

On Subtitle Translation of the Shawshank Redemption from the Perspective of Functional Equivalence Theory

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Abstract. With the vigorous development of the film industry, film subtitle translation, as an important component of non-literary translation and audiovisual translation, attracts more and more attention both at home and abroad. Film subtitle translation, as an important form of translation about media, has played a more and more significant role in realizing the communication among different cultures and different languages. It aims to let the target audience get the same artistic enjoyment as the source language audience. It goes without saying that the film subtitle translation takes a quite importance position in the translation study. The movie was translated by BT5156 subtitle translation group whose translation version is brief and easy to understand. This paper attempts to use Nida's "functional equivalence" translation theory as a guide, to analyze and discuss the film subtitle translation of the U.S. film *The Shawshank Redemption*.

Introduction

As early as in 2000 in *Chinese Translators Journal*, Shaochang Qian says that film translation is of great importance. For more than a decade, film and television translation research has achieved fruitful results [1]. From different angles of view, movie subtitles can have different classification. From the linguistic point of view, subtitle translation can be divided into intra-subtitles and language subtitles. Sometimes this subtitle translation is called "diagonal subtitling translation" [2]. In order to realize the purpose and function of the subtitle translation, the translator should not only follow the relevant translation principle, adopt the specific translation strategy, but also pay special attention to the cultural phenomenon in the translation process [3].

Features of Film Subtitle Translation

The features of subtitle translation are so typical. There are some differences between subtitle translation and the traditional written one which the translators must be aware of it. It should be noticed that the subtitle translators should first know the distinctive features of it, and then they can get satisfied translated subtitles. Therefore, it is of great significance to know some features of the subtitle language.

Colloquial Language. The language in movies is usually used in daily life to finish the conversation between different characters in different settings. The lines in the movies are often colloquial. The colloquial language is just blurted to express the meanings or feelings of the characters, which is not strained by grammar in most situations, quite different from the formal language. Therefore, when translating subtitles, the translators should choose the words and phrases which are used more frequently in daily life, instead of the formal words, only if when it is necessary to show a certain character's identity or knowledge. At the same time, the translators should pay attention to the style of speaking of the characters in the movies, as in our daily life everyone will form his or her own style of speaking.

Dependency. The language used in subtitles is not independent. It is coherent with the plots and pictures of the movies. It means that before translating the subtitles, the translators should first appreciate the whole movie from the beginning to the very end of it, and they must understand clearly the meaning of each line in the movie, even the connotative meaning. The lines uttered by

one character in a movie are often accompanied by some different images on the screen. Therefore, the translators sometimes must appreciate the movie through the information on the screen. When translating the lines, one must pay attention to the music, the shots, the plots, facial expressions, etc. The subtitle translation is alive only in the movie. Subtitle translation is to movie what fish is to water. Without the movie, the subtitle translation is of no use at all.

The Limitations of Time and Space. Subtitles are always added at the bottom of the screen, and if the subtitles of two kinds of languages are placed at the same time, the space for each language is so limited. At the same time, the time available for display the subtitle is usually influenced by several factors, for example, the speed at which the words are uttered, the average reading speed of the audience and the short intervals between subtitles. More importantly, the speed at which the characters speak is faster than the transcription of the subtitle delivered on the screen, as the subtitles will be inserted simultaneously when they can be heard. So, the translation of the lines must be concentrated in order to achieve an acceptable reading speed. If the audiences have no time to watch the subtitles, then the subtitles will be of no use at all. Therefore, the limitations of both time and space make the subtitle translation more distinctive when compared with the written version.

Nida's Functional Equivalence Theory

The subtitle translations imply that producing the same meaning or message in the target version as intended by the original one is the main objective of a translator. The notion of "sameness" is often understood as an equivalence relation between the source and target versions. The equivalence relation is generally considered the most salient feature of a quality translation.

For the target version can never be one hundred percent equivalent to the source version at all levels, researchers have distinguished different types of equivalence. There are many theorists who have studied equivalence in relation to the translation and have provided fruitful ideas for further study on this topic. One of the most famous theorists is Eugene Nida.

Nida suggests formal and dynamic or functional equivalence. Formal equivalence focuses attention on the message itself, in both form and content. It requires that the message in the target language should match as closely as possible the different elements in the source language [4]. Dynamic or functional equivalence is based on the principle of equivalent effect, where the relationship between the receptor and message should be substantially the same as that which existed between the original receptors and the message.

When formal equivalence was put forward, it attracted much attention in the field of translation. However, when Nida advocated functional equivalence, translation field showed much more interests. Nida is in favor of the application of functional equivalence as a more effective translation procedure.

This is perfectly understandable if we take into account the context of the situation in which Nida was dealing with his translation of the Bible. Thus, the product of the translation process must have the same impact on the different audience it was addressing. Only in Nida and Taber's edition is it clearly stated that 'dynamic equivalence in translation is far more than mere correct communication of information' [5]. It is noticed that Nida pays much attention to different receptors' responses what will be given rise by the source language and the target language. In his opinion, it is language functions, instead of language forms that matters a lot in translating.

Translation Strategies Adopted in The Shawshank Redemption's Subtitle Translation

Subtitles have so many typical features that subtitle translation will be definitely different from the translations of other texts, such as novels, news and poems. Newmark believes that what kind of translation strategy should a cultural word take, firstly, depends on the type of text it is in, also it depends on the recipient's need and the importance of the word in a particular text [6]. All of the above features require the maximum lucidity of subtitle translation so various in translation strategies. It has been found that how to achieve the closest equivalence is very important according

to Nida's functional equivalence theory from the previous discussion. The author hopes to find out how subtitle translators can be guided by this theory after analyzing the translation strategies adopted in the target case film.

As is discussed above, subtitle translation is a kind of special translation, the function of which is to make the target audience understand and appreciate the movies just as the original audiences do. Therefore, the translators will definitely consider the response of the audience to the translated versions, so that they can transfer the culture deep behind the subtitles, and in that way the target language will be faithful to the original texts and functional equivalence will be achieved.

Deletion of Information. Baker refers to deletion as “omission of a lexical item due to grammatical or semantic patterns of the receptor language” [7]. She states further that this strategy may sound rather drastic, but in fact it does no harm to omit translating a word or expression in some contexts. If the meaning conveyed by a particular item or expression is not vital enough to the development of the text to justify distracting the reader with lengthy explanations, translators can and often do simply omit translating the word or expression in question.

When translating the subtitles of the movies, deletion of some unnecessary is necessary. Although the translators delete some information, it does not affect the appreciation of the film from the perspective of the target audience.

There are many examples in the subtitle translation of *The Shawshank Redemption*:

Example 1: - He strolled... Like a man in the park without a care or worry in the world.

他漫步着就像在公园里散步。

Example 2: - That tall drink of water with the silver spoon up his ass.

那个高个子。

Example 3: - You speak English, butt-steak?

你会说英语吗?

Example 4: - I channel it. Filter it. Funnel it.

我为他安排好一切。

Example 5: - Like he had on an invisible coat that would shield him from this place.

像穿了件隐形外套。

All the examples showed above are the deletion of translation. We can see that the deletion of some unnecessary lines does not affect the audience's appreciation of the film. The functional equivalence is achieved in the movie.

Addition of Information. Information which is not present in the source language text may be added to the target language text. Information added to the translation is usually cultural, technical, or linguistic. Addition of information may also be required due to the shift of voice and the alteration of word classes to avoid misinterpretation. So does the subtitle translation. When the translators deal with the lines that seem to be difficult for the target audience to understand, they should add some extra information to avoid this kind of situation.

The author find there are some typical examples in the movie which are using the translation strategy of addition.

Example 6: - A little parole rejection present.

这是庆祝你假释被拒的礼物。

Example 7: - The same reason he hung his fantasy girls on the wall.

也如同他把美女的画像挂在墙上的原因。

Example 8: - You shut up, or I'll sing you a lullaby!

闭上你的臭嘴，否则有你好受的!

Example 9: - There must be a con like me in every prison in America.

我想在美国每个联邦或州的监狱里都有像我一样的人物。

From the listed examples, the author find out that the additional information is very necessary to have a better appreciation of the film. Additional information to clarify the meaning of a certain line is needed to help target audience understand its underlying concept.

Adjustment of Information. Adjustment of information is another important strategy for achieving equivalence. The adjustment of form may mean changes of categories, word classes, and word orders. Hermans once put that all translations mean a certain degree of manipulation of the original text for some purpose [8]. Adjustment of information, according to Nida, has various purposes, including: 1) to permit adjustment of the form of the message to the requirements of structure of the receptor language, 2) to produce semantically equivalent structures, 3) to provide equivalent stylistic appropriateness, and 4) to carry an equivalent communication load.

The author find out there are at least four examples in the film.

Example 10: - He puts his hand in your shirt and squeezes your tit till it's purple.

他只是假仁假义罢了。

Example 11: - The boys always go fishing with first-timers. And they don't quit till they reel someone in.

他们总是喜欢逗新人。不达目的，誓不罢休。

Example 12: - If I were you, I'd grow eyes in the back of my head.

如果我是你，我会倍加小心。

Example 13: - If I hear so much as a mouse farts in here tonight.

如果我今晚听到有半点声音。

All of these adjustments are to create a better understanding of the film for the target audience. The functional equivalence is realized in this way.

Conclusion

As early as 1960, the important Western academic journals *Babel* published on the study of film translation, launched the Western, especially European translation studies in the field of film translation's development [9]. While in China, the film and television translation research still in the initial stage. The scope of domestic research is also fragmented, one-sided, not yet a systematic theoretical research. Also, there are some prejudices thought that the film is a popular art, not on the Daya Hall, film and television translation is of less academic value, and even denied that the translation of film and television is a translation activities. These prejudices have seriously hindered the development of film and television translation research in China [10].

In this paper, the author mainly focuses on functional equivalence theory put forward by Nida and its application possibility in subtitle translation in the target film *The Shawshank Redemption*. Nida's introduction of the concepts of formal and dynamic equivalence was crucial in introducing a receptor-based orientation to translation theory. The influence of functional equivalence theory is deep, because it has broken through the traditional binary and mechanical point of view by his exploration on criterion of translation. The dynamic thinking has made people realize that it is not only the source text should be emphasized but also the objective outside world, the translators and the receptors. This theory has transferred the angle of view to the receptors in translation, which assures the activity of subtitle translation a widen horizon.

However, it should be pointed that the translators can only judge the receptors' reflection by themselves, and to some degree, they just guess how the receptors will be reflect, which means it is unavoidable for the translators to make mistakes in getting the judgment. Then maybe they will adopt a wrong strategy to guide them in translating. Besides, different receptors will have different responses as they have different backgrounds. And most important of all, people speaking different languages have different cultures, ways of thinking and virtue, etc., which means they cannot share exactly the same as the original language. What's more, the research of subtitle translation is a time and effort consuming job. It is hard to get the existing versions of both English and Chinese, and the author just get the examples form the videos. Therefore, the ones adopted in the paper may lack diversities, and the author may have neglected some typical examples.

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