



A Study of Film Title Translation From the Perspective of Peter Newmark's Communicative Translation Theory

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Abstract

Film is a popular art form, and it is a useful tool of intercultural communication. As the brand of a film, film title can help audiences have a better understanding of the content of the film. A good translated film title should not only achieve its commercial value, but also can bring audiences to aesthetic experiences when they watching the film. Hence, the film title translation is so important.

This thesis tries to use Peter Newmark's communicative translation theory to study the methods of film title translation. In communicative translation, the translators should try to produce the same effect on the target readers as is produced by the original text on the source readers. The author put forward that, when use communicative translation theory to guide the film title translation, the translators must follow three criteria: a) the translation should be target-language-oriented; b) the translation should be aesthetic; c) the translation should be consistent with the content of the film.

Key words: Peter Newmark's communicative translation theory; Film title translation

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INTRODUCTION

Film is one of the most popular audio-visual arts, it not only tells us lots of different stories, brings us happiness,

but also drives us to ponder something in our lives. Film has developed into an important part of our daily life; it is also a valuable tool of intercultural communication between different countries and races.

To some extent, film title is the label and trademark of a film. A good film title will no doubt be a bonus to the film, and it can achieve the goal of attracting audiences, so as to drive them to buy tickets. When a film was brought into foreign markets, it was also important to have a good translated film title, thus it can attract more attention of target language audiences. Since our country has practiced the reform and open policy in the last century, we have brought in many excellent foreign films especially English films. How to make foreign films also be popular in our country? It is very important to have a translated film title understood and loved by native people. Under this situation, many Chinese translators were focused on the film field, and began to study the useful methods of film translation especially film title translation. They have made a great deal of wonderful progress in the process of exploration.

Although there are many methods of film title translation, such as literal translation, free translation, and transliteration, there are still more or less some problems and confusions, thus these ways can't accurately convey the connotation of the film.

The British translator Peter Newmark put forward the idea, "In communicative translation, the translator is trying to produce the same effect on the target readers as is produced by the original on the source language readers". He also thinks that when choose the suitable translation method, we should consider the three main factors: the purpose of the original author and the translator, text type, and readership. According to the classification of text type, film title is vocative text, and film title translation belongs to the category of advertising translation. Therefore, the author thinks that Newmark's communicative translation theory is suitable to guide the translation of film title between Chinese and English film.

When translate film title, we can achieve the purpose of publicizing and recommending the film to target-language audiences by using communicative translation theory.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Characteristics of Film Title

Title is an important part of a film, and it is also the first part of a film that attracts people. As the label of a film, the title should not only reflect the artistic quality of the film, but also to meet its business value. Generally speaking, we can study the characteristics of film title from three aspects: language characteristics, cultural characteristics, and aesthetic characteristics.

1.1.1 Language Characteristics

The most obvious language characteristic of the film title is its clearness and conciseness, for film title can highly concentrate the content of a film. In general, a film title is no more than five words. According to a research, for most of the Academy Awards winning films and nominated films, their titles usually contain two words or four words. For a lot of Chinese films, their titles contain four words. Such as, 《一步之遥》、《心花路放》、《非常完美》、《非诚勿扰》. And for many English films, there is only one word of their titles, such as *Titanic*, *Crash*, and *Ghost*. In order to achieve some effects beyond language, film titles often use rhetorical methods, such as metaphor, hyperbole, oxymoron, alliteration, rhyme, repetition, personification, contrast, etc.

1.1.2 Cultural Characteristics

Film is a kind of art form, and it is also a culture carrier. Film can record the changes of the cultural development; it can also capture the complex things of social life that in other ways can't achieve. To show the objective world is a basic purpose of films. Humans can't make films without either objective world or culture. All good films are cultural phenomena and ideological trend of social production of specific era. In short, culture is the basis of films, films also enrich the culture at the same time.

China has a long history, and Chinese culture greatly influences Chinese art. Film is an important form of art, and it is also a culture carrier, thus a lot of Chinese films convey great Chinese culture. Take film 《霸王别姬》 as the example. The film talks about the half-a-century lives of two Beijing Opera artists Duan Xiaolou and Cheng Dieyi, by narrating their sorrow and happiness, the film shows the thinking and understanding of traditional culture, people's survival state and human nature to its audiences. “霸王” in the title stands the overlord Xiang Yu of Chu dynasty, while “姬” refers to Xiang Yu's loved wife—Yu Ji. There is some record of their beautiful and sad love story in the history. If we know nothing about the story of 霸王 and 虞姬, we can't totally understand all that Cheng Dieyi did to Duan Xiaolou, and we can't

recognize what the film is talking about. The film was shot in the period of the Cultural Revolution, if we don't know the history of the Cultural Revolution, we can't understand many plots of the film.

1.1.3 Aesthetic Characteristics

Film title should not only be concise and express cultural information, but also should be beautiful or aesthetic. The aesthetic feeling that the film title can bring a person is the aesthetic characteristics of film titles.

First, the title's artistic conception is beautiful. Excellent film titles can let a person have rich and beautiful imagination through the lexical meaning of the title, and can arise one's enthusiasm for the yearning and pursuit of good things. The film *Gone With the Wind*, its Chinese translation is 《乱世佳人》; and the film *The Bridges of Madison County*, its Chinese translation is 《廊桥遗梦》. These two translated versions of the film title are good examples.

Second, the title's rhyme is beautiful. Rhyme beauty refers to that the film titles sound loud and clear, flow freely, and have musical rhythm, and can let a person enjoy auditory felling.

Third, the title is popular and easy to understand. As it is known to all, a film is successful or not in the market is depended on if it has a large number of audiences. To have a large number of audiences, on one hand, it is related to the content and the quality of the film, on the other hand, it has a link to the film title that whether it is beautiful, popular and easy to understand and whether it can make audiences have aesthetic felling.

Forth, the film title should be creative. As mentioned before, film title's rhyme and artistic conception must be beautiful, and the film title should be popular and easy to understand. Besides these characteristics, film title should be creative and attractive, and can attract the attention and interests of audiences, then make them desire to watch it. There are a lot of ways to attract the audiences, but having a creative and beautiful film title can yet be regarded as a kind of good method.

Above all, the film title should have the characteristics of three aspects, they are language characteristics; cultural characteristics, and aesthetic characteristics. Only with these three characteristics, can a film title be a qualified film title.

1.2 Functions of Film Title

Film title is the most important part of a film, for the film itself, the first part that attracts audiences are also its title. Film title as the label of a film, one of its most basic functions is identified function, that is to say, makes audiences recognize it. In general, the film title has four functions, namely vocative function, informative function, expressive function and aesthetic function.

1.2.1 Vocative Function

Vocative function may be the most important function of the film title. To some extent, it is the commercial

function of the film, its core is the audience. To determine whether a film is successful or not, the key is if it has a large number of audiences. Film is the art form that most likely arises the enthusiasm of public, then they will express their interests by buying tickets. Vocative function is to make people do some practices which are relevant to commerce, such as watching the film, talking about the film, and thinking about the film. A wonderful film title can lead people to go into the cinema, as a result, the film can contribute a lot to its box office. So, to a certain extent, film title is the brand of a film.

1.2.2 Informative Function

The informative function of a film is that the film title can convey some content related to the film. Audiences usually know little about the film when they are faced with a new film. Film title should give the audiences a hint about the story, that is, it provides the information that is related to the film. According to the title, the audiences can know the film's background and plot, so they can decide whether they are interested in the film or not.

1.2.3 Expressive Function

Film title establishes the identity of a film, or it is an indispensable element in the spread of the film. In terms of film, the expressive function is that the film title can convey the intention of the film producer. Expressive function is the key of communicative effect of a film, thus the audiences can sigh with emotion due to the tone of the film, such as the lyric, interesting or scary atmosphere.

1.2.4 Aesthetic Function

Aesthetic function is specifically designed for that kind of language to please people. First, it is achieved by real or imagined voice; second, it is achieved by rhetorical methods. Film titles should be able to let the audiences have aesthetic feeling. Aesthetic function can be done by the charm of language. For example, English is an intonation language which can make the sentence from a statement into a question by changing the pitch; it can also change those structures which are meaningless to the whole sentence. English can also create aesthetic rhythm through the use of different tones and stresses. Such as *Singing in the Rain*, *Rock and Rule*, *Dumb and Dumber*, etc. On the contrary, Chinese is tonal language, which has different pitches or tones. It can contrast meaning by using single syllable. Chinese has four pitches or tones, so Chinese can create rhyme beauty by the arrangement of different pitches or tones. Such as 《非诚勿扰》 and 《东成西就》. In addition, film title often uses rhetorical devices, which are also a language characteristic mentioned above.

1.3 Translating Methods of Film Title

So far, these are several ways of film title translation: first, literal translation. Literal translation, also named direct translation, is the rendering of text from one language to

another language word-by-word instead of conveying the sense of the original text. In the translation of film title between English film and Chinese film, it is translating an English word to its corresponding Chinese character, or translating a Chinese character into the corresponding English word. For example,

<i>Side by Side</i>	《肩并肩》
<i>Big Miracle</i>	《巨大奇迹》
<i>Honey Moon</i>	《蜜月》
<i>The Best of Me</i>	《最好的我》
《青春之歌》	<i>The Song of Youth</i>
《英雄》	<i>Hero</i>

Second, amplification and omission. That is adding words or reducing words to the original title or changing something a little on the basis of the source title. Such as,

<i>Titanic</i>	《泰坦尼克号》
<i>Fast Girls</i>	《女飞人》
<i>Life of Pi</i>	《少年派的奇幻漂流》
《四十而惑》	<i>This is 40</i>
《送冰的人》	<i>The Iceman</i>

Third, content-based translation. That is translating the film title more takes the content of the film into consideration instead of the meaning of the original one. In this way, the translated title and the original title are totally different. Like,

<i>Delhi Safari</i>	《动物也疯狂》
<i>Gone with The Wind</i>	《乱世佳人》
<i>The Wedding Planner</i>	《爱上新郎》

2. THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Communicative Translation Theory

Communicative translation theory is one of the translation modes that British translation theorist Peter Newmark put forward, the aim of it is to try to make the effect of translation to the target language readers is same to the effect of the source language to the original readers. That is to say, the point of communicative translation is to transfer information according to the target language's culture, and the way of using the language, instead of trying to reproduce the original text faithfully. In communicative translation, translators can freely explain the original text, to adjust the style, to eliminate ambiguity, and even to correct original author's mistakes. In order to achieve a certain purpose of communication, and have a special group of target readers, the translators are bound to break the limitation of the original text. Communicative translation theory is often adopted in these text types, such as news reports, textbooks, public notices, and many other non-literature works.

What should be noticed is that communicative translation is not a translation strategy that is extreme, it is the "middle way" of translation just like semantic translation. And it is not that free like compilation or that stiff like translating line by line.

2.2 Criteria of Communicative Translation

In communicative translation, one of the basic rules translators must keep in mind is that they must always keep the target language readers into consideration, because communicative translation is always put the target language readers in the first place. Schleiermacher, a Germany philosopher, once states that there are only two translation methods, “either the translator leaves the author in peace, as much as possible, and moves the reader towards him; or he leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the author towards him” (Venuti, 2004, pp.19-20). In communicative translation, the translators should keep the target readers in the peace, and drive the original text towards them as much as possible.

In particular, there are three criteria in communicative translation.

First, the translation is supposed to be target-language-oriented. Culture is the source of communicative translation, and every language has its own unique culture. The core of communicative translation is trying to produce the same effect on the target readers as is produced by the original on the source language readers. That is to say, communicative translation should be target-language-oriented.

Second, the translated text should be aesthetic and make people have aesthetic experience. For most people, they all have the tendency of pursuing beautiful and aesthetic thing. If a translation work can bring people aesthetic experience, it will attract more attention, then can achieve its purpose, especially communicative purpose.

Third, the translated text should be consistent with the content of the original text. As we have discussed above, under the guidance of communicative translation theory, we can properly adjust the original text in order to make the target readers have a much better understanding of the translated text. However, what should be pointed out is that translators must focus on the original text, because one of the aims of doing translation is to transfer information, and the original text is the source of information, as well as the basis of translation. Thus in communicative translation, translators must respect the original text, and ensure the translated text is related to the content of the original text.

3. APPLICATION OF PETER NEWMARK'S COMMUNICATIVE TRANSLATION THEORY TO FILM TITLE TRANSLATION

Peter Newmark's translation theory is important to film title translation, especially his communicative translation theory. Film title translation belongs to the category of advertising translation, so communicative translation

theory is suitable to be applied in film title translation, and can achieve the aim of introducing the film to target language audiences. As we have talked before, in communicative translation, there are three criteria. First, the translation is supposed to be target-language-oriented; second, the translated text should be artistic and make people have aesthetic experience; third, the translated text should be consistent with the original text. In this part, we will discuss the exact application of Peter Newmark's communicative translation theory in film title translation.

3.1 The Application of the Target-Language-Oriented Criteria to Film Title Translation

Film is one of the most important cultural tools in intercultural communication, title as the label of a film, plays a crucial role in the process. When someone was faced with a film, title is the first part he will notice, so a qualified film title should exactly transfer the culture of the language it uses. Meanwhile, when a film is on foreign markets, it is also important to have a good translated title.

As a part of culture, film will inevitably reflect the cultural characteristics which it belongs to. When translate the title of a film, we should try to make the cultural information it conveys is totally understood by the target language audiences. A lot of films like using legends and mythologies, religion stories, and allusions in other literature, these allusions are unique in their own culture, and in other cultures, however, they will express the very different meaning. Such as English film *Seven*, literally, it seems it should be translated as 《七》. But what are seven? As it refers to seven people, seven items or seven things? In fact, in western religions, “seven” is often used to standardize people's moral or religious rites, number “seven” has a profound impact on western languages. The film is a thriller reflects the seven deadly sins listed in *the Bible*, seven are the short form of seven sins. Chinese translated version is 《七宗罪》, that is seven deadly sins. Seven deadly sins refer to the seven sins of Christianity written in the statement of *paradise lost*, they are gluttony, greed, lust, pride, sloth, anger and jealousy. This is peculiar to the Christian culture, people who do not understand the Christian culture will not know what the seven deadly sins are, then they will not totally understand what the film is talking about. The translated film title 《七宗罪》 clearly transform the culture Chinese audiences may not exactly know. As a result, it is easier to understand the theme of the film.

In this way, we can know, the aim of translating English film title into a Chinese one is to make the Chinese audiences understand and accept these films. In the process of translating English film title into Chinese, skillfully combining with Chinese culture, adjusting measures to local conditions, often can get surprising effects.

According to Peter Newmark's communicative translation theory, we should try to produce the same

effect on the target readers as is produced by the original on the source language readers. That is to say, the translated version should be target-language-oriented. Such as the film *This is 40*, its Chinese translated version is “四十不惑”. We all know that in Chinese culture, when one is in 40s, he will not be confused, that is “四十而不惑”. So translating the film title to “四十不惑” instead of the literal translation “这是四十”, Chinese audiences will be familiar with it, they can immediately know what kind of story this film may tell about.

Take a more example, Chinese film 《吉星高照》, the character “吉” in the film title is a specific Chinese character, and it means something that can bring of people fortune. But foreign people don't know the exact meaning of the Chinese character “吉”. According to the target-language-oriented criteria of communicative translation theory, when translated the Chinese film title into English, we should take the English culture into consideration, and try to make the translated title immediately understood by those people whose mother tongue is English. So the film's English version is *Lucky Star*. In English there is a phrase “lucky dog”, it means a person who is lucky. So by comparing “lucky dog” with “lucky star”, English-speaking people can get a rough understanding of the meaning of “lucky star”, then they can have a better understanding of the Chinese film.

3.2 The Application of the Aesthetic Criteria to Film Title Translation

Just as a film title should be beautiful and can bring artistic experience to audience, its translated version also should be artistic. As an important tool to put the film into the market and to occupy the market, film title always has its own unique aesthetic. The aesthetic feeling that the film title can bring a person is the aesthetic characteristics of film titles.

Aesthetic principle tells us that any beautiful thing is the dialectical unification of form beauty and content beauty. In other words, we can divide film title's aesthetic characteristics into form beauty and content beauty. The form beauty of film title mainly refers to the beautiful rhyme of the title, while content beauty including the beauty of artistic conception, beauty of popularity, and beauty of creativity, etc. a vivid and beautiful film title can attract audiences and make them have aesthetic experience, this is the aesthetic function of film title. The aesthetic characteristics of translated film title are often reflected in the form, sound-effect, and figures of speech. In this way, audiences are attracted and touched by the aesthetic characteristics of the title, thus they can remember the title. That is to say, a film title translation should follow the artistic criteria. Take the film *The Big Blue* as the example. The title of the film is so simple to understand, the word in it is simple, and its meaning is also simple. When the film was introduced to China, its Chinese film title is 《碧海蓝天》. For Chinese

audiences, the film title is so beautiful, and when meet the film title, they will imagine many wonderful thing, in other word, the film title brings them aesthetic experience.

First, the title's artistic conception is beautiful. Excellent film titles can let a person have rich and beautiful imagination through the lexical meaning of the title, and can arise one's enthusiasm for the yearning and pursuit of good things. The film *Gone with the Wind*, its Chinese translation is 《乱世佳人》; and the film *The Bridges of Madison County*, its Chinese translation is 《廊桥遗梦》. These two translated versions of the film title are good examples. Taking a more example, film *Ghost*, if we translate it directly into Chinese 《鬼》, it has no aesthetic felling, and makes people mistake it as a thriller, but if the translation is 《人鬼情未了》, it sounds very beautiful and sad, and it also let people full of imagination and expectation. Second, the title's rhyme is beautiful. Rhyme beauty refers to that the film titles sound loud and clear, flow freely, have musical rhythm, and can let a person enjoy auditory felling. Chinese film 《东港谍影》(rise and fall), 《不见不散》(rhyme), and English film *Singing in the rain*(rhyme), *Rock and rule* (alliteration) are good examples. Third, the title is popular and easy to understand. At home and abroad, most of film titles are easy to understand and accept for common people, such as *Love at first sight*, *Star wars*, 《英雄》、《手机》, etc.. This kind of film titles are easy to understand and accept for audience and they will be never forgotten. Forth, the film title should be creative. For example, the English film *The Net*, if we translate it directly into Chinese as 《网络》, it is so bland and make audiences think that the film is must be boring, but if we translate it to 《网络惊魂》, it is creative, and can arise one's curiosity and make them have the desire to watch it.

What kind of film title is artistic? Here we just take some more examples of artistic translation of the film title.

<i>The Last Five Years</i>	《恋恋如歌》
<i>Accidental Love</i>	《意外的爱情》
<i>Spring</i>	《爱在初春惊变时》

3.3 The Application of the Content-Consistent Criteria to Film Title Translation

The primary function of language is to pass information. The information here not only refers to the form of information, but also the tone and style of the original text. Title is an important element of a film, its most important function is informative function. So an accurate translated film title should not only be accurate in meaning, but also be faithful to the content, style and tone of the original title, that is to say, film title translation should follow the content-consistent criteria. Such as the film *Ghost*, mainland literal translated it as 《幽灵》. The translated title is creepy and will make people mistake it as a thriller.

But in fact, this film is about a romantic love story that with a teary ending. If translate the title to 《幽灵》, it is likely to mislead audiences, but the translated title 《人鬼情未了》 just exactly convey the film's original intention, it is also closer to the main story of the film.

That is to say, no matter it is literal translation or free translation, the primary principle of film title translation is to convey the exact information of the film. Such as the film *Gone with the Wind*. It tells a beautiful girl's hard life during the war, if its Chinese version is 《随风离去》, we will be confused and have no idea of what story the film talks about, but if we translate it as 《乱世佳人》, We can say, the translated title is consistent to the content of the film, thus, Chinese audiences can have a better understanding of the film, then they can decide whether they are interested in it or not.

CONCLUSION

(a) Major Findings

In general, this thesis has the following major findings: First, film title is vocative text, film title translation belongs to the category of advertising translation, and Peter Newmark's communicative translation theory is suitable to guide the translation of film title. Second, when using communicative translation theory, the translation of film title should be target-culture-oriented. Third, the author puts forward several specific standards to guide the translation of film title. First, translation should be target-culture-oriented; Second, the translations should fully achieve the aesthetic values of the film title. Third, the translated film title should be related to the content of the film, as a result, audiences can get some information related to the film through the title.

(b) Limitations and Suggestions

The limitations of the thesis are as follows: First, the knowledge and translating experience of the author is limited, which may impede a more profound study on this topic; second, the study is mainly focused on latest films, and didn't study the details of early films. In addition, the collected data is not enough; third, this thesis didn't thoroughly study the phenomenon and reason that there are different translated versions of the same film title in different regions.

Because of the limitations of this thesis, the suggestions for further study can be divided into the following three aspects: First, to know more knowledge about communicative translation theory; second, to collect more examples and data of different times; third, to study the details of the phenomenon and reason that there are different translated versions of the same film title in different areas.

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