

Study on the Subtitle Translation of Empress in the Palace from the Perspective of Three-dimensional Conversion of Eco- translatology

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Received: 13 August 2024; **Accepted:** 5 September 2024; **Published:** 24 September 2024

Abstract:

Language is the important bridge of transmitting culture. The rise of China's international status has given rise to the great enthusiasm of spreading and studying Chinese. Many foreigners are keen to study and know about Chinese culture through watching Chinese movies and TV series. The Empresses in the Palace, which is the representative of Chinese historical court series, enjoy an important status in China and also has been spread oversea. It's typical court culture and hierarchical system show the splendid Chinese culture of Qing Dynasty to the world. At the same time, in order to deliver different cultures through this series and realize cultural communication, many translators focus on the subtitle translation of *The Empresses in the Palace*. The translation theory - eco-translatology - has received great attentions. This paper aims to analyse the advantages and disadvantages of the subtitle translation of *The Empresses in the Palace*, through combining the three dimensional conversion of eco-translatology and adopting the case study research method. The research finds that while translators are translating the subtitles, they need to adapt to the translation ecological environment of the original subtitles and to select from the target language, keeping the balance among the ecological environment of language, culture and communication between the original language and target language.

Keywords:

The Empresses in the Palace, Eco-translatology, Subtitle Translation, Three Dimensional Conversion

1. Introduction

Empresses in the Palace, the TV series which was set in the background of Qing Dynasty and was on the Netflix in America, showed the rigid hierarchy and court cultures of this dynasty from many aspects. However, there have been a few series spread oversea like it. With the hot spread of *the Empresses in the Palace*, there has been so many researches about the subtitle translation of this TV drama. The words in

this drama are specific. There are many poems and historical stories like “Blind imitation with ludicrous effects”, which can not be adopted and understood by Americans and even people with different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, subtitle translation assumes this responsibility. Translators need to turn these culture-loaded words into a pattern which can be understood by targeted audiences, while translating these words accurately. Due to the differences between Chinese and English cultural backgrounds, subtitle translation is not only a kind of conversion between two languages but also a communication and combination of different cultures [1]. Whether the poems difficult to be understood and specific words can be translated properly decides whether Chinese traditional cultures can be spread effectively and determines to what extend can Chinese TV dramas be accepted.

This paper will analyse how translators realize the three dimensional conversion among language, communication and culture through the perspective of eco-translatology by adopting case study research method. At the same time, translators can exert their subjective initiative and creativity to get the best translation.

2. Film Subtitle Translation

According to Tang [2], the subtitles of movies and TV dramas have following features: immediacy, colloquialism and universal acceptance, which may bring difficulties caused by the differences of language cultures to translators. In addition, because of the different ethnic culture, people with various culture backgrounds may have different understandings towards the same text. Subtitle translation of TV dramas is to turn the source language into target language and put it at the bottom of the screen [3] and is also the explanatory supplementary notes conveyed by the film information to the vision [4]. According to Li [5], there are two types of subtitles: intralingual subtitles and interlingual subtitles. “Interlingual subtitles are commonly referred to as subtitle translation, which translates the source language into the target language and superimposes it on the bottom of the screen while retaining the original sound of the film and television” [5]. Western countries first studied the subtitle translation, while the Strategies of Subtitle Translation was the first paper which researched subtitles translation in China from professional perspectives [6]. The purpose of subtitle translation is to make audiences better understand TV dramas, so it has a great importance to the spread and communication of cultures.

3. Eco-translatology Theory

On the base of Darwinian Evolution, Hu Gengshen, the professor of Qinghua University, proposed the eco-translatology theory, believing that translation process is the alternate circulation between translators’ adaptation and selection [7]. Hu defined eco-translatology theory as the adaption and selection of translators, basing on the ecological translation environment [7]. In another words, translation is the adaptive process of translators towards the original words and selective process towards target versions. Eco-translatology emphasizes that translators are the center of the whole translation process, highlighting the dominate role of translators in the translation process. Translators need to select proper translation strategy and methods according to the eco-environment of target language in order to ensure that the communicative purpose, linguistic purpose and cultural purpose of the source language can be reserved and spread and at the same time, translations can live forever in the target language environment to realize the balance [8].

4. Eco-translation of Empresses in the Palace

The Empresses in the Palace was translated by the American translators who are proficient to English and Chinese cultures. This drama has won a great success in America not only because of the actors and stories but of the contributions of subtitle translators [9]. During the translation process, translators need to consider the conversions of language, communication and culture while keeping the fluency of words and conveying the cultural meanings and communicative purpose. *The Empresses in the Palace* is the great research subject of eco-translatology because it has oceans of cultural-bound words and graceful poetry. In the following parts, the detailed analysis towards the subtitle translation of drama, combing the three-dimensional theory, will be introduced. Meanwhile, the advantages and deficiencies of selection of translation strategies during the subtitle translation will be discussed as well.

5. Case Study

5.1. Adaptation and Selection in the Linguistic Dimension

The adaptive and selective conversion in linguistic dimension means that translators select in the linguistic level, to be specific, translators need to select words, phrases and sentence structures properly during the translation process [1].

(1) Ning ke zhi tou bao xiang si, bu ceng chui luo bei feng zhong.

English version: They would die on the branch retaining their scent than be scattered on the cold wind.

In the *Empresses in the Palace*, example (1) was said by the emperor. He asked Shen Meizhuang why she loved chrysanthemum. Shen quoted a line from a poem written by Zheng Sixiao, a poet in Song Dynasty, to note that the chrysanthemum would like to die on the branch with fragrance than to fall in the cold wind. This sentence aims to show the characteristics-alooftness and purity-of chrysanthemums. However, “chrysanthemum” is not the subject of this sentence in Chinese version, while translators were translating it, they took the adaptive conversion of linguistic dimension into consideration and complemented the subject “they” to make the sentence structure more complete.

(2) Zhi shi bu zhi ni shi fou dan de qi zhe ming zi.

English version: I only wonder if you are a match for such an auspicious name.

Considering the differences of part of speech between Chinese and English, translators adopted the adaptive conversion in linguistic dimension. In Chinese, “Dan de qi” is a verb, which means to bear. However, if they used “bear” or “undertake”, these two words are rarely used to mean “bear a name or undertake a name”. Therefore, while translators were translating, they change these two words into a phrase “a match for”, to indicate a match for name and identity, which is in accord with the habit of target audiences.

5.2. Adaptation and Selection in the Linguistic Dimension

Differences between western and Chinese cultures are the difficulties that translators need to face while translating. Translators are the communicators of bilingual cultures. Therefore, a good translator need to have a cultural awareness,

knowing that translation is the inter-cultural communication to protect the eco-balance and harmony between the two cultures, aiming to ensure the achievement of communicating the information [10]. While translating, translators not only need to focus on the eco-environment of target audiences but pay attention to the methods of how to adopt proper translation strategies to convey the information exactly while considering the differences of cultural backgrounds [6].

These differences can be embodied by a kind of specific words. The words that can reflect the unique information of different cultures to convey the the ideas and thoughts of unique cultures are called cultural-loaded words [11].

(3) Dan qiu pu sa bao you, rang xin nv bei liao pai zi bu de ru xuan jin gong.

English version: May Buddha grant this blessing, let me be passed over for service in the Imperial Harem.

“Liao pai zi” is a kind of expression used in Qing Dynasty, when the emperor select girls from the Eight Banners to serve him. There are no specific words in English to express this culture. Therefore, while translating this sentence, translators need to consider the translation strategies to translate the culturally loaded words. If the girls were selected by the emperor, then it called “Liu pai zi”, in contrast, if not being selected, it called “Liao pai zi”, meaning “being ignored” and “being passed over”. The translator selected free translation to make the audience better understand this unique expression, thus realizing the conversion in cultural dimension.

5.3. Adaptation and Selection in the Communication Dimension

Translators need to conduct adaptive and selective conversion according to the communicative intention in the translation works. While translating, translators not only should convey the information and cultural connotation accurately but focus on whether the communicative intention of original language is showed in the target version [7]. Only if the target audiences can understand the literal meaning and hided intention, and realize communicative purpose, can the ecological balance be ensured between the original language and translated version in the communicative dimension.

(4) Ying zhu zhi hui zen neng yu chun yuan huang hou de ming yue zhi guang xiang jiao.

English version: My insignificant skill cannot compare to the performance of Chunyuan.

This sentence fully shows the adaptive conversion in the communicative dimension. In the subtitle translation of TV dramas, translators are supposed to convey the communicative intention of original words and fully consider the remarkable feature of subtitle translation, that is the limited time and space [11]. This scene happened on the birthday banquet of Princess When Yi. Cao Qinmo devised to make Zhen Huan dance in public, which used to be played by Empress Chun Yuan, who was the ex-empress. Cao intended to let Zhen Huan be disgraced. However, thanks to the coordination of Shen Meizhuang and Marquess Guo, Zhen Huan had a good performance. Then she said this sentence. “Ying zhu zhi hui” means the light of candle, which is weak and unnoticeable, and “Ming yue zhi guang” means the light of moon, which is splendid and eye-catching. She compared her performance to the light of candle to show her respect to Chun Yuan, meaning that her performance was not compared with Chun Yuan’s. This words was euphemistic while the translator used simplification translation strategy to make the communication connotation of original

language be understood in limited time and space by the audiences and realize the effective conversion in the communicative dimension.

6. Conclusions

There are more and more researchers studying the subtitle translation. It can be noticed that translators play a significant role in the translation process. Many people emphasized the subjectivity of translators in this process. While translating, translators need to adapt in the language, cultural and communicative dimension, that is the eco-environment of original language, target language and audiences. Then, they should select proper translation strategies to conduct language conversion in order to get a good translation. This demands the translator to have a good understanding of the eco-environment of language, to master different translation strategies and to make the communication of cultural information between two countries more closely, thus spreading Chinese cultures oversea.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

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