

A Brief Analysis of English Film Title Translation from the Perspective of the Strategies of Domestication and Foreignization

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Abstract: The film is a highly influential and popular audio-visual art. The title of a movie is the epitome and essence of its content. Films are both cultural arts and commercial products. An excellent film title translation plays an important role in promoting film transmission, which includes social functions such as conveying film information, showing the beauty of language and promoting box office revenue. As the continuous deepening of globalization and the prosperity of the China's film and television industry, there is an increasing number of foreign films entered the Chinese market and some influential and acclaimed Chinese films also accessed to international market. In this process, it is inevitable to involve the linguistic, cultural and aesthetic differences between the source language and the target language. Faced with the cultural differences in translation, the core issue is how to flexibly use translation strategies to have the translation of film titles to be the best. This paper analyzes the application of domestication and foreignization strategies in the process of translating English film titles, and discusses the interrelationship between these two strategies, the effects they achieved respectively and the development trend of them.

Keywords: English Film Title Translation; Domestication; Foreignization; Cultural Differences; Translation Strategies.

1. Introduction

Film is one of the major cultural media of today, and its influence on cultural exchanges has gradually expanded. The way films tell stories makes it easier for the public to accept and convey emotion directly to the audience. The diversity of the content of the film conveys different aspects of the country's culture to the audience, and reflects the cultural characteristics of the country and promotes the audience's understanding of different cultures. With the development of globalization and China's film and television industry, English movies have continuously entered the Chinese film market. Therefore, the translation of English movies has received extensive attention. Among them, the translation of film titles is particularly important. An excellent film title translation plays a crucial role in attracting audience's attention.

Good translation of an English film title must not only conform to the cultural background and spiritual needs of the target language, but also reflect the main content of the film in a concise manner. In the process of translation, we often use two strategies, namely, domestication and foreignization strategies. Therefore, in the second part, this paper will analyze the characteristics of English film titles by examples. In the third part will specifically analyze the influence of different factors on the translation of English film titles. In the fourth part, it gives the definition of domestication and foreignization strategies, recites several examples of applications of domestication and foreignization strategies in the translation of English film titles and analyses their advantages and disadvantages respectively. After that, it will discuss the interrelationship between this two strategies and their development trend. In the final part, it has a brief conclusion about the paper.

2. Features of English Film Titles

The title of the film may highlight the content of the film,

or reflect the main characters, or convey the information about the theme. English film titles are diverse and vivid, but most of them reflect the characteristics of conciseness, understandability, and attractiveness.

2.1. Conciseness

The main feature of the English film title is that the language is concise and the structure is simple. The title is just like the eyes for audience to look into a movie, and it is a high-level summary of the content of the film. The conciseness of the film title is expressed in three aspects. One is directly named after the hero(es) of the film. For instance, *Forrest Gump*, *Jane Eyre*, *Edward Scissorhands*, *Romeo and Juliet*, etc. The second is named after the place where the story happened. Such as, *Pearl Harbor*, *Casablanca*, *Jurassic Park*, *Titanic*, etc. The third is named after the movie's theme. For example, *Kill Bill*, *Serendipity*, *Ghost*, etc. Most of these film titles used only one or two words, short and concise, but they perfectly reflect the content of the film, leaving a deep impression on the audience.

2.2. Understandability

A film is usually considered as a manifestation of real life and a form of expression of art. Film is a popular art, produced for the audience, with the main purpose of attracting the audience. To make the audience resonate with the film, the most important thing is to avoid using some obscure words. Therefore, under the premise of reflecting the theme, the title of the film needs to conform to the audience's educational level and understanding ability, and strive to make the language popular and easy to understand so that the audience may understand the content of the story better as well as the style of the film, like, *Beauty and Beast*, *Rome Holiday* and *Princess Diaries*, *A Dog's Purpose*, etc. All these mentioned above used very simple words, it is very easy for audiences to get the main idea or theme of the movie and leave them a place of imagination. To the extent of the word selection, the

choice of words will vary for different audiences. Based on the main target audience of a film, the film's title is determined according to their level of education and comprehension. For example, as a children's animation, Alice in Wonderland use simple words in line with the children's ability to understand. And "Wonderland" can also raise children's imagination, and thus attracting their interest.

2.3. Attractiveness

To a certain extent, most of movies were produced for commercial purpose. An important measure of the success of a film is the box office. In order to survive and develop, producers must pay attention to the value of the box office. The mass media is constantly evolving and there are increasing number of movies are coming into the market. Therefore, in order to stand out from all kinds of movies, the title must be interesting, attracting the attention of the audience, arousing the interest of the audience, causing the audience to think, and willingly purchase tickets to enter the cinema. Take Dance with Wolves as an example, when people saw the title, they may think that how can people dance with wolves? Does it means literally? What is the "wolves" refer to? There are many movie titles of this type, such as, It Happened One Night, Silence of the Lamb, etc. All these movie titles are effective in arousing the audience's thoughts, thus arousing their interest in buying movie tickets and entering the cinema to find out more.

3. Analysis of Influential Factors of English Film Title Translation

The theme of the film is varied, and the title of the film is even more colorful. Film is a work of art as well as a commodity. Thus, in the production of films, both artistic factor and commercial one should be considered. If the artistic is overemphasized regardless of commercial factors, the box office cannot be guaranteed. Similarly, if a film only considers commerciality and ignores artistry, the film is inevitably too superficial and ultimately cannot be successful. The same is true for the translation of film titles. In the process of translation, we must consider both artistic and commercial. At the same time, the translation of the film title is also affected by many aspects.

3.1. Language and Culture Features

There are so many differences between Chinese and Western cultures. In the prolonged course of the development of China and the West, they have formed their own culture with distinctiveness. In the process of the formation of Chinese and Western cultures, due to the differences in terms of social background, natural environment, geographical location, history and other factors, the two cultures have great differences in thinking styles and language habits. "The Orientals and the Westerners have fundamental differences in their way of thinking. Our Chinese people are more comprehensive, reintegrating, implied, and subtle. Westerners lay emphasis on analysing, presenting twists and turns, excavating the deep meaning and describing the details".[19] These distinctions affect the translation of English film titles to a certain extent. The Chinese are concealed and implicit, while the Westerners are relatively straightforward and don't like to be mealy-mouthed. For example, It Happened One Night, Beauty and Beast, using a few simple words, can reflect the theme. Both the Chinese and western cultures are

rich in vocabulary with strong cultural colors. "It is essential to recognize that each has its own genius. That is to say, each language possesses certain distinctive characteristics which give it a special character".[19] English film titles often use people's names as title with strong individualism, like, Batman, Ironman, Spider-Man, etc. This individualism and heroism are very obvious in Western movies. The three, which have mentioned above, were translated into, "蝙蝠侠", "钢铁侠", "蜘蛛侠", respectively when they were introduced into Chinese market. The application of the word "侠" fully embodies Chinese characteristics, and perfectly demonstrates heroism in Western culture with Chinese martial arts culture. This kind of translation is not a word-to-word translation, but a translation of using words with similar meanings in Chinese culture, so that the audience can get the feelings that the film wants to express, and quickly have a resonate, thus obtaining better understanding of the film.

3.2. Aesthetic Ideas

In the translation of film titles, the differences in aesthetic ideas have also been a major impact on the process. The nation's general aesthetic idea has a direct or indirect impact on its language activity, and the English film titles translation is also a kind of cross-cultural activity. In China's aesthetic idea, it considers human beings as the aesthetic subject and emphasizes people's emotions and feelings so that it has strong subjective color. Western countries emphasize the unity of mind and reason and the harmony of form. They advocate taking objective things as the main part, emphasizing the importance of facts and making them more rational.[10] In China's traditional aesthetic concept, the parataxis is more popular. It emphasizes the symmetry and harmony in meaning. This aesthetic concept is especially obvious in Chinese ancient poetries as well as Chinese film titles, like, "东邪西毒". However, the hypotaxis is more important in western culture. They pay more attention to the structural integrity, such as, It Happened One Night. The very differences between China and the West in aesthetic ideas requires the translators a full consideration about the aesthetic meaning of the words, which need to be translated in their respective cultural backgrounds in the process of translating English film titles. The titles should be translated in accordance with the differences between Chinese and Western aesthetic ideas. After the English film titles are translated into Chinese, the Chinese audience can get the main content of the film initially from the title alone.

3.3. Commercial Factors

It has been mentioned above, that film production is a business act, which needs both art and box office. And the title of the film is undoubtedly an important means of attracting the audience. Therefore, when the English film title is introduced into the Chinese market, the translation of the film title is particularly important. There is no shortage of examples in the market where improperly translated titles have led to audiences misunderstanding the film's subject matter, thus affecting the box office revenue. Thus, in the process of translating the title of a movie, commerciality must be fully considered. To translate the title of the English film into a vivid and interesting Chinese one, it can not be just a word-for-word translation, but conducted on the basis of fully understanding the content of the film and the emotions that the film wants to convey, and then using the words in Chinese culture that express similar meanings to replace, so as to catch

the audience's eyes and fully achieve its promotional effect. It's not hard to see that the commercial factor plays a critical role in the process of English film title translation. The translation of film titles should not only attract the audience, but also meet the theme and fit the public aesthetic ideas. For example, the English film *Bathing Beauty* was translated into “出水芙蓉” in China. If it was translated literally, it would be “身穿泳装的女人”, which is neither concise nor attractive and also lack of beauty. But the idiom “出水芙蓉” not only matches the original name perfectly, but also reflects the scene where the actresses performed a synchronized swimming in the climax of the film. The fresh meaning of these four words in Chinese also shows the heroine's grace, and the connotation of this idiom is well known to the Chinese people so that it will easily stimulate the audience's imagination and get the information that the heroine is very beautiful at the first sight of the film title, and thus attracting their interests to enter the cinema.

4. Domestication and Foreignization Strategies in English Film Title Translation

In the process of translating English film titles, it is important to fully consider the factors which have been mentioned above, and select appropriate translation strategies to translate the title more in line with the aesthetic taste and thinking mode of Chinese audiences, and better reflect Chinese culture. There are many different translation methods. Typical of these are domestication and foreignization strategies. Domestication and foreignization were put forward by the well-known American translation theorist Lawrence Venuti in 1995 in *The Translator's Invisibility*.^[3] This chapter will analyze the application of domestication and foreignization strategy in English film title translation from three respects, and then discussing their interrelationship and the development trend.

4.1. The Application of Domestication Strategy in English Film Title Translation

The domestication strategy is commonly used in the translation process of English film titles, and plays an crucial role in promoting audience understanding of movies. This section will use three aspects to analyze the use of domestication strategy in the translation of film titles, that is definition, examples, and advantages and disadvantages.

4.1.1. The Definition of Domestication

The term “domestication” was proposed by L. Venuti in *The Translator's Invisibility*. Venuti allies it with Schleiermacher's description of translation that “leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the author toward him”.^[1] Domestication requires the translator to adopt a clear and fluent style, which is authentic and easy to read. It minimizes the strangeness of the foreign language text to the target reader, and does not see the trace of the translator in the translation, which is making the translation not look like it is translated, but like the original.^[9] Therefore, in the process of translation, domestication pays attention to the use of the culture related expressions of the target language to express the unknown or unfamiliar cultural connotations in the source language, so as to obtain a better effect on information convey and direct communication. Domestication translation helps readers to understand the

translation better and enhances the readability and appreciation of the translation.

4.1.2. Analysis of Specific Examples

The domestication strategy is a common used strategy in English film translation. It satisfies their needs mainly through the use of language that meets the reader's or audience's appreciation. Its main feature is to use the unique words of the target language to translate, and to express it in a way that is easier accepted by the reader or the audience, so as to realize the exchange of culture, language and customs. Here are some examples:

The first example is *Lolita*. According to Wikipedia, *Lolita* is an American tragedy drama produced in 1962, adapted from the novel of the same name. The film's main story is the male protagonist Humbert. During his teenage years, he had his first love with a 14-year-old girl, Anna Belle. Finally, she died of typhoid fever and thus causing Humbert's pedophile. When he reached middle age, he fell in love with the 12-year-old daughter Lolita of the landlord. In order to get close to Lolita, Humbert married the landlord and stepped forward to achieve his goal. The film inherited the original novel's name—*Lolita*, and after introduced into the Chinese market, it was translated as “一树梨花压海棠”. The expression of “一树梨花压海棠” is from one of Su Dongpo's poems, which is satirize his friend, Zhang Xian. When Zhang Xian was eighty years old, he got an 18-year-old concubine, so Su Dongpo made a poem. “梨花” is a metaphor for the white hair of the old man. “海棠” is a metaphor for the girl's tender. The background of the poem and the meaning behind it are highly similar to the story of *Lolita*. The film's title translation uses domestication strategy, which uses the allusion. The translated title thus implicitly expresses the main content of the film, making it easier for the audience to understand the film. Translating with a poem is in line with the aesthetics of the Chinese audience, which not only have the title be more beautiful than word-for-word translation, but also more attractive to the audience.

The second one is *Waterloo Bridge*, which is a black-and-white film in the United States. It was produced in 1940. The love story in the film touched the audience of generation after generation. It is regarded as one of immortal films with the most sad and beautiful romances in the history of film. As an early English film introduced to China, its translated title played an indelible role in making it endure on the Chinese screen. The film was originally called *Waterloo Bridge*, literal translation is “滑铁卢桥”, which is the promise land of male and female protagonists in the film. However, if literally translated as “滑铁卢桥”, it is not only lack of beauty, but can not reflect the love story in the movie neither. What's worse, audience may have thought it was a historical movie at first glance when they saw the name. The Chinese translation of the film is “魂断蓝桥”, which also uses the domestication translation method, citing the story in Zhuangzi. According to Wikipedia, in Zhuangzi, there is a story that “A scholar named Weisheng made an appointment with a girl to meet at the bridge. He waited for a long time, but the girl did not arrive. At this time, the river soared and drowned the bridge. In order to keep his words, the scholar refused to leave. Hugged the bridge pillar and drowned in the water.”^[4] In accordance with the “Xi'an Government Record”, the bridge is in Shaanxi. The bridge is in Lantian County, which is called “蓝桥”. The translator borrowed this allusion here, which made the translated name not only full of beauty, but also reflect the sad

and beautiful love story perfectly. Because of its profound cultural connotation, it left a deep impression to Chinese audience.[4]

There are many examples of using the domestication strategy to translate English movie titles. For example, *Gone With The Wind* is translated as “乱世佳人”. Compared with another translation “飘”, the translation of “乱世佳人” is more in line with the film content and the storyline of the novel, the word “乱世” points out a turbulent historical background. The word “佳人” reflects the beauty and courage of the heroine, and the use of the words “佳人” to describe a pretty woman is also quite Chinese. Another example is that *Flipped* has been translated as “怦然心动”. The original meaning of this word is “transformation or change”. In the slang, it means “ecstasy, high excitement”. The translator uses the meaning of “ecstasy” in the proverb, and translates it with the idiom “怦然心动”, expressing the pure love of the girl to the boy. It also reflects the girl fall in love with the boy at first sight. It is also a perfect expression of the line of the heroine in the film— “The first day I met Bryce Loski, I flipped”. In short, the domestication strategy is mainly based on the Chinese people’s way of thinking and language habits, with the target language reader as the center, to translate the film title.

4.1.3. The Advantages and Disadvantages of Domestication

The domestication strategy is the most commonly used translation strategy in film and television translation because its foothold is the reader, which can deal with the cultural factors of different countries. This translation strategy is highly respected by some old translators in China in the 1930s. They pay great attention to the deeper things that film and television works want to express.[18] It can be seen that the domestication strategy is more helpful to the audience to have a relatively deeper and better understanding of the content of the film in advance because it is in line with the aesthetic concept and thinking of the target language readers so that the film titles can better arouse the interest of the audience. It is conducive to the promotion of Chinese culture by embodying Chinese cultural elements.

The translation of the film title by the domestication strategy is usually expressed in the language of the target language that matches the content of the film, which is equivalent to giving the film a new name. Therefore, some unique elements in Western culture, or the cultural connotations embodied in them and Westerners’ ways of thinking and aesthetic ideas, are not well reflected. This affects the understanding of Western countries and is not conducive to cultural exchange and communication.

4.2. The Application of Foreignization Strategy in English Film Title Translation

The foreignization strategy was the other translation strategy which proposed by Venuti in 1995 in *The Translator’s Invisibility*. It is also frequently used in English film title translation. In this section, the foreignization strategy will be analyzed through three aspects as well: that is the definition, examples, and advantages and disadvantages.

4.2.1. The Definition of Foreignization

About foreignization, Schuttleworth&Cowie defined it as “a term used by Venuti to designate the type of translation in which a TT is produced which deliberately breaks target

conventions by retaining something of the foreignness of the original”.[12] It is the preferred choice of Schleiermacher, whose description is of a translation strategy where “the translator leaves the author in peace, as much as possible and moves the reader towards [the writer]”.(Schleiermacher 1813/2012: 49).[1] Foreignization respects the heterogeneity of the original text, which close to the language and content of the original text. It deliberately run counter to the language norms of the target language, and retain some exotic things in the original text.[9] In translation, the use of foreignization is to make the reader feel the language characteristics of foreign cultures, to absorb foreign language expressions. It requires translators to move closer to the authors, and to adopt the exotic language expressions corresponding to the SL to convey the content of the original text. The purpose of applying the foreignization method is to consider the differences of cultures, preserve and reflect the characteristics of foreign nationalities and language styles, and thus creating an exotic atmosphere for the target readers.

4.2.2. Analysis of Specific Examples

The foreignization strategy requires the translator to preserve the original concept, culture and semantics of the source text in the translation process, thus leading the reader or audience into the atmosphere of the original language culture, arousing the curiosity of the reader or the audience and giving them a feeling of freshness. Foreignization includes the level of pronunciation. For example, *Titanic* is translated as “泰坦尼克号”, *Romeo and Juliet* as “罗密欧与朱丽叶”, *Harry Potter* as “哈利波特”. Foreignization also includes the semantic level. For instance, *Rain Man* was translated as “雨人”, *The Lord of Rings* was translated as “指环王”, and *The Shawshank Redemption* was translated as “肖申克的救赎”. These translated names have also impressed the audience with the success of the film, and then the foreign expressions were widely learned and used by the target readers. In this way, the unique language and ideology and culture of the Western countries were introduced into the target language. *The Seven Year Itch*, for example, has been translated as “七年之痒”.

The Seven Year Itch is a romantic comedy film, which premiered in the United States on June 3, 1955. The main characters of the film Richard Sherman and his wife Helen had married for seven years, and their relationship was very steady. However, when his wife and son left home to go on holiday in the country, Sherman had a maggot in his head about the beautiful star of the advertisement who had just moved into the upstairs, and in the process of imagination, his morality and his own evil intentions continued to collide, and finally he made decision: refused to seduce and immediately rushed to the resort where his wife and son were. What the movie has left in audience’s mind is not only the scene of Marilyn Monroe standing on the subway vent, but also the title of the film, which has become a proper word, meaning that love will often enter a dangerous period seven years later. When the film was introduced to the Chinese market, the translator used the foreignization strategy to directly translate the original film title. The concept of “七年之痒” is therefore widely used in China to describe the crisis in love and marriage.

4.2.3. The Advantages and Disadvantages of Foreignization

The foreignization strategy retains the original language and cultural characteristics, so that the target language readers

feel exotic and feel the existence and unique charm of other cultures.[12] By using the foreignization strategy, Chinese audience can more effectively know the Western people's way of thinking and language habits, which is conducive to the exchange and dissemination of culture. Foreignization seeks to 'send the reader abroad' by making the receiving culture aware of the linguistic and cultural difference inherent in the foreign text.[1] The Western historical background reflected in the titles will not only improve the learning interest, but also deepen the understanding and impression of Western history and culture. The audience can also get to know some Western unique words or concepts, which can help to enrich the language and culture of the target language, and facilitate cultural exchanges.

For the target audience, the title translated by means of the foreignization strategy may cause difficulties in understanding. Because of the expressions which are exclusively used in Western culture. If it is a place name, it will not effectively attract the attention and interest of the audience. Chinese people are subtle and implicit, while Westerners are relatively straightforward. Therefore, most of English film titles are relatively simple and plain, which is not conducive to the audience to have a relatively deep understanding of the content of the film. The ideological culture embodied in the film title may not resonate with the audience. In short, the use of foreignization strategy is a challenge for the commercial success of the film.

4.3. The Interrelationship between Domestication and Foreignization Strategies and Their Development Trend

Domestication aims to minimize the strangeness of the translation by a transparent, fluent, 'invisible' style. And the foreignization, however, focus on emphasizing the foreign identity of source text through a non-fluent, estranging or heterogeneous translation style. It entails choosing a foreign text and developing a translation method along lines which are excluded by dominant cultural values in the target language.[1] Domestication and foreignization have always been controversial and always difficult to reconcile. Domestication and foreignization should be two opposites that are mutually related, complementary, mutually integrated and interpenetrating, with dialectical unity rather than mutual opposition.[14] As a matter of fact, there is no fixed law to translate the title of a film, which is both an art appreciation and a commercial advertisement, but the translation of the title should not just consider the market effect and ignore the aesthetic function of the title. The purpose of translation is to find a film title that is similar to the original and conforms to the type of the film. At the same time, it requires the translator to consider the possible market reaction in advance and try to find a convergence point among art, market and cultural exchange.

Regarding the development trend of domestication and foreignization translation strategies in China, Guo Jianzhong once suggested that the two will coexist forever, and no one can replace the other.[6] The author agrees with this view. When translators choose domestication and foreignization strategies, they should analyze the cultural factors in the original English film title, the type of film theme, the idea the film wants to convey, and the target audience, etc. In the process of translating film titles, translators need to consider a variety of complex issues. Both strategies of domestication and foreignization are bound to coexist in the long run.

5. Summary

As the analysis above, domestication and foreignization are not only manifested in the language level, but also in the processing of cultural factors. Domestication should not only make the translation conform to the expression habits of the target language, but also the cultural characteristics of the original text in line with the cultural stipulations of the target language. The foreignization must retain not only the characteristics of source language, but also the cultural factors of foreign countries. Domestication strategy facilitates the recognition of dissimilarity factors by the target language readers, while the foreignization strategy is conducive to the introduction of dissimilarity factors and vocabulary of the source language, thus enriching the corpus of the target language. Both the two strategies have their own merits and can achieve different results, so it is impossible to say which method is better.

This paper analyzes the translation of English film titles from the two translation strategies of domestication and foreignization. The author holds the view that these two translation strategies exert critical impact on the translation of film titles. Domestication is closer to the audience of target language, so that it will be easier for audience to understand. Foreignization, however, is more faithful to the original titles, thus making a great contribution to bring foreign concepts of source language to target language. It is incorrect to say which one is better than the other, for each has its own merits. In general, film is a kind of popular art. There is no fixed standard in translating movie titles. Different choices have different considerations and depend on the different situations in which the film is set, so as to achieve the purpose of cultural exchange and learning.

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