Analysis on the Application of Localized Translation in the Movies – English to Chinese

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Abstract: Audiovisual translation is gaining strong attractions. However, academic studies in this aspect are far from sufficient, especially in China: the current studies involving subtitling translation at home are relatively backwards both in depth and width. The academic studies are obviously disconnected with practice in reality and the issues discussed are also out-of-dated. Therefore, the specific issue of subtitling translation deserves exploration in depth. This essay aims to investigate and study the use of popular cyber language in subtitling translation and existing problems by analyzing sufficient amount of examples, and offer a few solutions. It will focus on temporary analysis of cyber-speak and subtitle translation, providing the past and current accomplishments related to these areas. Then, it will analyze the derivations and characteristics of cyber-speak, discussing the cyber-speak applied in translations in two dimensions which are cultural image and humor respectively. The essay will demonstrate the traditional interpretation method, after which it will show the examples of cyber-speak translations in both positive and negative effects. In the end, it will pay attention to the problem in the application, and offer some solutions and suggestions to avoid mentioned problems.

Keywords: Subtitling translation, popular cyber language, audiovisual translation, new translation method, cyber-speak, network buzzwords, langs

1 Introduction

“Poor Subtitles Could Hurt ‘Guardians of the Galaxy’ in China”
-- The Hollywood Reporter

The film industry has been involved in public’s life around the world. Meanwhile, the Hollywood’s movies have attracted a majority of Chinese cinephile. As a consequence, subtitle translation plays a critical role, thereby influencing the quality of a film or audience’s preference to a film. Recently, The Hollywood Reporter published an article called Poor Subtitles Could Hurt ‘Guardians of the Galaxy’ in China, written by Abid Rahman. It pointed out that local reviews have been mixed, with many arguing that translation mistakes are ruining the humor. Additionally, the China Daily reported that quite many moviegoers of this film were not satisfied with the Chinese subtitles and they doubted the professionalism of the interpreter. The interpreter used plenty of Chinese cyber-speak or traditional poets, besides, she mistranslated the original jokes or puns, spoiling the humor of Guardians.

When subtitle translation meets with cyber-speak, a phenomenon occurs which is the application of Chinese localized translation in the English films. This phenomenon
becomes a hot topic in both cinephile and scholars who specialize in translation study. Whether cyber-speak can make an finishing point in a movie is worth studying.

2 Literature Review on Cyber-speak and Subtitle Translation

The Internet as an information and communication platform has become necessary in our daily life. Existing side by side with other media, the latest mass medium has changed our communicative behavior enormously. (Nazaryan, A.& Gridchin, A. 2006). The domestic studies of cyber speak have aroused many controversies and this phenomenon has been discussed from different areas by scholars and specialists, including linguistics, psychology and sociology. These researches focus on two main problems that how we should look upon this phenomenon and that how we regulate the use of cyber speak.

2.1 Literature Review on Cyber-speak

At the initial period of cyber-speak, the academics’ attitude was against it, and cyber-speak was deemed as the language rubbish of Chinese (Shan Xiong, 2000). Years later, cyber-speak tended to be accepted by the majority of people. Also, the academics reached to an objective attitude which is “The cyber speak is linguistic, social as well as cultural phenomenon, and it should be fully analyzed. Therefore, negative conclusion should not be simply made.”(Zheng Hanyuan, 2002)

2.2 Literature Review on Movie Subtitle Translation

Subtitle translation or even audiovisual translation has long been neglected as a whole compared with other fields of translation study. Despite being a long-standing and popular industry emerging along with film, subtitle translation "seems to have only appeared in the academic translation study in recent years"(Cintas, 2004: 60).
Known as one of the scholars who studied subtitle translation early in China, Zhang Chunbai proposed some important principles of subtitle translation: "According to the basic characteristics of film art and language, it seems that audiovisual translation follows the principle that highlights free translation and meanwhile seeks to retain the meaning of original text. As Eugene Nida said, translator is supposed to strive for functional equivalence" (Zhang Chunbai, 1988:53).

The study on subtitle translation abroad was commenced long time ago. In the light of the analysis on the characteristics of subtitle translation, Henrik Gobblieb came out with the renowned methodology of subtitle translation, i.e., subtitle translation can be performed in ten ways, including extension, paraphrase, conversion, parody, transcription, adaptation, condensed translation, omission, deletion, and neglect. All these methods have been widely applied in practical translation.

In respect of amateur subtitle translation, Spanish scholar Jorge Díaz Cintas put forward a new concept: "translation by amateurs for being used by amateurs", giving his recognition to the quality and innovation value of amateur subtitle translation: "the newly emerging cyber subtitle translated and used by amateurs is in fact consistent with the need of present market. Relative to TV, cinema and DVD products made by traditional methods, cyber subtitle is far less dogmatized but more innovative and individualized." (Cintas & Sánchez, 2006:40). He also pointed out the development trend in which traditional subtitle translation and amateur subtitle translation not only integrate with but also compete against each other.

3. Cyber-speak and Subtitle Translation
3.1 Derivations and Characteristics of Cyber-speak

Although Chinese scholars and researchers have drawn a unified conclusion on the definition of cyber-speak, there is a widely acknowledged theory: there are two
kinds of cyber-speaks, with the former referring to the words of internet and cyber activities and the latter to the language used by netizens for online communication (the language includes not only Chinese characters, but also symbol, combination of numbers and English letter abbreviation). In this essay, the latter is the focus to be discussed.

The source of cyber-speak is constantly changing. Currently, most of the cyber languages are not derived from internet, but become prevalent overnight after being reposted by netizens insanely. In recent years, there have been three major sources of cyber-speak:

The first type is the quotation of netizen's original word, mainly intended to make comments on current affairs. "Are you kidding me?"-a recently popular cyber-speak is exactly this type of cyber-speak.

The second type grows out of the most-watched Chinese TV series and films. Recently, "I am under your charge"-the line of a China-made TV series has become in favor overnight upon being released.

The third type is the creative products of netizens, including the new cyber-speak such as "the news is so exhilarating that everyone is celebrating and spreading it to the rest of the world ", and "she was deeply moved but still rejected him".

3.2 Characteristics and Limitations of Subtitle Translations
3.2.1 Characteristics of Subtitle Translations

The concept of Subtitle translation has changed in recent years, and it covers a larger scope, including intralingua translation, interlingua subtitling for deaf people, the phonetic explanation for blind people, news and drama subtitle. Intralingua translation contains letters, dubbing and voice-over. Subtitle is the text of the dialogues in film and TV, normally displayed at the bottom of the screen. Compared with the translation of dubbing and voice-over, subtitle translation retains original audio trace, playing a positive role in language learning. Nevertheless, subtitle translation may have an effect on the completeness of scene and divert the attention of audiences since they have to take notice of the scene, audio track and subtitle simultaneously. Given spatio-temporal limitations on subtitle production, translators are often required to compress the text and reduce information content. If audience is
not familiar with the source language, the misunderstanding or distortion of plot or might be caused.

In China where there are an unprecedented number of English learners and lovers, dubbing translation has been gradually replaced by subtitle translation as the major means of audiovisual translation.

3.2.2 Limitations of Subtitle Translations
The limitations of subtitle translation are constituted by the difficulties in translation language, culture and cognition, the translation from spoken language into written language, difference in audience groups, and spatio-temporal limitation. Of these factors, spatio-temporal limitation is the question that text compression asks professional translators. Temporal limitation requires the subtitle to be displayed on the screen for the duration of 2-7s, which shall vary with the scene change rate and audience's average reading rate. Spatial limitation demands that every screen should only be equipped with two lines of subtitles, each of which should include no more than 20 words. Additionally, translator is also expected to keep the subtitle consistent with scene and sound by adjusting the subtitle according to film pace. Under such limitations, translator needs to delete the unnecessary information, compressing the text into the one with proper size and length.

3.3 Cyber-speak Applied in the Subtitle Translations
3.3.1 The Localization of Cultural Image
3.3.1.1 The Culture Image in Translation
For every subtitle translator, it is a vital task to translate the cross-cultural boundary but maintain the original style of the subtitle. "Translation has demonstrated the willingness to understand other culture." (Sun, 2003:34) The decent translation can be viewed as a helpful way to not only approach another culture, but also understand other's culture and introduce local culture.

The processing of cultural image has long been a difficulty in subtitle translation, some scholars even arguing that cultural image is "untranslatable". "Untranslatable" means that some contents in original text cannot be fully understood or appreciated by the audiences through subtitle. On the contrary, however, some opposite views insist that "there is definitely no 'untranslatable '" (Whitman, 2001:144). Such scholars
emphasize that a successful translator must associate the thoughts or information that original work needs to convey with the thinking of target audiences. "In translation, attention should be paid not only to the thinking of the target audience group, but also to the intention of original work"(Whitman, 2001: 147). To some extent, all foreign films and TVs are required to be reproduced before being fully understood and accepted by target audiences. As regards the degree of change, faithfulness shall be considered.

3.3.1.2 The Localization of Dynamic equivalence and Cultural Image

Dynamic equivalence (or functional equivalence), proposed by Eugene Nida, emphasizes that the natural expression of the text being translated should overwhelm the factors such as full translation of the text and original word order. Nevertheless, on the contrary, formal equivalence argues that the faithfulness to original text should surpass natural expression of the text being translated.

Dynamic equivalence looks at translation method from audience perspective, particularly appropriate to subtitle translation. Under the guidance of this principle, translator is supposed to figure out the dynamic balance between the response of target language audience and the information conveyed by film, and such dynamic balance is the consistency between the response of the target language audience to the translated work and "the response of the source language audience to original work". This implies that to a certain degree, as long as the audiences can understand the translated information, it is unnecessary to figure out the meaning of the cultural image of source language. The application of dynamic equivalence in subtitle translation is in fact a way to localize foreign cultural image and replace it with Chinese cultural image that Chinese audiences are acquainted with. If a translator is capable of seeking out an appropriate Chinese cultural image as well as keeping the response of Chinese audience to such image identical to that of English-speaking audiences to original image, he will be able to produce a film featured with the concept of Chinese character and the thinking of English language through subtitle.

3.3.1.3 The Localization of Cyber-speak on Foreign Cultural Image

The localization of English cultural image can help Chinese audience become more familiar with foreign works. In Mamma Mia, for instance, in the first scene of
the second act where Pepper who has an Oedipus complex expresses his love to Tanya aged more than 40 bravely, Tanya says "I am as old as your mother," and Pepper replies "Call me Oedipus!" Seeing this scene, the audiences who are acquainted with Greek mythology or "Oedipus complex" in psychology may smile a smile of understanding. However, considering that majorities of Chinese audiences lack an understanding of Greek mythology, translator decides to translate like this "I love the one like Liu Xiaoqing!" since she was once the focus of netizens due to the nice look despite the old age. In this way, the translator manifests "Oedipus complex" while producing a humorous effect in presence of Chinese audiences.

3.3.2 Humor Creation

3.3.2.1 Humor Strategy in Film: To Explain or To Create?

Since humor is a subjective concept, the principle that translation of humor should follow is to seek out the relevancy and equivalence between English jokes and the translated Chinese version. In reality, it is difficult to take into account these two aspects. In view of this, amateur translators work out a new method that is not accepted by professional translator. In translation, they tend to give priority to the readability and the fluency of text, then explaining the jokes in italics or brackets on the screen. In this case, the audiences may need to stop to or replay the film to read the subtitle and the explanation.

Having analyzed large numbers of the subtitles in the films released in China, professional translators seem to have found a better way. Instead of struggling with the cultural connotation or textual game of original jokes, they select to bring forward new jokes by dint of cyber-speak since cyber-speak is originally a kind of humor with strong expressive force which contains the cultural meanings that Chinese audiences know well.

3.3.2.2 Effects of Cyber-speak Humor

Cyber-speak has been widely used in comedies and sitcoms. It is interesting that the use of cyber-speak usually produces an unexpected humorous effect, even though the humor is not the original intention of the original author. For instance:

Goose: Yeah, I think he’s lost it.

鹅女士: 我认为他脑子秀逗了。
This sentence is from Garfield II. In original work, Goose considers that Garfield has done a very stupid thing as a pseudo king, and the translator of YYeTs expresses the sarcasm and doubts with "Xiu Dou ". "Xiu Dou" originating from Radio Television Hong Kong is the transliteration of the English word "pseudo", which originally refers to false illusion but afterwards means that the brain doesn't work suddenly. Such translation has yielded a humorous effect that makes itself popular with Chinese audiences.

Another instance in Fast and Furious:
Sheppard: He can do whatever he wants.
Sheppard: 他就是这么任性.

This sentence can be easily translated directly in Chinese as: “他想做什么就做什么.” However, the word “Ren Xing” is an internet buzzword recently, which can accurately convey an image of wealthy prince in the Middle East. Also, it brings humor effect to the Chinese audience.

4 Problems and Solution of Cyber-speak Application in Subtitle Translation
As an innovative means of audiovisual translation, the application of cyber-speak in subtitle translation is being tested. Not only do professional and amateur translations face some common problems, but there are some problems and mistakes peculiar to the online amateur subtitle translation.

4.1 Common Problem in Translation
4.1.1 Limited Range of Application
Despite having accepted and begun to use cyber-speak, translators are not competently confident in such method. As a matter of fact, only certain particular categories of film and TV works are open to cyber-speak. According to the film and TV works introduced into China and the response of Chinese audiences, cyber-speak frequently appears in comedy films, animated films and sitcoms. As a consequence, these films lead to the misunderstandings that "only cyber-speak is funny", and it is widely believed that cyber-speak is only aimed at amusement.

As a matter of fact, the response of audiences is the major reason for this phenomenon. Though as previously mentioned, the cyber-speak is more than a joke
maker, audiences still hold that the major aim of cyber-speak is to make the film more funny and trendy and so do the translators. In film and TV works of other genres, the use of cyber-speak is still considered unsuitable.

4.1.2 Limited Accepting Groups

Numbers of scholars insist that cyber-speak is oriented to young generations. Though this does not consist with the fact, cyber-speak still has a limited number of audiences. The audiences of substitute should be constituted by all people, but most of cyber-speak is only known to a particular group, which has explained why the old audiences consider it difficult to understand Chinese substitution. On the other hand, cyber-speak develops much faster than people's average cognitive competence does, because of which audiences may easily find that they fall far behind, lacking the ability to understand the emerging words in subtitle.

In the movie of Men in Black 3, translator Jia translated “Bullshit Barbecue” as “地沟油，瘦肉精”. Bullshit Barbecue originally means dirty Turkish barbecue, however, Jia localized it into unhealthy food (Di Gou You and Shou Rou Jing) and made an exaggerated effect. However, not all the audience accepts this translation. There is a severer dispute among Internet users. They think that translator Jia misunderstood many plots and she didn’t translate this movie appropriately. (Douban.com)

Another example of controversial movie translation from translator Jia exists in Pacific Rim. “Elbow Rocket” is translated as “天马流星拳”, which originally came from a Japan comics series Saint Seiya, and most people are familiar with it. However, when it appears in a western movie, most audience feels weird and uncomfortable, while only a small group accepts this translation and they think it brings out humor effect.

4.2 The Professionalism of Translator

Apart from the problems above, some problems and mistakes in the works of amateur translators can be found more easily, because they are universally inferior to professional translators in professionalism and English proficiency.

Besides, cyber-speak is frequently abused. Many of amateur translators eager to
demonstrate the subtitles they create usually show off their uniqueness with a mass of cyber languages. This is possibly the greatest weakness of the subtitle translated by amateurs, because they value personal talent and innovation over faithfulness and fluency. As a matter of fact, substitute is supposed to be the tool used by the public rather than to show off personal talent.

An example of from Galaxy Guardians of the Galaxy will show shows the importance of the professionalism of translator:

Rocket: when he’s assaulting us with that haircut

小浣熊: 非主流发型

In this occasion, the translator ignored “assaulting us with”, just focusing on using the hot word” Fei Zhu Liu Fa Xing. Therefore, she destroyed the original meaning and the audience would feel confused.

4.3 Solutions

The key to successful translation is to know where the boundary is. The film and TV works should be translated creatively rather than literally, and while involved in translation, translators are required to follow some rules. Firstly, fluency is the priority. "In audiovisual translation, expressiveness in the principle of 'faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance' is of greatest importance. To make 'expressiveness' fluent, 'faithfulness' should be sometimes sacrificed to a certain degree. Since audiovisual dialogue is not the scientific paper, the legal instrument or the business contract, there is no need to stay faithful to original text absolutely "(Qian Shaochang, 2000: 62)

If ordinary language is able to convey the information completely and decently, it is not necessary to make use of the inaccurate or unnecessary cyber-speak to please audiences or produce a dramatic effect. Instead of being a personal talent show, translation is a service oriented to different audience groups, which is mainly aimed at helping audiences understand foreign films in a better way.

Secondly, how to use cyber-speak in a situation properly should be considered in a cautious and prudent manner. The application of cyber-speak in subtitle translation is a double-edged sword, which will contribute to universal applause when being
applied appropriately, but produce an adverse effect when being used incorrectly. Though the creativity and talent of amateur subtitle translators deserve praise, sometimes traditional method indeed has its unique value. Without considering the strong personal style, amateur translators will be likely to become aware of the ultimate goal of subtitle translation, i.e., present a foreign film or TV series to audiences with the most simple and accurate Chinese characters.

5 Conclusions

In comparison with the studies abroad, the domestic ones of subtitle translation and the cyber-speak are still in their infancies. And the main problems of such studies are various, of which are unrealistic theoretical researches, the lack of systematism, as well as outdated research objects. However, foreign films and television pieces gradually expand their influences of cultural communication and language learning, making both areas worthy of exploration and research. There is no doubt that the application of localized cyber-speak in the subtitle translation will bring new perspective to both areas.

The utility of network buzzwords in subtitle translation provides a new perspective to solve some problems of traditional translation and both positive and negative responses from the audience have been received. However, we can tell that such language using is more suitable in most commercial popcorn movies than serious ones. Briefly, the applications of cyber-speak in the subtitle translation can vividly and accurately convey cultural connotations, creating new humorous effect which is welcomed by the audience. (Liu Ting, 2013) Compared to traditional translation methods, the use of cyber-speak can make the conversation more lively, and reproduce the original style and flavor of the play maximally.

In addition to a variety of advantages, network buzzwords applied in the subtitle translation are still on the test stage. Cyber-speak could be only used in some specific works of film and television play, mostly in comedy movies and sitcoms, as well as some popcorn movies. The audience is relatively limited to relatively youngsters who are more familiar with the online world. Nonetheless, translators tend to exert a funnier effect on films, and therefore, they apply the network language exaggeratedly.
However, usually the role of cyber-speak cannot be fully played in the movies. Meanwhile, the phenomenon of misusing network language exists as well.

Based on the above mentioned problems, the translator needs to be more cautious in word choice in order to standardize the application of cyber-speak in the subtitle translation. When choosing words to make films more attractive, the range of audience should be taken into consideration. Words and phrases familiar to the majority of audiences of are better than those limited to a specific group. When using internet catchphrase, the translator should develop a comprehensive understanding of the plot and film style, thus to determine whether the network catchword is suitable.

Although cyber-speak is not perfect applied in films currently, and many challenges are quite obvious in the application, the trend of applying network language needs gradual development, mainly constructed on its creativity and personal style. And the academic research and practical operation of such field have broad promotion and development of space. The translation methods of rules is not necessarily invariable, and only time can decide if the trend is a flash in the pan or it can survive for a long time, and finally become a new method for film translation in digital era.

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