

Application of Contextual Adaptation in Film Title Translation

Li Qun

College of Foreign Language, Taishan University, Shandong 271000, China

Abstract: Film title is an important part of film and the first part to be directly confronted with the audience, so its translation plays a critical role in the promotion of the film production. Context is the environment where language can survive and improve as it restricts language and determines its destiny. So the translator should translate the film title according to the context.

Keywords: Film Title; Translation; Cultural Difference; Contextual Adaptation; Translation Strategy

As we all know, film is an art form that integrates performance, visuals, and sound, and its rich content brings people visual enjoyment that other art forms cannot provide. With the development of cultural exchanges between China and other countries in the world, film, as a special medium of cultural dissemination, plays a crucial role in promoting and spreading our own culture. Since the implementation of the reform and opening-up policy, a large number of English films have flooded into the Chinese market, while domestic films have also developed rapidly. How to make films effectively play their role in cultural dissemination, so that audiences will not forget them and they will remain fresh over time, translation is crucial.

The film title, as an important component of a movie, is the condensation and essence of the film's content, involving various aspects of social and cultural forms, including politics, economy, history, religion, etc. How to overcome the understanding gap caused by different socio-cultural backgrounds is the first problem that translators need to solve. Context is the environment in which language survives, is used, and develops. It restricts language and determines its fate. It is also the bond connecting the two parties of verbal communication. Context adaptation theory, as a new theory explored in the field of pragmatics in China, has strong guidance on how to overcome the understanding gap caused by different socio-cultural backgrounds.

The so-called context refers to the linguistic environment. Polish anthropologist Malinowski believed that "discourse and environment are closely intertwined, and the linguistic environment is indispensable for understanding language." Context is divided into macro-context and micro-context. Micro-context refers to the semantic collocation and semantic combination of words, which locates meaning in specific senses. Macro-context refers to the entire socio-cultural context, which involves various aspects of life, including politics, economy, religion, history, etc. Different countries have different linguistic contexts. It is precisely because of this difference and the independence of context that a gap in understanding is created. Therefore, when translating, the translator should first consider the context.

Traditional translation theories advocate that translation should be faithful to the original text. When translating, translators often prioritize the consistency of meaning between the translation and the original text, followed by the consistency of style. However, the essence of translation is the transmission of information, that is, the exchange of information. Context plays a crucial role in translation, as it serves as the foundation of translation. Therefore, during the translation process, translators should not only utilize their own linguistic knowledge but also consider the context of the original text. Only by doing so can they accurately convey the author's intended meaning.

According to the theory of context adaptation, there are three common methods for translating movie titles.

1. literal translation

Literal translation is a translation method that maintains the original meaning and style, with a focus on the accuracy of meaning. When the title of a movie can basically summarize the content of the movie, we often use literal translation, which is more in line with the context of the movie. For example, the following movie titles are translated: Cold Mountain is translated into "Cold Mountain", God Father is translated into "The Godfather", Kill Bill is translated into "Kill Bill", and Schindler's List is translated into "Schindler's List". This translation method maintains the meaning and structure of the original text to the greatest extent. However, when translating literally, the translator must consider the context of the translation. For example, the title of the movie Spider Man, if translated literally, would be "Spider Man". How-

ever, according to China's social and cultural environment, Chinese people worship chivalrous and righteous heroes, and the protagonist of this movie is a chivalrous and righteous hero who upholds justice. Therefore, Spider Man is translated into "Spider-Man" instead of "Spider Man". In this way, it not only conforms to the context of the original text, reflects the main content of the movie authentically, but also conforms to the context of China, arousing the audience's interest in watching.

Nowadays, an increasing number of Chinese films are also making their way to the international market. Direct translation is also employed by many translators in translating Chinese film titles. For instance, the film "Red Sorghum" directed by Zhang Yimou, which is a film with strong Chinese cultural characteristics, reflects Chinese cultural traits from its title to its content. Especially the red sorghum in the film is the most eye-catching. Therefore, in order to maintain the original style, the translator adopts direct translation and translates it into "Red Sorghum". Another example is the film "The Horse Thief" directed by Tian Zhuangzhuang, which is translated into "The Horse Thief". These films are popular in foreign markets, and the translation of the film titles plays a significant role.

2. Transliteration

Transliteration is also a relatively common method for translating movie titles, especially when translating those containing names of people or places. This translation method is often used, such as "Chicago", "Romeo and Juliet", "Tess", "David Copperfield", "Gandhi", etc.

In the translation of Chinese films, the most typical example of using transliteration is the film "Ke Ke Xi Li". This film tells a story that takes place in the Kekexili region of Xizang, using transliteration to directly reflect the location where the story takes place and the regional characteristics of the film.

3. Free translation

Free translation is a method often used in the translation of movie titles. This method does not adhere strictly to the form of the original text, but focuses more on expressing the meaning and spirit of the original text. Many movie titles contain a wealth of cultural information, such as idioms, slang, and historical events. If such titles were translated literally or phonetically, they could easily cause misunderstandings and confusion for audiences lacking knowledge of English culture. To bridge the cultural gap and avoid disagreements and misunderstandings, translators should pay more attention to the content of the movie. Take the famous romantic movie "Ghost" as an example. The word "ghost" in the title is translated literally because ghosts exist in many Chinese stories and are acceptable to Chinese audiences, which can certainly attract viewers. The phrase "love never dies" is a free translation adopted by the translator based on Chinese cultural context, as love stories between humans and ghosts are common in China, such as "A Chinese Ghost Story". Therefore, "Ghost" is easily accepted by Chinese people. Such translation not only reflects the main content of the movie but also arouses the curiosity of Chinese audiences. However, if a literal translation were used, the movie would be translated as "Ghost", which completely deviates from the content of the movie, turning a beautiful love story into a horror ghost story. A good translation should never cause misunderstandings among audiences, thus deviating from the content of the original text. Ye Shengtao once said that a good title can allow the author to reflect the central idea of the article. For readers, they can predict the content of the story before reading based on the title, sparking infinite imagination. Take "Forrest Gump" as another example. This movie won six awards at the 67th Academy Awards and achieved great success in the Chinese film market. The translation of this title draws inspiration from Mr. Lu Xun's novel "The True Story of Ah Q", adapting to the Chinese context. However, if a literal translation were used, it would be translated as "Forest Gump", which not only fails to reflect the content of the movie but also does not adapt to the Chinese context.

Chinese culture is profound, and the meanings represented by Chinese characters are even more complex and deep. Translating Chinese film titles into English requires translators to combine context and truly embody their essence. For example, the revolutionary romance film 'Red Lover' tells a memorable love story during the Chinese revolution, so the film title was translated as 'A Time To Remember'. Another example is the film 'Beautiful Mom', which tells the story of a deaf-mute child and his mother's difficult life, and was translated as 'Breaking the Silence'. These translations have successfully adapted to the context of the translated text, attracted the audience's attention, reflected the cultural connotation of the film, and achieved vivid artistic effects.

References

- [1] Li Mingwen. An Analysis of Contextual Adaptation in News Interviews [J]. Lanzhou Academic Journal, 2022(2)
- [2] Liu Nengjun. The Influence of Context Adaptation on Discourse Understanding [D]. Jiangxi: Jiangxi Normal University, 2023
- [3] Chen Pingwen. A Review of Context Theory Research [J]. Journal of Chinese Language Studies, 2017(1)
- [4] Ni Peng. The Enlightenment of Context Theory on English Reading Teaching [J]. Journal of Qiqihar Teachers College, 2019(1)
- [5] Chen Chao. Application of Context Theory in Short Dialogues in CET-4 Listening and Its Implications for Teaching [J]. Examination Weekly, 2020(1)
- [6] Liu Hanyu. Research on Acquiring Deep Vocabulary Knowledge in High School English Classrooms Under the Guidance of Context Theory [D]. Nanjing: Nanjing Normal University, 2021
- [7] Xie Jing. English Speech and Situational Context Teaching in College English [J]. Science Education and Culture, 2022(3)
- [8] Bu Xun. The Enlightenment of Context Theory on Teaching Strategies in English Intensive Reading Courses [J]. Journal of Nanchang Institute of Education, 2022 (4)