

# Study on the Subtitle Translation of Devious Maids from the Perspective of Functional Equivalence

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## Abstract

Subtitle translation, as an emerging tool of translation, plays an important role in culture exchange between different countries. The accurate interpretation of the subtitles in films or televisions allows the audience to understand the characters in the film correctly, and make it easier to grasp the theme of the film. This thesis mainly analyzes the meaning, characteristics, roles of subtitle translations and its function in culture exchanges, and focuses on translation methods of subtitle translation based on the perspective of Functional Equivalence.

## Keywords

Functional Equivalence; Subtitle Translation; Features; Translation Methods.

## 1. Introduction

With the rapid spread of information, subtitle translation plays an important role in people's daily lives. Due to language differences, it is difficult for the audience to understand the content of foreign film and television dramas, under this kind of circumstance, subtitle translation has appeared and is constantly developing and perfecting.

This thesis attempts to study the translation of subtitle translation from the perspective of Functional Equivalence and propose relevant translation methods. This thesis mainly contains five parts. The first part introduces the significance and necessity reason for choosing this subject. The second part is a brief introduction about the development of Functional Equivalence and four principles of Functional Equivalence are mentioned. The third part mainly analyze the definition and features of subtitle translation. The fourth part is the key point of the thesis, the Devious Maids is briefly introduced and eight translation methods based on Functional Equivalence are studied. The conclusion part mainly concerns about the research findings, innovations, limitations and future suggestions.

## 2. A Brief Introduction of Functional Equivalence

The theory of functional equivalence is put forward by the American Eugene A. Nida. Nida points that the purpose of Functional Equivalence is not just to search the entire equal of the surface meaning of the text and the deep meaning of it. While achieves functional equivalence between two different languages. The most important element of Nida's theory is "Functional Equivalence", which requires the translation to be natural and the content to be expressive(Nida,1984). It breaks the fixed translation principles in traditional Chinese translation and proposes a variety of new translation principles.

In order to have a criterion to reduce the language differences between the source language and the target language, Eugene A. Nida proposes the famous "Functional Equivalence" translation theory from the perspective of linguistics based on the nature of translation. In this theory, he points out that "translation is the reproduction of the source language from semantics to stylistics in the most appropriate, natural and equivalent language"(Guo Jianzhong,

2000). What's more, Nida's description about translation suggests that translation is not only merely equal in vocabulary meanings but also equal in semantics and style. The information conveyed by the subtitle translation contains not only vocabulary information but also deep cultural information.

In his previous work, Nida uses "Dynamic Equivalence" to describe its own equivalence theory, that is, Dynamic Equivalence is the response of the author of the translation to the translation and the response of the original reader to the original text (Nida, 1969). What's more, because people often misunderstand this, Nida said in the preface that due to the misunderstanding of the term "Dynamic Equivalence", many Bible translators have seriously violated its guiding principles, leading many people to believe that if a translation has a very large influence, and it must be a model of "Dynamic Equivalence". Thus, in order to emphasize the language function of translation and solve misunderstandings, Nida adopts the term "Functional Equivalence" instead of "Dynamic Equivalence".

### 3. An Analysis of Subtitle Translation

#### 3.1. A Brief Introduction of Subtitle Translation

A subtitle is a printed statement or an component of dialogue that appear at the bottom of the screen. And it is more easily found in foreign films or television dramas. Based on subtitle translation, we can enjoy various types of film and television dramas, subtitle translated into various countries provide us a more convenient way to know more about other languages and culture backgrounds.

Accurate translation of film or television in subtitles directly affects the understanding by the target audience. Nida's main purpose of Functional Equivalence is to achieve the maximum effect of the target audience that are responded to the target language film or television. Focusing on the target audience, various translation methods are adopted to highlight the effect of the translation on the original text. At the same time, it can better combine the subtitles with the scenes enjoyed by the target audience, as well as to have a better understanding referring the connotation of the film and the audience could also get a more complete enjoyment.

During the process of translation, based on the theory of "Functional Equivalence" we conclude that the quality of the translation should be considered according to the following standards: delivering the original information in the text; grasping the spirit and main idea of the original; the language is naturally smooth, conforming to the translated language norms and expression habits; reader response is similar (Gong Fei, 2013:148-150).

#### 3.2. Features of Subtitle Translation

##### 3.2.1. Colloquialism

The American dramas and films are mainly belong to the melodrama. Under many circumstances, they are photographed indoors. Most of them describe the work and life of a certain group of people. In American TV series and different kinds of films, Americans show their unique sense of humor of , and most of them like to use colloquial language. Numerous expressions are also often used in American life (Li Yunxing, 2001:3). For example, the daily life of Americans will be referred to use "Dude" by people who are familiar with, which means "buddy, dude". Sometimes it means that someone is very arrogant when they repeat certain words, they start to use "blah.blah.blah" to omit those repeated words, which is equivalent to Chinese "Wait" or "Nonsense". Therefore, when subtitles are translated, judgments should be made according to the situation, and efforts should be made to preserve their spoken style.

Example 1:

Uh, we're out of light bulbs. Then go to the store. Well?

All the light bulbs are used up, so go to the store and buy them. Why not move?

From this sentence, we can easily grasp that when the author translate the subtitles in televisions or dramas, the language is more colloquial.

### 3.2.2. Short-term Existence

English sentence patterns are mostly covered with simple sentences, complex sentences and compound sentences. On the contrary, Chinese is filled with short sentences in spoken language. Sometimes a simple English language needs a longer Chinese expression, but formal subjects and passive voices are normally used in American's daily life. While Chinese does not have a corresponding syntactic sentence pattern, which also causes difficulty in translation. Subtitle translation should not be too long. For the purpose of allowing the audience to read the subtitles quickly, a translation method or several other translation methods is often necessarily used.

Example 2:

I do. I really do.

I know.

The author just translates the two sentences into a single Chinese sentence "I know", which is concise and easy to understand.

### 3.2.3. Serviceability

In fact, subtitle translation is a tool which provided for us to better watch TV and movies, understand the dialogue of characters, understand the whole story, and accurately grasp the main idea of its expression. The serviceability of subtitle translation is mainly reflected in the flexibility and clarity of its translation, which helps us to understand the context of the story easily.

Example 3:

--I wanted to go to San Diego tomorrow.

--Hey, priorities!

--I wanted to go to San Diego tomorrow.

--There are priorities.

The author translates "priorities" into Chinese-speaking habits "There are priorities" to help the audiences to understand the context.

### 3.2.4. Time and Space Limitation

Scenes in film and television dramas change frequently and there are many people. If there are only subtitles and no sounds and pictures, it is impossible to accurately express all the information in the play. That is to say, the subtitles serve the audience to better understand the information in the drama. It is just an auxiliary tool. Without pictures and sounds, the subtitles have no meaning.

Therefore, for the relatively long dialogue in the film, under the guidance of the Functional Equivalence, it can be treated in a reduced way. (De Linde, Zoe, 1995:9-20) When the translator translates long and cumbersome expressions, they tend to present them in another appropriate way. The main methods of reduction are: first is concentration, that is, just translating the original information; second is comprehensive free translation, refers to the meaning of translating the original words with relatively short sentences; the last method is omission, completely omitted (Shao Wei, 2009:89-91).

Example 4:

--Does she like to play?

--Not sure.

When we watch *Devious Maids*, we know that Mr. Powell is a pimp, so here "play" refers to sex trade. Translating it into "play" sounds not only witty but also concise.

## 4. Translation Methods in Devious Maids

### 4.1. A Brief Introduction of Subtitle Translation

In *The Devious Maids*, Rosie, Marisol, Carmen, Valentina, and Zoila, they are five maids in Beverly Hills. Every day, they help the rock star, the invincible billionaire, the self-serving film and television celebrities to clean the room, organize the house, and even wiping their employer's disgusting private life. Their work also includes "covering murder case". With the outbreak of a murder, the whole story kicked off.

The whole story is started with the murder of a maid, the son of Marisol (Ana Ortiz) was accused of this murder. In order to clear her son's name, she is a maid in Beverly Hills to find the truth, but her real identity is a professor in a college. The husband of Rose (Dania Ramirez) died young, leaving a son raised by Rose's meager salary. Zoila (Judy Reyes) is confident and fascinating, Valentina (Edurne Ganem) is her daughter and also her colleague. Carmen (Roselyn Sanchez) dreams of becoming a singer, but harsh reality put her dream down. In the richest area of American, the four women shuttled and lived here, but they had no relationship with these glamorous hills. They were just a group of maids who served the rich and cleaned up the mess for the rich. A bizarre death has linked the fate of the four women. In order to defend their common interests, they must hold on to a certain secret.

In these ups and downs of the TV series, we can see the daily expression of Americans and find that their language is easy to understand and interesting. The translator grasps the main storyline when translating, rather than just focus on the linguistical grammar and its ordering. Based on the subtitle translation, there are much translations we could learn from.

### 4.2. Translation Methods

In this part, some translation methods applied in subtitle translation will be introduced.

#### 4.2.1. Literal Translation

In order to convey the sense of the original text, the text translation from one language to another has been rendered by literal translation. Under this way, the contents are maintained and the form of the source language is in lines with the cultural traditions. Literal translation emphasizes form similarity, and points out that the original text should be equal to the target ones when it refers the words, syntax or styles.

#### 4.2.2. Free Translation

Free translation is a another means to deliver the meaning and spirit of original text without trying to translate the sentence patterns or figures of speech in other appropriate way. It doesn't mainly focus on the original form, like words, syntax, structure, metaphor or other rhetoric devices, but insist to translate the text properly and correctly. It pays much attention to the meaning of the original content rather the original form.

#### 4.2.3. Repetition

Repetition is a translation technique that duplication is used to make the translation faithful to the original text, to produce a clear, smooth and fluent text, as well as a text that conforms to the habit of the target language. Duplicating the content can express the speaker's emotions, convey the speaker's attitude, and emphasize the content in the whole story.

#### 4.2.4. Amplification

In order to make the translations understandable and more in line with the language habits of the target language, we will add some extra words or explanations to make the viewers better understand. This type of translation is called amplification. Subtitle translation embodies that translators can not only increase and convey the information needed for the audience to better understand the context, but also rationalize and make the context more meaningful.

#### 4.2.5. Omission

The viewer needs to grasp the meaning of the subtitles in a short time, and the subtitles should better serve the audience, so that they can better understand the logic and the whole story. Therefore, in order to save the time and space of the audience, the omission method is widely used in subtitle translation. The omission is to make the translation more concise, more in line with the habit of the target language, to save some words that repeatedly express the same meaning, but the meaning of the original text has not been changed. In most cases, omission in TV series are widely almost everywhere, we can easily find in the following examples.

#### 4.2.6. Conversion

In many cases, we use word-to-speech to convey the exact meaning of the original text effectively, making the translation more natural. Chinese is dynamic, and verbs predominate. While English is static, it prefers to use fewer verbs. A large number of concepts expressed by verbs in Chinese are expressed by nouns in English. Chinese is a language with numerous significant verbs. Therefore, the most important part of the English-Chinese translation of the word class is to convert all kinds of English nouns into Chinese verbs.

#### 4.2.7. Division

Division is a translation method that disassembles the long sentence structure in English in order to better conform to the Chinese expression to give viewers a better understanding of video content in a limited amount of time.

### 5. Conclusion

Subtitle translation plays an important role in our daily lives. When we watch American TV series, we could easily find some translation methods. At the same time, as a tool to better understand the story, subtitles also apply another way for audience to grasp the main idea of the story. In this thesis, the author explores different types of translation methods about subtitle translation from the perspective of Functional Equivalence.

Although there are many efforts made to the study of subtitle translation from the perspective of Functional Equivalence in the study, there are still many limitations exist in this paper. On the one hand, the examples in this text may not be complete, they can't represent all different kinds of circumstance in American TV series. On the other hand, the paper only takes one American TV series as a research case, thus the findings may not be so persuasive. What we have learned from subtitle translation from the perspective of Functional Equivalence may not enough, but we could focus on those limitations mentioned above. Hence, a further study should be conducted.

Meanwhile, as subtitle translation functions as an new emerging tool to introduce American cultures to China, the translators should know the significance of it, and try their best to improve it.

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