

A Study of Chinese-English Subtitle Translation Techniques in *Amazing China* from a Skopos-Theoretic Perspective

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Abstract: As a vital carrier of documentary-based communication, subtitle translation determines audiences' comprehension and acceptance of content. Co-produced by CCTV and BBC, *Amazing China* presents China's wildlife resources and varied natural landscapes, owing its global popularity partly to high-quality subtitles. Drawing on Skopos Theory, this paper explores its subtitle-translation techniques under the skopos, coherence and fidelity principles, covering such strategies as addition, omission and word-order shift. It proves these methods balance cultural output and audience receptivity, offering references for cross-cultural subtitle translation to facilitate Chinese culture's global outreach.

Keywords: Skopos Theory, *Amazing China*, Subtitle Translation.

1. Introduction

Against This chapter mainly elaborates on the research background, research significance, literature review and research methods. Against the backdrop of globalization, *Amazing China*, a model Sino-foreign co-production documentary, confronts great difficulties in subtitle translation. Based on Skopos Theory, this paper explores practical translation techniques for documentary subtitles. It reviews domestic and international studies on Skopos Theory and subtitle translation, identifies gaps in existing research, and adopts literature research, case analysis and induction as primary research approaches.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter provides a detailed account of the core theory guiding the present research-Skopos theory. Proposed by Hans Vermeer, the theory holds that translation is a purposeful communicative act, encapsulated in the maxim that the end justifies the means[1]. The chapter focuses on the three fundamental rules of Skopos theory: the Skopos rule (the overriding principle that determines translation strategies), the coherence rule (intratextual coherence, requiring fluency and acceptability of the target text), and the fidelity rule (intertextual coherence, demanding that the target text maintain a relationship with the source text). These principles provide the theoretical basis for the subsequent analysis of subtitle translation methods.

2.1. Overview of Skopos Theory

Skopos theory, proposed by Hans Vermeer, posits that translation is a purposeful human communicative act, not mere mechanical conversion. The translational purpose determines the whole process, i.e., "the end justifies the means." The activity involves the author, translator, and target receiver[2]. The translator, no longer a servant, decides strategies based on the brief, including client's intention and audience expectations. For subtitle translation, the main purpose is accurate information delivery and cultural dissemination, influencing the handling of culture-loaded

terms.

2.2. Core Principles of Skopos Theory

Skopos Theory has three core principles guiding subtitle translation. The skopos rule holds translation is governed by its goal: subtitles aim for quick audience understanding and resonance under time and space limits, so target readers' acceptability comes first. The coherence rule requires intratextual readability, natural target language and image-matched plain subtitles to avoid confusion. The fidelity rule stresses intertextual loyalty to original core information and cultural meanings, not rigid word-for-word equivalence, and it is subordinate to the skopos rule.

3. Analysis of the Subtitles in *Amazing China*

This chapter summarizes three subtitle features linked to Skopos Theory's rules. Distinctive local place names and endemic wildlife follow the skopos rule to promote Chinese culture through literal or transliteration. Unfamiliar geographic and folk terms comply with the coherence rule and demand explanatory translation for Western viewers. Rich aesthetic connotations fit the fidelity rule, requiring a balance of foreignization and domestication instead of mechanical word-for-word translation.

4. Subtitle Translation Techniques in *Amazing China* from a Skopos-Theoretic Perspective

Based on Skopos Theory's three principles, this core chapter analyzes six subtitle translation strategies with cases: Generalization-Specification Shift, Addition, Active-Passive Shift, Omission, Word Order Shift, Part-of-Speech Shift. Translators flexibly use them to balance cultural output and audience comprehension within subtitle time and space constraints[3].

4.1. Translation Techniques based on Skopos Rule

Guided by the Skopos Rule, translators flexibly adjust wording from audiences' perspective with targeted translation strategies to realize cultural communication and audience comprehension.

Generalization-specification shift switches between general abstract and specific concrete semantics to avoid mistranslation and Chinglish while retaining original core meaning.

Example

Original:

这为数百万的候鸟们和不愿被打扰的濒临灭绝的物种们，创造了宝贵的环境。

Translation: This creates valuable habitats for millions of migratory birds and endangered species that prefer not to be disturbed.

The passage depicts Jiangsu Yuantuojiang wetland, a vital resting ground for birds. The translation adopts specification: the vague general Chinese word “环境” is replaced by the specific term “habitat”. It clearly delivers the wetland's unique ecological value to foreign viewers, popularizes ecological knowledge, lets readers immediately understand the land's special significance for wildlife, and fully complies with the Skopos Rule.

Addition supplements semantic, rhetorical or cultural information to complete meaning and fit overseas audiences' cognition.

Example

Original:

长白山位于中国的东北部，因一年四季常年积雪而得名。

Translation: Located in the northeast of China, the Changbai Mountains is named after its iconic scenery of being perpetually white almost all year long.

This text introduces Changbai Mountains for foreign readers unfamiliar with China's geography. The added phrase “iconic scenery” explains snow as the mountain's representative landscape, filling readers' cognitive gaps and smoothing the naming logic. Consistent with English science writing norms, the addition facilitates cross-cultural geographic introduction and complies with the Skopos Rule.

4.2. Translation Techniques based on Coherence Rule

The Coherence Rule demands readable, fluent subtitles matching English grammar and audiovisual rhythm, with strategies improving instant comprehension^[4].

Active-passive shift swaps active and passive structures to fit English preference for passive voice and boost textual coherence.

Example

Original:

人们通过沙土的粗细判断出了风向是东南风。因为最细小的粉尘飞得最远，集中落在了东南方位。而西北部的土壤沙粒则更加粗粝。河流经过的地方，沉积出了平坦的地带。

Translation: Scientists can tell the wind direction by the thickness of the loess. Because tiny dust particles are carried the furthest, they came to rest in the southeastern most part of the plateau. The sand in the northwest part of the plateau is much rougher. Where the river crossed, an alluvial plain was deposited.

The excerpt explains Loess Plateau geology. The Chinese active sentence without a clear doer is shifted to passive “was deposited”, taking landforms as consistent subjects. It avoids frequent subject switching, streamlines logical narration, fits documentary subtitle reading features and well embodies the Coherence Rule.

Omission cuts redundant content to simplify sentences for concise, idiomatic English subtitles.

Example

Original:

除了钙化物形成多彩湖泊之外，九寨沟还有中国最宽的瀑布，宽达270米的诺日朗瀑布。

Translation: Besides these magical lakes, Jiuzhaigou also has China's widest waterfall Nuorilang Waterfall, with a width of 270 meters.

The text introduces Jiuzhaigou scenery. It omits the obscure geological description “calcium deposits forming”, replacing it with “magical lakes”. The redundant professional information is removed to smooth narration, match documentary viewing rhythm and satisfy the Coherence Rule.

4.3. Translation Techniques based on Fidelity Rule

The Fidelity Rule demands translations retain the original core information and connotations without distortion after satisfying skopos and coherence. Its strategies prioritize accurate information transfer^[5].

Word order shift rearranges sentence elements to fit target syntax while keeping the original meaning intact.

Example

Original:

按当地人的说法，只有与这座神山有缘的人，才能一睹天池最壮美的景色。

Translation: According to the locals, people could only see the most imposing scenery here if they have a special mysterious connection with this ‘magical mountain’.

The text introduces Tianchi's local folklore and mysterious cultural vibe. Chinese puts the condition after the result, while English shifts the order into a “result + if condition” structure. No key messages or original folkloric meaning are lost. It realizes dynamic fidelity matching English logic and fulfills the Fidelity Rule.

Part-of-speech shift converts word classes for natural target-language expressions while fully keeping the original core information.

Example

Original: 只有最强最勇敢的攀登者才敢于挑战。

Translation: Only the bravest climbers around the world dare to take the challenge.

The excerpt describes the tough climb up Mount Siguniang. The Chinese verb “挑战” is shifted to the noun “challenge” to fit the fixed collocation “take the challenge”. This adjustment only changes grammar without distorting original meaning, preserving complete source information and complying with the Fidelity Rule.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Major Findings

Centered on Skopos Theory, this paper analyzes subtitles of *Amazing China*. The theory's three principles effectively guide documentary subtitling, requiring flexible strategies oriented toward audiences. Six complementary translation

methods are jointly adopted: Generalization-Specification Shift, Addition, Omission, Active-Passive Shift, Word Order Shift and Part-of-Speech Shift. Structural adjustments boost readability, while addition supplements cultural context. Ultimately, qualified subtitles balance cultural faithfulness and foreign viewers' acceptability.

5.2. Limitations and Prospects

This study still has limitations. Its single-documentary corpus lacks breadth and relies only on textual analysis without audience reception data. Future studies may adopt questionnaires or eye-tracking tests, and explore combining Skopos Theory with machine translation post-editing.

Acknowledgments

This work was funded by Huzhou College 2026 Foundation for Scientific Research and Training Project of Innovation and Entrepreneurship for College Students. It was conducted under the supervision of Ms Zhuang Yishu from

the Department of English, Huzhou College.

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