

# An Eco-Translatological Study on the C-E Translation of Culture-Loaded Words in the Chinese Animated Film *Monkey King: Hero Is Back*

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In the context of globalization and Chinese culture's "Going Abroad" strategy, film plays an increasingly important role in cultural communication and in enhancing the soft power of Chinese national culture. Chinese animated films have developed vigorously in recent years. They rely on Chinese myths and classic novels, which favor the diffusion of Chinese culture. There is a load of Chinese elements in Chinese animation films, which contain a wealth of traditional art, aesthetic concepts, philosophies, ethics, and a great quantity of culture-loaded words. *Monkey King: Hero Is Back*, is a successful representative of Chinese animation films going abroad. As a new theory in recent years, Eco-Translatology is of great practical significance to correctly convey the culture in Chinese animated films. Under the guidance of Eco-Translatology and from the perspective of "three-dimensional" (language dimension, cultural dimension, and communicative dimension) transformation, this paper analyzes the subtitle translation of culture-loaded words in the film, aiming to summarize the effective and high-quality translation methods.

**Keywords:** Eco-Translatology, culture-loaded words, adaption and selection

## Introduction

As the global production and cultural exchanges become more closer, the politics, economy, and culture of all countries influence each other. The understanding of a country's culture-loaded words has a profound impact on people's understanding and love for it. Culture-loaded words reflect the spiritual, historical, and cultural connotation of a country, so its translation is extremely important in communicating with foreign people and improving the ecological environment.

After the release of the film *Monkey King: Hero Is Back*, it is a successful representative of Chinese animation films going global. But simultaneously, the quality and accuracy of subtitle translations in the film has also aroused heated discussion, especially for the translation of Chinese culture-loaded words. There are a large number of culture-loaded words in the film, and its translation has an extremely critical influence on the Chinese hero's going to the world. During the subtitle translation, translator is still the vital component in most cases, trying to find a way to have a breakthrough in the film translation (Wang, Zhou, & Zhang, 2019).

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In recent years, Chinese animated films have also allowed foreigners to learn about Chinese spirit and culture, such as *Kung Fu Panda*, *Monkey King*, *Nezha*, and *Mulan*. This kind of Chinese film with cultural connotation allows more foreigners to understand Chinese culture objectively. The translation of subtitles is a fundamental means for the dissemination of film culture and Chinese culture, and its translation quality affects the acceptance and satisfaction of foreigners for it. For any type of translation, how to convert the characteristic cultural content of the language is a difficult problem that the translator must face (K. F. Wang & Y. C. Wang, 2016), especially for the movie *Hero Is Back*. It is adapted from the Chinese traditional mythology novel *Journey to the West*, which contains a wealth of traditional culture and culture-loaded words; its subtitle translation is of great research value under the background of Chinese culture going out. Translating words containing Chinese traditional culture from the perspective of ecological translation will help traditional culture grow abroad, and allow more foreigners to understand Chinese culture, thereby achieving the goal of improving the weak status of Chinese in the world language system.

## **Literature Review**

### **Previous Researches on the Translation of Culture-Loaded Words**

Culture-loaded words reflect the characteristics of the national culture, including unique words, phrases, and idioms. In the long historical development process, it reflects the characteristics of the national culture and is significantly different from other national cultures (Liao, 2000, p. 232). The choice of translation strategies and methods for Chinese culture-loaded words should consider the principle of equality in intercultural communication and serve the Chinese culture to go global (Zheng, 2016). Communication based on equality favors the objectivity and precision of cultural dissemination, which enhances the soft power of Chinese culture. Therefore, in the context of globalization, in order to obtain language and emotion equality in the communication process and information exchange, the translator has to handle Chinese culture-loaded words well, which helps foreign audiences understand and love Chinese culture.

### **The Theoretical Researches on Eco-Translatology Theory**

Conforming to nature has been the advocacy of Chinese traditional culture for thousands of years. In the new century, since the harm caused by environmental degradation is getting more and more serious, people around the world put increasing attention towards the environmental protection. Therefore, the term “ecology” is currently a hot topic.

In fact, similar theories were proposed before the Eco-Translatology theory proposed. As early as 1987, Yev Warren (1989) used Darwin’s natural selection-adaptation theory to introduce biological sciences into linguistics, and set up a new theoretical framework for language use research. Eugene Nida (1993) stated that in order to adapt to different languages and cultures, to meet the “tastes” of different readers, translators need to make corresponding choices and processing on the translation.

All related translation studies in the past laid a basis for the Eco-Translatology theory. Hu Gengshen (2008) formally proposed the term “ecological translation studies” based on his monograph “the survival and choice of the fittest in translation”. Hu Gengsheng combines the philosophical concept of “ecological existence” with the ancient Chinese philosophy, which provides a new perspective for the translation of culture-loaded words. When porting culture-loaded words from one language to another, we need to examine the ecological environment of the target language, which is the same as moving plants and animals to a completely unknown

place. Consequently, ecological translation is more conducive to Chinese culture going out, and it is more conducive to the survival of Chinese culture's endless text transplantation and the "endlessness" of textual life (Hu, 2020).

The core concept is "choice and adaptation". They must be like the adaptation and growth of an individual or a nation. There is only adaptation to survive through changes in the new environment (Warren, 1989, p. 6). From language to culture, the core connotation of text transplantation is the adaptation and evolution. As a life form for the survival of the fittest, being born, derive, generate, regenerate, and survive are the key points of Eco-Translatology (Hu, 2019). The "translator-centered" theory is its core and multidimensional transformation is its specific translation method (Hu, 2008). The essence of ecological translation is adaptation and choice by three-dimensional transformations: language dimension, cultural dimension, and communicative dimension.

Eco-Translatology proposes translation as ecological balance from the macro, middle, and micro perspectives, through the translation system, translation theory, and translation studies of translation behavior (Hu, 2019). Under the guidance of the new ecological translation concept, it promotes and maintains the coordination and balance between translation ecology and ecological translation.

### **Translation of Culture-Loaded Words Under the Three-Dimensional Transformations**

The ecological environment of the target language reader, as well as its natural geographical environment, social customs, cultural context, and political environment all directly or indirectly affect the translation process. According to Hu Gengshen (2013), Eco-Translatology is a "study of ecological translation methods" or "study from an ecological perspective" translation. Three-dimensional transformations are its specific translation method. The method of Eco-Translatology focuses on the adaptive selection and transformation in language, cultural, and communicative dimensions, so that the translation can survive and regenerate in the ecological environment of the target language.

#### **Adaption and Selection in the Language Dimension**

Language is the pivotal carrier of culture and information, through which we can achieve communicative and textual purpose. It can reflect the social life, customs, and historical trajectories of a country or nation, and thus permeate all aspects of people's lives. The movie *Hero Is Back* has a great deal of vocabulary, syntax, and style with Chinese characteristics. This part uses examples to analyze the translation of culture-loaded words in terms of idioms, colloquialisms, and allusions.

According to the Eco-Translatology theory, during translation activities, the translator will make adaptive choices of language dimensions from multiple aspects and levels. The choice of adaptation of the language dimension is mainly word level conversion, but it is by no means a rigid literal translation of word-to-word. It requires translators to interpret the meaning of the word based on his or her own understanding, so that foreign audiences can better understand the film.

Example 1: 他法力高强，神通广大。

Translation: He has magnificent powers beyond belief.

The terms "神通广大" and "法力高强" have similar meanings. The Chinese language is more complicated, and tends to repeat words with similar meanings, while English tends to be short and brief. Therefore, the translator directly translates the core meaning of this sentence. From the characteristics of the language

dimension to adapt the translation to the target language, foreign audiences can understand the connotation of the sentence.

Example 2: 猴王把天兵打的落花流水。

Translation: The Monkey King had defeated the whole Heavenly.

“落花流水” describes the decline of the scenery in late spring, and it is often used in verses that someone is defeated metaphorically. It is an idiom with historical and cultural connotations. However, due to the time period when the movie subtitles appear and the three-dimensional space is limited, the translator gave up the transformation of cultural dimensions, and directly adopted the translation strategy of free translation, so that foreign audiences can understand the cultural connotation and extended meaning of this sentence.

Example 3: 学好拳脚，打山妖。

Translation: Learn kung fu and knock out the Trolls.

The sentence here uses the rhetorical technique of borrowing, using concrete to refer to the abstract. This sentence also reflects this difference between Chinese and English. When translating this sentence, the translator ignores the metaphor of the sentence and directly restores its original meaning, making the audience understand. When a film is translated to foreign countries, the first thing to do is to let foreign audience understand the dialogue, making the translation adapted to the language of the foreign audience, and let them understand the cultural connotation and charm. The second is to slowly develop in the ecological environment of foreign languages, so that foreign audiences can understand culture-loaded words, so that Chinese traditional culture can survive on foreign soil.

### **Adaption and Selection in the Cultural Dimension**

The choice of adaptation in the cultural dimension refers mainly to the difference in cultural background between the output language and the input language. There are a large number of mythological characters in the movie, such as *Monkey King*, *Jade Emperor*, *Nezha*, *God Juling*, *Dragon King*, and places with cultural connotations such as Wuxing Mountain and Huaguo Mountain. Since western readers do not learn about traditional Chinese culture, nor have they heard the story of *Journey to the West*, translators mainly use literal translation and transliteration when translating. Due to the instantaneous nature of subtitle translation and its limited time and space, there is no commentary explanation, but with the scenes in the movie, the audience can understand the contents and characteristics of the characters.

Example 4: 点点羊羊。

Translation: Eeeny, meeny, miney, mo.

The numbers here have corresponding nursery rhymes in English-speaking countries, so when the language and culture are common, the translator translates them into melody familiar to foreign audiences, so that the translation can adapt to their ecological environment and be understood.

Example 5: 咱们井水不犯河水。

Translation: We'll go our separate ways, okay?

The allusions here have no corresponding expression in English, so the translator creatively translates, so that the culture-loaded words can be understood and accepted and survive in order to adapt to the foreign language environment. The translator must adapt the translation to the ecosystem of target language, and take its ecological environment into consideration. Because the audience are unacquainted with the Chinese cultural connotations, the translator tries to maintain the cultural characteristics of the source language while helping foreign audiences have a better understanding of Chinese culture.

### Adaption and Selection in the Communicative Dimension

The communicative dimension requires translators to pay attention to the communicative characteristics between two different languages when translating, so that foreign audiences can understand traditional Chinese culture and appreciate its charm.

Example 6: 他呀，脑袋缺根弦儿。

Translation: He is just a bit stupid.

“缺根弦” originally refers to the lack of root strings of stringed instruments, and there is no way to play the music intact. Used in this sentence, the extension is that someone is unreliable and mightily stupid. When translating, in order for the viewers to understand the metaphorical meaning of this sentence, so as to achieve the purpose of communication, the translator directly explains its connotation so that the audience can catch the meaning of sentence quickly.

Example 7: 一个筋斗云啊，就是十万八千里。

Translation: Your Somersault Cloud takes you a hundred thousand miles.

Example 8: 一万三千六百斤。

Translation: Ten thousand pounds.

The Chinese-specific unit of measurement mentioned in the above two examples, Jin, is domesticated and translated into a unit of measurement familiar to foreign audiences when translating to achieve the communicative intention. In terms of specific units of measurement, the translator takes the film's goal into account of conveying weight and speed, so directly counts them as 10,000 and 100,000 when translating.

Due to film's special characteristics, the dialogue between the characters is very spoken, so there are a lot of common words and colloquialisms in the film. Because there are a heap of culture-loaded words in some sentences, the translator directly translates them simply to achieve a communicative intention. However, some sentences in the film do not correspond to the original subtitles, nor are they intended for communication. In this regard, the translation needs to be improved.

### Conclusions

The translation of movie subtitles has an important impact on the viewing experience of foreign audiences. Ecological translation uses “ecology”, “balance”, “transplantation”, and “adaptive choice” to refer to the interaction between the translation subject and the environment, and establishes a set of effective explanatory discourse. This thesis based on the theory of Eco-Translatology exerts the translator's main role in the translation process by adopting flexible translation strategies, and explains the connotation of culture-loaded words from the three-dimensional perspective, which makes translation actively adapt to the ecological environment of the input language. A good translation of the culture-loaded words in the film will have a multiplier effect for foreign audiences to understand Chinese traditional culture. It is recommended to use literal translation, transliteration, and free translation.

Based on the theory of ecological translation, this article uses examples and comparative analysis methods to analyze and summarize the representativeness of *Hero Is Back* from the “three-dimensional” of ecological translation, namely the linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions, making the culture-loaded words in the animated films adapt, survive, and derive in foreign language environments. Due to the particularity of movies, most of the translations are for communicative purposes. Therefore, some translations do not match the original subtitles, so it cannot accurately convey the intent of the movie. Therefore, there is still a lot of room for

improvement in the translation. More studies are hoped on the translation of culture-loaded words in the film to help spread Chinese culture.

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