

Feminist Film and Television Subtitle Translation Criteria From the Perspective of “Fitting in”

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In recent years, there are more and more feminist films and TV series with female characters as the main characters, but there are relatively few studies on subtitle translation for this theme. This paper intends to start from the feminist translation theory, combine the new standard of “Fitting in” proposed by Professor Keyong He, summarize the three translation criteria of feminist film and television subtitles, and use the official subtitles and the subtitles of the TPGuai Subtitle Group as examples to compare and explain these three translation criteria, hoping to provide experience for the subsequent translation of feminist film and television subtitles.

Keywords: feminist translation, subtitle translation, translation of feminist movies, TV products and drama

Introduction

With the continuous awakening of women’s consciousness, various film and television dramas related to feminism or featuring female characters have emerged in recent years. Many of them, such as *Wonder Woman* and *Spider-Woman: Super Sense Awakening*, sci-fi female hero movies, *Falling Judgment* and *Women’s Talk*, female documentary drama movies, etc., have won various awards and set off heated discussions on the Internet. Feminist films cover many types and a wide range of fields, but there is not much attention paid to the research on feminist film and television subtitles. The author believes that for film and television, character creation and theme communication are inseparable from subtitles. Language is an obstacle to communication, and translation is a bottleneck (He & Dong, 2021). Therefore, exploring the translation criteria of feminist film and television subtitles is crucial to the dissemination of feminist ideas. “Barbie” is the most watched feminist film in the past three years, breaking countless film and television records, and the subtitle clips in it have also been spread on major platforms. The TPGuai Subtitle Group is an all-female folk subtitle group organization, which focuses on the translation of feminist films and television, and has attracted much attention. In the whole process of translating the movie “Barbie”, it is based on the perspective of “Female”, which is in line with feminist values. Therefore, after obtaining authorization, the author intends to quote some of the passages in this article and compare them with the official subtitle translations, so as to illustrate the three principles of feminist film and television subtitle translation.

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Overview of Feminist Translation Theory

Feminist translation is closely related to feminist literary criticism (Yang, 2007). Since the second half of the 20th century, feminist literary critics have advocated feminism as an ideology, using “gender” as a starting point to explore the relationship between gender and text and explore female discourse (Liu, 2004). With the rise of the women’s liberation movement, feminist research on translation rose rapidly in the 1990s (Yang, 2007). Feminist theory questions the definition of “Fidelity” under traditional translation theory and opposes the “master-servant” relationship between the author and the translator under the premise of emphasizing fidelity to the original text (Sui & Song, 2019). At the same time, feminist translation theory believes that “Fidelity” is not to the author or the reader, but to be loyal to the writing plan. The so-called “writing plan” refers to the translator’s ability to make changes to the source text from a gender perspective, including content and style. That is, female translators can master the right to speak in the translation process and manifest the status of women in the text in the translation through “writing”. The translation of feminist translators is not just a translation behavior but a subjective writing with a certain right to speak (Xu, 2004). Among the many feminist translation theories, the three feminist translation strategies proposed by Professor Flotow, namely, “supplementation, adding prefaces and footnotes, and hijacking”, are the most widely accepted translation strategies in the translation community. “Supplementation” refers to the active intervention of female translators in the text to supplement the text with deficiencies caused by various reasons, such as cultural differences. “Adding prefaces and footnotes” is also a way of intervention, mainly targeting cultural deficiencies, adding footnotes or prefaces to shape the image of women. “Hijacking” caters to the faithful view in feminist translation theory, that is, female translators should add their own judgment and understanding on the basis of understanding the original text, highlight the female identity, and modify or delete negative expressions about women.

Feminist Film and Television Subtitle Translation Guidelines

Subtitles are divided into intralingual subtitles and interlingual subtitles. The object of subtitle translation research is generally interlingual subtitles. Due to the constraints of time and space, subtitle translators often need to adopt a reduction translation strategy, namely, concentration—only translating the main idea, compression—using the way of paraphrase to translate the original meaning in short words, and deletion—skipping redundant information (Li, 2001). Film and television subtitles are listenable, instantaneous, comprehensive, popular, and non-noteworthy. When translating, we should follow the principles of “faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance”, among which “expressiveness” is particularly important (Qian, 2000). Looking at the standards and strategies for subtitle translation, many scholars believe that subtitle translation follows the translation principle of “faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance” (Huang, 2010). At the same time, many scholars have applied the relevance theory to the translation of film subtitles. By searching CNKI, we can find more than 100 related literature studies. In recent years, Professor He summarized the 10 characteristics of film and television language. These include: easy to understand—film and television subtitles must be understood by the audience in a short time; rhythm—the rhythm of the subtitles should be consistent with the plot; personality—the language of the character must be consistent with his personality characteristics; occasion—the language of the character must be consistent with the changes in the occasion; artistic style and rhetoric—different themes of film and television have their own unique artistic style and rhetoric; pragmatic implications—the role’s implicit meaning; audience language habits and expectations—the audience has different expectations for the language of different characters;

cultural adaptation—the subtitles contain rich cultural information; avoid the false and stick to the truth—the subtitles should be adjusted according to different languages; and the subtitles should be logically connected. Based on these 10 specifics, Keyong He combined the theory of adaptation and proposed a new standard for film and television translation—Fitting in. That is, the subtitle translation should be fit to the original text, closely match the original text, and be appropriate, which has attracted wide attention. It includes five levels: “Fitting in” of the speaking occasion, “Fitting in” of language style and pragmatic implications, “Fitting in” of audience emotions and expectations, “Fitting in” of cultural adaptation, and “Fitting in” of consistency.

The author intends to start from the “Fitting in” standard proposed by Professor He, combine it with feminist translation theory, and propose three “Fitting in” criteria for film and television subtitle translation based on feminist translation theory.

Fitting in the Identity of Female Characters

According to the relevance theory, the translator is the transmitter of information. The translator creates the best relevance in the translation process to ensure that the target language receiver obtains the best effect with the least effort (Zhao, 1999). Different roles have different identities, and the words spoken by different identities express different positions. In feminist films and television, the words spoken by female characters, whether they are the protagonists or supporting roles, are all based on the identity of “female”. Therefore, when translating subtitles, the subtitles should be consistent with the female identity of the female characters, so that the target language audience can connect the words spoken by the characters with the female identity of the female characters with the least effort. In addition, the target language audience can also more deeply feel a three-dimensional rather than flat female image, thereby better highlighting women in feminist films and television.

Example 1:

Original subtitle: I have never had to visit Weird Barbie.

Official subtitle translation: 我还从来没见过怪人芭比。

The TPGuai Subtitle Group Translation: 我以前从来都不用去看怪怪芭比。

The plot here is that Barbie thought she was sick, and the other Barbies suggested she seek advice from “Weird Barbie”. “Weird” is a neutral word, and its meaning varies according to different situations. In this film, the Barbies just think that “Weird Barbie” has rich experience and behaves differently from other Barbies. There is no malice or derogatory meaning in their words, and they even feel pity and sympathy for “Weird Barbie’s” experience. And, it was Barbie herself who said this. Barbie herself treats all Barbies equally and regards all Barbies as friends, even “Weird Barbie” whom she has never met. She would not look at “Weird Barbie” with a derogatory eye. However, the official translation translates “Weird Barbie” into “怪人芭比”. Although the word “weird” is consistent with the meaning of the word “怪人”, “weird” has a derogatory meaning in some situations, referring to those who behave strangely and do not conform to the general values of society. This is inconsistent with Barbie’s own words. And compared with the translation of “怪怪芭比” by the subtitle group, the translation of “怪人芭比” is not very appropriate. Barbie herself and other Barbies are female, and other Barbies will not be abruptly defined as “怪人”. The word “怪怪” not only expresses the difference between the behavior of “Weird Barbie” and other Barbies, but also conforms to the female identity of the speaker Barbie herself, and can also arouse the audience’s sympathy for “Weird Barbie” rather than disgust.

Fitting the Speaking Intention of Female Characters

Translation needs to reproduce the speaker’s intention and grasp the character’s implicit meaning (He &

Dong, 2021). The primary goal of feminist translation theory is to strive for women's dignity and equality as a starting point, and strive to break the serious gender discrimination in translation research and social concepts (Xu, 2004). Therefore, from the perspective of feminist translation, film and television translation should not only accurately capture the direct verbal intentions of female characters, but also deeply explore and convey their implicit meanings, that is, the implicit emotions, attitudes, and deep motivations, so as to effectively highlight the wisdom, strength and independent achievements of female characters, and break the shackles of gender stereotypes. Given that women have long been marginalized and inferior in history, traditional concepts often portray women as introverted and submissive. Feminist film and television translation should be a weapon to break this shackle.

In feminist film and television works, female characters are often given the power to speak. Through their perspectives and voices, they bravely accuse the violence, oppression, and injustice against women for a long time and expose the truth of social gender discrimination. Therefore, when translating feminist film and television, translators need to deeply understand and faithfully reproduce the intention of this criticism and appeal, ensure that the translation can accurately convey the emotional depth and fighting spirit of female characters, so that the audience in the target language and culture can also feel the real demands and power of women, and promote the concept of gender equality to be spread and recognized at a wider social level. At the same time, this is also a powerful demonstration of women's subjectivity, encouraging more women to bravely express themselves and pursue equality and freedom.

Example 2:

Original subtitle: Could I just met the woman in charge?

Official subtitle translation: 我可以见见你们这里管事的女人吗?

The TPGuai Subtitle Group Translation: 我可以见见你们的女老板吗?

The official translation of "woman in charge" as "woman in charge" is not only not formal enough, but also ambiguous, misleading the audience to think that in addition to women, there are also men in charge. Combined with the original plot, this should refer to the boss who is a woman. According to the movie setting, all the managers in Barbie Park are women, so from Barbie's perspective, the "boss" should only be a woman. And Barbie raised this question because she only saw men in suits, so she wanted to find a woman in charge. A subtitle group translated it as "女老板" which is more in line with the speaker's way of thinking and intention. It not only meets the film and television subtitle translation criteria proposed by Professor He Keyong—the translation should be fit to the speaker's language style and intention, but also highlights the identity and ability of women and affirms women's achievements.

Example 3:

Original subtitle: And there's no undertone of violence.

Official subtitle translation: 而且没有丝毫暴力的意味。

The TPGuai Subtitle Group Translation: 我受到的目光就很有侵犯的意味。

"Violence" means both aggression and violation. Literally speaking, the official translation is not wrong. But combined with the plot here: Barbie, who has a good figure, passed by the construction site and was stared at naked by the workers, with their eyes full of scrutiny. The workers did not regard Barbie as an equal, but looked at the goods with the eyes of a man. Therefore, Barbie felt offended and uncomfortable. The "violence" here should be an act of violation with sexual connotations, not just aggression. If it is simply translated as "暴

力”, it cannot fit the female character’s experience and mood at this moment, nor does it face the fact that Barbie is expressing dissatisfaction and accusation against the workers’ behavior at this moment. The subtitle group translated it as “侵犯” to characterize the workers’ behavior, which not only pointed out the wrong behavior of the men, but also fit the female character’s intention to accuse them.

Fitting in the Emotional Expectations of Female Audiences

According to Newmark’s communication theory, translation should be reader-centered and strive to achieve the effect of the original text on the target readers. In subtitle translation, the translation should be audience-centered and strive to achieve the same effect of the original subtitle on the audience. The main audience of feminist films is women, so we need to take into account the emotional expectations of female audiences, adopt positive expressions in translation, and avoid using derogatory expressions. Positive expressions are conducive to shaping the positive image of female characters, and avoiding the use of derogatory expressions is to avoid smearing the image of women, thereby avoiding making female audiences feel uncomfortable.

Example 4:

Original subtitle: Get in the box, you Jezebel!

Official subtitle translation: 快点儿进去吧, 小妖妇!

The TPGuai Subtitle Group Translation: 快点给我进去吧, 耶洗别! (注耶洗别为圣经中的恶女, 利用其王后身份压迫以色列民该信异教)

“Jezebel” is an insult in slang. The official translation of this as “小妖妇” is basically correct in meaning, but the word “小妖妇” is not only an insult to others, but also an insult to women. “Barbie” itself is a feminist-themed movie, and it is very inappropriate to have insulting expressions about women in the subtitles. At the same time, this also shows that the translator of the official translation did not consider that such insulting expressions are not conducive to shaping the image of women, and may even make female audiences uncomfortable. The TPGuai Subtitle Group adopted Professor Flotow’s translation strategy—adding annotations, translating Jezebel as a person’s name truthfully, and adding annotations about the character’s behavior at the top of the screen, which not only allows the audience to understand the speaker’s intentions here, but also meets the emotional expectations of female audiences.

Conclusion

In the future, women will continue to awaken, and there will be more and more films and TV series related to feminism. For such film and TV subtitle translation, it is necessary not only to comply with the general film and TV subtitle translation standards, but also to start from the female identity, highlight the achievements and abilities of women, create a positive female image, and face up to women’s demands and emotional expectations.

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