

A Study of Subtitle Translation in *Paddington 2* from the Perspective of Eco-Translatology

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Abstract

Paddington 2 is a live-action animated comedy film adapted from the children's literature *Paddington* by British author Michael Bond. The story unfolds around a Peruvian bear dressed in an English school style. The warm and profound plot has won the hearts of countless viewers. As a newly released film with wide influence, choosing this film for research has significant theoretical significance and practical value. This paper conducts a study on the subtitle translation of *Paddington 2* from the perspective of ecological translation studies, focusing on three major dimensions: language dimension, cultural dimension, and communication dimension, and deeply analyzes the strategies and methods of subtitle translation. In terms of language, this study explores how to precisely transform the humorous style and puns of the original text. In terms of culture, it analyzed how to convey the characteristics of British culture and maintain its cultural connotation. In terms of the communication dimension, how to maintain the coherence of the dialogue and convey the emotions of the characters was studied. This research is conducive to deepening the theory of subtitle translation, enriching the practical application of ecological translation studies, promoting cross-cultural communication and exchange, improving the quality of film subtitle translation at the same time, and further verifying and perfecting the effectiveness and applicability of the theory of ecological translation studies. Through the research of this paper, translators need to break through cultural, communication and language barriers, and eliminate cultural barriers through appropriate translation processing, so as to convey the common themes such as kindness, humor and adventure in the film to audiences of various countries.

Keywords

Subtitle Translation; Eco-Translatology; *Paddington 2*.

1. Introduction

Since modern times, with the improvement of economic level and the development of globalization, people have paid more and more attention to the sufficiency of spiritual culture, and the interconnections between countries in the world have become increasingly close. As an important form of cross-cultural communication, film is a popular form of artistic expression, and subtitle translation plays a crucial role in film communication. Good subtitle translation can accurately convey the spiritual connotation of the work and help us to better understand the work. *Paddington 2* continues the warm narrative of *Paddington* and British cultural symbols (such as London landmarks, gentleman culture, diverse communities, etc.), through the anthropomorphic Peruvian bear *Paddington*'s adventure story in London, passing on friendly, inclusive and family values. The film has achieved both box office and word-of-mouth success worldwide, and its multi-language subtitle translation has become a key link in cross-cultural communication. The distinctive language style of the film, including a large number of humorous dialogues (such as puns, cultural metaphors), colloquial expressions and literary monologues, provides a rich corpus for translation studies.

Traditional translation theories often fall into the duality of literal translation or free translation, but eco-translatology advocates adaptive selection, that is, flexible adjustment of strategies according to specific contexts. In terms of language, *Paddington 2* dialogue contains a lot of British humor, colloquial expression and literary narration. Eco-translatology emphasizes that translators should adapt to the language style of the source language and find the best correspondence in the target language. Culturally, the film involves a wealth of British cultural symbols, and the translator has to weigh between cultural adaptation and audience understanding. In terms of communication, the characters in the film have distinct personalities, and the translation needs to reproduce the characters' images through diction and tone. From the perspective of eco-translatology, subtitle translation is not only a simple text conversion, but also a process of cultural transmission and communication. The ideological culture and values conveyed in the film are worthy of our study.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Development Stages of Eco-Translatology

Since the 1960s, the global society has undergone profound changes, and ecological thought has subsequently broken through disciplinary boundaries and permeated into the field of translation studies across disciplines. Under this academic background, Professor Hu Gengshen innovatively integrated ecological principles with translation studies and officially established the theoretical system of eco-translatology studies at the beginning of the 21st century. This theory breaks through the traditional research paradigm and, through the dialectical perspective of ecological holism and systems theory, constructs a translation and interpretation framework with oriental characteristics. Eco-translatology studies takes translation with ecological balance as the core proposition. It not only inherits the Western tradition of rational speculation but also integrates the wisdom of Eastern philosophy, and innovatively proposes the translation adaptation-choice theory of three-dimensional transformation (language dimension, cultural dimension, and communication dimension). This theoretical construction not only demonstrates the academic consciousness of Chinese scholars in the innovation of translation theories, but also reconstructs the cognitive dimension of translation activities through ecological metaphors.

In 2003, Professor Hu Gengshen first clearly proposed the concept of eco-translatology Studies in *Translation as Adaptation and Selection*. According to Hu GengShen, "The translator's adaptation is selective, and at the same time, the selection is also adaptive" [1]. He innovatively reconstructed the theoretical framework of translation from the perspective of adaptation and selection, and systematically expounded the dynamic adaptation mechanism and selection strategies of translators in the ecological environment of the source language and the target language. This theoretical exploration eventually formed the core theory of the eco-translatology Studies System, "Translation as Adaptation and Selection" (TAS), providing a brand-new ecological paradigm for translation studies.

In the trinity ecological cycle system, translators need to provide high-quality services to the target audience and remain loyal to the original author to accurately convey the intention. The effective transmission of discourse and the smooth realization of communication largely rely on the mediation and coordination work of the translator. It is necessary to initiate two-way dialogue, act as a mediator to maintain the balance of all parties and achieve the goals, thereby forming a mutually beneficial, powerful and harmonious ecological cycle.

2.2. The Main Content of eco-translatology

Translation as Adaptation and Selection theory is the core theory of eco-translatology studies. It was borrowed by Professor Hu Gengshen from Darwin's theory of Evolution by Natural

Selection. This theory holds that translation is a process in which translators adapt to the translation ecological environment (including factors such as language, culture, and society) and make choices, emphasizing the subjectivity of translators and the dynamic evolution characteristics of translation.

Due to the limitations of time and space, subtitle translation requires translators to adjust the original dialogue language to match the subtitle format. On the basis of retaining the original meaning, the oral language should be condensed, and the core content should be precisely conveyed through methods such as simplifying sentence structures and replacing short words. Take *Paddington 2* as an example. *Paddington*'s unique polite wording and quirky expression and other character language features need to be finely processed to ensure that the subtitles maintain the original emotional and humorous appeal within the limited duration. Selection refers to the translator's role in deciding which elements of the source text to retain, modify, or omit. Subtitle translation inherently involves this process because the target language audience must be given a concise yet faithful representation of the source text. In *Paddington 2*, selection becomes particularly important because the film's fast-paced nature and frequent use of visual gags and wordplay can present challenges for translators.

The core theoretical framework of eco-translatology studies is centered around three dimensions, namely, linguistic dimension, cultural dimension and communicative dimension, which are interrelated and interlinked.

Language dimension refers to the adaptive transformation of the source language and the target language at the formal structure system level by the translator, covering language ontology elements such as phonetics, speech, grammar, and text. It has the characteristics of symbolicity (dealing with the relationship between the signified form and the signified meaning of language symbols), systematicness (constrained by internal language rules such as grammatical rules and collocation habits), and explicitness (the conversion results can be directly observed through text comparison). Compared with previous linguistic studies, more attention is paid to the forced transformation caused by the differences in bilingual systems, emphasizing the ecological motivations behind the choices.

Cultural dimension refers to the cross-cultural adaptive processing of cultural load elements in the text, involving translingual factors such as values, customs, and historical background. It has the nature of metaphoricality (the deep symbolic meaning of cultural symbols), and exclusivity (the cognitive gap of certain concepts in the target culture).

Communicative dimension refers to the pragmatic adjustments made to the translation to achieve specific communicative functions, focusing on the usage effect of the text in real scenarios. It has purpose orientation (subordinate to the core demands of the translation initiator), audience centrality (adjusting the information density according to the reader's cognitive level), and situational adaptability (the same text needs to be processed differently in different scenarios). In the current era of digital communication development, the cross-cultural transfer of some emojis and memes requires special attention.

Through "threedimensional transformation", the interchange of languageforms between source language and target language, cultural exchange, and the realization of communicative intentions can be achieved [2].

3. Analysis of Subtitle Translation in Paddington 2 Based on eco-translatology

3.1. The Translation Eco-environment of Paddington 2

3.1.1. The Macro Eco-environment of Translation of Paddington 2

In the context of eco-translatology studies, the macro-environment of translation refers to the broader socio-cultural, historical and institutional context in which translation takes place. It includes the factors and forces that influence the translation process beyond the immediate text and linguistic constraints, such as social norms, audience expectations and the cultural dynamics of the source and target languages. These factors play a key role in translators' decision making, particularly in the case of subtitling, where the medium itself poses additional challenges related to space, time and legibility.

Paddington 2 is a British film with many cultural references and typically British humor. The cultural context of the target audience must be taken into account when translating the film into different languages. The macro-context includes knowledge of the target culture's British customs, humor and social norms, as well as understanding the audience's specific expectations of the film. British humour, for example, which is often characterized by puns, irony and understatement, must be adapted to appeal to an audience less familiar with these comic conventions.

The translation medium has an influence on the degree of preservation of the original culture. Due to the limitations of time and space, subtitles need to be carefully considered in terms of how much cultural information they can convey without overwhelming and confusing the audience. In a globalized world, audiences expect to understand films from different cultures without undermining the essence of the original works. Translators need to strike a delicate balance between domestication that makes the content familiar and alienation that retains the cultural flavor of the original works. This is particularly difficult when there is a significant difference between the culture of the original film and that of the target audience.

Globalization plays an important role in the macro landscape of subtitling. As films like Paddington 2 spread across the world, the need for localization becomes increasingly apparent. Localization means adapting the dialogue, references and cultural elements of a film to the local context without losing the spirit of the original. The process is not only about language translation, but also about adapting the film to the cultural and social environment of the target audience.

British humour and social norms may be familiar to European audiences, but may be more challenging for audiences in countries unfamiliar with British culture. They therefore need to be translated to better appeal to audiences in other parts of the world in a macro context. Translators must take into account both the local sensitivity of the target culture and the wider, globalized context in which the film will be used.

The social and political environment in which the film is set also has an impact on the translation of the subtitles. The acceptability of humor, innuendo and certain themes in Paddington 2 can vary depending on the social and political context of the target country. For example, jokes or cultural references that may be harmless in the UK may be perceived as politically sensitive or controversial in other countries. Translators should therefore be aware of the risk of misinterpretation and adapt their translations accordingly to avoid unintentional offense or misunderstanding.

3.1.2. The Micro Eco-environment of Translation of Paddington 2

The micro-environments in Paddington 2 refer to the direct elements of the text that influence the translation process, especially those related to language, conversation and the translation strategies used by the translator. These environments include the specific characteristics of the

source text, the linguistic issues of the conversation and the limitations of the translation medium itself. In the case of Paddington 2, the micro elements include language use, cultural references, humor, and the specific requirements of subtitles, all of which are shaped by the discursive and communicative elements of the film's dialogue.

Paddington 2 attracts the audience's attention with its language charm. During the translation process, it is necessary to focus on handling puns, idioms and stress changes, etc. The film not only contains standard formal language, but also has colloquial expressions that highlight the characters' personalities and cultural backgrounds. The protagonist Paddington's polite, well-mannered, innocent and simple speaking style contrasts sharply with the casual and humorous language of other characters. Although this language difference among characters can effectively distinguish them, it also poses a challenge for the subtitle translation, which is limited by time and space, to retain the language characteristics.

When translating subtitles, translators need to decide how to deal with different linguistic nuances. British slang or idiomatic expressions may not have direct equivalents in other languages. Translators are often faced with the choice of either keeping the original term (with footnotes or explanatory text) or finding a culturally equivalent term that the target audience can relate to. At the micro level, the challenge is to maintain the linguistic tone of the characters while adapting the language to the reading speed and space constraints of the subtitles.

In subtitle translation, translators need to handle subtle language differences. British slang and idioms often have no corresponding foreign language vocabulary. Translators have to decide whether to retain the original terms with footnotes for explanation or look for culturally equivalent expressions that fit the target audience. At the micro level, it is necessary to adapt to the reading speed and spatial limitations of the subtitles while maintaining the characteristics of the characters' language intonation.

When doing micro-translation, the translator needs to make a choice: whether to retain the original appearance of the references to cause possible understanding difficulties for the target audience, or to replace them with content familiar to the target culture. When translating food-related jokes like "tea and biscuits" from the UK, you can replace them with similar and appropriate snacks in the target language's culture, or briefly explain the original expression in the subheading. At the same time, ensure that the content is understandable while retaining the original cultural charm and meaning. The subtitle micro-translation of Paddington 2 is influenced by factors such as language, culture, humor presentation and technical conditions, which directly affect the translation of the film's dialogue. When translating, one has to deal with word games, humorous expressions, as well as the time and space limitations of subtitles and the difficulty of readability. It is necessary to comprehensively consider multiple factors to produce a translation that is faithful to the original text and easy for the target audience to understand and accept. Only by paying attention to these micro-level elements can the translator preserve the character characteristics, humorous effects and cultural background details of the film, and achieve a real viewing experience across languages.

3.2. Subtitle Translation of Paddington 2 from the Perspective of Three Dimensions

The essential differences between Chinese belonging to the Sino-Tibetan language family and English belonging to the Indo-European language family lead to significant distinctions between the two. When translating, appropriate theories should be selected to assist in subtitle translation in order to understand and adapt to these differences. The animated film Paddington 2 has a wide audience but is mainly composed of young people. Its subtitle translation needs to ensure that the vocabulary is in line with children's understanding level and mostly uses everyday language for expression. This study is based on the perspective of eco-translatology, aiming to evaluate the current situation of film subtitle translation, analyze and

summarize the research results, and provide references for the subtitle translation of animated films.

3.2.1. Linguistic Dimension

The adaptive selection and transformation in the linguistic dimension refer to translators' adaptive selection and transformation of language forms in the translation process. This kind of adaptive selection and transformation in the linguistic dimension is carried out in different aspects and levels [3]. From the linguistic dimension, subtitle translation needs to take into account the temporal and spatial limitations of media subtitles and the cultural expectations of the target audience, and make adaptive choices by balancing language usage, structure, intonation and style. Through reasonable adaptation of the original text, it can not only retain the integrity of the original content, but also enable the translation to evoke emotional resonance among the audience in the target language environment.

Example 1:

ST: A nice little haul, and no mistake.

TT: 偷天换日,没留下蛛丝马迹。

"Haul" in slang refers to stolen goods or spoils, and "no mistake" indicates being sure that there are no errors at all. Translating "haul" as "偷天换日", discarding the literal meaning but retaining the connotation, implies that this is a criminal act. If it is directly translated as "收获颇丰", the audience may not be able to capture that this is a criminal activity. "no mistake" is translated as "没留下蛛丝马迹", using idioms to convey the meaning that no accident occurred in this operation. If it is directly translated as "没有错误", it will cause misunderstanding for the audience and prevent them from understanding the specific meaning expressed by the subtitles. The translation sacrifices the literal meaning of "haul", but through semantic compensation and the use of the exaggerated rhetoric of "偷天换日", it achieves the equivalent transmission of criminal intent.

Example 2:

ST: Perhaps your auntie's rolling days are behind her.

TT: 也许你婶婶已经过了玩轮滑的年纪了。

"Rolling days" literally means rolling days, but here it implies two meanings through a pun. Specifically, it refers to sports such as roller skating that require wheels. Abstractly, the metaphor symbolizes an active and vibrant period. The Chinese language uses literal translation, abandons puns, and has a more pragmatic style. The word "玩" adds a sense of relaxation, making up for the loss of some humor and making up for it in a colloquial way.

3.2.2. Cultural Dimension

The adaptive selection and transformation in the communicative dimension means that translators pay attention to the adaptive selection and transformation of bilingual communicative intentions in the translation process[3]. It focuses on the equivalence of the translation with the original text in terms of communicative intention, function, and effect.

Example 3:

ST: Well, he wasn't the one, but you know what they say.

TT: 他不是我的类型,但你懂的

"The one" often refers to "the destined partner" in Western culture. In Chinese, there are similar expressions such as "真命天子". If it is directly translated as "那个人" without considering the context, it is very likely to cause misunderstandings for the audience. Translating it as "我的类型" is more in line with the younger audience of this film and is more colloquial. "You know what they say" is translated as "你懂的". As a frequently used and popular word on the

Internet, it is more natural than translating it as “你知道他们说了什么”. The audience of this film is more young people, and this translation method is deeply in line with the cultural habits of the target language.

Example 4:

ST: Now all we need is some news.

TT: 现在万事俱备,只差新闻。

“All we need is some news” as a direct statement emphasizes the only thing lacking news and having no specific cultural association. A literal translation as “现在我们需要的一些新闻” appears stiff and straightforward due to the lack of a sense of urgency in the original sentence. The translation “万事俱备,只差新闻” is adapted from the classic Chinese saying “万事俱备,只差东风” to express the meaning that everything is ready, only lacking the key conditions. This Chinese expression with cultural associations of strategic and preparatory is more vivid and in line with the cognitive habits of Chinese readers than a literal translation.

3.2.3. Communicative Dimension

The adaptive selection and transformation in the communicative dimension means that translators pay attention to the adaptive selection and transformation of bilingual communicative intentions in the translation process [3]. The communication dimension of eco-translatology studies focuses on the adaptability of translation choices to the interaction between the source text, the translator and the audience, emphasizing the guarantee of effective communication under media limitations. Subtitle translation needs to carefully balance the transmission of source information and the understandability of the film to the target audience. The communicative dimension is of vital importance in the subtitle translation of “Paddington 2”. The charm of the film stems from the realization of humorous emotional transmission and character shaping across cross-cultural language boundaries. The adaptive choice of the subtitle translation in the communicative dimension is reflected in the emphasis on information clarity, control of communication tone, and emotional connection with the audience [4].

Example 5:

ST: I'm going to be a window cleaner.

TT: 我要去擦玻璃[底层干起 慢慢往上爬]。

The original text refers to the announcement that he is about to engage in glass cleaning work. Considering the context, it can be understood as Mr. Buchanan suggesting to start from the bottom. The translation uses parentheses to supplement the prompt “底层干起,慢慢往上爬”, maintaining the concise oral style of the original text while forming a semantic closed loop through parentheses. It neither spoils the fluency of the text nor fails to ensure the equivalence of cross-cultural communication, and prevents the audience from misunderstanding due to not understanding the meaning.

Example 6:

ST: You know what they say. Plenty more fish in the sea.

TT: 你懂的,天涯何处无芳草。

The original text conveys a positive attitude of comfort and encouragement through the proverb “Plenty more fish in the sea”, expressing that there are still many opportunities after failure. The translator translated it as colloquial “你懂的,天涯何处无芳草”, shortening the distance between the speaker and the audience and creating an intimate dialogue atmosphere. This translation also conveys a sense of comfort and encouragement in the Chinese context, that is, there is no need to be frustrated by failure and there are many choices in the future. It retains the communicative intention of the original text while also conforming to the expression habits of Chinese.

4. Conclusion

Based on the “three-dimensional transformation” of eco-translatology, this study analyzes the application value of eco-translatology by combining examples of subtitle translation in the film *Paddington 2*. In the linguistic dimension, differences in English and Chinese vocabulary and syntax are properly handled to make translations conform to the expressive habits of the target language. In the cultural dimension, unique British cultural images are effectively conveyed with their intrinsic connotations fully interpreted. In the communicative dimension, the communicative contexts and intentions of the film are accurately understood to achieve communicative equivalence in translation. This study suggests that future research and practice in subtitle translation can further explore the application of eco-translatology and develop more targeted translation strategies suitable for various film genres and multicultural contexts. Continuous optimization of translation methods can effectively improve the overall quality of film subtitle translation, facilitate the diversified and prosperous development of global film and television culture in cross-cultural communication, enable audiences from different cultural backgrounds to perceive the charm of foreign cultures through films, and further promote the exchange and integration of human cultures.

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