

the Chinese but less in the English language. It was also found that when the translator used the same translation strategy, the same humorous feature would be recreated in the corresponding TT. For example, when the substitution strategy was used, the TT usually contained the "Relief" humor feature, while when the adaptation strategy was used, the TT usually demonstrated the "Incongruity" humor feature. Humor translation in an audiovisual context is limited by time or space, but for all of the fragments included in the analysis of the current research, the humorous effect was very well expressed and transformed in the TT, which is very difficult to do and can demonstrate the good command of knowledge and skills of the translator.

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