

Analysis of E-C Film Title Translation from the Perspective of Pragmatic Equivalence

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Abstract: Pragmatic equivalence in translation was put forward about two decades ago. From then on, it has received increasing popularity. This thesis will apply this theory to actual analysis to test its effectiveness. Importantly, it aims to reveal how to grasp the intended meaning of film titles accurately and select appropriate translating strategies to achieve the equivalent pragmatic effect of pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics. In turn, this study may assist film translators in perfecting E-C film title translation, pushing forward the development of film industry as well as film translation teaching.

Keywords: Film Title; E-C Translation; Pragmatic Equivalence

Nida (1982) once said, "Translating means translating meaning". However, for film title translation, it is not just about translating the meaning of the original title, but also sometimes conveying the meaning of the movie. Linguistic choice, context and cultural elements should be carefully dealt with.

1. Research Object

Film title, according to The Complete Film Dictionary, means words that appear on the screen not as a section of the event but as a way of carrying information to the audience. Movie is a combination of culture and commercial product, and it becomes an important approach of cross-cultural communication. It is imperative that film title translation be promoted in terms of theories and translation strategies.

Film title has four unique features. First, it is concise, straight, understandable, vivid, distinctive and rich in meaning. Second, the aesthetic feature of film titles is usually reflected in employing diverse rhetorical devices. Third, film titles are closely related with cultural elements. Fourth, the commercial feature of film title is being eye-catching and attractive to achieve the biggest film box-office. According to He Ying (He Ying, 2001), film titles perform four functions: informative, expressive, aesthetic and vocative functions.

2. Theoretical Framework

The famous American translation theorists Nida (1964) once expressed that culture differences rather than language structure may make translation more sophisticated. It is inevitable that translation should deal with the connotation in language. And Lakoff (1973) has shown that connotation is a part of pragmatic meaning.

Yule (1996) defined pragmatics as a subject that studies how to deliver more information through explicitly speaking content. Pragmatics is subdivided into pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics by British linguist Leech (1983). And Kasper (1996) claims that pragmatic comprehension mainly studies the comprehension of phenomena of pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics. Later, He Ziran made a further distinction between pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics, and studied the effects of pragmatic factors upon the meaning choices of different linguistic forms. He put forward the significant concept of pragmatic equivalence in translation.

Mo Aipin (Mo Aiping, 2010) also argues that pragmatics and translation are both interrelated and differentiated, and that the combination of the two is pragmatic translation. The combination of the two has a prospering prospect because they both involve language use and information understanding under certain context especially vocabulary choosing and expression appropriateness (He Ziran, Ran Yongping, 2010).

Pragmatic equivalence is divided accordingly into "pragmalinguistic equivalence" and "sociopragmatic equivalence" (He Ziran, 1997). And as indicated by Professor He (2003), pragmatic equivalence aims at translating meaning in full, and should take full

account of the differences between the target language and source language in pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics.

Pragmalinguistics in translation, refers to “the study of pragmatic force or language use in the context from the viewpoint of linguistic source” (ibid). And pragmatic force can be divided into implicit pragmatic force which is below the surface and unstated and explicit pragmatic force which is on the surface and stated.

Sociopragmatics in translation refers to “the pragmatic studies which examine the conditions on language use that derive from the social and cultural situation” (ibid). To achieve the equivalent effect of sociopragmatics in translation, translators are required to hold a correct conception of the different social and cross-cultural knowledge. Either an adaptation to the target reader culture to make the translation more friendly and easy-understanding or a copy of the style and cultural background of the source text to broaden readers’ horizon is acceptable (He Ziran, 2012). Obviously, this view coincides with the film title’s demand of meeting target audience’s need.

3. A Pragmatic Equivalence-Based Probe into Film Title Translation Cases

This chapter is going to discuss 24 examples based on the two aspects of pragmatic equivalence.

3.1 Pragmalinguistic Equivalence-Based Analysis

Pragmalinguistic equivalence is similar to Nida’s Dynamic equivalent translation, stressing on expressing, the pragmatic meaning of source language with the most natural and appropriate corresponding words on the basis of a correct understanding of the pragmatic meaning and force of the language of source text (Nida, 1964).

- (1) ST: Gandhi; TT: “gan di zhuan” (Note: Chinese characters are represented by Pinyin in this thesis)
- (2) ST: Madam Currie; TT: “ju li fu ren”
- (3) ST: Chicago; TT: “zhi jia ge”
- (4) ST: Titanic; TT: “tai tan ni ke hao”

The above four examples all employ the strategies of transliteration. It is found that when the names of person or place involved in film titles are very familiar to Chinese audience or full of historical and cultural connotations, they should be transliterated. However, this does not necessarily mean that transliteration can be used in all such cases, because it may sometimes make no sense to target audience, causing a loss of a large number of potential film audience. Here are some examples:

- (5) ST: Anastasia; TT: “zhen jia gong zhu” not “an na si ta xi ya”
- (6) ST: Bonnie and Clyde; TT: “ci xiong da dao” not “bang ni yu ke lai de”
- (7) ST: Jerry Maguire; TT: “tian xin xian sheng” not “jie rui ma kui er”
- (8) ST: Beauty and The Beast; TT: “mei nv yu ye shou”
- (9) ST: Ant-Man; TT: “yi ren”
- (10) ST: Jack the Giant Slayer; TT: “ju ren bu shou jie ke”
- (11) ST: Four Weddings and a Funeral; TT: “si ge hun li he yi ge zhang li”
- (12) ST: Star Wars 9; TT: “xing qiu da zhan 9”
- (13) ST: Pride and Prejudice; TT: “ao man yu pian jian”
- (14) ST: True Lies; TT: “zhen shi de huang yan”

Example (8)-(14) are typical of literal translation. Analyzing them, it is found that: film title (8)-(10) are description of the characters in the film, (11)-(12) are plot of the films, and (13)-(14) are the themes of the film. From a linguistic perspective, these titles all consist of commonly-used words and can be understood just from the literal meaning. Therefore, it can be concluded that film titles, which match the above two conditions, can simply apply literal translation to achieve pragmalinguistic equivalence. Literal translation is the most effective and simplest strategy when the target language performs about the same function of the source language in that case. Meanwhile, it retains the content and style of the original film title.

- (15) ST: Planes: Fire & Rescue; TT: “fei ji zong dong yuan: xiao fang jiu yuan”
- (16) ST: Ghost; TT: “ren gui qing wei liao”
- (17) ST: Lara Croft: Tomb Raider; TT: “gu mu li ying”
- (18) ST: Frozen; TT: “bing xue qi yuan”

From Example (15)-(18), liberal translation is employed. It is obvious that those translations achieve sociopragmatic equivalence. We can judge them by making contrasts. For example, if Planes: Fire & Rescue is literally translated as “fei ji: xiao fang jiu yuan” without pointing out its implicit meaning through a pragmatic meaning judgment of the content of the movie, it will be misunderstood as a documentary instead of a cartoon. Similarly, Ghost, if literally translated as “gui”, will be misunderstood as a horror movie instead of a

romantic; Lara Croft: Tomb Raider, if literally translated as “lao la ke lao fu: dao mu zhe”, will be too straight and stiff and can't deliver the feature of the character and atmosphere of the film; Frozen, if literally translated as “bing tian xue di”, can't convey to audience the romantic and fantasy style of it. It is necessary to judge the pragmatic meaning of the film title and what the film intends to express, and then choose the most appropriate target language linguistic forms to convey the full mean of the title. In such translating operation, translators may apply the techniques of addition, deletion, amplification and adaptation, to make titles more appellative and convey as much information as possible.

3.2 Sociopragmatic Equivalence-Based Analysis

Apart from differences in linguistic, the pragmatic meaning of Chinese and English subject to other different factors too, such as cultural elements. In light of the theory of domestication, adaptation, by means of creative interpretation, could help audience understand translated film titles. According to different cultural factors involves in film title, the discussion is divided into three kinds of adaption in translation: aesthetics, allusion and idiom, religion culture.

3.2.1 Aesthetic Adaptation

Aesthetic psychology, as an important part of ethnic culture, reflects and is influenced by people's thinking pattern and language. As for language, Chinese stresses artistic conception, harmony and unity and prefers four-character structure, while English cares more about conciseness. In film title, there ought to be an adaptation between these two.

(19) ST: Home Alone; TT: “xiao gui dang jia”

For movie Home Alone, there are two versions of translation--“xiao gui dang jia” and “du zi zai jia”. The former is more popular among Chinese, because it contains a social dialect “xiao gui” which makes it more friendly acceptable. In Chinese, “xiao gui” is a nickname to express adults' affection to brave and smart but naughty kids. Therefore, “xiao gui dang jia” caters to Chinese aesthetic psychology and can arouse people's desire to see it.

(20) ST: It Happened One Night; TT: “yi ye feng liu”

The translation takes Chinese expression habit into consideration by adapting a commonly-used expression. In this way, it produce the same pragmatic force including language aesthetics as the original title.

3.2.2 Allusion and Idiom Adaptation

It is often the case that a film names after certain allusion or idiom which is exactly the condensation of the film. Allusions and idioms contain profound cultural information. The strategy is to apply adaptation in translation.

(21) ST: One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest; TT: “fei yue feng ren yuan”

Actually, this film title was once translated as “fei yue du juan wo”, which is a typical ignorance of English idiom. Cuckoo's Nest is a special culture carrier, referring to asylum for lunatic, which is easily understood by English speakers. But, Chinese can't receive the same meaning from “du juan wo”. Therefore, such translation is a pragmatic failure. The version “fei yue feng ren yuan” that points out its implication to cater for Chinese acceptability is much better.

(22) ST: Allied; TT: “tong meng jian die”

The movie Allied is about the stories of two spies who fell in love with each other during their cooperation in World War II. The Chinese “jian die” comes from a legend in which both “jian” and “die” moves in couples, comparing to conjugal love. Therefore, the translation is effective in carrying the full cultural meaning of the original, achieving sociopragmatic equivalence.

3.2.3 Religion Culture Adaptation

Religion widely influences people's life and language communication. The religion culture of China is greatly different from the west. Then religion culture adaptation is inevitably for rendering film title translation in order to achieve sociopragmatic equivalence.

(23) ST: Seven; TT: “qi zong zui”

The film title Seven contains rich religious implication. It derives from Bible, telling a story about the seven horrible killings carried out by a psycho killer. Because the plot of the movie is similar to the story, so it was named Seven. Without the same religious background, it is hard for understand the title if simply translated as “qi”. Through religion adaptation, the translation “qi zong zui” gives audience a general information about the movie.

(24) ST: Friday the 13th; TT: “hei se xing qi wu”

Actually, this film title derives from Bible too, from the story The Last Supper. For westerners, “13” and “Friday” are of bad luck. Therefore, Friday on 13th is a double of bad luck. However, Chinese will not be curious about the movie if it is translated as “13 ri xing qi wu”. It is advisable to adapt religious difference and contain the emotion in the English title. Therefore, a better translation is “hei se xing qi wu”.

4. Conclusion

Based on pragmatic equivalence, this thesis analyzes 24 film title translation. It can be concluded that appropriate strategies are suggested for film title translation based on the type of the title and the judgment through pragmatic equivalence. It is suggestive that translator judges from the pragmalinguistic meaning and sociopragmatic meaning the intended meaning of the idiom and whether special cultural information is included. If not, it is advisable to render it from the perspective of pragmalinguistic equivalence by the methods of transliteration, literal translation and liberal translation. If cultural information is included, it is wise to translate the idioms by creative interpretation. In this way, pragmatic equivalence will be achieved in the translated title.

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