

On the Translation of Culture-loaded Terms in Subtitles from the Perspective of Cultural Adaptation-A Case Study of the Overseas Promotional Film of Creation of The God: Kingdom of Storms

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Abstract: Nowadays, with the rapid development of the Internet, cultural TV shows and movies from various countries spread quickly online as soon as they are released. Therefore, the cultural and national image conveyed through subtitle translations of films and television becomes crucial, a point that translators should contemplate. Eco-translatology is a translation theory that originated in China. It incorporates ecological concepts to construct translation to form a new research paradigm. This paradigm emphasizes selecting translated texts based on their inherent translatability. During the translation process, efforts are made to maintain the ecological balance of the original text in the target language. This approach aims to ensure that the translation and the original text achieve a comparable ecological equilibrium. This paper analyzes the English subtitles in the overseas propaganda film of *Creation of The God: Kingdom of Storms* from the perspective of cultural adaptation and selection in the theory of eco-translatology. This theory is then utilized to illustrate how to handle English translations of culturally loaded words in subtitle translation.

Keyword: Eco-translatology; Subtitle Translation; Culture-Loaded Terms; Adaptive Transformation from the Cultural Dimension

1. Introduction

Over the years, research on culture-loaded words has primarily focused on their translation strategies, methods, and principles. Many of them are culture-loaded terms in the texts. In recent years, with the development of the Internet, films and TV series have become increasingly important in disseminating culture to the outside world. Consequently, research on translating culture-loaded terms in subtitles has started to increase. Over the last several years,

some scholars have analyzed the translation characteristics and strategies for culture-loaded terms in film subtitle translation from the perspectives of functional equivalence, register theory of functional grammar, adaptation theory, relevance theory, and schema theory. However, the English translation of Chinese films tends to be biased towards the target language readers, with an overall comparison to American or English standards. Due to this, many Chinese-specific words have not been understood by people in other countries. Therefore, this paper analyzes the English translation of Chinese film subtitles based on the adaptation and selection of cultural dimensions in the theory of eco-translatology. It focuses on how to carry out the adaptation and selection of cultural dimensions in the English subtitle translation of culture-loaded terms.

2. Culture-Loaded Terms and Subtitle Translation

Words, phrases, or idioms that denote particular aspects of a culture are referred to as culture-loaded terms. Owing to the slow buildup over an extended period of time, these phrases will capture the distinctive ways in which a certain nation differs from others. (Liao Qiyi, 2000)

In the 36th Golden Rooster Awards, the film *Creation of The God: Kingdom of Storms* won many awards, including Best Feature Film, Best Photography and so on. It is the first mythology film in China, not only recognized domestically but also sparking heated discussions internationally^[1]. At the same time, the novel *The Legend of Deification* originally had a significant influence. It incorporates unique mythological and legendary characteristics of our country while also considering some historical facts. Because of the combination of myths, legends, and historical facts, there are many unique Chinese cultural words, known as culture-loaded terms, used in both dialogue and

descriptions. Examples include ‘祥瑞’, ‘天谴’, and ‘桀纣之恶’.

Subtitles include intralingual subtitles and interlingual subtitles. The process of translating a source language text into a target language text displayed underneath the screen while still retaining the original audio track of the movie or television show is known as interlingual subtitles translation, which is usually called subtitle translation. Subtitle translation involves the transmission of interlingual information, simplification or enrichment of discourse, and the conversion of spoken language into literary language. These aspects are distinct in theory but inseparable in practice. (Luyken et al., 1991) The process of converting and deleting the original text occurs in various translations, including interpretation and translation^[2]. However, the extent and scale of deletion are not as extensive as in subtitle translation. Subtitle translation is a difficult task because of time and space constraints, as it needs to align with the visuals and audio of films or television shows. This limitation poses a significant challenge for subtitle translators. In China, many movies now have bilingual subtitles, but the quality of English subtitles varies. The quality of subtitle translation is critical for the movie *Creation of The God: Kingdom of Storms* to be released overseas. Hence, exploring the subtitle translation of this movie is worth it.

Culture-loaded terms can be translated through transliteration, literal translation, annotation, or a combination of these methods^[3]. The translation of culturally loaded phrases in cinema subtitles shares similarities with literary translation, as well as the immediacy and popularity of subtitle translation. Furthermore, it is also constrained by time and place, such as film screen adaptation, dialogue, and scene transitions. Under such circumstances, subtitle translation should take into account the acceptability and aesthetic standards of the target language audience simultaneously. Finally, in the limited space and time, the translation cannot only convey the cultural connotation of the source language but also bridge the gap and estrangement with the target language culture^[4].

3. Analysis of Cultural Adaptation and Selection in Eco-Translatology

3.1 Adaptive Transformation from the

Cultural Dimension

At the first International Symposium on Ecological Translation Studies, Tian Sujie, a graduate student at Xi'an International Studies University, summarized the translation of brand names as an adaptive transformation of language, culture, and communication dimensions. Liu Aihua, a doctoral student in translation studies at Shandong University, comprehensively demonstrates the essential characteristics of eco-translatology, which are multi-dimensional, multi-level, interactive, and dynamic harmony.

Eco-translatology is developed from the theory of translation as adaptation and selection. The theory of translation as adaptation and selection is guided by Darwin's theory of adaptation and selection. It uses the relevance and commonality between the translation activities of human behavior and the application of the natural law of "survival and selection" to explore the relationship, mechanism, basic characteristics, and laws of the translator's adaptation and selection behavior in the "translational eco-environment". It makes a new description and explanation of the nature, process, standards, principles, and translation methods from the perspective of adaptation and selection^[9]. From this point of view, this paper analyzes and discusses the translation process, translation methods, and translation behaviors from the perspective of adaptation and selection.

Professor Hu Gengshen introduced eco-translatology in 2008 as an ecological paradigm for translation studies. It is a methodical theoretical discourse system. The theory of translation adaptation and selection draws inspiration from the concept of survival of the fittest in ecology to aid in understanding translation ontology. This theory encompasses the translation process (the cycle of translator selection and adaptation), the translation principle (multi-dimensional selective adaptation and adaptive selection), the translation method (three-dimensional transformation: linguistic, communicative, and cultural dimensions), and the translation standard (multi-dimensional transformation degree, reader feedback, and translator quality) (Hu, 2004)^[5]. Eco-translatology continues the important concept of balance in ecology. Balance has become the core concept of eco-translatology, aiming to maintain ecological balance between the original text and the target text^[6].

The theory of translation adaptation and

selection defines translation as "the selective activities that translators adapt to the ecological environment of translation" (Hu, 2002; 2003; 2004). It can be seen that translators should make different choices to adapt to the eco-environment of translation on the basis of multi-dimensional adaptation, that is, the so-called "adaptive selection". The worlds of the source text and the source/target languages, the linguistic, communicative, cultural, and social aspects of translating, as well as the writer, the client, and the readers, are all included in this eco-environment (Hu, 2004)^[7]. Although it is impractical and unfeasible to expect the translator to become accustomed to every aspect of the translational eco-environment, it is the collection of multiple factors that constrain the translator's adaptation and optimal selection. (Guthnecht & Rolle1996). Therefore, the only translation principle, known as "multi-dimensional adaptation," capable of capturing the fundamental concepts of the theory of translation adaptation and selection corresponds to multi-dimensional adaptation. The fundamental tenet of translation adaptation and selection posits that the translator's capacity to adjust to the translational eco-environment is essential for understanding how the principle of survival of the fittest is relevant to translation^[8]. Adaptive transformation from the cultural dimension means that the translator focuses on conveying and interpreting the cultural connotations of both the original language and the target language during the translation process. This adaptive selection of cultural dimensions involves recognizing the distinctions between the original language culture and the translated culture in terms of nature and content. It aims to prevent misinterpretation of the original text based on the cultural perspective of the translated language^[9]. The translator pays attention to adapting the translation to the entire cultural system to which the language belongs while converting the original language. In other words, the translator should not only understand the similarities and differences between Chinese and English in language structure and grammatical features but also familiarize themselves with the social norms and deeper meanings of these vocabularies, structures, and other expressions commonly agreed upon in the English-speaking culture. This will help ensure that the translated text conforms to the way of thinking and the cultural consciousness of the

readers of the target language^[10].

3.2 Analysis of Culture-Loaded Terms in Subtitle Translation

Culture-loaded terms are the concentrated embodiment of China's outstanding traditional culture and the most core external manifestation of traditional culture. Hence, the analysis of the translation of culture-loaded terms can explore whether the translator is paying attention to the bilingual culture, what kind of adaptive choices have been made, and whether these choices have conveyed the meaning of the original language and catered to the target language readers. The film is set in ancient China, and many actors' lines are written in the classical literary style, making it challenging to translate the subtitles into vernacular Chinese^[11]. Even so, a great deal of the gods, monsters, rare jewels, and precious stones may not have clear English equivalents because it is a mythological concept. For example, '石矶娘娘', '丘引', '虬首仙' and so on. In addition, each language has its own characteristics, and there are differences between Chinese and English.

Therefore, when we translate these culturally loaded terms that have no counterparts in English, we need to analyze them carefully to decide whether the translation is more in favor of the original language text or the target language readers or audience; that is to say, we need to adopt the cultural dimensions of adaptation and selection in ecological translation. "Adaptation" and "selection" are the instincts of the translator and the essence of the translation process. In the process of translation, translators have to both adapt and choose, and translation is described as an alternating cycle of translator's adaptation and translator's choice, in which words, sentences, chapters, and styles with a higher degree of adaptation are selected, adopted, and retained, while those with a lower degree of adaptation are discarded, deleted, and modified.

Example 1

ST:天下浩劫将至.

TT: The Apocalypse is approaching.

Analyses: The term "天下浩劫" is a culturally loaded term that can be divided into two phrases: "天下" and "浩劫". The term "天下" is a concept exclusive to the Han cultural circle, representing the entire world under the sky without constraints of time, space, or geography. The term "浩劫" means a great catastrophe and

originates from the second poem of the Jade Terrace Observatory by Du Fu in the Tang Dynasty. Instead of translating "Catastrophe in the world" separately, the subtitle translation combined them into "The Apocalypse". Firstly, due to time and space limitations, the length of subtitles has been shortened. In order to adapt to the space limitations of film and television subtitles, omissions are made. Secondly, in terms of content, "The Apocalypse" refers to the end of the world as described in the Bible. The term "Apocalypse" originates from the Greek language and was later used in religious texts to refer to the prophets' predictions of the end of the world, which led to the derivation of the term "大灾难". The term "world" corresponds to the word "天下", and the term "end" corresponds to the term "浩劫". While not an exact match, it effectively conveys the intended meaning. Finally, from a cultural perspective, while this translation may not directly convey the unique cultural concepts of the source language country, it captures a similar concept in the target language country. Such a choice is made to adapt to the restrictions of the subtitle and to ensure that readers of the target language, who may find the concept relatively unfamiliar, can know and understand it. In turn, words that are highly adapted to the target language readers are retained; and words with rich Chinese cultural meanings are deleted.

Example 2

ST:此卦名为无妄。

TT: The hexagram says "deception".

Analyses: The original meaning of the word "卦" refers to a set of symbols that symbolize natural phenomena and changes in people and things, used for divination. It is a unique traditional culture in China, derived from the Book of Changes, and includes a set of symbolic symbols. By combining the Yang and Yin lines, each hexagram consists of three lines, forming the Eight Trigrams. These symbolize the eight fundamental aspects between heaven and earth, as well as the interplay of hardness and softness in Yin and Yang. The Eight Trigrams combine and overlap to form the Sixty-Four Trigrams, symbolizing the contradictory connections between things. In ancient China, hexagrams were used for divination to predict good or bad fortune. In the Oxford Dictionary, "hexagram" primarily refers to a "hexagonal star", but due to the rapid spread of culture, the word "卦" is also

defined as a "hexagram". The hexagram has a specific translation, influenced by cultural adaptation and selection. After continuous acceptance and improvement, it has been recognized and accepted in both Chinese and English languages. This also indicates that the translation of culturally loaded terms in subtitle translation can aim to transliterate more and lean more towards the source language, which will gradually be recognized as it develops.

Furthermore, the term "无妄" is the name of the hexagram. One of the sixty-four hexagrams, shaking down and moving up. The definition is that evil ways cannot be practiced, and no one dares to deceive. There are also meanings of unpredictability, accidents, and inevitability. The saying comes from *Intrigues of the Warring States: Chu State IV*: "There is unexpected luck and undeserved misfortune in the world." In many literary translations, the term "无妄" is translated as "Wu wang" by direct transliteration. The translator does not learn from their experience but interprets it as "deception" through self-analysis. This involves taking "妄" to mean whim, rather than translating based on the names of the hexagram. The translator chooses to omit the Chinese character "无" and directly translates it as "whim". For foreign audiences who do not understand the culture of the Book of Changes, it is easier to comprehend and can also be linked to Yin Shou's conspiracy. However, due to the constraints of subtitle time and space, the translator had to make such an adaptive selection. Moreover, the translator's adaptive selection was also very clever, using a quotation mark to indicate the uniqueness of this word. The translator employed adaptive selection in translating symbolic language to ensure accuracy, vividness, and intuitiveness.

Example 3

ST:杀伐太重，上天震怒。

TT: Death has incurred the wrath of Heaven.

Analyses: The meaning of "杀伐" in the Chinese dictionary is to fight and kill. The subtitle translator translated "杀伐太重" into "death", simplifying the meaning of the word "杀伐". But this adaptive selection can also reflect the violent scenes of war depicted in the film. At present, the term "上天" in Chinese culture is not entirely equivalent to the word "Heaven" in Western culture. In ancient Chinese culture, "上天" not only refers to heaven, but mainly

denotes the supreme God in heaven, the leader of the gods, and a traditional cultural concept and traditional belief of the Chinese people. Therefore, "上天" is a term rich in Chinese culture, but there is no exact equivalent concept in the West. Because subtitles are constrained by time and space, the translator has conducted cultural adaptation to ensure comprehension and engage the target language audience. As a result, the term has been translated as "heaven" to pique the interest of the readers. According to the translation of "天人合一" (Unity of Heaven and Man), the meaning of "天" is derived from it to adapt, which also conveys the original meaning. The subtitling translator's choice to translate "上天" as "heaven" is an adaptive selection in the cultural context, and this interpretation has preserved the original meaning.

Example 4

ST:倾家丧国之物岂可留于世间

TT: Evil temptress begone from this world!

Analyses: The term "倾家丧国之物" can be interpreted as "resulting in the breakdown of family relations and encroachment of the national territory by others". However, due to limitations in time and space, subtitles cannot be translated word for word. Instead, a process of cultural adaptation is necessary, whereby the phrase is rendered as "红颜祸水" or "Evil temptress", conveying a similar meaning.

According to the Oxford Dictionary, the definition of "evil" is connected with the Devil and with what is considered bad in the world. On the other hand, the definition of "temptress" is a woman who tempts someone, especially one who delicately lures a man into having sex with her. In this movie, the term "倾家丧国之物" refers to Su Daji, the last woman of the Shang dynasty. Su Daji was possessed by a beautiful fox spirit for thousands of years and was ordered by Nü Wa, a goddess in Chinese mythology, to bring chaos to the Shang dynasty. This is why King Zhou of Shang became so cruel and committed heinous acts. Based on the meanings of the two words, "temptress" seems to be very in line with the image of Su Daji, which corresponds to the Chinese phrase "倾家丧国之物" and the English phrase "Evil temptress". Therefore, choosing "Evil temptress" under cultural adaptation is also very appropriate, while also meeting the limitations of subtitles in terms of time and space.

Example 5

ST:离开朝歌，你是未来的天下共主。

TT: Leave Zhaohe, you're destined to become King of All Realms.

Analyses: The phrase "天下共主" is now commonly referred to the person who rules the entire planet, which can be translated as 'The king of the entire world'. However, as this film is set in ancient times, the nation as a whole has been divided into several tiny areas at the same time, and as a spatial concept, territory is distinguished. It can be classified broadly into two main categories: Formation due to natural causes and formation due to non-natural causes. The factors of non-natural causes include human, culture, specifically economic development, social traditions, humanities and arts, political systems, etc. The ancient history of China was divided by dynasties, each has a different territorial division. The film is set in the Shang Dynasty, which had a total of seven capitals, each ruled by a king. However, these kings were thought of as disadvantaged compared to the ultimate ruler known as the "天下共主," which translates to the king of all different realms. Therefore, considering the historical context and plot development, the translator made an adaptive decision to translate "天下" as "all realms", which not only captures the characteristics of the division of geographic regions in ancient China, but also completely restores the meaning of the original language. This not only preserves ancient China's geographical parted ways, but it additionally entirely reclaims the original language's meaning. As a result of this, an ecological balance has been established, ensuring that the meaning of the original language remains unchanged without ambiguity for the target language readers and audience. However, since the movie is set in ancient times, the entire country was divided into many small regions during the same period, and each region was granted the title of king. Based on the historical background and plot development, the translator made an adaptive choice by translating "天下" to "all realms". This not only indicates the different geographical divisions in ancient times but also fully restores the meaning of the original language.

Based on the above analysis, at this stage, when translating Chinese films, translators primarily consider whether the target language readers can

understand the translation and whether it may lead to misunderstandings. Only after these considerations do they focus on conveying Chinese cultural elements or resort to foreignization when certain concepts cannot be directly translated into the target language. The purpose of exporting Chinese culture is weakened in this way. The purpose of exporting Chinese culture is weakened in this way. Through many years of experience, we have found that it is not a bad news because many aspects of Chinese culture have been exported to other countries, including dumplings(饺子), feng shui(风水), tai chi(太极拳), and the Mid-Autumn Festival(中秋节). When translating culturally significant words in subtitles from Chinese to English, the approach should prioritize the understanding of the English-speaking audience. However, it is also important to convey Chinese cultural elements and deepen the audience's understanding of them. Additionally, it is crucial to maintain a balance by appropriately incorporating the cultural elements of the original language in the original film.

Translation has always been the focus of attention, and international exchanges are becoming more and more frequent. In this case, the relevant staff are required to understand the culture of different countries and their own culture. Due to the different living environment and development history, the rich cultural connotations are also different. Translators should constantly explore and verify cross-cultural communication issues, and put forward more translation methods, so as to make translation more and more mature.

4. Summary

This paper analyzes the subtitle translation of an overseas propaganda film by applying the cultural adaptive selection in eco-translatology proposed by Professor Hu Gengshen. Although the subtitle translation is currently biased towards the target language, it may become more biased towards the source language in the near future as our understanding of Chinese culture deepens alongside the development of culture and economy. Thus, more attention can be paid to the dissemination of Chinese cultural

traditions, and the output of Chinese culture can be improved through the development of subtitle translation.

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