

Analysis of Lighting up the Stars Subtitle Translation under Skopos Theory

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Abstract: The demand for English subtitles for export is rising daily as a result of the standardization, popularization, and commercialization of China's international film and television business. There are Wuhan dialect characteristics in the family film *Lighting Up the Stars*. To demonstrate how crucial the skopos theory is for translating subtitles for films and television, the author analyzes the English subtitles of *Lighting Up the Stars* under skopos theory. She advocates the idea that when translating subtitles for movies and television shows, translators ought to prioritize the Skopos Theory first before searching for the best translation methods in order to shoulder the responsibility of presenting compelling China stories through their works, fostering cross-cultural communication, and accurately and fully showcasing China's unique charm.

1. Background

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the entertainment sector has flourished and all nations are currently experiencing globalization as a consequence of the quick advancement of global technology and the rising popularity of the internet. Therefore, it is imperative to unlock the door and open up the market, as well as bring Chinese culture out and amplify the Chinese voice. As the main carrier of cultural transmission, movies have surpassed the basic function of amusement and leisure, providing a window through which foreigners can view Chinese culture. Nowadays film and television works hold an important place due to their widespread popularity and distribution.

Directed by Liu Jiangjiang, *Lighting Up the Stars*, a warm and ethical film starring by Yilong Zhu, Enyou Yang, Ge Wang, Lu Liu, Jingmin Luo, and others, was released in China on June 24, 2022, and has become a hot domestic cinema. And overseas distribution by China-Lion in 29 cities and 55 theaters in the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and other countries, even screened at the NYC Regal Tangram cinema in Flushing, New York. In addition, due to its impressive weekend box office results, *Lighting Up the Stars* extended its run for three days. As a result, it is crucial to use both a theoretical and practical approach to subtitling this movie. In this essay, the English subtitles of the movie *Lighting Up the Stars* will be examined from the standpoint of Skopos Theory.

2. Theoretical Framework

The Skopos Theory is used as the theoretical foundation for this section of the study, and an overview of the Skopos Theory is given in this section, followed by the explanation of its three principles.

2.1 A Brief Introduction to Skopos Theory

The German functionalist school of translation is based on a theory called the Skopos Theory in the field of translation studies. "Skopos" is a Greek word that signifies "aim" or "purpose." The theory's founder, Katharina Reiss, applied Buhler's theory to translation studies in the 1970s and introduced the notion of functionalism through her Text Typology Theory. Its central idea—that the purpose determines the means^[1]—formed the basis for the development of functional linguistics. The functionalist approach to translation breaks the limitations of the traditional concept of "equivalence" in translation and redefines it, allowing the translator to use any method, including literal translation, free translation, and other translation techniques, as long as it serves the objective of the translation. Translation is seen as a conscious cross-cultural communication, with the importance of the target language being emphasized.

In its evolution as a sub-field of functional theory, the skopos Theory has gone through four stages: Reiss's text types theory and language function, Hans. J. Vermeer's skopos theory, Justa Holz Manttari's model of translation action, and Nord's documentary translation and instrumental translation. Among them, the most important is Vermeer's three principles of the functional approach to translation, which are the skopos-oriented principle, the coherence principle, and the fidelity principle.

2.2 Three Principles of Skopos Theory

2.2.1 Skopos Rule

Reiss's student, Vermeer, first proposed the specific concept of the skopos theory. He believed that translation is just one of the human activities for survival in the boundless universe, and that any behavior has its own special intention, so translation itself is a purposeful behavior. Vermeer, a Reiss student, was the one who initially put forth the specific notion of the functional method to translation. He held that as every action that humans take in order to survive has a potential purpose, therefore translation is a purposeful action and this action might initiate a new situation or event. Furthermore, skopos theory can be used to settle translation disputes^[2]. As an illustration, there are some disagreements on the usage of free translation vs literal translation. It will not be solved until assessing the situation with skopos theory. "Free" or "faithful" is determined by the aim of the translation. This rule specifies whether the translator should translate literally, freely, or employ alternative translation strategies.

In accordance with the skopos theory, the paramount rule that all translations follow is the skopos rule^[3]. As a result, translators ought to map out the entire translation procedure and select translation techniques depending on the ultimate goal, i.e., the result determines the method. Generally, in cross-cultural communication, the objective is typically of utmost importance. The semantic meaning of the translated subtitles should be seamlessly incorporated with the film sequences and meet the expectations of the target language readers. In the hierarchical category of priority, the coherence rule and the fidelity rule under the skopos theory both belong to the skopos rule.

2.2.2 Coherence Rule

The Semantic Coherence Principle, also referred to as the Coherence Rule, places emphasis on intra-textual coherence and differs from the skopos rule in that it stipulates that the "information produced by the translator" (target text) must be interpreted in a coherent manner that is consistent with the target language audience's cultural context ^[4], and it indicates that the target texts are not only acceptable but also readable. Therefore, in order to create translated works that are enduringly popular and well-received by the audience, translators must take into account all pertinent background information of the target language audience while translating, as well as possess broad and thorough knowledge and an extensive understanding of their culture.

2.2.3 Fidelity Rule

Skopos theory has also come under scrutiny and criticism with the rise of Functionalism. As a continuation of skopos theory, Nord presented the principle of Function Plus Loyalty ^[5] to address the "ten major questions" and fill in the gaps. The fidelity rule highlights the necessity to consider the interests of all three parties involved (author, client, and target audience), thus preventing situations where translators can rewrite at will. The term "fidelity" as used by Nord refers to a kind of interpersonal interactions in which the translator is committed to the situations at the source and target situations, as well as accountable for the ST sender and the TT recipient. It varies from "loyalty" in this situation. It also should be noted that this principle acknowledges and respects the translator's position, so the degree of fidelity may vary depending on the purpose.

3. Characteristics and Limitations of Subtitle Translation Theory

Subtitle translation is a specialized technical language that, appearing as a translation at the bottom of the screen during the scenes of a motion picture or television program in a foreign language. Also it is a special literary translation with colloquial nature. Consequently, there is an undeniable connection between subtitle translation, audiovisual translation, and interpreting since they all share the common features of instantaneousness, communicativeness, and popularization. Danish scholar Gottlieb ^[6] summarized the characteristics of subtitle translation as simple five words: written, additive, immediate, synchronous, and poly-media.

Typically, subtitle translation presents the source and target languages simultaneously at the bottom of the screen. According to academic statistics, Chinese subtitles should be kept to one line and no more than thirteen characters, while English subtitles should be no longer than two lines for an ideal viewing experience for the audience. Subtitle translation consequently becomes susceptible to restricts in terms of instantaneity, limitations, and popularization^[7]. These limitations include those related to time, space, and language style. So as to achieve the highest level of "three exchanges: communication, interaction, and integration," translators must essentially work against the clock while employing genuine and colloquial terms that are close to the original meaning to aid viewers in understanding the plot.

4. Study on the Subtitle Translation of *Lighting up the Stars* under Skopos Theory

4.1 Introduction of *Lighting up the Stars*

The film *Lighting Up the Stars* tells the story of two individuals with conventionally heroic and rebellious personalities, Sanbi Mo and Wen, who are ultimately redeemed by their love for one another and voluntarily return to the orthodox path. The story uses the traditional Chinese mythological figures of Wukong Sun and Nezha as its main symbols. And the movie takes the

funeral industry as its theme and explores the central values of the "Five Relationships" of traditional Confucian culture while portraying the tale of discipline and inheritance between individuals and collectives, fathers and sons. The primary protagonist Sanbi Mo has always had a rebellious mentality, and Wukong Sun, who wrecked havoc in the Heavenly Palace, is his hero. He has dedicated his entire life to challenging the fundamental tenets of Confucianism's conventional social order. As a result, he disobeys his family's desires and declines to take over the family funeral business, creating an intensely antagonistic father-son relationship. He doesn't initially develop such a strong emotional bond with another person or even the urge to take responsibility until Wen, who lost her grandma and has no one to turn to, shows up during a burial ceremony. Sanbi Mo is ultimately "trained" in his mental processes and fully integrates into the community when he witnesses his father and elder brother's powerful spiritual strength and profound understanding of death demonstrated in the face of death. This movie is a representative piece that captures the pioneering spirit of the era while portraying Chinese heroes and telling admirable Chinese tales.

4.2 Translation methods of *Lighting up the Stars* under skopos theory

4.2.1 Interpretative Theory of Translation

Professors of French translation Danica Seleskovitch and Marianne Lederer originally proposed the Interpretive Theory of Translation (Théorie Interprétative De La Traduction), which is the first systematic interpretive theory^[8]. Seleskovitch emphasized that translators should put their attention on comprehending and communicating the deep meaning underlying the translation object rather than being constrained by the surface language form of the source language and neglecting the translation's primary goal, which is to capture the essence beyond the source language. Similar efforts were made to achieve "spiritual similarity" in translation by the Chinese translator Fu Lei.

Example 1: 人生大事

Translation: *Lighting up the stars*

Despite the fact that this movie's name does not follow the literal approach and instead renders the entire phrase 'Life Event' as 'Lighting Up the Stars'. According to the author, the Interpretive Theory of Translation serves as the foundation for this translation technique. First, readers may not be able to infer from the meaning of 'Life Event' that this is a comforting, warm-colored movie. Additionally, a lovely wish is reflected in the image of the stars. Sanbi Mo, who was initially apathetic about Wen's grandmother's passing, conjures such a white lie to soothe the young woman's feelings. Throughout the entire movie, this heartbreaking scene occurs.

4.2.2 Literal Translation

The simplest and most fundamental translation technique is literal translation. Using the literal translation method, if a culturally appropriate word can be identified, can aid viewers in better understanding the context of the movie and character analysis.

Example 2: 小文：“老子去拉屎！”

莫三鼻：“以后不许自称老子！”

Original translation: Xiaowen: "I'm having a shit!"

Sanbi Mo : "Stop talking like that!"

Revised translation: Xiaowen: "Your lord is going to have a poop!"

Sanbi Mo : "Stop addressing yourself like that!"

This dialogue takes place between the two main characters at a time when their familial affection and understanding are blossoming. While it can only be used in casual contexts, the pronoun “Laozi” used in the original text is frequent in Wuhan dialect. Yet, in the context of traditional Confucian

culture, it is also a representation of an unbreakable familial hierarchy. The translation failed to convey the original film's intention to underline that Xiaowen was using the phrase incorrectly, which could have shaped her into a disobedient and disruptive child. In turn, the author is of the opinion that this culture-bound word should follow the Literal Translation and be translated as "your lord" in order to convey its proud pussy and vulgar cultural meaning. Besides, Sanbi Mo's response should also make it evident that he wishes to change Xiaowen's bad speech habits and inappropriate use of unpleasant language to try to help her become a more sensible, decent person. As an outcome, alongside to changing the verb, the author additionally emphasized Sanbi Mo's meaning behind his remarks.

4.2.3 Domestication Method

Example 3: 天要下雨，娘要嫁人。

Original translation: Rain shall pull from the sky, widows shall get married.

Revised translation: When it's ready to happen, it will happen.

An old Chinese proverb with the implication that things evolve according to their own rules and cannot be changed by human will. It serves as a reminder for individuals to deal flexibly with change and adapt to nature. In the film, Sanbi Mo not only lost the inheritance of the house but also had a debt to pay. Therefore, he informed the other two partners in the funeral home that they would have to part ways and figure out their own way out. The original translation of this proverb may be confusing to international audiences who are unfamiliar with it if it is translated literally. Due to this, the author utilizes the domestication method to translate it as "When it's ready to happen, it will happen," making it easier for audiences in other countries to follow the conversation and the plot. This is done in accordance with the idea of coherence in skopos theory.

Example 4: 日子都让你过成浆糊了。

Original translation: You make the days go by like tasteless porridge.

Revised translation: You make your life a total mess.

In this line, Sanbi Mo's sister expresses her displeasure with her brother's lack of ambition. "Jianghu" is a Chinese culture-loaded words, and its initial meaning—a paste-like blur—can be broadened to suggest that people are confused and lead chaotic lifestyles. The term has unique cultural connotations in China, therefore it is challenging to adequately translate its meaning into English. Although the Foreignization Method is employed by the author to effectively express the word's meaning, "tasteless porridge" is a Chinese metaphor that is rarely used in English. In order to translate it into common English expressions using the Domestication Approach, the translator's initiative may be applied, and the degree of fidelity is altered according to the objective under the guidance of the fidelity rule.

5. Conclusion

With the development of China's cultural soft power, an increasing number of foreigners are beginning to acknowledge and appreciate Chinese culture. Viewing translated Chinese movies and TV shows can open doors for cross-cultural dialogue and help more overseas friends develop a more in-depth understanding of Chinese society and culture. And the prosperity of culture will spur economic expansion and broaden global impact. When combined with exceptional works, high-quality subtitle translation will improve the audience's viewing experience and support the growth of China's film and television industry as well as the diffusion of Chinese culture. Hence, improving the quality of subtitle translation is crucial for cultural advancement. From this angle, the movie *Lighting Up the Stars* English subtitle translation is unquestionably a superb illustration of in-depth examination.

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