

Application of Eco-Translatology in Game Subtitle Localization: A Case Study of "Black Myth: Wukong"

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Abstract. This paper examines the phenomenon-level game "Black Myth: Wukong" using the eco-translatology framework of "three-dimensional transformation" to systematically investigate the cultural communication strategies in the process of game subtitle localization. Through close reading and comparative analysis, the study focuses on how translators balance the preservation of Chinese cultural essence with the acceptability in the target culture. Findings show that in the cultural dimension, imagery reconstruction and semantic compensation strategies allow traditional cultural symbols like Nuo opera and land temples to be cross-culturally reborn; in the communicative dimension, discourse reconstruction and intertextual mapping effectively convey political metaphors and Eastern philosophical wisdom embedded in character relationships; in the linguistic dimension, rhetorical devices such as alliteration and dashes are creatively employed to retain poetic qualities of Chinese while conforming to English expression norms. This research aims to offer an innovative path for cultural export in the digital age and provide useful insights into the globalization of the gaming industry.

Keywords: Eco-translatology; Game Subtitle Translation; Black Myth: Wukong.

1. Theoretical Framework of Eco-Translatology and Localization Shift in Game Subtitles

Eco-translatology breaks the traditional binary paradigm in translation studies, placing translation behavior within a dynamic system of "language-culture-communication" (Hu Gengshen, 2013). Its essence lies in deconstructing the source language ecological system and adaptively reconstructing it in the target language environment. The theory innovatively proposes the meta-proposition that "translation is ecological balance," requiring a topological isomorphism between linguistic form, cultural gene, and communicative intention (Chen & Li, 2020). In game subtitle localization, this ecological balance manifests as cross-media transcoding of cultural symbols: the translator must preserve the cultural gene of the source text while reconstructing the target player's cognitive topological structure. For instance, in "Black Myth: Wukong," the localization process essentially reshapes the Eastern mythological system through topological transformation to achieve cross-cultural transplantation of player experience.

2. Cultural Communication Value and Translation Challenges in "Black Myth: Wukong"

By modernizing the classic novel "Journey to the West," "Black Myth: Wukong" has become a phenomenal case of cultural export, attracting players both domestically and internationally. The game narrative integrates Taoist metaphysics, Nuo opera masks, and other Eastern symbols, reinterpreting Chinese mythology through AAA-level audiovisual language, echoing Jenkins' (2006) theory of transmedia storytelling. However, its localization faces multiple challenges.

The foremost is cultural distance. Symbols like "land temple" and "Nuo mask" have deep Chinese connotations but often lack direct equivalents in Western contexts, creating semantic vacuums. Additionally, ideological differences pose difficulties; for example, the implicit power metaphors of the heavenly court in Chinese culture clash with Western individualism, complicating accurate ideological translation. Finally, differences in linguistic form also led to poetic loss when translating Chinese poetic expressions into Western languages.

3. Practice Innovation of the "Three-Dimensional" Adaptive Transformation Theory in Subtitle Localization of "Black Myth: Wukong"

3.1 Cultural Dimension: Topological Deformation and Cultural Gene Regeneration

Game text translation in the global context transcends simple linguistic conversion, becoming a dynamic reconstruction of cultural symbols. Using "topological deformation," translators can retain the genetic sequence of the source culture while adapting to the target cultural context.

Example 1: Original: “土地庙” Translation: “Keeper’s Shrine” Analysis: Rather than using the standard "Earth Temple," the translator invokes "Shrine" to align with Western fantasy's concept of a guardian, thus restructuring the spiritual core of land deity worship into an accessible fantasy schema.

Example 2: Original: “百戏傩面” Translation: “Folk Opera Mask” Analysis: Instead of transliterating as "Nuo Mask," which might create a terminological barrier, the translator uses "Folk" for folk roots, "Opera" for artistic media, and "Mask" for performative function, forming a cognitive bridge.

3.2 Communicative Dimension: Cross-Cultural Transfer of Political Metaphors

Game narrative translation under globalization is essentially an ideological discourse negotiation. Through intertextual mapping and contextual reconstruction, the translator conveys the political subtext of power structures like the heavenly court.

Example: “又想唬我回去当神仙” Translation: “to threaten me to obey and serve once more” Analysis: “Threaten” expresses the tension; “obey and serve” implies forced submission, uncovering the deeper implication of hegemonic power.

Example: “有些人却是越发放心不下” Translation: “his choice to forgo the life above only fueled their mistrust” Analysis: The mistrust represents the gods' fear of Wukong's power and challenge to order, effectively transformed from subtle Chinese expression.

Example: “以霹雳手段，显菩萨心胸” Translation: “Cleanse the world with blood, and grow lotuses in it. That is your destiny” Analysis: Blood and lotus form a dual image of strength and compassion, aligning with Wukong's dual nature.

3.3 Linguistic Dimension: Sensory Encoding and Poetic Construction

Game text requires a unique "playability poetics," demanding a shift from semantic fidelity to playability. Through rhythm mapping, interface adaptation, and multimodal synergy, translators achieve ecological equivalence.

Example: “毫毛分身” Translation: “Hair Clone” Analysis: “Hair” preserves Taoist imagery; “Clone” activates sci-fi association, achieving cross-temporal dialogue.

Example: “师傅，我保住了。经，我取到了。” Translation: “My Master - safe! The Scriptures - sound” Analysis: The dash creates rhythmic pauses, preserving poetic parallelism while enhancing emotional resonance.

Example: Combat commands (e.g., Poke, Thrust, Slash, Spin Sweep) Analysis: Onomatopoeic and alliterative strategies map the physical action to sound and motion, enhancing immersion through linguistic-auditory synergy.

4. Conclusion

This study proposes the "topological deformation" strategy to reconstruct cultural symbols like Nuo masks and land deity worship, bridging semantic vacuums and enabling cross-cultural sensory experience. It adopts a three-level translation model to decode political metaphors of the heavenly court, achieving metaphorical explicitness and digital reinterpretation of Eastern philosophy. On the

linguistic level, poetic rhythm compensation strategies build sensory encoding systems, transforming Chinese phonetic aesthetics into multimodal interactive language.

This research extends eco-translatology into digital media, using concepts like "topological reorganization," "third-order translation," and "sensory interface" to break traditional paradigms and promote immersive dissemination of Chinese cultural values in the digital era.

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