

## A Study on Three-Dimensional Transformation of Movie Title Translation From the Perspective of Eco-Translatology

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### Abstract

Being a bridge of cross-cultural communication under the background of globalization, movies have played an increasingly more significant role in contemporary society. A good movie title is an integral part of a successful movie in that the quality of title translation will influence the communication between nations to large extent. As a discipline at burgeoning period, Eco-translatology makes a new definition of translation as well as the translation principle and method which is named as Three-dimensional Transformation. Based on this principle, this paper analyzed the translation of many movie titles from the perspective of linguistic-dimension, cultural-dimension and communicative-dimension which aims to provide a new train of thought when translating.

**Key words:** Eco-translatology; Three-dimensional transformation; Cross-cultural communication

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### INTRODUCTION

With the development of globalization, the interaction between nations has been enhanced inevitably, of which cultural exchange plays a necessary role. In order to get stronger discourse power, every nation tries its best to

promote its own culture to the international community. As a result, many new approaches are continuously created to convey cultural values and beliefs such as organization of multinational corporations, EXPOs, Grammy Awards in music, Oscar Awards in film industry and so on.

Movie, as an emerging product due to the improvement of technology, now is widely chosen to represent the history and cultural values of a nation, because it combines pictures with sound, or in other words, our visual senses and hearing senses. Owing to such a superior feature, movie is always considered as an important expression for a culture to become well familiarized. China is now at a critical point where cultural soft power should be developed compatible with China's international standing. The recent decades have witnessed China's economic take-off, while subsequently how to reorient the promotion of Chinese culture remains to be pressing, as no one could ignore the popularity of watching movies as a way of well-accepted entertainment.

It is true that movies have a significant role in cultural exchange, and how to translate movie title often attract attention within translation academy. Titles are considered as the eyes of a movie from which audience can get the first impression. What's more, audience can foretell the main content from movies' title and then choose what they like. The value of a movie lies not only in its box office but also in its aesthetic and cultural values and a good translation of movies' title can help to realize these three functions. On the one hand, a good translation can achieve a better promotion. On the other hand, the aesthetic and cultural values within the movie can be accepted by more audience.

As for Chinese movie market, a good translation of English movies' title will contribute a lot to arouse the interest of potential audience and then create greater economic benefit. The same goes to Chinese movies. According to the 2014 Blue Book of China's Culture, "in spite of the quick increase of Chinese movies' box office

and the expansion of Chinese movie market, it is still a great challenge for Chinese movie to get into overseas markets”(Zhang, 2014). Therefore, the translation of movie title deserves a more systemic and scientific study for its theoretical and practical meaning.

## 1. ECO-TRANSLATOLOGY AND THREE-DIMENSIONAL TRANSFORMATION

### 1.1 Eco-Translatology

Nowadays, ecology is one of the most heated disciplines with the advancement of globalization and there emerge many new interdisciplinary subjects owing to the combination of ecology and various disciplines. Being one of them, Eco-translatology combines ecology with translatology which can be understood as an ecological approach to translation studies or translation studies from the ecological perspective (Hu, 2008).

The proposal of Eco-translatology has a profound background. In the 1960s, the world was experiencing a change from industrial civilization to ecological civilization. The views on ecological translation date back to 1980s, in which Peter Newmark put ecology at the top among the five classifications of culture (Newmark,1988) and Wolfram Wilss emphasized the importance of environmental factors during translation process such as the features of translation activity and the competence of translators. In 1995, the American ecological philosopher David Griffin proposed the concept of “Eco-existence”, which symbolized the official advent of ecological existence philosophy. Viewing from the above, ecological perspective has already been adopted in translatology in the last century.

Under such a background, ecological dimension became a new perspective in translatology. Eco-translatology, which was first put forward in 2011 by Professor Hu Gengsheng, is the first translation theory proposed in China. This theory adopts the “adaptation/selection” principle of Darwin’s biological theory as its theoretical foundation, explaining the translation process, translation methods and translation standards from the perspective of ecology.

The core concept of this theory is “translator-centered”, which means that the translator should take the role of transformation of the two languages and cultures in the translation process to make the ongoing adaptation and selection (Guan ,2014). According to Eco-translatology, translator should make adaptation between source language and target language based on the translation Eco-environment. Translation Eco-environment refers to the world consisting of source language, target language and translation text, and more specifically, it includes languages, communication, cultures, societies, authors, readers, etc (Hu, 2011). Different from traditional translation theory that put focus on linguistic context

or cultural context, eco-translatology expands the connotation of context to the various aspects concerning with translators and the source language.

Apart from “translator-centered”, there are still some other theoretical tenets that are included in Eco-translatology, namely, ecological paradigm of translation, the ecological principle underlying the paradigm, the Eco-environment for translation, the three-dimensional transformation, adaptation/selection and post-event penalty and so on. Among those tenets, three-dimensional transformation is one of those most prevailing tenets often used to analyze translations. In this paper, three-dimensional transformation is adopted as the theoretical framework to analyze the translation of movie title.

### 1.2 Three-Dimensional Transformation

Hu concluded the translation principle as Three-dimensional Transformation, that is, the adaptive selection and transformation on the dimensions of language, culture and communication on the principle of “multi-dimensional adaptation and adaptive selection” (Hu, 2011).

The “linguistic dimensional adaptive selection and transformation” refers to the adaptive selection and transformation of language forms in the different aspects and at different levels in the translation process such as writing, vocabulary selection, grammar, ellipsis and so on. It is known to us that there exist quite a few differences between Chinese and English as far as the way of thinking concerned so that the way of expressing also varies a lot. As a result, we should take the whole translation Eco-environment into account when translating.

The “cultural dimension adaptive selection and transformation” means that translators should care more about the transfer and interpretation of bilingual cultural connotation in the translation process. It attaches great importance to the difference between the source language and the target language cultures in regard to nature and content. In this way, the twisting of the original writings brought by starting from the viewpoint of target language can be avoided. Translators ought to further concern over the two languages’ cultural framework during translating (Hu, 2011). Each country has its own unique social and cultural customs, and the unique cultural background has created different habitual expressions among countries. This has created considerable obstacles for exchanges among countries that belong to different cultural systems. Being considered as the miniature of a nation’s culture and history, translators should spare no efforts to reflect the cultural connotation of the original movie and to play to audiences’ cultural values.

The “communicative dimensional adaptive selection and transformation” refers to the adaptive selection and transformation concerning bilingual communicative intention in the translation process. Whether the original communicative intention is reflected in the translation is the main concern of translators. In addition to the

transformation of language information and the transfer of cultural connotation, communicative level deserves more attention. Translating means communication, and the communicative process depends on what translation the audience have heard and read. In many fields of translation, especially in the field of movie title translation, the translation must cater to the needs of cross-cultural communication and reflect the communicative intention of the original text in the translation.

Eco-translatology holds the view that a high-level translation should achieve the goal of restoring original text at linguistic, cultural and communicative dimension. Adopting this as translation principle, this paper aims to provide a new idea for translating movie titles by analyzing those translations of popular movies.

## 2. TRANSLATING MOVIE TITLES BY THREE-DIMENSIONAL TRANSFORMATION

Since the importance of translating movie title has been discussed above, now it is well accepted that translating movie titles is not a simple transformation between two languages. According to the Eco-translatology, a good translation should involve various aspects like society, culture, language, communication, as well as the

The Table 1 gives some examples on linguistic-dimension.

**Table 1**  
**Linguistic-Dimension in Movies**

Chinese Title	English Title	Country
饮食男女	Eat Drink Man Woman	China
四大名捕	The Four	China
活着	Lifetimes	China
盗梦空间	Inception	U.S.
怦然心动	Flipped	U.S.
少年派的奇幻漂流	Life of Pi	U.S.
飞越疯人院	One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest	U.S.
闻香识女人	Scent of a Woman	U.S.
美国往事	Once Upon a Time in America	U.S., Italy
当幸福来敲门	The Pursuit of Happiness	U.S.
沉默的羔羊	The Silence of the Lambs	U.S.
末代皇帝	The Last Emperor	U.S.
逍遥法外	Catch Me If You Can	U.S., Canada
穿条纹睡衣的男孩	The Boy in the Striped Pajamas	U.K., U.S.
血战钢锯岭	Hacksaw Ridge	U.S., Australia
叫我第一名	Front of the Class	U.S.
燃情岁月	Legends of the Fall	U.S.
驯龙高手	How to Train Your Dragon	U.S.
真爱至上	Love Actually	U.S.
星际穿越	Interstellar	U.S., Canada, Iceland

Table 1 offers us some examples of translation. Viewing from the table, it is easy to find that the titles of English movies tend to use concise structures and plain vocabulary while Chinese usually applies four-character structure and modifiers. What's more, nouns are widely

relationship between authors and readers. All of them constitute the Eco-environment of translating movie titles which should be given priority to. Therefore, translators should take those factors into consideration, and spare no efforts to make the most appropriate selection of translation. Based on the Eco-translatology theory, the translation of movie titles will be discussed in the following part from the perspective linguistic-dimension, cultural-dimension and communicative-dimension.

Nearly all of the movies analyzed are selected from the Rating List "Top 250" of Douban. Users of Douban are evaluating the movies they have watched from "very poor" to "strongly recommended" every day. Douban "Top 250" was generated by algorithm analysis based on the number of people who viewed each video and the evaluation of the movie.

### 2.1 Adaptive Selection on Linguistic-Dimension

Adaptive selection on linguistic-dimension means that translators transform language forms at various aspects and levels. Narrowly speaking, language forms consist of pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. Translators should make the translation conformed to target language's grammar usage and audience's reading habits. Whether the translation has adapted to linguistic-dimension can be judged by its readability and fidelity.

applied in English while verbs are preferred in Chinese. The translations will be analyzed in detail as follows:

#### (a) Language structure

Four-character structure is a common expression in Chinese for its rhythm is consistent with Chinese idiom

and its poetic flavor. Translating English movie titles in this way can increase the acceptability of translation because it caters to the reading habit of Chinese audience. Some of the translations mentioned above are in accordance with this type such as *Inception* 《盗梦空间》, *Flipped* 《怦然心动》, *Once Upon a Time in America* 《美国往事》, *The Last Emperor* 《末代皇帝》, *Catch Me If You Can* 《逍遥法外》, *Legends of the Fall* 《燃情岁月》, *Love Actually* 《真爱至上》, *How to Train Your Dragon* 《驯龙高手》, 《星际穿越》. *Catch me if you can* tells a story of FBI detective Karl and criminal offender Frank who is good at forging documents. Gradually, after many failure catches of Frank for so many times, the friendship and understanding between the police and the thief have been developed in the same way as the father and son. The game of chase and escape has become less ruthless. Translating the title into 逍遥法外(get away from crime without being punished) meets the Chinese audience's aesthetic standards with a four-character idiom and expresses the movie theme exactly.

(b) Diction selection

In contrast to Chinese which uses a large quantity of verbs, English is less dynamic because it prefers nouns. As for English movies, protagonist's name or place name of the event is usually chosen as the title, which is quite normal to foreign audiences. However, most nouns are meaningless and lack of attractiveness in Chinese. Provided that we translate them literally, it will be hard to reach the same effect as its English version. Under such circumstances, translators will add some modifiers or change noun phrase to verbal phrase in order to incur the interest of potential audience. Similarly, when translating Chinese movie titles, a simpler structure and noun phrase will be superior to a complex one. The movies mentioned above can be analyzed in the following way:

Life of Pi → 少年派的奇幻漂流 (adding modifier)

Hacksaw Ridge → 血战钢锯岭 (adding modifier)

The Silence of the Lambs → 沉默的羔羊 (adding modifier)

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest → 飞越疯人院 (changing to verbal structure)

Scent of a Woman → 闻香识女人 (changing to verbal structure)

The Pursuit of Happiness → 当幸福来敲门 (changing to verbal structure)

The Boy in the Striped Pajamas → 穿条纹睡衣的男孩 (changing to verbal structure)

Front of the Class → 叫我第一名 (changing to verbal structure)

活着 → Lifetimes (changing to noun structure)

四大名捕 → The Four (deleting modifier)

Words like “奇幻(fantasy)” and “血战(bloody battle)” are attractive modifiers for Chinese audiences. With these modifiers, audience can imagine what happened in the movie and then feel curious about the plots so that the purpose of promotion can be reached in this way. Another way worth attention is word formation such as nominalization and verbalization. For example, the Chinese translation of *The Pursuit of Happiness* is 《当幸福来敲门》(when happiness is knocking). “Happiness” transforms from object to subject and “pursuit” transforms from noun to verb. Personification makes the translation more vivid to express the movie theme, staying hopeful about life.

**2.2 Adaptive Selection on Cultural-Dimension**

The “adaptive selection on cultural-dimension” requires the translator to focus on the transfer and interpretation of bilingual cultural connotation in the translation process. Any language is related to its national culture. Translating is not only equivalence between languages but also adaptive selection between cultures. Nida ever stated that “translation is an exchange between two cultures”<sup>[8]</sup>. For a real successful translation, knowing two cultures is more important than grasping two languages, because words become meaningful only in its effective cultural background.” Therefore, movie translators must take the similarities and differences between two cultures into consideration. Based on the target culture, translators can make adaptive selection of source culture so that misunderstandings can be avoided and exchange cultural values in an effective way. Table 2 offers us some example on cultural-dimension.

**Table 2**  
**Cultural-Dimension in Movies**

Chinese Title	English Title	Country
鬼子来了	Devils on the Doorstep	China
霸王别姬	Farewell My Concubine	China
大话西游之月光宝盒	A Chinese Odyssey Part One - Pandora's Box	China
倩女幽魂	A Chinese Ghost Story	China
唐伯虎点秋香	Flirting Scholar	China
卧虎藏龙	Crouching Dragon and Hidden Tiger	China
人在囧途	Lost on Journey	China
中国合伙人	American Dream in China	China
七宗罪	Seven	U.S.
钢铁侠	Iron Man	U.S.

All of the movie titles mentioned above boast some features that are unique to their cultures. For example, the Chinese movie 《鬼子来了》, which tells a story happened in War of Resistance Against Japan, includes a traditional Chinese vulgarism “鬼子” (close in meaning like Japs) which is a common cursing nickname for foreigners by Chinese people. During War of Resistance Against Japan, it became a popular name for Japanese army who committed such miserable crimes to Chinese people. When translating this title, cultural factors should be taken into consideration so that “ghost” cannot be an appropriate translation for the nickname while “devils (the chief evil spirit; Satan)” can express the same meaning as “鬼子” which make it easier for foreign audience to understand the story.

Another successful translation goes to the movie *Seven*. The original meaning of “Seven” refers to the seven deadly sins, which is a grouping and classification of vices within Christian teachings (81). According to the standard list, they are pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony, wrath and sloth, and the movie is about a series murder based on those seven sins. Comparing with translating “seven” into corresponding Chinese number, translators add “sin” into its translation title in that it is confused for those who have little knowledge about Christian teachings with a simple number “seven”. By its Chinese translation 《七宗罪》, the story content will be more explicit and misunderstandings caused by lack of knowledge about western religion can be avoided. In this way, movie plays a good role in cross-cultural communication.

There are also some failure examples such as translating 《卧虎藏龙》 into *Crouching Tiger and Hidden Dragon*. There exist great differences between

“龙(Long)” and “dragon” in terms of their cultural meaning. “龙(Long)” used to be the symbol of emperor which symbolizes authority and auspiciousness while “dragon” is a fierce creature in English culture. Similarly, translating 《霸王别姬》 into *Farewell My Concubine* is also controversial. “Concubine” refers to a woman who lives with a man but has lower status than his wife or wives. However, this movie is a story about the joys and sorrows between two Beijing opera actors. In contrast to its Chinese title, the English titles obviously lose its original poetic flavor and may mislead foreign audience to consider it is a movie about a concubine. In this way, the importance of adaptive transformation on cultural dimension can be demonstrated.

### 2.3 Adaptive Selection on Communicative-Dimension

Adaptive selection on communicative-dimension means that translators must consider whether the original communicative intention has been reached in the process of translation. A communicative translation must be readable and understandable without any doubts and obscures. Apart from the semantic information and cultural information, what deserves our more attention is its original communicative information, because it the communicative effect values more than the content. In order to fulfill this function, it is unnecessary for translators to rigidly adhere to the original text form. They should choose appropriate translation by adapting to communicative purpose so that readers can understand the content without difficulty using simple and beautiful language. Table 3 will give some examples of adaptive selection on communicative-dimension.

**Table 3**  
**Adaptive Selection on Communicative-Dimension in Movies**

Chinese Title	English Title	Country
大闹天宫	The Monkey King	China
那些年我们一起追过的女孩	You Are the Apple of My Eye	China
乱世佳人	Gone with the Wind	U.S.
机器人总动员	WALL·E	U.S.
三傻大闹宝莱坞	3 Idiots	India
疯狂动物城	Zootopia	U.S.
飞屋环游记	Up	U.S.
消失的爱人	Gone Girl	U.S.
魂断蓝桥	Waterloo Bridge	U.S.
超能陆战队	Big Hero 6	U.S.

Taking the famous Chinese animation movie 《大闹天宫》 as an example, it tells a Chinese traditional legend of Sun Wukong (the Monkey King). The original title depicts a representative plot of the story, that is, a monkey who leads a group of monkeys against the rule of the Emperor in heaven. If translated literally into “Havoc in Heaven”, foreign audience may take the movie as an action movie and neglect that the original theme is to put the Monkey King at a prominent position. By its English translation,

the *Monkey King*, audiences may connect this Chinese animation with a famous English animation named as *the Lion King*. Therefore, foreign audiences will be interested in going and seeing the movie and the communicative intention can be reached.

Another impressive translation is *You Are the Apple of My Eye* which is an traditional expression in English. It means “you are my most cherished person or dearly loved”. Then, let’s go back to its original Chinese title,

namely, 《那些年我们一起追过的女孩》, which is romantic and by this title people can directly understand it is a literary movie about adolescent love story. Supposing that the title is translated into “the girls we have been after in those years” word by word, the aesthetic value is totally lost and with such a long and boring title, few people will be attracted. To our delight, the translator chose a more appropriate one.

There are also many other examples such as *Up* 《飞屋环游记》, *Zootopia* 《疯狂动物城》, *Big Hero 6* 《超能陆战队》. According to the theory of Eco-translatology, for the need of communication, language units should be reorganized in translation to achieve the purpose of communication and exchange. All of those movies above are translated in a way detached from the original text in order to arouse target language audiences' interest by using a more authentic expression.

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## CONCLUSION

With the deepening of globalization process, cross-cultural communication is involved in nearly every small aspects of our life. Being one of the most common ways for people to get familiar with foreign culture and customs, more and more English movies are introduced into China which consist a considerable part of Chinese movie market. Meanwhile, Chinese directors have also been devoting efforts to making Chinese movie to be a bridge between China and the world. To some extent, movie is more than a form of art but a mixture of culture, aesthetics and business. Hence, movie title translators play a crucial role because the quality of the title translation influences the box office and reputation of a movie in other countries. A successful translation must be adaptive to its target language's Eco-environment and then carry

out the translation with a higher degree of adaptation, so as to be better accepted and understood by the people from target cultures.

This paper has analyzed quite some examples of translating movie title among which good and bad examples are all included and made a comparison between translation titles with original one. What we can learn from successful translation is that the translators need to make a flexible use of the transformation on linguistic, cultural and communicative dimension, and faithfully display the language style and cultural connotation of the movie. In this way, the final communicative purpose can be achieved.

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