

Research on English-Chinese Subtitle Translation Strategies Based on the Perspective of Translation Communication Studies—Take the Subtitle Translation of *Soul* as an Example

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Abstract

From the perspective of translation communication, this paper focuses on translation strategies adopted in English-Chinese subtitle translation to achieve communication effect, according to the “5Ws” of communication mode, and to provide a useful reference and a new research perspective for subtitle translation research.

Keywords: subtitle translation, translation communication, “5Ws” of Communication, *Soul*

1. Introduction

Soul is an animated film jointly produced by Walt Disney Company and Pixar Animation Studio. It tells the story of Joey, the hero, and Soul No.22 who have spent a wonderful journey together, and finally found the value and significance of their life. The film is vivid and the subtitle translation of that breaks structures and constraints of the source language, conforming to the expression habits of the target audience, making the audience feel immersive when watching the film. And thus, this paper will explore translation methods adopted in the English-Chinese subtitle translation of this film by case analysis, from the perspective of translation communication, so as to offer references for improving the quality of subtitle translation.

2. Theoretical Basis

2.1 Translation Communication Studies

Translation communication studies introduce communication theories into the field of translation studies, such as communication subject, communication information, communication audience, media, and communication effect, which provides a new frame for translation studies and a new understanding of the essential attributes of translation activities (Xie & Liao, 2016). Since the 1930s, communication has been a product of interdisciplinary research and is related to other social and scientific disciplines. After the 1960s, some scholars realize that communication theory can be used in the formulation of the system of translation theory and put forward their views about it.

Eugene Nida, a famous American translator, broke the limitation of structuralist linguistics and firstly proposed that readers' psychological reactions should be used as a basis for judging the quality of the translation, and put forward Communication Theory (Nida, 2001). German translation theorist Wolfram Wells pointed out in his book, *Translatology: Problems and Methods*, that the previous research ignored the characteristics of translation, especially ignored that it is related to the nature of information transmission. He emphasized the communication nature of translation and believed that cross-language translation was a special kind of communication, involving two languages (Wiss, 2001).

Lv Jun, a Chinese researcher of translation communication theory, pointed out that translation studies were a special field of communication studies and put forward seven elements of the communication process --- who spreads, what be spread, through what channels, to whom, what is the purpose of communication, on what occasions and how effective it is (Lu, 1991). These seven elements are interrelated and restricted to constitute the whole translation process, which lays a foundation for the study of translation communication. Liao Qiyi analyzed how information theory, an important component of communication theory, impacts translation studies (Liao, 1997). Ma Zhengqi supported that translation practice is a cross-cultural communication activity and has features of culture and communication (Ma, 2001).

2.2 “5Ws” of Communication

The “5Ws” of Communication is one of the important theories of communication studies. Harold Lasswell, an American politician, put forward the “5Ws” of Communication in his book *The Structure and Function of Social Communication*, that is, who, which channel, to whom, and with what effect. These five aspects correspond to five elements in the communication process, such as communicator, communication content, communication medium, communication audience and communication effect, which constitute five basic contents of communication research --- control analysis, content analysis, media analysis, audience analysis and effect analysis. This paper will explore strategies and methods of subtitle translation in *Soul* from these five aspects.

3. Case Analysis

3.1 Control Analysis

The communicator is the beginning of the communication process and is responsible for communication information collecting, sorting out, and processing, etc. Kurt Lewin, as one of the founders of communication, first put forward in his book, *Channels of Group Life* published in 1947, that the communicator is the gatekeeper of the communication process influenced by many factors such as politics, economy, culture and social system. The content of the communication is controlled by the communicator, while, in turn, communicator is controlled by the social system where it is, so the study of communicators is called control analysis. In translation work, the translator is an audience in the source text but a communicator in the target text, which is influenced by many factors in the translation process. Therefore, the translator should exert his subjectivity in the translation process and overcome various cultural or linguistic difficulties and accurately convey the content expressed in the source text.

3.1.1 Paraphrase

First of all, the translator adopts paraphrasing to translate the connotation expressed in the source language of the title and the name of the place in the film to the audience.

Example 1: Source Text: *Soul* Targeted text: 心灵奇旅

Soul, the name of the film, is only one word in the source text, which means soul and spirit. According to the film and the hero's experience, the translator translates that into 心灵奇旅 in Chinese, which not only points out the theme but also creates suspense. Moreover, it conforms to the expression habit of the Chinese, being fond of specific information. For example, “Excuse me” is translated differently in different situations according to the context. In the film, when the hero Joey wants to escape from the Great Beyond, he says “I’m sorry. I’m sorry. Excuse me!” to the people who hinder him, and the sentence is translated as “让让! 让让! 让我过去!” to express the hero's purpose directly. The translator concretely translates Joey's purpose so that Chinese audiences can better understand Joey's anxiety with the dual effects of animation and subtitles.

Example 2: ST: The Great Beyond

TT: 生之彼岸

Example 3: ST: The Great Before

TT: 生之来处

Example 2 is that Joey finds himself in a strange and weird place. And after asking others, he knew that all the people who came here were about to die. “The Great Beyond” in the dictionary means the place where people think their souls will go after death. Therefore, the translator uses paraphrase and translates it as “生之彼岸”, according to the situation. Moreover, Buddhism believes that the Great Beyond refers to the place where people get rid of worldly troubles and achieve positive results. This translation can not only convey the content of the source text but also narrow the distance between the characters and the audience. Similarly, “The Great Before” is translated into “生之来处”. According to the situation, these two places are two opposite concepts, and then the translator processes them in a Chinese four-character structure, being balanced in forms, which not only makes the audience understand the function of the place at a glance but also enhances the readability of the translation. For example, there is no definite description of the name “忘我之境” in the source language, but it is

expressed by pronouns, such as “the zone”. The translator summarizes it through the functional description of the place in the movie and translates it into “忘我之境”.

In addition, the paraphrase is also used in the following text:

Example 4: ST: Welcome to the M.S. 70 family, Joey. Permanently.

TT: 欢迎你加入第七十中学这个大家庭，恭喜你！

In Example 4 above, we can find that “permanently” means “for a long time without essential change” in Chinese. And the sentence should have been translated as “永久地欢迎你加入第七十中学这个大家庭!”, but according to the context, Joey’s job, as a teacher, enjoys five social insurances and a housing fund. Therefore, the translator exerts his subjectivity to translate “permanently” into “congratulations” in Chinese, which not only avoids the translationese but also expresses Joey’s fearless pursuit of dreams and directly shows the Chinese audience the connotation of the sentence, which helps the audience overcome language barriers and integrate into the movie.

3.1.2 Counter-Translation

In order to express the content of the target text more accurately and completely, we usually choose linear translation. Whereas in translation practice, linear translation may cause translationese. In order to make the audience understand the dialogue of characters in a limited time, when necessary, translators should choose counter-translation, which can optimize the viewing experience.

Example 5: ST: I don’t think you’re supported to go that way.

TT: 这是单行道，亲爱的，不能走那边。

Example 6: ST: I’m gonna make you wish you never died.

TT: 信不信我把你气得活过来。

Example 6 is that when Joey escapes from the Great Beyond, he hears it from the passengers. The sentence should be understood as “I don’t think you should go that way” in Chinese, but the translator chooses counter-translation to translate it into “这是单行道，亲爱的，不能走那边”，which expresses the speaker’s exhortation purpose clearly and adds “亲爱的，不能走那边” to strengthen the logic. In addition, Example 6 in Chinese means I will make you hope that you will never die. That is what Soul No.22 said to Joey when he learned that Joey was going to be his soul mentor. The translator adopts counter-translation to translate it into “信不信我把你气得活过来”，which can depict Soul No.22’s mischievous character more vividly.

3.2 Content Analysis

Communication content is the core of the communication process, including specific content and communication mode. The research on communication content is called content analysis. In the process of translation, the communication content is the source text, so the translator must accurately convey the information of the source text. The communication content in this paper is the film while subtitle translation is a major part of the communication content. Different from other types of translation, subtitle translation has no reading value in itself and it has to meet the audience’s need for appreciation (Ma, 2012). This shows that when translating subtitles, translators should not only ensure the completeness and fluency of the target text but also keep in mind that the target text should have ornamental value. Different from the source audience, the target audience’s understanding of the film mainly depends on subtitle translation, and thus authentic translation can optimize the audience’s viewing experience.

3.2.1 Translate and Edit

In this text, according to the scene and screen animation, the translator uses the “translate and edit” method to translate the target text, for example:

Example 7: ST: Except you. I don’t like you.

TT: 除了你，你去死吧。

Example 7 is what Mother Teresa’s soul says to Soul No.22 when she teaches him in the movie. The sentence in the original text means I dislike you, but the translator translates it in Chinese as “你去死吧” meaning “Go to hell”. The emotion of the sentence is stronger than Mother Teresa’s aversion to No.22 in the original text. Moreover, this is in great contrast with Mother Teresa who won the Nobel Peace Prize and is called a saint by the world and further explains why No.22 has not returned to Earth after thousands of years and paves the way for No.22 finally finding his passion for life and discarding his world-weary feelings.

Example 8: ST: What? That ain’t cool, Dez.

TT: 什么？我先来的，老戴。

Example 9: ST: But seriously, stay away from the processed foods.

TT: 说真的，你薯片吃的也忒多了。

Examples 8 and 9 also adopt the translate and edit method as well as Example 7. “What? That ain’t cool, Dez” is translated as “什么？我先来的，老戴”. We can see that the original text and the translation are different in literal. This sentence appears when Joey cutting in line in the barber shop and other customers complain to Dez, the keeper of the barber shop, so it is translated into “我先来的” meaning “I came first” according to the context, which can more specifically express the speaker’s purpose. Example 9 “Stay away from those processed foods” is translated into “你薯片吃的也忒多了” in Chinese, which means “You eat too many potato chips”. When the sentence appears, the screen shows that the character is holding potato chips. Therefore, according to the situation, it is very desirable to translate “processed foods” into “potato chips” and it also conveys the speaker’s purpose concretely, which conforms to the expression habits of the Chinese audiences.

3.2.2 Addition

English expression is abstract and Chinese expression is concrete, so according to the logic and writing habits of the source language, abstract expression can be concretized by addition.

Example 10: ST: I hear a heart monitor.

TT: 我听到了心电仪的声音。

Example 11: ST: I can smell hand sanitizer.

TT: 我还能闻到消毒液的味道。

Example 12: ST: We mystics meet in this glorious landscape every Tuesday.

TT: 我们几个神秘主义者每周二都会来这里打捞迷失的灵魂。

Objects are added respectively in Examples 10 and 11, while Example 12 adds the purpose of the mystics who weekly come to the place according to the situation, which can not only concretize the translation expression but also supplement the syntactically omitted elements of the original text.

In a word, the translation of film and television subtitles should not only consider whether the source text and the target text correspond in grammar or syntax, but also take into account other factors such as scenes and the character of the hero to make the target language close to the role and make the audience integrate into the scene, improving the enjoyment of the film.

3.3 Media Analysis

Media is the basic component of the communication process and the means to realize communication behavior. Wilbur Schramm, a communication scholar, mentions in his classic book, *A Look at Human Communication*, that media is a tool to expand and extend the transmission of information in the process of communication. The study of media is media analysis. In translation practice, different translation activities have different media. The media of this translation study is a kind of mass media --- movies, so translators should consider the characteristics of movie subtitles when translating. Movie subtitles are mainly influenced by time and space. Unlike readers, they can ponder obscure words repeatedly, but film and television viewers need to accurately understand the information conveyed by subtitles in a short time. Therefore, subtitles should be concise, or they will impede the performance of the movie. Therefore, subtitles should choose common, small and short words and sentence patterns should be concise and minimize the use of long sentences, insertion components, participle structures and clauses (Li, 2001).

3.3.1 Division and Combination

English emphasizes hypotaxis and Chinese emphasizes parataxis. Division and combination can help us break the limitation of source syntactic structure and translate sentences that conform to the writing habits of the target language, ensuring the integrity of the original meaning.

Example 13: ST: But don’t try, forgetting the trauma of children is one of the great gifts of the universe.

TT: 没关系，出生的过程太痛苦了，所以健忘也是一种幸福。

The translator turns “trauma” in Example 13 into an adjective, and then divides the sentence according to sense-group and translates them into the structure of “facts plus comments” in Chinese as “没关系，出生的过程太痛苦了，所以健忘也是一种幸福”. That not only vividly expresses the original idea but also conforms to the target language habit. More importantly, the sentence is short and life-oriented, which meets the requirements of subtitle translation.

Example 14: ST: Some people just can’t let go of their anxieties and obsessions, leaving them lost and disconnected from life. And this is the result.

TT: 有些人放不下心中的执念, 整天焦虑不安, 心灵与当下的生活失去了联系, 就会失魂落魄。

In Example 14, according to context, the translator transforms “anxieties and obsessions” into verbs and adds a noun “执念”, meaning obsessiveness, in Chinese, and then splits the sentence and translates them into “有些人放不下心中的执念, 整天焦虑不安, 心灵与当下的生活失去了联系, 就会失魂落魄”. Then he combines “leaving them lost and disconnected from life” into one sentence and adds the noun “心灵” in Chinese. After that he concretizes “And this is the result” into the state held by these souls trapped by obsession, and translates it into “心灵与当下的生活失去了联系, 就会失魂落魄”.

Example 15: ST: I’m an agreeable sceptic who’s cautious yet flamboyant.

TT: 我很内向, 有好奇心, 胆小喜欢夸张。

Example 15 is a typical attributive clause, while the attributive is not long. Generally, it will be translated as “我是大家公认的谨慎且自大的怀疑论者” in Chinese word by word. However, the translator translates it into three short sentences, “我很内向, 有好奇心, 胆小喜欢夸张”. In this way, the translation not only conforms to the character’s design but also shortens the time for the audience to understand subtitles, which meets the requirements of subtitle translation.

Example 16: TT: Band is a stupid waste of time.

ST: 乐队太傻了, 根本浪费时间。

In this sentence, the translator uses “waste” as a verb, and then splits the sentence according to the meaning of the sentence and translates it as “乐队太傻了, 根本浪费时间”, which avoids the translationese of literal translation and make the characters more vivid.

In addition, the translator also uses omission, such as “You did great. We love You. I’m so proud of you, Joey”, because of the same type of emotional expression of “We love You” and “proud of You” in Chinese, “We love You” is omitted and the sentence is translated into “你非常出色, 我们真为你骄傲”, making the subtitles concise and clear. Because movie subtitles are daily conversations, with short vocabulary, concise sentence patterns and simple components, and the omission method is not used frequently, so the author will not elaborate it here.

3.4 Audience Analysis

Audience refers to the receiver of information and the study of the audience is audience analysis. In the translation field, the recipient is the translator and the reader of the translated text, so the translator should not only understand the connotation of the source text but also comprehend the cultural background, value orientation and reading habits of the audience to meet the needs of the audience.

3.4.1 Popularization

“Popularization” is actually to serve and be responsible for the audience, which requires translators to put themselves in the audience’s shoes when they are working and to think about which translation method being used can make the audience understand films easier and to consider what expression cannot lead to cause misunderstanding (Ma, 1997). This requires translators not only to be close to the audience but also to be flexible and natural when translating.

Example 17: ST: I mean, what if you pick up the wrong thing?

TT: 而且万一你不是那块料呢?

For example, Example 17 is what No.22 says to customers when they are chatting with them in the barbershop. It should have been translated into “万一你选错了呢” through literal translation, but the translator translates it into “万一你不是那块料呢” by popularization. “那块料” is a very authentic spoken in China. And the translation follows No.22’s uninhibited nature. Similar translations can be seen from boxing champion Muhammad Ali who says to No.22 that “You are the greatest pain in the butt” which is translated as “你是世界上第一欠揍的家伙”, and from what decapitated Queen Mary says to No.22 that “Nobody can help you! Nobody!”, which is translated as “你就该上断头台, 没人救你”, and what Mother Teresa says to No.22 as mentioned above. Although these translations are somewhat different from the meaning of the source language, the speaker’s feelings are expressed more strongly in Chinese, which gives a lot of jokes to the film. That is one of the reasons why the film is popular with the public.

What’s more, compared with the target language and the source language in example 18, we find that the Chinese version is more emotional with a little aggressive, which can express Joey’s determination and anxiety to strive for the opportunity to perform himself. They are all short sentences that are very consistent with daily language.

Example 18: ST: And if you don't go with me, you'll be making the biggest mistake of your career.

TT: 要是你这次不用我, 就是你眼光不行, 根本不会挑人。

In a word, when translating subtitles, translators should not only pay attention to the language itself, but break limitations caused by vocabulary or syntax and take the role design into account and the target language should meet the situational requirements. Besides, the cultural background of the audience should also be taken into account to make translation popular.

3.5 Effect Analysis

The communication effect means that transmitted information, through the media, causes changes in the audience's behavior or thought. The study of communication effect is effect analysis. In translation practice, the translator should adopt proper translation methods to convey the source language information completely and arouse the audience's resonance to achieve a communication effect.

3.5.1 Structure-borrowing

The structure-borrowing method is mainly used in the translation of Chinese poetry and idioms to make the target language correspond to the source language.

Example 19: ST: And another thing, they say you're born to do something, but how do you figure out what that thing is?

TT: 而且还有, 大家都说天生我材必有用, 可你怎么知道自己生来有什么用?

In Example 19 above, the translator uses “天生我材必有用” to translate “you're born to do something” by structure-borrowing. The poetry comes from Li Bai's classic masterpiece, *Bringing in the Wine*, one of the most well-known poems in China. That translation not only shortens the time for the audience to understand but also narrows the distance between exotic works and the audience. It also makes the audience fall into thinking about the meaning of life with the characters when watching this clip and paves the way for summing up the meaning of life at end of the movie that we should relish every second of our life.

In a word, control analysis, content analysis, media analysis, audience analysis and effect analysis are all aimed at delivering the source text to the target audience completely and accurately as well as arousing the audience's resonance. Therefore, these five parts should serve the translation practice together and optimize the dissemination effect of the translated text.

4. Conclusion

Subtitle translation is an important field of cultural communication. From the perspective of translation communication, with the theoretical framework of the “5Ws” of Communication, subtitle translation should ensure the following four points. That is “Dissemination of information should be accurate; Dissemination of content ought to base on the scene; Pay attention to space and time of the media; Keep audience effect in mind”. Only by doing so can we continuously promote the development of subtitle translation and strengthen the connection between translation and other disciplines.

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