

## An Analysis of Subtitle Translation of *Emily in Pairs* Based on Skopos Theory

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**Abstract:** As foreign television shows and films are gradually becoming part of Chinese people's lives, subtitle translation is indispensable for people who want to watch foreign TV shows. The American TV series "Emily in Paris" sparked an upsurge in the pursuit of drama in 2020, and the subtitle translation in this drama is worth studying. This article takes Emily in Paris as an example and it conducts a study on the better ways of subtitle translation based on Skopos Theory. This article first introduces the characteristics of subtitle translation, and then from the perspective of skopos theory, it expounds the three principles of skopos theory. After that, the case analysis method is used to analyze the subtitle translation of the play under the guidance of the three principles of skopos theory. In addition, this article also compares the functions of two major translation strategies "domestication" and "foreignization" in subtitle translation and the different effects they produce.

**Keywords:** Skopos Theory; Subtitle Translation; Domestication; Foreignization.

### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, as China's economy and society develop, culture exchange has been accelerating. China is importing many famous films and TV dramas from other countries in the world, which makes Chinese people more interested in learning English. As a significant medium of cross-culture communication, subtitle translation should be attached more importance for the sake of better implementing Chinese Culture Going Global Strategy. However, poor subtitle translation and a lack of translation quality assessment system have aroused misunderstandings among Chinese people. High-quality subtitle translation can accurately convey cultural connotations and facilitate cross-cultural communication, while inappropriate subtitle translation may cause flavor loss or even lead to serious misunderstandings. Therefore, subtitle translation is of great importance. In order to improve subtitle translation in foreign TV shows and facilitate cultural communication in the world, this article makes an analysis of subtitle translation of Emily in Paris, a typical American comedy gaining popularity and praise, from the perspective of skopos theory and provides suggestions for subtitle translation improvements.

### SUBTITLE TRANSLATION

#### Definition of Subtitle Translation

"Subtitle translation" refers to the translation of interlingual subtitles, that is, the source language is translated into the target language without removing the original sound of the film and TV dramas, and then the translated language is superimposed below the original language subtitles [1]." Compared to foreign countries, the quality of domestic subtitle translation research is still insufficient because of lack of sufficient attention.

The major goal of subtitle translation is to convey the precise message to the audience in an effective way and make them understand and appreciate the film and television limited by time and space. In order to achieve this aim, translators must follow some principles and adopt some translation techniques and strategies, as well as attach great importance to the cultural phenomenon.

#### Features of Subtitle Translation

Qian Shaochang pointed out, Film and television language can be divided into five characteristics: popularity, listening, no annotation, comprehension and instantaneity [2]. According to this theory, we can arrive at a conclusion that the major features of subtitle translation are popularity, temporality and spatiality and colloquialism.

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### **Popularity**

Popularity means that the translation must be acceptable to the public. It requires that subtitle translation must be plain yet funny due to the differences in the way of thinking, comprehension and aesthetic standard among audiences. In this case, audiences have no difficulty in understanding the content of the films or TV plays[3].

### **Temporality and Spatiality**

Temporality and Spatiality refer to film and television dramas that are limited by time and space. The limitation of time is reflected in the fact that the information transmitted by the subtitles should be synchronized with video screen, and the best time for the subtitles to stay is 2-7 seconds; the limitation of space is evidenced by the number of language symbols appearing on the screen should not be too long. Many subtitles that do not conform to the temporal and spatial characteristics will greatly affect the viewer's viewing experience.

### **Colloquialism**

Generally speaking, the evolution of TV drama or films is promoted by the dialogues between characters. The existence of a large number of conversations has caused specific requirements for subtitle translation. To avoid having difficulties in understanding the plot in terms of the complicated sentence structure or long sentences, translators should apply informal languages in a simple and plain manner. In order to convey the meaning of the original language accurately, translators should choose an adequate language style in accordance with the type of movies and TV series.

## **SKOPOS THEORY**

### **Definition of Skopos Theory**

Hans J. Vermeer, a German linguist and translation scholar, is a representative of German Functionalist Approaches and he is also best known for establishing skopos theory. Before translation was perceived as a functional act, the quality of a translation was assessed based on "equivalence" and how faithful the translation was to the source text. Compared to the above, Skopos theory is the process of translation determined by the function of the product. Skopos theory derives from the Greek word skopos, which means "aim" or "purpose". Vermeer believes that, according to action theory, every action has a purpose. Translation is an action, therefore it has to have a purpose of each translation determined by a commission and a set of instructions given by the requester regarding the translation. This theory is one of the functionalist approaches whose aim is to dethrone the source text (ST). This is done by emphasizing the role of the translator as a creator of the target text (TT) and giving priority to the purpose(skopos) of producing TT.

Skopos theory broke the limitation of translation theories that used to be original text-oriented, and it first expounded translation activities from the perspective of translation purpose and translator.

### **Three rules of Skopos Theory**

The purpose of translation determines the content of translation, and the translator must follow three rules in the process of translation: the skopos rule, the coherence rule and the fidelity rule. Among the three rules, the skopos rule is the primary rule of skopos theory. Christian Nord once proposed, "The purpose of the translation is based on the original text. The text has a specific purpose and should serve this purpose." All texts are for a specific purpose and should serve it. The coherence rule means that the target language text should be logical and readable. It also requires that the translation must conform to "intra-lingual coherence", that is, the target text must be able to be interpreted in a coherent way with the target receptors' context. The fidelity rule refers to a certain degree of coherence between the original text and the target text, which is also called "inter-lingual coherence". Moreover, it means that the translation must have a certain relationship with the corresponding original, and be more faithful to the meaning of the original. Among the three rules of skopos theory, the skopos rule is the first, which determines the coherence rule and the fidelity rule.

### **Adaptability of Subtitle Translation Study from the Perspective of Skopos Theory**

There are two types of subtitle translation: intra-lingual subtitle and inter-lingual subtitle. The latter is commonly referred to as subtitle translation that is, translating the characters' dialogues and necessary visual information into the target language on the condition that retaining the original sound, and then superimposing them on the screen. The subtitles must be synchronized with characters's dialogues, actions and picture, and they must change with the actor's mood and speech speed. On the one hand, subtitle translation is limited by time and space, and the translated text should be as concise and clear as possible to reduce the burden on the target language audience; on the other hand, it is limited by factors such as the style of films and television dramas, the characteristics of the characters in the play, and the target language. This article analyzes the Chinese subtitles provided by Renren subtitle group as the research object.

The purpose of subtitle translation determines the entire process of subtitle translation. First, subtitle offers plot information, which is the fundamental purpose of helping audiences overcome language barriers and understand its connotation. Second, it transfers foreign culture. Subtitle translation, as a part of culture exchange, can realize cultural transformation

between the source language and the target language. Finally, it can introduce exotic flavors and customs. By watching the subtitles of a movie or TV series, the audience can be easily to understand foreign cultures. The aim dominates the entire translation action. The translator should process the information of the audiovisual works according to the habits and traditions of the target language to achieve the goal of subtitle translation.

### **Analysis of Subtitle Translation of Emily in Paris Based on Skopos Theory**

#### **Analysis of Subtitle Translation from Skopos Rule**

There involves three principles of skopos theory. The top-ranking rule for translation is the "Skopos rule". Each text is produced for a given purpose and should serve this purpose. The Skopos rule thus reads as follows: translate/interpret/speak/write in a way that enables your text/translation to function in the situation in which it is used and with the people who want to use it and precisely in the way they want it to function. The aim of subtitle translation is to help the target language audience understand the plot of this TV show and to achieve entertainment and cross-culture communication.

Example 1:

Original: You'll get the hang of it!

Translation:你会适应的。

Emily and Camille meet with each other at the first time in a flower shop. Emily wants to buy flowers, while the shop owner has bias on Emily due to she is an American girl. Camille happens to help her and tries to comfort Emily. Camille is a outgoing and active French girl. Emily has no friends in Franch, so she is grateful to Camille's help. So Emily's life in Paris is not successful. After Camille talks with Emily, she says the phrase "get the hang of" means that Emily will be accustomed to the life in Paris. The translator renders "You'll get hang of it" into "你会适应的", which is in line with Chinese rules. In addition, subtitle translation should be more simplicity and matched the charactersitics of characters in films or TV shows.

Example 2:

Original

Sylvie: Oh no, no. I don't need another problem right now.

Sylvie: Well, given that there's an American actress hosting the event,

Emily: I just think that you should be utilizing the American in your office.

Sylvie: You really think you're up for the task?

Emily: Absolutely

Translation:

希薇: 不行...我可不希望又惹上麻烦。

希薇: 开幕仪式将由一位美国女演员主持。

艾米丽: 我认为你应该善用办公室里的美国人。

希薇: 你确定应付得来?

艾米丽: 当然了。

Emily, who lives in a foreign land, is solitary herself and wants to try her best to get well along with her French colleagues. However, Emily's manager Sylvia never cares about her and doesn't want to make friends with her. She is optimistic about all things and takes initiative to engage in work in the hope of her leader can recognize her ability and efforts. When the company needs to serve an American female star in an event, she volunteers to undertake this task. When she goes to Sylvia's office, she says "I just think that you should be utilizing the American in your office. If the sentence "I just think that you should be utilizing the American in your office." is literally translated into "我认为你应该利用你办公室的美国人", the meaning of "利用" has great negative effects. It is not the emotion that Emily wants to express. Under the context of the talk, Emily recommends herself to finish this work, and she knows how to show her advantages. So in this talk, Emily is in a positive emotion rather than a negative one. So the sophisticated translator knows better about the context and translates "utilize" into "善用". It not only expresses Emily's purpose of pleasing Sylvia, but also hopes to verify her work capacity. Subtitle translation should be targeted at the target language reader in order to easily understand and appreciate the show. It conforms to skopos rule.

#### **Analysis of Subtitle Translation from Coherence Rule**

The coherence rule focuses on the translation that must be adequately coherent to allow the intended users to comprehend it, and provide them assumed background knowledge and situational circumstances. What the translator can do, and what he should do, is to produce a text that is at least likely to be meaningful to target-culture receivers. It also requires the translation version should be fluent, simple, natural, and easy to be accepted and understood by the target language receptors. In addition, here are examples:

Example 1

Original:

Emily: That... That was amazing.

Gabriel: That was nothing.

Emily: No, it was above and beyond.

Emily: You made me look great out here.

Gabriel: Well, it's not a hard thing to do.

Translation

艾米丽: 这一餐做得太棒了。

加贝尔: 小事一桩。

艾米丽: 不是, 你帮我了一个大忙。

艾米丽: 你让我脸上有光。

加贝尔: 这并不是难事。

After Emily fails to reserve the restaurant, she asked her neighbour Gabriel who is a cook to help her. Gabriel agreed to help Emily finish her work. He cooks delicious dinners for Emily's leaders and customer. This dialogue occurs that Emily shows her appreciation to Gabriel when the task is perfectly done. When translators translate the dialogue, they should take the context and plot into consideration. If "above and beyond" is rendered into "远不止如此" literally, it is not in accordance with Chinese people's way of speaking. In this case, according to the relationship between the talker and language context, the translator translates "above and beyond" into "你帮我了一个大忙". It conforms to the way of talking that Chinese people often do when expressing gratitude to the other party, and has a semantic coherence with the context. When the translation is fluent and simple, the target receptor is like watching a Chinese conversation, and has the same communicative effect as the source language receptor[5].

#### Example 2

Original

Emily: My name sounds like an airline.

Judith Robertson: Emily Coop-air Fly me.

Judith Robertson: Well, that's the price we pay.

Emily: I'll get down to brass tacks.

Translation:

艾米丽: 我的名字听起来像航空公司。

朱迪·罗伯森: 艾米丽·库珀, 带我飞吧。

朱迪·罗伯森: 这就是我们要付出的代价。

艾米丽: 我们聊正经事吧。

This dialogue occurs in a restaurant between Judith Robertson and Emily. Judith Robertson, an American girl, lives and works in France. She wants to invite Emily to post the program information in her Instagram. Like other people do from other countries in the world, the two Americans talk about their homeland to enhance the affection with each other at first. They find faults about French food and French people and all of things in France that they dislike. When Judith says "that's the price we pay", it cannot be translated literally into "这是我们索要支付的价格". Translating this sentence, the translator should take the context into account. So the final translation is "这就是我们要付出的代价". When you live in a foreign country, you should adjust and adapt everything that you are not accustomed to. Another big challenge for translator is the idiom "brass tacks". When translating, the idiom should not be rendered into Chinese in consistence with its original meaning. At the same time, dictionary is a good tool that helps translators find an

adequate translation. So the idiom "brass tacks" can be translated into "言归正传" or "正事". Translators must pay attention to idioms.

#### Analysis of Subtitle Translation from Fidelity Rule

忠实法则指的是目的语文本需要符合“语际连贯”, 即译文需要被目的语观众所接受, 并且符合目的语观众的文化背景和交际情境, 译者需要去了解目的语观众的社会文化背景以及期待视野等, 进而采取灵活的翻译策略达到的跨文化交际的目的。

#### Example 1

Emily: I read *Second Sex* in college.

Emily: Most of it

艾米丽: 我大学时期读过《第二性》这本书。

艾米丽: 读得七七八八吧。

The sentence is uttered by Emily. Emily meets with her new French boyfriend at the first time in a coffee house. Her new boyfriend talks about philosophers. When he mentions Pochwa, the author of *Second Sex*, Emily replies that she read this book in college. And she adds "Most of it." Emily wants to have some topics with this man. If the translator renders this sentence into "看了大部分" literally, it is not faithful to the original meaning. The version "读得七七八八吧" not only shows the personality of Emily, but also in line with the expression habits of Chinese audiences in chatting and dialogue, making it easier for the target audience to understand the plot. TV shows's subtitles belong to oral expressions. In this case, when translating, translators cannot be ignoring this feature.

#### Example 2

Original

It used to be gritty and authentic.

It is a shame how popular it's gotten.

None of the charm it had before.

#### Translation

这里曾是个朴实无华的地方。

结果变成了热门景点, 真可惜。

魅力不再,

When Emily and Camille visit a famous French landscape, Camille used "gritty and authentic" to express the beauty of it. "Gritty" means that a gritty description of a tough or unpleasant situation shows it in a very realistic way. "Authentic" refers to worthy of acceptance or belief as conforming to or based on fact. When translating this sentence, the translator should use less but accurate words to express the meaning of the two words in light of the simplicity of subtitle. So it can be translated into "朴实无华". It not only expresses the meaning of the original words completely, but also adopts the Chinese four-character translation, which conforms to the temporal and spatial feature of subtitle translation. It is appropriate and concise.

## Translation Strategies in Subtitle Translation of Emily in Paris

### Foreignization

### Language Category

#### Example 1

Original:

Emily: I'm really looking forward to working with you.

Sylvie: To our very own American Vaga-Jeune

Translation:

艾米丽: 我很期待跟你们共事

希薇: 为“美国青春剂”干杯。

Emily was not welcomed by everyone at the first time when she went to Savior. The manager Sylvie looked down upon her with mean words. Emily is young and full of energy. She has aspiration on her work. However, it was not recognized by her France colleagues. “American Vaga-Jeune” is a medicine that it helps people defer their declining. However, Sylvie uses this phrase “American Vaga-Jeune” to blow Emily’s confidence and spirit. At the same time, she mocks Americans’ way of working and values. The translation “美国青春剂” is a new word expression for Chinese people, and it contributes to cross-cultural communication. In addition, in this TV show, the target language receptor can find the personalities and language feature S of French people. Therefore, when it refers to keeping the original language features, foreignization should be applied.

### Culture category

#### Example 2

Original: Bote just smacked a walk-off grand slam, two outs left in the bottom of the ninth.

Translation: 博特刚击出了一记再见全垒打！九局下，两出局。

This dialogue occurs that when Emily and her boyfriend were watching a baseball game in a pub before she went to France, Chicago Cubs team they supported got a home run and successfully qualified to the next round. The “a walk-off”, a baseball term, means that the hitting of a home run with runners at all three bases in baseball. So it cannot be rendered into Chinese literally. Baseball originated in British and developed in the U.S.A. Chinese people may not be familiar with this kind of sport and its terms. Therefore, when translating, the translator kept the foreign flavor of this term; it can promote culture exchange, reduce culture shock and enrich Chinese culture.

### Domestication

### Lexical Category

#### Example 1

Original: It's really cutting edge. Very new.

Translation: 这是最新的想法。没人想过。

The “cutting edge” can be rendered into “最新的想法”. Word is a kind of symbol. It not only has more intuitive referential meanings, but also more complicated pragmatic meanings. Therefore, in the process of translation, the translator should not merely pursue the referential meaning and the linguistic meaning, but should strive to achieve the transfer of semantic meaning, and that is to say, emphasizing emotional meaning. In addition, the aim of translation is to promote the communication between different cultures.

#### Example 2

Original: My God, do you think she was hitting on you?

Translation: 天啊，她是不是在撩你？

“Hit on you” is a phrasal verb, which means that it shows someone that you are sexually attracted to them. Translators should be well-equipped with language abilities. So the translator translated “hitting on you” into “撩你”. This meaning of Chinese character “撩” is the same as “hitting on you”. When Chinese audiences watch “撩” onscreen, they can easily understand the meaning and learn the usage of this phrase. In addition, “撩” is widely used on the Internet by young people in China. It can arouse the echo of Chinese people. Camile and Emily are girls, while Emily’s workpartner thinks that Camile is nice to Emily. The translation “撩你” not only conforms to the features of subtitle translation, but also accords with Chinese people’s way of expressing.

### Syntax Category

#### Example

Original: So I can make love to you again with a clear conscience.

Translation: 我想跟你再做爱一次，这次问心无愧。

This sentence is uttered by Emily’s boyfriend. Her boyfriend wants to have sex with Emily and shows how much he loves Emily. The phrase “with a clear conscience” can be literally rendered into “干净的良心”. However, the translator translated it into “问心无愧”. When we take the relationship and the context of this sentence into consideration, it can be easily understood the connotation of it.

## CONCLUSIONS

Translation activities aim for achieving the exchange and integration of multiple cultures. Now, in the information age, the dissemination of film and television drama works is becoming more and more convenient. Subtitles as an indispensable part of film and television dramas; it is precisely because of the differences in language and culture that audiences have a better understanding of the content of film and television dramas. Under the guidance of skopos theory, we know that subtitle translation should first let the audience understand the content of the text as the primary purpose; and secondly, it needs to meet three major characteristics: popularity, temporality and spatiality, and colloquialism. Therefore, subtitle translation amateurs should place priority in domestication as in order to ensure the transmission of information accurately according to actual situations,

and secondly, for those contents with foreign flavors, they can adopt foreignization translation strategies.

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