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硕士学位论文

英语电影字幕翻译中的文化因素及翻译策略

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## 摘 要

随着社会经济及科技的迅速发展,我国与世界各国跨文化交流日趋频繁。人们对外国的语言及文化也表现出浓厚兴趣。但是由于各国语言文化的差异性,翻译在整个交流过程中变得尤为重要。自从中国加入世贸组织,许多外国优秀影片涌入中国电影市场,中国电影市场出现繁荣景象。然而电影市场的繁荣却与翻译界对电影翻译的重视程度不符合。鉴于电影翻译的现状,作者试图运用奈达的功能对等理论对电影字幕翻译进行研究。奈达的功能对等理论强调目标语读者的对翻译的反应并要求目标语读者与源语读者反应一致。

随着翻译的文化转向,翻译理论家和学者把翻译看做不仅是语言之间的转换,而且更是一种文化交流方式。他们把研究重点转到了翻译中的文化因素。本文的研究重点是英语电影字幕翻译过程中的文化因素并提出相应的翻译策略。

论文首先简略介绍了国内外电影字幕翻译的现状。翻译学者及理论家传统上根据文化优越性来选择他们翻译的目标。他们认为翻译文学作品要比翻译电影更有声望。但是随着经济文化的发展,这种情况有所改变。作者列举了在电影翻译界做出过突出贡献的理论家及他们各自的成就。通过了解前人的成就,分析出其中的不足,为以后的发展提供了道路。

其次作者探讨了电影字幕翻译的概念及特点。许多翻译理论家对电影字幕翻译有不同的定义及不同的看法。电影字幕翻译不同于其他文学翻译,有其自身独特的特点。电影本身就是声画结合的艺术,因此电影字幕翻译受空间及时间等因素的制约。只有了解了这些制约因素才能提出正确的翻译策略。本文运用奈达的对等理论来探讨电影字幕翻译,所以有必要对奈达的理论及应用此理论的必要性及可能性做出介绍。第三部分讨论了文化与翻译。随着翻译的文化转向,更多学者将注意力放在了翻译中的文化因素上,因为翻译不只是语言的翻译更是文化的翻译。本文所指的文化因素,主要是指英语成套词,如动物词,颜色词,人名和地点词等;英语成语及文学作品及日常生活中文化意象的翻译。

通过吸收前人经验及成就,作者总结出三条翻译原则:准确,简洁并要达到功能对等。在电影字幕翻译过程中会出现一些问题。问题主要从三个方面体现:翻译者本身,电影字幕与画面统一及对话中文化词语的翻译问题。为解决这类问

题，作者提出了相应的翻译策略。

关键词：字幕翻译；文化因素；功能对等

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## Abstract

With the rapid development of science and technology, cross-cultural communication becomes intensified. More and more people are eager to learn knowledge about foreign countries; because of the differences of languages and cultures of different countries, translation becomes necessary in this process of information exchange. With China's entry into WTO, lots of foreign films are imported there appears the prosperity of film industry in China. However, this prosperity is in sharp contrast with the current situation of the translation of films. So this paper will present the study of English film subtitle translation by applying Nida's functional equivalence, which lays emphasis on the target language readers' responses and calls for equivalent response of the target language audiences.

With the cultural turn in translation, translation theorists and scholars see translation not only as linguistic transfer but more as an act of cultural communication, and they are more concerned with cultural elements in translation. The focus of the paper is to discuss how to deal with cultural elements in English film dialogues during translation process.

This paper firstly gives a general review on the translation history of English film subtitle translation both at home and abroad. Traditionally, scholars and translation theorists like to select their objects of study on the basis of cultural prestige and it is thought more prestigious to study literary works than to study popular literature, such as film translation. However, this phenomenon changes due to economic and social development. The author lists some representative scholars and their achievements in film translation, especially in film subtitle translation. Then summary of past studies is made to have a clear understanding of the situation in this field.

Then the author examines the definitions and unique features of film subtitle translation. Many scholars have defined subtitle and subtitle translation and come to different opinions. The purpose to present these definitions is to have some general idea about subtitle translation. Subtitle translation is subject to some constraints both

in technical aspect and linguistic aspect. These constraints lay great burden on translators. Understanding these constraints will be the basis for a successful translation. This paper applies Nida's theory to film translation, so it is important to present his theory and analyze the possibility of applying this theory to film subtitle translation. The third part of this paper deals with culture and film subtitle translation. As the appearance of cultural turn in translation, more and more scholars pay attention to cultural elements in translation, because translation is not only realized in linguistic level but also in cultural level. As to the cultural elements in this paper, the author mainly refers to word sets, such as animal words, color words, words of persons or places; cultural-specific words, mainly refers to idioms and finally cultural images from literary works and daily life.

By absorbing the achievements of previous scholars, the author comes to the conclusion that the guiding principles for film subtitle translation should be conciseness, accuracy and principle of achieving equivalence. While translating film dialogues from English to Chinese, problems may arise. These problems can come from the translator, or film subtitle translation itself. To solve these problems, translators must adopt some strategies.

**Key Words:** English film subtitle translation; cultural elements; functional equivalence

**Category Number:** H315.9

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## Introduction

With the rapid development of science and technology and the advent of information age, cross-cultural communications are becoming increasingly important. Definitely speaking, when all the cross-cultural communications go smoothly, people are not aware of the existence of cultural differences. Only when they come across something troubling them can they realize that they face the strange culture of a foreign country. In this case, translation becomes necessary. Translation is a cross-language transformation activity. From the angle of culture, translation is even an activity of cultural exchange. Generally, literary works such as novels, poems, essays are translated for people to learn and enjoy the languages and diverse cultures of foreign countries. However, it usually takes time for people to read again and again to have a precise understanding and it also requires people with high education backgrounds, which results in a limited group of readers for this kind of activity. Film, as a new way of communication, can solve this kind of problem, and is much more welcomed and accepted by people of different ages, with different educational backgrounds and social status. Therefore, it takes a large proportion in information exchanges.

Film, as a kind of popular entertainment, is a “reflector” of the culture of its society. Imported films not only entertain viewers, but also educate them and broaden their outlook on life by showing them exotic cultures. Watching foreign films is a fast and easy way to get knowledge about foreign languages and cultures. Film translation is attached growing significance with the rapid development of intercultural communication that has been one of the dominant forms of culture in modern society. Extended beyond the field of art, film has become a part of people’s lives and exerted strong influence on the formation of people’s language, living patterns and even values. (Chen Xiaoyun, 1999) Film translation is undoubtedly one of the commonest forms of translation encountered in everyday life in modern society.

However, in spite of the obvious significance of film translation in daily life and

in cross-cultural communication, only a small number of scholars have focused their attention on it. "There is a blatant discrepancy between the obvious importance of translation in the media and the limited attention it has so far been thought worthy of." (Dirk Delabastita, 1990:97) The reasons for this discrepancy are not difficult to seek. Firstly, scholars prefer to devote their energy to the development of a theory of translation. Their theories are so abstract that there is hardly any room left for the empirical study of actual translation, and certainly of translation of films. Secondly, translation scholars tend to select their objects of study on the basis of cultural prestige, rather than interest. It is often thought more prestigious to study the translation of novels, poems than that of films. (Dirk Delabastita, 1990) Fortunately, some institutions and scholars both at home and abroad begin to realize this awkward situation and try to change it. They make great contributions to the development of film translation and lay solid foundation for further studies.

Each country cultivates a different tradition of translating films and subscribes to one of the two major modes: dubbing and subtitling. They both have their own advantages and limitations. For dubbing, translation is covert and audiences can only hear target language dialogues. They are deprived of the chances to improve their linguistic ability. There is no change of medium in dubbing, so audiences can concentrate on the pictures. However, dubbing needs more labor work and is more costly than the other form of film translation. For China, foreign films flood into Chinese market, but the government cannot afford to organize the dubbing of every film imported. While with the improvement of people's language ability and their expanded knowledge about the outside world, the Chinese people have the ability to see and appreciate foreign films with subtitles.

Subtitling, on the other hand, changes the medium from original spoken dialogue to written target language version in the form of one- or two-liners at the bottom of the screen. In the subtitled films, the originality of the language and culture is preserved. Therefore, audiences can enjoy the foreign language and its culture. No matter what translation method is adopted, the purpose is the same: to transmit foreign culture and promote intercultural communication.



This paper will focus on subtitle translation only, which is of course not to say that dubbing is less worthy of academic investigation. The choice between dubbing and subtitling as main translation method is arbitrary and has a complex series of elements, such as history, tradition, financial resources available. None of these elements on its own can account for local preferences. Ultimately, the choice of method is determined largely by audiences' habits.

Film subtitle translation will be studied from cultural perspective and the author tries to establish a set of principles that can be used to guide the practice. As is known to all, study of translation is the study of cultural exchange. Film is a part of culture, so film translation should be done in a specific socio-cultural context. At the same time, the main purpose of film translation is to meet the needs of the Chinese audiences. The translated version is not satisfactory without the audiences' understanding and appreciation. Bearing this in mind, translators should take the audiences into consideration and try to make the translated works acceptable to the Chinese audiences. Nida's functional equivalence which emphasizes the response of the receptors can satisfy translators' needs.

This paper has four chapters. The first chapter is literature review. The author presents previous studies on this field both at home and abroad to have a general idea about film subtitle translation. The second chapter states the definitions and characteristics of film subtitle translation and the theoretical basis of this paper—Nida's functional equivalence. The third chapter examines cultural elements in this paper. To have a better understanding, the relationship between culture and translation is discussed first and then the author presents three kinds of cultural elements—word sets, cultural-specific words and cultural images from literary works and daily life. The fourth chapter presents strategies to deal with cultural elements. Film subtitle translation is different from other kinds of translation. Translators may confront with many problems. To solve these problems, translators should follow some principles and then adopt some strategies to produce high-qualified version.

## **Chapter One**

### **Literature Review**

#### **1.1 Previous Studies on Film Subtitle Translation**

Film has changed the way we see the world dramatically during the past years, and it is clearly a kind of sophisticated and possibly the most important art in modern society. Film translation has a rather complex history of theories and practices. It is born with the appearance of talkies, sounded movies. Compared with other forms of translation, the history of this new type of translation is rather short, not to say systematic and theoretical study concerning it. It's really a pity that film translation has been largely ignored by translation studies for a long time. However, it does not mean it was not researched. During the twentieth century, there was a shift in the material translated, new ways of communication emerged. The translation of films joined the written world. Until now, it has been gaining more and more attentions and interests by scholars and theorists.

##### **1.1.1 Development of Foreign Films in China**

This paper makes its focus on translating film dialogues from English to Chinese. Therefore, the development of foreign films, English films especially in China should first be presented.

Foreign film made its first appearance in late Qing Dynasty. At that time, only the royalty have the chances to see films. Most of these imported films are silent; therefore, it is safe to say before liberation, China virtually has no film translation. Audiences listened to simultaneous interpretation through earphones while watching foreign films. However the interpretation was usually poor and frequently interrupted, listening to these interpretation was no pleasure to the audiences. In early 1949, the Changchun Film Studio of Northeast China was founded and from then on, film dubbing started. Changchun was the best in film dubbing at that time because Northeast China was liberated by the People's Liberation Army in 1948 when the rest

of China was still controlled under Kuomintang regime. After Mainland China was fully liberated, the Shanghai Film Studio set up a dubbing department and dubbed its first film. After China opened itself to the outside world in 1978, there began a boom of film translation as a result of looser control over the import of foreign films. (Qian Shaochang, 2001) Also there was a change from dubbing to subtitle translation. "According to one poll carried by sina website in 2000, about 70.87% people prefer to watch subtitled film." (Duan Hongxin, 2001:45) This figure indicates that at present in China, subtitled film enjoys more popularity than dubbed one.

### 1.1.2 Film Subtitle Translation Studies Abroad

The subtitle translation studies began with the development of film industry, high technology and globalization. For the film industry is unquestionably better developed in the western world, especially in Europe and the United States, the amount of film is huge in Europe, and Europe scholars have also done a lot of researches.

The first academic article to study film translation from a translation perspective appeared in the late 1950s and early 1960s. A special edition of the magazine *Babel*, published in 1960 under the title *Cinéma et traduction*, marks a symbolic starting. Ever since then, considerable articles and essays were published on various magazines and journals. The golden age of film translation came in the 1990s, and there appeared a real revolution in this field. Many famous scholars and theorists made fruitful achievements.

Gambier is one of the leading figures during this period. He has devoted great effort to the classification of film translation modes, the skills of would-be subtitlers and the reception of audiovisual translation. He edited a book with Henrik Gottlieb: *(Multi)media Translation: Concepts, Practices, and Research*. It is a collection of twenty-six articles. These articles discuss how the rapid changes in technology and the globalization in communication have added new sphere to the field of translation and are challenging the translator's role. (Multi)Media translation, especially screen translation has led scholars to take a fresh look at the translator's strategies and behaviors. Some papers present the concepts of media and multimedia, the necessity

of interdisciplinarity, the polysemiotic feature of audiovisual media. Other papers discuss practices, mainly in subtitle translation. Finally some show the cultural and linguistic implications of screen translation. The twenty-six articles, together with an introduction and an epilogue, are divided into three sections: “Concepts”, “Policies and Practices” and “Empirical Research”. Some topics may overlap, but each article offers a fascinating look at the various aspects of multimedia translation.

Gottlieb began his career in the study of subtitle translation in the 1990s. He is definitely one of the scholars that have formally theorized about this area. His study covers from the definition and constraints of subtitle translation, the linguistic dimension of subtitles, and the translation of idioms from English into Danish, to the training and teaching of subtitle translation and, the strategies for subtitle translation. His study is relatively all-around, and provides theoretical basis for future research.

Other major scholars also made great contributions to film translation, for example, Ivarsson and his book *Subtitle translation for the Media* (1992) which offered a very detailed history of the technical aspect of subtitle translation and an overview of subtitle translation for the deaf and hard-of-hearing; Tomaszkiwicz and his doctoral thesis in French in 1993 which applied the theory of relevance to the study of subtitle translation; Dirk Delabastita carried out research on the norms that underlie translation behavior and paid more attention to the cultural elements while translating. Besides, one can find research articles in translation journals. *Translation Journal* has a special column “Art and Entertainment” in which many articles deal with the problems of film translation. *Metal*, *Babel*, *Perspectives: Studies in Transtology* are also famous magazines in this field.

### 1.1.3 Film Subtitle Translation Studies in China

China also has a long history of film translation. Before 1949, China’s film industry, based in Shanghai, was overwhelmed by American and British products. Most of the imported films were silent, so the translation of films was not well developed. Since 1949, China has kept on introducing a great number of films from

foreign countries, so film translation developed accordingly. Subtitle translation was the main translation method at that time.

However, compared with the researches in foreign countries, the related investigations in China are far from being satisfactory. Not a single work can be found thus far. Only some limited articles are published in some journals.

Zhang Chunbo (1998) takes film as an audiovisual art that serves the mass audiences. Therefore, he thinks the translation of films should center on the target audiences, and translators should take target language audiences' language level and cultural awareness into consideration. He applies Nida's functional equivalence to the study of film translation, and suggests the translation method should be free translation. He also states that the cultural items in film translation are very difficult to deal with. To solve this kind of problem, he suggests the domestication method, abandoning the original image and replacing it with one that is familiar to the Chinese audiences.

Ma Zhengqi (2003) first studies the unique features of film translation and then states the principles. There are five points to consider before he summarizes basic principles for film translation. These five points are that the film translation should 1) be colloquial language; 2) be in accordance with character's personality; 3) satisfy the emotional need in the film; 4) achieve lip-synchronization; 5) be popular language. Based on these five points, he draws the principles for film translation: the translated text should be real-life, or close to our life; be personality-relevant; be true to human feelings; be in accordance to lip movement (this may require some adjustment on the word order or syntactic structures); and be audience-responsible, that is to say, try to use common, popular language.

Qian Shaochang (2000) also devotes great energy to film translation. He wrote an article entitled *Film Translation--the More and More Important Realm in Translation Field*, which points out the importance of translation and calls on the translators to pay more attention to it. Based on his own translation experience, he summarizes seven points to pay attention to. First is to let audiences distinguish whether the third party is male or female. Second, the subtitles must coincide with the

lip movement of the actors and actresses. Third, translator should pay attention whether there are pauses in actor or actress's dialogue. If there is, this pause should be shown in the translated version. Fourth, translator should pay attention to gestures occurred in the movie. The fifth one is the translation difficulty because of different cultural backgrounds and knowledge range. Sixth, it is the most difficult task to translate puns and humorous or quick-witted remarks. Seventh, the translation must be very simple and smooth to understand by general audiences. He thinks that the film is a perfect synchronization of voice and moving pictures, therefore, a certain extent of faithfulness can be sacrificed in order to achieve vividness and aesthetic equivalence.

The above three scholars have something in common with their opinions. They all pay much attention to target language audiences' understanding and appreciation of films. Their opinions are in accordance with Nida's functional equivalence. Besides, they have stated out principles and strategies for film translation. Though their studies are not done systematically, they have stepped forward greatly in the field of translation.

Li Yunxing, professor (2001) in Tian Jin Normal University, marks in his article *Strategies for Translating Subtitles* that the primary requirement of subtitle translation is to provide, within the constraints of time and space, the most relevant information in the most effective way. The article analyzes the features of subtitle translation in terms of time-space constraints, informative function and cultural elements, and then puts forward corresponding strategies for translation, with concrete examples for illustration.

Zhao Chunmei (2002) has done profound research on film translation through her personal experience. In her paper, *Translation into Chinese of Film Scripts and Scripts of TV drama series – Four Main Conflicting Demands*, she analyzes four conflicting demands in film translation-- length of translation and the original content; word order and the sequence of moving pictures; domestication and foreignization method. In her opinion, as an important means of cultural exchange and showcase of foreign culture, foreign films contain heavily culture-loaded images and culture-specific phenomena; therefore, translator should try his best to retain the

original unique language expressions, metaphors, allusions, persons' names, etc. In a word, her opinion on film translation is that translator should try to use literal method, only when it can not work out, should a translator resort to free translation method to achieve equivalence with the original texts.

## 1.2 Summary of Past Studies on Film Subtitle Translation

In general, these studies cover almost every aspect of film, and some also deal with dubbing translation simultaneously. Their analysis help to enlarge the range of translation field to the multimedia context, bridging the gap between subtitle translation and traditional literary translation, and therefore the existing translation principles and strategies can be used in subtitle translation. Subtitle translation is a dominant form of film translation in our country and it enjoys great popularity among Chinese people. Subtitle translation can be seen as the best way to introduce the beauty of target language and culture, for Chinese, mostly English and its culture. Therefore, some of the scholars have noticed the importance and urgency of film subtitle translation and they have done some research on it. Chinese scholars make their researches focused on the principles and strategies of film subtitle translation. They analyze the special characteristics of subtitle translation and its differences between dubbing translation. The above scholars are examples. On the contrary, foreign scholars analyze film translation from much broader perspectives, such as linguistics, pragmatics. They also state some basic principles that lay basis for further studies.

However, the research on English film subtitle translation is still not mature. Only some articles can be found in some magazines. Moreover, most film subtitle translation remains in empirical stage. The majority of the researchers and investigators carry out their studies from their own translation experiences. Most parts of the researches have been conducted under no theoretical guidance, and most of the studies examine subtitle translation in the western contexts e.g., translation between French and English. Seldom do the studies concern translation of languages in different linguistic families, say, Chinese and English. Compared with dubbing

translation, studies about subtitle translation is relatively small.

Though a relatively great number of articles can be found in China, few of them are done systematically. Most of the studies are too general to give specific strategies for subtitle translation translation. As to cultural elements in film translation, some scholars have noticed the importance of culture in translation process, but their studies are done without theoretical basis, not to say systematic analysis. The study of cultural elements in English film subtitle translation still has a long way to go.



## Chapter Two

### Theoretical Consideration on Film Subtitle Translation

#### 2.1 The Definition of Subtitle Translation

To begin with, subtitles are the written version of the dialogue in the target language in a film, and usually appear in two lines at the foot of the screen simultaneously with the dialogue or narration in the source language. (Agnieszka Szarkows, 2005)

The term “subtitles” originates from what we nowadays call “intertitle” or “insert title”, which means parts of text, drawn or printed on paper, being filmed and placed between parts of the film action. “At the time, these terms meant something totally different from what they mean today: an ‘intertitles’ or ‘insert titles’ was a replacement shot for a part of film that contained verbal information in the original language”. (Minchinton, 1993:11)

Quite a few scholars have given definitions to subtitle translation. In Shuttleworth and Cowie’s *Dictionary of Translation Studies* (1997), subtitle translation is defined as “...the process of providing synchronized captions for film and television dialogue.” However, we should distinguish between caption and subtitles. Subtitles are different from captions. Captions are pieces of textual information usually inserted by the program maker to identify names, places or dates relevant to the story line.

Birgit Nedergaard-Larsen (1993: 212) defines subtitle translation as “...a special type of language transfer: a written, condensed translation of a predominantly spoken original”. This simultaneous provision of meaning in two different ways, one in oral and the other in written text, is a new form of language transfer. It combines the two ancient forms of interlingual communication, i.e., “interpretation” involving speaking only, and “translation” involving writing only.

Henrik Gottlieb (2001: 311), a leading authority on subtitle translation, says that it is a unique form of translation. His definition may be the most exhaustive one:

subtitle translation is "...a (1) written, (2) additive, (3) immediate, (4) synchronous and (5) polymedia translation". He further explains these five points in detail:

(1) being of a written--as opposed to a spoken-nature, subtitle translation differs from all other types of audiovisual translation.

(2) the label additive indicates that verbal material is added to the original, retaining the source-language discourse.

(3) the label synchronous reflects the fact that the original work (with or without the original dialogue) and the translation are presented simultaneously-- unlike "simultaneous" interpreting, where the interpreter always lags behind.

(4) the term fleeting refers to the fact that, in filmic media, all discourse is presented in a flowing manner, beyond the control of the receptor.

(5) the term poly-semiotic states the fact that the target language rendering only covers one of several interacting channels of communication in the translated version.

Gottlieb (1998) further distinguishes different forms of subtitle translation: from a linguistic viewpoint, there is intralingual (within one language) and interlingual (between two languages) translation; intralingual translation is done within one language for the benefit of the deaf and hard-hearing; interlingual translation is between two different languages for audiences to overcome language barriers.

On the technical aspect, subtitles can be either open or closed. Open subtitles are something that are inserted onto the film images and cannot be removed from the screen. The target text constitutes a physical part of the translated film and is transmitted together with the film sound and picture. They are mainly used in inter-lingual translation. Closed subtitles are usually captional, which means the target text is commonly transmitted as teletext. Closed subtitles are usually used for intra-lingual translation and intended for the hard-hearings. In this paper, film subtitle translation refers to interlingual (from English to Chinese) and open subtitle translation.

## **2.2 Constraints of Film Subtitle Translation**

A translation constraint is any factor in the translation process that limits the realization of an optimally approximated translation. These constraints affect the quality of translation. Understanding how these constraints work within the translation system and how they can be managed and ideally removed will certainly benefit both the translator and the translation assessor.

According to Xia Ping (2000), translation is basically a decision making process under constraints such as space, time, quality of information, problem-solving attitude and so on. These constraints affect the quality of performance and the quality of the translation product and always threaten the realization of a best translation. Film translation is no exception, which imposes a variety of constraints on the translator. The author will discuss these constraints from the following aspects.

### **2.2.1 Technical Constraints of Film Subtitle Translation**

As a product of mass communication, the transmission of films is subject to certain technical constraints. To borrow the word of Guardini, Paola (1998: 97) the two technical constraints refer to "...time and space of presentation, [both] imposed by the original". The subtitler has to minimize loss of images and at the same time, to ensure that there is adequate information and reading time for the viewers.

The constraint in space derives from the limitation of screen. A maximum of two lines of subtitles should be presented at a time for English. This would guarantee that no more than 2/12 of the screen image would be covered by subtitles at a time. In the case of a single-line subtitle, this should occupy the lower of the two lines, rather than the top line in order to minimize interference with the background image action. The number of characters per line should allow around 35 characters in order to be able to accommodate a satisfactory portion of the (translated) spoken text and minimize the need for original text reduction and omissions.

The position of the subtitles is also considered important for subtitle translation. According to Fotios Karamitroglous (1998), subtitles should be positioned at the lower part of the screen. As this area is occupied by image action that is less important

for the aesthetic appreciation of the film. The lowest line should appear at least  $\frac{1}{12}$  of the total screen height above the bottom of the screen, so the eyes of audiences do not have to travel a long distance towards the lowest part of the screen to read it. The same is true with the horizontal axis. The eyes of audiences do not have to travel a long distance along the sides of the screen to read the subtitles. Space of at least  $\frac{1}{12}$  of the total space should be provided to the left of the first character and right to the last character.

The time of presentation of subtitles is dictated by “...(a) the duration of the utterance in the original version; (b) the reading speed of the viewers (as the subtitles need to be readable even to slow readers); (c) the visual information given on the screen, which also needs to be perceived clearly by the viewer, and (d) the editing style adopted in the film.” (Guardini, 1998:98)

The reading speed of the “average” viewers (aged 14-65, from an upper-middle socio-educational class) for a text of average complexity is about  $5 \frac{1}{2}$  seconds. But another  $\frac{1}{2}$  second should be included due to the fact that our brains need about  $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$  of a second to start processing the subtitles. This means that a full two line subtitle containing 14-16 words should remain on the screen for a maximum time of around 6 seconds. It should be noted that equal to the importance of retaining a full two-line subtitle for at least 6 seconds to ensure enough reading time, is the importance of keeping the same subtitle on screen for not more than 6 seconds or this would cause automatic re-reading of the subtitle, especially by fast readers. For a single-line subtitle of 7-8 words, the necessary maximum duration time would be  $3 \frac{1}{2}$  seconds. The minimum duration of a single-word subtitle is at least  $1 \frac{1}{2}$  seconds, however simple the word is. Less time would render the subtitle as a mere flash on the screen, irritating the viewers’ eye. In cases where the text is lexically and syntactically easy to process or the fast pace of the film action dictates a reduction in the duration of the subtitles, the duration time could be shortened down to the maximum of the reading time (3 subtitled words per second or  $\frac{1}{3}$  of second per subtitled word). (Karamitroglou, 1998)

As for the lead-in time, Karamitroglou (1998) suggests that subtitles should not

be inserted simultaneously with the beginning of the utterance but 1/4 second later, since tests have proved that the brain needs 1/4 of a second to process the appearance of spoken linguistic material and guide the eyes towards the bottom of the screen looking for the subtitles. However, the leading-in time can not be longer than 1/2 of a second or the viewers will be waiting for the subtitle and doubt whether the subtitle they see matches with what they have already heard.

Subtitles should not be left on the image for more than two seconds after the end of the utterance, even if there is no other utterance in these two seconds. This is because subtitles are supposed to transfer the spoken text as faithfully as possible, in terms of both content and time of presentation. If not, viewers would distrust the quality of the subtitles.

### **2.2.2 Textual and Linguistic Constraints of Film Subtitle Translation**

As a text type, film subtitle has its special constraints, which create particular difficulties and determine the strategies to be employed in its translation.

Textual constraints have to do with the poly-semiotic nature of film language. Film is a semiotic composition composed of four channels:

1. The verbal auditory channel, which includes dialogue and background voices and maybe lyrics.
2. The non-verbal auditory channel, which is made up of natural sound, sound effects, as well as music.
3. The verbal visual channel, comprising the sub-titles and any writing within the film, as for example, letters, posters, books, newspapers, graffiti, or advertisements.
4. The non-verbal visual channel, which includes the composition of the image, camera positions and movement as well as the editing which controls the general flow and mood of the movie. (Baker, 2004: 82)

In subtitle translation, there is a shift from verbal acoustic channel to the verbal visual channel. The shift of mode will inevitably leads to numerous amounts of

textual adjustments. Therefore, the subtitler has to pay attention to the visual information provided by the film in case viewers get the chance to criticize the lack of information in the subtitle.

Linguistic constraints relate, on one hand to the structural aspect of language, on the other hand to the cultural aspect of language. Guardini (1998:104) further divided linguistic constraints into intra-linguistic constraints and extra-linguistic constraints. Intra-linguistic constraints are concerned with "...syntactic and grammatical differences between the source language and the target language". Intra-linguistic constraints cover many linguistic aspects, including wordplay, idioms and proverbs as well as slang translation. Extra-linguistic constraints relate to "...aspects of language which are not strictly linguistic, but relate to the source culture as conveyed by its language".

Other theorists also summarize the constraints in other ways. No matter in what way film subtitle translation constraints is stated, the aim of translation is the same—to convey linguistic and cultural information in the most sufficient way. While translating, translators must pay attention to the synchronization of pictures and dialogues. Bearing this in mind, specific strategies will be presented in Chapter Four.

## **2.3 Exploration of Nida's Equivalence Theory**

Film subtitle translation has caught translators' attention. Based on its special features and constraints, translators should study it on theoretical basis. Without the guidance of translation theory, translators would not have standards to judge their versions. Therefore, it is necessary to present the theoretical basis of this paper.

### **2.3.1 The Concept of Equivalence**

It is generally hold that an equivalent is a word or phrase that in a specific context exactly corresponds to the smallest unit in the original. But this definition is vogue and ambiguous, because the notion of equivalence should not be understood in its mathematical meaning of identity, but in terms of proximity. Full equivalence can never be established between two languages.

Equivalence is a central concept in translation theory. It holds an important position not only in some present definitions of translation, but also in some prevalent criteria for good translation as well. But its definition, applicability within the field of translation also caused heated controversy. "There is hardly any other concept in translation theory which has produced as many contradictory statements and has set off as many attempts at an adequate, comprehensive definition as the concept of equivalence between source language text and target language text." (Wilss, 2001:134)

Many scholars have made their own shining points on the definition of equivalence and helped develop translation theory. Their studies of equivalence are in relation to the translation process, with different approaches, and have provided fruitful ideas for further study on this topic. For instance, we have Vinay and Darbelne, Roman Jakobson, Nida and Taber, Catford, House. Their theories can be divided into three groups. First there are those translation scholars who are in favor of a linguistic approach to translation and who seem to forget that translation itself is not merely a matter of linguistics. In fact, when a message is transferred from the SL to TL, the translator is also dealing with two different cultures at the same time. This particular aspect has been taken into consideration by the second group of theorists who regard translation equivalence as being essentially a transfer of the message from the SC to the TC. Finally, there are other translation scholars who seem to stand in the middle, Baker for instance, who claims that equivalence is used for the sake of convenience—because most translators are used to it rather than because it has any theoretical status.

### 2.3.2 A Survey of Nida's Equivalence Theory

Nida's theory of translation is reflected in his two major works: *Toward a Science of Translating* and *The Theory and Practice of Translating* co-authored with Taber.

Nida sees translation as a kind of communication. He believes that the translation we call in the target language refers to the information reproducing the original text

by using the closest and the most natural equivalence from semanteme to style. "Translating consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalence of the source-language message, first in term of meaning, and secondly in terms of style". (Nida & Taber, 2004:12) It is obvious that meaning was given priority over style. The aim of translating meaning is to find the closest natural equivalent, such an equivalent is not merely the one which reflects the linguistic content of the original message, but also the one which has the same effect on the one who receives it as the original one has on the source language receptors. What Nida states is accepted by most people in the field of translation, for this statement emphasizes to transfer the information of the original text closely and naturally, that is to say, the translated text should be faithful not only to the original text, but also to the writing style so that it is favorable for the readers of the translated text to achieve the same effect as the readers of the original text.

Nida distinguishes two approaches to translation, one is "formal equivalence", and the other is "dynamic equivalence", with the former replaced by "formal correspondence" in Nida and Taber and the latter by "functional equivalence".

Formal equivalence refers to the faithful reproduction of formal elements in the source text. It focuses on the message itself, in both form and content. Thus, a translator is concerned with such correspondence as poetry to poetry, or sentence to sentence. (Nida & Tiber, 2004) Nida and Taber clearly state that there are not always formal equivalents between language pairs. They therefore suggest that these formal equivalents should be used wherever possible if the translation aims at achieving formal rather than dynamic equivalence

Dynamic equivalence is based on the principle of equivalence effect, that is the relationship between receptor and message should be substantially the same as that between the original receptors and the message. Dynamic equivalence is therefore defined as a translation principle according to which a translator seeks to translate the meaning of the original in such a way that the TL wording will have the same impact on the TL audience as the original wording did upon the SL audience. They argue that "Frequently, the form of the original text is changed; but as long as the change follows



the rules of back transformation in the source language, of contextual consistency in the transfer, and of transformation in the receptor language, the message is preserved and the translation is faithful". (Nida and Taber, 2004:200)

Nida further defines dynamic-equivalence translation as: the closest natural equivalent to a source-language message. This type of definition contains three essential terms: (1) equivalent, which points toward the source-language message, (2) natural, which points toward the receptor language, and (3) closest, which binds the two orientations together on the basis of the highest degree of approximation.

Nida's dynamic equivalence heavily stresses the equivalence of response rather than the equivalence of form. But the response can never be identical, for the cultural and historical backgrounds are different. But there should be a high degree of equivalence of response, or the translation will fail to accomplish its purpose. The translation should provide as much as possible a message that is equivalent to the source language message. The expression of the message should fit naturally into the receptor language, that is to say a message should conform to the receptor language and culture, the target context of the message, and the receptor language audience.

In his later work, Nida (2001) adopted the term "functional equivalence" instead of "dynamic equivalence", as the term "dynamic equivalence" was misunderstood by some persons. In order to emphasize the concept of function, "functional equivalence" is used to describe the degree of adequacy of translation. Therefore, functional equivalence should be stated primarily in terms of a comparison of the way in which the original receptors understand and appreciated the text and the way in which receptors of the translated text understand and appreciate the text

Though using a linguistic approach to translation, Nida also pays much attention to the message of the text or, in other words, the cultural connotation under linguistic words. He then strives to make sure that this cultural connotation be transmitted clearly in the target language.

### 2.3.3 Comments on Nida's Equivalence Theory

Nida makes great contribution to the development of translation theory. He

points a way away from strict word-for-word equivalence. His systematic analysis of translation has been influential to many subsequent translation scholars.

Nida's theory shifts the focus of translation from the form of message to the response of the receptor. "Therefore, what one must determine is the response of the receptor to the translated message. The response must then be compared with the way in which the original receptors presumably reacted to the message when it was given in its original setting." (Nida, 2004:1)

His equivalence theory emphasizes not formal correspondence, but functional equivalence—the response of readers. That means the translated text should produce a response in a reader in today's culture that is "essentially like" the response of the original receptors, if it does not, one should make changes in the text. Therefore, the form of the original text does not really matter to Nida. Changes in the text like words, structures are allowed as long as the target language text functions in the same way as the original text.

Wilss highly praised Nida's theory and his dynamic equivalence, which "...has a wider and more comprehensive connotation than faithfulness and surpasses the debate of literal vs. free translation and at the same time provide a new perspective for other translators." (Liao Qiyi, 2002:173)

However, there are many fundamental problems in studying Nida's functional equivalence. As mentioned above, his theory emphasizes reader's response. It is difficult to determine how the original readers comprehend the text. Moreover, it is almost impossible to evaluate effectively the response of those who read a translated text. Therefore, it is difficult to determine whether the response of the original readers is the same as that of the target language readers.

## **2.4 The Possibility of Application of Nida's Equivalence Theory to Film Subtitle Translation**

Traditionally, the adequacy of translation is mainly judged on the basis of the correspondence in lexicon and grammar between the source and target languages. While Nida proposes that "The adequacy of a translation depends on a great many

## Chapter Three

### Cultural Elements in Subtitle Translation

#### 3.1 The Notion of Culture

The notion of culture is essential for translators. Translators should not only be bilingualism but also be biculturalism. The notion of culture is a very comprehensive and complicated one. Translation theorists, linguisticians, anthropologists have given definitions about culture in accordance with different emphasis laid on different aspects of culture. However, culture is so broad a notion that no theorists made satisfactory definitions. The following are some typical definitions.

*The Contemporary Chinese Dictionary* provides such explanations for culture:

1) Civilization; culture; sum total of the material wealth and cultural wealth created by man in the course of the historical development of society, cultural wealth in particular, such as literature, arts, education, and science, etc..

2) (Of archaeology) comprehensive body of sites and ruins left behind, which are independent of their locations, in a given historical period. The identical tools, implements, and manufacturing skills are the characteristics of the same culture, as the Yangshao culture, and the Longshan culture.

3) Education; culture; schooling; literacy.

One definition generally accepted as the most classic is provided by English anthropologist Edward Tylor, in his book *Primitive Culture* published in 1871. He (1871: 13-14) defines culture as "...that complete whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by a man as a member of society."

Though his definition is tendentious, which only emphasizes spiritual aspect of culture, it provides a basis for later theorists. "No matter how culture is defined, the scope of all the other definitions of culture put together does not go beyond that scope of the definition presented by Tylor". (Zhang Meifang, 2001:14) Sociolinguists and cultural anthropologists in later time improve its definition by adding material aspect

to it. Edward Sapir (1986: 18) defined culture in three main senses:

- a) Culture is technically used by the ethnologist and culture-historian to embody any socially inherited element in the life of man, material and spiritual;
- b) Culture refers to a rather conventional ideal of individual refinement, built up on a certain modicum of assimilated knowledge and experience but made up chiefly of a set of typical reactions that have sanction of a class and of a tradition of long standing;
- c) Culture refers to those general attitudes, views of life, and specific manifestation of civilization that give a particular people its distinctive place in the world;

Peter Newmark was the first to put linguistic elements into its definition. In his work *A Textbook of Translation*, he (1988: 10) states: "I define culture as the way of life and its manifestation that are peculiar to a community that uses a peculiar language as its means of expressions."

To sum up, culture is a complicated concept, which has both the broad sense and narrow sense, the culture of narrow sense lays emphasis on spirit, dealing with the social superstructure and customs and habits; and the culture of broad sense deals with different aspects of the society, including the material culture, the culture of the social system and convention and the spiritual culture.

One more thing should be pointed out is that in translation there are two kinds of culture. One is called Culture with a big C, and the other is called culture with a small c. The former refers to the culture that the text as a whole reflects or entails. This kind of culture roots in the cultural entity of some society. The latter is the cultural elements that imply in different levels of language. In this paper, cultural elements refer to the second one—culture with a small c. therefore; emphasis will be put on the cultural elements that entail in language.

### **3.2 Cultural Turn in Translation**

Traditionally, translation was defined from the perspective of linguistics. Translation studies conducted from linguistic perspective neglect the cultural elements

involved in translation process. In fact, translation is a kind of cross-cultural communication, not merely a handling of languages. As is known to all, language is a cultural phenomenon and is a carrier of its culture. It can not survive once separated from the culture it is deeply rooted. So translating itself is a process that involves not only languages but also cultures. Translators should not just concentrate on how to convey the message in one language by the means of another language but endeavor to display the differences of the two cultures' modes of thinking and the habits of expressing feelings. They are permanently faced with the problem of how to deal with the cultural elements in a source text and of finding the most appropriate techniques of successfully conveying these elements in the target languages. These problems may vary in scope depending on the cultural and linguistic gap between the two languages (or more) concerned. For example,

Charles Hermen: So what is your story? Your're a poor kid who never go to the exit of  
Orlando?

John Nash: My parents actually brought me up quite well balance. I have *a chip on both shoulders*.

from *A Beautiful Mind*

查尔斯·赫曼：你的人生经历呢？一个从来没有走出家门的穷小子？

约翰·纳什：我父母其实注意我的身心发展平衡。我只是对往事耿耿于怀。

This is part of the conversation between Nash and his roommates. Chinese audiences may understand each word of the phrase “a chip on both shoulders” perfectly. So if a translator does not pay attention to its cultural connotation, it is probably translated incorrectly. This is an English idiom which means to carry a grudge. It dates back to the 19th century when fighters would put a chip on their shoulders and dare others to knock it off. Here it means the character—John Nash was bitter or angry about something that happened to him in the past.

With the development of civilization, communications between different countries become frequent. As a result, over the last few decades, two tendencies in translation studies become noticeable. One is that translation theories bear a marked brand of culture theories. The other is that more importance is attached to the

culturally oriented approach than the linguistically oriented approach. The combination of the two tendencies leads to the fact that translation is regarded as the communication between different cultures.

It is Denial Shaw who first truly begins to study cultural problems in translation. In his work *Transculturation: The Cultural Elements in Translation and Other Communication Tasks*, he states that translators should be familiar with original language culture and target language culture. The task of them is to communicate with these two cultures in translated works. Translators have to understand surface structure and deep structure of the language to get its meaning. Deep structure is the real meaning of the language which consists of many cultural elements. These elements are implicit to target language readers. Therefore, translators should express these meanings clearly and exactly.

In 1988, Mary Snell-Hornby published her influential book *Translation Studies: Toward an Integrated Approach*, which furthered the development of translation from cultural perspectives. After making an insightful survey of the traditional translation theories and the dichotomy phenomena in translation history, Snell-Hornby points out that translation is an independent discipline adhering to neither the linguistics nor comparative literature. She defines translation as an interaction between two cultures instead of an activity taking place just between two languages.

In 1990, André Lefevere and Susan Bassnett edited a collection of essays entitled *Translation, History and Culture*. They co-wrote the introductory essay to the volume, intending it as a kind of manifesto of what they saw as a major change of emphasis in translation studies. They are trying to argue that the study of the practice of translation has moved on from its formalist phase and is beginning to consider broader issues of context, history and convention. This shift of emphasis is called “the cultural turn” in translation studies. “The object of study has been redefined; what is studied is the text embedded in its network of both source and target cultural signs and in this way translation study has been able both to utilize the linguistic approach and to move out beyond it”. (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990:123)

Eugene Nida and Peter Newmark also pay much attention to culture in

translation. Early in 1964, Nida classified the cultural system into five categories, i.e. the ecological culture, linguistic culture, religious culture, material culture and social culture. In his works and articles, he hold that translation is not a matter of language alone: "A language is always a part of culture and the meaning of any text refers directly or indirectly to the corresponding culture. Ultimately words only have meaning in terms of the corresponding culture". (Nida, 2001: 286) He further states that translators are at least bilingual, but this is really not enough. To be a competent translator, one needs to be bicultural in order to sense the cultural implication under source language. (Nida, 2001)

Peter Newmark supports Nida's theory and he make an exploration on relationship between culture and translation. In his definition of culture, he sees language as an important part of culture. However, in the practices of translation, he does not see language as component of culture. He explains that, "If it were so, translation would be impossible. Language does however contain all kinds of cultural deposits, in the grammar, forms of address as well as the lexis which are not taken account of in universals either in consciousness or translation". (Newmark, 2001: 94) Therefore, he only focuses on the cultural words that may cause translation problems.

In China, at the early age, Chinese theorists have felt the importance of culture in translation, though at that time, they did not use the word culture directly. As China's opening-up policy, many new theories flooded into China, theorists absorbed advanced theories and developed them. Cultural elements in translation arrested attention of theorists. For example, Wang Zuoliang (1994) states that the translator should be a real cultural man, which means he should have a good command of two languages and the correspondent cultures as well. He cannot understand the language without understanding its culture. And consequently, he cannot make good translation.

Professor Wang Ning (2006: Preface) once asserted "cultural turn" in translation studies as following:

...in the vast context of globalization, the significance of translation is sure to gain weight, which will surely lead to the redefinition of translation...Hence, translation studies

should get rid of the shackles of the linguistic layer, and be put into the broader cross-cultural context so as to get the accomplishments by means of borrowing the methodologies of related disciplines.

Great development has been achieved in cultranslation in China through the endeavor of many translation theorists, but the theoretical system of cultranslation does not come into being until recent years, when Liu Miqing (1999) maintained the theoretical frame of cultranslation in his book *An Outlined Theory of Cultranslation*. Different from his predecessors and contemporaries, Liu Miqing formulates the theoretical system of cultranslation, which has shed new light on the development of translation studies.

According to him, language is the carrier of culture, and hereby, the components of language, i.e. morphemes, words, sentences, texts and grammars as well as the elements of culture. At the same time, culture is expressed and transmitted through language, which does not make any sense if it is devoid of meaning. Thus, the meaning of language is the true focus of translation. In addition, He also formulates the cultural matrix, which consists of five strata, i.e. the material stratum, the institutional stratum, the behavioral and the customary stratum, the mental stratum and the language stratum. Among the five strata, the former four strata are built on the language stratum, for language is the medium through which human express themselves. Hence, the conclusion goes that cultranslation focuses on rendering the cultural meaning of language, which, actually refers to the connotations and the denotations of the languages.

### 3.3 Cultural Elements in Film Subtitle Translation

Film is a particular kind of cultural product. It carries and reflects the culture as a whole. Film often exerts great influence on our perception and appreciation of the foreign culture. Through voice and images, we see and accept the foreign. As the globalization intensifies and communication smoothens, more and more foreign films are imported especially that from America. Therefore, film translation becomes



increasingly important.

### 3.3.1 Word Sets and Cultural Connotations

Before discussing word sets, it is necessary to know something about connotation. According to the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, connotation refers to a meaning or idea suggested by a word or thing in addition to the formal meaning or nature of the word or thing. This definition is a general one. In daily life, connotation has a different meaning. To explain this meaning, it is helpful to explain the theory of meaning. The theory goes like this: every word or phrase has two kinds of meaning: primary, literal meanings (sometimes called denotations), and secondary meanings known as connotations. Connotations are what a word “really means” with emotion or value judgments.

Word sets such as animal words, plant words, color words, names of persons and places, etc. have the same conceptual meaning but different associative meanings, which mean different cultural connotations in Chinese and English.

Words of this kind in English and Chinese can be further divided into the following subcategories: (1) words with basically the same or similar cultural meanings; (2) words with partially equivalent cultural meanings; (3) words with greatly different cultural meanings; (4) words with completely different cultural meanings; (5) words with cultural meanings absent in the other. These 5 types make up the basic modes of culturally loaded words in the two languages. However, the differences between these 5 types are only a matter of degree. Actually, the greater the gap is between the two, the more differences between their cultural meanings.

Take color words for an example. In the film *Ladder 49*, there is a sentence: “Green beer, girls. Here we go. Green beer.” Green beer here is kind of beer dyed green. Though here green has no such cultural connotation, it is a chance for translators to know something about this color. Green is associated with Saint Patrick’s Day, a Roman Catholic Feast day which honors Saint Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland. In China, there is no such connotation of the color green.

Timon: Gee, he looks *blue*!

Pumbaa: I'd say brownish gold!

Timon: No, no, no, I mean he's depressed.

from *Lion King*

丁满：噢，他看上去灰溜溜的。

彭彭：我看他是金黄色的。

丁满：不，不，不，我是说他很沮丧。

In the example above, blue is a color word, in both Chinese and English, it has the same conceptual meaning. When Timon said he looks blue, Pumbaa misunderstood him and thought he was saying the color of his skin. The translated version “灰溜溜” in Chinese can mean both the color of something and the emotion of somebody. And blue here means depressed or sad, so the translated version transmits the information perfectly.

Walter: who is married to Harold, who ran off with his secretary?

Annie: He came back, because Irene threatened to *put the dog to sleep* if he didn't.

from *Sleepless in Seattle*

华尔德：她嫁给了那个带着秘书私奔的哈罗德。

安妮：但是他又回来了，因为艾琳威胁说不回来她就 *把那个女人干掉*。

Dog is an animal that is very familiar to all peoples. So audiences can understand its literal meaning. In fact, dog in English can be used as a slang word which means ugly women. So this phrase is a gentle way of saying to kill somebody. In Chinese, “把那个女人干掉”。

### 3.3.2 Cultural-Specific Words

Cultural-specific words here mainly refer to idioms. Idioms can be called crystallization of language. English idioms constitute the most colorful and fascinating aspect of its language. Without them, English would be dull and dry. As one part of language, idioms reflect the environment, life, custom, history and religious belief, so they have rich cultural connotations. For English learners, it is not sufficient to learn English without learning English idioms. This is also true for English film appreciation and study.

The word “idiom” originates from Greek, and it means a special expressing way of human language, or a kind of art of human language. For a long time, linguists and translators put much emphasis on the definition of idiom and its construction. *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary* (1976) defines idiom as “...an expression established in the usage of language that is peculiar to itself either in grammatical construction or in having a meaning that cannot be derived as a whole from the conjoined meanings of its elements.” That is to say, idiom owns its very meaning different from those of the single words, and its particular structure established by long use. Two features of idioms can be inferred from its definition. First is no other synonymous word can be substituted for any word in the idiom; the other is that the structure of idiom can rarely be changed. For example, “hold your horses” means “to be patient and to wait”, which has nothing to do with horse and the word “horse” can not be changed by “dog” or “cow”, “pie in the sky” means “to search for the impossible dream”.

Most people think English idiom is equivalent to Chinese “chengyu” (成语). Actually English idiom has a much broader category, “chengyu”(成语) is just one item. English idioms in a broad sense include common sayings, slang words, proverbs, allusions and colloquialisms. Before discussing these items, people should have a general idea about the differences between Chinese and English idioms, mainly in cultural aspect.

Idioms are difficult to translate because of its cultural characteristics. As mentioned above, idioms reflect cultural differences between Chinese and English. This paper will state these differences in three aspects. First is difference in natural environment. Take Britain. Britain is an island country, surrounded by sea. Its navigation industry is well developed. Therefore, British people have a deep passion for sea and water, which is reflected in language. Such idioms *as weak as water, to miss the boat* are good examples. On the contrary, China is an agricultural country from ancient time; Chinese people tend to put more emphasis on land than water. For instance, when expressing someone who is extravagant, Chinese people use “挥金如

土”。Second is difference in custom. Custom is the long-established way of thinking and behaving. Take food habit for example, cake has been a common food in English for a long history. So they use “a piece of cake” to indicate that something is easy to do. In Chinese the corresponding counterpart is “小菜一碟”. The reason is that dishes are common in Chinese, while cake cannot be seen until the last one hundred years in Chinese. The last one is that in religion. Religion plays an important role in every country. Most English-speaking countries believe in Christian. Idioms related to God are abundant. People express surprise, shock by using “oh, God”, “Jesus Christ”. Chinese people are influenced by Buddhism. 放下屠刀，立地成佛，跑得了和尚，跑不了庙，all reflect its religious belief.

One can find a great number of examples in film dialogues by using English idioms. The reasons have been stated at the beginning of this part. Here are some examples.

Duke: “Your majesty, I see no point in *beating about the bush*. I regret to inform you, Sire, that the young lady has disappeared, leaving behind only this glass slipper.” Yes, I’ll do it. I just can’t.

公爵：“陛下，我看没有必要旁敲侧击了，我很遗憾的告诉您，那位年轻的女士已经不见了，只留下了一只水晶鞋。”对，我就这么说了。不，我还是不敢。

from *Cinderella*

This happened when the duke talks to himself at the door of the king’s bedroom, thinking about how to tell the king what has happened. *Beat about the bush* is an English idiom meaning saying something indirectly.

After discussing the differences between Chinese and English idioms, the author would like to take slang word and allusion as examples to discuss idiom in film subtitle translation.

English slang, an ever-changing set of colloquial words and phrases, is an aspect of language and cultural phenomenon. It is an important component of everyday language. It makes itself heard everywhere not only in literary works but also in daily life. Film, as a way of entertainment, is no exception. Therefore, studying film can not exclude the study of slang.

Readers recognize slang when they first read or see it. It is true to some extent, but not accurate. Since its appearance in around 18th century, definitions have been the work of some lexicographers, but so far no satisfying and fixed definition has been given. *The Oxford Dictionary of Modern Slang*(1992) defines it as: "...language in common colloquial use but considered to be outside standard educated speech and consisting either of new words or phrases or of current words used in new sense." In this part, the author will not put much emphasis on the definition of slang; therefore, it is sufficient to get some general idea about slang.

Slang, as a special form of language, naturally reflects its culture. Slang originates from subcultures and first got popular among subgroups, such as gay, the drug community, religious cults and so on.

Jack: No, you get *wasted* at a shift party.

from *Ladder 49*

杰克：跟这伙人一块喝你会醉的。

In this sentence, the word *wasted* doesn't mean what we say in daily life. Here it is used as a slang word meaning totally drunk.

Mia: So, my mom said you wanted....to talk to me about something. *Shoot*.

Queen: Oh, before I "*shoot*"...I have something I want to give you. Here.

米娅：我妈妈说你要跟我说一些事，快说吧。

王后：在我“快说”之前，我要给你一件东西。拿着。

from *The Princess Diaries*

The word *shoot* is usually used with some kind of weapon. People may use it in daily life to mean say or speak out and it is a very colloquial way to express such meaning.

Different scholars and different dictionaries define allusion in different ways, which results in misunderstanding about allusion. For convenience of discussion and to have a clear idea about it, main definitions in dictionaries and by scholars must be contrasted and analyzed.

*Oxford Concise Companion to the English Language*: an indirect reference. The term formerly included metaphors, parables, and puns, but now generally means

implicit use of someone else's words, whereas quotations usually come with acknowledged stories.

A Chinese dictionary *Ci Hai* defines it as 诗文中引用的古代故事, 和有来历出处的词语。(quotations of some ancient stories and lines from literary work.)

*Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* defines allusion as "...an act of not speaking of something in an open manner, or something of spoken of without directness, esp. while speaking about something else." That means allusion is a brief reference to a famous person, place, event or part of work of literature.

From the above definitions, one can see the similarity and difference between English allusion and Chinese 典故. Chinese 典故 emphasizes quotations of ancient stories or lines, while English allusion is much broader. All the acts of speaking of something in indirect manner while speaking of something else can be classified into allusion.

Both Chinese 典故 and English allusion share similar characteristics. These characteristics can be inferred from its definitions. One is its indirectness. Its indirectness is different from that of metaphor. There is no such word as "like" or "as" in it and it has no direct relationship with the person or thing really referred to. That means what one really expresses is not mentioned directly, but is made known by quotations of other persons or things which have appeared in earlier works. The second characteristic is its cultural restraints. It originates from myth, religion, folk tales or legends, historic events, literary works, etc.

Negil: Don't make me feed you to one of the models.

Andy: Sorry. It's a busy day. My personal life is *hanging by a thread*, that's all.

from *The Devil Wears Prada*

内格尔: 别跟那些模特一个德性。

安迪: 对不起。我太忙了。我的个人生活岌岌可危。

*Hang by a thread* is an allusion originated from English legend about Damocles. Damocles is an officer of King Dionsysius. Dionsysius got tired of Damocles' flattering and asked him to a party. In the party, the king asked Damocles to sit under an arrow hung by a piece of hair to warn him that his situation is dangerous. Here this

allusion is used to mean depend on a small thing or be at risk.

Kennedy: we get over 4,000 calls a year. That's a lot of action. Got to be willing to go *the extra mile*. Are you willing to go *the extra mile*, Jack?

Jack: Yes, sir.

肯尼迪：每年都要接 4000 多起火警，频繁出动。总是超负荷工作。怎么样，杰克？你愿意这样工作吗？

杰克：我愿意，长官。

from *Ladder 49*

This conversation is between Jack, a newcomer in the firehouse and his captain. It happened when Jack was first day on his job and the captain told him something about their work. *Go the extra mile* originates from the Bible. It is an adaptation of a commandment of Jesus' in the Sermon on the Mount, "whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain".

### 3.3.3 Cultural Images from Literary Works and Daily Life

Although cross-cultural communication intensifies, there are still some words and expressions that are alien to other cultures, especially names of places and persons. These items have no equivalents in the target culture and become an obstacle either for language learners or for film audiences. These items are called cultural images.

Cultural image should firstly be an image. Plants, animals are classified into the scope of image. Cultural image means image with cultural values. Physical image and connotation are two parts of cultural image. Physical image is the carrier of meaning and is often the material object. Connotation is the extended meaning in a certain linguistic and cultural environment. Different countries cultivate their unique cultures, and form their own cultural images. For example, in the film *The Shawshank Redemption*, there is an interior monologue after Red failed to apply for a bail. The monologue goes like this:

Red: There's must be a con like me in every prison in America. I'm the guy who can get it for you. Cigarettes, a bag of reefer if that's your thing, a bottle of brandy

## Chapter Four

### Strategies for Translating Cultural Elements in Film Subtitle Translation

#### 4.1 Problems in Film Subtitle Translation

Although film is very popular among ordinary people and film plays an important role in cultural communication, only a small number of scholars pay attention to its translation. The reasons have been discussed before. Film translation is different from that of novel, and it has many constraints. That is why some theorists call it “constrained translation”. Because of its constraints, problems arise while translating. The following are some problems from different perspectives.

##### 4.1.1 Problems Concerning Translators

Translator plays two roles while translating. At one hand, translator should be an interpreter. The task is to translate one language to another. At the other hand, he must be a cultural transmissioner. This is a more important and difficult role for a translator. This is what the theorists called both bilingual and bicultural.

Generally speaking, English learners can grasp English vocabulary and grammar easily. So it is easy to be bilingual. They can deal with the language problems properly while translating. However, cultural awareness of translators is not satisfactory. This is the reason why there are many mistranslations. For example, in the film *Ladder 49*, one character said “...get me up to speed”. This is a very colloquial way of saying telling me the current situation. Only those who are very familiar with its culture can understand its real meaning. Otherwise, it can possibly be translated into “帮我提速”. Another example from the film *Pirates of the Caribbean*: Elizabeth: You are despicable.

Jack: *Sticks and Stones*, love. I saved your life. You save mine. We're square.  
Gentleman, milady, you will always remember this as the day that you almost caught



Captain Jack Sparrow.

伊丽莎白：你真卑鄙。

杰克：棍棒，石头，亲爱的。我救了你，你又救了我，我们扯平了。先生们，女士们，你们会永远记住今天，你们差点捉住了杰克·斯帕洛。

The phrase *stones and sticks* in the second sentence actually originates from a traditional saying: sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me. In Chinese “棍棒和石头能打碎我的骨头，但是说的话从来不会伤害到我。” The translator does not aware its cultural connotation and just translates it literally. This would confuse the audiences what the character wants to express. So this kind of mistranslation has something to do with the translator. To translate it properly, the translator must have some knowledge about the English culture. So here this phrase can be translated into “我不会当真的”。

#### 4.1.2 Problems Concerning Culturally Loaded Words and Expressions

Successful translation depends on understanding of original culture. The purpose of translating films is to communicate. The responsibility of translator is to transmit cultural elements to target language audiences. However, there are some cases when the differences between target language culture and original language culture are too great to find an equivalent in the target language culture. For example, there is no equivalent word for hippie in Chinese. Hippie is an American born word. It refers to a group of young people who wear long hair and weird clothes and behave in uncommon way. Some translate literally to “希比士” or “希比派”. Obviously when a Chinese audience sees this word, he cannot understand the real meaning. “嬉皮士” is much better, but can also raise misunderstanding.

In film *King Arthur*, when the bishop Germanius saw the statue of Pelagius who hold different political and religious opinions from his, he threw it to the ground and broke. When he did this, he said “Pelagius” to do his bit for this person. Here Pelagius is an English monk who lived in Rome in 360-420 A.D. He denied the concept of original sin and Christian grace and so was declared a heretic by the Catholic Church.

If translated it literally into “帕雷杰斯”, Chinese audiences may not understand who he is. Explanation of this person should be added. As the time and space constraints of film, translator should not add too words, “异教徒帕雷杰斯” will be sufficient.

#### 4.1.3 Problems Concerning Film Pictures and Subtitles

When people see a film, they prepare not only to see the picture, but also listen to the dialogue of the characters. But we can hear complaints about the non-synchronization between subtitle and picture. This kind of problem has something to do with the constraints of film subtitle translation. Subtitles should be inserted in accordance with the lip movement of the characters. When a character finishes speaking, subtitles must remove immediately. The other reason for this kind of problem may be connected with the company. In order to make as much profit as possible, the company ignores quality of translation. People see roughly produced films with lots of mistakes. Subtitles are badly made and are translated word for word. Subtitles appear in Chinese, but sounds like English. Even more, there are some dialogues completely broken away from the picture. This kind of film only makes the audience feel dull and tired. Films cannot make full use of their advantages in communication and produce perfect effect of art. For example,

Harriet: You can go there if you want, but don't open his refrigerator. They don't cover anything when they put it in the fridge. They just stick it in and leave it there till it walks out by itself.

哈丽亚特: 如果你想去就去吧, 但是别开他的冰箱。他们把东西放进去之后就一直放到东西自己走出来。

哈里亚特: 想去就去吧, 但是别开他的冰箱。男人太懒了, 东西放到生虫子。

*from Sleepless in Seattle*

By comparing these two versions, one can find that the second one is better. As the first one is too long for audiences to read and understand in a limited period of time. The second one occupies much less space on the screen and takes less time to read and it expresses Harriet's idea clearly and renders the key information.

## 4.2 Principles for Film Subtitle Translation

As having been discussed in Chapter One, film subtitle translation has its own characteristics. Anyway, it still belongs to literary translation. Thus at the starting stage, it is necessary to follow some basic principles. Tytler, for example, states three principles: the translation should give a complete transcript of the ideas of the original work; the style and manner of writing should be of the same character with that of the original; the translation should have all the ease of the original composition. However, it is difficult to achieve these three principles at the same time. So Tytler again states that of these three principles, translators should give priority to the first one—to give a complete transcript of the ideas of the original work. Of course, the ideas of the original work include surface information and deep cultural meanings. When translating, the most difficult elements to deal with are idioms, proverbs and words with slightly different meanings. The reasons lie in language structure, but mostly in culture. Yan Fu, for example, put forward three principles for translation—faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance. Of these three principles, faithfulness and expressiveness are universally adopted and considered as a touchstone for good translation. Nowadays, faithfulness and expressiveness have changed to a certain degree from the original one and different translation theorists interpret them in different ways. For film translation, these two principles are of great significance as they are endowed with wider connotations according to characteristics of English film.

### 4.2.1 Principle of Accuracy

Accuracy is the basic requirement for any kind of translation. Without it, the purpose of translation to communicate would not be achieved. Yan Fu put it in another way—faithfulness, which means that the translated work should be faithful to the original one in meaning.

Whether the meaning of the original dialogue has been transferred correctly or not is crucial to film subtitle translation. The inaccuracy rendering of original information will cause misunderstanding and confusion, let alone appreciation and

communication. For example,

Zazu: You should've *been first in line*.

Scar: I *was first in line*, until the little hair ball was born.

from *Lion King*

沙祖: 你应该站在最前面。

刀疤: 我应该是下一个国王的第一继承人, 直到这个无用的小毛团出生。

The phrase “be first in line” appears twice in this conversation. But their implications are different. Zazu said this to mean that Scar should be present at the ceremony and should be happy about the birth of the little lion. But Scar means he was the first one to be king after the king's death. So when translating, translator should pay attention to its different implications and translate them accurately.

Peter Newmark (1988:111) once stated “A translation has to be as accurate as possible, as economical as possible, in denotation and in connotation, referentially and pragmatically.” Lu Bingqun (2002) in his articles *Criticism on the Translation of Some Films and TV Shows* collected many examples of mistranslation in subtitled films. For example: in the film *Town and Country*, there is one dialogue like “Watch out, will you? You some kind of nut?” It was translated as:你小心点, 行吗? 你是哪一种坚果呀? But actually, nut in this sentence does not mean hard-shelled fruit but some kind of crazy. So, the correct version should be:你小心点, 行不行? 你这是疯了吗? Another example comes from the film *Black Moon Rising*, which is a story about robbers. One dialogue is “How many names have you got? How many wigs have you got?” The person who asks this question aims at knowing 你有多少假发套?, while the subtitles on the screen is 你有多少翅膀? In an American famous film *U571*, when the submarine is attacked by another destroyer, the caption commanded that “All hands forward!” which means 全体船员到潜艇前方集合! But it was translated as 全速前进!, which is different from its real meaning. These examples all show that the correct translation of the source text is the premise of an optimal subtitle translation, which guarantees the understanding and appreciation of the film.

Film language is different from that of written texts, which consists of verbal language and nonverbal language. Therefore, in film subtitle translation, accuracy

means the translators should be faithful both to the form and the meaning of sentences. Form here means the length of the sentences and nonverbal language in the original film dialogue. And of course, faithfulness does not mean sacrifice of meaning. Translators should make great effort to achieve equivalence in form by making the least loss of original meaning.

#### 4.2.2 Principle of Conciseness

In film translation, information is conveyed in four channels. The meaning of the dialogue is not generated by written text—subtitles only. Subtitles would make no sense without other three channels. So it requires the synchronization of pictures and subtitles. If the subtitles are too long and complicated, viewers must make great effort to understand them and this will influence the appreciation of the image, music and plot of the film. In this case, subtitles would be a heavy burden to audiences.

Consequently, as a tool to help audiences to overcome language and cultural barrier, subtitles should not become the main focus of them, instead subtitles should provide the key information of the dialogue with as less words as possible to leave more time for audiences. Thus subtitles are required to be concise. As Nida (2001: 68) suggested, “It is both scientifically and practically more efficient (1) to reduce the source text to its structurally simplest and most semantically evident kernels, (2) to transfer the meaning from source language to receptor language on a structurally simple level, (3) to generate the stylistically and semantically equivalent expression in the receptor language”. Mailhac (2000: 130) also hold the idea that “Subtitles should be acted as a supplement to the original dialogue and to enable the viewer to deal with the subtitles at an appropriate pace, two criteria must be satisfied: legibility and readability.”

Sam: *Tough, tough, tough, tough.* This is going to be much tougher than I thought it was going to be.

from *Sleepless in Seattle*

山姆：太难了，比我想象的难多了。

Sam learns to date with women, but he finds it was hard to do that. The word

*tough* was used four times for emphasis. If translate them “难, 难, 难, 难”, audiences would be bored about this kind of repetition. And it occupies more space and takes more time to read. To achieve conciseness, translator can condense them into one phrase “太难了”, audiences can appreciate its meaning from the character’s face and his tone.

### 4.2.3 Principle of Achieving Equivalence

A number of elements govern the kinds and degree of adjustments that may be useful to achieve equivalent. In his book, *Language and Culture: Contexts in Translating* (2001), Nida has provided six principles to achieve the closest, natural equivalence. These principles are very useful in translating. However, it is too general for film subtitle translation, as film subtitle translation has more constraints, such as the synchronization of subtitles and pictures and sound. When it comes to cultural elements, it seems much more difficult. Translators cannot use footnote which is suggested by Nida. Audiences have not enough time to reading long and complicated subtitles with notes. Subtitles should be an aid rather than burden. Therefore, some specific strategies must be applied to achieve equivalent in film subtitle translation.

Tarzan: It’s very nice.

Jane: Oh, thank you. I could do a thing with it in this humidity though. It’s...

You...you do speak and this time I thought you were just a *big, wild, quiet, silent* person-thing.

泰山：非常好。

简：谢谢。天气潮湿不好整。你…你会说话。我一直以为你是个野人。

from *Tarzan*

The four adjectives in Jane’s utterance are used for emphasis. Jane thought that Tarzan could not speak, so when she heard Tarzan’s words, she was surprised. 野人在 Chinese refers to some kind of people that live away from human society and do not learn to speak and write. This Chinese word is equivalent to the above four adjectives in meaning. What’s more, this version is rather concise and it leaves more time for audiences to enjoy the picture.

### 4.3 Strategies for Translating Cultural Elements in Film Subtitle Translation

#### 4.3.1 Develop Translators' Cultural Awareness

As we have discussed above, good translation depends heavily on translators. Translation is not only about language transfer, but more about cultural transmission, which is proved by many theorists. Therefore, it is obviously necessary to develop cultural awareness of translators—to be not only bilingual but also bicultural. This means that at one hand, translators must have a thorough understanding of both the target language culture and original language culture; at the other hand, translators must take proper attitudes toward the target language culture. These two elements will affect the choices of translation strategies of translators and further affect the quality of the translation.

Many people agree that a good translator must be a reader, a writer and a creator. First he must be a reader. He must first have a good and proper understanding of the original work, which is the basis for his translation; then he must transfer the information he gets from the original work in another language. He is re-writing the original work; and at last he must be a creator. Owing to the differences in language and culture, it needs his effort to transfer the information in his own way to achieve equivalence.

To be bicultural, a translator must know the religious beliefs, customs, ways of thinking and material aspect of the target language culture. For example, Chinese people tend to be modest. When a person gets praised, he would deny it and if not, other people would think him arrogant. It may sound uncomfortable to foreigners, but not to Chinese people. This is Chinese culture. However, when a western person faces this situation, he will accept it happily and says “thank you” to the one praising him.

Luther: It was a *Herculean task*, but you made it.

卢瑟: 这是个非常艰巨的任务, 但是你成功了。

from *Mission Impossible*

Herculean a proper name which originates from ancient myth. He is the son of Zeus and he was a hero with extraordinary strength. He was punished to finish twelve

hard tasks because of his misleading. Here a Herculean task refers to a task that requires great power and wisdom. To translate it properly, the translator has to be familiar with the western myth and legends. Then the translator adopts some appropriated technique to render its meaning underlying this phrase.

Simba: Hey Uncle Scar, when I'm king, what'll that make you?

Scar: *A monkey's uncle.*

Simba: You are so weird.

辛巴：刀疤叔叔，如果我当了国王那你是什么？

刀疤：一个无能的人的叔叔。

辛巴：你真奇怪。

from *Lion King*

The phrase *a monkey's uncle* is an old fashioned expression. It came from the time when people didn't accept Darwin's theory of Natural Selection and were offended at the idea that they could share DNA with monkeys. Here means the uncle of someone who is low and worthless.

Being bicultural, it is not sufficient to know both original language culture and target language culture. Attitudes toward these cultures are also important. A translator must bear in mind that all cultures are equal and there is no priority among them. Each culture has its own course of development and each has its weak points and strong points. Having a proper attitude toward cultures is the starting point. So to be a good translator is to have an equal attitude.

#### 4.3.2 Solve Problem of Constraints in Space and Time

Technically speaking, film subtitle translation is subject to the constraints of time and space. Synchronization is the basic requirement for good translation. Then there comes the problem of different talking speed of characters and reading rate of audiences. Because the reading speed of the average viewer is considered to be slower than the talking speed of actors, researchers have agreed that text reduction is the typical strategy.

The poly-semiotic nature of film also allows text reduction. According to



Gottlieb (1998), there are intersemiotic redundancy and intrasemiotic redundancy in the information conveyed. Intersemiotic refers to the four channels which play their own parts in information conveyance. Besides subtitles, information can also be transmitted by other three channels. So the loss of information by text reduction can be compensated by other three channels.

Of course, translators can not reduce the source text at will. As to which pieces of information should be omitted or which be included depends on the contribution of these pieces to the comprehension and appreciation of the target film as a whole. Subtitler should not attempt to translate every word. Kovocic (1994:250) applies relevance theory to subtitle translation, stating that "Decisions about deletions are context-dependent and hinge on the translator's judgment about whether the viewer can have access to the intended interpretation without them". The subtitler should attempt to keep a fine balance between retaining a maximum of the original text (essential for the comprehension of the linguistic part of the target film), and allowing ample time for the eyes to see the rest of the non-linguistic visual elements (essential for the appreciation of the aesthetic part of the target film).

In addition, the source text in film is oral speech. Oral speech is characterized by filler words, repetition, tautologies, tag questions, false starts, stammer and correction, etc, which are termed "intrasemiotic redundancy" by Gottlieb. Translators had better reduce such intrasemiotic redundant elements while subtitle translation. As to the ways of reducing text, Gottlieb (1994) put forward three different ways, namely condensation, decimation and deletion. Condensation manages to retain both meaning and most of the stylistic features of the original. The transfer from spoken to written language eliminates some of the redundancies automatically and thereby enhances coherence for the audience. In *Forrest Gump*, when Gump talked about the living condition of Jenny, he said "She lived in a house that was as old as Alabama". If translated into "他住在一间很旧的屋子里", audiences can understand it perfectly. If translated literally into "像阿拉巴马州一样陈旧的风子里", it seems fussy and occupies much more space on screen which will affect the appreciation of the film.

When the dialogue is quite long and complicated and the talking speed of the

actors is very fast, decimation can be used as one method. Translator does not have to translate every word in the dialogue, what he should do is to pick the key words and organize them in a concise way. For example,

Ugarte: Think of the poor devils who can't meet Renault's price. I get it for them for half.

尤加提：雷诺的价更高，我收半价。

from *Casablanca*

In the film, the character uttered the above sentence very fast. If the original utterance was translated word for word into “想想那些可怜的家伙，他们付不起雷诺开的价”，the audiences will feel confused about the long and complicated subtitles. They will not have enough time to read every piece of information and it will exceed the spatial constraints of subtitles. The above translation solves this problem and conveys the most identical meaning as the original.

When speaking, people like to use words that have little semantic meaning in the dialogue. For example, padding expressions (you know, well, as I say) are mostly empty of semantic load and their existence are functional. Tautological cumulative adjectives/adverbs (“great big,” “super extra,”) are used to emphasize, they can be incorporated in a single-word equivalent. Deletion is mainly used to deal with this kind of problems. They can be omitted without loss of information to the audience, although it may affect the semantic or stylistic content.

Emily: well, I am trying. Miranda sacked the last two girls after only a few weeks...

艾米丽：我正在找。马琳达几周内炒了前两个女孩....

from *The Devil Wears Prada*

Forrest : You know it's funny what a young man recollects.

年轻人的记忆很奇怪

from *Forrest Gump*

Fanny: I ....I *absolutely, totally and unduly* adore you and I just think you are the most beautiful woman in the world...”

芬尼：我非常，非常，非常崇拜你，你是世上最美丽的女人.....

from *Notting Hill*

When Fanny first met the superstar Anna in her birthday party, she was shocked and cannot believe she would have a chance to meet such famous person. So she said the above sentence. The three adverbial words are translated into the same three Chinese words to emphasize Fanny's shock.

#### 4.3.3 Translate Cultural Elements in Film Subtitle Translation

Although more and more concepts are shared and understood by different cultures, there are still some terms and expressions that reflect values and traditions of a particular country and have no true equivalents in the target language. There are two main ways to deal with these elements and they are known as foreignization and domestication. Domestication is here understood—after Lawrence Venuti—as “...translating in a transparent, fluent, ‘invisible’ style in order to minimize the foreignness of the target text” (Munday 2001:146). The result is that all foreign elements are assimilated into the dominant target culture, thus depriving the target audience of crucial characteristics of the source culture, which is also shown in the following quote:

The dominant trend towards domestication in translating from American English over the last three centuries has had a normalizing and neutralizing effect, depriving source text producers of their voice and re-expressing foreign cultural values in terms of what is familiar(and therefore unchallenging) to the dominant culture. (Hatim & Mason, 1997:145)

To put it differently, domestication is the approach that favors and privileges the target culture over the source culture, moving the author/creator towards the reader/audience.

Foreignization is an approach to translation which can be described as “...sending the reader abroad”, as Venuti aptly put it (Munday, 2001:147). It is a method which assumes that the translated text does not ‘pretend’ to be an original and

where the foreign identity of the source text is highlighted—which makes the ideological dominance of the target culture impossible. Foreignization privileges the source culture, and it evokes a sense of ‘otherness’, emphasizing the foreign nature of a film.

Birgit Nedergaard-Larsen (1993: 219) put forward six strategies to deal with culture-bound problems in film and TV subtitle translation. These strategies move “...from the totally target language-culture-oriented to the totally source language-culture-oriented” and can be seen as “...a continuum from the complete non-translation at one end to total adaption at the other one”. They are as follows:

Transfer/loan (including exotism and imitation) → direct translation → explicitation → paraphrase → adaptation to TL-culture (including situational adaptation and cultural adaptation) → omission

Based on his strategies, the author puts forward her own strategies in dealing with cultural elements in film subtitle translation.

#### 4.3.3.1 Transliteration

Transliteration means to translate SL words and expressions on the basis of their pronunciation. By this method, many foreign words can be brought in, and further English learner can have a better understanding of English culture. This method is usually used to translate proper names. For example, in Chinese, there are “沙发, 咖啡, 克隆” which are transliterated of English words “sofa, coffee and colon”.

As discussed before, film is polysemiotic. Information is transmitted through four channels. Some loss of information by subtitles may be compensated by other three channels. When translating proper names by transliteration, it may sounds strange to TL audiences, but through the pictures, audiences can understand it promptly and properly.

Carl: Man, look at that. *A Testarossa*.

你看, 德士达路沙。

This happened when Carl and Sam were walking in the street. Suddenly Carl saw a Testarossa parked at the curb. Testarossa is one of the most outstanding sports car made by Ferrai Automobile. People may be not familiar with this brand, but when

Carl was saying, there is a close-up of beautiful sports car on the screen. Then audiences will understand what Testarossa is.

Another example from the film *Ladder 49* is the same case.

Jack: My mom gave it to me. You know what this is? It's a *Claddagh ring*. If it's pointed down...it means you're free. And if it's pointed up towards your heart...it means you belong to someone.

杰克：妈妈给我的。克拉达戒指。如果心尖朝下，意味着我终身未定。如果心尖朝上对着你的心，就证明情有所归了。

Claddagh ring a kind of elaborate ring. Claddagh is a fishing village in Galway, Ireland. It is a token of affection. It is designed with two hands clasping a heart surmounted by a crown. Chinese people may feel strange about the name. but in the help of pictures and explanation of the character, they can also get its meaning.

#### 4.3.3.2 Literal Translation

Literal translation is also called word-for-word translation by Cicero, Horace. Douglas Robinson (1998: 125) defines it as "...ideally the segmentation of the SL text into individual words and TL rendering of those word-segments one at a time". As the system of Chinese is quite different from that of English, it is impossible to achieve word-for-word translation. It is an ideal literal translation. What it really means is not to distort the true features of original information. Of course, translators should try to achieve equivalent at both linguistic level and cultural level. *Time is money* is translated into "时间就是金钱" is an good example of literal translation. However, this kind of translation is rare. What translators should do is to retain the essence of the SL information.

As far as cultural elements concerned, literal translation means to transplant cultural elements directly into the TL by literal translation, the foreignness of SL words and expressions are retained. English learners can learn English cultural information more easily and thoroughly and further to have good communication with foreigners. If literal translation is within the scope of audiences' comprehensibility and within the temporal and spatial constraints, this should be the first choice of

translators.

Dennis: it's St. Paddy's.

Linda: I'm not drinking. I'll get a *Coke*.

丹尼斯: 今天是圣帕特立克节。

琳达: 我不能喝酒。喝一杯 *可乐*。

"Coke" here is a trademark for a cola manufactured by Cola Company. All people in the world know what is Coke, so it can be translated literally.

Fauna: What is it, Flora?

Flora: I'm going to...shh, shh, shh! Even *walls have ears*. Follow me. I'll turn her into a flower.

芳娜: 是什么办法, 芙罗拉?

芙罗拉: 我要将.....嘘, 嘘, 嘘! *隔墙有耳*, 跟我来。我要将它变成一朵花。

from *Sleeping Beauty*

Bunty: In all my life, I've never heard such a fantastic load of tripe? Oh face the facts, folks. The chances of us getting out of here are *a million to one*.

Ginger: Then there's still a chance!

邦蒂: 在我一生中, 从来没有听说过这么美丽的胡话! 哦, 面对现实吧, 伙计们。我们出去的机会是 *百万分之一*。

金杰: 那还是有机会!

from *Chicken Run*

Linda: So you guys usually pick up girls in the supermarket?

Jack: No, I throw them over my shoulder and carry them down a ladder.

Linda: Sort of a *Tarzan, Jane thing*. I should get going.

琳达: 你们常在超市里找女孩子搭话吗?

杰克: 通常是把他们扛在肩上, 走下梯子。

琳达: *像人猿泰山和珍妮*。谢谢我现在得走了。

from *Ladder 49*

Tarzan and Jane are characters created by Edgar Rice Burroughs. Tarzan is born to aristocratic parents, but orphaned in the African jungle and raised by apes, who teach him to speak their languages. Jane is an American woman who comes to the jungle

and meets Tarzan. They fall in love with each other. The film *Tarzan* made great success in China, so Chinese audiences are very familiar with these two characters. It is good enough to translate literally.

#### 4.3.3.3 Paraphrasing

There is a common phenomenon in translation when some expressions may not have equivalents in the TL and transliteration and literal translation cannot convey the meaning properly, only paraphrasing is workable. Paraphrasing is to explain the sense of the original words or phrases according to the context with idiomatic target language. It cannot convey the whole cultural message and therefore causes some loss of the cultural information, but it can achieve a high degree of equivalence. Paraphrasing is a domesticating method and is often necessary and useful in dealing with cultural elements.

Lenny: Goddamn it. Who's the *wise guy*? Interrupting my sh--- Goddamn it! Somebody's going to pay for this.

兰尼：天哪！该死的。谁干的好事？你要是烧死我吗？等我找你算账。

from *Ladder 49*

Literally “wise guy” means clever person which have no derogatory meaning. When Lenney was in the bathroom, Tommy sets a newspaper on fire and tosses the burning paper underneath the stall door. So Lenny yelled about that. “Wise guy” here is a slang expression for a person who thinks himself to be very clever, and who tends to make sarcastic or impudent remarks. According to the context, it is translated by paraphrasing.

Gib: Her hormones are going like an alarm. It's even money she lets that physicist on the bike boink her.

Harry: Not Dana.

Gib: Not Dana. *Denial*. It's not just a river in Egypt no more, is it? She's probably stealing the money to pay for an abortion.

from *True Lies*

吉布：可是她的荷尔蒙已发出警讯，所以很可能已和那个骑机车的小子上床。

哈里：达娜不会的。

吉布：达娜不会的。还死不承认。你不过是自欺欺人罢了，她偷钱很可能就是为了去堕胎。

“Denial isn’t just a river in Egypt” originates from the old saying “Da Nile isn’t just a river in Egypt”, as the pronunciation of “denial” and “Da Nile” is similar, it is used as pun. Chinese people may be familiar with Egypt and Nile, but they cannot understand what the exact meaning of this phrase if translator does not figure out its cultural connotation.

#### 4.3.3.4 Replacement

This method is also very useful to deal with some difficult cultural elements, cultural image for example. Cultural image is an image with cultural values. It is the condensation of wisdom of different nations. The central point of cultural image is its cultural connotations. It has two kinds of connotation. One is the physical object, and the other is its implied meaning. Owing to the specific living conditions and way of thinking, English and Chinese nation may hold different attitude toward the same object. In this case, replacement is the most suitable method—to replace the original cultural image with one that is familiar with the TL audiences. But the basis is to achieve equivalent between TL and SL. For example, in the film *Casablanca*, “a lot of water under bridge” was translated into “往事如烟”. This reflects the difference of ways of thinking between English and Chinese people. When thinking about something in the past, English people tend to compare it to water running away with no return, while Chinese people compare it to vapor disappearing into the air. Here are some more examples from films.

Ellen: Food is what he needs most from the looks of him. Mr. Earnshaw. He’s *as thin as a sparrow*. Come into the kitchen, child.

艾伦：恩萧先生，看他的样子，还是先吃点东西好。他瘦得像根杆。到厨房来吧，孩子。

from *Wuthering Height*



In Chinese, sparrow is considered a kind of small bird, but it has no relation with “thin” or “slim”, if translated literally, Chinese audiences will be confused. So to achieve equivalence, this expression was translated into “瘦得像根杆”, which is typical Chinese expression.

Scarlet: I'm scared to death, and if you had *the sense of a goat* you'd scared, too. Oh, the yankees.

斯嘉丽: 我吓得要死了。你就是木得像头驴, 也该觉得害怕。哦, 北佬。

from *Gone with the Wind*

While translating, translators have to pay attention to the cultural connotations of the words, which has been discussed before. Goat in Chinese has something to do with tameness and mildness, but it does not symbolize numbness. When Chinese people want to describe someone who is numb, they use another animal word donkey(驴). So to achieve equivalence, the translator replace the word goat by another one donkey(驴).

Jane: Shouting won't help, Mr. Clayton. He doesn't understand English.

Clayton: Then I'll make him understand. If I can teach a parrot to sing “*God Save the Queen*”, I can certainly teach this savage a thing or two.

简: 对他叫没有用, 他不知道你再说什么。

柯灵顿: 那我画给他看。我能教鹦鹉唱国歌, 我就能教他。

from *Tarzan*

“God Save the Queen” is the national anthem of the UK. Most Chinese people may not know its name, so it would be more comprehensible to translate it to “国歌”, which also convey the meaning perfectly.

There are no universal and good-for-all translation strategies in film subtitle translation. The choice of translation strategies is manipulated by various elements, such as the type of films, the purpose of the films, the intended audiences and specific problems encountered in translation process. Whatever, the purpose is the same—to achieve equivalence of appreciation of the films between source language audiences and target language audiences, and by this way to improve Chinese audiences' language ability and cultural awareness and to promote cultural communication.

## Conclusion

Nowadays, intercultural communication becomes intensified. Many things from foreign countries have been transmitted into China. However, there are still things that are unfamiliar to Chinese people. In such cases, translation becomes necessary. The purpose of translation is not only to transmit linguistic information but more important to convey its cultural information. The appearance of cultranslation shows that scholars have seen the importance of culture in translation.

Film is a kind of art with integration of picture and sound. Compared with written materials, people can get information more easily by watching film, so film has a much broader readers than any others. Translation of films is necessary in getting information about foreign countries and in cultural communication. Cultural elements in English film dialogue reflect natural environment, religious belief, cultural values and ways of thinking of its country, which are alien to Chinese people, so these cultural elements pose great obstacles to translators who try to bridge the gap between understanding and appreciation of original language audiences and that of target language audiences.

This paper makes a tentative study of cultural elements in English film subtitle translation, in which Nida's functional equivalence is applied. Nida's functional equivalence lays emphasis on the receivers' responses and the naturalness of the translated version. It aims at making target receptors' response to the target text be essentially the same to the original receptors' response to the original text. This is the theoretical basis for the application of functional equivalence to film translation.

After discussing the characteristics of film subtitle translation and cultural elements in film dialogue, the author summarized some common problems in film subtitle translation. These problems involve three aspects in film subtitle translation: translator, film language and film itself. Then principles and specific strategies are adopted.

Though the author hopes to provide a comprehensive solution to the problem,

there are also some weak points... Firstly, examples in the paper are selected from many films that have experienced a relatively long period of time. Different translated versions of these film dialogues limits the author to adopt some new translation, because Chinese audiences have accepted the old ones; secondly, the research focus is constrained in English film, which does not include translation from Chinese to English and translation of TV plays. Lastly, the cultural elements may cover a relatively wide range, but the analysis is not thorough and profound enough.

Hopefully this paper can shed some light on the study of English film subtitle translation. Due to the situation of film translation in China, some materials are unavailable, further studies in this field are welcome.

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