A Study of English Translation Strategies of Subtitles of the Domestic Animated Film *Chang'an* from the Perspective of Eco-translatology

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This article conducts an analysis and exploration of the English subtitles translation of the domestic animated film *Chang'an* from the perspective of eco-translatology. Taking three-dimensional transformation as the entry point, it analyzes the adaptation and selection of subtitle translators in the translation process from the dimensions of language, culture, and communication in *Chang'an*, aiming to enrich the practical analysis of eco-translatology and provide valuable insights and references for the theoretical construction and practical application of eco-translatology. This article enriches the practical analysis of eco-translatology and also validates to a certain extent the applicability of "three-dimensional" transformation.

Keywords: subtitle translation, eco-translatology, *Chang'an*, three-dimensional transformation, translation as adaptation and selection

1. Introduction

Film serves as a vital conduit for Chinese culture, offering both entertainment and cultural dissemination. Subtitle translation for domestic films is essential due to language and cultural barriers. The animated film *Chang'an*, released in 2023, delves into the Tang Dynasty's poetry scene through the eyes of poet Gao Shi and Li Bai. It portrays Chang'an's rise and fall, the poetry scene's splendor, and the essence of Tang poetry, showcasing Chinese cultural treasures. The film gained significant attention, even featuring Li Bai's animated character at the 2024 CCTV Spring Festival Gala. Translated by Australian sinologist Linda Jaivin, known for her work on films like Farewell My Concubine, the subtitles infuse her deep understanding of Chinese culture. This paper will analyze the English translation of *Chang'an* from an ecocritical perspective, exploring its adaptation and selection processes in translation across language, culture, and communication dimensions.

2. Literary Review

In recent years, the film industry has undergone a swift evolution, facilitating the exchange of ideas and cultures across global borders. The demand for timely film releases has posed challenges for dubbing to meet audience expectations. Consequently, this has spurred the rapid advancement of subtitle translation, including

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within animation. Despite its widespread adoption, subtitling has often been neglected in translation studies, as noted by Fawcett (1996). Some scholars have questioned its translation status due to the necessity for synchronization. Nevertheless, subtitling remains a vital form of translation, deserving further scholarly attention.

In the realm of subtitle translation, notable scholars such as Henrik Gottlieb of Denmark and Yves Gambier of Finland have made significant contributions, shaping theories and methodologies in the field. Gambier and Gottlieb (2016) define subtitle translation as "the conversion of verbal messages into written text presented on screen, synchronized with the original verbal content." Gottlieb (1994) views subtitling as a transparent form of translation, preserving the original content and thus open to scrutiny from those with even basic knowledge of the source language. Gambier (1994) highlights subtitling's vital role in facilitating audiovisual and cross-linguistic communication within Europe.

Overall, the exploration of subtitle translation in Europe has progressed due to its linguistic and cultural diversity. Scholars are increasingly examining the intersection of technology and subtitle translation, recognizing its broader societal implications beyond traditional analyses.

3. Translation Method of Three-dimensional Transformation

The "Three-dimensional transformation" translation approach views translation as an interconnected ecological system, focusing on language, culture, and communication dimensions. Translators must carefully adapt and transform across these dimensions to ensure accurate and coherent translations.

Broadly, the language dimension includes the coexistence of different languages, while narrowly, it involves linguistic elements' symbiosis across languages. Translators navigate grammatical, lexical, stylistic, and pragmatic aspects to maintain accuracy and convey cultural nuances effectively. Language serves as the foundation for cultural and communicative dimensions, crucial for successful translation. This aspect of translation deserves significant academic attention. A broad cultural dimension encompasses dominant, non-dominant, and endangered cultures, while a narrow one pertains to balancing cultural elements in translation. Hu (2008) highlights translation as communication and interaction between translators and the source language's cultural environment. Translators must not only meet readers' information needs but also engage them to foster interaction, communication, and information exchange between source and target language readers. The communicative dimension encompasses international and individual exchanges broadly, while narrowly focusing on the interaction between communicative intentions and behaviors within a translated text. Translators must understand the source language's communicative purposes and effectively convey this information to target readers.

The interconnectedness of language, culture, and communication in a text highlights their inseparability, emphasizing the need to consider all dimensions in translation analysis. Achieving a comprehensive translation requires balanced transformation across these dimensions to adapt effectively to new contexts (Hu, 2009). Superior subtitle translation particularly focuses on striking a balance between source and target languages. Following the principles of three-dimensional transformation ensures the preservation and adaptation of the original text's linguistic, cultural, and communicative ecosystems, ensuring the subtitle translation's effectiveness and vitality.

4. Analysis Based on the Three-dimensional Transformation

Eco-translatology employs the "three-dimensional" transformation method, where adaptation and selection occur across language, culture, and communication dimensions to integrate a work into a new "translational eco-environment" and achieve "ecological balance." These dimensions are interdependent, complementing each other in translation, each with its own focus: language emphasizes linguistic form, communication emphasizes information transmission, and culture prioritizes expressing cultural connotations.

4.1 Adaption and Selection from Linguistic Dimension

During the translation process, translators' adaptive selection and transformation of linguistic forms manifest in various aspects and levels. The transformation of linguistic forms serves the purpose of text translation, aiming to align with the linguistic characteristics of the target language and the reading and communication habits of the audience.

Example (1)

ST: 北冥有鱼，其名为鲲。化而为鸟，其名为鹏。

TT: There's a North Sea fish   That's called the Kun

It transforms into a bird   That's called the Eagle

This sentence was said by Zhuangzi, which perfectly fits the situation of Li Bai in the context. At that time, Li Bai and Gao Shi met for the first time, and together they caught the thief, developing a good impression of each other and teaching each other their respective skills. Li Bai had just started learning spear technique, riding his horse vigorously, comparing himself to the great roc with the famous quote from Zhuangzi. This scene depicts the ambitious aspirations of the young Li Bai, eager to indulge in life and make achievements.

Firstly, the translation of these two lines of poetry maintains consistency with the original text in sentence structure and length, fully preserving the formal characteristics of the poem. "North Sea" refers to the North Sea, as mentioned in the Ming Dynasty's commentary on Zhuangzi's Inner Chapters: "'North Sea' refers to the North Sea, an immense place unseen by ordinary people, metaphorically representing the profound mysteries of the Tao." Thus, the first half of the sentence means there is a fish in the North Sea. "There's a fish in North Sea" is a traditional translation, but the four short sentences in the original text—"鱼" (yu) "鲲" (kun) "鸟" (niao) "鹏" (peng)—are actually different forms of the same thing, interconnected and progressively advancing. The translator ends with "fish," "Kun," "bird," and "Eagle," achieving unity in sentence structure and word choice. Secondly, the translation is meticulous in word selection. "Kun" and "Eagle" are both names, representing mythical fish or birds that do not exist in reality, but the translation methods are different. "鲲" is transliterated as "Kun," while "鹏" is translated as "Eagle."

The difference in translation is also the result of the translator's adaptation and selection, as the contexts and available visual information for the two are not the same. The large fish "Kun" exists in legend, and its image is not provided in the movie, and the original text has indicated that "Kun" is essentially a fish. Since the plot relies less on this sentence, focusing on another form of "Kun"—the "Eagle"—directly annotating it with Pinyin does not affect the viewer's understanding. "Eagle," on the other hand, is different. The movie begins with an eagle flying over Gao Shi's camp, introducing the war scene where the narrator Gao Shi is located. After the example sentence, Li Bai adds, "In such a prosperous era, we should be like Great Eagles!" The

translation of "大鹏" echoes this. Eagles appear multiple times in the movie, soaring in the sky with extraordinary spirits. The language information provided by subtitles is closely coordinated with visual and auditory information and is presented progressively (Li, 2001). Li Bai compares himself to the Great Eagle to express his desire to soar between heaven and earth like an eagle and achieve great deeds. Therefore, the different ways of translating "鲲" (kun) and "鹏" (peng) reflect the translator's consideration of various factors in the translational eco-environment, in terms of language selection and transformation.

4.2 Adaption and Selection from Cultural Dimension

Cultural adaptation and selection transformation in the translational dimension refer to the translator's focus on conveying and interpreting the cultural connotations in bilingual cultures during the translation process. Hu (2004) describes translation as a choice-driven activity aimed at transferring cross-cultural information. By paying attention to the differences in nature and content between the source culture and the target culture, translators can avoid misinterpretations of the original text from the perspective of the target language culture. Translators should focus on adapting to the entire cultural system to which the language belongs (Hu, 2011). Culture is a whole and multidimensional entity, encompassing folklore, allusions, historical figures, historical events, as well as official positions or units of time, among others, all of which require adaptive selection. Translator Linda Jaivin pointed out in an interview that her translations consider the historical context (Jin, 2013).

Example (2)

> ST: 你要入赘许家?
>
> TT: You're joining your bride's family?

Example (3)

> ST: 成为许家的赘婿，他就可以从此一改身份。
>
> TT: By joining them as a son-in-law, he could change his status.
>
> ST: 赘婿?
>
> TT: Taking her family name?

After Li Bai's father passed away, he was driven out of his home. He confided in Gao Shi about his intention to marry into the Xu family in Anlu. Though Gao Shi didn't fully approve, he understood Li Bai's reasons for wanting to marry into the Xu family. The dialogues in Examples (2) and (3) respectively come from Gao Shi's reminiscence and his present perspective. In both instances, the terms "入赘" and "赘婿" are mentioned several times in quick succession, with varying translations each time. In ancient China, it was common for the woman to "嫁" the man's family, while the man "娶" the woman into his family. However, "入赘" is the opposite, referring to a man "嫁" into the woman's family, living with her family and taking her family's relations as the primary social connections. A man who marries into the wife's family is called a "赘婿". While the custom of marrying into the wife's family has existed in Chinese culture, "赘婿" has often been criticized, as indicated by Gao Shi's subsequent statement, "In our Great Tang, a son-in-law who marries into his wife's family is most looked down upon".

"Marrying into" is an action, while "赘婿" denotes an identity. There's a clear distinction between "嫁" and "娶" in Chinese, but English only has the single word "marry" without this differentiation. In Example (2),

"入赘" is translated as "join bride's family", while in Example (3), "赘婿" is translated as "join them as son-in-law" and "入赘" as "take her family name". The term "入赘" is not translated in either instance. In the film context, terms related to marrying into the wife's family frequently appear, so the translator didn't repeat translations but instead explained from multiple angles what marrying into the wife's family entails culturally: firstly, the husband joins the wife's family; secondly, he becomes a nominal son; thirdly, he adopts the wife's surname. In Western culture, there's no fixed convention of joining one side of the family, with newlyweds often living alone and the wife typically taking the husband's surname. Therefore, understanding marrying into the wife's family can be somewhat challenging. Here, the translator tried to provide a comprehensive understanding of the behavior of marrying into the wife's family and the identity of a son-in-law by selecting different expressions and perspectives to make it easier for international audiences to comprehend. As Linda Jaivin mentioned in an interview, "English subtitles serve to supplement the information provided by Chinese subtitles. What's not expressed in Chinese subtitles should be appropriately supplemented to facilitate understanding for international audiences". The translator didn't mechanically repeat the same terms in translation but instead, in a limited time and space, provided explanations of the cultural phenomenon of marrying into the wife's family, demonstrating the translator's adaptation and selection in the cultural dimension.

4.3 Adaption and Selection from Communicative Dimension

The purpose of communication is information transmission, and translators focus on the adaptability and selection of bilingual communicative intentions in the translation process. This requires translators to not only convert language information and convey cultural connotations but also to prioritize the selection and conversion of communicative aspects, ensuring that the communicative intentions in the original text are reflected in the translation. In the process of communication, information is diverse, redundant information needs to be eliminated, and missing information needs to be supplemented. All adaptations and selections are aimed at information transmission.

Example (4)

> ST: 眼看将到洞庭湖，我已经行囊见紧了。
>
> TT: I'd only reached Dongting Lake and my money was running out.

Example (5)

> ST: 偷我马匹行囊还不是贼？
>
> TT: You steal my horse and bags and you're no thief ?

Gao Shi set out alone from home to seek fame and success. By the time he reached Dongting Lake, he was already in dire straits. At this moment, Li Bai was chasing a thief who had stolen his horse and belongings. Coincidentally, Gao Shi's appearance resembled that of the thief, so Li Bai mistook Gao Shi for the thief at first, but later the misunderstanding was resolved, and they became acquainted. Example (4) is from the current perspective, where Li Bai recounts his past to the military officer. Example (5) is from Gao Shi's recollection. These two scenes are connected in the movie. The term "行囊" appears twice, but the translator chose not to translate it in the same way. "行囊" refers to the bag carried while traveling, typically made of cloth and

containing clothes, daily necessities, identity documents, money, etc., depending on the purpose and distance of the journey.

A comparison reveals that the meaning of "行囊" in Examples (4) and (5) is different. In Example (4), when Gao Shi left home, there was indeed a package on the horse, which is referred to as "行囊". However, besides money, it also contained other essential items for the journey. "见紧" indicates that the contents of the bag are gradually being used up. Based on this scene, it is evident that "行囊" metaphorically refers to money, as Gao Shi laments that he has little left shortly after leaving home. Therefore, to make the audience understand what Gao Shi is referring to, the translator removed the other contents of the bag and directly translated it as "money". Conversely, if translated directly as "bags", the audience would not grasp Gao Shi's predicament.

In Example (5), "行囊" does not refer to anything else. The horse thief stole Li Bai's horse along with the packages on it, so the "行囊" refers to the several packages on the horse, making it reasonable to translate it as "bags". This demonstrates that the same word can have different meanings in different contexts, and translators need to adapt to the unique translational eco-environment of each scene based on the movie plot, visuals, and characteristics of the subtitles.

Conclusion

From the perspective of Ecological Translation Studies, this paper analyzes the Chinese animated film *Chang'an,* aiming to explore how translators adapt to the translation ecological environment comprehensively during the translation process, and make corresponding choices and transformations in the dimensions of language, culture, and communication. Film subtitles possess their own uniqueness in translation, and the analysis of translations should be based on specific translation ecological environments. This paper enriches the practical analysis of Ecological Translation Studies and provides a certain degree of validation for the applicability of "three-dimensional" transformation.

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