

# ***An Analysis of the Chinese Subtitles of Kung Fu Panda 3 from the Perspective of Communicative Translation***

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**Abstract:** Film is always a concentrated embodiment of culture and languages. Nowadays, attention has also been paid to film subtitle and its translation. As China further promotes the spread of culture, traditional Chinese symbols such as "Kung fu" and "martial arts" are also becoming familiar to foreign countries. This work has selected the film Kung Fu Panda 3 as the research object, which is a story based on a Chinese cultural background while presents in an English context. Through a comparative analysis of Chinese and English subtitles of the film, the film subtitle translation strategies and skills are explored from three translation techniques among Peter Newmark's translation theories.

**Keywords:** subtitle translation, Peter Newmark, *Kung Fu Panda*

## **1. Introduction**

With the development of Internet and technology, more and more foreign movies are introduced into China, and subtitle translation has also started to emerge. Wilss believes that translation is closely related to information transmission, and the essence of translation is communication, and movie subtitle translation can maximize the communicative function of movies[1]. Subtitles of motion picture refer to non-visual content such as dialogues in films, television and stage works in the form of text, and as well as the text of post-processing of film and television works in general. The content and explanatory text that appear on the screen of a movie or on the underside of a television set, such as the title of the film, the cast and crew list, the lyrics, the dialogue, the descriptions, the introduction of characters, the names of places and dates, etc., are called subtitles[2]. Translation, on the other hand, is the process of converting information from one language to another and keeping its meaning intact. The theory of translation has evolved over the years, with many scholars developing various approaches to the task. One of the most influential theories is the functionalist approach, proposed by Katharina Reiss and Hans Vermeer, which is based on the functionalist view of language. According to this theory, translation should not only convey the meaning of the source text, but also serve the communicative function of the target text.

In this paper, we will analyze the translation of Chinese and English subtitles of the movie *Kung Fu Panda 3* based on Peter Newmark's translation theory. The subtitle translation practice will be analyzed using different translation strategies, such as communicative translation, idiomatic translation and free translation. The movie is chosen because it is a popular and widely known movie with many cultural references and challenges. At the same time, the movie has well-made graphics, is a good example of Sino-American cooperation, and comes with many laughs and cultural connotations. The movie uses subtitles to translate the dialogues from English to Chinese, a complex task that requires a thorough understanding of both languages and cultures.

The purpose of this paper is to assess the effectiveness of the translation strategies used in the subtitles of the film. The analysis will focus on the extent to which the subtitles convey the intended meaning, retain cultural references, and are stylistically appropriate. This paper will contribute to the understanding of the challenges and strategies involved in the translation of cultural and linguistic elements in movies.

## 2. Literature Review

Peter Newmark's translation theories covered a wide range and classified carefully. He put forward eight translation methods, among which four emphasize on the source language: word-for-word translation, literal translation, faithful translation and semantic translation, and the other four kinds emphasize on the target language: adaptation, free translation, idiomatic translation and communicative translation.

Word-for-word translation refers to the translation of an article without regard to readability and communicative context, which directly preserves the word order and composition of the original text and translates words one by one. Literal translation means to translate words one by one in accordance with the original grammatical structure, regardless of context. Faithful translation attaches importance to the meaning and structure of the original text, retains the abnormality of the original text, but translates the meaning of the original text. Semantic translation is more understandable than faithful translation, in which some cultural expressions will not be preserved as it is.

Adaptation refers to a complete rewrite of the original text with full consideration for the target language. Free translation does not pay attention to the original form but translates its original meaning. Idiomatic translation uses cultural expressions in the target language and may deviate from the original text, while communicative translation pays attention to context and at the same time selects a comprehensible phrase for readers.

This work will analyze the Chinese subtitles of *Kung Fu Panda 3* and mainly focus on three translation methods among Peter Newmark's translation theories which are found applied in the subtitle translation, namely communicative translation, idiomatic translation and free translation.

### 2.1. Communicative Translation

Communicative translation is partial to the target language, it is faithful to the readers of articles. Hence, it considers more about the context and idiomatic expressions. Based on the original meaning of the context, translators can change the order of sentences and add or omit some information for better understanding and communication. Communicative translation is clearer and more fluent as it is in line with the target language's habit.

### 2.2. Idiomatic Translation

Idiomatic translation is frequently found in the movie *Kung Fu Panda 3*. From the subtitling translation, some of the messages of the original are reproduced. In target language, colloquialisms and idioms, four-character phrases as well as a series of idiomatic expressions are used and achieve

a successful effect on target readers. Thus, in this part, some of the subtitling translations extracted from the movie will be analyzed in detail based on this translation strategy.

### 2.3. Free Translation

Free translation is the translation by meanings. That is to say, the translation is made according to the true meanings of a sentence or even a paragraph, rather than according to a literal paraphrase. So, it is also called the paraphrastic translation. It does not pay attention to the form of the original work, including syntactic structure, wording, metaphors and other rhetorical devices. However, it does not mean that the content can be deleted or added to at will. The translator must consider the original carefully, translate it naturally, and convey the meaning of the original work. At the same time, free translation is a skill that requires the translator to understand the culture of both the source and target languages and must have extensive knowledge.

## 3. Analysis

This section will give a detailed analysis on the subtitle translation and discuss how the three translation methods are applied to convey the original meanings.

### 3.1. Communicative Translation

(1) ST: Finally inner peace.

TT: 终于清静了。

On the basis of preserving the original form, the translation of this line is carried out in a way that readers can easily understand using the colloquial expressions. Meanwhile, the translation of "inner peace" is consistent with the line in the film picture of the master in the cultivation environment.

(2) ST: Five hundred years in the spirit realm, you pick up a thing or two.

TT: 五百年灵界的修炼，不是白练的。

“白” is often used in Chinese to describe something that takes effort in vain. Using the negative expression, it emphasized Kai’s achievements and showed his self-conceit. This translation is both appropriate and easy to understand.

(3) ST: Po, that's a promotion. Take the job, son.

TT: 阿宝，这可是份美差啊！还犹豫啥？儿子。

The literal translation of “Take the job” can be understood, but it may not be that vivid and does not match the excited and eager mood of Mr. Ping in this picture. The translation of “还犹豫啥” is not distorted, but very flexibly reflects the original meaning in a natural way in Chinese.

(4) ST: They taught me how to give chi.

TT: 他们还教会我如何释放气。

“释放” in Chinese can be used with visible gases and invisible things like “stress or mood”. The translation of “give chi” as “释放气” accords with the Chinese context and is easy for readers to understand.

(5) ST: I've always felt like I wasn't eating up to my full potential.

TT: 我一直认为我吃东西的潜力还没完全挖掘出来。

ST: I knew I wasn't eating up to my potential!

TT: 我就知道我在吃方面潜力无限。

Both the translations reversed the order of the sentences and used the skill of negation translation, which reduced the difficulty of understanding. When there are multiple negatives or negations, the sentence is often translated as positive meaning for readability. In the movie, Po is motivated by others to eat more, so the use of “被挖掘” is quite appropriate.

(6) ST: Oh, lunch break?

TT: 吃点东西吗?

In line with the target language habits, this translation is flexible and easy to understand. Po's father asked Po if he wants to take a rest and eat something, so just translated “lunch” is enough for readers do understand its meaning.

(7) ST: What if the panda doesn't have the food you like?

TT: 如果你不喜欢吃那些熊猫的东西怎么办?

The translation of this sentence has switched the word order and inter changed subject-object, commonly used in English-Chinese translation, easy to understand.

It emphasizes the Mr.Ping's caring for Po and how he didn't want Po to go. “那些熊猫” showed Mr.Ping's idea that he thought Po is different from those pandas.

(8) ST: If I lived here, I wouldn't tell anyone either.

TT: 如果我住在这, 我也不好意思告诉别人。

“不好意思” is a common Chinese phrase which shows the mood of embarrassed, so it is appropriate to translate like this which emphasizes the mood of the character and indicates the poor environment.

(9) ST: Let's feast in my son's honor.

TT: 我们去大吃一顿吧! 庆祝我儿子回来了。

This translation supplemented some grounded words like “大吃一顿” based on the original text and the context, made it easier to understand.

(10) ST: Goodbye forever.

TT: 把这当做是最后的道别。

“最后的道别” is in line with the readers' habits. If it translated literally “再也不见”, it will have a more negative emotional connotation which will contrary to the original meaning.

### 3.2. Idiomatic Translation

The application of idiomatic translation is widely found in the translation of the selected subtitle. In the translation, the use of both colloquialisms and the Chinese-typical four-character phrases are used in an appropriate way.

#### 3.2.1. The Use of Colloquialism

(1) ST: Sweet!

TT: 舒坦!

The original text is a small segment before the feature starts. It shows that the main character Po is lying on the moon, saying “sweet”. The Chinese translation uses colloquialism, translating it as

“舒坦” instead of literally translated. Combined with the visuals [3], it can be easily seen that the translation not only conveys the intended meaning of the original text, but also seems more authentic, allowing the audience feel the character's relaxing state.

(2) ST: All you have to lose is our respect.

TT: 你放马过来便是。

The original text is what Tigress tells Po when Po's master wants him to be the teacher of other people in the village, and asks him to guide Tigress's personal training. On the semantic level, the meaning of the original text is a bit changed. The English version is substituted by an idiomatic Chinese expression “放马过来”, which can deliver a similar meaning as the source language does (although not totally equivalent), as well as fit the context in the movie [4]. According to the plot of the film, firstly Tigress doubted Po's ability to be a qualified teacher, so both “all you have to lose is our respect” and the Chinese version “放马过来” to some extent shows the meaning of disbelief and provocation. Therefore, the translation here is quite understandable despite of the loss of faithfulness.

(3) ST: Those 103 dumplings? I was just warming up.

TT: 103 个包子，还没够我塞牙缝呢。

The original text was spoken by Po's father [5], Li Shan. Even though the translation uses a colloquial and completely different expression “塞牙缝” (fill the slits between the teeth) to replace, the meaning is still conveyed and the expressive effect is achieved (a panda's appetite is emphasized). Consequently, translating in this way makes it more authentic and closer to Chinese expression habits.

(4) ST: Oooh. sweet.

TT: 干得好。

This is a monologue that Po said to the other character Meimei in the movie, when Meimei successfully defeated the jombies (jade zombies). Although the translation basically uses a quite Chinese-style expression without fidelity to the original form, it is quite concise (only three characters) while clear, expressing the meaning but causing no confusion from the audience.

(5) ST: Get ready to feel the thunder.

TT: 准备好接招吧。

The original text was what Po said to Kai (the villain in the movie) after he converted into a real Dragon Warrior. The word “thunder” in English carries a rhetorical meaning and so is quite vivid, but when being translated into Chinese, it is not directly translated, instead a more colloquial and everyday expression “接招吧” is adopted. This translation does not make the expression sound awkward, but rather more idiomatic and in line with the context of Chinese Kung Fu elements [6].

### 3.2.2. The Use of Four-character Phrases

(1) ST: Inner peace. Inner peace.

TT: 波澜不惊，方能心如止水。

The English text is a monologue spoken by Master Oogway who is meditating under the tree. The translation replaces the two identical “inner peace” in the original text with the Chinese expressions “波澜不惊” and “心如止水”. This kind of four-character structure is a typical Chinese way of expression and also incorporates elements of Taoism [7]. It displays a picture of martial artists entering a state of concentration while training, which better resonates with Chinese audience.

(2) ST: Wow, she's amazing. She's so beautiful.

TT: 她真是花容月貌，美若天仙。

The original text is what Po said when he returned to the village and saw Meimei. The words “amazing” and “beautiful” in the original text are translated into Chinese using the four-character phrases “花容月貌” and “美若天仙”. Although this modification slightly changes the degree of description, it can better evoke the reader’s imagination of the role. At the same time, using four-character phrases initially intended to be used on humans to describe pandas can achieve a kind of comedic effect [8].

(3) ST: Our battle shook the Earth.

TT: 我们打得山摇地动。

The original text is spoken by Oogway in the tone of its own narration of the fight between itself and Kai. The translation uses the four-character phrase “地动山摇” to reproduce the meaning of “shook the Earth”. The change is not very significant, as the original expression in the source language is also exaggerated. The Chinese translation retains this way of expression and finds a substitute that is almost appropriate both in form and semantic conveyance.

(4) ST: Just let yourself fall into it.

TT: 只要顺其自然就好。

The original text is what Li Shan said when he taught Po how to roll like a real panda. The translation reproduces the English version to great extent, which shows more freedom [9] in target language because the translation is more inclined to convey the meaning that the character wants to express rather than extreme faithfulness to the source language. Plus, “顺其自然” is a commonly used four-character phrase in Chinese in such context, which is more comprehensible for the audience compared with a literal translation.

### 3.3. Free Translation

(1) ST: I have to turn you into you!

TT: 我要做的是激发你们自身的潜能!

The direct translation of "I have to turn you into you" is "我必须把你变成你", but in the movie this would seem strange and difficult to understand, and does not fit with the content of the plot. Here, *Kung Fu Panda* has to teach everyone kung fu to fight with Kai, so he has to stimulate everyone's individual potential. The translator here uses a free translation method to give an apt representation of all the connotations that the source language is trying to convey.

(2) ST: Oh, Stripy Baby. So beautiful.

TT: 花娃娃，好漂亮啊!

Here, stripy means “条纹”，and the direct translation is "条纹娃娃", but if the translation is "条纹娃娃" obviously does not match the picture of the tigress doll in the movie. At the same time, the translator freely translates the tigress-shaped doll into a “花娃娃” according to Chinese characteristics, which is more in line with the meaning of the original text and more conducive to the understanding of the general audience.

(3) ST: No more questions!

Go away, kid.

TT:别再问问题了, 坐好, 小屁孩。

Here the translator translates "Go away, kid", not directly as "走开, 小孩". The film shows everyone sitting together for dinner, and it is impossible to let the kid go away on such an occasion. The translator's free translation here is extremely apt.

(4) ST: Try to keep up.

TT:试着跟上姐的舞步。

In this part, the translator translated "Try to keep up" as "试着跟上姐的舞步" and added "姐的舞步" to the translation. The word "姐" is more grounded and has a funny element [10]. At the same time, it is consistent with the confident image of the panda Mei Mei in the movie. If the translation is just "试着跟上", it will seem rather boring.

(5) ST: Oh! Rookie mistake.

TT:菜鸟都这样。

Here, the translator did not translate "rookie mistake" as "新手犯的错误", but as "菜鸟都这样" is more in line with the film's oral expression habits, used to communicate, which is simple and clear.

(6) ST: I'm coming in hot!

TT:全速前进!

In this case, "I'm coming in hot!" translates to "我正热火朝天地赶来". Here, a direct translation in context would be strange and difficult to understand [11]. At the same time, the translator omits the subject in the translation and uses a free translation method to translate. The translator perfectly expresses the content of the source text with just four words "全速前进", which is worth studying and thinking about.

(7) ST: Let me get some of that.

TT:我也要抱抱。

"Let me get some of that" translates directly to "让我拿点那个". But according to the movie, the panda wants to hug, not to take something. The translator here freely translates this sentence according to the picture, which fits the original context and is easy to understand.

(8) ST: Kai has taken their chi.

TT:是天煞吸走了他们的真气。

"Kai, which means "god" in Japanese, possesses supernatural power. Instead of translating "kai" as "凯", the translator chose to freely translate "kai" as "天煞" in Chinese. The name of the villain in Chinese is preserved from the style, so that people will know that the character is a villain at first hearing [12]. In this way, it can also be contrasted with *Kung Fu Panda*, Tigress, Master Oogway and other decent characters.

(9) ST: Nice. Very tacky.

TT:好极了, 你们就这点本事。

"不错, 非常俗气" is literally translated as "Nice, very tacky". However, if translated in this way, it would not be logical in the context of the movie. Therefore, it is very appropriate for the translator to freely translate the phrase in context as "好极了, 你们就这点本事". At the same time, it also accurately conveys the sarcastic meaning of the source language.



(10) ST: Pandas on three.

TT:大家都把手放上来。

"Pandas on three" translates directly to "熊猫在三". However, this would seem illogical, and the audience would have difficulty understanding what is "熊猫在三". Therefore, the translator used a free translation here, and combined with the film image is hand over hand cheering, so the use of easy to understand "大家都把手放上来" is very appropriate.

(11) ST: How about you spare me the chit-chat?

TT:你能别废话了吗?

"Spare me the chit-chat" is a parallel structure with the previous "spare your life", but the latter is a fixed collocation, meaning "赦免某人", so the latter expression can only be translated, "你能别废话了吗" fits the context and the image of the character.

(12) ST: Subtle, Po. Very subtle.

TT:讨厌, 阿宝, 真讨厌。

The original meaning of "subtle" here is "不易察觉的, 微妙的". But a direct translation would be strange. It is also inappropriate to say "微妙" as a colloquialism. So the translator uses the free translation method, using the Chinese lovers often say "讨厌" when they meet and jokes as the most appropriate translation here, and also with the movie scene.

#### 4. Conclusion

To conclude, subtitle translation is also the translation of culture, thus the output should be flexible, understandable and reader friendly. In this essay, all these three methods embodied in the film show their significant effects on improving comprehensiveness of target readers. Communicative translation is reader-oriented since it focuses more on conveying the original meaning of the source text, rather than rigidly obeying the original structure. Idiomatic translation uses abundant colloquialisms, idioms and four-character phrases that are full of Chinese characteristics. The adoption of these idiomatic expressions can better resonate with Chinese readers, as well as achieve "film localization". Free translation also pays more attention to delivering the meaning instead of totally being faithful to the form. For reader's better understanding, free translation sometimes paraphrases the source text or changes word and sentence order to make both content and language readily acceptable and comprehensible to the readership. Therefore, all the three methods used in the film subtitle translation make *Kung Fu Panda 3* much closer to target audience, and so the translation can be viewed as successful. Moreover, they assist the film to gain its popularity more easily in China film market because the translation to some extent maintains the Chinese-style elements, which has greatly aroused Chinese audience's interest.

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