

# *Research on Film Subtitle Translation from the Perspective of Translation Norms: Taking 'My Country, My Parents' as an Example*

**Jia Xiaoya**

*Shandong University of Science and Technology, Qingdao, Shandong, 266000, China*

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**Abstract:** In today's world, cultural exchanges and integration are more frequent. It is crucial to tell Chinese stories well, promote Chinese culture to "go global", and enhance the influence of Chinese culture. As one of the important ways of cross-cultural communication, film plays a significant role in spreading Chinese culture and showing the image of China. With the continuous expansion of China's film market, more and more excellent films are entering the international stage. Excellent film subtitle translation is not only an auxiliary tool for foreign audiences to understand the film content, but also a key factor to improve the reputation of Chinese films, and an important carrier to realize the "going global" of Chinese culture. With the guidance of the famous translator Toury's theory of translation norms, this paper analyzes the translation norms in the subtitle translation of the film My Country, My Parents, in order to provide reference for the improvement of the translation quality of domestic films.

## **1. Introduction**

Film subtitles are not only the language information in film and television works, but also the bridge of cross-cultural communication, which plays an important role in introducing the story background, promoting the plot development and highlighting the character's personality. The film "My Country, My Parents" is a patriotic film with a period characteristic and Chinese story, and it contains a lot of subtitles related to dialects, idioms and culture-loaded words. In order to improve the translation level of film subtitles, make them easy to understand, close to the language habits of the target language audience, ensure the movie-watching experience of foreign audiences, and improve the international influence of excellent Chinese films, the author borrowed the translation norms theory of Toury and analyzed the English subtitle translation of "My Country, My Parents". It is found that the theory of translation norms has certain guiding significance for film subtitle translation.

## **2. An Overview of Toury's Translation Norms**

Gideon Toury is a famous Israeli translation theorist and one of the representatives of the Tel Aviv School. Toury developed Zohar's theory of multiple systems and Holmes's theory of descriptive

translation studies, and founded the normative theory of translation. Traditional translation studies focus on "normativity", centering on the original text, and try to formulate a series of norms for translators to abide by in translation practice (Han Jianghong & Chen Mei, 2012)<sup>[1]</sup>. Toury regards translation as a cultural and social activity. According to Toury, translation is influenced by many factors, which go beyond the source text, the systematic differences between languages, the textual traditions involved in translation, and even the translator's cognitive ability, and lie at the socio-cultural level (Zhang Shuzhen & Zhao Ning, 2009)<sup>[7]</sup>. He divides norms into three broad categories: Initial norms, Preliminary norms, and Operational norms.

Initial norms refer to whether the translator chooses to be faithful to the linguistic and cultural norms of the source language or the target language, which reflects the translator's fidelity to the original text. The former means that the translator sacrifices less the linguistic and cultural characteristics of the source language in the process of translation, and retains more exotic cultural customs of the original text, that is, "adequate" translation. The latter means that the translator tries to comply with the linguistic and cultural norms of the target language to make the translation easier for the target language readers to understand, that is, "acceptability" translation. Toury points out that most translated works are not in two extremes, but somewhere in between. In the process of translation, translators need to find the optimal balance point between "adequate" translation and "acceptable" translation.

Preliminary norms involve the overall selection of the translation. Translators need to consider from the perspectives of source language society and target language society, including political, cultural and economic factors, and then analyze which works are worth translating, as well as the authors, text types and cultural backgrounds favored by the target language culture (Zhao Xia, 2015)<sup>[8]</sup>. Preliminary norms include translation policy and translation directness. Translation policy refers to the influence of specific culture and time on text selection, which should take into account literary works of different genres, the requirements of different publishers, the writing styles of different authors, and the translation of authors, works, genres and schools preferred by specific languages (Peng Shiyu & Zhang Qingqing, 2016)<sup>[3]</sup>. The directness of translation is related to whether translation is carried out through an intermediary language, that is, whether the translator translates directly from the source language or selects a third-party language for translation.

Operational norms refer to the specific translation methods and skills chosen by translators in specific translation practices, such as literal translation, free translation, additional translation, and reduced translation. Operational norms include matricial norms and textual-linguistic norms. The matricial norm is the macroscopic arrangement of the translated text, involving whether the translated content is complete, whether the paragraph is deleted, reset or divided, whether the paragraph or annotation is filled. Textual-linguistic norms restrict the choice of materials to replace the original text language, for example, the choice of pure language or literary, as well as the words and sentence structure of the target text, and in fact determine the translation strategy adopted by the translator (Zhao Xia, 2015)<sup>[8]</sup>.

### 3. Characteristics of Subtitle Translation

Subtitles are texts that flash on the screen and disappear immediately, unlike texts in a book, which readers can refer to before and after (Li Yunxing, 2001)<sup>[2]</sup>. This feature of subtitle makes subtitle translation subject to certain constraints. On the one hand, subtitle translation is limited by time. The time shown in the subtitles is synchronized with the speed of the characters in the picture and the speed of the scene change, and as the corresponding picture and sound disappear, it will be replaced by the next subtitle. Therefore, subtitles are not static like the text on a book, nor can they be flipped back and forth or annotated. In addition, due to the differences in people's education level and

understanding ability, the time spent watching subtitles is also very different. If the subtitles are too short, the audience will not fully understand the information of the film. On the contrary, the subtitles are too long, which will cause the subtitles to be out of sync with the picture. Subtitles, on the other hand, are constrained by space. As we all know, the size of the screen and the screen, as well as the length of each line of the actors, makes the length of the subtitles and the size of the font limited. The translated subtitles should not be too long, otherwise it will take up too much screen space and affect the audience's viewing experience. It should not be too short to avoid missing important information. To sum up, subtitle translation must consider time and space factors. This requires the translator to choose common words and use short, concise and flexible sentence patterns to realize the transmission of information in limited time and space (Yang Yang, 2006)<sup>[6]</sup>.

## **4. Subtitle Translation Strategies for My Country, My Parents from the Perspective of Translation Norms**

### **4.1 Introduction to the Film**

The film *My Country, My Parents* is another main theme film after *My People, My Country* and *My People, My Hometown*. The film is composed of four units: *Windriders*, *Poem*, *AD Man* and *Go Youth*. From the perspective of family and country, it focuses on four different periods of revolutionary war, socialist construction, reform and opening up, and the new era, telling the story of several generations of parents who never forget their original aspirations, selfless dedication, and arduous struggle. It shows the Chinese people's national spirit of love for the motherland, self-improvement and innovation, and pays tribute to the generations of parents who have contributed to China's revolution, construction, reform and development.

*Windriders* tells the story of an outstanding cavalry regiment during the Anti-Japanese War who was not afraid to sacrifice, protect the people, and fight bravely to kill the enemy. Ma Renxing, head of the cavalry regiment played by Wu Jing, in the face of the difficult choice of protecting his son or saving the people, he chose to give up the small family to protect everyone, fully interpreting the Chinese children's family feelings. It is countless fathers like Ma Renxing who have led to today's prosperity. This part mainly pays tribute to the revolutionary martyrs who sacrificed fearlessly.

Set against the background of the launch of China's first artificial satellite *Dongfanghong-1* in 1969, *Poem* tells the arduous exploration and contribution of an ordinary space family in the desert to the aviation industry. Pay tribute to a generation of scientists who have worked hard on behalf of the motherland's space industry.

The third story, *AD Man*, tells the story of the birth of China's first television advertisement. The film is set in Shanghai during the period of reform and opening up, and portrays the image of a father who dares to lead and explore. This unit also shows the rapid development and progress of China in a way from small to big.

*Go Youth* tells a warm, funny story between a robot from the year 2050 and a teenager with a scientific dream. The two people formed a father and son, in the process of getting along, the robot father became the guide of the young man's little scientific dream, and constantly encouraged the young man to pursue his dream of science and technology, showing the great creative spirit of people abroad.

### **4.2. Subtitle Translation Under the Guidance of Translation Norms**

#### **4.2.1. Initial Norms**

The initial norms require the translator to make a choice between the source language and the

target language. In view of the current trend of Chinese culture "going global", when translating culture-specific words, a choice can be made on "adequacy" or "acceptability", or both of high adequacy and acceptability, in combination with Toury's translation norms (Wen Yuxian, 2018)<sup>[5]</sup>.

#### 1) Naturalization strategy

Domestication is oriented towards the target language or target readers, that is, in the translation process, the translator should try his best to meet the needs of the target readers, and use the language and expression that the target language readers are familiar with and accustomed to convey the language and culture of the source language. Naturalized translation can make the target text more authentic, smooth and easy to understand, and help the target language readers better understand the target text and enhance its readability. The film adopts the domestication strategy in the translation of some culture-loaded words and idiomatic dialect words, which helps the audience to understand and appreciate the film and realize the initial norms.

##### Example 1

There is a Shanxi Wanrong buddy is tetanus account.

There was this kid from Shanxi and tetanus took his life.

The "Yue Fei" here does not mean explanation, explanation, but refers to "death". It can also reflect that when people speak, they will choose some alternative words to express euphemistically, rather than directly stating the original intention, but both parties can understand each other's intentions. Since foreign audiences do not understand Chinese culture, it is translated as "took his life" to accurately convey the meaning of the original text and follow the original norms.

##### Example 2

I can't control you if you want to be Yue Fei.

If you want to be a hero, I won't stop you.

"Yue Fei" was a famous anti-Jin general, strategist and national hero in the Southern Song Dynasty of China. You want to be a hero, I can't control you. Due to the limitation of time and space in the translation of the word, it is not feasible to add notes, if the translation is directly translated as "Yue Fei", foreign audiences will be confused. The subtitle translation here as "hero" follows the initial specification, realizes the acceptability translation, and is easy for the audience to understand.

##### Example 3

I can understand that children write a composition praising their parents as a flower.

I can understand that kids often put their parents on a pedestal in essays.

The translation takes the English idiom "put sb. on a pedestal," which means to worship someone. Such a translation method accords with the reading habits and expressions of the target language readers, and belongs to the acceptable translation method. At the same time, it makes it easier for the audience to immerse in the child's worship and admiration for his father in the film.

##### Example 4

The Japanese armored car is catching its ass.

Japanese armoured vehicles are not on our tail.

This part of the film tells the story of the cavalry regiment being surrounded by Japanese troops. "Chasing and biting" can show the unfavorable situation and tense situation of the cavalry regiment at that time. The translation chooses to use the authentic expression "on our tail" to indicate the meaning of closely following, which is close to the readers of the target language and enables the audience to quickly understand the connotation of the subtitles. Experience of the tense atmosphere in the film shows that the translator has chosen to adopt acceptable translation and conform to the initial standard content.

#### 2) Alienation strategy

The foreignization strategy is based on the source language, and the translator tries to retain the words or sentences with the characteristics of foreign culture as much as possible in the translation

process. The translation takes into account the differences of national culture, accepts the linguistic characteristics of foreign languages, absorbs the expressions of foreign languages, and retains the linguistic, literary and cultural characteristics of the original texts. The translation strategy of foreignization can make the target readers feel the foreign culture and achieve the purpose of cultural exchange. The foreignization strategy in subtitle translation can make the target audience feel the cultural characteristics of the source language, which is conducive to cultural communication and cross-cultural communication.

#### Example 5

Also praised my father is the construction of the four modernizations of the great man.

And they even praised my dad as a central figure in the realization of the four modernization developing strategies.

Through the subtitle translation, it can be seen that the translation is a literal translation of the "Four modernizations" - the four modernization development strategies. The "Four modernizations" refers to industrial modernization, agricultural modernization, national defense modernization, and scientific and technological modernization, but the subtitle translation does not explain the connotation of the "Four modernizations", so the audience may have a partial understanding of it and feel curious, so that they can know the information and practical significance of the "four modernizations" through consulting. In the process of translation, the translator chooses to preserve the unique background of the source language, and this translation method conforms to the initial norms.

#### Example 6

Spring river warm duck prophet

The duck is a prophet of spring when the river becomes warm.

"Chun jiang shui nuan ya xian zhi" is a poem in the Northern Song Dynasty poet Su Shi's "Huizhong Spring River Night Scene Two", which means that ducks play in the water and first perceive the warming of the river water in early spring. The translation retains the writing image of "duck" in the original subtitles and uses it to describe the foreseer. Such a translation method is not only easy to understand, but also enables the audience to fully understand the original meaning of the subtitles. It also shows that the translation tends to follow the linguistic and cultural norms of the source language, arousing the audience's interest in the extended meaning of the lines, and thus plays a role in spreading traditional Chinese culture.

### 4.2.2. Preliminary norms

#### 1) Translation policy

Translation policy refers to the factors that affect the selection of texts. At present, Chinese film subtitle translation is affected by the development situation of the film industry, the preferences of the audience, ideology, policy and other factors.

China wants to enhance the soft power of culture and promote Chinese culture to go out, it needs to enrich the content and channels of communication, with the help of new media and mainstream platforms, to promote the popular film and television content to foreign markets, and create a favorable external public opinion environment for our country. With the increase of China's international influence and the vigorous development of the film industry, there are already many excellent films that are loved by foreign audiences. The film "My Country, My Parents" has been released in Belgium, the Netherlands, North America and other countries. After watching the movie, foreign audiences said that the movie shows the macro process of China's development through the unique poetic expression of the East, so that every audience who enters the theater can feel the same. By focusing on specific characters, the film shows the touching, warm and brave stories of the Chinese people in different periods, and presents China's great achievements in revolution,

construction, reform and the new era. The film has been well received by the public for its story content with Chinese characteristics, real and full characters and touching Chinese spirit, so as to realize Chinese culture going out.

To sum up, there are many factors that affect the subtitle translation of excellent films, including the quality of the film itself, the love of the public, the needs of social development, and the degree of fame of the film.

#### 2) Directness of translation

Directness of translation involves direct translation and indirect translation, whether the target text is directly translated from the source language or a third language is selected as the intermediary language. The title of the film is translated from Chinese subtitles into English, which is a direct translation.

### 4.3 Operational norms

Operational norms include matricial norms and textual-linguistic norms, which determine the translation strategies and methods used by translators in the translation process. Matricial norms grasps the macro level of the translation, involving the integrity of the translation, whether the text needs to be adjusted, and the addition, omission, rewriting and conversion of subtitles are all decided by it. Textual-linguistic norms affect the micro level of translation, such as vocabulary, syntax and grammar.

#### 1) Additional translation

By adding or supplementing some necessary words, the additive method of translation makes up for the possible semantic gaps, so as to achieve semantic coherence, make the translation semantic clearer, and conform to the expression habits of the target language. The subtitle translation method is used in this film to make the subtitle translation more appropriate to the context and more complete.

##### Example 7

Help me figure out a way to hide this from the kids.

Could you help me hide his death from the children?

The content that the heroine wants to hide is supplemented in the translation, which can not only make the sentence complete, but also conform to the English grammar standards, and at the same time, the subtitles can express the original meaning more smoothly and completely. The method of additional translation can make the audience understand the intrinsic meaning of the film more thoroughly, and it is an effective strategy to realize the operation standard.

#### 2) Omission

Omission means that some words in the original text can be omitted in the translation, so as to make the translation more concise and not cause reading burden to the reader. Although this method will omit some words or sentences, the meaning of the original text will not be omitted. Using the provincial translation method in subtitle translation can make the subtitle more concise and convenient for the audience to watch.

##### Example 8

I said I didn't say no one should touch it.

You know his off limits.

Because subtitle translation is limited by time and space, translators should be as concise as possible when translating. If the original text is translated word for word, it will make the translation appear verbose and complex and take up screen space. The translation uses the expression "off limits" to mean "not allowed to use", so that the audience can understand the things emphasized in the film and reduce the burden of reading.

#### 3) Rewriting



Rewriting means that the translator retranslates the target text based on the target audience's language habits, cultural traditions, ways of thinking and other factors, and on the basis of accurately conveying the original information, so as to make the target text conform to the target audience's aesthetic perception (Tian Yuan, 2021)<sup>[4]</sup>. By rewriting and adjusting the word order and integrating information, the artistic characteristics and characters of the original text are reproduced. There are many colloquial expressions in the subtitles of the film, and the adaptation strategy is adopted to make the subtitle translation conform to the reading habits of the target language readers.

Example 9

Old Wang is fine

Stay safe and sound.

This line is to the comrades before leaving the charge and miss. "hao hao de" is a typical colloquial expression in Chinese, and in the film, it means that I hope my comrades pay attention to safety, do not get hurt, and return safely. If the translation method is literal translation, the audience may be confused. By rewriting the method, using the imperative sentence pattern and two concise adjectives "safe" and "sound", the meaning of the original film can be accurately expressed, so that the audience can quickly understand the meaning of the subtitles, so as to achieve the acceptability of the translation.

## 5. Conclusion

The main theme film convert of " My Country, My Parents " describes the changes of the times in a small way, presents the arduous struggle of several generations of fathers, and tells Chinese stories and spreads Chinese voice in a unique way. Nowadays, as the pace of Chinese culture going global accelerates, the number of excellent domestic films being shown abroad is increasing day by day. Film subtitling is a crucial part of cross-cultural communication. Translators should pay attention to the adequacy and acceptability of the translation, take full account of cultural differences, choose appropriate translation strategies, and transmit film information, so as to achieve the purpose of spreading Chinese culture. This paper selects the Chinese-English subtitles of " My Country, My Parents " and uses the translation norms theory of Toury to study film subtitles, and analyzes the specific application of the corresponding translation strategies in the initial norms, preliminary norms and operational norms in the translation process, with a view to enlightening and drawing lessons for film subtitling translators and contributing to Chinese culture going abroad.

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