

# Ecotranslatology-based Research on the Strategies and Methods for Translating English Film Titles into Chinese

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**Abstract**— This paper explores the English film title translation strategies and methods through the theory of Eco-translatology proposed by Hu Gengshen. It studies the theme from three dimensions which are linguistics, culture and communication. And it can be seen that Darwin's tenet of "natural selection and survival of the fittest" is fully employed in the theory. It is hoped that Eco-translatology can be better used in the market of film translation and other translation markets.

**Keywords**— English film titles, Eco-translatology, translation strategies, translation methods.

## I. INTRODUCTION

As an artistic form, films satisfy both academic and popular needs, which tell stories, present vivid images, convey deep emotions and appeal to the audience by their wonderful combination of sound, color and images. As part of the film, the title also indicates the foremost information about the film to the viewers, which can attract the audience at the first sight. A brilliant translation of the film title cannot only arrest the attention, but also help to establish the film's everlasting reputation.

The film title has its own features of linguistics, culture and communication, which deserves the translators' careful consideration. However, until now, almost no one has proposed a systematic principle to guide the film title translation, for there are many problems in the process of film title translation, such as mistranslations, loose regulations, many versions for the same film, and so on. All these bring about negative influences to the film market. On the other hand, although there are numerous articles concerning the representation of literary works or scientific literature, few essays are written concerning the translation of films, let alone film titles.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Based on the title, Eco-translatology and film title translation should be reviewed. And the studies on English

film title translation are divided into three aspects, film genre, the naming of English films and the previous studies on English film title translation at home.

### 2.1 Previous Studies on Eco-translatology

In 2001, "Eco-translatology" was firstly proposed by Hu Gengshen. And he (2004) further studied translation activities taking advantage of Darwin's evolution theory of "natural selection and survival of the fittest". Later in 2013, he gave an overall explanation of the theoretical basis and development of Eco-translatology, and discussed Eco-translatology at the macro-, meso- and micro-levels.

In 2010, the first International Symposium on Ecological Translation was convened. So far it has been successfully held six times. And the annual *Journal of Eco-translatology* has also been published six times, resulting in the six volumes which embody a deep analysis about the study status and problems of Eco-translatology from domestic and foreign Eco-translatology scholars. Moreover, Hu Gengshen (2008; 2010; 2011a; 2011b) has published extensively in the key journals about Eco-translatology, which points out that the interdisciplinary study meets the requirements of the day and academia by analyzing the present status and future development of Eco-translatology and indicates that the ecological theory involves nine research focuses and theoretical perspectives about translation ecological environment, adaptive selection, ecological paradigm and relative theories.

Eco-translatology has attracted considerable attention at home in the past decade. It has also been recognized by overseas scholars (Hu, 2011b). Nevertheless, it is still a long way for the theory to go global.

## **2.2 Previous Studies on English Film Title Translation**

By comparison, theoretical study on audiovisual translation, namely the translation of foreign films and TV programs remains barely touched upon. However, the perspectives of the film (title) translation are flourishing. Delabastita (1989) gave an evidence that film translation should emphasis on its culture. Chaume (2004) and Peña-Cervel (2016) studied the film translation from the linguistic perspective, combing the translation theory and discourse analysis to prove that film translation is highly interrelated to communication studies. Ulrych (2000) and Mei (2010) showed that film title translation should pay attention to the translation strategies, such as Domestication and Foreignification. But in China, Qian Shaochang (2000: 61) points out that the number of the audiences of film and TV series is much larger than that of literary works, and the audiovisual translation has no less influence than literary translation.

### **2.2.1 Film Genre**

In film theory, there are generally three categories in genre: education, documentary and fiction. The first two genres can be seen to transfer information. Their language is plain and the style is formal. They can only focus on the limited number of audiences. However, the fictional film aims at entertaining all types of audience. Therefore, in order to attract the attention of the audience, it has a very strong color of emotion (Tang, 2006: 23).

### **2.2.2 The Naming of English Films**

In general, the film title may cover the main content of the film and uncover the theme of it. For translators to do a better job in translation, it is really necessary to better understand how English films get their titles, for this will help translators to know the differences between English and Chinese film titles. The film is a synthetic art with narrative characteristics. Accordingly, the film can be named in accordance with the following aspects (ibid.).

Firstly, films are named by the plot; secondly, they are named by the theme; thirdly, they are named by the main character; fourthly, they are named by the background (ibid.: 24).

### **2.2.3 Previous Studies of English Film Title Translation at Home**

In recent years, Qian Shaochang (2000: 63) has pointed out the importance of film translation by mentioning that it has

more influence on people's everyday life than the pure literary works. However, film translation researchers are outnumbered by the researchers on literary translation. This imbalance calls for more researchers to contribute more efforts to this largely uncharted field. He proposes the five characteristics about film language: listening, comprehensiveness, transience, commonness and limitation (ibid.: 70).

Based on the audience's expectation, some authors provide a better translation of film titles. With the linguistic and cultural differences, as well as the effect of the title on the audience, the audience's expectation, reception competence and their judgement will bring a solution for translators to produce better translated works.

## **III. AN OVERVIEW OF ECO-TRANSLATOLOGY**

In general, Eco-translatology, a macroscopic and systematic theory, is "an ecological approach to the translation studies" or "translation studies from an ecological perspective", which has developed from the theory of "translation as adaptation and selection" (Hu, 2008: 11-12).

### **3.1 Definition of Eco-translatology**

As has been mentioned above, Eco-translatology includes two subjects: "ecology" and "translatology". And it can also be regarded as an interdisciplinary study.

"Ecology" is defined as "the brand of biology" which studies the relationship between living things and the environment as well as the interrelationship between living things themselves (Victoria, 1995: 429). Nowadays ecology is the science based on holism, and it emphasizes the interrelated and interactive integrity (Krohne, 2001: 11).

"Translatology" is the discipline that studies the rules and the art of translation. And translation theory is the rational conception and concludes a series of translation knowledge, such as translation essence, principles, process, methods and criteria.

Based on the ecology and translatology, Eco-translatology has formed a series of terms and conceptions from the perspective of translational ecology, such as "translational eco-environment and ecosystem", "the survival of the fittest", "translators' selection", "translators' adaptation" and "symbiotic interaction" (Hu, 2003: 284), as well as ongoing theoretical and applied researches and accumulated results. All these finally lead to the production of Eco-translatology.

### **3.2 The Principle, Process and Methods of Eco-translatology**

Only from the literal sense, the concept of the translational eco-environment is far broader than what the “context” refers to in the traditional explanation. Indeed, this environment is made up of many restricting factors which influence the translators’ best translation activity -- selective adaptation and adaptive selection in the translation process (Hu, 2004: 15), which means Eco-translatology views translation activities from a broader perspective, not just limits them to the level of linguistic equivalence.

The other important aspect is the translators’ selection and adaptation. It lays emphasis on the importance of the translator, which can be attributed to the different characteristics of the source text (henceforth “ST”) and the translator, with the former relatively “static” and “passive”, and the latter comparatively “flexible” and “active”. Under this condition, the translation activity can be regarded as the process in which the translators take account of all the factors either internal or external, work over the ST, and then produce the target text (henceforth “TT”) based on their objective and subjective understanding. Therefore, from the perspective of Eco-translatology, the translation process should be considered as an alternative circle of the translators’ selection and adaptation (ibid.: 1).

#### **3.2.1 Translation Principle**

In Eco-translatology, “Translation is the translators’ selective activity on the basis of its adaptation to the translational eco-environment” (Hu, 2008: 13). According to the definition, it can be easily deduced that how the translator conducts the activity of adaptation and selection matters a lot. In a sense, the translator only needs to adapt to some important elements for the sake of convenience and efficiency, which is called multidimensional selective adaptation in Eco-translatology (Hu, 2004: 15). On the other hand, on the basis of multidimensional adaptation, the translators make the decisions of different selections or different translators may select different TTs, which is called multidimensional adaptive selection of Eco-translatology (ibid.: 17). In this case, Eco-translatology generalizes the translation principle as “multidimensional selective adaptation and adaptive selection”.

#### **3.2.2 Translation Process**

There are two stages in the translation process: the first is the translators’ selective adaptation and the second is the translators’ adaptive selection.

At the first stage, the translator adapts himself or herself to the translational eco-environment, with emphasis

on the ST as the main factor, taking account of and fully analyzing all the other elements in the eco-environment, such as source language (henceforth “SL”), target language (henceforth “TL”), addresser, addressee, translator, clients and so on.

At the second stage, the translator, as an important part of the eco-environment, selects the TL within the sphere of or with the restriction of the translational eco-environment. After discussing these two stages, we can easily draw the conclusion that the translation activity should eventually achieve the goal of the multidimensional transformation and the multidimensional adaptation.

#### **3.2.3 Translation Methods**

As for the relationship between language, culture and communication, translation is the conversion of language, and language is part of culture; culture is the deposit of human activities, and human beings are part of the nature; all these constitute a meaningful inner relationship. Hu Gengshen (2003: 289-290) further proposes the concept of “sequence chain”, an inner-logical related chain of the cognitive extending (see Figure 1).

Translation ↔ Language ↔ Culture ↔ Human ↔ Nature

*Fig.1: Sequence chain of Eco-translatology*

The inner relationship of the chain is straight and plain: as members of the nature, humans’ long time interactive activities produce culture; culture is transmitted by the medium of language, and language is the carrier of cultural information as well as the container of culture storage; translation is needed when language does not work, and it is also a kind of great social strength. Thus, language, culture and communication are all regarded as the indispensable aspects in translation research and translation practice, which should be taken into consideration when translators are conducting the transformation and selection.

### **3.3 Application of Eco-translatology to Film Title Translation**

In order to testify the applicability, the association between translation and ecology should be first discussed.

Ecology can be regarded as the “science of science”, providing the rules for other theories in a holistic and an overall way (Krohne, 2001: 11). In this case, when translation is guided by ecology, Eco-translatology comes into being. In addition, film title translation is an important part of literary rendition, so Eco-translatology, as the “science of science”, can explain and guide the film title translation scientifically and effectively.

As far as the film title is concerned, it is regarded as quite different from other literary forms in many ways. The most prominent difference is that film is a combination of art and business in nature. Thus, film should be defined both as a cultural product and a valuable commodity. On the contrary, the Chinese film title prefers allusions and indirectness, and it is always named according to the clue and vagueness tinged with more artistic flavor.

In conclusion, the translators need to apply the proper strategies and methods to select the optimal TT, so as to adapt to the eco-environment of translation. In a word, all the above-mentioned points fully indicate that Eco-translatology can guide the analysis and explanation of film title translation.

#### IV. ENGLISH-CHINESE FILM TITLE TRANSLATION STRATEGIES BASED ON ECO-TRANSLATOLOGY

Based on Eco-translatology, in the translating process the translators need to take into consideration the linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions to complete the multidimensional transformation of translation, and further accomplish the multidimensional selective adaptation. Or rather, the translators should combine the TL culture, TL habit and the appreciation level of the audience in the language translation process to conduct the language conversion and the artistic re-creation. Finally, the “popular, colloquial and artistic” translation should be emphasized

(Bao, 2001: 71) to attract the audience, arouse their aesthetic pleasure and play the part of advertising and promotion.

In essence, the linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions can be regarded as translation strategies from a global point of view. The strategies below in the form of dimensions are achieved by the specific translation methods. For example, the linguistic dimension as a translation strategy is achieved by some translation methods, including conversion of language structure, conforming to language beauty, conversion of a noun to a verb and addition of adjectives.

##### 4.1 Adaptive Transformation from the Linguistic Dimension

Adaptive transformation from the linguistic dimension emphasizes “the translators’ adaptive transformation forms in the translation process” (Hu, 2009: 2).

##### 4.1.1 Converting the Structure of Language and Conforming to the Beauty of Language

Seen from the linguistic dimension, the Chinese translation of English film titles should select the appropriate language structure, proper language style and expression based on the language habits of Chinese readers. The four-character structure, as the language form that can easily be accepted by the target readers, is frequently adopted in the Chinese-English (E-C) film title translation. The examples in Table 1 (Lin, 1279-1293) in which all the TTs have a four-character structure are concise in image and resonant in sound, not only delivering the charm of the ST, but also enhancing the readability and attractiveness of the TT.

Table 1: Use of four-character expressions in film title translation

Adam’s Rib	金屋藏娇	Airport	九霄惊魂
All That Jazz	浮生君梦	Arrogance and Passion	气壮山河
Cocktail’s Melody	莺歌蝶舞	Cyanide and Raindrops	雨夜奇案
Dinner at Eight	八时餐会	East of Eden	天伦梦回
Go Arrogantly	势不两立	Goodbye, Mr. Chipps	万世师表
Great Waltz	翠堤春晓	Heroes of Telemark	雪地英雄
Hotel Imperial	帝国饭店	How Green Was My Valley	青山翠谷
Lawrence of Arabia	沙漠枭雄	Leaves at the Fall	怨妇悲秋

According to Table 1, the Chinese translation of *Go Arrogantly* and *Arrogance and Passion* convert the structure of the source language. They are traditional

Chinese idioms, which can enhance the beauty of language and will be easily accepted by the target readers.

##### 4.1.2 Converting the Noun Form of the Original Title to the Verb or Adding Adjectives

It is known that nouns are too plain to make the vividness come true and verbs are used more frequently than nouns in Chinese. In this case, we usually turn noun phrases into verb phrases or subject-predicate structures. Examples of this kind are *The Rock* (勇闯夺命岛), *Home Alone* (小鬼当家) and so on. Besides, for the sake of enhancing the attractiveness of the title, a noun can be modified by adjectives with a vivid image. The film title *Speed* translated into “生死时速” brings to the audience not only the tension and excitement but the tempestuous plot and thrilling experience.

#### 4.2 Adaptive Transformation from the Cultural Dimension

Adaptive transformation from the cultural dimension requires the translators to take account of the transmission and explanation of the source and target languages' cultural connotations during the translation process (ibid.).

According to Li Cheng (2008: 63), translation is a cross-cultural activity where words in one cultural environment are transplanted to another cultural environment. Films and film titles always fail to get across to people in another cultural system mainly because they are immersed in their distinct cultural system made up of the nation's literature, history and other factors. Cultural distance is also an additional factor, which becomes “the extra-linguistic factor” and barrier of the understanding and communication (ibid.: 64). Therefore, complying with national psychology and national culture is the linchpin of a successful film title translation.

Therefore, in the process of translation, only when translators ponder over the language customs and target readers' cultural acceptability, and present the English film title in the most natural and familiar language, can the translated titles be completely accepted and understood by the audience and thus good results be realized. “蝙蝠侠”, “蜘蛛侠” and “十二罗汉” as the Chinese titles of Hollywood blockbusters *Batman* and *Spiderman* as well as the action movie *Ocean's Twelve* are full of distinctive Chinese characteristics. “侠” (*xia*, swordsman) means a hero in English. It always shows us justice and fairness and conveys the chivalrous spirit of the Chinese people and the pursuit of *xia* culture, and “罗汉” is a Buddhist term, meaning “powerful” for the Chinese nation.

The American movie title *Waterloo Bridge* translated into Chinese as “魂断蓝桥” which is regarded as an excellent translation. It tells a poignant love tragedy during World War II. The Waterloo Bridge in the movie is of great importance, for it is either the place of the hero and heroine

starting their beautiful love or the position where the heroine ended her life. If literally translated into “滑铁卢桥”, the title not only fails to convey the film's plot, but misleads the viewers, for most of them are predisposed to think that this is a documentary film pertaining to Napoleon or the battle of Waterloo. On the contrary, the translator took the cultural factors into full account and highlighted the emotional implication by creatively transforming “Waterloo Bridge” to “蓝桥”, the image borrowed from the ancient China as the symbol of lovers parting and adding two characters “魂断” so as to suggest the tragic ending. This innovative translation not only conveys the information of the story, but also appears to be elegant and refined in form (Jia, 2009: 29). In addition, it is more orderly in rhythm, so as to be more expressive and fascinating. In this way, the translator successfully avoided the confusion of the Chinese audience caused by the geographical and cultural differences as well as the lack of historical background. In the film *Lolita*, *Lolita* is indeed the name of the heroine. If literally translated into “洛丽塔”, the title would look very common and unattractive to the audiences who are not familiar with the novel at first glance. The film actually describes the deformed love of pedophilia, so the translator used the Song poet Su Dongpo's ridiculous verse line “一树梨花压海棠” (a tree of pear blossoms overwhelm the begonia) as the Chinese title. It is no wonder that this title is highly appreciated by most translators and scholars and has become an outstanding example in film translation (ibid.).

#### 4.3 Adaptive Transformation from the Communicative Dimension

Adaptive transformation from the communicative dimension means “the translators' adaptive transformation of the source and target languages' communicative intention in the translation process” (Hu, 2009: 3).

On the one hand, the audience is supposed to know about the theme and the content of the film. If *The Piano* should directly be translated into “钢琴”, the translation would be plain and boring, and there is no doubt that the audience could not grasp what the film is to present. So the translation of “钢琴别恋” (*Love from the Pianist*) seems much better for which conforms to the plot of the film, and it makes the proper modification of the original title.

On the other hand, the translated title is supposed to be novel and fascinating to imbue the audiences with a strong desire to watch the film. The good cases in point include “修女也疯狂” for *Sister Act*, “亿万未婚夫” for *The*

*Bachelor*, “子弹横穿百老汇” for *Bullets Over Broadway*, and so on.

Moreover, the artistic quality of translation should be intensified by making the translation not only get closer to the ST but also deliver the vivid image of the original, so as to evoke the audience’s aesthetic resonance. Indeed, natural and elegant titles can always arouse people’s aesthetic sentiment and stimulate their artistic entertainment. In the process of translating, the translators need to make explicit the implicit information via the contextual representation and vivid language. In addition to bringing the audience the beautiful atmosphere, this kind of title can directly point to the film theme, thus achieving the optimal translation effect. Typical examples of this category are “缘分的天空” for *Sleepless in Seattle*, “舞动人生” for *Billy Elliot*, “金法尤物” for *Legally Blonde*, and so on.

#### 4.4 Summary

The principle of the “three transformation dimensions” of Eco-translatology provides a distinctive perspective for English film title translation, which underlines the importance of the translators’ multidimensional selective adaptation in language, culture and communication. After the selection and adaptation, the translated title can finally arrive at the combination of validity, culture and artistry, exert the guiding influence on the moviegoers, and eventually add the brilliance to the film.

## V. CONCLUSION

The theory of “Eco-translatology” is used in this study which focuses on the “three transformation dimensions”. It not only describes the present situation of E-C film title translation, but summarizes how Eco-translatology is applied to the E-C film title translation.

Due to various reasons, few scholars have offered a systematic principle to guide the film title translation. Therefore, there exist many problems in the process of film title translation, such as mistranslation, loose regulation, multiple versions for the same film, only a few good film title translations, and so on. Thus, some tentative research on film title translation under the guidance of the “the three-dimensional principle” of Eco-translatology are conducted to offer some constructive instructions for English film title translation. It should be noted that there are some weaknesses in this study.

Firstly, the paper mainly applies the analytical and comparative methods to conduct the study, in which the quantitative analysis is lacking owing to the limited time

and the authors’ theoretical competence. Secondly, Eco-translatology starts from a macroscopic point of view and the eco-environment of translation is an integrative whole, so the present study is far from a comprehensive one. And some elements like the translators, clients and investors are ignored. Thirdly, due to the fact that there are more English films imported to China than Chinese films exported abroad and more research on E-C film title translation rather than C-E film title translation, only English film title translation is considered. This is actually not enough, because cultural communication is interactive and bidirectional.

It is expected that in the future, scholars will conduct more research with depth and comprehensiveness, especially on the C-E film title translation. To have a further research, it is better to have a deeper study of Eco-translatology, and then put it into practice for E-C film title translation. In addition, more studies are required for the influencing factors in the process of English films title translation. And hopefully, this paper will contribute to the E-C film title translation.

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