

Subtitle Translation Strategies under the Guidance of the Relevance Theory

Nannan Ma

Shenyang Aerospace University, Shenyang, Liaoning, China

Abstract

With the rapid development of globalization, Cross-cultural communication has become more frequent. Films, as a popular form of mass-media, play an inevitable part in culture exchanges. A vast majority of foreign films have been introduced to Chinese audiences and on the vice versa. Language and cultural differences are the main obstacles to Cross-cultural communication, so the accurate interpretation of film subtitles is particularly important for audiences to understand the film and the culture related. Subtitle translation is a dynamic transformation of both cultures with the purpose of enhancing the comprehension of foreign cultures. In this paper, we tend to study the translation strategies applied in translating subtitles of the American blockbuster Avengers under the guidance of relevance theory.

Keywords

Subtitle Translation; Relevance Theory; Cross-cultural Communication.

1. Introduction

The Avengers 4, first released in China on April 24, 2019, is a sci-fiction produced by Marvel Studios, co-directed by Anthony Russo and Joe Russo, starring with Robert Downey Jr., Chris Evans, Chris Hemsworth, Mark Alan Ruffalo, Scarlett Johansson, Jeremy Renner, Paul Rudd, Brie Larson, Don Cheadle, etc. As the fourth episode of *The Avengers*, it is adapted from the American Marvel comics. The film is worshiped by the youth in China and has broken the record in foreign movies' box office. As the routine, superheroes in the movie exemplified diverse personalities but share the common values and virtues. Their personalities of being brave, responsible and willing to give has been vividly demonstrated in the movie, which has attracted millions of comic fans.

Avengers 4 tells the story of a sudden and powerful evil force poses a deadly threat to the planet, and no superhero can stand alone. The SHIELD, long dedicated to protecting global security, was caught off guard by the fact that its commander realized that he had to create the "strongest" coalition in history to bring together superheroes to save the world from the dark Ones. The Avengers, made up of six superheroes emerged. They showed their unity and finally defeated the forces of evil to ensure the safety of the earth. After the devastating events of *Avengers: Infinity War*, the surviving heroes look to regroup and devise a plan to defeat Thanos once and for all. *Endgame* is depicted as the culmination of the MCU's first three phases.

The success that the movie has achieved in China cannot be segregated from the appropriate translation of its subtitles. Subtitle translation is a dynamic transformation of both cultures with the purpose of enhancing the comprehension of foreign cultures. The translation of the movie enables the Chinese audiences to comprehend the connotation and denotation demonstrated by the superheroes in the movie. In this paper, we tend to study the translation strategies applied in translating subtitles of the American blockbuster *Avengers IV* under the guidance of relevance theory.

Conventionally, a subtitle, as an auxiliary part to assist audiences' understanding of the movie, functions as the link between the movie and its audiences. While appreciating the film, audiences are receiving diverse information both visually and verbally. Subtitle translation tends to transform the culture and convey the connotation of the movie to the greatest extent within the restriction of time and space.

2. Relevance Theory and Subtitle Translation

Relevance Theory was put forward by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson in the book *Relevance: Communicative and Cognition* for the first time in 1996. According to Sperber and Wilson, the crucial mental faculty that enables human beings to communicate with one another is the ability to draw inferences from people's behavior. From the communicators' perspective, to produce a stimulus, verbal or otherwise, is the process in which the audience may infer what the author means and what the author's informative intention is. The verbal and linguistic communication is diverse. The diversity lies in the degree of explicitness which the incentive can achieve. The explicitness is derived from various properties of language and its semantic representations.

Gutt first applied relevance theory to translation studies. The relevance theory of translation points out that translation is a dynamic ostentatious-inference process that interprets the source language. In the process of translation, the original author and the translator constitute communication on both sides. The authors express their communicative intention, while the translators decode reasoning, seek optimal relevance, and comprehend the authors' purposes. The translator and the target language readers constitute the two communicative sides at the same time, the translator transform the source language into the target language, and then target language readers deduce to express the meaning of the source language. Gutt believes that "translation is the use of inter-language interpretation, and the core relationship between the original work and the translated work is an interpretative similarity." He conceives that "the quality of a translation depends on the degree of convergence among related factors".

The relevance theory perceives that translation is a communicative process between the source language and the target language. To make a fluent communication, the translator should express the intention of the target language in the translation. As a result, subtitles, as the bridge between the movie and the audiences, should be translated accurately in assisting the audiences to understand and enjoy the movie. Subtitle translation is not only a process of transferring two languages, but also a process of transferring and disseminating culture. Therefore, the translator should not only interpret the intention of the original text as completely as possible, but also fully understand the cultural information in the original text. Translation is not a translator's unilateral activity, especially in subtitle translation. Therefore, the translator needs to regard the benefit of the target language recipient as the ultimate purpose of the translation activities, and strives to enable the target audience to obtain the maximum degree of association with the minimum effort.

Relevance theory plays an essential role in translation, which aims to accurately express the author's intention, so that the receiver of the target language can accurately understand the artistic conception of the original text. When translating subtitles, translators should not only fully consider social and cultural factors, but also consider the maximum relevance and the best relevance. On this basis, the translator should take the relevance theory as the guide to convey the communicative intention implicit in the process of express-reasoning in a complete way, so as to realize the audience's understanding of the story and appreciation of the film.

3. Strategies Applied in the Subtitle Translation of Avengers

3.1. Omission

Due to the linguistic feature of subtitles, subtitle translation should be neat and informative. The translation strategy of omission should be utilized to make the translation more feasible to understand and to achieve the best relevance.

Example 1:

I'm in charge. 我说了算

I know, of course you are. 我知道，当然是你说了算。

It makes you think that maybe you didn't realize I was in charge.

你根本就不是真心觉得这儿我说了算。

The conversation took place during a battle between Thor and Star-Lord Quill over who was the boss of the ship. The actual intention of Quill's last sentence was to show that Thor did not feel that he was the boss of the ship. Under the guidance of relevance theory, the translator should bear the responsibility of transmitting the intention of the original text, so the author should translate the intention of the original text in subtitle translation. The translator did not choose to translate the meaning of each word, but translated the essence of this sentence. This translation not only succinctly expressed the intention of the original author, but also made it easy for the audience to understand.

Example 2: You know if you want, I could come with you. 要是需要，我可以陪你去。

Example 3: You know, your dad liked cheese burgers. 你爸爸最喜欢芝士汉堡。

There is a pet phrase "you know" in both sentences. But it does not have the real meaning, it is just a way of saying something that someone is used to saying consciously or unconsciously. So when the translator translated this two sentences, he deleted "you know". The translator just translated the real meaning of the sentences.

3.2. Amplification

Although subtitle translation mainly follows the economic principle to reduce the amount of information the target audience has to deal with, due to the syntactic and cultural differences between Chinese and English, it is sometimes necessary to add and translate does not violate the limitation of subtitle in time and space, the method of amplification can make the implicit information manifest, so as to make the target audience produce the best relevance for reasoning.

Example 4: What do you think? Maximum occupy has been reaches.

你想什么呢？你上来电梯就超重了。

The conversation took place when the Hulk wanted to take the elevator like the other heroes. But he was so big and heavy. If he got on the elevator, the elevator would not only be overweight but also break down. The relevance theory requires that through subtitle translation, the audience can obtain the maximum subtitle relevance with the minimum effort. In order to make the audiences easily understand and express this intention of the original author, the translator added the action into the translation.

Example 5: I love you thousand. 我爱你一千遍。

I love you three thousand. 我爱你三千遍。

The conversation took place as the Iron Man comforted his daughter to sleep. This sentence omits “times”, if the translator did not add to the translation, only literal translation, it would make audiences difficult to understand, also lost the relevance between the audiences and the lines. Therefore, the translator added the “times” meaning in the translation. And the translation also made the line a classic. Ten years of Marvel, courtesy of Marvel and courtesy of Iron man, Iron Man ended Marvel’s career with “I love you three thousand”. Now this line is also used to express love before friends, lovers, and parents.

3.3. Domestication

Translators can adopt the domestication translation strategy to localize the source language, and to take the target language or the target audiences as the destination, and make the original text close to the target audience usage.

Example 6: Honestly, until this exact second I thought you were a Build-A-Bear.

说真的，你不开口说话，我以为你是毛绒玩具呢。

This conversation took place when the Iron Man saw Rocket for the first time after being rescued from space by Captain Marvel. In this sentence, there is a Build-A-Bear. Build-A-Bear is an experimental new retail brand based in st. Louis, Missouri. BABW is a company that markets teddy bears and toy animals. Customers are free to design their own unique teddy bears. Few Chinese audiences know Build-A-Bear and what it means. However, relevance theory requires that subtitle translation should allow the audience to obtain the maximum relevance with subtitles with minimum effort. Therefore, the translator translated “Build-A-Bear” into a plush toy that the audiences can easily understand.

Example 7: Oh look, the table’s set for six guests. 一块吃饭吧。

This sentence took place when the Captain American, Black Widow and Ant Man arrived at the Iron Man’s home to persuade him to join them and save humans and the world once again. The Iron Man rejected them and said this sentence. If the translator literally translated this sentence, it meant the table can sit down six guests. If this sentence was translated this way, the audience would not understand and violated the intention of the original author. Obviously, this would violate the principle of relevance theory. So the translator did not chose the literal translation. The translator used the domestication, not only translated the intention of the original author, but also made the audience easily understand.

Example 8: Move it or lost it, hairbag. 再不走就不等了，酒鬼。

This sentence took place when Thor gave up being the king of Asgard to travel with the guardians of the galaxy, and the Rocket told him to hurry up the ship. There was an American slang expression in this sentence, it was hairbag. Hairbag is a noun, referring to a disliked people, such as loser, jerk and asshole. Under the relevance theory, the subtitle translation should enable the audience to obtain the maximum cultural information with the minimum effort. Following this principal, the translator used the domestication, and translated “hairbag” into

asshole that Chinese audiences generally understand. In this way, the original text author's intention can be conveyed and the audience can get the maximum relevance.

Example 9: No amount of money ever bought a second of time. (寸金难买寸光阴。)

The Iron Man wanted to tell his father that money can not buy the time and spend more time with his family. Under the guidance of relevance theory, the translation should make the audiences get the maximum relevance. Although the use of literal translation can also make the sentence relevant to the audience, it is obviously that the use of domestication to translate the sentence into a proverb familiar to the Chinese audience will be easier to understand than literal translation, which will make the audiences less effort. Therefore, the translator translated this sentence in to a Chinese proverb.

4. Conclusion

Subtitle translation should be guided by relevance theory. Relevance theory is a theory of verbal communication based on cognitive science. It is not a special translation theory, it provides a unified theoretical framework for translation. Under the framework of relevance theory, subtitle translation is a dynamic inter-language translation. Translators should pay more attention to the context of the original text. Through the analysis of context, the translator can find the best relation between the original text and the context, so as to understand the contextual effect of the original text. The translator must evaluate the cognitive environment and cognitive ability of the audience, choose the appropriate translation strategy, and try to convey the information that is more closely related to the audience.

References

- [1] Gutt, E.A. Translation and Relevance. Shanghai: Foreign Language Press, 2004.
- [2] Chen, Haitao. "A Study on the Tendencies for Film Subtitle Translation from the Perspective of Hall's High and Low Context Theory." Overseas English (2014): 110-111.
- [3] Long, Yang. "Relevance Theory in Translation of Film Subtitle." Overseas English (2019): 175-176.
- [4] Shao, Jun. "Relevance Theory in Translation." Science and Technology Information (2008): 224, 260.
- [5] Wu, Jing. "A Study on Translation Process Based on Relevance Theory." The Guide of Science and Education (2015): 144-145.