

On the Translations of Catchwords in Chinese movies and American movies from the Perspective of Skopos Theory in *Garfield*

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Abstract: The Skopos theory is an approach to translation which was put forward by Hans Vermeer and developed in Germany in the late 1970s. It focuses on the purposes of translations and provides a new perspective for the research of translation. Catchwords, however, makes more and more important influences on people's lives. Movies, as a main carrier of catchwords, also give a significant influence to our lives and talking. This thesis mainly makes a research on the translation of catchwords in Chinese and American movies, making *Garfield* as an example, using the methods of comparison, analysis and comprehension. After these different versions of translations, the thesis comes into a conclusion that Skopos Theory is the best choice to guide the translation of catchwords in Chinese and American movies.

Keywords: Skopos Theory; Movies; Catchwords; *Garfield*.

Introduction

As the process of globalization put forward and international information exchange, the communication and integration of different cultures are reinforced. Globalization, as one of the most remarkable features of modernization, has put great prominent influence on the field of economy as well as that of culture, which leads to people's relative distance shortened geographically. Movies are a main way for people to get information of the foreign country and catch a better understanding of the culture. Chinese people now take American movies as a main way of entertainment. They sob at sentimental scenes, laugh at interesting images and the humorous dialogues. Moreover, most Chinese movies have put their subtitles on screen in both Chinese and English. Double-captioned movies become a tendency for movies in China. To make most audiences easily appreciate the American films, subtitle translation becomes an urgent task. Catchword, as a very important part of the subtitles, plays a significant role in translations. It influences people's understanding a whole sentence even the emotions of the characters. So, the translations of the catchwords mean a lot to the audiences. When translated appropriately, they can be very vivid; once translated not well, they may ruin the whole conception. This paper mainly focuses on the translations of the catchwords in the subtitles in both Chinese and American movies under the guidance of the Skopos theory, making *Garfield* as an example. By comparison with some other methods, the thesis will use some examples to prove that it is probably the best method to direct the translation of the catchwords in the movies.

1. The Introduction of Skopos Theory

Skopos Theory is a main method of translation. People now translate many works under the guidance of Skopos Theory. It is widely accepted by most translators. There is a long way for Skopos Theory to improve itself to reach a

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height like today.

1.1 The origin and basic definition of Skopos Theory

Translating as a purposeful activity, the idea put forward by functionalists, focuses on the function of translation. It is represented by Vermeer's Skopos theory, or the theory of Skopos applied to translation. Throughout the history of translation in which the priority of translation was usually put on the source text by various theories, in contrast, Skopos theory shifts its attention to the target text. According to the Skopos theory of German functionalism, translation process should start by deciding on the intended purpose/function of the translation. The selection of translation principles and strategies has to be compatible with translation purpose as well as the function or functions to be achieved in target text.

1.2 The development and importance of Skopos Theory

Skopos theory, which plays a major role in the functionalist approaches to translation, didn't appear overnight. Before we come to the detailed description of Skopos theory, it is necessary to outline the landmarks related to the development of the German functionalism school.

In 1971, Katharina Reiss first put forward a new model of translation criticism on the basis of the functional relationship between source and target texts, or the particular purpose of a translation activity. Katharina Reiss completed her book called Possibilities and Limits of Translation Criticism, which is generally regarded as "the starting point for the scholarly analysis of translation in Germany" (Nord, 2001). Based on the functional relationship between the source text and the target text, Reiss developed a theory of translation criticism. In her book, Reiss pointed that an ideal translation should be in which "the aim in the, target language is equivalence as regards the conceptual content linguistic form and communicative function of the source language text"(Nord:1997).

In 1984, Reiss and Vermeer formally questioned the traditional concept of "equivalence" and suggested the more universal one "adequacy". They found that there exist situations in which equivalence are not possible and not even desired in some cases. In Vermeer's Skopos theory, a theory of purposeful action, one of the most important factors that determine a translation purpose is the addressee the intended receiver or audience in the target language and culture with expectations and communicative needs. As Vermeer puts it, to translate is "to produce a text in a target setting for a target purpose and target addressees in target circumstance." (Nord 2001:12) We notice that Vermeer makes no mention of the source text, thus the status of the source text is obviously lower than the target text in Skopos theory. What Skopos theory emphasizes is not the function of the original, but the function or set of functions the target text is to achieve.

2. The Analysis of the Catchwords in American and Chinese Movies

Catchwords, also called buzzwords and as a phenomenon of vocabulary, reflects the things and affairs that a nation or a region focuses their attention on in a particular period of time. It can be known by most people in a very short time and are said by them.

2.1 The introduction of catchwords

There are different catchwords in different time. As a sensitive mark, catchwords reflect the changes of the society. A lot of new thoughts and new things sprung up over the 30 years from the opening up to now, catchwords is a representative. It is a symbol of people's releasing their mind and also we can see the degree of the mind liberation. "Practice is the sole criterion for testing the truth." "To cross the river one has to be sure about stones at the bottom." "A cat is an excellent one as long as it can catch mice regardless of its color." "Development is the absolute principle." These are the very catchwords back in the years just after the opening-up policy and everybody at that time knew these sentences. The translation of catchwords may be different in varies situations, such as in the novels, in the magazine, in the movies and so on because of their different characteristics.

2.2 The characteristics of catchwords in movies

Language is a mirror of the society, and it reflects all the aspects of it. As well, language is a symbol of culture. So are subtitles and of course catchwords. People express their values and their attitude toward culture in catchwords. They are also symbols of the phenomenon happened in the society and the changes of the times. People in the last century were very familiar with the subtitles in the Russian movies and that fitted the situation that China was deeply influenced by Russia.

There are three main features of catchwords in movies:

Brevity: The number of words in each sentence of dialogues is limited and the speed of dialogues is very fast, too. If the presence of translated catchwords must be matched with the dialogues in the show, the brevity of wording and phrasing is very important during the translation consequence; viewer cannot go back and read again what they have not understood when watching subtitle stuffs under normal circumstance.

Subtitles vanish immediately after the end of the speeches in films which are presented in a continuous flow. For the storage capacities of human brain are limited, the brevity and condensation of the catchwords is beneficial to help audience to remember and understand the previous catchwords faster and better.

Colloquialism: Colloquialism is not serious, compact or well-knitted as written words. Characteristics of colloquialism are as follows: Abundance, Vividness, Flexibility and Roughness. Colloquial is an oral language which can be collected widely from many sources of language. Vividness means the features and flavor of colloquial is closely related to the audiences' life.

Synchronization: It is subtitle translator's duty to synchronize the catchwords with the whole films or TV programs. "Due to the linguistic and cultural differences between English and Chinese, we sometimes have different word orders and even different gestures for the same meaning." (Susan Bassnett & Andre, 2001). Professional subtitle translators always synchronize sound and picture in the screen with translation subtitles.

3. The Translations of the Catchwords in Garfield under the Guidance of Skopos Theory

3.1 A brief introduction of some translations of catchwords with different methods and the comparisons of these translations

There are some similarities between spiritual conformity and the Skopos Theory. The target language should anyhow satisfy the target audience in one way or another. Spiritual conformity is a special method. It just requires the translation and the original should be the same spiritually regardless of the version and form even the meaning. It is somehow easy for the translator to do the job, but it is too loose and makes the audience feel informal and cannot pay enough attention. However, there are also some differences between them. Skopos Theory not only requires an understandable translation, but also makes some requests on the detailed methods, and the translation should depend on different situations.

Skopos Theory says that translating is a purposeful activity. There are no exact Skopos rule, coherence rule and fidelity rule. Actually there is no exact requirement of it. It says that the translator can use different methods when it comes to different situations. The translators should vary their translations from different purpose. I think it is the best one to guide the translation of the catchwords in movies, because there are different kinds of catchwords in diverse movies and the translation should depend on the situation where the translation is used.

Of course, every method has its advantage as they are all supported by so many people. Faithfulness/expressiveness/ elegance are the early rules came up by Chinese, and they were well welcomed at that time. Although the translation under the guidance can be very delicate, they were a little strict for translation because there are three requirements and it is quite hard for a translation to satisfy them all.

There is a very classical example of translations under different thoughts. “剩女” is a very popular word in Chinese society. There are mainly three versions of translation.

1) Translation from literal meaning: “*Left woman*”. Actually, it is the easiest one of all. The translator can make

“剩女” into “*Left woman*” without any difficulties. Although it is easy to translate, the version can hardly be understood by the target audience. The phrase may cause many misunderstandings. People may think “*left*” as the opposite meaning of “*right*”.

2) Explanation: the women who are at their late 30s or early 40s without marriage. It is very clear to understand, but in movies, the subtitle should be very brief, or the screen will not be enough to place one translation.

3) Culture equivalence: “*3S women*”. The phrase means the women were born in seventies, single and stuck. There may be some differences between “剩女” and “*3S women*” in meaning, but this version perfectly makes the target audience instantly understand the meaning of it.

3.2 Some detailed translations of catchwords in Garfield

Applying the Skopos rule, coherence rule and the fidelity rule to the subtitle translation, we will figure out that the purpose of film subtitle translation is to aid the audiences with a well-translated subtitle which can contribute to a good understanding of what is happening on the screen and thus to carry out a smooth communication between the film and the target audiences. In order to fulfill this purpose, the translator’s task is to apply suitable principles and strategies of translation, to provide audiences with the clear and concise subtitle with the constraints of time and space.

The Skopos Theory is actually the best way to translate the catchwords in the movies. There are some examples in the following to prove that:

Example 1:

Luca---*You are gonna get it good today.*

Luca---今天你要吃不了兜着走.

Garfield---*I make a point to get it good every day.*

Garfield ---我每天都是吃不了兜着走.

This movie is regarded as comedy and audiences are composed of most of the teenagers and children, which decide the skopos theory. That is a conversation between Luca and Garfield. “*Get it good*” seems to express good wishes to others and maybe something good happens. But in fact, according to context, contrary meaning is transmitted like warning. “今天你走着瞧” is equal to “今天你要吃不了兜着走”. The translator translates it into the latter instead of the original meaning.

The first is as close as the second one, but the latter one can be better understood by the target readers because it is vivid and fashionable. As for Garfield’s answers, the same way of translation conveys harmonious and pleasant expressions. In this case, if the translator just uses the literal meaning, the whole story will not be so harmonious.

Example 2:

Luca---*You are on the wrong side of the street. Fat cat! Beat it.*

Luca---你不该来街的这边的,肥猫! 小心我揍你.

Garfield---*And you, Luca, the wrong side of the evolutionary curve.*

Garfield ---Luca,你是生物进化论失败的结果.

“*On the wrong side of*” is a normal word and the translation can be “在某一方面是错的”, it is good enough and people can all understand it. The first sentence is translated into “你不该来街的这边的” instead of “你来了错误的街道”. The former is in accordance with the principles of “*faithfulness/ expressiveness/ closeness*”. The second sentence is the essence of catchwords. “生物进化论失败” expresses one’s idiot and failure in all aspects of lives. It’s an insulting word but contains humorous ingredient. Under the guidance of the principles of “*The Skopos Theory*”, this version not only fits the meaning, but also makes the whole story a fashionable one.

In this dialogue, Garfield says that “*No dumb dirty animal is ever gonna get the better of me*”. This is a very normal sentence, but the translator does not make it normal like: “没有任何又笨又脏的动物能占我便宜”. Instead, the translator puts it into “屌丝是占不了我便宜的”. “屌丝” is now a very popular word to describe the men who is not handsome, rich or tall and it is sometimes used by people to make fun of themselves. The latter translation is a version under the guidance of Skopos Theory; it may not so close to the source text in meaning and form, but it is a very vivid

description to the one in the conversation. It can make the target audiences feel close to the whole story and American culture, and what is more, it makes people feel funny and that is the purpose of the movie.

4. Conclusion

As the movies both in China and American emerge so fast, people are more and more affected by the words in them. The exchange of the movies between the two countries is very frequent and the movies have become an undivided part of our daily lives. So the good translation of the catchwords in the subtitles becomes an emergency. Through the analyses of the catchwords in some movies and after comparing these translations, people can better understand the function of Skopos Theory and know better about American culture. When watching movies, language learners can find more information about language points to help them better learn language. What's more through these comparisons we can reach a conclusion that Skopos Theory is a better way of translating catchwords in movies. The characteristics of the catchwords in movies require a higher quality of its translation. Although there are advantages and disadvantages of each method, the best way to guide the translation of the catchwords in the movies is Skopos Theory. .

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