

Study on Film Subtitle Translation from the Perspective of Communication Study

-- Taking “Ba Bai” as an Example

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Abstract

In recent years, the translation of film subtitles has received more and more attention as a cross-cultural communication activity. Film is a very important part of the cultural industry, and the improvement of the international spread of Chinese films is hard without excellent translated texts. Taking the subtitle translation of the movie “Ba Bai” as the research object, this article combines the theory of communication and translation studies, and discusses the strategy of film subtitle translation. Research has proved that not only should the translation of film subtitles be studied from the perspective of linguistics, but also the nature of its cross-cultural communication should be emphasized. Translators need to fully consider the differences between Chinese and Western languages, cultures, social backgrounds and audience’s audiovisual needs, and use translation strategies rationally to promote the “going global” of Chinese films.

Keywords

Film Subtitles; Ba Bai; Communication Study.

1. Introduction

In recent years, with the continuous expansion of the Chinese film market and the development of exchanges between China and the West, more and more Chinese films have begun to move on to the international stage. As one of the important media of cross-cultural communication, film plays an important role in enhancing Western countries' awareness of us and enhancing China's international influence (Borui Zhu, 2021). In the process of intercultural communication of languages, film subtitle translation plays a key role in cultural communication, and film subtitle translation also has a pivotal significance for the spread of Chinese culture. From the perspective of communication science, this article examines translation activities and explores translation strategies. Kurt proposed that from the perspective of communication, the communicator is a “gatekeeper.” In the process of dissemination, the communicator needs to analyze and process the source language according to the original information and the needs of the audience. The translator, that is, the communicator, should play the main role in this process and be flexible in the translation.

2. Feature of Subtitle Translation

In the process of Chinese culture's external dissemination, film and television works are an important channel. Therefore, with the increasingly frequent cultural exchanges between Chinese and foreign films and television, film and television subtitle translation has become an “increasingly important link in the film and television industry” (Shaochang Qian, 2000). Film subtitle translation is a special kind of literary translation. Translators will find huge differences

between different languages and cultures in the process of translation. Subtitle translation of movies and TV series should be centered on the target audience, and their language and understanding ability should be taken into consideration. (Chunbai Zhang, 1998).

Generally speaking, each line of subtitles in a movie may stay on the screen for 2 to 3 seconds. Sometimes the subtitles are one line and sometimes two lines. Due to its space limitation and transient, the translation of movie subtitles should be concise and clear. Film subtitle translation is a kind of translation with specific purpose, and its fundamental purpose is to meet the expectations of the audience. Meeting the needs of the audience is the prerequisite for film and television communication, but the audience's own feedback is lagging. Therefore, in the translation process, the internal feedback of the subtitle translator plays an important role. This also requires the translator to exert his subject consciousness in the translation process.

3. Translation from the Perspective of Communication Studies

The essence of translation is the dissemination of information. Harold Raswell believes that there are five basic elements in the communication process, namely: "5W". Corresponding to the five elements in subtitle translation can be interpreted as: Who (who disseminates), that is, the translator; say What (spread content), that is, subtitle information; in Which channel (through what channel), that is, language Translation (communication channel); to Whom (audience), that is, audience; with What effect (what effect), that is, translation effect.

Translation is an information dissemination activity in the communication of different languages. Translation and communication have a very close relationship. Translation is the way and means of communication, and communication is the starting point and purpose of translation. Film subtitle translation is an important method of cross-cultural communication, especially in international communication. Translators, that is, subtitling translators, need to absorb the research results of international communication and cross-cultural communication. Communication studies provide a new perspective for subtitle translation. Effective communication activities need to follow six principles: credibility principle, pertinence principle, orderly principle, timeliness principle, appropriateness principle and synergy principle (Peiren Shao , 2015)

The credibility principle of communication requires that the information transmitted is true and conforms to objective reality. The principle of credibility coincides with the "faith" in the "Three Difficulties in Translation: Faithfulness, Expressiveness, and Elegance" proposed by Yan Fu in "Tian Yan Lun" "Faithfulness" is the primary criterion of translation and the basic principle of communication activities, the soul and life of communication. The translator should have a correct understanding of the subtitle information of the movie and must not distort the subtitle information. The pertinence principle of communication studies requires the communicator to understand the characteristics and cognitive abilities of the audience, and choose the content and communication skills based on this. In other words, translators need to be audience-centered and take into account factors such as the audience's ability to understand cultural differences in order to achieve effective information dissemination. The orderly principle of communication requires the communicator to spread from the shallow to the deep according to the characteristics of the information. In the international dissemination of Chinese films, the principle of order is a very important part. The source language (Chinese in the subtitles) can be easily recognized and understood by the source language audience. However, if it is only a word-to-word translation, regardless of the target language audience's cultural background and understanding ability, the target language audience cannot be correct understand the source language information. The timeliness principle of communication requires the communicator to seize the opportunity to carry out communication activities in a timely manner. The translator needs to grasp the length of the translation dialogue according to the

audiovisual nature of the subtitle translation and the needs of the audience. The principle of appropriateness requires the communicator to grasp the amount of information in dissemination according to the accepting ability of the audience, so as not to make the amount of information too long or too short. The principle of synergy requires the communicator to coordinate the relationship between himself and the audience, as well as the media leader, to closely cooperate, coordinate and communicate. In the process of subtitle translation, the translator also needs to coordinate multiple factors so that the audience can obtain accurate and effective information.

4. Translation Strategies from the Perspective of Communication Studies

Most of the subtitles in the film "Ba Bai" are character dialogues. The characters in the film come from all over the country. They speak different dialects with different professions, and have different life and cultural backgrounds. Most dialects are simple, straightforward, concise and easy to understand. Dialects also contain many local characteristic slang and vulgar language. These words have specific cultural meanings in China. Therefore, in the process of information dissemination, it will be relatively difficult for audiences who lack the relevant cultural background to understand the original text. There are six principles for effective information dissemination in communication science. When translating the subtitles of the film, the translator can combine these six principles (credibility principle, pertinence principle, orderly principle, timeliness principle, appropriateness principle and synergy principle) and adopt appropriate translation strategies to enable the audience to fully and effectively understand the original text.

4.1. Addition

"Addition" refers to the addition of information on the basis of the original work, which can be divided into "interpretation, comment, and writing (Zhonglian Huang, 2002). According to the meaning of the original text context, the logical relationship, and the syntactic characteristics and expression habits of the target language, words that do not appear in the original text but are included in the actual content are added during translation.

Example 1: 这些孩子, 专诸, 要离是也.

Translation: They all are Zhuanzhu and Yaoli (assassins).

In the film, many warriors fall on the bridge connecting the concession and Sixing Warehouse one after another. The elder on the stage mumbles to himself, these children, they are "Zhuan Zhu" and "Yao Li". "Zhuan Zhu" and "Yao Li" are assassins in the Spring and Autumn Period and Warring States Period. In the film, the people who send telephone lines to the Si Hang warehouse are just like the people who are going to leave. For those who do not understand this section of Chinese history, the translation of these two names will make it very difficult for the audience to understand. Here the translator adopts the translation strategy of additional translation, and explains the characters in parentheses after Zhuanzhu and Yaoli. Assassin is the English assassin. The Chinese pronunciation is usually pronounced as "Assassin". Its origin is the "Assassin faction" that was active in the Middle East during the Crusades. This school once developed assassination into an art, which was active in the 8th to 14th centuries. The translator interprets a certain part of the source language or adds related content to help readers in the target language understand the content. Such translation embodies the credibility principle and the principle of appropriateness in communication science. On the one hand, the added content makes the content of the translation more realistic and in line with objective reality; on the other hand, the amount of information can be increased appropriately in the process of disseminating information, so that the audience can understand the source language information better.

4.2. Omission

The omission translation method is the opposite of addition translation method. Omission means that some words in the original text are not translated in the translation, because the translation has meanings even though there are no words in the translation. Omission is to delete some dispensable, or there are words that are cumbersome or violate the customary expression of the translation, but not to delete some ideological content of the original text. Omission translation and addition are two translation techniques that complement each other.

Example 2: 英方要求我们所有人在桥面上通过,军容整洁,建制齐全.

Translation: The British requested us to retreat via the bridge. Look sharp and stay organized! Because subtitle translation is limited by space, the time for each line of subtitles on the screen is relatively short. Therefore, while understanding the original text, the translator needs to give full play to his subjectivity and appropriately adjust the translation to keep the English and Chinese subtitles as consistent as possible. In Example 2, the Chinese word "Everyone" is omitted in the translation. The translator translates "军容整洁, 建制齐全" as "Look sharp and stay organized". When translating, the translator did not translate every word in the original text, but conveyed the meaning of the original text. And it is very concise and clear, in line with English logic. Such translation reflects the principle of timeliness and synergy in communication studies. On the one hand, in subtitle translation, the translator can appropriately delete the original text according to the needs of the audience, so as to grasp the duration of the translated dialogue and avoid the subtitles staying on the screen for too long or too short. On the other hand, when translating, the translator must understand the original text, while also taking into account the audience's cultural background, audience's viewing effect and many other factors. The principle of timeliness and the principle of coordination are very guiding in subtitle translation, and they have a strong reference meaning in subtitle translation.

4.3. Alienation

Example 3: 我们是朱元璋的第十八代子孙.

Translation: We are the eighteenth-generation descendants of the Hong Wu Emperor.

Yuanzhang Zhu was the founding emperor of the Ming Dynasty and his reign was Hongwu. Yuanzhang Zhu is no stranger to Chinese audiences, but not to foreign audiences. The translator literally translated Yuanzhang Zhu into Hong Wu Emperor, so that audiences who do not understand Yuanzhang Zhu's. People can also share the pride of the character when he said these words, and understand the meaning of the film. Such translation embodies the pertinence principle and the order principle in communication studies. There are huge differences between Chinese and Western cultures. Translators need to consider the characteristics and understanding of the audience when disseminating information. The principle of order requires the translator to consider the cultural background and comprehension ability of the target language audience, so that the target language audience can understand the original language information from the simpler to the deeper.

4.4. Edition

Due to the huge differences between English and Chinese, for example, Chinese has more parallel structures, while English has more subordinate structures. Therefore, in the process of translation, the translator must edit according to the language habits of the target language readers. "Edition" means "organizing and ordering the content of the original to make it more perfect and refined, aiming to strengthen the functions, including Editing, arranging, writing, adjusting, etc." (Huang Zhonglian, 2002).

Example 4: 半世飘零半戎生.

Translation: I've spent half of my life drifting around, fighting alongside the army.

Analysis: Example 4 This sentence comes from the lyric in the shadow puppet show, which is a portrayal of the mood of the “eight hundred warriors”. If the translator literally translates this sentence, the translation obtained is “Drifting around half of time and fighting alongside the army”. The translation lacks a subject and does not conform to the English expression habits. Therefore, in the process of translation, the translator uses “edition” to sort out the original text information, adding “I” as the subject, so that the translation conforms to the language habits of the target language audience. Such translation reflects the pertinence principle in communication. The pertinence principle requires the communicator to understand the characteristics and cognitive abilities of the audience. There are huge differences between Chinese and Western cultures, and translators need to consider the characteristics and understanding of the audience when disseminating information.

Example 5: 日本人没有打下四行仓库。

Translation: The Japanese did not take over the Sihang Warehouse.

Analysis: After three hours the fierce battle between the “eight hundred warriors” and the Japanese, the people in the concession announced the defeat of the Japanese “打下” in the original sentence means “conquer”. If the translator literally translates it as fight, it will make it difficult for readers of the target language to understand the translation. When translating, the translator should remember not to copy the original text, which will lead to too heavy translation, and should adjust the information appropriately to make the translation more in line with the writing habits of the target language (Tianzhen Xie, 2008). Therefore, on the premise of not changing the image of the original text, the translator compiles the original text information, and translates “打下” into “take over”, so as to make the translation clear. Such translations embody the principle of synergy in communication studies. In the process of subtitle translation, the translator also needs to coordinate many factors so that the audience can obtain accurate and effective information.

4.5. Positive and Negative Conversion

Negative words exist in both Chinese and English. For example, in Chinese “不”, “没”, “无”, “否”, “非” negative signs such as “no” “not” “none” appear in English to indicate negation. However, due to the context Different from habits, the negative sentence of the original text is often converted into the affirmative sentence of the translation, and vice versa. Therefore, this conversion will definitely happen when translating Chinese-English subtitles.

Example 6: 国人皆如此倭寇何敢欺。

Translation: If only every Chinese was as brave as them, the Japanese wouldn't dare.

Example 7: 再不敢杀敌，严惩不贷。

Translation: If you chicken out again, no punishment is too harsh!

Analysis: The original text of Example 6 is a sentence said by He Xiangning. At that time, it was the first day that the soldiers of the National Army stubbornly resisted the Japanese army. However, the walls of the Sixing Warehouse were too hard, and the Japanese army had not succeeded after repeated attacks. They had tried to use heavy artillery, but feared that it would harm the western civilians in the safe area of the concession opposite. So they chose to try to blast the building under the wall. At this critical moment, Chen Shusheng, a soldier of the national army, tied a grenade to himself and jumped first to the Japanese army downstairs. Then one after another, the soldiers tied explosives to themselves and used self-destruction to stop the Japanese army's demolition. In the face of such a feat, He Xiangning, who was standing on the other side of the Suzhou River, sighed: “This is the case with the Chinese people, how dare Japanese pirates deceive them.” Example 6 “He dares” in this sentence expresses a rhetorical tone, which appears to be a declarative sentence on the surface, but its deep meaning is “dare not”, so the translation converts it into a negative and translates it as “would not dare”.

Such a conversion well expresses the meaning of the original text, and realizes the positive and negative conversion between Chinese and English. Likewise, “dare not to kill the enemy” in Example 7 is the negative form in Chinese. The translation converts it into the affirmative form “chicken out” which means to stop doing something because of fear. Such a conversion is a good way to express the tone of the speaker who looked down on those who dare not go to war. Such a translation makes the target audience more able to experience the mental activity of the speaker. This translation embodies the principle of synergy in communication.

5. Conclusion

From the perspective of communication science, this article analyzes the translation methods of some subtitles in the movie “Ba Bai” based on the characteristics of film subtitle translation. Taking into account the content and meaning of the film “Ba Bai”, the translator adopted the translation strategies of augmentation, omission and alienation, so that the target audience had a deeper understanding of Chinese culture and Chinese culture. Literary translation activities have accumulated a considerable amount and time. In short, it is not only important and necessary to study film subtitle translation from the perspective of communication science. Communication study can progress to reveal that the essence of film subtitle translation is a cross-cultural communication activity to promote the choice of translation strategies, and provide a broader perspective of translation for film subtitle translation.

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