# Translation Strategies of Internet Buzzword in Film and Television Subtitles in English-Chinese

ZHANG Wendi

University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China

With the rapid development of the Internet, Internet buzzwords, with their unique forms of expression and wide audience base, have occupied an increasingly important place in film and television works. These buzzwords not only enrich the dialogue content of film and television works, but also enhance the audience's empathy and viewing experience. However, in the process of English-Chinese translation, how to accurately and appropriately translate these network buzzwords has become an urgent problem to be solved. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the English-Chinese translation strategies of Internet buzzwords in film and TV subtitles, including the translation techniques in order to provide useful references for film and TV subtitle translation.

*Keywords:* film and television subtitles, network buzzwords, terminology translation, translation strategies

## Introduction

Film and television subtitle translation plays a vital role as a crucial bridge in cross-cultural communication. It is a highly demanding task that requires translators to have not only a solid foundation in language skills, but also an in-depth understanding of the target culture. This dual requirement is essential, because language is deeply intertwined with culture, and effective translation must convey both the literal meaning and the cultural nuances of the source material. In the modern era, the widespread use of the Internet has significantly impacted the way we communicate and consume media. As a result, Internet buzzwords have become increasingly prevalent in film and television works. These buzzwords, which are often characterized by their strong timeliness, regional specificity, and cultural particularity, have brought new and complex challenges to subtitle translation. They may emerge rapidly in response to certain social events or trends and then fade away just as quickly, reflecting the fast-paced nature of our digital age. Moreover, their meanings can be deeply rooted in the cultural context of a particular region, making it difficult for people from other cultures to understand them directly.

For instance, a buzzword that is widely understood and used in one country may be completely unfamiliar to audiences in another. This cultural gap can create significant barriers to comprehension and enjoyment of the content. Therefore, how to convey the original meaning while ensuring that the target audience understands and accepts these buzzwords has become a critical issue in film and television subtitle translation. Translators need to find effective strategies to bridge this cultural gap and make the subtitles both faithful to the original and accessible to the target audience. To achieve this, translators must be adept at navigating the complexities of both

ZHANG Wendi, Master candidate, College of Foreign Languages, University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China.

the source and target cultures. They need to be aware of the latest trends and social phenomena that give rise to these buzzwords and understand how to convey their essence in a way that resonates with the target audience. This might involve using equivalent expressions that capture the same sentiment, providing brief explanations or context where necessary, or even creating new terms that convey the same cultural significance.

In essence, the task of translating Internet buzzwords in film and television subtitles is not just about converting words from one language to another. It is about facilitating a deeper level of cultural understanding and connection. By doing so, translators can help ensure that the rich and dynamic nature of modern media content is preserved and enjoyed by audiences around the world.

## Characteristics of Internet Buzzwords

### Brevity and Conciseness

Internet buzzwords have emerged as a unique linguistic phenomenon in the digital age, rapidly spreading and playing a significant role in online communication. These words and phrases are characterized by their remarkable brevity and conciseness, which allows them to convey profound and powerful meanings with just a few words. This concise and efficient mode of expression is perfectly adapted to the fast-paced lifestyle of modern people, who often seek immediate and efficient communication. It also reflects the psychological need for quick and clear information exchange in the digital environment.

For example, the classic expression "Seize the Day" has been given a modern twist in the online context. Originally from Shakespeare's works, it now carries the meaning of "cherish the present and live your true self". This buzzword encourages people to make the most of their time, to pursue their dreams and happiness without delay. Its positive connotation has made it a popular motto among many young people on the Internet.

### Strong Timeliness

Another major feature of Internet buzzwords is their distinct timeliness and close association with social hotspots. They are often closely associated with current social hot events, hot topics, or cultural phenomena, quickly becoming popular with the rise of the hot topic and gradually fading from people's sight as the hot topic fades away. This time-sensitive feature makes Internet buzzwords a kind of "living fossil" that reflects social changes and records the features of The Times (Wang, 2012).

For instance, the word "GOAT" (Greatest of All Time) was once all the rage on social media. It is used to describe someone's status as the greatest of all time in a particular field, such as a legendary athlete in sports or a legendary singer in music. The popularity of this term reflects both the admiration and pursuit of excellence and the speed and breadth of information dissemination in the era of social media. However, as time has passed and social hotspots have changed, the popularity of the word "GOAT" has waned, but the spirit it carries remains forever engraved in people's hearts.

### Rich Cultural Connotations

Internet buzzwords are far more than simple combinations of words or mere language games. They often carry rich cultural connotations and social implications, serving as a true portrayal of social reality and a direct reflection of people's inner emotions and psychological needs. These buzzwords can encapsulate the spirit of a particular time, the values of a community, or the humor and creativity of a culture. The word "Hodor" (*Game of Thrones*) is a typical example. Although it is just the name of a character in the show, it has been given the humorous meaning of "only saying this one word" by netizens because of its unique pronunciation and character

image. The popularity of this buzzword reflects both the love and pursuit of the hit series *Game of Thrones* by netizens and the psychological need for relaxation and entertainment in fast-paced life. Another example is the term "Binge-watch", which vividly describes the behavior of modern people watching multiple episodes at once. The popularity of this buzzword reflects both the convenience of modern technology and the abundance of online resources, as well as people's love and pursuit of entertainment. It reveals the psychological need of people to relax and relieve stress through leisure activities such as watching TV series in the midst of busy work and study.

## Characteristics of Film and Television Subtitle Translation

**Time and Space Limitations**

Translation of film and television subtitles is like sailing in a narrow river channel, facing the dual strict constraints of time and space. In terms of the time dimension, captions are like precisely set clocks that must appear and disappear in sync with the lines of the characters in the picture without a second's error (Wang, 2013). The viewer's gaze lingers on the caption for an extremely short, fleeting moment, which is like asking a sprinter to sprint in a very short race; the translation must be concise and clear, like a laser that precisely penetrates the viewer's comprehension barrier, allowing them to quickly grasp the key information in a short time. Take the classic action film series *The Fast and the Furious* as an example. Intense car chase scenes are interwoven with rapid character dialogues, and characters' lines are frequent and speak at a speed like a storm. At this point, subtitle translation needs to be highly condensed, like "Get out of that car quickly!" Translate "Dodge that car quickly!" Keep the key action instructions while using concise expressions to fit the fast pace, otherwise viewers might miss the thrilling visuals and tense plot due to being busy reading the lengthy subtitles. From a spatial perspective, the screen is like a limited canvas, and the area available for subtitles is like a small corner of the canvas, unable to hold long discourse. The translator has to act as a "micro-sculpting master" of the language, and within the limited space, carve out the meaning of the original text with the most concise sentences.

**Orality and Comprehensibility**

The audience of film and television captions is like a vast ocean, covering people of all ages and different cultural levels. In order for every drop of water in this ocean to understand the meaning of the film, subtitle translation should conform to the daily oral expression habits of the general public and use plain and understandable language. This requires the translation to avoid obscure words, abandon complex and awkward grammatical structures, and strive to be close to everyday communication on the streets and lanes (Wang, 2013). Take *Friends* as an example, in which characters engage in countless witty conversations about everyday trivialities. When a character says, "Don't mess around. Let's figure out a way to solve the problem quickly", the subtitle reads, "Don't mess around. Let's figure out a way to solve the problem quickly". It's like a face-to-face conversation between friends, making the audience feel as if they were in the characters, enhancing the closeness and appeal of the show. As in *The Big Bang Theory*, Sheldon and other scientists discuss professional scientific topics, but the subtitle translation is also designed to be easy to understand. When Sheldon mentions complex scientific theories, such as "This experiment involves the principle of quantum entanglement", "This experiment involves the principle of quantum entanglement, which is a rather complex concept in quantum physics, but simply put…", the supplementary explanations in the second half of the sentence allow the general audience to roughly understand, avoiding comprehension barriers caused by technical terms and making the show more accessible to a wider audience.

**Close Integration With Images and Plots**

Excellent film and television subtitle translation is by no means an isolated island of language, but an organic whole that is closely interwoven with the content of the picture and the development of the plot, like the harmonious resonance of the instruments in a symphony. Subtitles should not only translate the characters' lines precisely, but also echo the scene perfectly in terms of language style, emotional color, etc., to become a bright lighthouse guiding the audience to understand the plot. In the classic suspense film *Inception*, the nested dream world and the thrilling plot progression, combined with the dim and mysterious visuals, the tense and hurried music, and the cautious and alert expressions of the characters, also create a tense and mysterious atmosphere through subtitle translation. When the protagonist Cobb warily says in his dream, "It's not that simple, we seem to have fallen into a carefully designed trap", "Things are not that simple. It seems we've fallen into a carefully designed trap". Expressions like "not that simple" and "carefully designed trap" fit the scene and make the viewer feel as if they were right there, following the protagonist to uncover the truth. In another suspense masterpiece, *The Invisible Guest*, the style of subtitle translation was adjusted as the plot took a turn. When the key clue emerges, the character excitedly says, "There seems to be some secret hidden behind. We must find it out". "Secret hidden behind" reinforces the mystery and helps viewers immerse themselves in the plot, experiencing the film's twists and turns.

## Strategies for Translating Internet Buzzwords in Film and Television Subtitles

**Literal Translation**

Literal translation can be used when the Internet buzzwords in the source language have similar concepts in the target language culture and literal translation does not cause comprehension barriers. This method preserves the form and cultural characteristics of the original buzzword and promotes cultural exchange. Take *The Big Bang Theory* as an example. When characters in the show mention "geek", it is directly translated as "jike", which in the Chinese context refers to people who have a passionate interest in computer and network technology and spend a lot of time delving into it, which is consistent with the meaning of "geek", and this translation has been widely accepted (Feng, 2024). For example, in the movie *Transformers*, "Autobot" is translated as "qicheren", which simply and intuitively conveys the characteristics of this group. Viewers can quickly understand what it refers to in the film, retain the characteristics of the original word, and also allow Chinese audiences to appreciate the sci-fi setting of the film.

**Paraphrasing**

For Internet buzzwords that cannot be directly matched in the target language and whose true meaning is difficult to convey through literal translation, paraphrasing is a good choice. Paraphrasing should be based on the meaning of the buzzword and the context, using the appropriate expressions in the target language to convey the meaning. In the movie *The Pursuit of Happyness*, the protagonist Chris, despite facing many difficulties, still strives for happiness. There's a line: "I'm the type of person, if you ask me a question, and I don't know the answer. I'm gonna tell you that I don't know. But I bet you what: 'I know how to find the answer, and I'll find the answer'. If translated rigidly, the Chinese expression would be very awkward. I'm the kind of person who, if I don't know the answer to a question you ask, will tell you directly that I don't know. But I assure you: I know how to find the answer, and I will definitely find it". It fits the Chinese expression and accurately conveys the protagonist's firm and positive attitude.

**Transliteration**

Some Internet buzzwords have unique Chinese cultural connotations that are difficult to translate accurately into English. In such cases, transliteration can be used, where the Chinese pronunciation is represented by English letters and explained in appropriate positions. In the movie *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, "jianghu" is transliterated as "jianghu". It first appeared as "a world of outlaws and adventurers, a place full of intrigues and chivalrous deeds in Chinese traditional culture, "jianghu" gradually became known to English-speaking audiences as the film spread internationally, used to refer to the unique world of chivalry and strife in Chinese martial arts culture.

**Corresponding Translation**

When a source Internet buzzword is semantically and functionally similar to an existing idiom, colloquial or fixed expression in the target language, a set translation can be used to make the translation more in line with the language habits and cultural perceptions of the target language audience. In the film *Forrest Gump*, "Life was like a box of chocolates, you never know what you're gonna get" is translated into Chinese as "Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna get", which is semantically similar to the Chinese phrase "the world is unpredictable", and viewers can easily understand the sentiment of uncertainty in life. For example, in *Broken Sisters*, Caroline says "It's not rocket science" which is translated as "It's not something mysterious", corresponding to a similar expression in Chinese, allowing the audience to naturally understand its meaning and effectively achieve semantic transmission.

**Transcreation**

When faced with new concepts, highly creative Internet buzzwords that have no corresponding expression in the target language, translators can use their creativity, combining English word formation, cultural background, etc., to create new words or new expressions that conform to the expression habits of the target language. In the movie *The Social Network*, the phenomenon of people's excessive reliance on online socializing can be translated as "net-addicted socializer", combining "net" (Internet), "addicted" (addicted), and "socializer" (socializer) to vividly express the characteristics of such people. Another example is the new concept of self-awareness in the American TV series *Westworld*, which is translated as "self-aware android". The combination of "self-aware" (self-aware) and "android" (robot) precisely conveys the unique setting in the show, which is in line with English word formation rules. It also helps the audience understand its meaning.

## Conclusion

The English-Chinese translation of Internet buzzwords in film and television subtitles is a complex and challenging task. It requires translators not only to have a solid language foundation, and be familiar with the language characteristics and cultural connotations of the source language and the target language, but also to fully consider the special requirements of film and television subtitle translation and the acceptance level of the target language audience (Yang, 2016). By flexibly applying various translation strategies such as literal translation, free translation, transliteration, paraphrasing, and creative translation, and in combination with specific film and television plots and contexts, translators can accurately convey the meaning of Internet buzzwords to the greatest extent, retain their unique charm, and promote cross-cultural film and television exchanges. In the context of globalization, for film and television, as an important carrier of cultural dissemination, the improvement of subtitle translation quality is of great significance for promoting understanding and integration among different

cultures. In the future, with the advancement of technology and the increasing interconnectedness of global cultures, the role of film and television as a medium for cultural exchange will become even more significant. The improvement of subtitle translation quality will not only enhance the viewing experience for international audiences, but also foster greater mutual understanding and appreciation among diverse cultures. Therefore, the study of translation strategies for Internet buzzwords in film and television subtitles will continue to deepen, providing valuable insights and practical guidance for translators and contributing to the broader goals of cultural exchange and global communication.

## References

Feng, C. (2024). Humorous translation of English TV program subtitles under the Skopos Theory—Taking *The Big Bang Theory* as an example. *Overseas English, 25*(23), 17-20.

Wang, J. (2012). English translation of the latest Internet buzzwords from the perspective of functional equivalence. *Journal of Hebei United University (Social Science Edition), 12*(2), 137-139.

Wang, Y. (2013). Basic strategies for English-Chinese subtitling of film and television works under the Skopos Theory. *Journal of Hebei United University (Social Science Edition), 13*(5), 124-126.

Yang, Y. (2016). Application of Internet buzzwords in English-Chinese subtitling of films and television. *English Square, 6*(6), 37-39.

Zhou, M. (2022). Reflections on the English translation of Chinese Internet buzzwords from a cross-cultural perspective. *Overseas English, 23*(18), 56-57+60.