

The English Subtitle Translation of Quanzhou's World Heritage Application Documentary: A Frame Theory Perspective

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Based on Fillmore's frame theory, this paper examines the translator's cognitive frame operation in the English subtitle translation of Quanzhou's World Heritage application documentary. It analyzes and discusses how the translator maximizes translation effect between the source language and the target language, so as to enhance the readability of documentary subtitles and promote the spread of traditional Chinese culture. The findings are as follows: Firstly, in the translation process, the frame operations used by the translator include frame correspondence, intra-frame operations, frame replacement, frame perspective shift and frame transplantation. Secondly, cultural documentaries are full of culture-loaded words, for which the translator usually uses frame transplantation. Thirdly, due to the instantaneous nature of subtitles, intra-frame operations and frame replacement are applied in terms of cultural background of the target language audience. Besides, in order to enhance the audience's reading experience, there may be some changes of narrative perspective in the English translation of cultural documentaries.

Keywords: frame semantics, frame operation, Quanzhou's World Heritage application documentary, subtitle translation

Introduction

As a form of artistic expression that simultaneously uses sound, frames, and subtitles to show real life, cultural documentaries play a significant role in preserving cultural heritage and spreading Chinese culture. Therefore, how to accurately convey the unique cultural connotations of the source language and promote the cross-cultural understanding of the target language audience has become one of the most key tasks for subtitle translators. Under the advocacy of "telling Chinese stories", the number of studies on subtitle translation of documentaries has greatly increased in recent years. These studies use Eco-translatology Theory, Skopos Theory, Functional Equivalence Theory, Manipulation Theory, and multimodal discourse analysis to investigate documentary translation, while studies from the perspective of frame semantics remain unexplored.

Frame semantics is a branch of cognitive semantics that employs an encyclopedic view of meaning to reveal the structured knowledge attributes associated with words and the impact they may have on semantic models (Evans & Green, 2006). Fillmore, the founder of frame semantics, defined "frame" as the coherent schematization of specific knowledge systems or experiences (Fillmore, 1985). In other words, frames are the way the knowledge

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system is represented in the brain, and they are the reference for meaning interpretation in a text (Wen & Xiao, 2019, p. 219). This shows that the concept of “frame” is inspiring for translation studies. Its application helps to improve translation theory, enhance the interpretive nature of translation research (Yu, 2008), and explain special linguistic phenomena (Deng, 2010). The analysis of frame operations can also document well the subjective role played by the translator (Liu, 2010), assess the quality of translations (Zhu, 2010), etc. Heretofore, related studies can be broadly divided into two categories: theoretical exploration and applied research. Theoretical exploration includes Snell Hornby’s (1988) reinterpretation of the translation process and Neubert and Shreve’s (1992) discussion about Fillmore’s classification of frame. Early applied studies include creative translation (Kusssmaul, 1994), lexical translation (Wang, 2005), cultural translation (Rojo, 2002a; 2002b; 2009), and metaphor translation (Snell Hornby, 2005; Zhou, 2008). During the past decade, the applied research is mainly translation studies with different text genres as the research objects based on frame theory, like literary works (Wang, Yang, & Hu, 2010), academic texts (Y. F. Zhang & H. T. Zhang, 2021), poetry and classics (Jia & Li, 2021; Xu & Yao, 2021), etc. However, there are few studies that take documentary subtitles as the research object, whose focus is not the study of subtitles of Chinese documentaries but that of foreign films and TV shows (Shen, 2013; Jiang, 2014; Duan, 2022; Wu & Yu, 2022).

Based on this, from the perspective of frame semantics, this paper probes into the cognitive operations of the translator in the English subtitle translation of Quanzhou’s World Heritage application documentary, including frame correspondence, frame discrepancy, and frame vacancy, exploring how the translator endeavors to achieve an ideal translation effect and enhance the readability of the translated text by using reasonable frame operations in translation process, so as to boost the dissemination of Chinese culture.

Analysis

The documentary on Quanzhou’s World Heritage application introduces a total of 22 heritage sites, recreating the prosperous scenes of commerce in China in the 14th and 15th centuries with sound, frames, and subtitles. It embodies the ancient Chinese commercial culture and is of great dissemination value. Hence, this paper tries to examine how the translator provides the target language audience with meaning activation close to the frame of the source language through frame operations in terms of cognitive frame correspondence, frame discrepancy, and frame vacancy (Wen & Xiao, 2019, p. 230), with the goal of achieving positive effect of cultural dissemination. Meanwhile, the frame operations of the translator will be discussed and evaluated.

Frame Correspondence

Frame correspondence means that direct correspondence between the original and target frames can be achieved. A frame is composed of frame elements, which generally include conceptual frame elements and image frame elements (Jia & Li, 2021). Frame correspondence is used when the conceptual frame and image frame activated by the original language and the target language are consistent. It is the most ideal frame operation (Wen & Xiao, 2019, p. 229), but such a situation is actually very rare in translation, especially in a text full of cultural elements. In other words, the operation only applies to expressions that are common sense or have little cultural connotations.

Example 1:

这艘回港的南宋福船，曾满载着龙涎香，乳香，胡椒等大批的香料。

This Southern Song ship was carrying a full load of imported spice including ambergris, frankincense and pepper.

In this example, the translation of “龙涎香, 乳香, 胡椒” is a case of frame correspondence. Both “ambergris, frankincense and pepper” in English and “龙涎香, 乳香, 胡椒” in Chinese belong to (spice) frame. The conceptual frame components “ambergris, frankincense and pepper” and the image frame component “imports from Asia and Africa” can be activated in the target audience’s mind.

Frame Discrepancy

When the frames of the source language and the target language are inconsistent, the frame operations of intra-frame operation and frame perspective shift (Wen & Xiao, 2019) are used. Since Wen and Xiao’s classification (2019) cannot explain some translations well, the frame operation of frame replacement is added (Wu & Yu, 2022).

Intra-frame operation. Intra-frame operation involves the substitution, addition, or deletion of frame components and changes in frame relations, similar to paraphrasing. It’s applied when the frames in the source language and the target language have commonality but differ from each other in certain frame components or features (Wen & Xiao, 2019, p. 230).

Example 2:

来自亚欧海洋贸易的参与方, 通过这个开放的窗口, 分享着经济与文化的成功。

Through this open portal, participants in maritime trade across Eurasia shared the fruits of commercial and cultural exchange.

Metaphors are component mappings between different frames (Wen & Xiao, 2019, p. 231). This example presents the metaphor (The harbour of Quanzhou is a window) to illustrate the high degree of openness of Quanzhou. The translator translated “窗口” into “portal” through the substitution of frame components, so both the original text and the translated text still belong to the same frame (Building). The reason for this adjustment is that for the source language audience, i.e., the Chinese, the use of “窗口” to metaphorically express “opening up” is common, such as “对外开放的前沿窗口” and “改革开放的窗口”. In contrast, in the English cultural context, the use of “portal” as the source domain in the metaphor of “opening up” is more typical. It is the central component in the frame.

Frame replacement. Frame replacement means that the translator replaces the frame in the source language with the corresponded frame of the target language culture. It can also refer to the substitution of frames which are difficult to understand in the source language with relevant frames in the target language (Wu & Yu, 2022).

Example 3:

这种聪明的区域联动究竟是自发形成的, 还是有意布局的呢?

Was this brilliant orchestration of such a large territory something that happened organically, or was it planned out intentionally?

Although “区域联动” and “regional linkage” are roughly equivalent in terms of frame, the translator chose to replace the frame (Machine) in Chinese by creating an “orchestration” metaphor. On the one hand, the use of “orchestration” activates the familiar cultural frame (Orchestration) for foreign audience because orchestration is invented in the West. On the other hand, although the frame of the target language is not consistent with that of the original text, the metaphorical association triggered by “orchestration” is the same and even more natural to foreign audience, which makes the expression easy to understand, attracting them to continue to watch the documentary. Besides, it’s also in line with the features of popularized expression in subtitle translation.

Frame perspective shift. Frame perspective includes the choice of the observer's point of view and the focus of attention, and the choice of the former is reflected in both the choosing of frames as well as the choosing of frame components (Wen & Xiao, 2019, p. 233), such as temporal relations, spatial relations, and person transitions.

Example 4:

不过令研究人员更为震惊的是，当这些桥的走向连接在一起的时候，他们发现了一个庞大的水陆转运系统。

However, what really astonishes researchers is that when you line up the directions indicated by each of these bridges, what you get is a massive land and water transportation network.

The original text is narrated in the third person, that is, from the point of view of “the researchers”, while the translator adopted the original perspective of “the researchers” in the first half of the sentence, and then directly used the second person in the second half of the sentence, changing the perspective to “the audience”. This may narrow the distance between the original text or the author of the original text and the English audience, making the documentary full of affinity and appeal.

Frame Vacancy

When the frame of the source language is vacant in the target language, frame transplantation is adopted. It refers to the direct transplantation of cultural frames of the source language into the target language culture, which is due to the fact that there is no common ground between the frame components of the source language and the target language. In terms of translation strategies, frame transplantation is mainly manifested as foreignization, including transliteration and literal translation (Wen & Xiao, 2019, p. 234).

Example 5:

当石湖港的桥吊卸下进口石材的时候，以“刺桐”命名的中国货轮正准备出发。

As imported stone material is unloaded from the ship by crane at Shihu Port, the Chinese freighter named Zayton is preparing to head out to sea.

Unlike the previous translation, “刺桐” here is translated as “Zayton”. A certain cultural image is added in the target language. In *The Travels of Marco Polo*, there were several references to a large Chinese trading port called Zayton, which was later verified and found to be a reference to Quanzhou by scholars around the world. It is said that when Quanzhou was built, the city was surrounded by coral trees, so it was called “Zayton City (coral tree city)”. Thus, “刺桐” here does not only refer to the conceptual component it originally represents, but also contains the image or cultural elements behind it. Given all this, using frame transplantation by transliteration makes for better cultural exchange and dissemination. Moreover, Quanzhou became an important port in China during the Song and Yuan Dynasties. The name “Zayton City” was brought to the West by the Arabs, from which Zayton was transcribed and gradually introduced into English. Consequently, compared with “Citong”, the use of the existing transliteration of “Zayton” may activate more audience's background knowledge, reducing some cultural barriers to some extent, as well as making the original language and the target language audience closer.

Example 6:

九日山祈风石刻

Jiuri Mountain Wind-Praying Inscriptions

Jiuri Mountain Wind-Praying Inscriptions recorded the activities of offering sacrifices to the sea god and wind-praying rituals held by the senior officials of the county and the Maritime Trade Office in the Song and

Yuan Dynasties, which reflects the belief in gods in ancient Quanzhou. To reflect the cultural activities in Quanzhou during the Song and Yuan Dynasties, the translator directly transplanted the whole frame of sacrificial activities in Quanzhou into English culture through literal translation. Due to the temporal and spatial limitation of subtitles, the translator only used one sentence “Cliff inscriptions recording the wind-praying rituals for maritime trade merchant ships held by Song officials” to explain, which may still cause difficulties for some audience to understand. However, because the documentary presented the scene of wind-praying, it not only lightens the burden for the audience, but also makes the audience understand the belief and culture of Quanzhou.

In addition, most of the heritage sites in the documentary are also translated using frame transplantation, such as “Tianhou Temple” (天后宫), “Zhenwu Temple” (真武庙), “Quanzhou Shuimen Alley” (泉州水门巷), “Qingjing Mosque” (清净寺), etc.

Findings and Conclusion

As an important carrier of cross-cultural diffusion, documentaries, with their huge influence, make a great contribution to displaying cultural charm and shaping national images. From the perspective of frame semantics, this paper studied the subtitle translation of Quanzhou’s World Heritage application documentary through the analysis of the translator’s frame operations from three aspects: frame correspondence, frame discrepancy, and frame vacancy, discussing how the translator improves the readability of the documentary subtitles through the frame operations according to the text genre, the needs of the audience, and the purpose of cultural dissemination in the translation process. Meanwhile, it also hopes to shed light on further translation studies on cultural documentaries.

The study yields the following findings: Firstly, in the translation process, the frame operations used by the translator include frame correspondence, intra-frame operations, frame replacement, frame perspective shift, and frame transplantation. When the source and target language frames are consistent, the translator generally adopts direct frame correspondence; when the frames are inconsistent, the translator uses intra-frame operations, frame replacement, and frame perspective shift; and when the source language frames are vacant in the target language, the translator commonly transplants the frame of the source language into the target language. Secondly, cultural documentaries are full of culture-loaded words, for which the translator usually uses frame transplantation. Due to the temporal and spatial limitations of subtitles and the multimodality of documentaries, frame transplantation mainly manifests as the translation strategies of literal translation and transliteration with little or without annotation. Thirdly, due to the instantaneous nature of subtitles, intra-frame operations, and frame replacement are applied in terms of cultural background of the target language audience. Fourthly, to enhance the audience’s reading experience, there may be some changes of narrative perspective in the English translation of cultural documentaries. Besides, there are some metaphors in the English translation of the documentary, for which the translator adjusts metaphors according to the habits of the target language. What’s more, it should be noted that for a text filled with cultural elements, the translator should carefully consult relevant information, putting accuracy of translation first. However, the number of cultural documentaries in this study is limited. Further research should be conducted based on more cases.

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