

An Analysis of the Subtitles of Wednesday from the Perspective of Communicative Translation

Yuanyuan Gu^{1,a,*}

¹*Hailiang Foreign Language School, Taozhu Street, Zhuji City, Zhejiang Province, China*
a. Guanna@STUDENT.WUST.EDU.PL

**corresponding author*

Abstract: Cultural exchanges have drawn more and more attention in the literature in recent years, in which film and television subtitle translations play an undeniably important role. The study on the English to Chinese subtitles provides a good perspective to reveal the process of cultural exchange and thus is a promising topic to look into. This study investigates the Chinese subtitle translation of the US TV series *Wednesday*, which is a horror and fantasy drama released on 2022 by Netflix, and the analysis is based on the framework of Peter Newmark's eight translator methods. The translations have been mainly put through the three translation techniques: addition, omission and shift, and three translation methods are found, namely communicative translation, idiomatic translation and free translation. The analysis reveals the target-audience emphasis tendency of the subtitle translation, which is resulted from the translator's habit, the purpose of the subtitle translation, the consideration of the audience, etc.

Keywords: subtitle translation, communicative translation, addition, omission, shift

1. Introduction

In the past few years, the investigation of US TV series has attracted many people's cautions. US TV series is the Chinese abbreviation for American TV and Internet series, which covers all audio-visual programs in the United States in a broad sense. Following with the high profile of US TV series, the translation of subtitle also draws the increasing number of educational circle's attention. Since there are fundamental differences between Chinese and Western cultures, and subtitle translation of movies and TV series is not a simple language conversion, but a cultural interaction and exchange rooted in the national cultural system. Therefore, subtitle translation should meet the cross-cultural principle, take the language characteristics as the basis, and be loyal to the content and cultural background of English movies and TV plays, so that the audience can be clear at a glance, so that the audience of different countries can directly understand the English movies and TV plays [1]. Thus, this study chooses the translation of subtitle of an US TV series called *Wednesday* to investigate.

Wednesday is a horror and fantasy drama directed and produced by Alfred Gough Miles Millar and starring Jenna Ortega, Gwendoline Christie, Percy Hynes White, Luis Guzman, Emma Myers, and others. It was released on Netflix on November 23, 2022. The TV series is based on the Addams Family, a comic book written by Charles Addams. It tells the story of Wednesday Addams, the daughter of the Addams family, who is forced by her parents to attend a boarding school for unusual

students to discover the secrets of the school's history and solve a series of murders. The work will analyse its subtitle translation from the perspective of the translation theory of Peter Newmark.

The purpose of this theory of translating is to be of service to the translator. It is designed to be a continuous link between translation theory and practice. It derives from a translation theory framework which proposes that when the main purpose of the text is to convey information and convince the reader, a method of translation must be natural [2].

2. Literature Review

Peter Newmark disagrees with the over-simple traditional dichotomy that divides translation methods in only free translation and literal translation, and instead he has proposed the concepts of communicative translation and semantic translation, which is further categorized as eight different methods [3]. The eight translation methods that are word-for-word translation, literal translation, faithful translation, semantic translation, adaptation, free translation, idiomatic translation and communicative translation. The first four methods belong to the semantic translation, which is source language emphasis, while the other four belong to communicative translation, which are target language emphasis. The typology has been widely applied in translators' training, providing an instructive guidance in translation evaluation and researches [4]. The following part will introduce the characteristics of the eight translation methods in order to prepare for the coming analysis in section 3 which is based on Newmark's typology.

2.1. The Word for Word Translation

This method of translation reveals the structure of the source language, so that Chinese readers can better understand how the translation came about. It is a very extreme translation method. The purpose is to make audience understand the original text's structure better. This fault is sometimes will make the statement be not smooth due to the gap between the language. Therefore, the employment of this translation method is not usual. This belongs to the source language emphasis.

2.2. Literal Translation

This method will convert the grammatical structure of the source text into a grammatical structure in the target text that is closest to the original one [5]. Sometimes, it will help readers to better understand, but in other cases, it cannot solve the language difference, and will make the overall structure and expression of the translation look strange. This is source language emphasis.

2.3. Faithful Translation

Faithful translation has a few more adjustments than literal translation. It is to adjust some other aspects of the translation without changing the grammatical structure, sometimes with a little structural adjustment, but not too much. This is the source language emphasis.

2.4. Semantic Translation

Semantic translation is different from faithful translation in that it takes more consideration of the overall beauty of the text. It will try to keep the meaning of the text as little as possible, so that the text does not have the problems of partial tone, wordplay and repetition. This can also better enable translators to have more resonance with the original text. Semantic translation focuses on the culture of the source language and the feelings of the original author [6]. This is the source language emphasis.

2.5. Adaptation

Adaptation is an active form translation. It includes in drama or novel translation mostly. This translation always keeps the theme, character and scene of original text. It is closer to the language native culture. This is the target language emphasis.

2.6. Free Translation

This translation method is the one that the target text has nothing to do with the original text from a purely semantic point of view. This technique mainly focuses on the original text. In order to get closer to the semantic meaning of the original text, great adjustments are made to the original sentence in the process of translation, so that the original text and the target text seem to have no great connection, and sometimes even no correlation. However, in connection with the above, we can know that the translation has a great relationship with the original text, so that readers can better understand the deep meaning expressed by the original text. Free translation accurately translate the subtitles of western films and TV series into Chinese in a way conforms to the language habits of Chinese audiences [7]. This is target language emphasis.

2.7. Idiomatic Translation

Idiomatic translation is a more idiomatic translation technique. It can reduce the language differences between the target text and the original text, and use a more authentic expression of the target language to get closer to the meaning of the original text. It is usually used to translate common sayings, such as some English idioms used in the original text, in order to express the meaning of the original text more idiomatic. I can also use Chinese language to translate English language. In idiom translation, we should not only pay attention to the surface expression form of idioms, but also explore their deep cultural connotation [8]. This is the target language emphasis.

2.8. Communicative Translation

The communicative translation always includes on subtitle translation. This translation method changes the structure of the entire sentence without affecting the content of the original text. This technique is closer to the target text, making the reader feel more intimate and natural. strives to make the content and language of the original text easy for readers to accept and understand. In accordance with the principles of fidelity, accuracy and rigor, the translation of informational texts under the guidance of communicative translation theory generally adopts the translation techniques such as disjunctive translation, conversion, inversion and additive translation to achieve the authentic fluency of the translation [9]. This is the target language emphasis.

Generally, it is too early to judge whether a translation method is applied properly without a thorough investigation of the context and background, and thus it is significant for translators to choose their translation methods in a flexible manner. Different translation methods are needed given different requirements and purposes [10]. The following section will go through the translation examples and their contexts, to analyse the translation methods applied in them.

3. Analysis

This section will analyse the subtitles of teleplay *Wednesday* based on Newmark's typology, with also a focus on the translation skills applied in the translation. To be more specific, the Newmarkian methods found with the text include communicative translation, idiomatic translation and free translation, and the translation skills found in the analysis consist addition, omission and shift.

3.1. Addition

The addition is a translation skill adding some words or sentences that the original text (sentence) does not include in order to position the reader understand text better and shorten the different languages' gap.

Example 01:

ST: "Yeah, they're just like you and me."

TT: "对 他们与你我没有差别。"

Addition is used in this example. It could have been translated directly as "对 他们就像我和你一样". However, the translator has not translated it directly. He/she uses additional translation skill to add some words. The sentence of "对, 他们与你我没有差别" has the same meaning of the one "对, 他们就像我和你一样". The translator's one is better than the literal translation's one, and the additional word of "差别"(difference) would make audience understand the director meaning better than another one. This one is closer to the Chinese traditional language expression than the literal one. This belongs to the communicative translation.

Example 02:

ST: "At least it's turning into a beautiful day."

TT: "至少今天天气不错"

The translator adds the word "今天" (today) that is Chinese temporal adverb in this sentence. It solves the language gap between English and Chinese. In English language, the tense is always obviously expresses in the sentence structure. The "it's" from original sentence (English one) is not "it was" foreshadow the tense on sentence is today (now). However, in Chinese language, it always does not make the tense through the word form (structure) express apparently. Therefore, the addition in here is to replenish the linguistic difference. This is the communicative translation.

Example 03:

ST: "This one slipped away from me."

TT: "这小孩是从我身边溜走的。"

The translator adds the word "这小孩" (this kid) to replace the word of "this one" from the original English sentence. "This one" could be anything that be pointed out specifically from someone. In here, the translator combines with the scenario and directly adds the specific name of this thing that the speaker points out in talking, but not just uses literal translation that does not specifically points out what the thing is. This addition is more suitable for the Chinese language expression that is more likely the Chinese expression while the Chinese people will use. As a result, audience will not feel weird about the subtitle and can understand easily the real meaning that the speaker in teleplay want to express. It belongs to the communicative translation.

Example 04:

ST: "Your first day and you're already on Sheriff Galpin's radar."

TT: "你第一天过来 就被加尔平警长盯上了。"

This example from teleplay adds the two verbs "过来" (came) and "盯上了" (eyed) in the process of translating. It is because in original sentence no verbs exist any. This addition could make the sentence in Chinese way be complete. Therefore, the literal translation used in here will make the expression in Chinese be straight. The translator changes the sentence structure mildly to add verb words make this sentence be more suitable for Chinese grammar and expression, which fit the communicative translation.

Example 05:

ST: "Desperate time."

TT: "现在是非常时期。"

The adoption of addition here makes the original phrase become a complete sentence. In the original English sentence, it just reveals “desperate time”, which may be weird for the literal translation in Chinese way, since the sentence is incomplete. It is not fit for Chinese communication aspect, the technique used in here tend to the communicative translation. The translator includes the additional translation method on here to make the expression be more accurate to the Chinese sentence grammar.

Example 06:

ST: “Attendance is mandatory.”

TT: “所有学生必须参加。”

The literal translation on here could be “参加是强制性的”. However, the translator considers to the language environment and the scene on the teleplay to add some corresponding word to make the audience understand better and make the expression of translation sentence more likely Chinese sentence expression. It fits the communicative translation.

Example 07:

ST: “天哪 如果你再厉害一些 就能带一整群回家。”

TT: “Jeez, you get any better at this, you’ll be taking home a whole pack.”

The translator almost put the text literally, but also add one word to make the audience could understand better. In the original sentence, there actually exists the word “if”. However, the word “if” are neglected due to the English oral expression. The translator considers the language gap, so he / she adds the word “if” Chinese meaning in the process of translating. This is the communicative translation.

Example 08:

ST: “All right. Subtle hint taken.”

TT: “好吧 我听懂你的暗示了。”

The beginning of this original sentence, the translator includes the literal translation, which remain the original meaning and sentence structure. In the second half, it changes the structure and add some words “我”和“你”that the original sentence has not express to make the translation expression more close to the Chinese expression. It is the communicative translation.

3.2. Omission

The omission is a translation skill. This skill gets through to subtract some words or sentences that is useless for the process of translating and does not make any impacts on the sentence in order to position the reader could understand the translating sentence.

Example 01:

ST: “Why aren’t you wolfing out?”

TT: “你为什么”变身”?”

The phrase of “wolfing out” does not exist a certain meaning in the dictionary, and the reason of the original English sentence uses this word is that this sentence is the protagonist talk to her roommate who is actually a wolf, yet because of some reasons she could only be like a common person, cannot be a wolf. The original sentence “wolfing out” means shape-shift, but it just belongs to the shape-shift of wolfing, not the other thing shape-shift. The original sentence expresses the wolf shape-shifting, but the translator subtracts the meaning of “wolf”. It just translates the shape-shift’s meaning. It is because the Chinese expression habit and the audience have already got enough information from the previous scene in teleplay, even the translating sentence does not express the shape-shift is for the wolf, they also could know the shape-shift in here presents the animal, wolf. Therefore, the neglecting of wolf does not impact any understand from audience. It is the communicative translation.

Example 02:

ST: "I cried my little black heart out."

TT: "我哭到心碎。"

Here, the translator includes sub-translation to subtract the meaning of the word "little black heart" that is necessary part for this sentence and does not have a vital influence on the meaning of the original sentence. It is because the "little black heart" be used in the original sentence is to reveals the protagonist on that time is on a young age, the "black" is to demonstrate the protagonist's character is inexorability. Therefore, the original sentence is a special expression in English. The current translation of cried heart out would be better. If it employs the literal translation in original sentence would make Chinese audience feel weird. It is the communicative translation.

3.3. Shift

The shift is a translation skill. This skill gets through to change or convert the original sentence's structure and another expression to express the same meaning with the original sentence in order to shorten the language gap and make reader could understand well.

Example 01:

ST: "I'm not sure whose twisted idea it was"

TT: 我不知道这是谁的扭曲想法

"I'm not sure" to translate it directly should be uncertainty, but here the translator translates the "I'm not sure" into "我不知道" that means I do not know. It shifts in expression and word from the original sentence. It could be more suitable in here, since this is the talking from the protagonist little girl that is a callous image in this teleplay. If it translates "我不确定" that is the direct meaning of "I'm not sure", it would have a contradiction with the image of this protagonist. It is because "我不知道" in Chinese way may sounds or looks like more ruthless than the "我不确定". This consider the communicative translation at the process of translating.

Example 02:

ST: "I want names."

TT: "是谁干的"

The direct meaning of "I want names" is "我想知道名字". However, the translator has not translated it directly, but changes the whole sentence structure of the original one to make this declarative sentence become an interrogative question. It could fit in this atmosphere. To combine with the scene of TV play, the protagonist girl is very angry with her brother is bullied. Therefore, she really wants to know who is the person bully her brother with a strong tone. "我想知道名字" means the person only wanted to know the name of the people who bullied her brother, and it does not have as a strong tone as the translation of "是谁干的, which means the girl has a rage of feeling of who bully her brother. This is the free translation.

Example 03:

ST: "What I do best."

TT: "做我最擅长的事。"

This sentence changes the whole structure of the original sentence. The convert on here is to change the word class from the original sentence. The original sentence of "What I do best" should be a noun phrase, but the translating sentence make it become to an verb. It may make this expression be closer to the nature expression in Chinese. This is the communicative translation.

Example 04:

ST: "I have no interest in following in your footsteps."

TT: "我并不想追随你的脚步"

The original of sentence could be translated into Chinese way “对于追随你的脚步这件事我并不感兴趣”directly, but the translator translates it “我并不是想追随你的脚步”. Therefore, this translating sentence is the adjustment of expression means from the original sentence. This may be more suitable for this scene. Following with the teleplay, the protagonist girl always hates to become her mother’s another shadow. Thus, the one “对于追随你的脚步这件事我并不感兴趣”will not be fit in here and also be weird in Chinese language. The literal translation used in here is such a little bit over official that do not fit in the Chinese normal conversation. The one “我并不是想追随你的脚步”will be more suitable for this atmosphere and the expression of the Chinese language. This is the communicative translation.

Example 05:

ST: “I’m not you, Mother.”

TT: “我跟你不一样 母亲”

Here, the direct meaning should be “我不是你 母亲。”, but the translator translates “我跟你不一样 母亲。” At this process of translating, the translator keeps the structure of the original sentence and to use more native words to replace the direct meaning of word, make the Chinese expression more natural. It more fit in this scene, the atmosphere on here has a lit bit stir up emotion and this sentence from the protagonist talking that has meaningful tone on here. The translator one in Chinese expression is more meaningful than the direct meaning one, which could make the audience understand the director’s meaning completely. This is the communicative translation.

Example 06:

ST: “I would have rather saved myself.”

TT: “我宁愿自救。”

The meaning on here could be translated “我会宁愿自己救自己”directly. But, here, the translator uses the Idiomatic Chinese word “自救” to replace the small end part of this sentence, which makes this sentence be short and Chinese audience could understand better. It belongs to the idiomatic translation.

Example 07:

ST: “We’re pilgrims. Potato, po-tah-to.”

TT: “我们是朝圣者。没什么区别。”

The beginning part of translation in this sentence does not have any translation method be used from the translator, which is just the literal translation. The vital part is on the last part of this sentence. The original sentence includes an English sentence that is closer to the native speaker, it may have a little bit difficult to translate. The translator changes the whole sentence structure in the last part of the original sentence. The translating of the last part in the sentence has a big change on the expression method. On the text way, As the scenes before and after mirror each other, it can be seen that the translation is related to the original. However, from the word meaning, it just a paraphrase that does not have any relationship with the original sentence. It belongs to the Free translation. It could get through to use the sentence that does not related to the original text in appearance seemingly to express the vital point meaning of the original sentence clearly, which could to deal with the difficulty of translating slang. It could make reader be easy to understand the expression meaning that the spokesman wants to convey.

Example 08:

ST: “Guessin’ the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.”

TT: “看来有其父必有其女。”

The translator translates the slang of “Guessin” in the real meaning. In the second half of this sentence, it does not translate it directly. The translator changes a whole new expression from the original sentence. It is because this sentence on the teleplay from Taylor’s father talks, he wants to

use an apple as an example to imply the little girl protagonist is just like her father, they are same violent. Here, the translator includes an idiomatic saying in Chinese to replace the original sentence, but the meaning is similar to the original meaning. This idiomatic saying that the translator employs could position Chinese reader comprehend better due to the translating expression is idiomatic. This belongs to the idiomatic translation.

Example 09:

ST: "Where's the rest of him?"

TT: "他的身体呢?"

"The rest of" means the remained part of a thing, but here the translator does not translate this meaning in here and employs another expression to replace it. The translator combines with the teleplay's scene, the spokesman on here want to express why the thing only has a one hand and where is his body. In order to avoid audience be confusion about there, the translator change the direct meaning to demonstrate the indication's meaning on this sentence in translating sentence. This is the communicative translation.

Example 10:

ST: "but this is next-level."

TT: "但这太不寻常了。"

The phrase of "next-level" does not have a real meaning in the dictionary, so here the translator takes into consideration of the atmosphere of scene at the process of translating to use the new expression replace the literal expression. The translating sentence and the original sentence do not have any relationship without this teleplay's scene, but in this scene the translating sentence is nearly same with the meaning that the original sentence want to express. This is free translation. Even though the two sentences seem like the two new whole different sentence, it is a best method to make reader could get the spokesman's meaning.

Example 11:

ST: "So, what happened to not wanting to be a slave to technology?"

TT: "你不是说 不想成为科技的奴隶吗?"

The translator uses the adjustment on expression. The original sentence actually be translated in Chinese should like this "所以, 对于不想成为科技的奴隶的人发生了什么?" sentence expression and structure, but this one is a little bit strange for Chinese expression. It is not nature for Chinese communication. The translator changes the sentence structure that makes this translating sentence conform to the Chinese habit expression, which also solve the discrepancy between the Chinese and English. This is the communicative translation.

Example 12:

ST: "Still not a hugger."

TT: "还是不喜欢拥抱。"

This sentence belongs to the adjustment of expression. On account of considering to the Chinese expression, it changes the noun phrase from the original sentence "not a hugger" into the verb phrase in the translating sentence. The change is appropriate for the Chinese habit communication. It makes Chinese audience comprehend the meaning better and also let the audience experience a better sense of viewing. This is communicative translation.

Example 13:

ST: "You should know I'm waiting for someone."

TT: "跟你说一下 我在等人。"

The translator has not included the literal translation on here. Instead, he or she combines the text with the scene of teleplay at the process of translating. It adjusts the expression on the half initial part

of this sentence “You should know”, which makes the translating sentence’s expression suits the Chinese habit communication. It belongs to the communication translation.

From the analysis, it can be seen that the translation methods applied in the text are communicative translation, idiomatic translation and free translation, which all belong to the target text emphasis type. The translator focused on communicative translation mostly, which is also the most recommended method of Newmark. The tendency reflects the translator’s preference in making the translation easily understood and accepted by the audience. The plenty of employment could make audience get a relatively smooth reading experience.

4. Conclusion

This work has analysed the subtitle translation of the US TV series *Wednesday* used the typology of translation methods proposed by Peter Newmark. It is found all the represented examples are rendered through three methods, namely communicative translation, idiomatic translation and free translation, with the first one most commonly used. It shows clearly the preferences and purposes of the translator of guiding the audience to comprehend the original text as much as possible without making much efforts. The subtitle translation has successfully achieved its purpose to make the audience enjoy the TV series.

References

- [1] Li, H. (2010). *A Probe into the translation of letters in English movies and TV plays*, *Overseas Abstracts Academic*, 4. (in Chinese).
- [2] Newmark, P. (1988). *A Textbook of Translation*. Prentice Hall International.
- [3] Munday, J. (2009). *The Routledge companion to translation studies*. Routledge.
- [4] Munday, J., Pinto, S. R., and Blakesley, J. (2022). *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Applications*. Routledge.
- [5] Ye, Z. (2001). *Advanced Course in English-Chinese Translation*. Tsinghua University Press. (in Chinese).
- [6] Su, J. (2020). *Application of Free translation in Subtitle Translation*, *Overseas English*, 9.
- [7] Zhu, C., Chen, W., Zou, D. (2008). *On the translation skills of English and Chinese idioms*, *Journal of Jilin Normal University of Engineering Technology*, 10. (in Chinese).
- [8] Mao, Y. (2022). *A Study of informational text translation under Communicative Translation Theory*, *foreign Trade and Economic cooperation*, 9. (in Chinese).
- [9] Wang, S. (2017). *The application of semantic translation in the English version of A Dream of Red Mansions*, *Journal of Jiamusi Vocational College*, 12. (in Chinese).
- [10] Budiman, A., Wulandari, Y., and Rosyidah, N. (2023). *Revisiting Newmark’s Theory of Translation: To What Extent Is It Appropriate?* *English Education, Linguistics, and Literature Journal*, 2(1), 37-49.