



A Brief Analysis of Translation Errors in Subtitle of the Movie *The Wandering Earth*

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Abstract

In recent years, film industry of China has developed rapidly. There have been a lot of high-quality movies which enter into the international market. Therefore, subtitle translation is so crucial to win more overseas audiences to effectively disseminate Chinese culture and display the soft power of China. This paper takes the Chinese and English subtitles of the Movie *The Wandering Earth* as the research object. It puts forward three categories of translation errors according to Nord’s theory and analyzes the examples of translation errors in the movie in order to provide references for movie subtitle translation.

Key words: Movie subtitle translation; Translation errors; *The Wandering Earth*

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INTRODUCTION

The current situation of Chinese film industry shows a good momentum of development. The international influence of Chinese movies has been increasing and

become more and more powerful, which has been welcomed by foreign audiences and also provides a boost for the construction of national cultural soft power. New developments have taken place in the international market and the commercial value of Chinese movies has tended to increase, especially in the field of science fiction movies. Recently, the film *The Wandering Earth*, starring actor Wu Jing, has not only won high praise, but also become a big winner of the Spring Festival movies in China. This film has become an important factor in promoting the development of China’s science fiction film industry and has been put on the international screen. The film shows concern for the great history of mankind, which combines science, the common concern of mankind, the common feeling of mankind, the ethical consciousness and values of the Chinese people together well. It has led our film industry to a higher level of development either in art or in the industrial production of the whole film.

Such an excellent science fiction film is also popular abroad and wins a good reputation. Therefore, translation of the subtitles of the film plays a very important role. However, many foreign audiences comment that there are many problems and errors in the translation of subtitles after watching the film, which not only affects their understanding of the film but also causes some ambiguities. Therefore, the author thinks it is very necessary to do such a case study to analyze subtitle translation errors in order to illustrate that our film subtitle translation urgently need great improvement and development. The author would like to analyze the English subtitle translation of this film based on Nord’s theory of translation errors in order to provide references for movie subtitle translation.

1. THEORETICAL BASIS

Eugene Nida, an American translation theorist, pointed out that “translation is to reproduce the information of the

source language with the nearest natural equivalence in the target language from semantics to style.” (Yao, 2010) However, in the process of translation, some translators still have some embarrassing translation errors due to the lack of knowledge of the source language and culture, or the carelessness and irresponsibility of the translators. From the perspective of translation function, Nord defines translation errors as “failure to properly implement the instructions in the translation outline or unreasonable solution to translation problems”(Nord, 2001). He holds that if a translation error is defined as a failure to carry out the instructions implied in the translation brief and as an inadequate solution to a translation problem, then translation errors can be classified into four categories: linguistic translation errors, cultural translation errors, pragmatic translation errors, text-specific translation errors (Nord, 2001).

Linguistic translation errors are caused by an inadequate translation of a translator when the focus is on language structures. And this kind of translation errors is often due to deficiencies in the translator’s source or target-language competence (Nord, 2001). Cultural translation errors are due to an inadequate decision with regard to reproduction or adaptation of culture-specific conventions, which depends on the influence they have on the function of the target text. In fact, translators who are not proficient in both target language and source language will not be able to pay attention to linguistic or cultural translation in an appropriate way. Translation should first focus on the correctness of language, and then on the appropriateness of communication or function. Therefore, it is very important to ensure that the translator has adequate language and cultural proficiency before translation. Pragmatic translation errors are mainly caused by inadequate solutions to pragmatic translation problems. According to the experience of many translators, pragmatic translation usually depends on the translator’s common sense, which is not difficult to solve. Pragmatic errors are one of the most important errors of translators, because the recipients often do not realize that the information they receive is wrong, which leads to serious consequences. Text-specific translation errors, which are related to a text-specific translation problem and, like the corresponding translation problems, can usually be evaluated from a functional or pragmatic point of view (Nord, 2001).

Based on Nord’s types of translation errors, this paper makes a classification analysis of translation errors in Chinese-English subtitle translation of the movie *The Wandering Earth*, aiming at discussing the underlying causes of translation errors. Since this paper focuses on the analysis of film subtitle translation errors, the fourth type of translation errors is not applicable here. Therefore, this paper will mainly analyze the first three categories of translation errors.

2. TRANSLATION ERRORS IN SUBTITLE OF THE WANDERING EARTH

The movie *The Wandering Earth* has become a hot topic nowadays, which arouses different opinions among the public, but the box office record proves everything. In foreign countries, especially in the markets of developed countries, the film has gained many good reviews. Of course, there are also negative opinions. Many foreign audiences have expressed their disappointment with the English subtitles of the film because of the poor translation. According to Nord’s theory, we will discuss translation errors of subtitle in this film on three categories: linguistic translation errors, cultural translation errors and pragmatic translation errors.

2.1 Linguistic Translation Errors

Nord believes that language translation error is caused by inadequate understanding of words and language structures (Nord, 2001). There are a large number of such kind of translations errors in English subtitle in this movie, which includes many misuses of words, grammatical errors and even spelling errors.

2.1.1 Misuse of Words

The process of translation is essentially a process of transformation of understanding and expression. Words are the basic linguistic units. If we understand them separately from the context in translation, it will easily lead to misunderstanding and translation errors. In translation practice, the translator must start from the context in which the language is used when judging the semantics of the original words. Sometimes the translator may be misled by pre-existing knowledge, inherent ideas, resulting in common sense errors and translation errors.

(1) ST: 同声传译已上线

TT: Synchronal translation is on.

In this example, the translator translates “同声传译” directly into “synchronal translation”. Firstly, when we look up the word in the Collins Dictionary, we can find that the word “synchronal” is obsolete, which is equal to “synchronical”, which means happening at the same time. Secondly, it can’t be found in the Collins Dictionary, and there are no similar phrases. Therefore, the correct translation of “同声传译” should be simultaneous translation. In the Collins Dictionary, the definition of simultaneous translation is “a form of translation in which the interpreter translates into the target language as quickly as possible while the speaker is still speaking in the source language”. So this sentence should be translated as follows “Simultaneous translation is on”.

(2) ST: 地面通讯马上会瘫痪

TT: Earth’s communications will be paralysis

In this example, there is also a translation error. In Collins Dictionary, “paralysis” means “the loss of the ability to move and feel in all or part of your body”. Paralysis is used to describe physiological phenomena in

human body. While in the Chinese subtitle, “瘫痪” refers to the interruption of communication, which means that communication is interrupted and can not be carried out. For example, the Earth’s atmosphere is sucked away by Jupiter, the ionospheric disorder disappears and radio communications cannot be used properly. The translation here is obviously inappropriate. Secondly, paralysis is a noun and can not be used as a predicate after a copula. Therefore, it would be better to use “broken-down” here, which refers that a broken-down vehicle or machine no longer works because it has something wrong with it. This subtitle can be translated into Earth’s communications will be broken-down.

2.1.2 Grammatical errors

Grammatical analysis, also known as syntactic analysis or semantic analysis, is the use of English grammar knowledge, through the analysis of the grammatical structure of the original sentence, so as to distinguish and determine the meaning of the original sentence or the meaning of a word in the original sentence. Eugene A. Nida points out that grammatical analysis is an extremely important part of translation. Understanding is the basis of translation process, and grammatical analysis is the premise and foundation of understanding. If the grammar analysis of this sentence is wrong, it will inevitably lead to translation errors.

(3) ST: 在这个地方 你敢用这个东西...

TT: I dare you! Use it here...

In the movie, this Chinese subtitle is a threatening word. It means that “I guess you dare not use this thing here”. The usage of “I dare you” is appropriate here. But when looking up various examples and the usages, we find that the correct usage is “I dare you to do something”. While, the translator mistranslates this subtitle into two clauses probably because the Chinese subtitle has two corresponding clauses. So that it can achieve formal correspondence. But such translation will make the viewer confused. Therefore, the correct translation here should be “I dare you to use it here”.

(4) ST: 三十年来发动机从来没有熄过火

TT: No Earth Engine has shut down for the past 30 years.

In this sentence, “shutdown” is a noun and can not be used as a predicate. Engine is not a proper noun in a sentence. It does not need capitalization. This translation shows that the translator’s basic skills are not solid, and there is no careful proofreading in the later stage. For this grammatical error, we can change the English subtitle to “There has been no Earth engine shutdown for the past 30 years”. In addition, the reasons for the extinction in the movie are not detailed and difficult to judge, but “shutdown” is mostly the result of manual operation. In Collins dictionary, shutdown means “the closing of a factory, shop, or other business, either for a short time or forever”. Therefore, a more stable translation can be “The Earth engine has been running continuously for the past 30 years.

2.2 Cultural Translation Errors

Cultural translation errors, due to an inadequate decision with regard to reproduction or adaptation of cultural-specific conventions (Nord, 2001). Language is the carrier of culture, which makes translation not only transform one language into another, but also express the culture carried by the source language in the target language to promote intercultural communication. In the process of communication, different cultures inevitably reflect collision, blending and conflict, which makes translators take into account both the original culture and the audiences’ acceptance when translating cultural factors. Therefore, cultural translation error is universal and inevitable.

(5) ST: 别晚节不保

TT: don’t mess up my last dignity

In this sentence, “晚节不保” is a typical Chinese idiom, which comes from a poem by the famous poet Yang Wanli. It originally means that a person has failed to maintain his own integrity when he is old. For example, some people of high moral integrity fail to stand the test in their old age and become disreputable. Later, people also use this idiom to show that when things are about to succeed, they fail. In the movie, this subtitle means that in the last shift of protagonist in the space station, he can’t make any mistakes when nearing to success. The subtitles express exactly the second meaning of this Chinese idiom. However, the translator literally translated “晚节” into “last dignity” without considering the real use of the idiom here. He uses literal translation while ignoring the cultural factor. Such a translation will confuse the audience and affect the continuity of the viewing of them. Therefore, “don’t waste the efforts already made” is probably a better translation for this subtitle, which is more concise and clear for the foreign audiences.

(6) ST: 还给您带了串儿, 趁热吃

TT: And I got you skewers too. Eat while it is warm.

This subtitle contains a very authentic daily phrase “趁热吃”, which is full of Chinese cultural color. Because of our traditional food culture, we have such daily phrase. It means when we have lunch or dinner, we must eat hot food. People usually think it is not good for our health when food is cold. However, compared with foreign audiences, there is no such kind of cultural background, so the translation of subtitle must be accurate. The word “趁热” is translated into “warm” here, which does not reflect the meaning of “趁热”. And when we look up the usage “eat while it is warm” and “eat while it is hot” on Google, the results shown are 9420 and 19700 respectively. Therefore, most frequently-used collocations are “eat it while it is hot.”, which can be applied to the translation of this subtitle.

(7) ST: 这是要上军事法庭的

TT: You will be handed over to the Military court.

This subtitle contains a specific cultural factor about military affairs - “军事法庭”. Its main duty is to try military crimes according to law. Especially after World

War II, many international military tribunals emerged, which are international judicial institutions specializing in combating and punishing war crimes. Therefore, the translator must pay attention to its English expression habits, rather than simple literal translation. The customary expression of “上军事法庭” in English is “be court-martialed”, which means being tried by military courts, which is much simpler than “being handed over to the Military court”, and “military” here does not need capital letters. Besides, there are only 62 identical uses of the phrase “handed over to the military court” in “Google”, and the sources are not authoritative. Therefore, conciseness is not the only reason for modifying this subtitle. Whether it conforms to English expression habits or not is also a key factor for translators to consider. Correct translation refers not only to the correct semantics in accordance with grammar and word meaning, but also to the correct usage in accordance with everyday application. Otherwise, the translation may be stiff and strange and lack readability.

2.3 Pragmatic Translation Errors

Nord believes that pragmatic translation errors is caused by the translator’s failure to adequately solve the problem of face-to-face pragmatic translation. If the translator misunderstands the original author’s intention or neglects the context, it will lead to translation errors. These pragmatic translation errors are mainly manifested in factors other than language itself. The most important is the use of language, such as the intention of the sender, the understanding and interpretation of the receiver, the pragmatic situations of the language at that time and so on. Especially, in the film, the translator should take into account the context of the subtitle.

(8) ST: 老大.....

TT: Boss.....

In the movies, the word “老大” is the address of the police officers to their captain. In our Chinese culture, the word “老大” is often used to refer to their leader or eldest brother, to express a sense of respect and kindness. So the boss here refers to the captain of the police, while the translator translates “老大” into “Boss”, which shows a very casual and non-formal sense of organization, making it impossible for foreign audiences to associate the subtitles with the identity of the characters in the film. The subtitle “老大” here refers to Captain Wang Lei, so it is better to translate it into “Captain” or “Sir”.

(9) ST: 大哥你看, 哎呦来劲了

TT: Hey, Boss, look. Hyper?

There are basically two kinds of meanings of “来劲了” in Chinese itself. The first meaning refers to that someone, who is warm-hearted, loves whatever he does and has enthusiasm; the second meaning refers to that someone has a kind of emotional fluctuation and feel very excited. Here the translator translates “来劲了” directly into “hyper”. In Collins dictionary, we find

that “hyper” means if someone is hyper, they are very excited and energetic. Such a translation is very consistent in the original meaning of the Chinese word. However, considering the plot of our movies and the pragmatic scene at that time, the background is that the boy is threatening them with weapons. The threatened man looks down on the boy and said speak the word. So that we can know the subtitle “哎呦来劲了” is not a description of the protagonist’s enthusiasm, but contains a kind of irony and warning. Obviously, the translation here is not appropriate. Maybe, a more appropriate translation of the subtitle should be “Hey, boss, look at him.” Such concise translation combined with film scenes can make the audience see the film smoothly. Therefore, translators should not only pay attention to the pragmatic phenomena of words in translation but also take full account of the movie scenes in which the subtitles are used, so as to avoid making foreign audiences confused about the plot and incoherent viewing.

CONCLUSION

In short, in the era of globalization, Chinese directors are making arduous progress on their way to the international market. The quality of translation directly decide whether Chinese films can win more overseas audiences. Translation with high quality effectively disseminate Chinese culture and improve the soft power of national culture. It is impossible that there are no translation errors in the translation works. Therefore, for translators, the most important thing is to reduce translation errors as possible as they can. When translating Chinese subtitles, the first ability a translator should possess is to be proficient in both Chinese and English and be familiar with the culture of source language and target language. What’s more, translators should focus on the target audience, take into account their reception level, mode of thinking, language and cultural aesthetic habits, so as to integrate the aesthetic experience of the target audience with that of the original audience. Finally, translators should eliminate utilitarianism, strictly demand themselves and constantly improve their translation skills. If the translators can achieve the above points, they will be able to minimize translation errors, dedicate more and more wonderful subtitle translation to the audience, and build a broad and fast cultural bridge for the communication between China and other countries.

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