From the Perspective of the Three-dimensional Transformations of Eco-translatology to Analyse Movie Subtitle Translation: A Case Study of Changjin Lake

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With the swift development of China’s soft power and the Belt and Road initiative, the cultural interaction between China and the West become more and more frequent. As an art, the film plays a vital role in spreading Chinese culture, and meantime, the film also is a significant means of cross-cultural communication, while the movie subtitle is a carrier to convey the film content and inner spirit to the foreigners. The study analyses the movie subtitle translation of Changjin Lake from three-dimensional selection adaptive conversion perspectives through comparing its source target to its translation target to leave a deeper understanding of translation skills and inner Chinese culture, which will further promote the “going out” of Chinese culture.

Keywords: movie subtitle translation, three-dimensional translation, Changjin Lake

Introduction

In recent years, many outstanding Chinese films move to the international stage, not only bringing visual enjoyment to viewers, enriching their spiritual needs, but also promoting Chinese culture to go global. Therefore, the film subtitle translation industry has achieved unprecedented development. It’s hard to imagine how people who have no chance to go abroad should feel the beauty of the outside world without movies. So, high-quality film subtitles not only allow foreign viewers to better understand the connotation conveyed in the film but also a kind of cultural exchange and sharing.

Changjin Lake was filmed by famous Chinese directors Chen Kaige, Xu Ke, and Lin Chaoxian, Starring Wu Jing and Yi Yang Qianxi, to resist US aggression and aid Korea. The film will be released in mainland China on September 30, 2021. The film uses the Battle of Changjin Lake in the War to Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea as its background. It tells a magnificent history that in the extreme cold and harsh environment, the Eastern Front combat troops relied on the iron will, the bravery and fearless fighting spirit to reverse the battle situation, which made a great contribution to the victory of the Changjin Lake.

Due to the rapidly growing film market, to keep pace with the international film market, and allow foreigners to have a deep understanding of Chinese cultural elements, translators must submit a copy that can perfectly replicate Chinese culture and allow foreign viewers to understand the meaning of the film effortlessly.

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However, an overview of the entire domestic translation research, most of them tend to literary translation, and there is no accurate translation theory to support, let alone about film subtitle translation theory. In recent years, Hu Gengshen, professor of Tsinghua University, put forward a new translation theory that is eco-translation, which advocated an adaptive and selective alternation method from the three-dimensional (vocabulary, culture, communication) perspective in translation studies. The proposal of this eco-translation theory is unanimously approved by the translators, the thesis also takes this translation theory to analyze the film subtitle translation of Changjin Lake.

Literature Review

The previous relevant studies of subtitle translation abroad started relatively early. For example, Gambier, Yves.& Henrik Gottlieb wrote (Multi) Media Translation. Concepts, Practices, and Research in 2001.

Eugene Nida proposed the functional equivalence theory that is the quality of translation in which the source information has been conveyed to the receptor’s language so that the response of the reactor is essentially the same as the original receptor. The Chinese film market also ushered in the peak of its career in 2019, therefore, the corresponding demand for movie subtitle translation is surging dramatically. While compared with foreign theories, Chinese relevant movie subtitle translation theory does not yet have a complete theoretical system.

In the early years, only some translation magazines published some fragmentary translation theory studies, such as “Exploring English-Chinese Audiovisual Translation” and “Relevance Theory and Film Subtitles Translation: A Case Study of Feng Xiaogang’s Films”. In recent years, some scholars such as Qian Shaochang, Ma Zhengqi, Zhao Chunmei, etc. made great theoretical achievements in movie subtitles.

Film subtitle translation is an emerging field in China, lack of theory is extremely unfavorable to the long-term development of Chinese films to the world. While the eco-translatology theory provides a comprehensive solution to the above problems. Professor Hu Gengshen of Tsinghua University proposed the theory of eco-translation in 2000, which is a translation study based on ecology as a research approach, also known as translation study from an ecological perspective. The translation research method of ecological translation has an interdisciplinary nature. When translating, the translator integrates the two disciplines of ecology and translation and then conducts a macro-integration of translation from the perspective of ecological choice and adaptability. The translation theory of “three-dimensional transformation” emphasized in this theory, namely the vocabulary, culture, and communication dimensions, not only puts translation on a more macro level for discussion, interprets the essence of its translation process, and also provides translators with more specific translation guidance.

Compared to previous translation theories above, the research method of eco-translatology is to expand from the original two-dimensional opposing thinking to multiple integrated thinking. The research content focuses more on the original ecology of the source text, the original ecology of the translation environment, and the original understanding of translation. The integration of ecological thoughts is more prominent in eco-translatology theory, realizing the harmony and reform of translation studies as well.
An Analysis of Subtitle Translation in Changjin Lake

The author compares source text with its target text of film subtitle translation from Changjin Lake and then analyzes the movie subtitle translation of ChangjinLake from the perspective of three-dimensional that is vocabulary, culture and communication dimension, selective and adaptive conversion. There is a translation chain to explain the translation process below.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Eco-translatology</th>
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Figure 1. Movie subtitle translation table in eco-translology.

Vocabulary Dimension

Due to the nearly different language manifestations that are Chinese is parataxis while English is hypotaxis. It is difficult to express the language beauty and connotation beauty of Chinese using literal translation. The vocabulary dimension in eco-translatology requires translators to pay close attention to the selective and adaptive conversion of vocabulary, grammar, rhetoric, phonetics, and intonation when translating source texts. Although English and Chinese belong to different language families, the textual information contained between the two languages can be understood by humans. Therefore, when translating movie subtitles, translators must focus on the original language environment, have a deep understanding of the language and deep connotation conveyed by the original text, select a suitable language translation way, and perform certain creativity based on being loyal to the original text. Strive to achieve the ecological environment closest to the source language. The author selects typical examples from film subtitle translation in Changjin Lake to analyze the techniques used in subtitle translation at the linguistic dimension.

Example (1)

ST: 四七年，我们打蒙阴，我在那看见一房子，硬山搁檩，两进院，那檐子底下能住五窝燕子。咱家世世代代在水上漂着，等把那房子盖起来，看着十里八乡咋看咱家。

TT: In 1947, when we fought in Mengyin County, I saw a house with a front and back yard there, with a flush gable roof and purlins. The eave can accommodate five nests of swallow. Our family has been floating on the water for generations, when we build a house there, the villagers would certainly see us in a new light.

The words talked by a protagonist named Wu Qianli. Here, the movie subtitle translator made an adaptive and selective adjustment of vocabulary. Base on the original language environment, the word “打” in the source text does not mean beating, it should be translated as “fought”. These three short sentences, which are “硬山搁檩，两进院，那檐子底下能住五窝燕子”, are very specific and pictorial in describing the exterior of the new house, while the translator chooses corresponding short sentences to perfectly retain the sentence structure in the target text. The translator uses “see us in a new light” to express the meaning of “咋看”. Wu Qianli’s vision for the new house has also been effectively conveyed in the target text, making the audience immersive.
Example (2)

ST: 有紧急情况，停止探家，天亮归队。

TT: Emergency! Your leave is canceled. Report for duty first thing in the morning.

Chinese is parataxis while English is hypotaxis. Therefore, the movie subtitle translated the whole sentence in the ST into three independent short sentences to avoid an ambiguous understanding of the lacking subject. Add the words, like “your” and “Report for duty”, to let the audience feel what military orders are like a mountain, and appreciate the charm of the Chinese language.

Example (3)

ST: 全体都有。

TT: Attention all.

The movie translator adopted a reorganized translation method in the TT, translated “全体都有” into “Attention all”, which let the foreigners know that is the military command. Here made a successful vocabulary selection and adaption.

Culture Dimension

The cultural dimension requires that in the translation process, the translator needs to convey the connotation and essence of Chinese and Western culture to foreign viewers. Language is an indispensable carrier for the effective transmission of culture, and only through the expression of language can culture be interpreted and ultimately achieve the purpose of communication. Therefore, the selective and adaptive conversion of the cultural dimension in eco-translatology requires the translator must to fully understand the cultural background and ideological connotation, based on truly respecting and understanding the commonality and individuality of Chinese and Western cultures during the movie subtitle translation process. Eventually, realize the effective transfer of Chinese and Western cultures. From the perspective of cultural dimensions, The author selects typical examples from film subtitle translation in Changjin Lake to analyze the techniques used in subtitle translation at the linguistic dimension.

Example (4)

ST: 瓜娃子。

TT: Little brat.

The word “瓜娃子”, a special cultural name, is a Sichuan dialect, which means a boy about 15 years or so. The movie subtitle translator translated as “Little brat”, which fitted for a special nickname of the same age boy. If the TT was translated as a little boy, it will lose cultural connotation. This literal translation method is in line with the direct and frank thinking mode of Westerners to let foreign audiences know at a glance. This unique translation method not only makes it easy for the audience to understand but also conveys its cultural connotation.

Example (5)

ST: 我没有把老大照顾好。

TT: Baili...is gone.

The word “照顾” conforms to the euphemistic and implicit expression of the Chinese while foreigners express themselves directly. So, the translator must have a deep understanding of the different expressions way
between Chinese and foreigners. If translate “照顾” into taking care of Baili (elder brother of the protagonist), it will make a joke. The movie subtitle translator in Changjin Lake according to the source environment translated “照顾” into “gone”, means died. Although the original text has no words, it has meaning. Given the cultural dimension perspective, it not only retains the cultural connotation of the original text but also makes it easier for the audience to accept.

Example (6)

ST: 各连立即收拾装备补给下车,化整为零, 以营下规模分散隐蔽穿插狼林山脉,前往长津湖战区,再行集结。

TT: All companies grab supplies and get off the train. Decentralize and spread out in battalions. Take cover and cut through Langlin Mountains and reassemble at the Changjin Lake.

As we all know, Chinese emphasizes parataxis and one subject can follow by more than one predicate verb, such as “收拾”; “分散隐蔽穿插”; “前往” and “集结”. While English emphasizes the logical sentence structures where only one predicate verb is in a sentence. Based on fully understanding the different compositions of Chinese and Western sentences, the movie subtitle translator used three complete sentences to replace the source text of its five short sentences. The selection and adaption adjustment from the cultural dimension reflects the tension of the war at the time, all the soldiers must immediately obey the order and disperse quickly.

Communication Dimension

The communicative dimension requires that in the translation process, the translator should conduct an in-depth study of the bilingual communicative intent, transform the communicative intent of the original text, and then fully present it to the foreign viewers in the movie subtitle. In a sense, the communicative dimension is to transmit communicative information to the greatest extent in a bilingual environment to achieve the ultimate goal of communication. Therefore, in the translation process, the translator must not only pay attention to the grasp of language information, but also deeply understand its cultural connotation, and finally realize the purpose of communication. The author will also select corresponding translation cases from the movie subtitle translation in Changjin Lake to analyze how the translator can creatively translate in the translation process.

Example (7)

ST: 麦克阿瑟，五星上将。一切顺利的话，感恩节前就能结束。（发表演讲）

TT: Douglas MacArthur(General of the army): God willing, it will be over by Thanksgiving. (a pre-war speech)

An important means to achieve the purpose of communication is to increase relative pronouns. The target text added relative pronouns of “God and it”, which is in line with the expression habits of English. The addition of these two relative pronouns also increases the soldiers’ confidence that the war will end soon. When translating the entire sentence, the vocabulary selection is accurate, so that foreign viewers can understand the Chinese language and cultural connotation while achieving the ultimate communicative purpose.

Example (8)

ST: 记者问; 将军，您说统一朝鲜半岛，这是否意味着美军会越过三八线?
将军回答：如果这样对朝鲜和世界都有利的话，上帝就会带领我们前进。

TT: Reporter asks: General, does making Korea whole, mean that American forces will cross the 38th parallel?

The general’s answer: If is the best thing for Korea and the world, then God will lead our path.

In the original text, the reporter asked the general that the unification of the Korean peninsula may cross the 38th parallel, which means that the flames of war will spread to China. The general did not answer directly but said that God will decide all of this. Here is just a simple conversation but there is a deep meaning hidden. Although the general did not answer the reporter’s question directly, his words have already told all soldiers that it is God’s will to unify North Korea and that the spread of war to China is also God’s will. Even if cross the 38th line, don’t feel guilty and uneasy psychologically. God will lead our path. Just cross the 38th parallel according to God’s will. The translator also took literal translation to avoid lengthy and complicated translation form, let the viewer know the speaker’s intentions without too much ambiguity, achieve the ecological balance of communication between the original text and the target text. The ultimate goal is to complete the communicative intent.

Summary

Professor Hu said that “the study of translators’ living status and ability development in a translational environment”. Thence, through selective adaptation and adaptive selection in the dimensions of language, culture and, communication, translators should realize the harmony and balance based on the translational eco-environment to achieve long-term survival in ecology.

Conclusion

Lu Xun once said, “Human society should take care of each other instead of being indifferent to each other. The easiest way is to communicate through literature and art.” The three-dimensional selective adaption and adaptive selection in eco-translatology is undoubtedly the best way. The movie subtitle translators in Changjin Lake actively exert their subjective initiative, constantly make adjustments in selection and adaptation, and use translation techniques such as lexical merger and reorganization at the level of language dimension to avoid ambiguity in the understanding of Chinese and Western languages; use additive translation method and accurate conversion of word meaning at the cultural dimension to present the original beauty of Chinese culture; at the communication dimension, mainly use paraphrase and add words to achieve the purpose of communication. The English translation in the movie subtitle not only provides a large number of examples for other translators’ subtitle translation, but also allows foreign viewers to feel the charm of Chinese culture, and at the same time accelerates the pace of Chinese culture “going out”.

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