

A Tentative Study of E-C Translation Strategies on Documentary Subtitles

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Keywords: TV documentary subtitle; translation strategy; translation principle

Abstract: With the arrival of globalization, marketization, information technology in the world, the continuous development of global exchanges across time and space from the economic, scientific and technological fields to the political, cultural field. The production of documentary has entered a booming era. The development of network media gives us the opportunity to see more foreign documentaries. Watching foreign documentary helps people to understand world culture, broaden their horizons and renew their knowledge. However, language barriers restrict the transmission of TV documentaries, so the subtitles translation is particularly important. When watching the original foreign language documentary, the audience's viewing experience will be greatly affected by the subtitle translation. Based on the analysis of subtitle language characteristics and translation status of TV documentary, this paper uses BBC TV documentary "The Impressionists: Painting and Revolution" as example. The corresponding translation strategies are put forward in the hope of guiding subtitle translation, promoting friendly communication among different cultures. This study is a preliminary exploration of the English-Chinese translation strategies of documentary subtitle. This paper first introduces the research background, significance and purpose of subtitle translation in documentaries. Due to the characteristics of the subtitles of TV documentaries, such as the time limit, space limit, character number limit, line limit, audio-visual coordination etc., the subtitle translation of TV documentaries is different from that of ordinary literary works, film and television works. Firstly, based on existing literatures definition of subtitle was introduced. Then, expound the linguistic characteristics of television documentaries and principles of subtitle translation. Through the analysis of the samples, this paper summarizes four strategies applicable to the translation of subtitles in English-Chinese documentaries, namely, the method of addition and omission, literal translation and free translation, discusses its application effect in the practical translation work. The data of the current research were E-C translation of documentary subtitles. All 57 items were selected from the 1st to the 3rd episodes of BBC TV documentary The Impressionists: Painting and Revolution . From the analysis of the data, it was found that the method of addition and omission, literal translation and free translation are suitable for documentary subtitle translation. Translators may adopt flexible and mixed translation strategies to make a decent translation, satisfy the audience is interest and needs. In addition, this paper offers review and profoundly rethink to the whole process of the current study. Recommendations for future research were also be made in this thesis.

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background and Significance

With the arrival of globalization, marketization, information technology in the world, the continuous development of global exchanges across time and space from the economic, scientific and technological fields to the political, cultural field. With the development of science and technology, the means of filming the documentary have more high-tech support, such as the application of "spy camera", 4k camera, UAV technology, automatic sensor camera, VR technology etc. The audience can not only enjoy the natural scenery in all directions, get a close understanding of the life of wild animals, but also can make a more detailed appreciation of the works of art, even restore their creative process. The production of documentary has entered a booming era, mention the international documentary channel, everyone is familiar with the BBC, DISCOVERY Channel, National Geographic etc. The development of network media gives us the opportunity to see more foreign documentaries. Watching foreign documentary helps people to understand world culture, broaden their horizons, renew their knowledge. However, language barrier restrict the transmission of TV documentaries, so the subtitles translation of TV documentaries is particularly important. Contemporary audience watching documentary, most of them are to grow knowledge, expand their horizons, cultivate their sentiments, get an unprecedented audio-visual enjoyment from it. When watching the original foreign language documentary, the audience's viewing experience will be greatly affected by the subtitle translation. Because of the characteristics of the documentary, the subtitle translation strategy of general film and television works is not fully applicable to the translation of TV documentary. Based on the analysis of subtitle language characteristics and translation status of TV documentary, this paper uses BBC TV documentary "The Impressionists: Painting and Revolution" as example. The corresponding translation strategies are put forward in the hope of guiding subtitle translation and promoting friendly communication among different cultures.

1.2 Objectives of the Research

The focus of this study is on the strategies of C-E translation of documentary subtitles. In this thesis, the characteristics of these translations will also be examined and summarized. Based on the analysis of subtitle language characteristics and translation status of TV documentary, this paper attempts to have a study of literal translation, free translation, and methods of addition and omission with BBC TV documentary "The Impressionists: Painting and Revolution" as its data. It is hoped that this study can provide some useful inspiration for further study of the translation of documentary subtitles.

2. Rationale

2.1 Definition of Subtitle

Wikipedia give a comprehensive definition of subtitle. It states that the subtitle is a text from the transcript or script of a dialogue or comment, such as a movie or TV program, video game, etc., usually displayed at the bottom of the screen, but if the screen has a text at the bottom of the screen, it can also be at the top of the screen. They can be either a written form of a written translation of a foreign language dialogue, or a written presentation of a dialogue in the same language, or no additional information to help the deaf and dumb or the hearing impaired listen to the dialogue or to understand the spoken dialogue. Or who has an accent recognition problem^[7].

According to Merriam-Websters Collegiate Dictionary, Subtitle is explained as "a printed

statement or fragment of dialogue appearing on the screen between the scenes of a silent motion picture or appearing as a translation at the bottom of the screen during the scenes of a motion picture or television show in a foreign language".

Scholars have also given definitions to subtitling. According to Birgit Nedergaard-Larsen subtitling is "a special type of language transfer: a written, condensed translation of a predominantly spoken original" ^[4](Nedergaard-Larsen 1993:212).

Professor. Henrik Gottlieb extensively studied subtitle translation. He defined subtitling as "the translation of the spoken (or written) source text of an audiovisual product into a written target text which added onto the images of the original product, usually at the bottom of the screen."^[2] (Gottlieb, 1994a:104).

2.2 Linguistic Characteristics of Television Documentaries

Different genres of TV documentaries have different language styles, but they all have some things in common, that is, the language is simple, logical and clear. Due to the change of picture, the language of documentary film may not be coherent and complete expression, with obvious jump thinking and logic. From the sentence point of view, in order to express as rigorously as possible, many compound sentences are often used, the sentence structure becomes complex. From the lexical point of view, apart from dialogue, documentary words are not too colloquial, often a variety of professional terminology.

Due to the characteristics of the subtitles of TV documentaries, such as the time limit, space limit, character number limit, line limit, audio-visual coordination etc., the translation of TV documentaries is different from the translation of ordinary literary works, film and television works. The main features are as follows:

First, the time limited. The subtitle requirements of the TV documentary are synchronized with the pictures and commentaries, the display time on the screen is particularly short, the speed of the explanation is locked, the switching of the camera is fleeting, there is no time to read them over and over to savor them carefully. "an average viewer can comfortably read in six seconds the text written on two full subtitle lines, when each line contains a maximum of some 37 characters, ie, a total of 74 characters"(Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2007:96). Therefore, only the faultlessly translation can perfectly express the complete content of the subtitle, not only achieving the consistency of content, but also achieving the consistency of style. This feature brings difficulties to the subtitle translation, requires us to master the readability of subtitles.

Second, space constraints. Subtitles as a tool to assist understanding, in order not to affect the screen, subtitles can only appear at the bottom of the screen, the screen can accommodate the length of the subtitle is also limited, so it is limited in space. Space, by the TV screen size and the average audience can see the minimum subtitle size, the screen appears at most two lines of subtitles, a line of up to 35 words; If there are excessive subtitles, the font size will affect the screen. Therefore, the sentences translated by the subtitle translator should not be too long, it is bet not to use the explanatory language and annotation too much. The translator needs to employ techniques such as abbreviation, simplification and ellipsis in translation.

Third, cultural differences. The cultural background and language habits behind different language families, the differences of expression caused by cultural differences can be seen everywhere in TV documentaries. Different languages represent different nationalities' behavior mode, thinking mode and expression mode. Many English words have specific expressions, such as "cut no ice", which means "no impact". The meaning of apple in English goes far beyond Apple". Due to the translation problem caused by cultural differences, "Apple" also represents luck.

At last, easy to understand. In the TV documentary film, in order to cooperate with the explanation,

the subtitle translation is required to be easy to understand, clear and concise, natural smooth. It is also requested that the meaning and style of the translated text are kept to the original text as consistent as possible.

2.3 Principles of Translation

In the translation of documentary subtitles, the most important principle is simplicity and comprehensiveness. In order to meet the characteristics of film and TV subtitle translation, it is necessary to "change more into less" in sentence structure and "simplify" in vocabulary. Under the circumstance of understanding the plot, tone and background, the translation should present the original color and original taste of the original sentence to the audience with the most clear expression form, the clearest logical relation. The translator should fully understand the social background, literary habits and language style of the target language audience. Just like Nida and Taber (1969) said about definition of translation: "Translating consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style".^[5] (Nida and Taber 1969:12)

According to the book, *English Through Translation*, states that the integrated meaning of words is far more important than the individual or partial meaning. In different languages, the semantic areas of corresponding words are different. Because of these two factors, choosing the correct words in the accepted language to translate the words in the source text largely depends on the context rather than word-for-word translation in a mechanical way.

2.4 Strategies of Translation on English Documentary Subtitles

Since English and Chinese are two entirely different languages, there are great differences in grammar, vocabulary and text structure. One of the unavoidable problems in translation is how to make the translation as smooth as possible. To achieve the goal, there are certain translation strategies we can follow, which are the methods of addition, omission, as well as literal translation and free translation. Besides, data of the present study would also be analyzed in terms of the strategies above.

3. Data Analysis

The data of the four strategies will be analyzed in the following chapters separately. Please note that items mentioned as examples in this chapter would follow the formula below.

“[Timer shaft] Original subtitle”

Example: “[58:18] But you’ll have to wait till the next film to see what happened”. Namely, the English original are presented. Timer shaft is the exact time when the subtitle appears on the documentary.

3.1 On Addition

This strategy is to add extra explication into the translated subtitle, which is helpful for the viewers to understand better, gain complete information. Otherwise, it is the way to fill the gap between different cultures of the original language and the target language readers, restore the balance between original and target text. For example, subtitles in ep3: the original subtitle is “[58:18] But you’ll have to wait till the next film to see what happened, [58:24] when we voyage to the end of Impressionism [58:25] and beyond”. In the example, “beyond” is translated into “The arrival of the Post-Impressionism”. Translators add extra explanation into the translated subtitle. Compare to literal translation, it delivers complete and professional information to audience. The next two examples in

ep1 are “[10:34] All sorts of elusive light effects [10:36] were now easier to record and enjoy.”; “[16:07] The speciality at Sevres is [16:09] to apply it in many layers [16:11] to create a depth of colour that isn't found anywhere else.” In the above two examples, translated version “lighting effects” “rendering” are terminologies, translator chose these words instead of literal translation delivers exact and professional information to audience, keeps consistence with the artistic style of the whole documentary.

3.2 On Omission

From the characteristics of subtitle translation concluded by the previous translators, it can be seen that subtitles are limited by time and space, so we should reduce the subtitle translation appropriately. A reduced translation strategy used in this kind of subtitle translation, also known as "the reductive form of translation", was put forward by De Lindein 1995.^[1] In 1999, Diaz-Cintas also proposed such strategy, which he called “constrained translation”.^[3] In the process of translation, according to the actual situation, on the basis of conveying complete information of the original text, the translators can use the method of selective translation, condensed translation and paraphrasing, appropriately eliminate some unnecessary elements, use concentrated language. For example, in ep1, the original subtitle is “[04:52] Pissarro was the glue [04:54] that held Impressionism together.”; the original subtitle is “[09:37] an American called John G. Rand, [09:39] working for good old Winsor Newton. [09:44] invented something remarkable, something brilliant and inspired. [09:50] Rand came up with this little beauty here. [09:56] The paint tube.” In the above two examples, the translator removes the colloquial words “glue”, “good old” “Rand came up with”, so that the information can be directly understood. Translate the “something remarkable, something brilliant and inspired” into concentrated language “Kuang Shi Qi Wu which means A rare thing”, which is concise and vivid.

3.3 On Literal Translation

Literal translation is one of the most commonly used translation strategies in English documentary subtitle translation. Literal translation, also called direct translation or word-for-word translation, refers to the transfer of the complete meanings of the original text from one language to another. It is a way to keep the content, form of the original language unchanged and keep it consistent with culture. It emphasizes the form similarity, requires the accordance between the original passages and the target one in the choice of word, syntax and style. A simplified version of literal translation is that “literal translation is a method in translation which follows the structure of language of the original decently” (Ye, 2001, pp. 5-6)

All of these translations presented below are faithfully followed the original passages in the choice of word, syntax, style and the structure of language of the original decently. For example, in the ep2, please see example 1: “[02:20] Pissarro's the same. [02:22] Fields of golden corn, [02:24] sunny orchards, [02:26] happy peasants, merrily at work in the fields. [03:01] That relaxed , optimistic, typical mood of Impressionism.” example 2: “[58:02] Wherever nature impressed them, [58:04] the Impressionists went after it and tried to capture it.”

3.4 On Free Translation

Because English and Chinese belong to different language families, under the influence of cultural background and other factors, there are many differences in language habits and ways of thinking, mainly in expressing habits. If the expression in English is translated directly into Chinese, it will appear stiff or even awkward. Therefore, in the process of subtitle translation of documentary, the translator should understand the meaning of the original text, use the target language habits to

translate. Just like Nida and Taber (1969) said about definition of translation: “Translating consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style”. (Nida and Taber 1969:12)

According to Eugene Nidas theory, dynamic equivalence, the term as he originally coined, can be described as that “high quality translation is that when the information of the original text is transmitted to the receptor language, the receptor's response is basically the same as that of the original receptor. The original intention of translation is that readers who use two different languages can understand the meaning of the original text in the same way. In the following years, Nida distanced the theory of “dynamic equivalence”, preferred the theory of “functional equivalence”. The theory of “functional equivalence” not only means the source text in the source culture and the target text in target culture are equivalent in function. Moreover, "function" can be regarded as a characteristic of text. This characteristic can functional equivalently connect people's way of interaction and communication in different cultures.^[6](From: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dynamic_and_formal_equivalence)

Furthermore, we should pay attention to the sense of rhythm of the translation. Chinese characters have a sound for each word, but the two-syllable and four-character structure can produce a better sense of language than the monosyllabic, sound more harmonious. Such as "ABB", "AAB", "AABB" and other structure words, as well as idioms and other expressions can make subtitles more vivid, more appropriate and easy to understand. Take the subtitles in ep1 for instance: the original subtitle is [11:27] The city was in the middle of a huge transformation [11:31] Everything was changing [13:51] But for the Impressionists , the conditions were perfect.” . In the example above, translator translated “the conditions were perfect” into “Ru Yu De Shui means feel just like a fish in water”, is vivid and full of rhythm; translated “changing” into “Shun Xi Wan Bian means constantly changing”, rich in literary flavor, both natural and smooth. The four word phrases in Chinese are widely used. Generally speaking, as a distinguishing feature of Chinese language, succinct, neat and rhythmic are three remarkable advantages of four character phrases. Correctly using four character phrases to translate English can add a lot of lingering charm to your translation works. Take the subtitles in ep1 for instance, please see example 1: [02:33] These days , Monet and the Impressionists are everywhere. 2: [10:17] The new paint tubes were spectacularly portable, [10:20] so easy to carry wherever you went. 3: [13:55] A city was changing beyond recognition. 4: [27:09] If ever an Impressionist picture [27:11] begins to look predictable or boring [27:14] like you’ve seen it before [27:19] what you need to do is get closer. Take the subtitles in ep2 for instance, please see example 5: [01:05] Who doesn’t love Monet's delightful Fields of Poppies, [01:09] with their unmissable smell of the summer? [01:23] Or his sunny moments by the river, [01:26] with their perfectly captured weather 6:[04:44] Monet spent his entire life living next to water. [05:02] where he was born in 1840, [05:07]and where the Seine is all twisty and urban. 7: [06:23] The problem with painting water, the difficulty the challenge, [06:28] is that it's constantly changing. [06:30] Everything affects it. [06:33] Every moment is different. [06:38] is sort of there and sort of not there.

When all the methods mentioned above are impossible, we must adopt non literal translation to reveal the implied meaning of idioms. Take the subtitles in ep2 for instance: the original subtitle are [58:46] They were after the truth and went where it took them. [58:50] And that's never been an easy journey.” In the above example, translated version “Tian Ya Hai Jiao means ends of the earth”, “Dao Lu Bu Ping Tan means bumpy roads” are commonly used Chinese idioms. These translations can better convey the sense to the target language readers.

4. Conclusion

This study is a preliminary exploration of the English-Chinese translation strategies of English

documentary subtitle. The data of the present study were E-C documentary subtitles. In this study, it was found that the method of addition and omission, literal translation and free translation are suitable for documentary subtitle translation. Therefore, translators could translate documentary subtitles under the guidance of these strategies. When translation achieves natural equivalence to the source language information closest in meaning and style, it will be a decent translation. Translators are demanded to be proficient in the source language, English, and the target language, Chinese, as well as the linguistic characteristics of TV documentaries, and principles of subtitle translation in this case, in order to make better translations. Moreover, the characteristics of the target language are also important for the reception and understanding of the target text. In order to meet the needs and interests of the audience, the translator can adopt flexible and diversified translation strategies to do decent translation.

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