On E-C Subtitle Translation of Coco Under Skopos Theory

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Abstract

Subtitle translation is the way to make people communicate with film and it is the film affective means of expression. A good subtitle translation can make people have emotional resonance. With the dynamic context adaptation as guidance for the film subtitling strategies, this paper aims to be conductive to the practical subtitle translation and helps people better understand movie subtitles.

Keywords

Skopos Theory; Subtitle translation; Coco.

1. Introduction

Subtitle translation follows the Skopos Rule, Coherence Rule, and Loyalty Rule to achieve the purpose of the overall translation behavior. Therefore, this article is from the perspective of Skopos Theory to analyze the strategies in the subtitle translation of the movie “Coco”. Such high-quality movie cannot be separated from high-quality subtitle translation. The strategies adopted in subtitle translation are more novel. Translators make full use of various methods to adjust the language structure of the original text, and use integrated methods to compensate, so that the original text and the translation reach resonance.

2. Background of Skopos Theory

Skopos theory emerged in Germany in the 1970s. It shows the conversion from linguistic and formal translation theories to functional and socio-cultural orientations. This makes it “the most popular language in translation studies”. German translation theorist Katerina Rice introduced functional categories into translation criticism for the first time. Rice insisted that the ideal translation should be a comprehensive communicative translation, which means the conceptual content, linguistic form and communicative function are equivalent to the original text. But in practice, priority should be given to the functional characteristics of translation.

Soon after, Rice student and German translation theorist Hans Vermeer proposed a teleology that liberated translation studies from the shackles of text-centered theory, which believed that translation was a purposeful and fruitful act based on the original text. This act must be done through negotiation. Translation must follow a series of rules, among which the Skopos Rule is the first. In addition, translation also follows the “inner-lingual Coherence Rules” and “inter-lingual Coherence Rules”. Vermeer also proposed the “concept of translation commission”. The translator should decide whether, when and how to complete the translation task. According to different translation purposes, translators adopt corresponding translation strategies, and qualified to decide what content can stay and what content needs to change. Vermer believes that the highest rule in translation should be the “Skopos Principle”. That is, the purpose of translation is different, and the strategies adopted in translation are different. In other words, the translation purpose determines translation strategies and methods.
2.1. Principle of Skopos Theory

2.1.1. Purpose Principle

Skopos theory advocates that the “Principle of Purpose” is the primary principle followed by all translation activities. Translation should be able to function in the context and culture of the target language in the manner expected by the recipient of the target language. The purpose of the translation act determines the entire process of translation behavior; that is, the results determine the methods. The purpose principle emphasizes the criticism of the purpose. Whether in translation or interpretation, the purpose is the first thing most people should consider. During the process of subtitle translation, the translator should also consider more than one purpose, on the one hand, to make the translation easy to understand, on the other hand, to make the sentences fluent and coherent.

2.1.2. Coherence Principle

Coherence means that the translation must meet the standards of coherence in the language, especially that the translation is readable and acceptable, so that the recipient can easily understand. German translation theorist Vermeer believes that “translation should be in the context and consistent with the conditions of the recipient” (Vermeer, 2001: 115). This means that the translator must understand the cultural and communication context embodied in the original text before translating, and be able to make recipients understand it. Nord said, “What a translator can and should do is translate an article that is at least meaningful to the recipient of the target culture.” (Nord, 2001: 247). This shows the importance of the two interlingual coherence standards: readability and receptivity. The coherence principle plays a large role in the three principles. A translator’s inconsistent sentences during translation are obviously unprofessional. This is also the most basic standard in sentences translation. To make sure that the translated sentences are smooth, so that the target audience can understand the story told by the subtitles. Inconsistent translated sentences lead to misunderstanding or daze. The target audience cannot understand the meaning of the subtitles, and it also causes unacceptability. Rigid and boring subtitle translation is definitely not acceptable to the target audience.

2.1.3. Loyalty Principle

Nord put forward the principle of faithfulness, which means that the original and the translation must be consistent. However, she found that there were two major shortcomings in Skopos Theory: Firstly, due to different culture models, people in different cultural backgrounds have different views about a good translation; In addition, if the translation communicative purpose of the Skopos principle is contrary to the original author’s intention, then we will abide by the Skopos principle while violating the principle of faithfulness. Therefore, Nord proposed the loyalty principle to address the cultural differences and the relationship between the participants in translation behavior. Nord believes that translators have a moral responsibility to the recipients of the translation and must explain everything to them about what they did and why they did it. This is one side of loyalty principle. On the other side, the loyalty principle requires the translator to be loyal to the original author. “The translator should respect the original author and coordinate the target language and author’s intention.” (Nord, 2001: 99) Therefore, the principle of fidelity mainly relates to the relationship between the translator and the original author, the clients and other participants in the translation process. Nord proposes that translators should follow the guiding principle of “function plus loyalty” to perfect this theory.
3. Coco and Its Subtitle Translation

3.1. Definition of Subtitle Translation

When it comes to subtitle translation, the first thing is to understand what the subtitle translation is. Subtitle translation can be defined as a translation practice, which usually involves written text presented at the lower part of the screen. It describes the original conversation of the speaker and the discourse element (letters, embeds, graffiti, placards, etc.) in the conversation of the speaker, and information contained in the score. The interaction of these three parts, the ability of the viewer to read and write text at a specific speed and the actual size of the screen determine the basic features of audiovisual media. Subtitles must be displayed synchronously with images and dialog boxes, and be able to stay on the screen long enough for viewers to watch the subtitles.

Subtitle translation hasn’t have a unified definition until now. Many researchers have given their own opinions. The most complete and scientific definition of subtitle translation is Danish translator Henrik Gottlieb’s. He believes that subtitles translation is “translating the spoken or written source text of an audiovisual product into a written target text and added to the original text image at the bottom of the screen”. (Gottlieb, 1994: 178). That is to say, when the audience are watching the native language subtitles, they are also listening to the source language. At the same time, in the process of subtitle translation, we must not only consider the screen size of the subtitle translation itself, but also consider that it is a written, instant and synchronized multimedia translation.

3.2. A Brief Introduction of Coco

“Coco” is the 19th animated feature film of Pixar Animation Studios. On March 5, 2018, the film won the 90th Academy Awards Best Animated Feature Film. “Coco” takes the Mexican traditional festival “Dead Day” as the background, which is equivalent to China’s “Qingming Festival”. On this day, people remember the deceased, prepare food and wine, sing and dance, and reunite with their loved ones. The film is about a young boy Miguel who loves music, but he is opposed by the whole family, because the family once saw a man who abandoned his wife and child for music. By chance, Miguel entered the undead world by touching a guitar. In that world, he met his departed loved ones and long-deserved musician De La Cruz. During the process of the acquaintance with them, Miguel discovered a shocking secret and deeply understood the meaning of the family.

3.3. Linguistic Features of Coco

3.3.1. Speech Adaptation

In “Coco”, the plot of the story unfolds with the progress of the dialogue. There are a large number of onomatopoeia in the film. It is a type of words created by people to simulate the sound of nature. The use of onomatopoeia in the film makes the character’s image more vivid and the plot more interesting. The audience feels like being in the movie. Although the two languages, Chinese and English, are very different, the emotions have the same magic when they are expressed in onomatopoeia, such as “Achoo!”, “Huh?” and “Tchsshh!”, which are translated as “阿嚏!”, “啊?”,”嘘!” These onomatopoeia have brought more pleasure to the film.

3.3.2. Lexical Adaptation

Lexical adaptation refers to the adjustment of subtitles due to the lack of vocabulary in the translation process. To achieve lexical adaptation, the translator must choose the appropriate language, so how to choose suitable words in subtitle translation is worthy to be considered carefully by translators.
3.3.3. Syntactic Adaptation
Chinese and English languages belong to different language families, so their rules for word formation are also different. English is a metamorphic language with grammar as the core, which means that all sentences follow the SV structure; while Chinese is a kind of desirable language, which is centered on meaning. The meaning of a sentence, a series of phrases or a series of clauses does not represent the meaning of the entire sentence. The reader needs to carefully consider it. Therefore, the translator should take the feature of inconsistency in the syntax into account in the process of movie subtitle translation. In the subtitle translation of “Coco”, the translator adopts translation techniques such as increasing translation, reducing translation and back-translation to achieve syntactic compliance.

4. Strategies for Subtitle Translation in Coco

4.1. Strategies for Dialect Translation Under Coherence Rule

4.1.1. Literal Translation
Example 2: “Be reasonable”
Translation: “要乖哦!”
“Reasonable” means “合理的、明智的”. Western countries advocate rationality. They believe that rationality is the source of knowledge. Only rationality can be trusted. For a child, being rational is like being a good kid.

4.1.2 Free Translation
Example 3: “Grab it tight.”
Translation: “坚持梦想”.
This is what Drakus said in an interview. If translated literally as “紧紧地占有它,” it would seem bland and boring. But the translator translates it into four words. Then it is powerful and the audience can feel the speaker’s firm heart.

4.2. Strategies for Culture Translation Under Loyalty Rule

4.2.1. Amplification
In the movie “Coco”, “That’s such a sweet sentiment.” “Thank goodness we found you in time” are translated as “真是感天动地”, “谢天谢地，我们及时找到你了”. The translations of the above two example sentences are faithful to the specific intentions of Chinese culture. Westerners believe in God, while Chinese believe in heaven and earth. They believe that heaven and humanity are connected, and that man and the outside world are one and the same. We are born in this world, the first thing is to observe the heaven and earth to understand nature, and locate the value of people in the system of heaven and earth and man, so that we can get a correct understanding. The translator processed the “sweet sentiment” and “thank goodness” in the film into the “感天动地” and “谢天谢地”, which are commonly used in the life of Chinese audiences, and are enlarged with the combination of the cultural habits of the Chinese. Not only the translation is easy to understand, but also close the psychological distance with the target language audience.

4.2.2. Omission
The subtitles are the characters’ dialogue content in the film, and the subtitle translation conveys this content to the audience. As long as it does not affect the transmission of the meaning of the discourse, some of the content can be increased or decreased or changed in the translation process.
Example 4: “But I could not have done it differently.”
Translation: “但是再给我一次机会我也不会有别的选择”.

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De La Cruz is known as the greatest musician in the world, and Miguel asks if he regrets giving up everything for music, including leaving his hometown and family. De La Cruz believes that no one can violate the fate’s arrangements, he is destined to become a musician, even if he can choose again, he will follow the same path. The subtitles here are not literally translated into: “我不可能做不同的事情”, but uses hypotheses tone to expresses De La Cruz’ s voice, reflecting his firm determination to become famous and to sing to people around the world.

5. Conclusion

Subtitle translation is limited by language, audience, and the subtitle translation needs to use the compensation strategy appropriately, so that the language of the translated subtitles is the closest to the language of the target audience, and the target audience will not feel the translation. This article analyzes the strategies and skills of E-C subtitle translation from a teleological perspective, takes the movie “Coco” as an example, proposes the translator needs to understand the language and culture of the target country, fully consider the feelings of the target language audience, and strive to maximize the equivalent of the target language and the original language, so that the translated subtitles are more in line with the social and cultural background of the target language audience and the recognition of the target language audience.

Acknowledgments


References