

Study of Domestication and Foreignization Translation Strategies for English Translation of Chinese Film Titles

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Abstract

As a kind of cross-cultural communication activity, film title translation carries the communication between two different languages and cultures. This paper will start from exploring the theories of domestication and Foreignization, and explain the application of domestication and foreignization strategies in film title translation through case studies. Through the study, it is found that due to the constraints of culture, language and the commodity property of movies, domestication strategy currently occupies the mainstream position in the translation of Chinese movie titles. However, at the same time, with the deepening of cultural exchange, the proportion of foreignization strategy is gradually increasing. Therefore, translators should consider various factors when translating, and make the best choice based on the faithfulness to the content of the film and the original title, as well as the role of the film as a commodity and cultural product.

Keywords

Film titles; Domestication strategy; Foreignization strategy; Translation strategy.

1. Introduction

In recent years, with the booming development of China's film and television industry, more and more excellent domestic films are exported overseas. As the audience's first impression of the movie, the title has aesthetic function and commercial promotion. Therefore, the quality of movie title translation will directly affect the box office and the psychological expectation of the audience. An excellent translation should be artistic and practical at the same time, i.e. aesthetic value and commercial value. Therefore, it requires the translator to go deep into the inner world of the film, with the purpose of conveying the message and appealing to the sense of beauty, so as to promote the film to its fullest extent.

Most of the domestic scholars' research objects in the field of film title translation focus on classic films from many years ago or common films that are household names, while this paper mainly studies the topic by analyzing examples, analysis and descriptions, taking the films released in China from 2015 to 2020 as the scope of research, and selecting 35 films from them as research objects, most of which are familiar to the audience and most of them are well-known and representative works.

2. Domestication and Foreignization Strategies - Theoretical Foundations of Film Title Translation Studies

Lawrence Venuti emphasizes that "domestication refers to the adherence to the current dominant values of the target language culture and the blatant use of conservative assimilation of the original text to make it fit the local canon, publishing trends and political needs. Foreignization, on the other hand, refers to deviating from the dominant native values and retaining the linguistic and cultural differences of the original text (1995)." The strategy of domestication requires that the translator must think deeper to the target language reader and speak like the native author. This helps the readers of the translated-in language understand

the translation better, thus enhancing the readability and appreciation of the translation. As for the translation of Chinese movie titles, the domestication strategy can make foreign audiences better understand the connotation of the titles and thus invest their interest and mobilize their emotions. At the same time, because of the profoundness of Chinese culture, many cultural qualifiers with strong national colors are difficult to translate the cultural connotation behind them, and the domestication strategy can help translators find appropriate landing points and alternative ways in the translated language, so that the readers of the translated language can better find the emotional attachment in line with their own culture [1].

The foreignization strategy aims to emphasize that the translator should try not to disturb the author, so that the reader will move closer to the author. This means that the strategy of foreignization is to accommodate the linguistic features of the foreign culture and to absorb the expressions of the foreign language. The purpose of using the strategy of foreignization is to take into account the cultural differences and thus preserve the exotic flavor. Therefore, the translation strategy of foreignization is not to "seek common ground" but to "preserve differences". For the film industry, ethnicity and difference are important gimmicks for commercial promotion and attracting audiences. The translation of Chinese film titles can maximize the dissemination and preservation of Chinese characteristics, so that foreign audiences can experience the charm of Chinese culture to a greater extent [2].

Unlike literal translation and free translation, domestication and foreignization strategies break through the limitations of language and form. And it involves more cultural and aesthetic expressions. In the field of film title translation, how to use these two translation strategies to better convey the cultural connotation behind the titles has become an important direction for translators to study. This paper takes the translation of some movie titles released in China in the past five years as an example to explore the English translation strategies of the current Chinese film and television industry, so as to analyze how to use the two different translation strategies of domestication and foreignization [3].

3. Domestication of Chinese film titles in English translation

As the first image of a movie, the quality of its translation will affect the box office. According to Xiang Huasheng's claim that "giving a movie a good title is like the finishing touch after drawing a good dragon". That means an attractive title can help a movie accumulate audiences. The task of a film title is to "concisely summarize the content of the film, reveal the theme in a simple and concise manner, and inspire the public with rich associations in a timeless and profound way." In the process of promoting Chinese films overseas, using domestication strategy to translate titles can make the target language audience accept our culture more directly and thus gain a sense of cultural identity. The domestication strategy can be based on the cultural needs, aesthetic needs and sense of cultural identity of the audience in the translated language. And it can turn the content of the film into expressions that are more familiar to the audience in the translated language and remove the cultural barriers between the two languages as much as possible.

In 2018, while the movie "我不是药神" received constant public acclaim, its English translation of the title *Dying to Survive* also played a huge role in promoting the movie's success. The film tells the story of a patient with leukemia who was arrested for selling counterfeit drugs after purchasing cheap but unverified anti-cancer drugs from India on behalf of 1,000 leukemia patients, which were not covered by national health insurance at the time. The overall tone of the movie is depressing and sad, with emphasis on the choice between life and death, expressing people's thirst for life in the face of death. The phrase *dying to do something* in the English translation of the title itself means *longing to do something*, and through domestication, *dying to survive*, i.e. *longing to live*, intuitively and strongly expresses the central idea of the

film [4]. The strong contrast between "dying" and "surviving" also shows the contrast between life and death in the movie. At the same time, such a strong contrast also reflects the emotions and sharp social contradictions embedded in the film. In the same year, the film "找到你" tells the story of a woman who plays a game of fate with her nanny in order to find her child. The title of the film is translated as Lost, Found, which also highlights the contradiction and impact of the film through a set of antonyms.

The film "无问西东" tells the story of four young people from different generations who graduated from Tsinghua University, all of whom are passionate about their dreams and seek their true selves. The title of the film is translated into English as Forever Young using the domesticating translation, and the word "Wu Wen Xi Dong" comes from the lyrics of the school song of Tsinghua University. It means that good moral character and useful words are the foundation of human growth, and with these two things, life and youth can be more exciting and soaring. The word is unique to a specific cultural environment, and it has the cultural characteristics of being subtle and introspective but meaningful in Chinese. So it is difficult to express its profound meaning if translated from the surface alone. Therefore, a domestication strategy is used here to express the inner meaning directly, which not only conforms to the English expression habits and helps foreign audiences understand the main idea of the film directly, but also expresses the core of the original film which aims to celebrate youth. The same applies to the 2016 film "七月与安生", which tells the story of two girls named July and Anson, who grow up from knowing each other to loving and killing each other. So its title is translated as soulmate, which also presents the core content of the film in a way that is better understood by the recipients of the translated language under the guidance of domestication strategy.

In 2019, the film "少年的你", which title translates as Better Days. It also uses the domestication strategy as a guide. The film tells the story of two teenagers whose fate is changed by a school accident, and they grow up together by guarding and relying on each other. Better days shows more of the desire for a better tomorrow, in line with the beautiful vision of the original film in which the main characters are in a deep mire but hold each other through difficulties. At the same time, it also gives the audience room for imagination and reflection.

The following year, the film "夺冠" tells the development history of Chinese women's volleyball team's efforts and struggles from the initial championship to the present, which interprets the tortuous experience of several generations of Chinese women volleyball team members who faced difficulties and kept fighting. The English translation of the title of the film is Leap, which basically means to leap hard, and it makes audience imagine the image of volleyball players jumping upward and striving hard on the field from the meaning of the word itself. And on the other hand, it can derive the spiritual quality of the Chinese women's volleyball team to strive for upward even when they are at a low point. Therefore, the use of domestication strategy in the English translation of Chinese movie titles helps the audience of the translated language find the support of their own culture in a short time, so that they can better invest their feelings in the movie. A good and successful English translation needs to reflect the central idea of the movie, and at the same time bridge the gap between the culture of the language of origin and the culture of the language of translation.

4. Foreignization of Chinese Film Titles in English Translation

The strategy of foreignization translation is to preserve the cultural characteristics of the country. And for the translation of Chinese movie titles, it emphasizes the preservation of the original flavor of Chinese culture, stimulating the curiosity of overseas audiences through the profound cultural charm, and thus creating an authentic and novel movie-going experience for them. The foreignization strategy includes phonetic foreignization, such as the translation of "叶问" as IP Man, and semantic foreignization, such as the translation of "建党大业" as The

Founding of the Party, which has been gradually accepted by audiences of the target language with the deepening of cultural exchange in recent years. This is due to the large number of Chinese cultural film and television works that retain their original flavor. Therefore, in the face of the increasing cultural penetration among countries, a large number of translations of Chinese films have also widely shown the attitude of foreignization.

The translation of historical documentary film titles mostly adopts the strategy of foreignization, which emphasizes objectivity and authenticity as a way to express respect and reverence for historical events. The use of this strategy can minimize the loss of meaning of the original language, so as to restore the cultural connotation of the original language to the greatest extent. For example, "建军大业", released in 2017, is translated as The Founding of an Army, and the English translation of the same series of "建党伟业" is The Founding of a Republic, which shows the unique characteristics of China by directly preserving the original meaning of the Chinese language. In addition, the English translation of the title of "红海行动", which was released in 2018, is Operation Red Sea, which also shows that the translation strategy is mostly used for films about real-life events. Another example is the film "湄公河行动", released in 2016, whose title is translated as Operation Mekong, and the film "八百", released in 2020, whose title is translated as The Eight Hundred.

The English translation of the title of "叶问4", a series of films about characters released in 2019, is IP Man, which is also a typical treatment under the strategy of foreignization. The main character of the film, Ip Man, grew up in Guangdong Province, so the Cantonese pronunciation of his name translates to IP Man. Therefore, the title of the film directly retains the characteristics of the original language in the English translation, which on the one hand reveals the identity information of the main character in the film, and on the other hand, the phonetic translation under this strategy also makes foreign audiences have a deep impact on the characters of the film. Especially for the cultural fields unique to China, such as martial arts, the translation strategy of foreignization is mostly used in the translation, which directly preserves the characteristics of Chinese on the one hand, and is a unique symbol of Chinese culture on the other.

The foreignization strategy puts Chinese in an active position to promote Chinese culture to the world in its original form, so that the audience of the translated language can understand and learn Chinese culture. The use of this strategy can directly convey the main content and genre of the movie, so that the audience can understand the content of the movie at the first time, but from another perspective, the slightly obscure title of the movie enriches the content information of the movie in an invisible way, so that the audience can maintain full curiosity about the plot. Therefore, the use of foreignization strategy can preserve the characteristics of the original language to the greatest extent, which is conducive to the better development of the source language culture to the world.

5. The Choice of Domestication and Foreignization Strategies

This paper takes 35 movies released in the past five years as the research objects, and through analysis, it is found that 28 movies use the domestication strategy, while only 7 movies use the foreignization strategy. It can be seen that the domestication strategy still occupies the main position in the field of film title translation at present. However, culture is fluid, and culture is always being lost, changed and lost in the process of transmission, and as a bridge between two cultures, there is no way to restore 100% of the connotation behind the source language culture in translation. Therefore, in the process of using translation strategies in practice, it is impossible to judge which strategy has caused greater cultural loss.

Translation theorists such as Venuti have raised the use of translation strategies to the cultural level, and for the translation of film titles, which strategy to use is based on conforming to the functions of film titles, i.e., expressive function, information transfer function, aesthetic function and evocative function. The expressive function refers to the performance of the title through different ways such as the highest level, adjectives, adverbs, and the use of words with positive or negative connotations. The information transfer function means that the audience can form a general impression of the relevant genre and main content of the film through the title before watching the film. Aesthetic function means that a good title can distinguish the film from other films and make the audience remember the film better. The call function refers to the fact that the title of a film, as a commercial product, should be set to attract the audience and stimulate consumption as much as possible [5].

Therefore, no matter which translation strategy is used, the four functional characteristics of movie titles should be upheld in translation, and the domestication strategy should not be used excessively to cater to the taste and interest of the audience of the translated language, and the cultural connotation of the original language should not be abandoned recklessly. Neither should we adopt the strategy of foreignization in order to promote our culture in its original form. Translation is never a simple communication between two languages, but a strong bridge between the cultures behind the two languages. This is especially true for the translation of movie titles, where the translator has to consider how to use translation strategies to promote cultural transmission within the framework of the four functions of movie titles.

Since domestication and foreignization strategies have their own advantages and disadvantages, translators are required to combine the two strategies when translating, so as to achieve the purpose of spreading culture and communication based on the function of film titles. The two strategies in film title translation are not contradictory but complementary and mutually reinforcing. The use and choice of translation strategies is not the purpose, but the cultural exchange is the purpose. Cultural communication between different countries or nations requires different modes and methods to accomplish together. Therefore, on the issue of strategy selection for Chinese film title translation, it is necessary to avoid one-sidedly adopting one strategy as much as possible, but should respond flexibly according to the specific content and context, and give full play to the advantages of each strategy to achieve the ultimate purpose of cultural communication and exchange.

6. Conclusion

Nowadays, with the booming development of China's film industry, more and more excellent domestic films are coming to the world, and it is not advisable to adopt domestication and foreignization strategies for the English translation of Chinese film titles, but to combine the two effectively in order to complement each other and better spread Chinese culture. Translation of film titles is a process of re-creation, and translators should make the best choice based on the function of film titles, taking into account not only the market influence of films as commercial products, but also the communication and dissemination power of translation as a cultural bridge.

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