

A Study of Film and Television Subtitle Translation under Computer Assistant Translation

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Abstract : In recent years, with the globalization of the world economy, the wave of globalization of film and television industry is also unstoppable. Alternative computer-aided translation has solved the problems of traditional artificial subtitle translation to a certain extent, the problems of software technology and translation lag still hinder the development of film and television subtitle translation. This paper first introduces the progression problems faced by China’s film and television subtitle translation and analysis their causes, and then explores the targeted solutions to these problems in terms of technology development, talent training and management system combined with computer-aided translation technology, in order to contrive bute to subtitle translation and film and television globalization.

Keywords : Subtitle Translation; Computer Assistant Translation (CAT); Translation Lag; Translation memory; Termbase

1. Introduction

In the era of digitalization and informationization, film and television entertainment has continuously infiltrated into our lives in a popular, networked and global way. Subtitle translation, as an important tool for obtaining information and enjoying entertainment, is becoming more and more important. Excellent subtitle translation can not only make the original work more perfectly presented to the audience, but also enable the audience to overcome language barriers in a short time to maximize access to information. Under the background of information revolution, the Internet is developing rapidly, and the related technologies in the field of intelligence are particularly prominent. Computer Assistant Translation (abbreviated as CAT) technology has solved the problems of traditional subtitle translation to a great extent and improved the translation efficiency. This paper aims to study the problems existing in subtitle translation and the targeted solutions under computer-aided translation.

2. The problems and reasons of subtitle translation in China

As a special type of language conversion, subtitle translation is a written translation of the original spoken language. In the viewing process, apart from the actors’ performances and the plot of the works, only subtitles can make the audience feel the feelings and thoughts expressed by the author most deeply and accurately. At the same time, subtitles will not stay on the screen for too long, and are affected by the screen size. The length and accuracy of subtitle translation will also have an impact on the viewing effect of film and television works. The particularity of subtitle translation determines the particularity of subtitle translation work, which has high requirements for translators’ time flexibility, cooperation ability and translation technology. At present, China’s

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subtitle translation work is composed of two camps: official subtitle group and folk subtitle group. The official subtitle group is centered on CCTV, while the folk subtitle group is relatively messy, such as Renren, OAC group, Eden and other major translation groups with a certain scale. There also have some freely formed subtitle translation teams. No matter what kind of subtitle translation group, there are some problems, such as the delay of subtitle translation, which affects the timeliness of viewing, and the lack of computer-aided translation technology and awareness of use.

2.1 Translation delay

Time is a major problem faced by the domestic subtitle translation industry at present, and there is a time lag in both official subtitle translation and folk subtitle translation. As far as official subtitle translation is concerned, it is always later than the audience expects. The main reasons are as follows: ① The introduction standards are strict. For example, the classic film *Titanic*, which won Golden Globe Award and Oscar Award, is favored by Chinese officials. But the problem is that these works have been popular abroad for a long time almost before winning the prize. For example, *Titanic* was released in the United States on November 17, 1996, became popular all over the world in 1997, and was released in mainland China on April 3 of the following year. “*Everyone Loves Raymond*” has been popular abroad for nine years even before it was introduced into China. ② The introduction procedure is complicated. Before the introduction of film and television works into the domestic market, CCTV will ask the filmmakers to provide a trial view, and then a professional team composed of directors, translators and professionals will discuss and decide after a trial view. This procedure takes as short as two months and as long as one year, which greatly delays the subtitle translation of film and television works and the release time of the works in China.

Different from the delay caused by the introduction of official standards and procedures, the problem of folk subtitle translation team lies in the different working hours. The members of the folk subtitle group are scattered, and most of them are composed spontaneously by college students and film and television lovers from all over the world. The personnel composition is complex and lacks organization, systematicness and order. Due to the different translation time of individuals, it is difficult to unify working hours, and it is more difficult to realize timely communication, coordination, discussion and even synchronous translation, which eventually leads to the problems of low overall work efficiency and delayed translation of the translation team.

In today's fast-paced life, the field of subtitle translation has unconsciously produced an invisible contest about the release time, which the party who first releases the works can first occupy the market and win the attention of the group. In order to seize the opportunity, the subtitle groups always ignore or sacrifice proofreading, follow-up technical support and other steps, and release it hastily after rapid translation. To solve this problem, the official can in case of violation of laws and regulations and without prejudice to national interests, reasonably adjust the relevant procedural requirements for the introduction of film and television works and speed up the updating and release of works. For folk subtitle translators, the translator's own translation quality and translation ability are the key to improve the speed of subtitle translation. Skillfully operate computer-aided translation software and make good use of the more flexible management mechanism of folk translation organizations can be as good as the official subtitle group, and make the domestic subtitle translation faster and more accurate.

2.2 Software technical problems

Lack of technical and tool support and ability to use subtitle translation is also one of the prominent problems in the process of subtitle translation, which will lead to low translation efficiency. At present, the common subtitle processing software in the market is Popsb, Subtitle Workshop, Translator, Time Machine, Subcreator and so on. Take Time Machine as an example, it is the mainstream software used by Chinese subtitle translators. This software supports multiple subtitle formats such as str and ass. Subtitles with suitable format or after format conversion can be directly transferred to video through this subtitle processing tool, and the rapid conversion of subtitle numbers can be realized. At the same time, videos can also be directly loaded into software for editing, such as merging and splitting subtitles in videos, making timelines, inserting key frames and arranging subtitle transition effects, so that subtitles can be accurately matched to every frame of videos. Most professional translation software has the functions of Translation Memory and Termbase. SDL Trados is the most popular CAT software in the world. The memory bank technology of the software is to store the existing original text and translation in an unnamed folder in a special file format, and use computer-aided translation software to accurately retrieve the translated or similar words, phrases and sentences in the later translation work, so as to avoid repetitive manual translation work. Termbase technology can help translators retrieve professional vocabulary quickly

and accurately, and timely supplement of new terms can also prevent confusion, thus ensuring translation speed and terminology unity. However, Time Machine does not have the memory bank and termbase functions of professional translation software such as SDL Trados. It means that translators have to complete a lot of high-intensity translation work in a limited time. For terms, it is necessary to consult professional documents and dictionaries to determine their accurate meanings, but repetitive translation is needed when encountering the same or similar words and sentences, which not only wastes a lot of time and manpower, but also cannot effectively ensure the consistency of terms and the unity of the overall content of the translation.

2.3 Other issues

The information age also puts forward higher requirements for subtitle translators to operate computer information technology. Traditional subtitle translators need to keep an accurate grasp of the new vocabulary and language background while learning computer-aided translation software. Compared with experienced and older subtitle translators, the new generation of subtitle translators are easy to master computer-aided translation software, but lack of translation experience and inaccurate judgment on some specific translation situations. The memory bank and term base functions of translation software can combine the advantages of the two. When a generation of subtitle translators set up a memory bank from the beginning of their work, it will be enriched and expanded in the future work. After more than ten years or even decades of accumulation and precipitation, it will be a treasure for future subtitle translators.

Besides, subtitle translation also faces other problems, such as great differences in interpreters' level, lack of responsibility of interpreters, lack of attention to subtitle translation by film and television companies, and imperfect management mechanism of subtitle translation teams.

3. Application of CAT software in subtitle translation

In a narrow sense, computer-aided translation software is one of the tools developed to optimize the translation process and improve the translation efficiency, and its greatest advantage is to save the translation work time to the maximum extent. Aiming at the most prominent time problem in subtitle translation, computer-aided translation software can not only help interpreters complete their work at a faster speed while ensuring the translation quality, but also accumulate materials for later subtitle translation.

3.1 Proficient in operating the memory bank function under CAT software

In subtitle translation, computer-aided translation software can help interpreters reduce their burden and improve their translation speed. Computer-aided translation (CAT) is an information technology that can improve translation efficiency in the process of language and translation culture communication. In the process of translation, if traditional manual translation is adopted, it will take some time to consider and polish the same or similar words and sentences. The memory and search functions of computer-aided translation software can solve this problem perfectly. Under CAT software, if the interpreter encounters the translated content, the system will automatically search and give the stored translation results, and provide translation reference and suggestions when encountering similar words or sentences. For example, in SDL Trados software, the translator can create a memory bank at the initial stage of operation. After importing the translated text to complete the translation work, the software system will automatically store it in the created memory bank through simple operation. In the subsequent translation process, Trados system can automatically identify, search and display the same or similar words and sentences stored in the memory bank, and even automatically supplement the translation through operation instructions. For example, in the American TV series *Charlie Diary*, the title of each episode is "Hi Charlie, it's your big sister Teddy with my video diary". After the first translation, the translator can automatically identify and insert the translation by using the memory bank function of CAT software. There are 97 episodes in the whole drama. If there is no CAT tool to assist translation, the translator needs to translate this sentence 97 times. Except for the main body of a series of movies and TV shows, there are a lot of identical or similar information at the beginning and end of each episode, so using the memory bank function can efficiently avoid duplication of work. Secondly, in the process of subtitle translation of foreign film and television works, many foreign slang and culture-loaded words will be encountered, so translators need to study not only their literal meanings, but also the cultural connotations behind them. In this case, the research results can be imported into the memory bank of the translation software, and the next time they are encountered, they can be searched directly from the memory bank and used.

3.2 Proficient in operating the termbase function under CAT software

Termbase is simply a corpus for storing terms. In SDL Trados software, translators can create termbase through new projects before translating the original text, select the languages of the original text and the target text, and then start translation. If technical terms are encountered in the translation process, the translator only needs to search them in the termbase. In film and television works, names of people and places frequently appear. Because subtitle translation is completed by subtitle groups with cooperation of many people, it is very likely that terminology translation is not uniform in a work or even an episode of works. For example, the American TV series *Supernatural* has been translated into “Mysterious Power”, “Evil Power” and “Evil Ghost and Evil Spirit” since its release. The name of Castiel, the main character in the play, has been translated as “Castile, Little Cam, Castile”, and the common name Alice also has many translated versions such as “Alice, Alice, Alice”. Another example is the series of films such as *Star Wars*, which are popular at domestic and abroad. Because the dramas are crossed and the timeline is long, a large number of scientific words such as “force” and “Millennium falcon” need to be unified all the time. The inconsistent translation of professional words such as names and drama titles will inevitably affect the audience’s understanding of drama invitations and works, and even affect the reputation of works. To solve this problem in subtitle translation, translators can use computer-aided translation software to take out special words such as names and place names and make them into a termbase, which can be shared within groups, so as to ensure the consistency of terms in works, save translation time and improve translation efficiency.

3.3 Proficient in operating the revision function under CAT software

The quality, box office and reputation of film and television works are closely related to subtitle translation. High-quality subtitle translation can help the audience understand the works, but no matter any translator or a translation method, there will be translation errors such as mistranslation, punctuation marks and semantic inaccuracies. Taking *Guardians of the Galaxy*, a popular film at home and abroad, as an example, there are 25 inaccurate subtitle translation, 11 missing translations and 40 translation errors. After its release, it received a large number of audience feedback, which shows the impact of subtitle translation on film and television works. The quality control in the later stage of the translation can help ensure the translation quality. On the one hand, the traditional manual revision will increase the translator’s workload and affect the translation speed, on the other hand, it can’t be foolproof. The revision function of CAT software can quickly check the whole translation, and the translator only needs to check and correct the text that may be wrong. For example, the film *White Night*, adapted from Dostoevsky’s short story of the same name, has been translated as “baiye”. The French meaning of this phrase is: A night without sleep. Combining the original novel with the plot of film and television, the hero fantasist and the heroine Naskinka always fall in love at night, and the last scene of the story also takes place on a snowy night, so its original name actually means pun, so it is more appropriate to translate the title as *Sleepless Night*. The film subtitles were translated earlier. If the revision function in computer-aided translation software such as Xbench is re-used, this problem can be verified. Furthermore, adding the revised results to the termbase will be helpful for future subtitle translation.

4. Conclusion

Information globalization is constantly changing the way people work. Computer-aided translation has become the most efficient, mainstream and convenient subtitle translation method. In view of the common problems in the field of subtitle translation, such as translation delay and unskilled operation of software tools, it is necessary to comprehensively improve the training of translation talents, software skills training and management system construction. Although subtitle translation still depends on manual modification and polishing to some extent, it is undeniable that CAT software has exerted great influence on subtitle translation and even cross-cultural communication in China. This paper is to study the main problems and solutions of subtitle translation in China, with a view to contributing to the development of computer-aided translation technology in the future.

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