

Adaptive Transformations in Subtitle Translation: An Eco-Translatology Analysis of *Hi, Mom*

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Abstract

Eco-translatology is a translation theory that was proposed by Chinese scholar Professor Hu Gengshen, which views translation as a process of adaptation and selection within a complex ecological environment comprising linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions. In recent years, with the growing global reach of the film industry, subtitle translation has become more important for the development of Chinese films on the international stage. As one of the key links in cross-cultural communication, the quality of film subtitle translation affects the box office and viewing experience. *Hi, Mom*, a widely acclaimed Chinese family comedy, topped China's box office during the Chinese New Year in 2021 and ascended to the third place in the global box office, and high-quality subtitle translation is indispensable to its success. Based on the theoretical framework of Eco-translatology theory, this study discusses the subtitle translation of *Hi, Mom* to analyze translators' adaptive transformation in linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions. By selecting and analyzing ten representative examples from key scenes and dialogues, the findings show that in the translation process of *Hi, Mom's* subtitles, different translation techniques were adopted that include the applications of amplification, omission, free translation, cultural substitution and explicitation to achieve adaptive transformations in the linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions. These insights contribute to the growing body of research on Eco-translatology and offer

practical guidelines for improving subtitle translation practices to better engage international audiences.

Keywords: Film Subtitle Translation, Eco-Translatology, Three-Dimensional Transformations, *Hi, Mom*.

Introduction

As China deepens its cultural exchanges with other countries through initiatives such as the Cannes Film Festival, the Venice Film Festival, and the Shanghai International Film Festival, Chinese films are emerging as key cultural carriers on the global stage. According to Lai (2023), only 45 Chinese films were released in North America between 2000 and 2009, but the number saw a breakthrough between 2010 and 2019, with a total of 169 Chinese films released in North American theaters. This increase reflects the growing acceptance and demand for Chinese films in Western markets, highlighting the necessity for high-quality subtitle translation. As more Chinese films gain exposure to international audiences, effective translation becomes crucial in bridging linguistic and cultural gaps, ensuring that films resonate with viewers from diverse backgrounds.

Hi, Mom is a Chinese family comedy film based on the director Jia Ling's personal experience. The film tells the story of Jia Xiaoling, who feels that she has let her mother Li Huanying down and dreams of making up for her regrets. However, an accident unexpectedly takes her back to the 1980s, where she meets her mother as a young woman. From that moment, Jia Xiaoling tries every possible way to make her mother happy. This movie allows young people to experience the era their parents lived in while also evoking memories of their youth for the parents, enabling the audience to feel the warmth of family bonds amidst laughter. It was released in China on the first day of Chinese New Year (February 12th) in 2021 and was released in several countries across the world later, including the United States, Canada, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand. The film reached the third position in the worldwide box office after dominating China's box office during the Chinese New Year in 2021 (Liu & Gao, 2023), representing the current global development trend of the Chinese film industry. It has been a favorite among millions of audiences and has received ratings above 7 on Douban, a Chinese website for film and television ratings. It scored higher than 93% percent of comedies and 89% of dramas. High-quality subtitle translation is indispensable to its popularity.

While much of the existing research on the subtitle translation of *Hi, Mom* has focused on isolated aspects like performance aesthetics (Chen, 2023), humor elements (Tian & Xu, 2024), and deviating effects (Lei & Li, 2022), there is a notable research gap in examining the film's translation through the comprehensive framework of Eco-translatology. This gap is significant because Eco-translatology provides a holistic approach that emphasizes the translator's adaptive selection of linguistic, cultural, and communicative elements, a perspective that has been largely overlooked in previous studies. Addressing this gap is crucial for advancing the understanding of how subtitle translations can effectively balance cultural nuances and maintain the original film's emotional resonance across diverse audiences. By applying Eco-translatology, this study aims to offer deeper insights into the translation process, thus contributing to more effective cross-cultural communication and enriching both translation theory and practice. Currently, the proactive promotion of contemporary Chinese translation theories remains insufficient. Chinese translation theories have yet to attract significant

attention from the international academic community (Han & Qian, 2021). It is still uncommon for Western scholars to elaborate on the translation thoughts and works of Chinese scholars. Therefore, it is essential to focus on the practical application of Eco-translatology in the field of subtitle translation. This study holds broader implications for both academia and practice. Academically, it promotes Chinese translation theories, encouraging greater global recognition and collaboration. Practically, it provides subtitle translators with adaptive strategies to handle cultural and linguistic challenges, enhancing cross-cultural communication and ensuring films like *Hi, Mom* resonate with international audiences while preserving their cultural essence.

The study aims to analyze the subtitle translation techniques of the film *Hi, Mom* and explore how translators dynamically achieve transformations in linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions. Meanwhile, it expands the application scope of Eco-translatology, providing a new research perspective and methods for audiovisual translation.

Literature Review

An Overview of Film Subtitle Translation in China

China is a late starter in film subtitle translation. In the late 1990s, leading Chinese translation scholars began to explore audiovisual translation. During this time, researchers primarily focused on principles and strategies for translating subtitles in films and TV dramas.

In the study *Film Translation: An Increasingly Important Field in Translation*, Professor Qian (2000), stated that film translation would play an increasingly important role in China and he appealed Chinese scholars and translators to pay attention to it. In his study, he analyzed the differences between film language and written language and identified five characteristics of film languages namely listening, comprehensiveness, instantaneousness, popularity and without annotations. Although his research provides insight into Chinese film subtitle translation, it does not establish a methodical or theoretical framework.

Li (2001), mainly concentrated on three main aspects of subtitle translation: temporal and spatial limitations, subtitle functions and stylistic features, and cultural vocabulary. His study was grounded in real-world examples, offering practical strategies such as reduction, condensation, and elimination to help subtitle translators overcome time and space limitations but it lacks depth in theoretical analysis. Yang (2006) also analyzed the technical constraints of subtitle translation which mainly refer to the limitations on space and time. In addition, the study provided specific strategies for handling complex cultural information in subtitle translation such as cultural compensation, cultural transplantation and cultural mediation. While this study offers practical strategies, it lacks a deeper exploration of theoretical framework which could provide more structure to the discussion of translation strategies.

Other Chinese researches focused on the translation theories adopted in specific case studies of films. For example, Lin (2010) explores the domestication and foreignization of film subtitle translation from a cultural perspective. In addition, Xue (2018), Zhang and Jia (2021), Men(2023) discussed subtitle translation from Skopos theory, Multimodel Discourse Analysis theory and Functional Equivalence theory, respectively.

The foundational studies on film subtitle translation focus on practical challenges, such as space and time constraints, and cultural nuance, which directly link to Eco-translatology's adaptation and selection process. Eco-translatology emphasizes the translator's role in adapting subtitles to fit the ecological environment of both the source and target languages. This approach integrates the earlier studies' findings by providing a more holistic framework that connects linguistic accuracy with cultural and environmental factors, moving beyond the technical limitations to focus on a dynamic balance between content and context.

Studies on Subtitle Translation of Hi, Mom

Many scholars mainly discussed the subtitle translation of the film *Hi, Mom* in the context of functionalist. Based on Skopos theory and translation strategies, some scholars made the analysis of the subtitle translation of The film *Hi, Mom*. Zhang (2021) addressed the appropriateness of translating the film's title "Nǐ hǎo, Lǐ Huànyīng" to "Hi, Mom" to align with its emotional core and enhance relatability for English-speaking audiences. Similarly, Zhao (2023) explored how idiomatic expressions were translated to maintain cultural essence while ensuring comprehension for international viewers. Luo (2024) expanded on these findings and explained how the fidelity principle was balanced with the need to adapt cultural references for global audiences and highlighted specific translation strategies that retained the original text's loyalty while making necessary cultural adjustments. Wu and Tian (2022) further discussed the role of fidelity in ensuring that the subtitles faithfully represented the original dialogue within the constraints of subtitle space and timing.

In addition, Lei and Li (2022), conducted the study by focusing on the rhetorical English translations of the film's lines, highlighting the importance of retaining rhetorical devices to maintain the film's expressiveness and thematic essence. They concluded that the use of rhetorical figures in translations enhances the success of the film in overseas markets by preserving the original deviating effects in syntax, semantics, and logic. Huang and Zhao (2022), Liu and Gao (2023), analyzed the film subtitle translation based on the domestication and foreignization perspectives and provided specific case analyses to illustrate the application of these two techniques. These studies collectively contribute to the understanding of how translators adapt to both linguistic and cultural ecosystems while ensuring that the film's expressive core remains intact.

Previous Studies on Eco-translatology

The development of Eco-translatology has been a continuous and expansive process, involving various aspects of theoretical construction and practical application. Hu presented his paper "An Initial Exploration of Translation as Adaptation and Selection" at a conference in 2001, where he explored the integration of Darwin's theory of "adaptation/selection" with translation studies. He proposed the concept of "translation as adaptation and selection," defining translation as the translator's adaptive selection activities within the translation eco-environment. This marked the beginning of ecological perspectives in domestic translation studies. Hu (2003;2004) further demonstrated the relevance of "adaptation and selection" in translation studies and emphasized the translator's central role in the translation process in his study. In addition, Hu (2006), proposed the application of ecological approaches in interpreting studies in his study *Adaptation in Consecutive Interpreting* and broadened its applicability.

Hu (2008), further elaborated on the fundamental concepts, origins, current status, limitations, and future research prospects of eco-translatology and pointed out that eco-translatology focuses on the holistic nature of the translation ecosystem. From the research perspective of eco-translatology, using its narrative approach, it provides new descriptions and interpretations of the essence, process, standards, principles, and methods of translation as well as translation phenomena. This expanded understanding moved Eco-translatology beyond a basic theoretical framework into a comprehensive model that addressed both the philosophical and practical dimensions of translation.

The eco-translatology theory gradually developed and became more refined between 2010 and 2013. Many scholars analyzed and explored it from multiple perspectives. Zhao(2013) , Zhang (2011), and Liu (2013), have applied this theory to the analysis of English translations of Chinese classics and literary works, such as “Dream of the Red Chamber”, “Water Margin” and “The Art of War” respectively. These studies paved the way for further research on using Eco-translatology in literary translation, emphasizing the translator’s ecological adaptation to the cultural and linguistic subtleties of both the source and target environments. Other scholars like Nie (2013), Wen (2012) and Liu (2010), have studied the translation thoughts of renowned translators like Zhang Peiji, Xu Yuanchong and Yan Fu to illustrate the theory’s validity. Additionally, Song et al (2012), have proposed using eco-translatology to guide translation teaching, scientific and technical translation, and interpreting activities. These explorations have deepened the research on eco-translatology, expanding its scope significantly.

In the past decade, eco-translatology has undergone rapid development. Wang et al (2019), analyzed the status, hotspots, and differences in eco-translatology research both domestically and internationally over the past 20 years. Fang (2020), studied the core concept of the translation eco-environment within eco-translatology, analyzing its different levels and proposing issues that need further research to maintain the “ecological balance of translation.” Luo (2020), explored issues related to translator research from the perspective of eco-translatology and established a dialectical relationship between translator dominance, responsibility, and development, further deepening the understanding of translator identity within eco-translatology.

At the same time, many scholars abroad have also engaged in the study of Eco-Translatology. Spanish translator Valdeón (2018), stated that Eco-translatology paradigm has impacted China significantly. Fomenko (2023), explores the correlation between ecolinguistics, eco-translatology, and the ecology of translation, analyzing these concepts in the context of modern discourse practice. Cronin (2018), elaborates on the theoretical framework of eco-translation in *The Routledge Handbook of Literary Translation*, emphasizing the relationship between translation and the ecological environment. Halili (2020), conducts an eco-translatological study on students’ perceptions of translation competence, revealing the effectiveness of eco-translatology in translation education. Dirgeyasa et al (2023), investigate the English translation of the Gayo narrative “The Legend of the Origin of Depik” through the lens of eco-translatology, showcasing the application of this theory in cross-cultural narrative translation.

Eco-translatology not only enriches the theoretical landscape of translation studies but also provides innovative methods and perspectives in practice, offering new insights for translation teaching, literary translation, and technical translation.

Theoretical Frameworks

The Background of Eco-translatology Theory

The emergence of eco-translatology is closely linked to economic and social transformations. Since the 1960s, human society has been transitioning from industrial civilization to ecological civilization. In 1972, the United Nations issued *Declaration on the Human Environment*, which brought the protection of the natural environment to the forefront of global attention. China also began to pay more attention to ecological environmental issues and subsequently proposed sustainable development strategies. (Hu, 2010). In this context, the “ecological” dimension gradually permeated various research fields in both social and natural sciences. Ecology became a leading discipline, driving advancements in both natural sciences and humanities. Interdisciplinary fields such as political ecology, ecological economics, ecological ethics, ecological anthropology, ecological aesthetics, ecological philosophy, ecological literature, and ecolinguistics emerged (Fang, 2024).

Eco-translatology is described as “a revolutionary, constructive, and interpretative translation paradigm and embodies the three philosophical value functions of eco-translational cosmology, eco-translational epistemology, and eco-translational ethics” (Liu, 2022). Ecology and translation studies intersect at least in the dimensions of “language conversion and processing” and “philosophical thinking and ethics.” The internal compatibility of these two disciplines, combined with the vigorous development of translation studies in early 21st century China, propelled the birth and growth of this new interdisciplinary field. After more than 20 years of development, eco-translatology, a discipline originating in China, has become prominent in the domestic translation community and is gaining international recognition (Fang, 2024).

Main Concepts

Translation as Adaption and Selection

From the perspective of Eco-Translatology, translation is understood as a dynamic process of adaptation and selection within a translational ecology. This theoretical framework posits that translators play a crucial role as active agents who enhance the subjectivity and significance of translation activities. When applied to subtitle translation, Eco-translatology emphasizes the translator’s ability to contribute significantly to the film’s success. A proficient subtitle translator can enhance a film’s box office performance and facilitate effective cross-cultural communication under the guidance by the principles of Eco-Translatology (Zhang, 2023).

The “Adaptation and Selection” model in Eco-Translatology draws from Darwin’s “Theory of Evolution by Natural Selection,” adapting these principles metaphorically to address specific translation issues. Hu (2004) defines translation as “a choice-making activity driven by the translator and based on the text, with the goal of transferring cross-cultural information.” Under this theoretical guidance, the translation process is conceptualized as the adaptation to the translational ecology, represented by the source text, and the selection within the translational ecology, driven by the translator. This process involves two key characteristics:

the translator's adaptation to the translational ecological environment and the selection of the target text that aligns with the identity of the translational ecological environment (Hu, 2004).

First, the translator must adapt to the ecological environment of the source text, understanding its cultural, linguistic, and contextual nuances. This involves a deep engagement with the source material to faithfully convey its meaning while considering the cultural context of the target audience. Second, the translator makes strategic selections that best represent the source text within the target language and culture. This selective adaptation ensures that the translation resonates with the target audience while maintaining the integrity of the original text.

Translation Method of Three-dimensional Transformation

According to the basic claim of Eco-translatology, methods of translation are simplified into three-dimensional transformations, which means that under the principle of "multi-dimensional adaptation and selection, translators relatively focus on the adaptive transformations of the linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions"(Hu, 2011).

Adaptive transformations in the linguistic dimension are the translator's adaptive transformations of language forms in the process of translation. In subtitle translation, this often means condensing longer sentences to fit the screen's limited space while still retaining the essence of the original dialogue. For example, a lengthy Chinese phrase may need to be shortened in English subtitles without losing the emotional or contextual meaning. This requires the translator to make choices about which elements of the sentence are most important and can be omitted or altered to achieve clarity and brevity.

The adaptive transformations in cultural dimension means that the translator pays attention to the transmission and interpretation of bilingual cultural connotations in the process of translation. It focuses on the differences in the nature and content between the source text and the target text. And in order to avoid misinterpreting source text from the perspective of the target culture, the translator pays attention to the whole cultural system to which the language belongs in translating. For instance, cultural holidays or address terms mentioned in a Chinese film needs to be adapted or simplified to make sense to international audiences. The translator must decide whether to retain the original cultural reference, provide a brief explanation, or substitute it with something more familiar to the target viewers, ensuring the message resonates without losing its cultural essence.

The communicative dimension emphasizes preserving the speaker's communicative intention while adapting it to the target audience's context. In subtitle translation, this often involves translating the tone and style of the dialogue while remaining within the constraints of time and space. If a character's dialogue in the original film is sarcastic or humorous, the translator must ensure that the subtitles convey this tone, even if the words themselves need to be altered or reduced in length. A joke in the original language relies on wordplay that doesn't work in the target language, the translator needs to replace it with a different joke that aligns with the character's intent and fits the cultural context of the audience.

Method

A qualitative approach is employed to analyze Chinese-English subtitle translations of the film *Hi, Mom*. The qualitative approach makes qualitative research, methodologies, and procedures more understandable (Nanda et al., 2000). As Creswell (2009) suggests, qualitative techniques involve subjective assessments that take into account the contextual factors surrounding the data, such as the cultural background of both the source and target audiences. By focusing on context and meaning, the qualitative approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how subtitles are adapted to different cultural ecosystems. In addition, the qualitative approach has been widely used in investigating subtitle translation (Chen, 2023; Obeidat, 2023; Sutrisno et al., 2023; Haider & Shuhaiber, 2024), which has demonstrated the usefulness and effectiveness of this method.

The dataset for this study consists of the full set of Chinese-English subtitles from the film *Hi, Mom*, encompassing all the dialogue translated between the source language, Chinese, and the target language, English. This dataset was obtained from *Tiger Picture Entertainment*, a film and TV distribution company which is committed to becoming a promoter of Chinese-language film culture, advancing Chinese culture globally, and wholeheartedly enhancing the international influence of Chinese film culture.

To conduct a focused analysis, ten representative subtitle examples were selected from this larger dataset. The selection process was based on three main criteria to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the adaptive translation process. First, subtitle lines containing idiomatic expressions, dialect variations or puns were chosen to analyze how translators adapt these linguistic challenges while maintaining meaning and clarity in the target language. Second, culturally specific references like address terms were prioritized to analyze how translators balance fidelity to the source culture with making the content accessible to international audiences. Finally, examples that carry significant emotional weight, humor, or irony were included to evaluate how the translators preserve and convey the original dialogue's communicative intent in the target language.

The data collection was conducted as follows: Firstly, the film *Hi, Mom* was watched by the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of its content. Secondly, 10 representative examples and their English translations with factors that are related to the linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions of the translation process were selected. Thirdly, the selected Chinese subtitles and their English subtitles were categorized. Lastly, the translation techniques of the examples were identified based on the three-dimensional transformations.

The data analysis was guided by Eco-translatology's three-dimensional transformations. For each subtitle example, literal translations were provided to aid readers unfamiliar with Chinese. The analysis on linguistic dimension examined how Chinese characteristic terms, dialects and puns in Chinese were adapted to fit the norms of English, coding each instance for specific linguistic challenges like idiomatic expressions or dialects. In analyzing the cultural dimension, the focus was on how Chinese cultural elements like family terms were adapted to make sense in English while preserving the original cultural context. Each subtitle example that contained unique Chinese cultural connotations was carefully examined to see how it was transformed to align with the cultural understanding of the target audience. In the

communicative dimension, the analysis focused on how emotional tone, humor, and irony were preserved or adjusted in translation. This coding process ensured that each example reflected its relevant dimension, allowing for a thorough exploration of the adaptive strategies used by translators to maintain the film's meaning and emotional impact for global audiences.

Findings and Discussion

Three Dimensional Transformation

Transformations in the Linguistic Dimension

Adaptive selection in the linguistic dimension means that during translation, translators conduct transformations of languages in different aspects and at different levels (Hu, 2011). In the process of subtitle translation, various linguistic aspects need to be converted to suit the language habits of the target audiences.

Translation of Dialects

In film subtitle translation, handling dialects requires consideration of the original work's cultural background and the audience's ability to understand. Dialects contain many unique local cultural elements and customs, which are often difficult to translate directly. Therefore, translators need to deeply understand the background of the dialect to convey the essence of the original work. The following translation examples make the translation more understandable.

Example 1:

ST: 你家是咱们厂第一个买电视的，那叫一个风光。

TT: Your family was the first to own a television among us factory workers. You are so envied.

Literal translation: Your family was the first in our factory to buy a television, and that was quite a spectacle.

“风光” is a Chinese term that primarily refers to beautiful natural scenery, such as picturesque landscapes of mountains and rivers or idyllic rural scenes. It can also describe bustling or prosperous scenes. Additionally, in colloquial speech, particularly in some dialects, the term can describe someone being in an enviable, prestigious, or respectable state. In the film, at Jia Xiaoling's celebration banquet for university admission, the factory manager uses the dialect “风光” to praise Wang Qin for being the first person in the factory to buy a TV. In the 1980s, televisions were a luxury, and owning one would attract envy. Here, “风光” is translated as “envied” to convey this context to foreign audiences within the limited time available. Instead of the Chinese expression, a passive voice and added subject align with the target language, enhancing audience comprehension. This approach exemplifies the eco-translatological principle of balance between the source and target language ecosystems, ensuring linguistic and cultural compatibility.

Example 2:

ST: 然后，这个时候这个大胖丫子不知道从哪啪一下子就把英子给砸底下了。

TT: That's when this **big girl** fell from god knows where. And landed on Ying.

Literal translation: Then, at this moment, this fat girl suddenly came out of nowhere and slammed Yingzi to the ground.

In Chinese dialects, the term “大胖丫子” is an affectionate expression usually describing a chubby and cute girl. To help target language audiences better understand this, an explanatory translation with annotations is necessary, but this could make the subtitles overly complex and distracting. Directly translating it to “fat girl” is also inappropriate, as the word “fat” can be considered impolite. The translator recognized this cultural difference and strategically translated “大胖丫子” as “big girl.” The phrase “啪一下子” describes the sound of a heavy object hitting the ground. Given the brief duration of film subtitles, directly translating “啪一下子” would result in a cumbersome and lengthy sentence. Therefore, translating such onomatopoeic words is often unnecessary. Here, the translator used a reduction strategy, which not only successfully met the requirements of subtitle translation but also conveyed the humor. Stripping away difficult-to-explain cultural attributes while retaining the essential meaning of the subtitles. This greatly facilitated foreign audiences’ viewing experience.

Translation of Chinese Characteristic Terms

The translation of Chinese characteristic terms is a nuanced task that requires a deep understanding of both linguistic and cultural contexts. These terms are often rich in cultural and historical significance and need to be conveyed in a way that is both accurate and accessible to target audiences.

Example 3:

ST: 直到后来我才发现，原来女大十八变，是骗人的。

TT: It was till much later that I realized that, as it turns out, not every little girl grows up to be beautiful.

Literal translation: It was not until later that I realized that the saying “a girl changes eighteen times as she grows up” is a lie.

“女大十八变” is a familiar term to Chinese audiences, meaning that as a girl grows older, her appearance and personality undergo significant changes. Accompanying this line, the film transitions from a younger Jia Xiaoling to an older Jia Xiaoling, aiming to portray a character who consistently struggles with her appearance, academic performance, and causes worry for her mother. The translator rendered this as “not every little girl grows up to be beautiful,” directly conveying the idiom’s underlying meaning through free translation. This allows target readers without a Chinese cultural background to easily grasp the film’s ironic tone, thereby better understanding the character’s psychological development and the storyline. Additionally, the translation retains the original’s sarcastic nuance, allowing target readers to experience similar emotional responses as the original audience, thus preserving the film’s overall atmosphere and narrative effect. Moreover, the translator’s use of natural and easily comprehensible expressions in the target language enhances the translation’s readability and fluency, demonstrating respect for and adaptation to the target culture. This cultural adaptability improves the translation’s acceptance in the target language culture, maintaining narrative continuity and allowing target readers to seamlessly follow the film’s plot and character development.

Example 4:

ST: 前半夜，咋起起不来。好像鬼压床了。后半夜，总算是起来了，结果，鬼剃头了。

TT: The first half of the night, I couldn't seem to get up. Like I was possessed or something. Then the second half, I finally got up and then my hair was gone.

Literal translation: In the first half of the night, I couldn't get up no matter what. It felt like I was being pinned down by a ghost. In the second half of the night, I finally managed to get up, but as a result, I experienced "ghost shaving."

“鬼压床” is a common folk saying, known medically as sleep paralysis. It describes a state where a person is partly awake, aware of their surroundings, but unable to move or speak, often accompanied by hallucinations and fear, feeling like being held down by a ghost. In the film, Guixiang misses a volleyball match because she wakes up bald. She describes her painful night using “鬼压床,” which is familiar to domestic viewers but needs more explanation for foreign audiences to understand. The translator avoids the potential confusion of Chinglish expressions like “ghosts press bed” or “ghosts shave head.” This method allows target language audiences without a Chinese cultural background to easily understand these symptoms, enhancing the comprehensibility of the information. The translator chose more colloquial expressions familiar to the target culture, such as “I was possessed or something” and “my hair was gone”. These expressions align with the linguistic habits of the English-speaking culture, making the translation more relatable to the daily life and understanding of the target language audiences. By using simple and easy-to-understand language, the translator retains the original humor and emotional effect, allowing target language audiences to experience similar emotional responses as the source language audiences. This approach not only conveys the information but also retains the emotional color of the original text, enhancing the vividness of the translation. The translation is concise and clear, fitting the character of “Wang Guixiang,” an ordinary Chinese woman in the 1980s, and aligning with the historical background and character traits of that time.

Example 5:

ST: 咱俩的想法不谋而合。

TT: I'm totally on board with you.

Literal translation: Our thoughts coincidentally align.

“不谋而合” is an idiom that refers to two parties have the same opinion or idea without prior discussion or planning. It describes a situation where there is a spontaneous agreement or concurrence, emphasizing the coincidence and mutual understanding between the parties. In the film, Shen Guanglin wants to show his capability to gain Li Huanying's recognition by joining the art show. His idea matches Jia Xiaoling's, so Jia uses the idiom to express their shared purpose. The translator uses the phrase “be totally on board with you” to present the essence of the idiom, which fits English expressions and helping the audiences understand the context better.

Translation of Puns

Example 6:

ST: 我妈总会时不时地到学校接受老师的教育。

TT: She often came to get lectured herself.

Literal translation: My mom would always go to school from time to time to receive education from the teacher.

The source text humorously and ironically describes the mother Li Huanying being “educated” by the teacher due to her child Xiaoling’s bad grades. The humor relies on the pun of “接受教育” (to receive education), highlighting the school’s role as a place of learning, while the mother is clearly there to be scolded, not formally educated. The translated text, “She often came to get lectured herself,” accurately reflects this core idea. The use of “get lectured” captures the seriousness and unpleasantness of the situation, while “herself” maintains the original’s humor and irony, emphasizing the mother’s involvement as if she were a student. The translator skillfully leaves the elements of “school” and “teacher” to be presented by the film’s visuals, effectively utilizing the actual scene to convey the context. The translator’s choice of words allows for similar emotional resonance and situational understanding, achieving effective cross-cultural communication.

Transformations in the Cultural Dimension

Due to the differences in nature and content between the source language culture and the target language culture, in order to avoid misinterpreting the original text from the perspective of the target language culture, the translator not only needs to focus on the language conversion of the source language but also needs to adapt to the entire cultural system to which the language belongs. Additionally, attention must be paid to the transmission of cultural connotations in both languages during the translation process (Hu, 2006). Therefore, when unique cultural terms from Chinese appear in the film, the translator makes adaptations based on the specific translation ecology.

Example 7:

ST: 我大侄女好不容易考上了我乐意给。

TT: I’m just happy that my god-daughter finally got into college.

Literal translation: My eldest niece finally got accepted, and I’m happy to give her the red envelope.

In Chinese, “大侄女” refers to the daughter of one’s older or younger brother, or a close friend’s daughter, and is a term of endearment. In the film, Li Huanying’s close friend Bao Yumei calls Jia Xiaoling “大侄女”. However, there is no exact equivalent term for this expression in English. “god-daughter” primarily refers to a girl for whom someone serves as a godparent at her baptism, with a responsibility to guide her religious and moral development. Additionally, in non-religious contexts, “god-daughter” can also refer to a girl who has a close, almost parent-daughter-like relationship with someone, even if there is no formal religious ceremony, indicating a close family or friendship bond. Although the term does not entirely match the functions and connotations of the source language, it aligns with the cultural background and cognition of the target audiences, balancing the differences between Chinese and Western cultures and conveying the essence of the source language. The translator has

made similar adaptive adjustments for several other cultural terms, fitting the translation to the ecological environment.

Example 8:

ST: 接下来有请状元郎的母亲, 李焕英女士隆重登场。

TT: Please welcome the mother of the prodigy, Ms. Li Huanying, to the stage.

Literal translation: Next, let's welcome the top scholar's mother, Ms. Li Huanying, to the stage. "状元" is a title from ancient China's imperial examination system, awarded to the top scholar who achieved the highest score in the final level of the examinations, known as the "palace examination". The imperial examination system had multiple levels, including the provincial exam, the metropolitan exam, and the palace exam. The person who ranked first in the palace examination was honored as the "状元". This title symbolizes exceptional academic achievement and is considered the highest honor in the realm of scholarship and civil service. In English, "Prodigy" refers to a young person who possesses exceptional abilities or talents at an early age, often in areas such as mathematics, music, science, or the arts. These individuals demonstrate skills or achievements far beyond what is typical for their age group. A prodigy typically stands out for their advanced level of performance and understanding in their field of expertise. The translation of "状元" to "prodigy" in the given context demonstrates a thoughtful adaptation that aligns with the target audience's cultural background and cognitive framework. This approach maintains the source text's emphasis on exceptional achievement while ensuring the translation is clear and relatable for the audiences.

Transformations in the Communicative Dimension

The adaptive selection and conversion of communicative intent in the translation process means that in addition to the conversion of language information and the transmission of cultural connotations, the translator focuses on the communicative aspect. This involves ensuring that the communicative intent of the original text is reflected in the translated text. (Hu, 2006). Due to the spatial and temporal constraints and the cultural transformation characteristics of subtitle translation, the translator needs to play a central role, continually adapting to the specific translation ecological environment, making choices to achieve the communicative purpose.

Example 9:

ST: 你好, 李焕英。

TT: Hi, Mom.

Literal translation: Hi, Li Huanying.

The subtitle translation of the title "你好, 李焕英" as "Hi, Mom" instead of the literal "Hi, Li Huanying" is a prime example. The name "Li Huanying" holds specific emotional and cultural significance in the Chinese context, but for target language audiences unfamiliar with Chinese culture, this name could not evoke the same emotional resonance. "Mom" is a universally familiar and emotionally charged term that more easily resonates with the audience and conveys the film's theme. Using "Mom" instead of "Li Huanying" makes the emotional core of the film clearer and more explicit, effectively conveying the mother-child relationship theme. It also aligns with the language habits and cultural perceptions of the target audience, enhancing the smoothness and acceptability of the viewing experience. The film's essence lies

in the emotional bond between mother and child, and “Hi, Mom” succinctly expresses this, achieving emotional resonance with the audience. This translation approach ensures that the film’s theme can be widely understood and accepted by international audiences.

Example 10:

ST:我跟你现在生活作风抓得严。

TT: I’m telling you, people frown upon this kind of behavior.

Literal translation: I’m telling you, they’re cracking down on personal conduct strictly now.

This scene occurs when Jia Xiaoling is asked to sign a letter of guarantee. Upon hearing that Zhang Jiang is the safety officer, Jia Xiaoling realizes he is Uncle Zhang, and excitedly grabs Zhang Jiang’s hand. But Zhang Jiang doesn’t like this behaviour. The background of this excerpt is the 1980s, a period when issues related to personal conduct were highly characteristic of the times. During the 1980s, people had a strong aversion to those with poor personal conduct, which explains why Zhang Jiang reacts negatively to Jia Xiaoling’s action, expressing himself in this manner. “生活作风” is translated as “frown upon this kind of behavior,” combined with the scene of them pulling at each other in the film, making it easier for target language audiences to understand the context of China in the 1980s in the communicative dimension.

Discussion

The analysis demonstrates that the subtitle translation of *Hi, Mom* effectively uses various techniques such as the application of amplification, omission, free translation, cultural substitution and explicitation to achieve adaptive selection in the linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions. These techniques ensure that the translations are both accurate and resonate with the target audience. Dialects and culturally specific terms are carefully adapted to retain their essence while being comprehensible to English-speaking viewers. Cultural nuances are preserved without causing misunderstandings, and the communicative intent is maintained to reflect the same emotional and contextual impact as the original. Overall, the study underscores the importance of adaptive selection in achieving effective cross-cultural communication, highlighting that successful translation involves more than just literal language conversion. The principles of Eco-translatology have been applied to ensure the subtitles resonate with international audiences while maintaining the integrity of the original dialogue.

Conclusion

This study presents the application of Eco-translatology in the subtitle translation of the film *Hi Mom*. By analyzing specific examples through the three-dimensional transformations of linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions, the research highlights the adaptive selection process translators undertake to balance the source and target language ecosystems. The findings illustrate that Eco-translatology provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the complexities of subtitle translation, emphasizing the importance of maintaining cultural integrity and achieving effective cross-cultural communication.

In addition, the study extends the theoretical scope of Eco-translatology by applying its three-dimensional transformations specifically to subtitle translation, an area that has yet to be

thoroughly explored using this framework. Through the detailed analysis of *Hi Mom*, the study demonstrates how translators can flexibly adapt subtitles to meet the dual demands of faithfulness to the original content and resonance with international audiences. In doing so, it fills a gap in current translation studies and offers practical insights into how translation strategies can be optimized. Contextually, the study is of particular relevance given the global expansion of Chinese film, where the quality of subtitle translation plays a pivotal role in international reception. This study provides valuable guidance for enhancing subtitle translations to ensure they convey both emotional depth and cultural nuance, contributing not only to translation theory but also to the practical enhancement of global cultural exchange.

Despite the insights gained, this study has limitations. It does not include a comparative analysis of different translated versions of *Hi, Mom*, which could provide a more in-depth understanding of translation choices and their impacts. Additionally, the study's focus on three-dimensional transformations excludes other potentially relevant aspects, such as inappropriate translations or different theoretical approaches. The limited number of examples analyzed also results in insufficient argumentation.

Future research could address these limitations by expanding the scope of analysis to include more examples and different versions of translated subtitles. It could also explore other dimensions of Eco-translatology or integrate additional translation theories to provide a more holistic view of subtitle translation practices.

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