

**MODERN VECTORS OF SCIENCE
AND EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT
IN CHINA AND UKRAINE**

中国与乌克兰科学及教育前沿研究

Harbin Engineering University

State institution "South Ukrainian National Pedagogical University named after K. D. Ushynsky"

Educational and Cultural Center "Confucius Institute"

Odesa, Ukraine

Harbin, the People's Republic of China

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The given articles may be of use to researchers, graduates, postgraduates and practising teachers who are interested in various aspects of Sinology, Cross-cultural Communication, Linguistics, Pedagogy and Psychology.

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ON THE DOMESTICATION OF THE ENGLISH-CHINESE SUBTITLE TRANSLATION WITH *THE BIG BANG THEORY* AS A CASE

Abstract: *In the context of cultural globalization, many American dramas have been introduced to China and have attracted widespread attention from the Chinese people due to their unique cultural background. The American sitcom The Big Bang Theory is a big hit in China, and its subtitle translation plays an important role as a medium between the audience and the content of the sitcom. The subtitling team has used a lot of strategies of domestication in order to give Chinese viewers the same aesthetic experience and feel the American humour. For translators, they should capture the current hotspots in time so as to meet the needs of Chinese audiences; for English learners, they should be good at thinking about the differences between Chinese and Western cultures so as to better realize cross-cultural communication. This paper attempts to take some English-Chinese subtitles in The Big Bang Theory as cases, by analyzing the three strategies of quoting idioms and Internet buzzwords in the subtitles, as well as the localized translation. Meanwhile, it focuses on the application of the strategies of domestication in translation and exploring how domestication translation can enable viewers to better understand the humour and culture in the American dramas, which will be widely used in the future translation practice bringing about valid and suitable methods and strategy for translation work*

and researches.

Keywords: subtitle translation; domestication; *The Big Bang Theory*

1. Introduction

As one of the important carriers of American cultural dissemination, American dramas are showing a global flow in the context of cultural globalization. American dramas have been developed in China for more than 30 years, from the earliest introduction of *Garrison's Gorillas* and *Growing Pains* on Chinese TV, which triggered a great interest in American dramas among the Chinese people. Later, American dramas represented by *Prison Break* and *Friends* really started the trend of American dramas nationwide [2, p.25-26]. Until now, American dramas are even more loved and respected by the younger generation as a unique film and television culture. However, due to the differences of languages, Chinese subtitles must be provided before the introduction of a movie to help Chinese audiences understand the content of it and clear the language barrier. Therefore, the importance of subtitle translation as a medium between the audience and television programs is obvious.

In the practice of subtitle translation, translators often adopt various translation strategies to make the translation more fluent. When translating, if the translator only adopts the word-by-word translation method and does not relate to the context and cultural background, the translation will be too rigid and lack vividness and interest. Therefore, the importance of domestication strategy in subtitle translation practice is self-evident. The Chinese subtitles of the American sitcom *The Big Bang Theory* use a lot of domestication translation strategy to translate the original text in a way that the audience can understand and accept. In this way, the Chinese audience can achieve almost the same aesthetic experience as the English audience, and successfully enjoy the American humor, so as to further understand the American culture.

2. Definition of Domestication and Subtitle Translation

2.1 Domestication and Foreignization

The concept of domestication can be traced back to 1813, which was put forward by the German scholar Friedrich Schleiermacher in *On the Different Methods of*

Translating together with the strategy of foreignization, that is to say, either the translator moves the reader to the author or the translator moves the author to the reader. Thus, for Schleiermacher, the goal of translation lies in the approximation of two persons and in enabling interpersonal comprehension [6, p.91]. Later, in 1995, Lawrence Venuti, a famous American translation theorist, further developed these two concepts in his book *The Translators Invisibility: A History of Translation*, in which he corresponded the first method to foreignization and the second method to domestication. He stated that domestication is when the translator brings the reader into the home culture, while foreignization is when the translator brings the reader into a foreign culture [5, p.811].

In short, when using the domestication strategy, it is necessary to take the reader as the center and translate the original language into the language used by the readers, so that they can get a better reading experience. Foreignization, on the other hand, is author-centered by the translator, so the linguistic features of the original language need to be retained so that the reader can experience the charm of the language and culture of other countries.

2.2 Subtitle Translation and Its Features

Subtitle translation is the translation of foreign language movies and TV series from their source language into the target language of the local audience. As a medium between the audience and the content of the drama, subtitle translation not only has the commonality of translation, it also has some unique features [1, p.39].

First of all, subtitling has temporal and spatial limitations. Since each line of subtitle lasts about 2 to 3 seconds, it requires the subtitle team to try their best to be as concise as possible when translating, and to present an accurate translation for the audience within the limited time. Secondly, due to the different education levels of the public, the subtitle translation should be easy to understand and have local characteristics, avoiding the use of overly written language, which may affect the audience's viewing experience. Finally, the differences between Chinese and foreign cultures should be noted. Especially in American dramas, there are often a lot of American humor words that are not known to the Chinese. When dealing with these

special words, in order to make the target language audience understand their meanings, it is necessary for the translator to transform them into language forms that the target language audience can understand. Thus, the domestication strategy is of great advantage.

3. The Application of Domestication in Subtitle Translation of *The Big Bang Theory*

The Big Bang Theory premiered in 2007 and ran through 2019 with 279 episodes over 12 seasons. The show tells the funny story of two genius physicists, Leonard and Sheldon, and their friends. It is critically acclaimed for its humor, intelligence, and unique insights into science. Effectively translating such American humor into subtitles that are easy for Chinese people to understand can be difficult. That's why the translators adopted a domestication strategy. English-Chinese subtitle translations in *The Big Bang Theory* can be categorized into the following three types: references to idioms, the use of Internet buzzwords, and localized translation.

3.1 References to idioms

As an excellent traditional culture of China, idioms contain Chinese language characteristics. Most of these idioms are within seven Chinese characters and are concise and condensed, which will play the role of a finishing touch when applied to subtitle translation. The subtitle team of *The Big Bang Theory* quotes a lot of idioms, which not only conforms to the expression habits of the Chinese language, but also allows viewers to understand the content of the plot and at the same time appreciate the traditional Chinese culture.

Example 1:

Amy: I meant compared to the real-world applications of neurobiology, theoretical physics is... what's the word I'm looking for?... hmm, *cute*.

The version of *cute*: 小巫见大巫.

Amy and Sheldon are engaged in different fields of research, and each believes that their field is the most valuable, so they have a heated debate. Amy, who has a PhD in neurobiology, expresses her disdain for Sheldon's theoretical physics, which she considers to be too "*cute*", and it is also refuted by Sheldon. In most cases, "*cute*" is

meant to describe something that is lovely. But in this context, it should be extended to mean naive and worthless. Therefore, it would be apt to translate it with “小巫见大巫”. This idiom means that one is far inferior to the other in comparison. The use of idiom for domestication translation makes the expression more condensed.

Example 2:

Sheldon: *Mourning the inevitable is a complete waste of time.*

The version: 人生自古谁无死. [8, p.149]

Sheldon's childhood idol, Professor Proton suddenly died. Instead of mourning, he perversely refuses to attend his funeral. So he uses this line to show his girlfriend Amy his reasoning. The poem quoted by the translator, “人生自古谁无死”, was written by Wen Tianxiang, a national hero of the Song Dynasty. The meaning of the poem is that since the beginning of time, people are bound to die, which conveys the author's noble sentiment of keeping his faith. This not only expresses Sheldon's subtle emotions, but also makes the translation more vivid and humorous. A simple word-for-word translation would have lacked emotional color and failed to highlight Sheldon's rebellious personality.

3.2 The Use of Internet Buzzwords

Internet buzzword is a kind of language formed and circulated on the network. It is a kind of language mainly characterized by popularity with the network as the carrier. Internet buzzword is a mutually agreed language expression among netizens, and it is also the seasoning of the current fast-paced and boring life. Most of the audience groups of American dramas are young people, and the introduction of Internet buzzwords can easily cause their resonance and recognition [7, p.140]. At the same time, it also adds a certain comedic color to the language.

Example 3:

Leonard: Maybe I *embarrass* her.

Sheldon: You're *embarrassing* me right now.

The version of *embarrass*: 囧

Sheldon wanted to team up with Leonard to fly a kite, but Leonard wasn't in the

mood for fun. He was worried and asked Sheldon why his girlfriend Penny didn't want him to meet her friends. He guessed that it was caused by the fact that he was making other guys feel embarrassed. However, Sheldon thinks that at this point Leonard is interfering with their teamwork and embarrassing him. “*Embarrass*” is translated as “囧”, which makes it very funny. The Internet buzzword “囧” means depressed, helpless, or embarrassed. Because the character “囧” looks like an expression of sadness, netizens quickly associate it with various negative emotions and use it to describe the state of being in a difficult or embarrassing situation. In general, “囧” is not only a word used to express complex emotions, but also a phenomenon reflecting contemporary social mentality and cultural trends. Therefore, it is very appropriate to use “囧” to describe the mood of Leonard and Sheldon.

Example 4:

Penny: I'm gonna be their fun Aunt Penny who gives them candy, and teaches them swear words and tells them stories about what a *weirdo* their mother is.

The version of *weirdo*: 奇葩

Amy tries to persuade Penny to give up the idea of not having children. She believes that only by becoming a mother can she realize the true meaning of love. Also, she accuses Penny of betraying her and should have accompanied her in becoming a mother. Penny, on the other hand, reassures Amy that she will still be there for her even if she has children. Moreover, Penny says that she will also satirize to Amy's children that her mother is a *weirdo*. The word “*weirdo*” originally meant someone who was strange, but in this context it is translated as “奇葩”. The word was used to refer to flowers that were unique and beautiful, but was later used as a metaphor for unusual works of literature or characters with distinctive personalities. Amy is an eccentric scientific genius, so the buzzword “奇葩” is not only humorous, but also easy to understand.

3.3 Localized Translation

The so-called localized translation means that the subtitle translation should be in line with the language habits of Chinese people, and should not be a simple direct translation based on the literal meaning only. It needs to be contextualized so that

Chinese viewers can understand and accept it. Eugene A. Nida in his book *Language, Culture and Translating* points out that translation is an exchange between two cultures. For a real successful translation, knowing two cultures is more important than grasping two languages, because words become meaningful only in its effective cultural background [4, p.140]. Therefore, when translating subtitles, translators should take into account the context and adopt localized interpretation strategies, so that Chinese audience can easily understand the meaning of the original lines.

Example 5:

Howard: Hey, buddy. What brings you to my little *slice of hell*?

The version of *slice of hell*: 寒舍.

Leonard is feeling very self-conscious about dating the girl Howard likes without permission. He was planning to meet Howard to board the door and apologize, hoping to be forgiven by Howard. When Howard opens the door, he doesn't act pleasantly when he sees Leonard and asks why he came here. Translating one's home as “寒舍” is a kind of self-effacement and has a strong Chinese traditional culture. Self-effacement is an important form of etiquette that reflects the Chinese cultural trait of modesty and prudence. Specifically, the term “寒舍” is used in Chinese to refer to one's home in a modest way, implying that the conditions at home are limited, although this may not be the case in reality. This self-degrading expression is actually a social strategy to win the respect or understanding of the other party by showing one's modesty. Appropriate localization in translation can better convey the cultural connotation and emotional color of the original text, and at the same time ensure that readers of the target language can smoothly understand and accept the translated content.

Example 6:

Leonard: I bet that bit killed at *The Chuckle Hut*.

The version of *The Chuckle Hut*: 相声秀.

Sheldon told Leonard a philosopher's joke, and Leonard had this to say about it. “*The Chuckle Hut*” is a funny American variety show, so it is not well known to Chinese

audience. And because it is a niche TV program, there is no official translation in China for the time being. “相声” is a kind of Chinese folk rap opera, characterized by humor and wit, and performed mainly through verbal means. The subtitle team has flexibly translated it into “相声秀”, which not only does not affect the original meaning of the sentence, but also allows Chinese viewers to understand the plot better. The other available translation, “搞笑俱乐部” (Funny Club), is also a naturalized adaptation of this foreign term, but is far less localized than “相声秀”.

4. Conclusion

Through the analysis of the above three applications of domestication in English-Chinese subtitle translation, it can be seen that the domestication strategy has the advantages of vividness, flexibility and entertainment, and plays an important guiding role in subtitle translation. Subtitle translation has unlimited creativity because the subtitle team uses witty, humorous, and understandable language and adopts the domestication strategy and other translation methods. Without these strategies, the translation would lose its charm. It is the right translation strategies that make the translation more accurate and vivid.

The world today is in an era of cultural diversity, and it is inevitable that there are cultural differences between countries. However, it is worth mentioning that the use of domestication strategy should be appropriate and standardized, and should not be overused. Moderate domestication can be the icing on the cake and bring better viewing experience to the audience. On the contrary, excessive domestication will lead to a lack of exoticism in the works, and prevent the audience from experiencing foreign humor and culture [3, p.252]. Therefore, in the practice of subtitle translation, the subtitle team should not only try to convey the national image and cultural characteristics of the original language, but also take into account the acceptability of the readers and the readability of the translated text. In this way, it can thus promote the communication and integration of different cultures.

English-Chinese subtitle translation has also been getting rid of the stale and taking in the fresh. It spreads the English culture, reflects the pulse of the times and combines

the characteristics of reality, and the change and development of this language is closely linked to the turnover of the times. Therefore, it puts high demands on translators to follow the pace of the times, capture the current hotspots in time, and be refreshing within the limited subtitle space to meet the needs of Chinese audience.

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英汉字幕翻译中的归化策略研究——以《生活大爆炸》为例

摘要：文化全球化背景之下，很多美剧被引进中国，并因其特有的文化背景引起国人的广泛关注。美国情景喜剧《生活大爆炸》在国内大热，其字幕翻译作为观众和剧情内容的媒介，发挥了重要作用。字幕组大量采用了归化翻译策略，以期中国观众能够得到相同的审美体验，感受到美式幽默。作为译者要紧随时代的步伐，及时捕捉时事热点，从而满足中国观众的需求；作为英语学习者，应善于思考中西方文化的差异，从而更好地实现跨文化交际。本文尝试以美国情景喜剧《生活大爆炸》中的部分英汉字幕为例，通过分析字幕中引用典故、网络流行语，以及本土化传译的三种策略，着重研究归化策略在翻译中的应用，并探讨归化翻译如何让观众更好地理解美剧中的幽默与文化，在日后的翻译实践中加以运用，为翻译工作及研究带来适用的方法与策略。

关键词：字幕翻译；归化；《生活大爆炸》