

# A Brief Analysis of Chinese Traditional Animated Film Subtitle Translation from the Perspective of Skopos Theory -- A Case Study of Yao -- Chinese Folktales

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**Abstract:** As the internet takes off, many excellent traditional culture animated films in China have been global in recent years. Due to different cultural backgrounds, translators have some difficulties in translating some culture-loaded words into English. Therefore, This paper selects the subtitles of the first episode Nobody of Chinese traditional folk story drama Yao -- Chinese Folktales. It shows the charm of Chinese culture across time and space. So this paper analyzes it from the perspective of Skopostheory combined with specific translation examples, hoping to provide reference for similar translation work studies in the future and better publicize and show the world the excellence of traditional Chinese culture.

**Keywords:** Skopostheory; Chinese traditional culture; Subtitle translation

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## 1. Introduction of Skopostheory

Skopostheory was put forward by Reiss and Vermeer in 1960s, which belongs to a branch of functionalist translation theory. The core of functional skopostheory is translation practice centered on translation purpose, which puts forward three principles, namely, skopos principle, coherence principle and fidelity principle. He proposes that translation is a purposeful act, and therefore purpose is the highest criterion; the translation provides information about the source culture for the target culture; the translation does not provide information contrary to that of the original; the translation must be consistent within the language; and the translation must be cross-linguistic.<sup>[1]</sup> As long as the translation achieves the purpose of translation, it is qualified. Even if there are some differences with the original text, it is acceptable.

## 2. Characteristics of Subtitle Translation

### 2.1 Colloquial

As an important part of daily entertainment, the art form of film comes from life without exception. Most of the characters' lines in movies come from real life, so the language is very lively and colloquial. Colloquial language means the language is easy to understand, close to life, and does not stick to strict text structure. The screen conversion speed of film and television works is fast, which requires the audience to quickly understand the development of the plot and promote the plot through the dialogue between the characters. The colloquial feature is very important in subtitle translation of film and television works, which can make the audience appreciate the works better.

Therefore, in the process of subtitle translation, the translator must also follow its colloquial characteristics to make the translated language easy to understand, concise and clear, and at the same time ensure the fluency of sentences.

### 2.2 Flexible

English subtitles can not only enhance the expressiveness and activity of the images, but also help viewers understand the content of the video more accurately, especially for viewers who don't know much about Chinese as a language. Subtitles flash on the screen, and the information advances step by step, appearing only for a few seconds or even shorter, and passing instantly. Subtitles need to be changed in real time on the screen and occupy no more than two lines in the picture.<sup>[2]</sup> Therefore, translators need to be highly flexible when translating, mastering the degree of time and space under the premise of ensuring the accuracy of the translated text, so that the

viewers can better access the information in the limited time.

### 3. The Subtitle Translation of Nobody from the Perspective of Skopostheory

Yao -- Chinese Folktale is an excellent animation work of China in recent years. The effect and artistic conception of the film have reached a perfect state, which has been very popular at home and abroad. The film tells eight independent stories rooted in the traditional culture of China in the form of animation. The theme is all-encompassing, from nostalgia to eschatological feelings, from caring for life to thinking about human nature, paving a world with Chinese imagination and showing the charm of Chinese culture across time and space. Some of the words with strong cultural background meanings are quite difficult to translate into English.

It is of paramount importance that translators can grasp the true meaning of the text and make authentic translations that can be understood by audiences with different cultural backgrounds. From the perspective of Skopostheorie, this paper analyzes the subtitle translation of the first episode of the film Nobody and probes into relevant translation practice examples under the guidance of Skopostheorie.

#### 3.1 Translation of Words with Traditional culture characteristics

##### 3.1.1 Translation of Names

Names are an important part of social language system. It fully shows the characteristics and connotation of national culture. Due to the cultural differences between China and the West, there are differences in names. This is also shown in literary works, and there are great differences in the naming of characters.<sup>[3]</sup>

Table 1: Examples of Names.

|         |  |     |        |
|---------|--|-----|--------|
| 玄奘法师    | Eminent Monk Xuan Zang from Tang Dynasty | 沙和尚 | Sandy  |
| 唐僧      | Monk Tang                                | 猪八戒 | Piggy  |
| 齐天大圣孙悟空 | Sun Wukong                               | 小妖怪 | Nobody |

According to the examples in the table, we can see that translators mainly adopt transliteration, literal translation and free translation. The role of “the Monkey King” is the most prominent in the play, and it is directly expressed by pinyin. The “little monster” appears in the title of the play, it refers to the little pig demon seemingly, but in fact it represents the ordinary lower class. So it is translated into “nobody” by free translation, which can better reflect the meaning of the original play. Most of the names of other characters are literally translated, which shows the characteristics of the characters concisely and clearly.

##### 3.1.2 Translation of Culture-loaded Words

Culture-loaded words refer to words that can best reflect the cultural information carried by language and reflect human social life in the language system. Culture-loaded words are words with national culture color, and they are also the language level that most directly and sensitively reflects the national history, culture and customs in a national language system.

Table 2: Example of Culture-loaded Words.

|      |               |      |                        |
|------|---------------|------|------------------------|
| 将计就计 | counterplot   | 小的们  | my little ones         |
| 别上火  | avoid illness | 修炼成精 | strive to be excellent |

“Jiangjijiuji” means to use the tactics used by the other side to deal with the other side in turn. This is taken from an allusion in ancient China, but the English word counterplot means “to intrigue against: foil with a plot”, which just corresponds to the Chinese meaning of this word.

“Xiao” is a modest word in Chinese context. “Xiaodemen” actually refers to subordinates from the perspective of the king, and it shows the comparison between honor and inferiority. So it is translated into “my little ones”

“Xiulianchengjing” is a concept of practice according to the traditional China, which refers to the individual’s cultivation of internal strength to achieve the extraordinary realm beyond ordinary people. “Strive to be excellent” is adopted in translation to express the original meaning well.

“Shanghuo” is a folk saying, which can be explained from the theory of traditional Chinese medicine. Chinese medicine believes that the imbalance of yin and yang in the human body will lead to “Shanghuo”. Therefore, the so-called “huo” describes some symptoms of heat in the body, and “Shanghuo” is also the internal heat syndrome after the imbalance of yin and yang in the human body, which is manifested in physical discomfort such as sores on the mouth, redness and swelling of the gums, sore throat and constipation. Therefore, the word was translated into “Illness”, which is concise and clear.

##### 3.1.3 Translation of Four-character Idioms and Proverbs

Idioms are a major feature of China traditional culture, and they are stereotyped words in Chinese vocabulary, mostly four char-

acters. Idioms have been handed down from fixed phrases through long-term use and refinement, and are often used as fixed structural units and complete meaning units. The characteristics of idioms are: firstly, the form is fixed. Idioms can't be simply explained one by one according to the literal meaning of their constituent parts. Idioms have a tight structure, so you can't arbitrarily change or add or subtract the components. Secondly, concise. Idioms are rich in content, and often an idiom tells people a meaningful story. Thirdly, neat and harmonious. The structural types of idioms are various, but most of them are four syllables. There are several sources of idioms: A large number of idioms are summaries of historical stories and ancient fables, or ready-made sentences in ancient written language. Quotations, literary and artistic works, and popular statements not written in ancient vernacular. In the process of social development, some new idioms have emerged one after another.

Case1

SL: 节外生枝

TL: Don't make new trouble.

The original literal meaning of "Jiewaishengzhi" is that there should be no branches. It means that there are new problems besides the original problems. According to Skopos Theory, the translation here adopts free translation to facilitate the understanding of English-speaking audiences.

Case2

SL: 唐三藏行善好施 为民除害是千年不遇的法师啊。

TL: Tang Monk, a charitable and philanthropic genius of the millennium, exterminates evils for our human beings!

The idioms adopted literal translation. Among them, the coordinate verb structure "xingshanhaoshi" is changed into noun phrases in translation, and the adjective "qiannianbuyude" is also changed into a noun phrase. Moreover, the adjusted word order is more convenient for the target audiences to understand.

### 3.2 Translation of Sentences

Under the guidance of Skopostheorie, different sentence patterns will have various translation results by adopting different translation methods.

Case3

SL: 后来都被唐僧收了去做徒弟。

TL: Sun Wukong and Pigsy are both willing to become disciples of Tang Monk.

Passive voice was changed into "are both willing to", highlighting the Tang Priest's profound influence.

## 4. Conclusion

From the perspective of Skopostheorie, this paper analyzes the English translation of culture-loaded words in subtitles of China's animation Yao -- Chinese Folktales. It is found that different translation strategies are adopted in subtitle analysis under each principle, and the choice of each strategy should take into account the communicative purpose of translation. The translation of the animated subtitles fully considers the context, receptive ability and reading ability of the target audience, and also ensures the spread of China cultural connotation in Chinese subtitles. From the case study, this paper finds that the three principles of Skopostheorie do not exist in isolation, but are interrelated. Translation that conforms to the three principles of Skopostheorie is more in line with the cultural background and language habits of the target audience, so as to better publicize language and culture. However, this paper only briefly analyzes the translation strategies adopted in English subtitle translation under the three principles of Skopos Theory, which have certain limitations. I hope this study can be helpful to subtitle translation in the future.

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