

The Translation of Commentaries in Hubei Documentaries of MFA Presenting Chinese Provinces to the World

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Abstract: As of February 2022, thanks to the events of MFA Presenting Chinese Provinces to the World, as many as 21 documentaries have been pushed to audiences both at home and abroad via various communication channels. The translation quality of commentaries of the documentaries has a great impact on the establishment of the city image and promotion of the city culture. This paper will study the commentaries in documentaries of Hubei Province from the perspective of Eco-translatology theory, which will help to expand the application of the theory, provide a new reference for the translation of city image videos, and enhance the worldwide reputation of Chinese cities.

1. Introduction

In the activities of MFA presenting Chinese provinces to the world, the stage is set up by the Lanting Hall, on which the local governments sing the opera. It acts as an important platform for foreign emissaries to understand China's national conditions. On March 2, 2016, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched the first global promotion of provinces—"Open China: from Ningxia to the World." Up until now, Henan, Fujian, Shanxi, Tianjin, Xiong'an New area and other 21 local regions have displayed themselves in the Lanting Hall. The promotion activities are diverse in content. The MFA will set up the stage, and the local governments will arrange comprehensive experience activities, such as leaders' recommendation, exhibitions and buffet receptions in order to display the local rich history and culture, beautiful natural scenery as well as outstanding achievements in economics and infrastructure construction. During the process, themed documentaries launched by MFA run through the activities. After the event, the documentaries have been pushed to audiences at home and abroad via various communication channels, and achieved good communication effect. Overseas viewers have learned more about the cities in mainland China through documentaries. In addition to the requirements of unique creativity, exquisite pictures, appropriate music, and wonderful commentaries, the city image videos also place higher demands on the translation of their commentaries. This research attempts to take the commentaries in documentaries of Hubei Province as an example and places it under the theoretical framework of Eco-Translation. By analyzing the merits and demerits of the translation of documentaries, it is expected to provide a basis for future work on the translation of city image videos, so as to

help Chinese cities to build good images and enter the world stage with a more confident attitude.

2. Overview of the theoretical Framework of Eco-Translatology

With the trend of the times, Eco-translatology theory came into being at the beginning of the 21st century. Borrowing ideas from many sources of thought, Eco-translatology holds the ideas that translation is a coherent and unified system. The interaction between the various components in the system has the characteristics of domino effect, and the various elements interact with each other. (Yue Zhongsheng, 2018: 51-59) Eco-translatology systematically explores the ecology of translation, text ecology, and “translation community” as well as their interactions and relationships with the concept of ecological holism, oriental ecological wisdom, and the theory of “adaptation/selection” as the foundation. The translator is in the leading position. In the process of translation, he or she should not only adapt but also select. (Hu Gengshen, 2011: 7)

“Adaptation” and “selection” are the active choices of the translator as the master of the environment. Translators can actively break the traditional norms of the target language culture, and at the same time coordinate the relationship with other translation subjects. (Liu Yafeng, 2009: 79) Hu Gengshen regards the degree of integrative adaptation as the evaluation criterion of Eco-Translation, and points out that “the higher the degree of integrative adaptation in the translation process, the higher the quality of the translation.” (Hu Gengshen, 2004) The degree of integrative adaptation selection must first analyze whether the translator adapts to a specific translation ecological environment from three dimensions, and then selects appropriate translation strategies and performs three-dimensional transformation in translation practice so as to produce high-quality translations. Therefore, this research will focus on the perspectives of translation ecological environment, three-dimensional transformation and translation strategy to analyze the English translation of commentaries in documentaries of Hubei Province.

3. Characteristics of the Commentaries in Hubei Documentaries

Up to now, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs has held two diplomatic promotion activities for Hubei Province in July 2018 and April 2021 respectively. The time span of the two activities is relatively long, which makes them lay emphasis on different aspects. The theme of the former activity is “China in the New Era: Hubei, from the Yangtze River to the World”. The total duration of the documentary was 8 minutes and 30 seconds. The Yangtze River civilization not only created the romantic and magnificent Chu culture, nourished the beautiful “Province of Thousand Lakes”, but also led Hubei to a new future that is more open, innovative and inclusive in the new era. The theme of the latter one is “Heroic Hubei: Reborn for New Glories”, with 10 minutes and 2 seconds long. Both of them are equipped with Chinese subtitles and English dubbing. At the end of 2019, the novel coronavirus pandemic first broke out in Wuhan City, and then swept the whole country and spread to the world. Against this backdrop, the second promotion activity is doomed to be a special one that introduced so much about the sacrifices and contributions that helped to ensure a vibrant spring and safeguard the health of the whole nation.

Both of the city image videos belong to publicity materials, so the translation of their commentaries also belongs to the publicity-oriented translation. In terms of text type, publicity-oriented translation belongs to non-literary translation. The purpose of publicity materials’ translation is to show the world the country’s development in terms of politics, economics, cultures and many other aspects. (Zhang Lin, 2011: 107) In addition, the author of source language and the translator of target language to a certain extent must undertake some political missions while in the process of translating the commentaries. It has required the translator to use the language in an objective and rigorous way. Based on the theory of ecological translation, the translators of the

documentaries have made suitable adaptation from three aspects, making the translated versions closer to the thinking habits of overseas audiences. The translation has clearly conveyed information and culture in the original language, which is conducive to shaping a positive image for Chinese cities.

At the same time, as a kind of subtitle translation of film and television works, the commentary translation has the following unique characteristics: first of all, immediacy. The subtitles of the film and television works appear on the screen synchronously in real time, and advance with the playback of the film and television content, which requires a high degree of matching between the subtitle content and the picture. (Li Yunxing, 2001: 39) Secondly, space limitations. Subtitles are generally located at the bottom of the player screen, and the space layout is relatively small. Due to this limitation, the number of words will have a direct effect on the overall viewing result of the audience. The wording needs to be concise and comprehensive. Thirdly, cultural differences. The audience are expected to understand the content of film and television works in a short time and space through the subtitles, which requires the translator to properly convert the cultural factors between the original language and the target language, so as to facilitate the audience's understanding.

4. The gains and losses of the three-Dimensional Transformation in Hubei Documentaries

Based on a certain frame of theory, we can have an overall evaluation of the translation quality. High-quality translation can be appreciated and used for reference. And at the same time, translated works can be revised according to translation critical theories. The translation quality of the commentaries of Hubei documentaries is commendable, but it also has some shortcomings.

4.1 Language Dimension Transformation

The adaptive selection and transformation of language dimension is to make the best adaptation in different aspects and levels of language. In order to ensure the effective communication of the translation, the translator should firstly grasp the communicative nature of the language and not fall into its formal description. At the same time, according to the specific situation, the translator is supposed to make adaptive choices and strive to accurately reproduce the language information of the source text so as to avoid or at least reduce translation losses in language conversion.

4.1.1 Appreciation of Language Dimension Transformation

There are huge differences between Chinese and English in terms of language expression. Therefore, having understood the ecological environment of the translation of Hubei documentaries, the translator needs to give full play to the translator's subjectivity, fully study the meaning expressed in the original language, adjust the vocabulary appropriately and change the language form according to the language expression habits of the target language readers, so as to avoid obscure translated works and misunderstanding of the audience. For example, "parataxis" is a characteristic of Chinese language, while in English language, "hypotaxis" is its distinctive characteristic. Therefore, in Chinese language, prepositions and conjunctions are used much less frequently. The translator should subtly transform the information without being restricted by the language form of the original text, so that the translation conforms to the language expression of the target language.

Example 1:

Original text: 长江奔流向海，湖北更加开放。

Translated text: The Yangtze River gushes into the ocean, taking Hubei to the world.

Example 2:

Original text: 烽火公司和长风公司生产的一根细如头发丝的光纤，能同时容纳 135 亿人通话。

Translated text: Optical fibers produced by Fiber Home and WOFC, though as thin as a human hair, can accommodate voice communications of up to 13.5 billion people simultaneously.

From example 1, It can be found that the translator has accurately grasped the main idea of the documentary. This sentence is a transitional sentence linking the previous and the next ones. The content after this sentence focuses on expounding that Hubei Province, as the host, welcomes multinational enterprises, international students, overseas participants, heads of state and international conferences with an open mind. All the greetings showed the positive attitude of Hubei Province to actively integrate into the world stage. The preceding and following sentences in this example actually have a weak causal relationship, or the preceding sentence gives the facts and background. The translator has a good command of the logic of this sentence. Instead of translating it into an isolated compound sentence, the structure of non-finite verb is used to guide an adverbial clause of result, making the sentence more compact. At the same time, the meaning of the latter clause has been concretized and clarified so as to achieve the effect of accurate translation.

Translation from Chinese to English often tests the translator's logical analysis ability. In example 2, the translated version reads fluently and elegantly, but the logic is implicit. And the logical relationship is conveyed between the lines. The translator analyzed the language using, accurately grasped its transitional relationship, pays attention to the use of the connective though, and shows the logic, so that the translation can be better understood by the target language audience.

Example 3:

Original text: 北斗导航系统，已发射 32 颗卫星，它将为全球提供厘米级精准定位服务。

Translated text: Beidou Navigation Satellite System has launched 32 satellites, which will enable centimeter-level accuracy positioning for global users.

A remarkable feature of Chinese is that general words will be added after the specific description. For example, the phrases “消除肺结核危害”，“大力开展群众动员工作”，“巩固经济发展，政治稳定，民族团结的良好局面”，here “危害”，“工作”and “局面” all belong to general words with virtual meaning, and the specific contents have been explained before. Therefore, the translation principle at this moment should be “abandon generalization and be more concrete”. In example 3, Beidou System essentially provides a service, so there is no need to translate the word. And the translated text really meets the English writing habits.

Example 4:

Original text: 人民至上，生命至上。

Translated text: The Chinese government put the people and life above everything else

Example 5:

Original text: 76 天生死与共，艰苦卓绝。

Translated text: 76 days of shoulder to shoulder fighting for life over death

The Chinese language presents the characteristics of “four or six sentences and four or eight sentences”, which makes Chinese language be more neat and tonal harmony. While adding to the unique charm of Chinese, it also leads to complicated and redundant decoration of Chinese writing. For example, in example 4, the translator chose to reduce the word “至上” and add the subject into the structure at the same time, which makes structure more complete. In example 5, the two sentences belong to the typical eight-character expression, which have the same meaning. Therefore, on the basis of information integration, the translator created one vivid English version.

4.1.2 Deficiency in Language **Dimension** Transformation

Example 6:

Original text: 习近平主席亲自指挥，亲自部署，一场举国动员的人民战争，总体战，狙击战全面打响。

Translated text: Under the personal command and direction of President Xi Jinping, the whole country was mobilized in an all-round people's war against the virus.

In this translation example, “亲自指挥，亲自部署” is a typical Chinese expression, which uses eight characters to express the same concept. There are also many similar examples that could be cited: 箭在弦上，不得不发；是可忍，孰不可忍；颠倒黑白，混淆是非. While translating examples of this kind, what the translator should do is to extract its central meaning. The words of “指挥” and “部署” are similar in meaning. It is suggested to choose either one of them in Chinese-English translation in order to better conform to the expression habits of the target language.

4.2 Cultural Dimension Transformation

The translator's adaptive selection and transformation in the cultural dimension calls for the translator's cultural awareness in translation process. Under the cultural framework of Ecological Translation, various languages have always been the manifestation and reflection of the national culture. (Sun Lin; Han Caihong, 2021: 90-94) Translation is a cross-cultural information exchange activity. The translator should, under the awareness of the bilingual cultural symbiosis of the source language and the target language, strive to adjust the cultural psychology, make up for the cultural connotation as much as possible, and seek cultural identity.

4.2.1 Appreciation of Cultural Dimension Transformation

Example 7:

Original text: 山川异域，风月同天

Translated text: Lands apart, sky shared

This expression originated from a good story about the friendly communication between China and Japan more than 1,300 years ago. The Japanese Prince Nagaya once embroidered a 16-character verse “山川异域，风月同天，寄语佛子，共结来缘” on the cassocks that he presented to the Tang Dynasty. Master Jianzhen was greatly moved by the verse, so he made six trips to Japan to promote Buddhism, which has become one of the most iconic great practices in the history of Sino-Japanese cultural exchanges. During the spread of the novel coronavirus pandemic, the poems and rhymes such as “Lands apart, sky shared” written on the materials donated by Japan to China have struck a chord among the Chinese people. In the midst of a disaster, this verse vividly explains that all humans are just like a community with a shared future. This couplet is refined in language and profound in meaning. Although the sentence can be translated as “Mountain and rivers on foreign land, wind and moon under the same sky” as well, the translated text has lost its original aesthetic concept. The translation of the documentary omits the four characters “山水” and “风月”, which guarantees the same aesthetic world of image as the original text. It reproduces the cultural characteristics and cultural information of the source language.

Example 8:

Original text: 国际社会纷纷伸出援手，77个国家和12个国际组织雪中送炭。

Translated text: The international community lent a helping hand; 77 countries and 12 international organizations sent much-needed supplies.

“雪中送炭” is a Chinese four-character idiom, which originated from a seven-character quatrain created by Fan Chengda, a poet of the Southern Song Dynasty. The original meaning is to send charcoal to others to keep warm in a snowy weather. It is now used as a metaphor meaning lending others moral support or practical help in times of crisis. It is actually a commendatory term. When dealing with this expression, the translator adopted the paraphrase method, that is, an interpretive translation of the original text, and pointed out that the international community gave help for emergency materials. Such translated text makes expressions with rich cultural connotations easier to understand at the moment, eliminates cultural differences, and realizes the purpose of conveying information.

Example 9:

Original text: 屈原; 曾侯乙编钟

Translated text: Patriotic Poet Qu Yuan; Marquis Yi Chime Bell

In this documentary, many iconic scenic spots and representative historical and cultural figures of Hubei province are displayed. When translating “屈原”, the translator took readers’ background knowledge into consideration and added the personal information as a patriotic poet, thus pointing out his poet’s identity and his personal sense of patriotism. “曾侯乙” is a marquis. In ancient China, the system of hierarchy “Gong Hou Bo Zi Nan” was divided into five levels by the Zhou royal family. There are many similarities between the ancient Chinese hierarchy system and the European hierarchy system—Duke, Marquis, Earl, Viscount and Baron. Based on the method of borrowing translation, the translator corresponded to these five Chinese titles to those of Europe one by one, which is helpful to be accepted by the target language readers, so as to achieve the purpose of information transmission.

4.2.2 Deficiency in Cultural Dimension Transformation

Example 10:

Original text: 古琴台

Translated text: Heptachord Terrace

“古琴台” is one of the three major cultural relics and tourist attractions in Wuhan, also known as “伯牙台”, which was built to commemorate the friendship between Yu Boya and his soul mate Zhong Ziqi. “古琴台” is more than a terrace, and it is actually an architectural complex covering an area of more than ten acres. In addition to the main building of the palace, there are also courtyards, gardens, flower beds, tea houses and other buildings. The layout is exquisite and well arranged. It can be seen that it is inappropriate to translate “台” into “Terrace”. 古琴 is one of the oldest traditional musical instruments of China. In the translation, the translator translated “古琴” as “heptachord” meaning “seven-stringed musical instrument”, which is far from the meaning of “古琴”. This is a mistranslation. It is suggested to copy the translation of “Erhu” and adopt transliteration, so it is translated as “Guqin”. Therefore, here “Guqin Terrace” is suggested to be translated as “Guqin Tai”.

4.3 Communication Dimension Transformation

The translator’s adaptive selection and transformation in the communication dimension puts more emphasis on whether the communication intention of the original text is reflected in the translated text while ensuring the transformation of language information and the transmission of cultural connotations.

4.3.1 Appreciation of Communication dimension Transformation

From the perspective of communication dimension, the general city image videos focus on reflecting its cultural and historical heritage and modern urban civilization, and creating a positive city image, thus attracting more talents and enterprises to choose to settle down in the city. Therefore, its publicity texts are highly informative and motivational. This puts forward higher translation requirements for translators, requiring them to make certain adaptive adjustments to the source language information to further achieve the purpose of communication and exchange.

Example 11:

Original text:五千年前，炎帝神农开创了华夏农耕文明。两千年前，湖北先民用青铜冶铸。

Translated text: Five thousand years ago, Yan Emperor Shennong pioneered China's farming culture; some two millennia ago, our ancestors explored the craft of bronze melting and casting.

In this commentary introducing the splendid ancient culture of Hubei, the text used in the original language is “湖北先民” meaning Hubei ancestors, but in the translated language it is translated as “our ancestors”, which truly reflects the consciousness of “ownership” of Hubei province. All the great creations made by the ancestors on the land of Jingchu have become the capital that the descendants of this land are proud of. In order to reflect the unique cultural heritage of the region, the translator subtly adapted the subject and thus realized the communicative intention of the documentary.

Example 12:

Original text:看世界 看长江 看湖北

Translated text: Hubei's development along the Yangtze River lights up the world.

Syntactic ambiguity is very common in Chinese, but rare in English. This is due to the difference in the syntactic structure of English and Chinese. English presents a formative structure. There are often connectives between sentences, phrases and even words, which are used to express the combination or modification relationship between them. Chinese is a conjunctive structure. The combination of sentences, phrases and words has great flexibility, and the use of conjunctions is much less than that in English. In this case, “看世界 看长江 看湖北” in the source language text presents a vague and uncertain relationship, which provides a free space for readers to interpret imaginatively. However, in the process of translation, through adaptation and selection in the communication dimension, the translator helps the target language readers to determine a logical relationship: that is, the development of Hubei province by the Yangtze River has added vitality to the development of the world. This expression is easier to understand and also consistent with the theme of the documentary, achieving effective communicative intention.

4.3.2 Deficiency in Communication Dimension Transformation

Example 13:

Original text:万里茶道

Translated text 1: The Ten-thousand-li Tea Road

Translated text 2: China-Russia Ten-thousand-mile Tea Road

The “万里茶道” is another significant international trade channel developing on the Eurasian continent after the “Silk Road”, and it is also an important part of “Belt and Road Initiative”. It is currently actively participating in the transnational joint declaration project of the world intangible cultural heritage. In the context of globalization, when translating publicity materials, translators should fully take into account the cognitive and cultural differences of the target readers. “里” in “万

里茶道” is a Chinese culture-loaded word. As a unit of measurement, it originates from the well-field system in ancient China. In Translation 2, it is translated into “mile”. At the same time, the background knowledge is annotated in the text, which satisfies the needs of effective information of foreign audiences and reflects the translator’s adaptive choice in the cultural dimension. In view of this, the English translation of 万里茶道 should be unified in this documentary and the translation method 2 is suggested.

5. Conclusion

In translation practice, translators should focus on the overall translation ecological environment of the translated works. On the basis of three-dimensional adaptive transformation theory, translators need to make integrated choices. The “Going out” of Jing-Chu Culture requires more film and television works to play an active role in publicity, and also requires translators to produce high-quality translation of commentaries. Eco-translatology theory provides a new theoretical perspective for city image videos translation. Translators should fully adapt to the translation ecological environment where they stay, and focus on language dimension transformation, cultural dimension transformation and communication dimension transformation during the translation process. From the perspective of ecological translation theory, the study of publicity materials’ translation is intended to make city image videos truly become an effective way of cultural dissemination and communication, which is of great significance to enhance the “image of Hubei”.

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