

Domestication and Foreignization of Humor Elements in the Translation of *2 Broke Girls*

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Abstract: With the development of globalization, films and TV series from foreign countries, as an important vehicle of culture, have sprung up and are appreciated by viewers due to high-quality subtitle translation. Thus, subtitle translation has become an important part in the field of translation research. Since its launch in China, the famous American sitcom *2 Broke Girls* has achieved universal praise among audiences. This recognition is attributed not only to its intriguing plot but also to the excellent subtitle translation, in which domestication and foreignization, two key translation techniques, play an important role. Although many scholars have already conducted research and discussions on domestication and foreignization, there is still a lack of studies on the application of these two techniques to this drama. Therefore, taking this sitcom as an example, through an analysis of domestication and foreignization methods and of the humorous elements in the drama, this paper explores the characteristics, advantages, and limitations of these two translation methods in their practical application in the drama, focusing on specific scenarios for research. It is found that domestication and foreignization play a crucial role in driving the plot forward and enhancing the comedic effect of this sitcom. In the process of translation, translators should combine these two translation strategies well to achieve a better effect.

Keywords: *2 Broke Girls*; Domestication; Foreignization; Humorous elements

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1. Introduction

In today's era of heightened globalization, cross-cultural communication has grown increasingly commonplace. Films and TV series in different languages, as important carriers of culture, are launched in various sources such as cables, cinemas, or online platforms. Many good films and TV series are appreciated and loved by viewers from foreign countries thanks to excellent subtitle translation. One case in point is *2 Broke Girls*, an American sitcom that is very popular among the Chinese audience.

Just as Nida (2001) has said: "The greater the differences in the source and target languages, the greater the need for adjustments"^[1]. In the process of translation, translators are often faced with two strategies:

domestication and foreignization. Domestication emphasizes the transformation of cultural elements in the source text into forms that are easy to understand and accept in the target culture, aiming to achieve cultural resonance. Foreignization, on the other hand, focuses more on preserving the cultural characteristics of the source text, presenting the exotic flavor to the target language readers, and promoting diverse cultural exchanges. Ways to maintain the humorous effect while dealing with cultural differences is a question that translators need to carefully consider.

At the same time, *2 Broke Girls*, an American sitcom deeply popularized by the audience, is rich in humorous elements and unique in language style, providing abundant material for translation studies. Thus, this paper takes the English-Chinese translation of *2 Broke Girls* as an example to explore the application of domestication and foreignization strategies in the translation of humor elements in the series. This paper aims to reveal the advantages and disadvantages of different translation strategies in conveying humorous effects and explore how to find a balance between domestication and foreignization in practice to better serve the target audience and achieve the purpose of cross-cultural communication ^[1].

2. Domestication and foreignization in translation

Lawrence Venuti, the famous American translation theorist, in his book *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* first put forward two translation strategies in the modern sense, that is, domestication and foreignization, which provide the translator with both linguistic and cultural guidance. According to Venuti (1995), the former refers to “an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values, bring the author back home,” while the latter is “an ethno-deviant pressure on those (cultural) values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad” ^[2]. This part will give a detailed analysis of these translation strategies including their definitions and characteristics.

2.1. Definition and characteristics of domestication

Nida (2001), as a representative advocate of domestication, believes that the expression of the translation should be completely natural, and as far as possible, the source language's behavior patterns should be incorporated into the cultural category of the target language readers ^[1]. Domestication means that the translation should aim at the target language or the target audience, and pursue the translation that conforms to the norms of the target language and culture, to better meet the reading needs of the target language readers.

2.1.1. Adaptation to target language culture

In linguistics, “domestication” usually refers to the process where language users employ the closest expression in their native language to express a certain concept or idea, thereby gradually adapting foreign words or expressions to their native language's habits and cultural background.

2.1.2. Familiarity and clarity for target audience

“Domestication” in linguistics studies can be understood as a process in which information is made more accessible and acceptable to the target audience.

For example, the TV series often features American slang and colloquial expressions that, if translated directly, might confuse the target audience. “You're a piece of work.” translates as “你真是个奇葩。” This translation incorporates expressions commonly used in colloquial Chinese, making it easier for the audience to

understand and resonate with.

2.1.3. Loss of original cultural elements

Domestication often involves a process where the original cultural elements of a message are lost or diluted as it is tailored to fit the understanding and preferences of a new audience. This is a natural occurrence as cultural messages are translated, repurposed, or simplified to make them more appealing or accessible.

2.2. Definition and characteristics of foreignization

Foreignization is a translation technique that strives to uphold the original style and cultural nuances of the source language while concurrently ensuring comprehension and appreciation among target language readers. Therefore, foreignization translation often uses more formal or archaic language, as well as some specific cultural and linguistic expressions of the source language, to convey the original meaning and style.

2.2.1. Preservation of original cultural elements

Foreignization, as an essential method for the preservation of original cultural elements, in translation involves maintaining the unique cultural references and linguistic characteristics of the source language in the target language. This approach aims to preserve the authenticity and originality of the source text, allowing target language readers to experience a sense of the cultural richness and uniqueness of the source text.

2.2.2. Challenge and curiosity for target audience

Foreignization translation poses a unique challenge to target audience members. This approach to translation aims to preserve the original cultural elements and linguistic characteristics of the source language, which can result in a text that is initially unfamiliar and even puzzling to the target audience. The target audience may encounter new cultural references, unfamiliar linguistic expressions, or unique writing styles that differ significantly from their cultural and linguistic norms.

2.2.3. Resistance to cultural conformity

Foreignization translation resists the urge to conform to target cultural norms, instead aiming to preserve the unique cultural elements and linguistic characteristics of the source language. This approach rejects the idea of a universal translation that sacrifices the cultural distinctiveness of the source text in favor of a more culturally normative target text. Instead, foreignization strives to retain the non-conformity of the source culture, allowing it to stand on its own, unique cultural feet in the target language.

3. The analysis of humor elements in *2 Broke Girls*

As a well-known comedy, *2 Broke Girls* is a humorous play that centers around two sisters who face the challenges of bankruptcy and the subsequent changes in their lives. The humor in this play is derived from several elements, including the characters' personalities, the situations they find themselves in, and the dialogue between them.

3.1. Categories of humor elements in *2 Broke Girls*

In *2 Broke Girls*, several categories of humor elements can be identified that contribute to the overall comedic

effect. These categories range from character-driven humor to situational humor, to dialogue-driven humor, to satirical humor, to physical comedy, and each plays a crucial role in making the play funny and engaging.

3.2. Difficulties in the translation of humor elements in *2 Broke Girls*

The translation of humor elements in *2 Broke Girls* can present unique challenges to translators, due to the complex nature of humor and its cultural specificity.

The first problem is understanding the original context. Then, it comes to capturing the right tone and style. Moreover, preserving the element of surprise is very hard. In addition, balancing accuracy and naturalness is a great hindrance as well. Finally, handling idioms and cultural references is also a rough issue to handle with.

To sum up, translating humor elements in *2 Broke Girls* can be challenging. With careful consideration and attention to detail, translators can successfully convey the comedic essence of the original show in a way that will resonate with target audiences.

4. The application of domestication and foreignization in the translation of humor elements in *2 Broke Girls*

The application of domestication and foreignization is crucial in the translation of humor elements. Domestication is the basic principle to solve the cultural problems involved in translation, which is the opposite of foreignization. Conversely, foreignization emphasizes the preservation of the cultural distinctiveness and linguistic style of the source language^[3], aiming to preserve the original charm and humor of the text. The appropriate use of these strategies can enhance the translation's fidelity, enhance its naturalness, and better convey the humor elements and cultural connotations of the original text.

4.1. The application of domestication in the translation of humor elements

In the subtitle translation of the sitcom *2 Broke Girls* the translator skillfully employs the translation strategy of domestication to reflect the humorous elements of the original series and make it more consonant with the cultural background and aesthetic habits of Chinese audiences^[2].

Firstly, the translator successfully conveys the humor of the original series to Chinese audiences by incorporating Chinese idioms, proverbs, and historical allusions. For instance, the line “well, with that smile and my bad heart. I’ll die trying.” is translated as “你这嫣然一笑让我想入非非, 我会尽力帮你。” Here, the translator employs “嫣然一笑” and “想入非非” which not only accurately convey the meaning of the original line but also cleverly incorporate Chinese idioms, adding humor to the translation.

Secondly, the translator adopts a domestication strategy when dealing with vocabulary closely related to Chinese culture. For example, “They are like pandas, cute but endangered.” translates as “他们就像大熊猫, 可爱但濒临灭绝。” Translating “pandas” directly as “大熊猫,” aligns with the cultural recognition of Chinese audiences, enabling them to quickly grasp the meaning and resonate with it.

Moreover, the translator pays attention to adapting to the audience's cultural background and chooses more familiar vocabulary and expressions in the translation. For instance, “He’s as wise as Confucius.” translates as “他智慧如孔子。” Keeping “Confucius” untranslated preserves its cultural significance as a symbol of wisdom and erudition in Chinese culture, facilitating the audience's understanding of the character's intellectual prowess.

In subtitle translation, the translator also employs methods of free translation and amplification. Due to

differences in grammar and expression between Chinese and English, some dialogues may lose their original meaning when translated directly. Therefore, the translator adopts free translation, such as translating “Caroline catch” into “我是值得抓住的。” This not only preserves the original meaning but also conforms to Chinese expression habits. Amplification, on the other hand, is used to add new information in the translation to help the audience better understand the scene and character traits. For example, “You have balls to wear a tuxedo” is translated as “穿燕尾服需要勇气。” This adds new information to the original meaning and enhances the humorous effect^[3].

Lastly, the translator incorporates Chinese cultural elements to embody humor. For instance, in translating “Oleg, I am like David Blaine of zippers,” the translator does not directly translate the name David Blaine but instead replaces it with the name of the famous Chinese magician Liu Qian, translating it as “我是拉链界的刘谦。” This approach allows the audience to quickly grasp the intended meaning while adding humor.

In conclusion, the translator skillfully employs domestication strategies in the subtitle translation of *2 Broke Girls* by incorporating Chinese idioms, proverbs, and historical allusions, adapting to the audience’s cultural background, and adopting methods of free translation and amplification. This makes it more consonant with their aesthetic habits while preserving the original style of the series.

4.2. The application of foreignization in the translation of humor elements

The application of foreignization in the translation of humor elements in *2 Broke Girls* is particularly crucial.

First, let’s consider an example of a dialogue between Max and Caroline. For instance, when Caroline suggests something unrealistic, Max might say, “You’re dreaming in Technicolor.” With foreignization, we can retain the original sentence structure and wording, translating it as: “你真是做着五彩斑斓的梦呢。” This translation maintains the humor of the original sentence while allowing Chinese viewers to appreciate Max’s direct yet humorous speaking style.

Next, let’s examine a dialogue where characters tease each other. For instance, if Caroline falls and dirties her clothes, Max might say, “Look at you, you’re a walking disaster.” Using foreignization, we can translate this as: “看看你，简直就是个行走的灾难。” This translation retains the humor of the original sentence and gives Chinese viewers a sense of the lighthearted teasing among the characters.

Furthermore, there are humorous dialogues involving cultural differences. For instance, when a character mentions a specific American slang or idiom, foreignization can be used for a literal translation, with annotations or explanations added when necessary, to help viewers understand its meaning and humorous context. This can be illustrated by Caroline’s line “My father is a billionaire, but he’s as cheap as a church mouse.”, which translated as “我父亲是个亿万富翁，但他抠门得像个教堂里的老鼠。” In this example, “cheap as a church mouse” is a typical English idiom used to describe someone who is extremely stingy. This idiom does not have a direct equivalent in Chinese culture. This translation not only preserves the cultural characteristics of the original text but also introduces this interesting expression to Chinese readers.

The analysis of these dialogue examples from this study allows the observation of the advantages of using foreignization in translating humorous elements in *2 Broke Girls*. However, it’s worth noting that foreignization is not suitable for all situations. In some cases, if foreignization leads to viewer confusion or unacceptability, domestication or other translation methods should be considered for adjustment. For example, Max: “I’m not a morning person, but I’m a cupcake person.” combined domestication and foreignization can be translated as Max: “我虽然不是个早起的人，但我是个蛋糕控。” In this example, “cupcake person” is a phrase that

combines English culture and colloquial expressions, used to describe someone who has a strong preference for cupcakes. In translating this phrase, the domestication strategy is employed to translate “cupcake” as “蛋糕,” which is a more generalized term in Chinese. Meanwhile, the foreignization strategy is also applied by retaining the Chinese internet slang “控,” which expresses intense fondness for something. This translation not only conforms to the reading habits of Chinese readers but also preserves a certain degree of English cultural characteristics.

Excessive domestication may lead to the loss of cultural characteristics and humor in the original series, preventing viewers from experiencing its unique charm. Therefore, the adaptation of foreignization cannot be ignored even should be paid more attention to.

5. Conclusion

As can be seen from the previous parts, while translating humor elements in *2 Broke Girls*, domestication is used to ensure that the humor remains relevant and accessible. On the other hand, foreignization aims to preserve the unique cultural characteristics and humor of the original series.

The dynamic dance between domestication and foreignization has resulted in a translation that is both humorous and culturally insightful. Therefore, it is necessary for the translators to combine foreignization with domestication.

Looking ahead, future research in this area could explore the impact of technological advancements. These technologies offer new possibilities for translating humor more accurately and efficiently. Future research could focus on the translation of humor elements in other sitcoms or comedic works from different cultures. Further research in this area has the potential to further enhance the understanding of humor translation and its impact on cross-cultural communication.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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