

A Study on Representation of Children's Disposition in *Ne Zha*'s C-E Subtitle Translation

LEI Yu^[a]; ZHAO Yushan^{[b],*}

^[a] School of Foreign Languages, North China Electric Power University, Beijing, China.

^[b] Professor. School of Foreign Languages, North China Electric Power University, Beijing, China.

*Corresponding author.

Received 31 May 2021; accepted 2 August 2021

Published online 26 August 2021

Abstract

In recent years, many excellent Chinese films are going abroad. Among them, Chinese animation fantasy adventure film *Ne Zha*, a new champion of box office in China film market, set its feet on the overseas markets. *Ne Zha* not only retains the essence of Chinese traditional culture, but also injects popular elements to convey the values and pursuit of longstanding Chinese culture. Many children are attracted to enjoy the beautiful and well-flowing action scenes and laugh and cry with its unpredictable plot. In addition, the acceptance of children and maintaining the childlike visions of the work should be considered in subtitle translation. Only by thinking from the standpoint of children and respecting children's feelings can translators deeply understand the importance of children's disposition in their works. From the perspective of children-orientation, this paper digs the representation of children's disposition in *Ne Zha*'s English subtitle translation at lexical, syntactical and rhetorical levels, to provide a new perspective for translators to better translate C-E film subtitle.

Key words: Children's disposition; C-E subtitle translation; *Ne Zha*

Lei, Y. & Zhao, Y. S. (2021). A Study on Representation of Children's Disposition in *Ne Zha*'s C-E Subtitle Translation. *Canadian Social Science*, 17(4), 50-54. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/css/article/view/12273> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/12273>

INTRODUCTION

Subtitle Translation should provide basic language information need by audiences of all ages. When it is popular among children, translators must take children's receptivity, mode of thinking, and psychological aesthetic demand into account. Correct perspective on children can help translators adopt appropriate translation strategies for better representing the flavor of film itself (Tong, 2004, p.63). The view that children's aesthetic ability is immature and meaningless has long been outdated. Seemingly quite simple at the first glance, translation from children's point of view is complicated in fact. The vital characteristic of children-orientation lies in children's disposition. Only by preserving, the original children's interest and taste of in the source text can the translation achieve functional equivalence and resonate with children's disposition. *Ne Zha*, an animated comedy hailed as an unprecedented success of Chinese animation, is a story about fighting fate and against stereotypes. Combining various exquisite special effects with humorous language and multi-layered emotions, the dialogues in *Ne Zha* is full of Children's disposition with strong Chinese flavor.

1. CHILDREN'S DISPOSITION AND *NE ZHA*

Children, often seen as care-receiver, cannot make serious choices at biological, legal and social levels. Because children's cognition is still in development, researchers tend to study their linguistic developing process and degree, ignoring the significance of language and preferences of children. In another word, children's strong aesthetic needs are ignored for granted. Children's Disposition or Children's Interest (童趣 in Chinese), refers to the artistic reflection of the emotional appeal of children's language and behavior in literary works that is compatible with children's psychological and

physiological characteristics (Xu, 2004, p.34-36). Whether literature or film and television works, the content that loses children's disposition will be cast into the shade. For a film as popular as *Ne Zha*, translators should have an in-depth understanding of the characteristics of the target audience without judgment, and give them respect and trust.

Chinese animated fantasy film *Ne Zha* is an adaptation of a famous Chinese mythological character Nezha, based on the epic myths and legends. Rooted in Chinese culture, the story surprisingly voices the modern values of new generation instead of clichés, which sheds a light on tackling some issues hotly discussed such as modern parenting, cyber bullying, racial and gender discrimination and so on. With a modern twist, *Ne Zha* is touching and completed. According to Summer Animated Film Survey (2019), *Ne Zha* scores 87.5 points in audience satisfaction, ranking first among 26 Chinese animated films and the fourth highest among historical films. Judging from the comments of audiences of different ages, nearly 70% of them think That *Ne Zha* is suitable for a wide range of audience. In terms of comments, younger audiences think *Ne Zha* has a touching storyline, beautiful pictures, interesting dubbing and vivid characters who is rebellious with upright passion and emotion. However, for a long time, the aesthetic ability and interest of children have been underestimated.

2. CHILD-ORIENTED PERSPECTIVE ON TRANSLATION

According to Xu (2017, p.8), children are independent of adults and have their unique thinking patterns and personality. Children-oriented translation requires translators to respect children's personalities and psychological characteristics in order to enable children to benefit from the discourse system dominated by adults. Children-orientation puts children in the first place by considering everything from the perspective of children, which echoes researcher Zhu Ziqiang's opinion on children literature: Perspective on children is the starting point (2009, p.55). Children-orientation provides a theoretical basis for China's child-oriented translation view, which was first founded by American educational reformer John Dewey.

Children-oriented perspective on translation asks adult translators to regard children as target readers, observe and perceive the world around them from children's perspective, and make the content of translation attractive to meet readability for children. Childish language style and children's disposition may be too delicate to notice, which means translators have sensitive stylistic awareness, keen language perception and rich imagination (Zhou, 2019, pp.149-151). Although *Ne Zha* is not specifically designed for children, its humorous and childlike animated feature makes children an important group fond

of watching. Whether subtitle translation can be accepted widely largely depends on the translator's attitude towards this specific group.

Children's disposition can be realized through certain linguistic means such as choice of words, syntax and rhetoric (Xu, 2004, p.34). The representation of children's disposition in translation depends on whether the translator holds child-oriented view of children, keeping in mind to liberate and develop children from children's primitive life desires. In the translation process, translators are forced to integrate translation strategies into the ideas of children-orientation to maintain and enrich the valuable qualities of human nature shining from children eyes (Xu & Jiang, 2012, p.99). Based on the characteristics of the target language as well as the target readers, translators shoulder the responsibility for carefully appreciating the language that embodies the children's disposition, mastering how to describe the childlike interest smartly, and then conveying the meaning of the context vividly.

3. REPRESENTATION OF CHILDREN'S DISPOSITION IN SUBTITLE TRANSLATION

Among the requirements asked by children literary translation, representation on the characteristics of children's language is of great importance as their language development system is largely influenced by the surrounding environment. Generally speaking, children's language is simple and clear structured in the short and pithy way, with a strong sense of music and rhythm. Dealing with translation of children's disposition, translators should experience childlike innocence heartedly and stand in the position of children. Keeping the style and form of childlike language in a proper way is a practical method to make children feel geniality and arouse their resonance.

3.1 Representation at Lexical Level

For Children have not established a large word bank, it is obviously on the wrong direction if the translators use too much flowery and sophisticated words and phrases. However, it does not mean that children have no demand in the choice of words for their disposition. Translation conformed to children's language characteristics can be easily accepted and loved by children. Because children's speech style and intonation is different from that of adults, when translating, the translator should not only convey the meaning of the original text, but also convey the characteristics of children's spoken language by using daily vocabularies.

Example 1:

人逢喜事精神爽，来陪我喝两口。

I love a party, and parties love me. It's baby time Mm!
Ha! How about a swiggy for the piggy?

In the original text of Example 1, Taiyi Zhenren uses a classic Chinese idiom “人逢喜事精神爽” from *Journey to the West*, which means people are in high spirits when involved in happy events, to show his relaxation and delight while the second half is a call for friends who are also fond of cup. Abandoning almost all the meaning of the original text, Taiyi Zhenren (太乙真人) was dramatized in the English version, singing a self-made-up party song at ease. By using anadiplosis, “I love a party, and parties love me”, easy-worded, shaped the image of Taiyi Zhenren in a more entertaining way, full of slapstick humor and action.

Example 2:

-- 这是负责驮载虚空之门的长生云我们都叫它小云云

-- 肥肥，小云云也是你叫的!

-- This is Chang Sheng Yun. He is in charge of the void portal. However, we just call him Clingy Cloud.

-- Well, we call you fatty!

In the example 2, children's disposition is illustrated by overlapping words “云云” and “胖胖” with strong readability. “云云” usually refers to a sissy name and “胖胖” is used to tease people who are choppy and stupid, are nicknames Taiyi Zhenren and Chang Shengyun given to each other. With a sense of intimacy, the addressing ways amuse audience of two immortal's mutual ridicule. The translator alliterates “云云” as “Clingy Cloud” and “胖胖” as “fatty”. To increase the amusement on Taiyi Zhenren's appearance and personality, the author believes that “fatty piggy” could represent children's disposition with a more childish humor full of emotional terms.

Example 3:

哎呀! 就抿一小口该喝还是要喝哟! 巴适!

Hey. Ah, some people just do not listen. Well, one sip cannot hurt! Do not want it going to waste! That is nice.

The dialect of Sichuan district in China, spoken by the character Taiyi Zhenren in *Ne Zha* is one of the features of the film. It is difficult to translate the dialect. Taiyi Zhenren shouts “巴适” after drinking heavily while waiting for Lady Yin to give birth to *Ne Zha*. “巴适” means feeling extremely enjoyable and comfortable. In example 3, “巴适” is an exclaim by Taiyi Zhenren for appreciating good wine and being intoxicated. The translator uses one-word adjective “nice” to convey the meaning of “巴适”. From my point of view, translating “巴适” as “best” may be a better choice as the Chinese pronunciation of “巴适” is “bashi” which is closer to “best” and superlative adjective can deliver the meaning of “super good” in “巴适”. If Taiyi Zhenren utters “best” in a dragging way as “Be-e-e-e-e-e-s-t”, an intoxicated facial expression together with body language could represent the original flavor of “巴适” surprisingly. In addition, the frequent use of interjections is in line with the requirements of children's disposition as well as the onomatopoeia such as “BAM!” , “Ah!” , “boom” in subtitle makes the film more vivid and entertaining.

3.2 Representation at Syntactical Level

In English texts, the creation of children's disposition out of grammar usually counts on inverted sentence patterns to express children's strong curiosity and spirit of adventure. When a Chinese text is translated into English, children's language features can also be expressed through syntactical changes. In translation, the most used grammatical means including misplacement, slang or idiomatic expressions in the source language could be another form in target language to represent children's disposition.

Example 4:

拜拜拜! 都拜了三年了!

Why didn't I think of that? I've only been pregnant for three years!

Example 4 is the complaint made by Lady Yin during a visit to a temple with her husband. As her three years of pregnancy without giving birth, Lady Yin has lost her temper totally. “拜” means to worship Buddha. When Lady Yin repeats “拜” for three times to explain that worshipping Buddha is absolutely useless, showing her extreme impatience for worshipping for three years without getting her bear baby. The translator uses a rhetorical question followed by the irony of “only”, display Lady Yin's anger vividly. In my opinion, to retain the intense emotion in the three-time- repetition, “拜拜拜” can also translate it as “why! Why! Why!”

Example 5:

我命由我不由天

T1: I am the master of my destiny. I will be the one who decides.

T2: That is me to be the master of me!

As shown above, free translation is used in T1 (the official English subtitle in *Ne Zha*) to transform the meaning of this sentence. It is worth mentioning that the line “I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul” comes from *Invictus*, a poem written by William Ernest Henle. But as *Ne Zha's* manifesto against his fate as a demon pill, this is not bold and ambitious enough. The emphasis sentence in T2 can show righteous ardour and determination in a magnificent way.

Example 6:

那你去.....去了就别回来了。

If you go.....gone, never come back.

Because of his stuttering, the character of Shen Gongbao is deeply rooted in audiences' hearts. In the film, his stuttering constantly causes misunderstanding. The translator expresses his stuttering through grammatical means and wisely distinguishes the verb tenses before and after stuttering cleverly.

Example 7:

对，这就是我，万人敬仰的太乙真人虽有点婴儿肥，但也掩不住我逼人的帅气。

I know what you're thinking, “Who's that dashing rogue on the pig?” That would be me, Taiyi Zhenren. And

if I weren't so busy being a super impressive butt-kicking, day-saving monk, I've been told I could be a model.

Example 7 is the opening line of Taiyi Zhenren while its English subtitle is not translation of the original text. Added a self-answering question and a cluster of catchy modifiers "super impressive butt-kicking, day-saving" in the English subtitle, the translator makes a recreation by upgrading the image of narcissistic and unabashed Taiyi Zhenren. Children can be easily won over by the opening scene where Daoist immortal Taiyi Zhenren was revealed to be an obese and seemingly incompetent middle-aged man riding a pig. In *Ne Zha*, one of the most powerful and respected Daoist deities was portrayed as a buffoon with real human personality rather a wise constrained man whose wisdom and authority.

3.3 Representation at Rhetorical Level

In both English and Chinese, a variety of rhetorical devices are used to create children disposition in order to enhance the appeal and interest of the text. In terms of pronunciation, alliteration, end rhyme, anadiplosis and other rhetorical devices are used to create entertaining phonetic and expressive effects to attract children. In *Ne Zha*, limerick, a playful vulgar poetry that doesn't pay much attention to meter, antithesis and oblique tones, but certainly rhymes, is considered as a major carrier of children's disposition. *Ne Zha* "writes" orally four limericks in the film with his stern face and languid voice, full of childlike humor. These limericks are easy to understand, humorous, sometimes sarcastic and hilarious. In translation, familiar words and simple sentence patterns should be used as much as possible to create rhyming limericks in the target language.

Example 8:

关在府里无事干，
翻墙捣瓦摔瓶罐。
来来回回千百遍，
小爷也是很疲倦。

These dumb walls crush my soul.

Even prisoners get parole.

No friends, no fun, it's just the worst.

Hopefully boredom will get me first.

The original text in example 8 ends each of the short sentence with compound vowel of "an" in Chinese. The translator also tries so hard to make the antithesis neatly with end rhyme. Although it is not translated word by word, the meaning is conveyed perfectly, which greatly increases the readability and is full of children's disposition. For this sentence "来来回回千百遍，小爷也是很疲倦"，both repetition and rhyme are employed in Chinese. Thus, translators are racking their brains for creative translation. The following two are contributed by users of Weibo.

V.1 back and forth thousands of times, the young master is very tired

V.2 The wheel has come full circle, and I am tired out.

Although the meaning of the original text is delivered, the biggest flaw in V.1 is no rhyme. Without rhyme, children's disposition in the limerick is inevitably lost in translation. In V.2, the first half of the sentence is inspired by Shakespeare's play *King Lear*. And the translator creates a pun by using two words "tire" and "tyre" with similar pronunciation, echoing from the beginning to the end. It is hard-won for translators to create new puns in the translation.

Example 9:

我是小妖怪，逍遥又自在。

杀人不眨眼，吃人不放盐。

一口七八个，肚子要撑破。

茅房去拉屎，想起忘带纸。

T1

I'm a scary demon, Better run and hide.

Legend says I'll eat and eat, till everyone has died.

And they're right You should steer clear.

Best take their suggestion,

Cause when I eat too much, I get real bad indigestion

T2

I am a demon, a roaming and free one.

I kill without blinking, and eat people without thinking.

I eat eight at a time, until my belly is as round as a lime.

I sit on the crapper, but I forget the toilet paper.

T3

I'm a little monster, with myself together,
wanna kill ur mother, medium rare be better,
eat a lot a time, and then never hunger,
want to go to loo, has no paper.

Ne Zha, a rebellious child who has not been accepted and loved by the world since birth, used to hide his emotion under arrogant appearance and act himself a callous and hardhearted demon. The limerick of example 9 is a reflection of his character and strong personality, so it has received wide attention. The above three versions of translation have their own advantages.

T.1, the official English subtitle of this example 9, is a new creation rather translation of the original content. No rhyme but full of expressions in line with children's disposition, language of T.1 is closer to that of western countries, especially when it goes with background music in the film. In terms of content of T.1, the related descriptions about *Ne Zha*'s extreme brutality and violence are removed and replaced with exaggeration and humors so as to avoid misunderstanding.

The translator's ingenuity can be noticed in T.2. Catchy to read, T.2 is well stocked with rhymes positioned in the same place as the original text and adopts free translation on the basis of rhyme. The choice of words in T.2 prefer to conciseness. "不放盐" is translated as "without thinking" to rhyme with "blinking" in the previous short sentence. "肚子要撑破", means burst belly because eat too much, is translated to "My belly is as round as a lime". Using

simile, more literalness and flavorful meaning are merged together in T.2.

By literal translation, T.3 realizes end rhyme with “er”, so it could impress audience with its smooth. Exaggerated expressions could better reflect children's cognition and feeling. In T.3, Ne Zha's inner dissatisfaction towards how other people see him, his helplessness and self-mockery for being trapped at home are obvious in the vicious language and relentless tone. In addition, inaccuracy happens in T.2 and T.3. In English, word “paper” is not equal to the meaning of “纸” in Chinese culture. So “纸” should not be substituted as paper, but tissue or toilet paper.

As for the translation of sentence “我是小妖怪，逍遥又自在，杀人不眨眼，吃人不放盐” in example 9, more excellent translations are contributed by enthusiasts of translating. The following two achieve an excellence in both content and rhymes.

T.4

I'm a little monster,
feeling happy and high,
Killing millions of lives,
eating human without salts.

T.5

I'm a little devil,
happy-go-luvky,
Killing man without blinking eyes,
eating man without sprinkling salts

The most amazing part of T.4 and T.5 is their vivid representation on “杀人不眨眼，吃人不放盐”. Present progressive structure used for rhyming not only makes the limerick catchy and memorable for its phonological beauty, but also depicts the real picture and the flexible and vibrant action. In fact, Ne Zha has never killed or eaten anyone. Although he was born as a carrier of demon pill, he has a good nature. He makes some limericks just to make fun of himself after being alienated and reviled by the people of Chentang Pass and imprisoned at home without freedom. All in all, representing children's disposition need to pay attention to the factors that make up readability including diction, sentence pattern and rhythm. The importance of rhyme cannot be overstated.

CONCLUSION

Under the trend of “Chinese culture products going out”, Chinese films have sprung up like mushrooms in global film market, tearing up the stereotyped label as a

cringey subculture. In the promotion of Chinese films, subtitle translation is the link of communication between different cultures. Expectations on precise and creative translation of film subtitle are getting higher while excellent subtitle translation is conducive to resolving the cultural differences between China and the West, and beneficial to improvement of China's international image and cultural soft power. The children-oriented perspective on translation thinks highly of experience and aesthetic enjoyment of children. From the eyes of children, the once “doubtful and valueless” aesthetic force needs to be treated equally. Representing children's disposition builds a strong sense of confidence for translators that no matter how trivial the difference may be, consideration from translators will be noticed and appreciated from lexis, syntax and rhetoric. There is no universal translation method suited for the translation of children's disposition. Domestication and foreignization should be integrated so as to fully present the text and its meaning in translation. The translation methods should vary from situation to situation. Excessive emphasis on literal translation or free translation could cause one-sided and unscientific opinions as translation showed to children could lead to a new kind of children's disposition. It is time to get rid of distractions and contribute to the development of children's disposition.

REFERENCES

- Tong, M. J. (2004). On the application of functional translation theory to translating children's literature for interpreting “Child Interest”. *Journal of Central South University of Forest & Technology (Social Sciences)*, 63-64.
- Xu, D. R. (2004). On the translation of children's literature. *Chinese Translators Journal* (06), 34.
- Xu, D. R. (2017). *Children-oriented translation studies and literary criticism* (p.8). Nanchang: 21st Century Publishing Group.
- Xu, D. R., & Jiang, J. L. (2012). A review of translators' perspective on literary translation for children evidences by the translation of puns. *Journal of Ocean University of China (Social Sciences)* (02), 99.
- Zhou, M. (2019). The dilemma and outlet of Zhou Zuoren's children-oriented perspective on translation. *Journal of Lanzhou Institute of Education* (08), 149-151.
- Zhu, Z. Q. (2009). *Introduction to children's literature* (p.55). Beijing: Higher Education Press.