

A Study on Chinese Translation of English-Japanese Movie Titles from the Perspective of Linguistic Conformity Theory

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Abstract. Movie translation plays an important role in the dissemination of a movie, just like the trademark and promotion card of a movie. It not only needs to match the style of the original movie, but also needs to have commercial value. The quality of title translation directly affects the box office and audience attendance. This paper takes the 250 movies with the highest Douban ratings as the research object, and collects relevant data by constructing a database. Through the literature survey, it is found that the current Chinese translation of movie title translation is mostly studied from the perspective of Purpose Theory and Dynamic Equivalence Theory, but a systematic framework has not yet been formed, so it is difficult to solve the problem of actual title translation. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the current problems in movie translation from the perspective of linguistic conformity theory, including copying and reproducing, formatting translation, unclear meaning, and words deviating from the theme. This paper argues that the proposed title translation should truly and accurately reflect the core of the original title and more deeply combine with the local culture, with the intention of providing new perspectives for movie translation to improve the translation quality of Chinese titles.

Keywords: Movie Title, Linguistic Conformity Theory, Translation Research, Translation Criticism, Data Analysis.

1. Introduction

As an art form integrating vision, hearing and emotion, movie is one of the important carriers of cultural communication and dissemination. Movie title is the eye of the movie, which has the dual effects of art appreciation and commercial advertisement, and directly plays the role of guidance and publicity. As the identifier and the first visual mark of the movie, the title carries the emotion, theme and commercial value of the movie (Ryu, 2020) [1] A good title can not only convey the content of the movie, but also arouse the interest of the audience, thus obtaining high box office (Bai, 2018). [2] In today's globalization, cross-cultural communication of films has become increasingly frequent and important, and one of the key links is the translation of films. Therefore, the quality of title translation directly affects the acceptance and box office performance of movies in different cultural contexts. China has long been an important market for Western and Japanese films, and in this context, the translation of movie titles is particularly important.

Scholars believe that the translation of movie titles is the most complex compared to other texts (Kaneeva & Bagdasaryan, 2021). [3] Past studies have mainly focused on Purpose Theory and Dynamic Equivalence Theory, trying to solve the dilemmas in translation through these theoretical frameworks. However, in the actual process of movie translation, tricky problems are often encountered, and it becomes a serious challenge to accurately convey the emotions and themes of the original film while conforming to the cultural background of the target audience (Sdobnikov, 2019).[4]

In this paper, we will try to introduce this new theory in the field of movie translation through the lens of linguistic conformism. Linguistic Conformity Theory emphasizes the flexibility of language use and communicative purposes, and is particularly applicable to film translation involving different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Through this theory, this paper will explore how to better conform to the language habits, cultural cognition and aesthetic orientation of the target audience in the translation of film titles, so as to realize the effective communication of films.

By analyzing the data of the 250 films with the highest Douban ratings and comparing them with examples, this paper will explore the strategies and characteristics of different regions in title translation, with a view to providing a new idea and method for film translation. Through this new

perspective, this paper is expected to inject new vitality into the research and practice in the field of film translation and contribute to the global dissemination of films in this paper.

2. Literature Review

In the field of movie translation, scholars have conducted in-depth discussions with different theoretical perspectives. Purpose Theory and Dynamic Equivalence Theory have been widely utilized as the two mainstream approaches to solving translation problems. Purpose theory emphasizes that the ultimate goal of translation is to produce the desired effect in the society of the target language, and its translation strategy emphasizes adapting to the cultural and linguistic habits of the receiver. Dynamic reciprocity theory, on the other hand, focuses on maintaining the equivalence of information in the translation process and emphasizes the transmission of similar information and emotions in different cultural contexts. Zu (2021), [5] from the relevance theory, puts forward the importance of background knowledge in translation. Scholars have studied the manipulative behavior of translators in audition translation from the perspective of translator subjectivity (Chaume, 2019; Fuentes-Luque, 2019) [6], and some scholars have considered it from a cross-cultural perspective (Tukhtarova, Issakova, Kussaiynova, Kenzhemuratova, & Nassyritdinova, 2021) [7], including examining cultural inequalities from a postcolonial perspective (Chow, 2023; Alyfia, & Ali, 2021) [8], or discussing them in terms of the inherent differences in language systems (Sari, & Zamzani, 2020; Samokhval, & Paslavaska, 2023; Trupej, 2019) [9]. With the development of the times, ephemeral studies are also gaining attention (Perego, & Pacinotti, 2020) [10], and scholars such as Deng and Yu (2022) [11] and Liu (2022) [12] discuss the development and future of machine translation in audiovisual translation. Jin (2023) [13] discusses from a disciplinary point of view that film translation is an interdisciplinary study that needs to integrate theoretical knowledge from the fields of translation, cinematography, communication, and history, and emphasizes the need for an integrated research approach. However, these methods do not always achieve ideal results in solving practical problems in movie translation. Especially in the translation of film titles, there are problems such as copying and reproducing, formatting translation, unclear meaning, and words deviating from the theme. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the problem of movie translation from a new perspective and propose more practical solutions.

"Linguistic Adaptation Theory" is a concept originated from the theory of biological evolution and later introduced into the study of pragmatics, which is an important theory in translation. Founded by Jef Verschueren, a famous Belgian linguist and secretary-general of the International Society for Pragmatics, the theory emphasizes that the use of language is a process of making language work, and stresses that the purpose of translation is to make the translated text naturally and fluently understood and accepted in the target culture (1995). German scholar Christian Nida, on the other hand, is a representative figure of the theory, who believes that users constantly choose the appropriate linguistic approach according to the needs of the communicative environment in order to achieve communicative purposes. Conformity refers to the mutual matching and adapting relationship between the language use environment and the language structure. The theory focuses on the intermingling of language and culture and tries to realize the best fit between the source language and the target language in the translation process, which has made great contributions to the field of cross-cultural communication and translation research.

This paper is concerned with how to accurately convey the source language information through translation and make it produce the same, or even better, effect in the target culture. This paper will discuss the issue from various levels, such as language, culture and communication, aiming to deeply analyze the phenomenon of linguistic conformity in the process of translation, and to provide substantial guidance and suggestions for the translation of movie titles.

For the theory of linguistic conformity, past studies have mainly focused on several aspects. Yuan Binye (2002) in "The Implications of Linguistic Conformity Theory for Translation" and other related scholars pointed out the main translation modes of linguistic conformity theory, including generalized

translation, interpretive translation, ellipsis and so on, through specific examples, and analyzed them mainly from the perspectives of direct translation and Italian translation of film titles. He illustrates the problem of exaggerated translation in movie translation by combining the movie titles and shows that the translation of movie titles needs to conform to the original movie content and value orientation. However, these conclusions are not enough to improve the quality of existing movie translations, and many problems still exist. This paper will explore how to better apply this theory in movie translation from the perspective of linguistic conformity theory. Linguistic Conformity Theory emphasizes the process by which a language user chooses linguistic means according to the needs of the communicative context in order to achieve the communicative intention. In movie translation, this means that translators need to flexibly apply translation strategies according to different cultural backgrounds, audience groups and communication purposes, so as to ensure that the translated title is both faithful to the original film and appealing to the target audience. Through this new perspective, this paper can provide a more flexible and dynamic solution for movie translation, so as to enhance the quality of the translated title and the communication effect of the movie.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data collection and screening

In the study of translation of movie titles, data research is the basic research method (Peña-Cervel, & Ovejas-Ramírez, 2022) [14]. In this study, the 250 movies with the highest ratings on Douban were firstly selected through the ranking of Douban ratings. As an influential movie evaluation platform in China, Douban has a high representativeness and reference value.

3.2. Data Analysis and Comparison

Through the establishment of a database, the title translations of the selected films were systematically collected and organized, including the translated titles and their corresponding original titles in each region. On this basis, the translations from different regions are compared and analyzed, and the commonalities and differences are explored in order to find out the linguistic adaptation strategies for title translation.

3.3. Introduction of linguistic adaptation theory

In the process of analysis, the theoretical framework of language conformity theory is especially introduced to examine the flexibility and communicative purpose of translation strategies in different regions from the perspective of language use, and to explore how it affects the final effect of title translation.

3.4. Example Analysis and Conclusion Summarization

Through the dissection of specific cases, combined with the theoretical support of linguistic conformism, the practical problems of title translation are analyzed in depth, and new strategies applicable to film translation are summarized. At the same time, the characteristics of translation in different regions are summarized to provide practical guidance and theoretical basis for film translation.

Through the design and implementation of the above methodology, this paper will comprehensively and deeply explore the application of linguistic compliance theory in movie translation, and provide theoretical support and practical reference for improving the quality of movie title translation.

4. Analysis and discussion

4.1. Linguistic Conformity Theory in Movie Translation

The theory of linguistic conformity is reflected in the translation of film titles in three main aspects: first, it is closely related to the cultural context (Zairjanovna, Tulaboevna, Mirsharapovna, & Allovidinovna, 2022) [15]. The translation of film titles reflects not only the customs of a region, but also political, historical, scientific, philosophical, customary, geographical, religious beliefs and ways of thinking. Secondly, it responds to the context of microcosmization and commercialization. Under the influence of the current commercial and visual culture, the audience tends to be characterized by impatience and flatness. Therefore, movie translation needs to conform to the competitive situation in the context of commercial culture in order to arouse the audience's interest and desire to watch, so as to pull the movie box office. Finally, it conforms to the different levels of appreciation of the general audience. Successful movie translation needs to integrate translation with real life and cater to the audience's tastes and appreciation levels by keeping up with the times and adapting to the living environment (Turg'unova, 2022) [16].

Movie translation is also a reflection of culture, which can directly reflect the cultural and humanistic environment in the target language. Even in different regions of the same country, their translation styles will have their own emphasis and distinctive regional characteristics. Some titles emphasize the "other" in translation to increase the exotic flavor (Dore, 2020) [17]. By analyzing and comparing the translations of film titles across the Taiwan Strait and in three places, this paper can experience the value of plurality in Chinese culture more deeply. It is not difficult to find that mainland China's film titles are often closely related to the original titles of the films, favoring direct translation (Yuan, 2022) [18], and the overall style is relatively rigorous and upright; Hong Kong's translations tend to be more life-oriented and urbanized, sometimes combined with the Cantonese dialect, and the style is lively, free and grounded; and Taiwan's translations directly state the theme of the film, which not only summarizes the content of the film, but also takes into account the Chinese characters and the Chinese language. On the other hand, Taiwanese translations directly state the theme of the movie, which not only summarizes the content of the movie, but also takes into account the multiple meanings of the Chinese characters and the clever use of multiple sounds and meanings.

Through the above discussion, this paper concludes that the theory of linguistic conformity plays an important role in movie translation. Next, this paper will study in depth how to use linguistic compliance theory in specific movie translations in order to improve the quality and effect of translation.

4.2. The Specific Application of Linguistic Conformity Theory in Movie Translation

The adaptability of language is the core of language function, which is crucial to ensure effective communication. When examining language from the perspective of adaptability, attention must be paid to four dimensions: adaptability of language structure, adaptability of contextual relations, dynamic adaptability and the process of adaptability. Language is characterized by three important features: variability, negotiability and adaptability. The translation of movie titles also reflects a language-based communicative endeavor that requires comprehensive consideration of myriad social, cultural and historical factors in order to achieve a level of reciprocity that is both consistent with the original meaning and understandable and acceptable to the audience. This paper will briefly analyze two aspects: adaptation of linguistic structure and adaptation of contextual relations. In existing translation studies, the translation strategies of movie titles can be broadly categorized into three types: phonetic, direct and Italian translation (Chi & Ma, 2018; Lotfollahi & Moinzadeh, 2012) [19]. Depending on the social background, language, and culture, the preference of translation strategies is expressed accordingly (Iglukova, & Usataya, 2019) [20]. The object of this paper is the Chinese translations of English and Japanese movies, which differ between the mainland, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, which belong to the same Chinese character cultural circle, due to different historical backgrounds.

4.2.1. Direct translation or direct use of film titles

In European and American films, titles are often short and clear (Maa & Garrido, 2020), and are often based on names of people or places (Shi, 2014, 607) [21]. For example, *Forrest Gump* is named after a person, and the Chinese translations of the film use direct and meaningful translations of the name, i.e., *Forrest Gump* and *Forest Fools*, respectively. Other titles based on human names, such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, and *Othello*, are typical examples.

The basis of naming by place name, such as the drama film *Casablanca*, retains the toponymic character of the original title, *Casablanca*, in the translation. Released in 1942, the movie followed the Allied and Axis powers' contest in North Africa at that time, which was immediately recognizable to the audience at that time. The war and romance film *Pearl Harbor*, translated as *Pearl Harbor*, is equally straightforward, pointing out that the film recounts the Japanese sneak attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, which became the trigger for the outbreak of the Pacific War in World War II. Similar examples include "Paris, Texas" translated as "Paris, Texas" and "Wall Street" translated as "Wall Street". Direct and phonetic translations of English movie titles are more commonly used in various languages, such as Persian and Spanish (Lotfollahi & Moinzadeh, 2012, p. 511; Peña-Cervel & Ovejas-Ramírez 2022, p. 98) [22].

In the case of Japanese films, the use of Chinese characters retains more than half of the same meaning as Chinese characters, providing considerable convenience for translators. This allows translators to directly follow the original Chinese character titles without making any changes. For example, the direct translation of *Rashomon* as *Rashomon*, *Kamata March* as *Kamata March*, and *Wind Forest Volcano* as *Wind Forest Volcano* belong to the unique characteristics of Japanese movie titles.

The above analysis shows that when translating titles containing names of people and places, there are more phonetic and direct translation methods, and due to the similar Chinese character system between China and Japan, the method of direct portability is also adopted without too much processing. This not only preserves the exotic flavor of the original text, but also makes the audience feel more intuitive, reflecting the phonetic aspect of conformity.

4.2.2. Expanding the Italian translation on the basis of retaining the original meaning

In the process of title translation in this part, there is a lexical/cultural mismatch between the source language and the target language. The theory of linguistic conformity guides translators to try their best to bridge this mismatch, such as translating the title into a four-word format that is in line with the expression characteristics of Chinese (the target language), and is also in line with the aesthetics of the audience in the target language, which can enhance audience favoritism.

This strategy aims at conveying cultural elements and pursuing better publicity effects, not simply sticking to the literal structure of the original title, but expanding it appropriately on the basis of retaining the original title in order to add color (Nikitina, 2023) [23]. This strategy is categorized into three ways: prefixed, suffixed and remarked. For example, the translation of *Speed* into *Life and Death* emphasizes the sense of urgency and action, which belongs to prefixed translation. On the other hand, the American animated film *Mulan* is translated as *Hua Mulan* by adding the family name "Hua", so that the Chinese audience understands that it reflects the heroine of Chinese legend, which belongs to the postfix translation.

In terms of note translation, "Sissi" is translated as "Princess Sissi", and by adding the word "Princess" to the identity of the main character of the movie, it reminds people of this person in European history and does not create ambiguity.

4.2.3. Using Ecological Translation to Abandon the Original Name and Sublimate the Italian Translation

In the first and second parts of the book, there are phonetic and lexical changes, i.e., the translator applies the theory of linguistic conformity to make changes in these two aspects. In this part, the translator's initiative is maximized in order to make the translated title more in line with the idiom of the target language, better received and understood by the audience, attracting eyeballs and increasing

the box office. That is, in the process of translation, the translator bridges the gap between the original language and the target language due to geographic, cultural, social and other reasons from the syntactic point of view, flexibly adjusts the structure of each vocabulary word, and changes the lexical properties and expressions from the perspective of culture, acceptance, and aesthetics in order to achieve the purpose of dynamic equivalence. Therefore, the translation of the title appears to be at the language level on the surface, but in fact it cannot be separated from the cultural connotation behind the language.

In view of the feature that European and American film titles are directly named after people or places, if they do not belong to the adaptation of familiar literary masterpieces, it is often difficult for Chinese viewers who are not familiar with the local culture and history to realize the meaning of the titles. In this case, the theory of cultural conformity should be adopted, and the Italian translation method should be used to find an alternative way to clarify the theme (Nicolae, 2020) [24]. For example, the translation of *The Waterloo Bridge* has gone through several revisions and finally adopted the form of "Soul Break Blue Bridge", which not only retains the central word of the original title "bridge", but also faithfully conveys the main idea of the film through the Italian translation, with concise words, poignant and beautiful. It is also a poignant and elegant translation of the original title, reflecting the deep heritage of Chinese culture.

Another example is *Gone with the Wind*, which is directly translated by Hong Kong and Taiwan as *Gone with the Wind*, conveying the feeling of "passing away with the wind", but slightly lacking in the sense of the times. The mainland uses the Italian translation of "Gone with the Wind", which highlights the turbulent background of the United States before and after the Civil War - "Gone with the Wind", and also points out the main character - "Beauty". "Gone with the Wind", which vividly conveys the personal struggle and love in the big era, implying the sense of "the mountains and rivers are shattered and the wind is fluttering, and the world is floating and raining". Sublimation not only occupies an important position in the translation of movie titles, but is also the primary translation strategy in the translation of animation movie titles (Wang & Ji, 2021, p. 88) [25].

As mentioned above, from direct translation to extended Italian translation to Italian sublimation, each translation technique focuses on the conformity of cultural, historical and emotional factors to different degrees, which reflects the important role of linguistic conformity theory in movie translation (Wang, & Ji, 2021).

4.3. Problems in Movie Translation in the Perspective of Linguistic Conformity Theory

Verschueran (1999) pointed out in his book that both communicative context and linguistic context are very important in intercultural communication. Among them, communicative context is divided into physical world, psychological world and social world. The psychological world refers to the cognitive and emotional aspects such as the personality, emotions, desires and intentions of the two communicators, while the social domain refers to the norms in the social environment and occasions that regulate the speech behavior of the speaker and the listener. In the translation of movie titles, it can be concluded that any communication cannot be separated from the context, and that the cultural proprietary items are the products of cultural defaults in terms of historical traditions, religious beliefs, culture and art, living environment and social development of the communicators, and their significant differences cannot be ignored. When China introduces foreign movies, cultural treatment is especially important in movie translation, however, the following problems often exist.

4.3.1. Errors and Ambiguities in Direct Translation

Due to the differences in geography, culture, history, society and so on in each country, the direct introduction of certain information will lead to the audience being at a loss and difficult to understand, therefore, the translator needs to give full consideration to the psychological and social world of the target language countries, the original information in the British and American movie titles, which contain many slang or technical terms, if the lack of knowledge of the background or sloppiness in the translation of sloppiness and carelessness, simple copying and reproducing, it is easy to result in mistranslation. Dwyer (2019) and Tee, Animi, Siau, Amirdabbaghian (2022) have pointed out that the

translation of fans in today's audiovisual translation has increased flexibility along with a slight distortion of meaning.

For example, the American drama film *American Beauty* is simply translated as *American Beauty* in mainland China, which creates an obvious misunderstanding of the meaning. In fact, the "American Beauty" in the title refers to the red rosebud in English, which is different from the general understanding. The Taiwanese translation of the title "*American Heart - Rose Love*" is relatively more relevant to the original meaning.

4.3.2. Confusion Caused by Formalized Translation

It is mentioned in the theory of linguistic conformity that the social background of the target language as well as its linguistic habits should be respected. Due to the historical era and expression habits, in Hong Kong and Taiwan, there are often film titles that are very different from the original ones, and the titles do not remind the readers of anything related to the original movie, making people feel uncertain. For example, *The Shawshank Redemption* is directly translated as *The Shawshank Redemption* in the Mainland, while it is translated as *The Thrill of it All 1995* in Taiwan, and *Dark of the Moon and High Flying* in Hong Kong. Compared to the mainland, Hong Kong and Taiwan have a higher degree of tolerance in terms of cultural integration, but also due to commercial factors, resulting in translations that are sometimes too fancy and deviate from the original meaning of the movie. Although this kind of translation is in line with the naming characteristics of Hong Kong and Taiwan movies at that time, it is also too general and loses the eye-catching communication characteristics that movies must have.

To sum up, these problems are particularly prominent in movie translation, which requires a more precise translation strategy to ensure the accurate transmission of cultural elements. At the same time, it is also necessary to combine the academic achievements in the fields of cultural studies and linguistics to improve the quality of translation.

4.4. Practical Application of Linguistic Conformity Theory in Movie Translation

As a special form of translation, movie translation is different from literary translation. The translation of movie titles has the characteristics of both film and television translation and title translation, and it strives to be concise, clear, attractive to the audience and focused. The audience's understanding of a movie often starts from its title, and appropriate translation of the title can reveal the content and main idea and enhance the attraction to the audience. Therefore, this translation process faces unique challenges in terms of cultural transmission and communicative purpose. In order to better achieve this purpose, this paper puts forward the following suggestions:

4.4.1. Accurately Restore the Essence of the Film Title

Context is dynamic, and movie title is a special form of textual expression. While conveying the essence of the original text, it is also necessary to consider whether the essence of the storyline can be reflected, so as to ensure the accuracy and vividness of the translation. In movie translation, the concept of linguistic conformism should be adopted to solve the interference of cultural proprietary items. The title, as the first impression of the movie, carries the core information of the movie. Therefore, translation should strive to accurately and truthfully reflect the essence of the original title. This can be done by drawing on the modal theory to understand the process of transmission of movie titles in a culture so as to better preserve their cultural characteristics and connotations.

4.4.2. Combination of Localization and Ecological Translation Studies

Proposed by Hu Gengshen, a professor at Tsinghua University, Ecological Translation Studies, guided by Darwin's theory of biological evolution and drawing on ancient Chinese ecological wisdom such as the unity of heaven and mankind, specifically elaborates on translation from the theory of translation adaptive selection, i.e., translation is a process of alternating cycles of translator's selection and translator's adaptation under the principle of multi-dimensional adaptive selection and selective adaptation. Translators need to convert from three dimensions of adaptation: linguistic, cultural and

communicative in the translation process. This linguistic dimension of adaptation conversion is carried out in different aspects and dimensions. Localization is an indispensable part of film translation. By flexibly applying the theory of ecological translation, translation can be studied holistically from the perspective of ecology, so as to make translation closer to the habits, customs and tastes of the target culture. The ecological translation theory proposed by Prof. Hu Gengshen provides strong theoretical support for this (Hu, 2006).

4.4.3. Strengthening the Communication of Personal and Geographical Names by Adopting the Intentional Translation Method

Translators need to pay attention to the adaptive selective conversion of bilingual communicative intent in the process of translation. This adaptive selective conversion of communicative dimensions requires translators to focus on the communicative aspect of the selective conversion in addition to the conversion of linguistic information and the transmission of cultural connotations, and to pay attention to whether or not the communicative intent of the original text can be reflected in the translated text. In the case of using the name of a person or place as the title of a movie, it is recommended to adopt the Italian translation method to enhance the effect of cultural communication. By adopting supplementary Italian translations such as prefixed, suffixed and remarks on the basis of the original name, the audience can understand and resonate more easily, thus attracting more viewers.

These suggestions synthesize several translation theories, such as linguistic conformity theory, modal theory, ecological translation science, etc., aiming to provide more scientific and accurate guiding principles for movie translation to achieve better cultural transmission and communicative effects.

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