Analysis of the Subtitle Translation of *The Shawshank Redemption* from the Perspective of the Skopos Theory

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Abstract: Translation is an important communication skill between different languages. In modern society, audiovisual products are distributed to worldwide areas as a popular means of mass media. As the globalization of economy and culture is advancing in the new century, audiovisual subtitle translation plays an increasingly important part. Good subtitles can enhance the audience's experience of appreciating foreign films and make cultural communication more effective. This thesis conducts a brief survey on the strategies for film subtitle translation using the case study of the famous film *The Shawshank Redemptio*n. In this paper, based on Skopos theory, the author made a comprehensive analysis of subtitling activities and pointed out that subtitling, as a specialized area of translation, is not only guided by translation studies but also under the constraints of film properties. The Skopos theory of film subtitle translation is to provide, within the constraints of time and space, a well-translated subtitle that can contribute to a good understanding of what is happening on the screen. In short, the end justifies the means. Therefore, during the process of subtitle translation, the subtitler should take all the factors into consideration to identify the translation purpose, and then adopt corresponding translation strategies. From this perspective, the author takes the Skopos theory as instruction and applies the reduction and addition method to analyze the film subtitle translation. In the age of globalization, foreign films are increasingly entering people's lives. Watching foreign films is a popular and effective way to understand foreign cultures. However, in China, subtitle translation has not attracted as much academic attention as it deserves and few theories could be appropriately applied to subtitle translation. Therefore, the author hopes that subtitle translation could be paid more attention in terms of cross-cultural communication.

Keywords: Subtitle translation; Skopos theory; Domestication; Foreignization; *The Shawshank Redemption*

1. Introduction

With the improvement of our life, more and more people desire to visit the cinema for better audiovisual enjoyment. However, translation problems between different languages bother the translator and the audience. The reason is that though subtitle translation belongs to the field of literary translation, it does not attract equal attention

as the other forms of literary translation. Therefore, strategies and methods should be adopted to complete the translation. Though some scholars make their efforts to the studies and make great contributions in this field, more requires to be done to improve subtitle translation so as to provide a better experience for the audience [1].

2. Literature review

2.1. Introduction to Skopos theory

Skopos theory originated in the 60s and 70s of the last century. The famous German translation theorist Hans Vermeer developed this translation theory model on the basis of action theory. In the Skopos theory, translation is a kind of cross-cultural interaction on the basis of source text, and intentional activity through the medium of language. Vermeer's Skopos theory contains three principles: skopos rule, coherence rule, and loyalty rule [2].

Skopos rule is the chief rule in the Skopos theory, namely, the translation could militate in the target language context and culture as expected. The purpose of the translation produces the process of the whole translation behavior, namely "the end justifies the means." Generally, "purpose" refers to the communicative purpose of the translation, namely "The communicative function of the translated text to the target language readers in the target cultural context." Therefore, the translator should know the specific purpose in the given context, and choose proper translation methods according to the purpose [3].

The coherence rule means the language of the translation must conform to the standard of intra-textual coherence, that is to make translated text readable and acceptable and let the target language receiver understand and use it in the specific cultural context. Inter-textual coherence refers to the coherence between the target language and source language, namely the meaning of the translation is closely related to the original meaning [4].

The loyalty rule is put forward by Nord, using it to cope with the relationship between the cultural differences and participants of translation work. On the one hand, Nord believes that the translator has a moral responsibility to the receivers, and must explain what they do and the reason for doing it. On the other hand, the translator must be loyal to the original author. Translators should respect the original authors, and coordinate with the target language and the author's intention [5].

All in all, the Skopos theory consists of these three basic rules, in which the coherence rule and loyalty rule must obey the Skopos rule, which is the core of Skopos theory. As to the standard of translation, the Skopos theory adopts adequacy rather than equivalence. Under the theoretical framework, adequacy means that the translation should meet the requirements of the translation purpose, "in the process of translation, select the proper words on the basis of the purpose." This is a dynamic concept related to translation behavior.

2.2. Studies of subtitle translation abroad

Studies of subtitle translation in the West started much earlier than that in our country. The article "On Subtitles in Television Programmes" in the Babel published in 1974 by Dollerup was considered as the first paper concerning the film subtitle translation. He analyzed the different types of errors existing in the subtitling of television programs from English to Danish. He suggested subtitles as a means to learn foreign languages, which added pedagogical value and significance to his research.

A conference on dubbing and subtitling was held by the European Broadcasting Union in 1987. Then, a number of conferences and publications appeared [6]. Then, studies of film subtitle translation boomed and flourished in the 1990s. This period was seen as its golden age. The publication of two important books made such a great contribution to this field. Luyken, together with another four European scholars completed the first book in 1991, *Overcoming Language Barriers in Television: Dubbing and Subtitling for the European Audience*, in which different translation modes applied to the linguistic transfer of films were introduced and

the amount of European translated films, labor costs, and audience preferences were analyzed and presented systematically. In the following years, Ivarsson, a Swedish translator, published the book *Subtitling for the Media: A Handbook of an Art*. Technical development of subtitling was offered in this book. Six years later, the second edition of this book with the revised name *Subtitling* came to birth. New information was added to the book, such as new film translation strategies and skills after the appearance of digital technology. These two books can be considered a breakthrough in the field of subtitling, which is highly beneficial and encouraging for further study and development in this field.

Great contributions are made by so many well-known scholars in the field of film subtitle translation. Books and papers produced by those scholars provide us with lots of information and references [7].

2.3. Studies on film subtitle translation in China

Compared with the development of the study of film subtitle translation in the West, the study in China is still in its initial phase. Not so many scholars are specialized in this field and most of their studies are far from being comprehensive and systematic.

As an experienced subtitling translator, Professor Shaochang Qian describes the features of film language in his articles. Based on the study of cultural differences and specific restrictions of film translation, some translation strategies are summed up by Professor Qian. Furthermore, expressiveness, one criterion of the three-character translation principles put forward by Fu Yan, is considered to be of vital importance to audiovisual translation.

"Strategies for Translating Subtitles" written by Yunxing Li analyzes translating culture-specific words from Chinese to English. He stipulates that the primary requirement of subtitling is to provide, within constraints of time and space, the most relevant information in the most efficient way. "Strategies for Translating Subtitles" analyzes the features of subtitling in terms of time-space constraints, informative function, and cultural factors and then puts forward corresponding strategies for translation, with concrete examples for illustration [8].

In "Translation into Chinese of Film Scripts of TV Drama Series - Four Main Conflicting Demands," Chunmei Zhao analyzes the four main conflicting demands appearing during the translation process: length vs. content, word order vs. picture order, naturalization vs. alienation, and transliteration vs. semantic translation. Suggestions for resolving these conflicts are also given by Professor Zhao.

2.4. Summary

To sum up, all these studies listed in this part give an introductory profile of this subject, covering from the definition to the strategies and many translation methods that can be put into use in the subtitle translation, which serves as a solid base for the later researches in this field. However, problems still remain. For example, attention put to this field is still inadequate as the traditional literary study for subtitle translation is always seen as entertainment rather than academic study. Moreover, most of the studies are done by Western scholars, and studies in China are lacking. Thus, this research on the subtitle translation of *The Shawshank Redemption* is significant.

3. A case study on *The Shawshank Redemption*
3.1. Strategies of domestication to subtitle translation

Domestication refers to target-language-culture-oriented in which expressions acceptable in the target language culture are exploited in order to make the translated texts intelligible and suitable for the target text readers. Venuti advocates that the definition of domestication translation is "translation is the kind of text which uses violence to replace foreign text language and cultural differences, and provide a readable text to target language readers" [9].

3.1.1. Addition and reduction

Addition refers to giving replacement and supplement to the indispensable part which is hard to express clearly. Reduction refers to deleting some parts of the text, whose synonym is omitted. In terms of translation, the meaning of the original text cannot be added or reduced casually, otherwise it is not loyal. Whether to add words or delete words, the point is to keep the meaning unchanged. "Good reduction keeps the original meaning, good application achieves the ultimate meaning," which is pointed out by the ancient literary theorist Xie Liu, who sums up the principle of addition and reduction that should be followed. Some examples are as follows.

So, when Andy Dufresne came to me in 1949, and asked me to smuggle Rita Hayworth into the prison for him, I told him no problem.

所以当安迪·德福瑞恩来找我，问能否弄张丽塔·海华丝的图片进来时，我告诉他没问题。

She said she wanted a divorce in Reno.

她说她想离婚。

It's Brooks.

布鲁克斯出事了。

3.1.2. Condensation

Condensation means condensed translation, which requires effort to ensure the logic of the original text in terms of content and structure, but is greatly compressed, which is basically the condensed expression. Gottlieb believes that condensation is to simplify the text at minimize loss, so you can keep the primitive meaning and main literal style. Subtitle translation is the process of converting the spoken language to written language, in which unnecessary words are deleted to make the reading easier [10]. For example:

He puts his hand in your shirt and squeezes your tit till it's purple.

他只是假仁假义。

I am known to locate certain things from time to time.

你想要什么就有什么。

Old man's crazy as a rat in a tin shithouse.

老家伙疯了。

3.1.3. Replacement

Replacement includes substitution and transformation. Substitution refers to the use of the ready-made expression in the target language to replace that in the original. Replacement is an effective way of dealing with the problem brought about by cultural differences. Cultural image is endowed with cultural values and is the wisdom crystallization of different ethnic groups. If the translator meets obstacles in the interpretation of the source language, he should try to use a cultural image that the target audience are familiar with to replace that in the source culture. For example:

I understand you're a man that knows how to get things.

我知道你能拿到违禁品。

Most new fish come close to madness the first night.

很多新来的人在第一晚都几乎发疯了。

Yes sir! I'm a regular Sears & Roebuck.

是的，先生。我是个零售商。

Here, in example 3, the idiom "Sears & Roebuck" is a famous American chain corporation. Red said he could get everything his cellmates wanted, and did it just as well as the Sears & Roebuck.

3.1.4. Paraphrase

As a translation method, paraphrasing is helpful and effective. Subtitle translators can express words or sentences in other words in order to make the translation clearly, so that the target audience can get the essential meaning easily. Dryden defined paraphrase as "have a certain degree of freedom in translation, and in this kind of translation, the author always stayed in the translator's mind, but the author's original words may not be respected as its meaning" [11]. For example:

Some hotshot banker, and he's <u>the one they pinned it on</u>.

她丈夫是个银行家 , 而他竟成了<u>替罪羊</u>。

Would you be willing to swear before a judge and jury, with your hand on the <u>Good Book</u>...

那么你能在法官和陪审团面前 , 手放在<u>圣经</u>上 ...

The next morning, right about the time <u>Raquel was spilling her secret...</u>

第二天早晨 , 就在那<u>海报被撕下来的时候</u> ...

Here in example 3, "Raquel was spilling her secret" means a hole dug by Andy was hidden behind the poster of Raquel, so when the warden tore it off, the hole was found. If the translator expresses the meaning directly, the audience who do not watch the above parts may be confused, therefore the strategy of paraphrasing is needed here.

3.2. Foreignizing translation

It aimed at limiting the "ethnocentric violence of translation" brought by the domestication translation. The target text is produced by retaining something exotic, to break the target language habits and cultural norms. To a certain extent, Venuti's foreignization translation strategy is a kind of cultural intervention, which challenges and questions the behavior of outsiders, leaving the reader in the exotic foreign as well as highlighting the language of the exotic culture differences. For example:

He's a phantom, an apparition, second cousin to Harvey the rabbit.

他是一个幻影 , 幽灵 , 是兔子哈维的第二个表弟。

Did I say you were good? Shit, you're Rembrandt.

我没说过你很能干吗？该死，你简直是伦勃朗。

Here, in example 2, Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn was one of the greatest painters in the 17th century in Europe [12]. Chinese people may not be familiar with Rembrandt, but from the above information, it is easy for audiences to guess he must be someone who is capable and successful. Therefore, the translator does not need to explain who Rembrandt is.

4. Conclusion

In the Skopos theory, translation is a purposeful activity, in which the first rule is to realize the function of the text, namely following the purpose principle of the text. As a special form of translation, subtitle translation is purposive behavior. Its purpose is to provide related and effective information to help Chinese audiences find the most simple and effective way to easily communicate with the original film. The translator should follow the purpose of the translation, and make concrete analysis according to the concrete conditions, so as to successfully achieve the function of subtitle translation.

Based on the above analysis, the subtitle translation of the film *The Shawshank Redemption* follows the Skopos theory. Under the guidance of Skopos theory, the translator adopted translation strategies of domestication and foreignization and specific translation methods, accurately conveying the content of the film, achieving the goal of cultural exchange and communication. During the process of subtitle translation of

this movie, in order to make the domestic audience have the same experience as foreign counterparts as much as possible, convey the film's intention completely, let the domestic audience enjoy a wonderful story, and try to avoid understanding obstacles caused by cultural differences, domestication translation strategy is the main choice adopted by translators under the guidance of Skopos theory.

Meanwhile, this paper only takes one film (*The Shawshank Redemption*) as an example to explore the subtitle translation strategies, hoping to give some valuable information to subtitle translation and norms. However, there are a variety of foreign films, one could not represent all. This study is just a specific case study, not horizontally compared with other foreign movies. Translation itself is a matter of "different people having different opinions," so the translator should hold an objective attitude during the discussion. Due to the limited knowledge and inadequate subtitle translation experience, some problems caused by personal preferences in translation is inevitable, such as the translation version used in this paper may not be accepted by all the audience. No matter what kind of translation strategy is adopted, the common goal for all subtitle translators is to keep a natural and fluent style, convey the source language style and characteristics, make the audience enjoy the same experience as the foreign audience, and understand the cultural connotation.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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