Subtitle Translation in the Documentary of China Bouquet from the Perspective of Ecological Translatology

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Abstract:

As the current wave of globalization has proceeded, it is increasingly important to strengthen a culture of communications. Documentaries serve as a window into various cultures. High-quality subtitle translation contributes to the documentary's widespread acclaim and appreciation. *China Bouquet* is a cultural publicity documentary, with the language, culture, and communication elements embodied in its subtitles requiring the translators to make adaptation and selection in multi-dimensional transformations. With the application of qualitative method, this thesis studies the Chinese-English subtitle translation strategies and methods in *China Bouquet* on the theoretical basis of Eco-translatology in order to contribute to the promotion of cultural exchanges.

Keywords: Eco-translatology, subtitle translation, multi-dimensional transformations, documentary

1.Introduction

With the accelerating processes of globalization, cultural exchanges between countries have become more frequent. A significant number of film and television works have become an important link for cross-cultural communication, especially documentaries, which offer viewers a unique opportunity to gain insight into the authentic reality of events, people, and social phenomena by capturing and disseminating genuine footage. *China Bouquet*, a bilingual documentary issued by the China Internet News Center, has achieved remarkable communication effect with professional subtitle translation since its initial broadcast. Nevertheless, subtitle translation is a complex undertaking. The discrepancies between Chinese and English linguistic expressions, coupled with the constraints imposed by subtitles in terms of time and space, have posed additional challenges to the translation process.

Eco-translatology theory has applied ecological principles and methods to translation research. This theory regards language as an ecosystem, and translation as a process of information exchange and resource transformation between different languages, therefore requiring attention to the interdependence and balance between languages. The basic theory of Eco-translatology summarizes translation methods as three-dimensional transformations, which means that under the principle of multi-dimensional adaptation and adaptive selection, it relatively focuses on the adaptive selection transformation of linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions.

This research employs the theoretical framework of Eco-translatology to analyze the methods by which translators proactively make adaptive selections from the three dimensions of language, culture, and communication in *China Bouquet*.

2.Literature Review

2.1 The Research on Subtitle Translation from Abroad

The development of the Western film and television industry preceded that of rest of the world, resulting in the earlier research of subtitle translation, emerging in the 1950s. Dollerup (1974) comments on the general errors in English-Danish bilingual subtitling in Danish television programs, and underscores the importance of subtitle translation in the context of foreign language learning. Titford (1982) puts forward the concept of "constrained translation" for the first time, and points out that the limitation of subtitles in time and space, which has a significant influence on the subtitle translation studies.

In recent years, there has been a notable increase in the number of scholars engaged in the diverse studies of subtitle translation. Pérez (2023) introduces the translation strategy employed for interjections in subtitle. Boito and Flotow (2023) analyze the similarities and differences of the female image in the different subtitle-translated versions of the documentary. Martinez (2023) study the Spanish-English translation of action verbs in sports documentaries. They believe it can facilitate a deeper understanding of verb usage in different scenarios for learners.

2.2 The Research on Subtitle Translation in

China

In comparison to the studies on documentary subtitle translation abroad, research in China started late and is still at an exploring stage. Qian Shaochang (2000) clearly states the necessity of prospering subtitle translation, and presented five characteristics for subtitle translation, including audible, comprehensive, momentary, popular and non-annotated. Li Yunxing (2001) summarizes characteristics of subtitle translation and provided practical strategies for translators, considering temporal and spatial constraints, information function, and cultural factors.

Currently, many scholars use a specific film or documentary as a case study, analyzing it based on a certain translation theory and pointing out the specific translation strategies employed by the translator. Liao Xuelu and Zhao Yan (2020) sort out the mistakes in the subtitle translation strategy of *Green Book* and put forward feasible strategies for the English to Chinese translation of subtitles from the perspective of the communication theory of translation. Li Huixiang (2022) applies the adaptation theory to the practice of English movie subtitling in various aspects, focusing on the film *Kung Fu Panda*. Cheng Wei (2014) employs the practical experience of translating documentaries for CCTV as a case study to propose enhancements to the readability of Chinese-English subtitles in documentary translation.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 The Characteristics of Subtitle Translation

Subtitling is an art form that combines audio and visual elements and is subject to numerous constraints when it comes to translation.

In terms of spatial consideration, the subtitles must adapt to the dimensions of the video screen. They should occupy a minimal portion of the interface, be of a reasonable length, and be expressed in a clear and concise manner. Otherwise, they may impede the viewer's perception and experience. It is recommended that Chinese subtitles be displayed in a single line at a time, with each sentence comprising a maximum of 13 to 15 characters. Similarly, English subtitles should be presented in a maximum of two lines, with each line comprising a maximum of 37 characters.

In terms of temporal duration, subtitles remain on the screen for an exceedingly brief period. Subtitles are a form of text that appears in conjunction with the screen and, as such, are unable to exist independently of the screen. As a result, they must be perfectly synchronized with the screen. However, the audience's reading speed is slower than the reaction speed of the narration. Therefore, when translating subtitles, it is essential to ensure that the translated subtitles end at the same time as the source subtitles and the narration.

Furthermore, in *China Bouquet,* there are many culture-loaded words that reflect the history, beliefs, customs, and ways of thinking unique to a particular cultural group. These words carry unique cultural connotations and may not have direct equivalents in other cultures.

Therefore, it is necessary for translators to require in-depth knowledge of the languages and adopt flexible translation strategies to accurately convey the meaning of the original language while maintaining the fluency and artistry of the target language. This ensures that viewers can profoundly comprehend the cultural connotations conveyed by the documentary.

3.2 Translators' Adaptation and Selection in Multi-dimensional Transformations

3.2.1 The Linguistic Dimension

The adaptive selection in linguistic dimension refers to the translators' adaptive selection and transformation of language form in the process of translation. [10]

3.2.1.1 Parataxis and Hypotaxis

In linguistics, hypotaxis and parataxis are one of the most obvious differences between English and Chinese. [3] In hypotactic constructions, subordinating conjunctions and relative pronouns serve to connect the dependent elements to the main clause. Nevertheless, in Parataxis, phrases and clauses are placed one after another independently, without coordinating or subordinating them with conjunctions.

Table 1 Analysis of Parataxis and Hypotaxis in the Linguistic Dimension

Source Text	Translation
Example 1: 就必须要打磨，必须要见新的铜碴，焊接的时候它才牢固。--《礼之器》	We have to polish it to see the copper inside first, then the weld could be more solid. (*Vessels of Ritual*)
Example 2: 中国人的传统风筝以竹纸为本，拟物赋彩，祈福纳祥。--《引线乘风》	Traditional Chinese kites are made of bamboo and paper in the different shapes of creatures and painted in various colors to wish for happiness and auspiciousness. (*Chasing in the Wind*)

In Example 1, the source text indicates conditional relation. Only if we polish it first can we weld it solid. Although there are no obvious conjunctions in Chinese, it does not affect the audiences' understanding of the meaning of the sentences. When translating into English, the translator makes this implied logical relationship explicit by adding the words "to" "first" and "then" to clearly express the conditional and sequential relationships in the original sentence.

In Example 2, the Chinese sentence describes kite's appearance, material and cultural significance. These phrases are coordinated without conjunctions. The translator adds "to" suggesting that the purpose of making kites is to pray for luck and good fortune.

As can be seen from Table 3.1, Chinese is a paratactic language, while English is a hypotactic language. In the process of Chinese to English translation, it is necessary to explicitly render the logical relationships among sentences by adding appropriate conjunctions so as to accurately convey the meaning of the source language, but also in line with the English expression habits.

3.2.1.2 Abstract and Concrete

English words are often abstract and can express multiple meanings, which makes them more suitable for conveying complex ideas and subtle emotions. In contrast, Chinese words are more concrete and often use specific objects or concepts to convey certain ideas.

Table 2 Analysis of Abstract and Concrete in the Linguistic Dimension

Source Text	Translation
Example 3: 太毛躁了容易损伤器物，就必须得要坐得住。--《礼之器》	Being too impetuous could easily lead to damaging the relics, so we must be patient. (*Vessels of Ritual*)
Example 4: 中国人习惯用筷子只夹取自己面前的食物，不逾越到他人面前，以"和"为贵。--《神奇的筷子》	Chopsticks reflect the characteristics which are highly praised in Chinese aesthetics—temperate, well-disciplined and harmonic. (*Magic Chopsticks*)

As shown in Example 3, "坐得住" is a relatively concrete phrase that signifies the ability of an individual to remain in a seated position for an extended period, particularly when engaged in activities that demand patience and concentration. Rather than literally translating "you have to sit still", the translator has abstracted the concept to "be patient", indicating a person's character trait of not hasty or impetuous.

In Example 4, the source sentence provides a detailed account of the manner of Chinese using chopsticks, along with the ethical principles and values embodied in it. These values include the promotion of harmonious coexistence between individuals. In translation, these specific behaviors are abstracted as the highly praised Chinese virtues of "temperate, well-disciplined, and harmonic".

3.2.2 The Cultural Dimension

As we all known, language and culture are interdependent and interactional. Translation is not a simple transformation from one language to another, but a cultural transformation process that cannot be ignored. [4] Therefore, the translators should transform the source text from the cultural dimension. *China Bouquet* contains many words, phrases, or idioms symbolizing unique features of Chinese culture.

3.2.2.1 Material Culture Loaded Words

Material culture loaded words refers to the material civilization created by human beings, including all kinds of food culture, tea culture, clothing culture, architectural culture and other material cultural heritage. When translating these words, translators should adopt flexible translation methods and techniques.

Table 3 Analysis of Material Culture Loaded Words in Cultural Dimension

Source Text	Translation	Source Text	Translation
琮	Cong	女儿红	Daughter's Red Wine
玉璧	Bi	红妆	Hongzhuag (red makeup)
四合院	Siheyuan		

As indicated in the table 4.3, the terms "琮" and "玉璧" refer to ancient jade objects, while "四合院" denotes a

distinctive Chinese architectural style. For these words, transliteration was used. Despite their unfamiliarity to the target audience, these terms are often accompanied by visual aids in the documentary. Furthermore, the transliteration can convey a sense of cultural confidence.

To make translation more understandable, it is recommended to combine transliteration with annotation. In the table, "红妆" in ancient Chinese typically signifies the red cosmetics used by women when they do makeup. The translator has not only preserved the pronunciation of the source word but has also enabled target audience to get a preliminary understanding of the category of items that the word may represent. This method helps to maintain the cultural characteristics of the source text while ensuring that it remains accessible to English audiences.

Literal translation provides a fluent and accurate translation that is easily comprehended by the the target audiences. "女儿红" is a traditional Chinese red wine made from glutinous rice, usually brewed at the birth of a daughter and presented as a dowry at her marriage. The ritual serves to symbolize good fortune and wealth. The liberal translation of the term is Daughter's Red Wine. While this translation accurately conveys the fundamental meaning, Red Wine is a kind of wine made from grapes in Western culture. To prevent confusion among target audiences, an alternative translation, such as "Daughter's Red Rice Wine," may be more appropriate.

3.2.2.2 Linguistic Culture Loaded Words

The linguistic culture loaded words mainly includes idioms and sayings. As a result of the differences between Chinese and English, the structure of these phrases often needs to be altered during the translation process. While this may result in a loss of the source text's charm, it is crucial to maintain the integrity of the translated text.

Table 4 Analysis of Linguistic Culture Loaded Words in Cultural Dimension

Source Text	Translation
Example 5: 靠山吃山，靠海吃海。 --《蒸的艺术》	One has to make use of local resources available. (*The Art of Steaming*)
Example 6: 捞纸工人们正在如火如荼的忙碌着。--《超级宣纸》	Paper fishers are busy working, seething with enthusiasm. (*Mega Rice Paper*)

The source sentence of Example 5 is a Chinese idiom that conveys the wisdom of rational use of resources in accordance with the environment and conditions. In the documentary, it refers to the fact that the residents of a coastal town depend on the creatures in the sea for their livelihood. In the process of translation, adopting literal translation, although maintaining the form of the source text, may prove to be confusing or misunderstood by target audiences. Consequently, the translator employs the free translation method, rendering it as "One has to make use of local resources available". This translation not only conveys the essence of the original text but also aligns with the prevailing English expression style, facilitating comprehension for foreign audiences.

"如火如荼" is a typical Chinese idiom, comprising the phrases "red as fire" and "white as flower of thatched grass". It is used to describe something that is developing very vigorously, enthusiastically, or fiercely. In this context, the idiom depicts a scene where workers are busy and energized. However, there is no direct equivalent in English that fully conveys all the cultural connotations of "如火如荼". Therefore, the translator employs a domestication strategy and translates it as "seething with enthusiasm", so that the audience in the target language can easily understand its connotation.

3.3.3 The Communicative Dimension

The translators should also focus on the communicative level, in which whether the author's overall communicative intention in the source language system is reflected in the target language system. [10]

Table 5 Analysis of Information Disparity in the Communicative Dimension

Source Text	Translation
Example 7: 虽然空间很小，但从这里走出来的风筝却不一样。--《引线乘风》	Although it's small and ordinary, the kites that fly out here are quite extraordinary. (*Chasing in the Wind*)
Example 8: 风筝的动作设计大多来自生活中常见的事物，把这些故事搬上天空，刘宝华对风筝的独特解读。--《引线乘风》	Most of the kite's motion designs are inspired by ordinary things and the kites are Liu's way of telling these everyday stories in the sky. (*Chasing in the Wind*)

In Example 7, this sentence means that Liu Baohua, as a kite enthusiast, has set up his kite-making studio in his own home. Despite the limited space, Liu Baohua's expertise in handcrafting enables him to produce kites that are distinct from those typically found in the market. " 走出来 " is a colloquial expression that is more commonly used in Chinese language and culture. The literal translation of this phrase is "walk out," which has the meaning of "strike" and "abandonment" in English. However, the source expression means "make out", employing Personification. The translator translates it as "fly out," which is a concise and clear translation that effectively conveys the original message, realizing the adaptive transformation of the communicative dimension.

As shown in Example 8, the phrase " 搬上 " does not refer to the action of moving, but rather implies the role of the kite as a storytelling medium. If this phrase were to be translated literally as "putting these stories into the sky", it would likely confuse the audience, as the phrase would fail to fulfill its communicative intent. In contrast, the translator has chosen to translate it as "telling", a choice that allows the audience to understand the meaning with greater ease and adapt to the screen space limitation.

In this regard, given the considerable discrepancies in the linguistic expressions of China and the West, translators must adapt to the translation ecosystem and ensure effective communication through appropriate free translating.

4. Conclusion

In the globalization, the use of new media platforms to spread Chinese culture to the global audience is becoming increasingly crucial. In documentary *China Bouquet,* translator, taking into account the characteristics of subtitle and language, has applied liberal translation, transliteration, add some essential information and omit some repetitive expressions to facilitate the transformation of linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions. It has played an invaluable role in spreading Chinese traditional culture to the world and is conducive to further promoting cultural exchanges.

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