

Study on the Translation of Euphemisms in the Perspective of Domestication and Foreignization

Niqian Peng¹, Xueshuo Ma^{2,*}

¹School of Foreign Languages, Jilin Institute of Chemical Technology, Jilin, China

²School of Foreign Languages, Jilin Institute of Chemical Technology, Jilin, China

*Corresponding Author: 739416762@qq.com

Abstract

Domestication and Foreignization are the dominant translation strategies in Anglo-American cultural societies, and they are given different degrees of attention in different translation fields. In this paper, we take some scenes in *Friends*, a popular American sitcom, as an example and evaluate the current translation status of the euphemisms appearing in the sitcom, relying on the translation strategies of naturalization and dissimilation. The results of the study indicate that translators can reduce the differences between culture and language by adopting appropriate strategies for translation. The study also proves that Chinese translators have a better understanding of American culture and can maintain the entertainment of the translation while ensuring the correct translation content and reasonable translation process.

Keywords

Domesticating translation; Foreignizing translation; American comedy; Euphemism; Entertainment.

1. Introduction

With the development of the Internet and the rise of video software, British and American comedies have rapidly opened up a market in China. While subtitle translations have gradually been scaled up and the quality of the translations has begun to receive attention. Those comedies are mainly aimed at audiences in Western countries. It is easy for audiences in the same culture to understand the comedy. However, the cultural background and living habits of the West and China are very different. When the comedies enter China, Chinese audiences would find it difficult to understand some of the contents and expressions in them. [1] Considering the cultural vacancies and conflicts, the author believes that exploring the translation of Chinese subtitles of sitcoms is conducive to strengthening the understanding of foreign cultures and promoting cultural intermingling among ethnic groups. Domestication and Foreignization are two important strategies in subtitle translation. Macroscopically, in the translation of any text, the translator has to choose different situations: literal translation or free translation? Domestication or Foreignization? [2] In recent years, it has received much attention from various fields. However, the author found from the data search that there is less research on the translation of euphemisms appearing in subtitles based on this strategy. In this paper, we use the American sitcom *Friends* as the corpus and apply the theory of domesticating translation and foreignizing translation to explore the translation of euphemisms appearing in subtitles.

The translation terms were coined by the reputed translation theorist Lawrence Venuti in his book *The Translator's Invisibility*. Long before Venuti, the German translation theorist Schleiermacher mentioned in *On the Different Methods of Translating* that "there are two ways to translate: one is to let the author remain there and lead readers to approach the author; the

other is to make the author approach readers while readers remain there." [3] Venuti, on the other hand, refers to the former as Foreignization and the latter as Domestication and adds his view that Foreignization is the adaptation of readers to the linguistic features of the foreign culture. Translators need to take into account the differences between national cultures while allowing the translation to retain the exoticism of the original work. As he says, "the translator who employs the strategy of Foreignization aims to expand the translation practice, not to bother readers or to hinder reading, much less to give readers the feeling of a translation accent, but to create new conditions of readability." [4] This paper will examine the euphemisms in Friends based on this theory. (The following subtitle translations are all from the Sohu video translation. The Domesticating translation aims to minimize the exoticism of the target language, localize the source language, and provide a natural and fluent translation for audiences. Venuti points out that this strategy is a dominant translation strategy in Anglo-American cultural societies. In a cultural society where the strategy is the standard translation method, it is the "invisibility" of the translator that allows the translation to be domesticated in the target language culture without being detected by readers. [5]

Foreignizing translation does not fully comply with the linguistic norms of the target language and intentionally retains words or sentences from the source language about its culture, context, etc. Venuti describes it as a "pressure to depart from the nation" that serves to "inject linguistic and cultural differences in foreign texts into the target language, sending the reader abroad". (1995:20)

2. Theories

2.1. Subtitle Translation

From a linguistic perspective, subtitle translation can be divided into Intra-lingual Subtitling and Inter-lingual Subtitling. In this paper, we focus on Inter-lingual Subtitling translation, which is the process of translating the source language into the target language and overprinting the target language on the bottom of the screen or picture simultaneously while preserving the original sound. [6]

There are three characteristics of sitcom subtitles.

1. Brevity: Subtitles in film and TV dramas are limited by both space and time, and need to follow the actors' actions and the end of their mouths. In order to reduce audiences' burden of reading subtitles and improve the experience, the translation of subtitles needs to be concise and clear.
2. Conveying the meaning: To ensure that the information in the source language will not lose and that audiences' understanding of the plot does not deviate too much, the translator needs to consider the linguistic and cultural disparities between the source language and the target language.
3. Humor: There are many kinds of humor in sitcoms, such as laughs due to wordplay; laughs due to cultural load; laughs created by voice changes, etc. Therefore, when translating such subtitles, translators should conduct sufficient research and consider carefully, so as not to make audiences' understanding of the plot inaccurate by omitting or mistranslating the subtitles because of the lack of background knowledge.

The author believes that by studying subtitle translation, the theory of Domesticating translation and Foreignizing translation can be better analyzed in-depth and used.

2.2. Euphemism

Euphemism is derived from the Greek word "euphemismos". The prefix "eu-" means "good" and the stem "phemism" means "speech," [7] to express certain facts or ideas politely or gently, to reduce their vulgarity. Euphemism can include rhetorical refrains, which mean the use of a

word or phrase to express the opposite of its literal meaning. In fact, there is an inextricable relationship between the creation of euphemisms and the existence of Taboo. Taboo refers to words that are offensive or difficult to say. Euphemisms were created to avoid them and to express ideas in an indirect way. Its main functions are to avoid taboo words, be polite, disguise facts, and express humor.

When translating the euphemisms of film and television works, translators should fully consider the needs of audiences, focus on audiences' reactions, and adopt corresponding translation strategies. By doing so, their understanding of the film and their feelings after watching it are consistent with the feelings the author wants to present in the film. [8] In the following, I will give examples to show their functions.

3. Practical Application of Domestication and Foreignization

3.1. Domestication

In the eleventh episode of the third season of Friends, five people other than Chandler are sitting in the living room of their home talking. At that moment, a noise came from overhead, which led to the following conversation:

Ross: Somebody's at the door on the ceiling.

Monica: That's our unbelievably loud upstairs neighbor.

Here, the "neighbor" is translated as "芳邻" in Chinese, which means a good neighbor. What the passage is trying to convey is that the upstairs neighbor was making too much noise, but Ross euphemistically used a knock on the door to convey the meaning. Rose's words were a declarative sentence, but Monica saw it as a question and gave him an answer. The meaning of the conversation changes to "Who's knocking on the ceiling? That's our good neighbor, it's noisy as hell." Here, "a good neighbor" makes an extreme contrast between the sentence and its context, because good neighbors are not likely to be noisy. The translator's strategy of Domestication not only preserves the punch line but also makes the subtitle translation better. Another example is the conversation that takes place in Season 4, Episode 16 when Ross and his fiancée Emily returned to the Central Cafe to meet the group after visiting the Victorian doorknob exhibition:

Emily: My uncle dragged us there, but it actually, it turned out to be really interesting. They were so ornate and beautiful. Look at that.

Monica: I don't know how museums work in England, but here, you're not supposed to take stuff.

The phrase "take stuff" is translated as "顺手牵羊", a Chinese idiom. It means taking someone else's stuff while they're away. During the conversation, Emily showed them the doorknob she bought from the souvenir store, but Monica misinterpreted it as something Emily stole. Monica then politely said that in America she can't just take someone else's stuff while they were away, or more straightly steal something. However, if the Chinese translation was "you should not steal anything in our country", the euphemism would be lost and then the punchline. But the translator holds the euphemism and naturally brings the source language into the culture of the target language, which is a good way to achieve the "invisibility" of the translator.

3.2. Foreignization

In the first episode of the first season, there is a quote from Chandler and Joey when they urged Ross to forget his ex-wife and find a new girlfriend.

Ross: Grab a spoon. Do you know how long it's been since I've grabbed a spoon? Do the words 'Billy, don't be a hero' mean anything to you?

Here, the underlying sentence is translated as “比利，别逞英雄，” which is the direct translation of the source language. Joey had compared finding a new girlfriend to picking up a spoon, so Ross responded to him with a famous anti-war song as a euphemism for his displeasure. One lyric in the song reads, "Billy, don't be a hero. Come back and make me your wife." Here, Ross compared finding a new girlfriend to going to war, and the corresponding lyric was an exhortation to not be heroic and to keep the status quo. The translator directly translates this line and adds the commentary "'Billy, don't be a hero,' an anti-war song from the 1970s'. This presents the foreign culture directly, and because of the commentary at the top of the screen, viewers can better understand the message the source language is trying to convey.

Another example is the dialogue at the end of the second episode of the first season when Ross showed the group an ultrasound of his unborn son:

Ross: Well? Isn't that amazing?

Joey: What are we supposed to be seeing here?

Chandler: I don't know, but I think it's about to attack the Enterprise.

The “Enterprise” is also directly translated into relevant Chinese, “企业号”. Here, Chandler showed that he can't see what it is, but euphemistically said it's going to attack the Enterprise. The Enterprise is a warship from the movie Star Trek. The thing that Chandler said was about to attack the Enterprise is actually a small alien warbird, so he euphemistically compared Ross's unborn child to an alien. The translator uses the same method as the previous example, annotating the words "Star Trek" at the top of the screen. The translator has directly preserved the cultural differences between the source and target language countries, 'sending readers to a foreign country'. However, due to the incomplete cultural transmission, some audiences do not understand the message the line wanted to convey even if they see the annotation added by the translator, because these audiences have not seen the Star Trek movie. Therefore, the author thinks some information should be added to the commentary to read "The warship in Star Trek is attacked by aliens," which would be more appropriate.

3.3. The combination of Domestication and Foreignization

The disadvantage of Domesticating translation is that it "blindly uses monolingual language, which rejects foreign culture" and sometimes does not achieve cultural integration. And Foreignizing translation contains many cultures that are unfamiliar to target audiences, which may lead to misunderstanding of the plot by them. Whether using the former or the latter, translators should combine and flexibly use them according to the different cultural backgrounds of the source language, and the target language, the intention of the source language and the needs of audiences, to achieve a good cultural exchange.

For example, in the first episode of the first season, there is a dialogue as follows:

Rachel: And then I got really freaked out, and that's when it hit me: how much Barry looks like Mr. Potato Head.

“Mr. Potato Head” is translated as “薯头先生” in Chinese, the direct Chinese translation of potato and head. It is not so explicit that most audiences can imagine it. What's more, when people asked Rachel the reason for her escape, she compared her fiancé to Mr. Potato Head. Almost all Americans know the image of Mr. Potato Head. However, because China has not been spread by that culture, not many viewers know it and do not have a visual impression of it in their minds. As a result, it is more appropriate to combine the two translation strategies here, and translate it directly as "Barry's head looks like a potato". In this way, the exoticism is preserved and audiences can understand the message conveyed by the source language.

Another telling example is in the twenty-fifth episode of the third season. Ross's new girlfriend Bonnie shaves her head at Rachel's urging, and then Bonnie invites Chandler and Joey to go swimming, followed by the following dialogue:

Bonnie: You guys, the water's great. You should really go in.

Chandler: No, thanks. I just had an M&M.

Here "M&M" is translated as "光滑的巧克力豆", which means "chocolate beans with smooth shells. In this context, Bonnie recommends that Chandler and Joey go swimming, while Chandler euphemistically uses chocolate beans to reject Bonnie and mocks her bald head. The translation adds the modifier of smooth to make it easier for audiences to understand the meaning of the source language. However, the translator used Domesticating strategy to translate "M&M" into chocolate beans. With changing times, most viewers have a clear and intuitive impression of M&Ms. However, it has been years since the end of Friends. And the brand has become popular and has been known by more people in China. Only using one of the two strategies to translate cannot fully express the meaning of the source language, so it is more appropriate to use a combination of them. Therefore, it is more accurate to be translated as "光滑的M&M巧克力豆", which is the combination of its characteristics, brand name, and nature. In this way, audiences are made aware of the new imagery and understand the plot at the same time.

4. Conclusion

To sum up, under the guidance of Domestication and Foreignization, the translator can convey the information of the source language as much as possible and also let audiences fully understand the meaning of the target language. The analysis of the examples in this paper can conclude that the two theories have good parsing power and can play a guiding role when dealing with the translation of euphemisms appearing in the subtitles of sitcoms.

References

- [1] K.X. Wang: Analyzing the Domesticating Translation in the American Drama "The Big Bang Theory", Overseas English, 2020, No.5, p.166.
- [2] Y, Ding: Strategies and Methods of Subtitle Translation of the Sitcom "Friends" From the Lexical Level. Overseas English, 2019.
- [3] Schleiermacher, Friedrich: On the different methods of translating[A]. In Rainer Schulte & John Biguenet (eds.). Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida[C]. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- [4] Lawrence Venuti: The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation (Second Edition) [M]. London and New York: Routledge,2008, p.19.
- [5] Lawrence Venuti: The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation[M]. London and New York: Routledge,1995.
- [6] Y, Yang: Comments on the Translation of Film Titles, Journal of Southwest Jiaotong University (Social Sciences), 2006(7), p.93-97
- [7] Y.P. Liu: The Translation of Euphemism Based on Functional Equivalence Theory, Central South University,2011.
- [8] J.Y. Wu, S.Q. Wang: Translation of Euphemisms in the Translation of American Sitcom Subtitles from Functional Equivalence Theory—Taking Friends as an example, ANHUIWENXUE, 2018, No.415, p.53.