

Subtitle Translation of *Crazy Alien* From the Perspective of the Hermeneutic Motion Under Hermeneutics

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Abstract

The subtitles of the film *Crazy Alien* use new words, culture loaded words and the colloquial language which needed translations from Chinese-English and English-Chinese at the same time. *Crazy Alien* has grossed 2.2 billion at the box office, making it the fifteenth film in Chinese film history with a box office exceeding 2 billion. The subtitle translation plays an important role in the process of conveying the intention of the film to the Chinese and foreign audience. The translated version is easy for audience to understand and realizes the culture communication. This paper analyzes the subtitle translation of *Crazy Alien* from the perspective of the Hermeneutic motion under Hermeneutics in order to provide a new point of view for subtitle translation studies. The fourfold of Hermeneutic motion: “trust”, “aggression”, “incorporation” and “restitution” have practical instruction significance in the process of the subtitle translation of *Crazy Alien*.

Key words: The Hermeneutic motion; *Crazy Alien*; Subtitle; Translation

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INTRODUCTION

Subtitle translation of film plays an important role in the spread of Chinese culture overseas and the process of cross-cultural communication. Some scholars focus on the cultural differences in subtitle translation of film in the light of intercultural communication. Other researchers analyze the translation strategies or principles adopted in some specific film from the perspectives of Adaptation-selection theory, Relevance theory, Skopos theory, the principles of Faithfulness and Expressiveness and so on (Zhang, 2018, p.60). In recent 5 years, the hot topic is studying on film subtitle translation from three-dimensional transformation of Eco-translatology. Another hot topic of film subtitle translation is from the perspective of Functional Equivalence Theory. Few studies pay attention to the subtitle translation of film from the perspective of Hermeneutics. Some particular subtitles and their translations from *Crazy Alien* will be analyzed in this paper in the light of the Hermeneutic motion under Hermeneutics.

1. CRAZY ALIEN

The film *Crazy Alien* is based on the novel, *A Village Teacher*, by Liu Cixin.

Liu Cixin is one of the representative writers of Chinese science fiction. His masterpieces include full-length novel *Supernova Era*, *Ball Lightning*, *The Three Body Problem*, *The Dark Forest*, *Death's End* and so on. His medium-length novels include *The Wandering Earth*, *A Village Teacher*, *Full Band Interception* and so on. *The Three Body Problem* is considered as the landmark work of Chinese science fiction literature which wins the Hugo Award for Best Novel awarded by the 73rd World Science Fiction Society in 2015. Liu Cixin is the first Asian writer to win this award.

A Village Teacher tells a story of a village school teacher Li Baoku who imparts the law of mechanics to his

four naughty students in the last days of his life. Those students resist the threat of destruction and save the earth civilization from the alien by using what their teacher had taught them.

The film *Crazy Alien*, directed by Ning Hao, is adapted from Liu Cixin's novel *A Village Teacher*. The spiritual core of the original work is saved, but the plot is changed. The film tells of an alien Chika who is preparing to establish diplomatic relations with "Amanika", the most advanced nation on planet Earth. When he is enraged and ready to destroy the earth, he accidentally falls to the earth and is trained as a monkey by the protagonist Geng Hao to perform a monkey play. Then it is soaked into medicinal liquor. Secret agents of "Amanika" have been tracking the whereabouts of the alien. When the alien is ready to destroy the earth again after recovering his energy, he is stopped by the protagonist with a banana. In the end of the film, the earth is saved from destruction and establishes diplomatic relations with the alien. Like the novel, the film uses local culture to fight against the advanced civilization of the universe. It is not the great hero who saves the earth, but the ordinary people.

The film has a strong Chinese cultural background. The strong sci-fi elements such as "the star wars" and "time and space transition" in the original work have been replaced by Chinese folk myths and cultural elements such as "playing monkeys" and "Journey to the West" (Zhang, 2019, p. 56), which embodies juggling culture, wine culture, traditional Chinese medicine, Taiji and other traditional cultures. The film also contains American culture and common elements in Hollywood blockbusters, such as heroes, high-tech, aliens, the International Space Station, U.S secret agents and so on.

The film contains both Chinese and American cultures, and contains both Chinese-English and English-Chinese translations in the process of subtitle translation, which is unique. Subtitle translation should take into account both Chinese and English audiences' cognitive environments, fully explain the connotations of Chinese and American cultures in the film, and successfully achieve cross-cultural communication. To make Chinese and foreign audience better understand the film and the culture, different kinds of translation methods are adopted in the process of subtitle translation. This paper analyzes the translation of the subtitles from the perspective of the Hermeneutic motion under Hermeneutics in order to make contribution to subtitle translation studies from a new point of view.

2. HERMENEUTICS AND THE HERMENEUTIC MOTION

Hermeneutics is the interpretation theory which includes verbal and non-verbal communication. Folk etymology believes that "Hermeneutics" comes from "Hermes",

who is the "messenger of the God" (Hoy, 1981, p.1). Hermeneutics is first used to the scripture interpretation, and then is broadened to general interpretation (Grondin, 1994, p.2). Schleiermacher first combines the hermeneutics with translation in the nineteenth century. He explores the understanding of sacred texts and other ways of communication, and discusses the relationship between the understanding and translation. In the 1930s, Heidegger believes that hermeneutics studies "the way for existence only exists through interpretation" (Heidegger, 1935, p.45). He holds that translation is the interpretation and understanding of the original work. Everyone's interpretation is different when they interpret the same text. On the basis of Heidegger's thought, Gadamer puts forward interpretation principles of "historic significance of comprehension", "fusion of horizon", "effective history" in *Truth and Method* (Gadamer, 1975, p.245). Gadamer analyzes the nature of the interpretation and comprehension in the light of hermeneutics. They both emphasize that the translator's subjective initiative and creation is important. George Steiner made a thorough study of the translation process and published the book *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* in 1975. He regards the act of meaning transformation as the Hermeneutic motion (2001, p.312).

The Hermeneutic motion is fourfold, which includes "trust", "aggression", "incorporation" and "restitution". All understanding and translation starts with an act of trust (Steiner, 2001, p.312). Trust is the belief based on the experience of the translator. The translator likes and accepts the original text, and believes that the original text is meaningful and worthy of translating. Aggression is translator's second move which is incursive and extractive, and "all cognition is aggressive" (Steiner, 2001, p.313). It is reflected that translator's subjectivity is inevitable in the process of the comprehension of the original text. The translator invades, extracts, and brings home (Steiner, 2001, p.314). Incorporation means that the meaning and form of the original text can be imported by the translator. "No language, no traditional symbolic set or cultural ensemble imports without risk of being transformed" (Steiner, 2001, p.315). The translated text assimilates the elements from the original text, which is called "naturalization". Restitution is the fourth stage to compensate the off balance text. Steiner believes that the translation "must mediate into exchange and restored parity" (Steiner, 2001, p.316).

3. THE HERMENEUTIC MOTION IN THE SUBTITLE TRANSLATION OF *CRAZY ALIEN*

The subtitle of *Crazy Alien* mainly has four features: first, the subtitle contains both Chinese and English, and need Chinese-English and English-Chinese translations;

second, some words keep up with the trend of the times and others are culture loaded; third, the language used is colloquial language; fourth, the length of the subtitle is short. Translators should make the most of their subjective initiative, deeply understand the original subtitle and adopt specific translation methods so as to make the translation faithful and appropriate, and make Chinese and foreign audience better understand the film and the culture. George Steiner's Hermeneutic motion has practical instruction significance and can be adopted to analyze the subtitle translation of *Crazy Alien*.

3.1 Trust

The translator's trust towards the film *Crazy Alien* is generated for the following reasons. The film *Crazy Alien* is adapted from the novel *A Village Teacher*, one of Liu Cixin's masterpieces. This film is the first Chinese black comedy that has science fiction elements. It is released during the Spring Festival in China and creates an atmosphere of family reunion, which is suitable for family members to see together. The theme of the film is the ordinary people should believe in themselves that they are valuable persons as long as they work hard and respect themselves, which is inspiring. The film contains both Chinese and American cultures, and the translation of the film will achieve cross-cultural communication. Under the background of "the Belt and Road" Initiative, the successful translation of the film will promote the spread of Chinese culture overseas. To sum up the above factors, the film *Crazy Alien* is worth translating.

3.2 Aggression

The second move of the Hermeneutic translation is aggression. Translator will comprehend the original text in his point of view, and deal with the culture differences and historical issues in order to help audience better understand the film. The translation methods of free translation and omission are adopted to invade the original text and extract the meaning.

Example 1:

Man, this pic will *freeze TikTok* for a day
这张照片绝对能上TikTok热搜

Example 2:

Hold your horses, cowboy
太空仔你耐心点

Example 3:

Cut the chatter, boys
你们俩别贫了

Above subtitles are the examples of English-Chinese translation. In Example 1, "TikTok" is the overseas version of the popular app "抖音", and "freeze TikTok" means this video will become very popular that everyone will watch it in TikTok. "Hold your horses" in example 2 means stay calm and do not get annoyed. In example 3, "Cut the chatter" means hold your jaw and do not speak too much. The translator comprehends those words and

expressions in his point of view, and translates them into Chinese colloquial language "上TikTok热搜", "你耐心点", "别贫了" of ordinary people by using free translation method. The translation is incursive and extractive, transfers the foreign culture, and brings the meaning home.

Example 4:

还在那原地杵着呢
You've always *running in circles*

Example 5:

我寻思拉你一把
This is me *helping you*

As for Chinese-English translation, the process is also aggressive. In example 4, "原地杵着" means someone does not go forward and stay where he is. It has the similar meaning with the English phrase "run in circles". "拉你一把" in example 5 means "help you". Free translation method is adopted to understand and interpret those Chinese colloquial words in the original subtitles, which can help the foreign audience better understand the intention of the author.

Example 6:

Hey halfwit, I guess you're taking lame selfies again
我猜你又在那玩无聊的自拍

Example 7:

我保你一生荣华富贵
Can make you rich

Example 8:

伤筋动骨一百天
Her bone fractured

In the above examples, both the English-Chinese translation and Chinese-English translation are adopted the translation method of omission. In example 6, "halfwit" means a stupid person, and the omission will not change the main idea of the subtitle. "荣华富贵" in example 7 means wealth and power, the translated subtitle omit the "power" part. As for example 8, "伤筋动骨一百天" is a Chinese idiom which means it will take 100 days to recover if someone's bone is fractured. The translation omits the idiom and just conveys the information of bone fractured. The omission makes the translated subtitles short and concise for foreign audience to understand.

3.3 Incorporation

On the basis of the aggression, translator imports the meaning and form of the original subtitle and uses the target language to reproduce the information, culture and linguistic style. The language expression habits of the audience will be considered in the process of translation, and the translated subtitles will lose the features of the original text in some ways.

Example 9:

人活一口气
As long as we are breathing
佛争一炷香
We will not give up

In this example, “人活一口气，佛争一炷香” is the common saying which means people should not give up and respect himself. Considering the language expression habits of the foreign audience, the translator abandons the antithetical parallelism in the original subtitle and explains the meaning of the sentences by using the translation strategy of domestication.

Example 10:

今天可谓是高朋满座

We have so many distinguished guests here today

大家的光临

I am humbled

使我们花果山大舞台

by your gracious presence

蓬荜生辉

at the Huaguo Mountain stage

In example 10, there is not a consistent one-to-one match between Chinese and English subtitles. The translator comprehends the meaning of the original subtitles and uses domestication strategy to translate them in accord with the expression habits of English.

Example 11:

倒爬火焰山

A stroll across the mountain of flames

筋斗云里翻

Flip amongst the clouds

大圣扫堂腿

Monkey style sweep kick

铁棒定乾坤

Walking on iron stilts

一根铁棒震天下

One metal rod shakes *the earth*

两根铁棒闯天涯

Two metal rods through *the heavens*

“倒爬火焰山”，“筋斗云里翻”，“大圣扫堂腿”，and “铁棒定乾坤” are all the terminology of monkey show. The translator imports the meaning of the terminology and makes them naturalized in the translated subtitles. The translator also substitutes the “天下”，“天涯” with “the earth”，“the heavens”，which conforms to the cognition environment of the foreign audience.

Example 12:

My God

天啊

Example 13:

遭老罪了 这绑得

Jesus

Example 14:

五畜奶奶

Animal Goddess

The above subtitles are the examples of image substitution. In English culture, “god” is the being or spirit that is worshipped, “Jesus” is the son of God, and “goddess” is a female god. In Chinese culture, the equivalent images are “老天爷” and “五畜奶奶”. The translator imports the culture of the original subtitles

and uses images in target culture to explain them, which achieves cross-cultural communication successfully.

Example 15:

Captain Andrews, stand by to receive

准备接收吧 扎克·安德鲁斯上尉

For the name of a person, last name is usually following after the official position in English while in Chinese we often use people’s full name before his position. Translation method of addition is adopted by the translator to supplement the name into full name to help audiences better understand the film.

Example 16:

I’m in love

我爱上它了

Example 17:

没文化的

You ignorant

In example 16, the object is omitted in the original subtitle. In the translated subtitle, the object “它” is added to make a complete sentence which conforms to the expression way of Chinese. In example 17, the omitted subject “you” is added in the translated subtitle, and foreign audience will be easy to understand the meaning of the sentence.

3.4 Restitution

The fourth stage of Hermeneutic motion is restitution. In the previous translation stages, the culture differences and translators’ subjective understanding will inevitable led to the out of balance between the original subtitles and the translated ones. Translators need to compensate for the meaning and form to make the balance.

Example 18:

天天抖手

Shake hands everyday

精神抖擞

Fresh mind will stay

In this example, the original subtitles have the same end rhyme of “ou”, and the translator makes the translated subtitles end with the rhyme of “ay”. Compensation in linguistic level is made to make the balance between the original and translated subtitles.

Example 19:

三百六十行

Different lines of work

各行有各长

Have different unique aspects

奥运有健将

The Olympics has champions

耍猴有猴王

Monkey shows have a monkey king

In the original subtitles, they have the writing style of “XX 有 XX”. To compensate the sentence pattern, the translator uses three “have” to maintain the style of the original subtitles. The balance of form and content has been achieved.

CONCLUSION

The subtitle of the film *Crazy Alien* has the following features: the use of new words and culture loaded words, the colloquial language, and the need of Chinese-English and English-Chinese translations at the same time. Those features make the film a good carrier of the culture communication, and the subtitle translation of the film is worth of studying. This paper discusses the subtitle translation of *Crazy Alien* in the light of the Hermeneutic motion under Hermeneutics. Beginning with the trust, the translator actively invades the original subtitles, imports the meaning and form, and compensates to make the balance between the original and the translated subtitles. Both Chinese and foreign audiences can fully understand the film so that the cross-cultural communication is achieved successfully.

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