An Analysis on the Strategies for Film Subtitle Translation from the Perspective of Skopos Theory—A Case Study of Lost in Russia

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How to cite this paper: Xiaojie Li, Cuiling Gao. (2023) An Analysis on the Strategies for Film Subtitle Translation from the Perspective of Skopos Theory—A Case Study of Lost in Russia. Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Science, 7(6), 1221-1224. DOI: 10.26855/jhass.2023.06.034

Received: May 25, 2023
Accepted: June 22, 2023
Published: July 20, 2023

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Abstract

The main purpose of skopos theory is to convey the relevant information of films to the audience in a specific cultural background under the restriction of time and space so that they can have a better understanding and appreciation of films. This paper adopts the method of case study to analyze the subtitle translation of the popular film Lost in Russia. From the perspective of skopos theory, this paper analyzes and studies Chinese-English subtitle translation with Chinese cultural connotation in the film, which contains Chinese poetry, idioms and other elements. Moreover, the paper discusses the translation strategies that translators should adopt in view of these difficulties, so as to enable readers to reach the purpose of barrier-free movie viewing and cross-cultural communication, and to establish concise and coherent translations from the perspective of audiences. To conclude, the paper, from the perspective of skopos theory, explains the role of excellent subtitle translation in promoting cultural communication.

Keywords

Skopos Theory, Film Subtitle Translation, Strategies, Lost in Russia

1. Introduction

1.1 An Overview of Skopos Theory

Skopos theory of translation function, also known as functional translation theory, is the foundational theory and mainstream thought of functionalism in Germany. It emerged around 1970s. Hanying Zhou (2022) thinks that with the change and development of the times, this skopos theory of translation function is also changing and developing. The representatives of functionalist skopos theory mainly include Katharina Reiss, Hans Vermeer, Christine Nord and Justa Holtz Manttari.

1.2 An Introduction to Film Subtitle Translation

Subtitles are defined as providing synchronized subtitles for movie and TV conversations. Lehoux Jobin Etienne (2020) thinks from the perspective of linguistics, film subtitle translation can be divided into two types, namely inter-lingual subtitle translation and inter-lingual subtitle translation. In addition, one phenomenon that is becoming more and more common in film subtitle translation is the translation of popular words and cultural elements of some different countries.
2. Three Principles of Skopos Theory

The theoretical basis of teleology is behavior theory, which was put forward by Hans Vermeer, a famous German translation theorist. Vermeer's teleology contains three principles; the principle of purpose, the principle of coherence and the principle of loyalty.

2.1 Skopos Rule

Vermeer believes that the first principle followed by translators is the principle of purpose. So the principle of purpose can be expressed as translating in a way that makes the text perform the intended function in the context in which it is being used, and in a way that is consistent with the way the text users wants the text to perform the intended function.

2.2 Coherence Rule

Ran Chen (2023) points out coherence rule means that the translation must meet the standards of inter-textual coherence. The rules of the target language are more requirements on the translators, that is, they must consider the audience of the translation in the process of translation, and try to translate in the way of the cultural customs of the audience.

2.3 Loyalty Principle

The loyalty principle was proposed by Nord. According to Nord, a translator has a moral obligation to recipients of the translation, which is reflected in the moral obligation to explain hem both what they do and why they do it. In addition, in the process of translation, translators should fully respect the author of the original text, which we can get it in the translation.

3. Film Subtitle Translation under the Guidance of Skopos Theory

3.1 Features of Film Subtitle Translation

Qian Shaochang believes that film and television translation is a part of literary translation. Translators use the most concise words to express the most abundant meaning whose purpose is to achieve effects. Zhang Yunhe (2022) believed that film subtitle translation has three characteristics, which are comprehensive, immediacy and popularity.

3.2 Methods of Film Subtitle Translation

Literal translation, free translation, amplification and omission are common methods of subtitle translation. The common method of subtitle translation is to retain the content and form of the original text. Free translation can be understood as a translation method opposite to literal translation. The word amplification, like the literal meaning, is used to express the original content better by using the word increment. Omission is the compression of the original text in order to make the translation as concise as possible.

3.3 The Application and Guiding Significance of Skopos Theory in Film Subtitle Translation

In applying skopos theory to film subtitle translation, at first, translators should judge the purpose of the film translation. Secondly, they should determine the strategies and methods for film subtitle translation. Skopos theory holds that the principle of teleology is the most important principle in all translation activities. Translation should function in the context and culture of the target language as expected by recipients. So translators should take the skopos principle, the coherence principle and the loyalty principle as the guidance, use the most simple and coherent translation to transfer, then the audience can enjoy foreign films without any obstacles, and achieve the purpose of cross-cultural communication.

4. The Strategies for Film Subtitle Translation from the Perspective of Skopos Theory Based on Lost in Russia

4.1 A Brief Introduction to Lost in Russia

The film is mainly about a small boss, Xu Yiwan. He entangled in business disputes, but accidentally with his
mother on the train to Russia. Because his mother's dream was to perform at the Red Star Theatre in Moscow and
in order to fulfill it, Xu decided to go to Moscow with his mother. Finally, Xu Yiwan and his mother successfully
arrived in Moscow, and Xu knew his mother's painstaking. He called his ex-wife and told her the truth, and his
honest is in exchange for his ex-wife's understanding. His mother also understood what the true love is.

4.2 The Application of Domestication Strategy to Subtitle Translation of Lost in Russia

Domestication means to localize the source language, take the target language or the target language readers as
the destination, and convey the content of the original text in the way the target language reader is used to.

1) Free Translation

It is a translation method that retains the content of the original text, but does not need to completely retain the
form of the original text. Then, let's take a look at some of the examples in some of the subtitles for this movie.

Eg. 萧：真是的，天天喝。 萧母（卢小花）：就一瓶。

This conversation is between Xu Yiwan and his mother (Lu Xiaohua), Lu Xiaohua stipulated her son how much
water to drink every day so that her son could urinate in the specified time. But what she didn't know was that her
love for her son was more of a control over him, so Xu Yiwan impatiently said this sentence. And that was trans-
lated “Drink like a fish! Just one bottle”.

The subtitle translator is very intelligent. There is no simple literal translation, but a common free translation
method. "Drink water every day, just like a fish", the translation added this meaning, and meanwhile the whole line
is more lively and concise.

2) Omission

Omission is to compress the content of the original text to a certain extent, which can be understood as only
keeping the main part of the sentence, in order to make the translation more concise.

Eg. 对，就是这么残酷，就这么无情，就这么无理取闹。

Ruthless, soulless, senseless.

For Chinese readers, they are also easily associated with Qiong Yao, a Chinese female writer, who is good at
presenting romantic love stories. In many TV series written by Qiong Yao, this sentence is a classic statement, "你
残酷，你无情，你无理取闹", especially in the Romance in the Rain. Since then, whenever people mention such
lines, they will think of Qiong Yao's works. But if you choose a literal translation, you must first explain who is
Qiong Yao and it will appear that the words are long and unrefined. Therefore, the translator of this sentence used
free translation and omission in a reprobative tone to make the subtitle translation more concise without affecting
understanding. And the audience can invest more energy in the movie. Moreover, it is a rhyming translation, ruth-
lessness, soulless, and senseless all ended with -less, accentuating a coherent grandeur, and having the same syllable,
which was catchy to read. And about this sentence “不许提问、不许说话、你闭嘴”, the translation of this
sentence is a common rhyming translation. At the same time, the translator translated it as “not a question, not a
sentence, not a word.”

3) Increase or Decrease

Increase or decrease means increase or decrease the number of words in the translation. The "word" here does
not necessarily mean a word, but also includes words or even whole sentences. In the process of subtitle translation,
translators can delete the less important information that will not affect audiences' appreciation and understanding
of films.

Eg. 男朋友和闺蜜在床上兴风作浪, 结果被我爸爸瓮中捉鳖。

My fiance cheated on me, my dad ambushed them when they were, rolling in the deep on bed.

It was Natasha, a Russian girl who met Xu Yiwan on the train. And "Rolling in the Deep" is a name of a song, a
pop song by a British singer Adele Adkins. “Rolling in the Deep” represents Natasha's loneliness and sadness.

The translator's translation reflects the comprehensive characteristics of subtitle translation. The story took place
in this situation. The audience has already known what Natasha wanted to express, so the picture has been fully
expressed, and the subtitle has been cut to some extent. In addition, although this kind of translation seems simple,
it fully reflects the rich vocabulary of subtitle translators.

4.3 The Application of Poetry and Popular Words

Tianhui Zhang (2021) believed that in film subtitle translation, the combination of poetry and popular words has
a strong purpose.
1) The Application of Poetry

In the translation of movie subtitles, subtitle translators often choose to use poetry to translate characters' current dialogues.

Eg. 一江春水向东流吧 Hakuna Matata

This is what Natasha said in the movie. "一江春水向东流" is a phrase coined by Li Yu, expressing his sorrow as the spring water rolled toward the east. As we all know, Hakuna Matata from the movie The Lion King is used directly in the translation. In fact, Hakuna Matata is an old and wonderful African proverb that means to be carefree and dream will come true. In the film, the fatherless lion was deported, and he meets two friends in his life. And that line is where he picks himself up and starts over. We can clearly find that Lost in Russia and The Lion King tell us the similar stories, the same growth. Finally, Xu Yiwan like this little lion also found his own territory.

2) The Application of Popular Words

Quoting popular words can make the film closely connected with the increasingly developing society, increases the fun of movies.

Eg. 从它(台灯)进门的第一天起,我就觉得它长得很做作 It looksarty-farty to me

That is what Xu's ex-wife said. "Arty-farty" is often used in derogatory contexts. Ass is a rough word in English. Obviously, the context and dialogue of this sentence are also intended to express a sense of vulgarity. Therefore, the seemingly simple translation directly reflects the high level of subtitle translators.

5. Conclusion

According to the skopos theory, the translation strategy discussed in this paper is about a new popular movie Lost in Russia, which properly follow the four translation methods of film subtitle translation——literal translation, free translation, amplification and omission. What’s more, this films reflects the immediacy, popularity and comprehensive of film subtitle translation.

Acknowledgements

On the occasion of the completion of the thesis, the first author Xiaojie Li would like to express sincere thanks to the tutor, Miss Gao Cuiling, for her help and guidance in the process of completing the thesis.

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