

# A Study on Subtitle Translation Strategies of Are Our Kids Tough Enough? Chinese School from the Perspective of Domestication and Foreignization

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**Abstract:** With the deepening of the reform and opening up in China and the increase of international cultural exchanges, more and more English documentaries have entered the Chinese audience's view, and more scholars have also focused on the translation of documentary subtitles. Documentary is a new type of cultural carrier suitable for cultural communication. As a branch of film art, documentary film often has more educational significance while entertaining the audience. It shoulders the mission of disseminating knowledge belonging to all mankind and promoting cross-cultural communication. However, the spread of documentary is inevitably affected by different cultural backgrounds and language differences. Most of the audience still need to rely on subtitle translation to help them understand the content conveyed by the documentary. In China, documentary translation is still in its infancy. In this field, the experience and theory of subtitle translation still have some deficiencies, which will lead to the difficulty in achieving the audience's expectations. As a result, the research on the Chinese translation of English subtitles still needs to be promoted. This paper mainly analyzes an English documentary on Education launched by the BBC, Are our kids tough enough? Chinese School. This paper attempts to combine the strategy of domestication and foreignization with the subtitle translation of this documentary film, and discusses the application of domestication and foreignization in the subtitle translation of documentary films. The purpose of this paper is to provide a perspective for the Chinese translation of English documentaries, and finally come to the conclusion that the domestication is mostly adopted in the translation of English documentaries, supplemented by foreignization. Subtitles for this article are from [www.ZiMuZu.tv](http://www.ZiMuZu.tv).

**Keywords:** Subtitle translation; Foreignization and domestication; Are our kids tough enough; Chinese School

## Introduction

With the rapid development of economic globalization and mass media, documentary, a new carrier for cultural communication, emerges as the times require. However, influenced by the language barrier, subtitle translation of documentary is crucial for the audiences to understand the content and create profundity in thoughts. The research methods of domestication and foreignization can provide theoretical guidance for the subtitle translation of documentary films, and the reasonable use of domestication and foreignization makes the subtitle translation more acceptable to the audience, so as to appreciate the cross-cultural achievements. Educational significance is often an important feature of documentary. Zhang Sufang<sup>[1]</sup> pointed out that the documentary broadcast by BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), Are our kids tough enough? Chinese School, has achieved a wider discussion in both China and Britain. The purpose of this paper is to explore the application of domestication and foreignization in the documentary and the educational reflection brought by the success of subtitle translation. As a result, in the following content, the author will give a brief overview of translation strategies and the introduction about the documentary, Are our kids tough enough? Chinese School, pondering over the questions on the way of education.

## 1. Background on the documentary, Are our kids tough enough? Chinese School

In the documentary "Are our kids tough enough? Chinese School", the introduction of Chinese education by Bohunt school is actually a bold attempt to integrate western education with typical Chinese exam oriented education.<sup>[1]</sup> BBC launched a research project to invite five Chinese teachers who have been strictly selected to teach for one month in the British top public school, Bohunt middle school. They are responsible for teaching 50 British students aged 13 to 14 in the "China experimental class", while the other students of Bohunt middle school are taught by British teachers in the school as usual. After a month, the two groups of students will take mathematics and natural science examinations respectively to see which teaching method is more effective. The results will be published in the documentary. According to the documentary, they hope to explore whether China's high-quality basic education can teach British students well. However, the reality gives them a red light that their "high intensity" teaching method is not only inhumane, but also stifles students' autonomous behavior. At the same time, aggrieved and tearful Chinese teachers believe that British students are lazy men raised under the high welfare system in Britain.<sup>[2]</sup> In the end, however, Chinese education won. In the final test, Chinese school students scored higher in every subject than British students, but is this kind of education really a good way of education? This documentary shows the public in different ways of education from both Chinese and English perspectives, which has a strong significance of educational reflection. Only a good subtitle translation of documentary can better achieve the function of spreading cultural ideas and education. More accurately convey ideas, cause people can have deeper thinking through the more accurate ideas conveyed by the subtitle translation. Therefore, in order to make subtitle translation more successful, domestication and foreignization should be adopted in the translation of documentary.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

The terms of Domestication and Foreignization were put forward by Lawrence Venuti, a famous American translation theorist, in 1995 in his book *Invisible Translator*.

Domestication is to localize the source language, take the target language or the target language readers as the destination, also adopt the expression methods that the target language and the readers are used to convey the content of the source text. Friedrich Schleiermacher, a famous German Translator in the 18th-19th century claimed that the translator should not disturb the reader and let the author close to the reader<sup>[3]</sup>. He advocates that dynamic equivalence should be centered on the target readers and serve the target readers' understanding and response.<sup>[4]</sup> In films or documentaries, domestication translation helps the audience better understand the subtitle translation and enhance the readability and appreciation of the translation.

Friedrich argued that the translator should not to disturb the author's text as much as possible and let the reader close to the author (Friedrich, 1996:39). According to Venuti,<sup>[5]</sup> the foreignization method refers to "respect and retain cultural differences, guide the audience to temporarily stay away from the national culture and enter the foreign cultural atmosphere". The purpose of foreignization translation is to preserve and reflect the characteristics of the foreign nationalities and language styles.

As a result, it is generally regarded that strategies of domestication and foreignization form the unity of opposites and complement each other. No absolute domestication and absolute foreignization exist in the translation activity. In the process of translation, whether domestication or foreignization should be adopted should be based on the actual translation situation and background. At the same time, we should also consider the purpose of the documentary, the language characteristics of the source language and the target language, and the national culture. In the translation of documentaries and film materials, translators generally adopt the strategy with the combination of domestication and foreignization in order to achieve a specific and dynamic unity.

## 3. Case Analysis on the translation of *Are our kids tough enough? Chinese School*

### 3.1 Domestication

Domestication refers to a transparent and fluent translation strategy, which aims to reduce the audience's strangeness to foreign texts. It is a kind of text-oriented translation.

#### Example 1

Voice-over: Leading the routine is science teacher Yang Jun, and he's keen to bring the Chinese ethos to his new students.

旁白: 领操的是科学老师杨君(音), 他非常想在他的新学生中树立起中式校风。

The translation strategy of domestication is embodied in this dialogue. The background of this voice-over is that Chinese teachers come to Bohunt school on the first day. The first thing they did was to gather all the students on the playground to have an exercise between classes. Through the commentator's explanation in the documentary, it can be found that there is no such tradition in British schools. However, in the translation of this sentence, the translator translates "leading the routine" into "领操", and the meaning of the original words is "routine or a set of actions". After adopting the domestication translation strategy, the cultural content familiar to the Chinese audience is restored, which is in line with the context of this sentence and more in line with the speaking habits and thinking mode of the target language audience, so as to make it clear to Chinese audience at a glance. In addition, the "中式校风" of this sentence is also an embodiment of domestication translation strategy. The word "ethos" in English refers to "national spirit or moral thought", but here the translator translates it into "中式校风", using domestication method. "校风校纪" is a very familiar word for Chinese people, representing a kind of spiritual outlook. Therefore, the translation here is very close to the background of the target language which allows Chinese audience to quickly understand the information of the documentary.

#### Example 2

Jay Brem: You'll just be talking at them, the children won't understand it, the children won't access it, tailored to the needs of our particular groups, and if we, as teachers, don't develop lessons to take... it's just going to fall on deaf ears.

杰伊·布雷姆: 你就只是单方面的灌输, 学生也不懂其里, 也不懂其表, 按照受众群体的需求来设定的话, 如果我们作为老师不发掘课程, 结果只能是对牛弹琴。

This teacher is a math teacher at Bohunt high school, Jay Brem. Here, domestication translation strategy can be fully reflected. First of all, the translation of "表、里", there is an idiom in China: from the surface to the inside, which means from the shallow to the deep. This refers to Mr. Brem's view that students can neither understand the surface meaning of knowledge nor really grasp the profound connotation of knowledge under the Chinese teaching mode. Obviously, the domestication translation method can let the Chinese audience grasp the key points of the subtitle information and be close to the expression way of Chinese. The translation of idioms is also an important embodiment of domestication translation. "对牛弹琴" is a common idiom in China. However, the use of idioms in Chinese culture does not lose the deep meaning of the source language, but also being simple and vivid. It is successful to let the Chinese audience to achieve the purpose of subtitle translation.

#### Example 3

Zou Hailian: We're going to do an extra activity, 1000 years ago, say Chinese ring.

邹海连: 我们做一个课外活动, 1000年前发明出来的, 叫做九连环。

"九连环" is a traditional Chinese folk intellectual toy, which is connected in series with nine rings and with the aim to solve the ring. The translation of "九连环" in the original is "Chinese ring", which means "中国环", but the documentary was spread to China, aiming at Chinese audiences. It is hoped that people will reflect on education through such a double perspective education experiment. Therefore, it is very appropriate to translate the original text into "九连环" directly by adopting domesticated translation strategy. For Chinese people, it is very familiar with such an ancient puzzle game. Most people have the experience of understanding the nine rings. Such translation can quickly bring Chinese audience into the documentary atmosphere in which people play this puzzle game. British students are still very strange to the wisdom of China, and their eyes and expressions show a kind of desire and excitement. This is

also the immersion culture teaching method developed by Chinese teachers, in order to mobilize their enthusiasm.

To sum up, we can see that, in subtitle translation, the application of domestication is mainly reflected in its closeness to the target culture. Whether it adopts the use of some Chinese idioms or common sayings, or the use of domestication to translate some products with Chinese traditional characteristics, it retains the Chinese cultural connotation and artistic details, and makes the Chinese audience resonate with the source language audience in terms of language and emotion.

3.2 Foreignization

Foreignization is a kind of translation thought produced in the translation process. It focus on breaking the convention and retaining the foreign characteristics contained in the original work which is also a kind of translation based on original text.

Example 4

Miss Yang: You have BTEC, you have IGCSE, you have different syllabus to suit different students' ability...

杨老师：你们有BTEC和IGCSE课程体系，你们为不同能力的学生准备了不同的教学大纲...

Here it directly uses the abbreviation form, and too many notes to these two curriculum systems are not accepted by the translator. However, the use of foreignization translation does not affect the audience's understanding of the whole dialogue. On the contrary, it highlights the two education systems in Britain, which improves its popularity and achieves the purpose of cultural communication. BTEC, refers to the business & Technology Education Council, which is the abbreviation of that, while IGCSE is a very well-known education system. It is one of the most tested systems in the world between the ages of 14 and 16. The foreignization of proper nouns is also an appropriate strategy for documentary translation. The documentary is limited by time, space and text, thus subtitle translation should be concise and clear to provide the audience with the best viewing experience.

Example 5

Roise: Stephen Hawking wouldn't do very well.

罗茜：斯蒂芬·霍金也跑不起来啊。

Usually, in the translation of movies and documentaries, the translator will adopt the foreignization translation strategy when translating names of people, places, food and things with distinctive foreign color.<sup>[6]</sup> The background of this sentence is that Chinese P.E. teachers test British students according to the standard of high school entrance examination, which makes many students feel that their self-confidence has been hit. Especially student Joe, who is at the top of the academic list, but sports is his short board. He is not good at sports, so the Chinese teacher's request is almost impossible for him to complete. He can't help crying because he is afraid of losing face in front of his classmates. In an interview with his classmates, Roise expressed sympathy and thought that it was really a hard nut to crack, and there was no need to force him on things he was not good at, and took an example, "even Stephen Hawking can't do well". For the translation of person's name, if literal translation or transliteration is adopted, sometimes annotation is needed. But in this example, Stephen Hawking is a well-known celebrity, so the direct use of foreignization translation is the most appropriate. This will not affect the audience's understanding, but retain the cultural characteristics of other countries, so that the target language audience can feel the cultural connotation of the source language better.

From the above analysis, it can be seen that the foreignization method is mainly applied to the content of some proper nouns, names of people, place names, etc. The adoption of the method in foreignization can make the audience understand the foreign customs better and experience the cultural or historical background of other countries, and to a certain extent, help the Chinese translation of English documentary films more successful.

4. Conclusion

Table 1 Number of the application of domestication and foreignization in the documentary

| Episode            | Domestication | Foreignization |
|--------------------|---------------|----------------|
| The first episode  | 25(75%)       | 8(25%)         |
| The second episode | 30(73%)       | 11(26.8%)      |
| The third episode  | 28(65%)       | 15(4.9%)       |
| Total              | 83(71%)       | 34(29%)        |

From what has been analyzed and the data above, we can draw the conclusion that domestication is often used in subtitle translation of documentaries(71%), with the method of foreignization as supplement(29%). There are many factors in the choice of domestication and foreignization Strategies, and their effects are also different.<sup>[7]</sup> Due to the time constraint of documentary subtitles, the audience must receive the information in a short time. With domestication, the audience only need to deal with the familiar words and expressions, because the translation strategy can effectively reduce the burden of receiving information. <sup>[8]</sup> Therefore, domestication strategy should be regarded as the main strategy of subtitle translation, especially when dealing with cross-cultural words in documentary, while foreignization strategy can be an auxiliary choice in subtitle translation. Only by combining the two, skillfully using, can the function of disseminating knowledge be better realized and audience can be better entertainment.

In addition, this paper is based on an educational documentary as the analysis object. In such an educational cultural background, through the subtitle translation of the documentary, we have more thoughts on the Sino-British education system. Translation is a kind of transformation work, which needs to take full account of the background culture of both sides. Limited to the space, the author

summarizes that the biggest difference between documentary and ordinary film is in the communication significance and educational function. Such characteristics make subtitle translation plays a particularly important role in documentary. Only successful subtitle can lead people to think about the same topic correctly, which is the crucial point.

The biggest obstacle in subtitle translation is how to deal with the relationship between the source language and the target language correctly. The translation work must take the audience as the center, and fully consider the target audience's acceptance ability, understanding ability and aesthetic taste. The author believes that domestication and foreignization should be combined in subtitle translation, with domestication as the main factor and foreignization as the supplement, so as to achieve the goal of cultural exchange and communication.

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