
RESEARCH ARTICLE

The English Translation of Chinese Film Titles: A literary Review of Domestic Research

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ABSTRACT

The translation of films is indispensable for Chinese cinema to "go global." As the "eyes" of a movie, the title of a film is the first impression that attracts people to watch the movie. A successful title translation promotes a movie, boosts its box office, and promotes culture. Based on the database of China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), as of September 2022, I found that the core journals related to the study of the English translation of Chinese film titles mainly focus on translation strategies and methods, translation theories, the comparison of English and Chinese film titles and the translators' point of view. The research on the English translation of film titles is expected to deepen translators' understanding of film titles to serve the public and also to promote the internationalization of Chinese films and help culture "go out."

KEYWORDS

Film English translation, film title English translation, translation strategy, translation theory, going out

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1. Introduction

The film is a carrier of culture and a product of culture. The depth of China's cultural exchanges with other nations is growing as its overall power rises. One of the most straightforward and efficient ways to disseminate culture is through the film (Jin Haina, 2015: 120). Chinese films have also grown to be an effective means of "going out" as their "getting out" is incorporated into the larger framework of the "Belt and Road" program. Without film translation, Chinese films cannot "exit" the market. The history of Chinese cinema translation dates back almost a century (Jin Haina, 2015: 118). Film translation comprises a significant amount of English translation. The title of the movie draws viewers in as the first element of the art form; hence the translation of the title is crucial (Tian Lu, 2009: 116). Since the 1980s, domestic academics have been researching the translation of movie titles (Lu Zhijun, Qin Jianghua, 2015: 85). However, there aren't many domestic studies that look at English translations of Chinese film titles; most domestic studies concentrate on Chinese translations of film titles (Lei, Jing: 2020: 133). As of September 2022, this paper's search of relevant journals on Chinese National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) yielded 31 critical articles on the topic of English translations of film titles. In summary, these articles are mainly carried out from the following aspects. In addition to helping translators understand film titles better to serve the audience, and better interpret them, research on the English translation of film titles also supports the internationalization of Chinese films and the "going out" of culture.

2. Domestic research

Even though the fact that is translating English film titles seems like a trivial task, it can be challenging to translate them well, and it can also be challenging to get an impression of what the films are about by merely looking at the titles (Wu Min, 1995: 55). Through the search of the Chinese National Knowledge Infrastructure, domestic scholars have been studying the English translation of Chinese film titles since the beginning of the twenty-first century, and articles published in leading journals have mainly covered the following topics.

First is translation strategies and methods. Cao Peisheng (2007) argues that cultural differences between China and the West lead to different responses from audiences, so the translation of Chinese film titles should not only fit the content of the original film and reflect the theme of the original text but also conform to the language, cultural characteristics and aesthetic habits of the target language audience. Huang Xiuhong (2007) argues that the cultural qualifiers of Chinese film titles should be translated using foreignization translation to serve the "going abroad" of Chinese culture. Wang Jue (2008), while discussing translation strategies, also analyses the main factors affecting the English translation of film titles, arguing that translators should preserve the cultural elements of the source text while fulfilling the function of the title text. From the perspective of creative rebellion theory, Liu Ming and Cao Yang (2008) suggest that in addition to direct translation and phonetic translation, methods such as free translation and creative translation can also be applied to translate Chinese film titles. Du Zhan and Zhao Hui (2012) contend that Chinese titles can be flexibly translated into English by combining domestication and foreignization. Zhen Yu (2012) classifies film titles into the categories of personal names and place names, events, and things, idioms and poems, and gives targeted translation methods and strategies; Li Xiaoying (2013) investigates four translation methods for Chinese film titles: literal translation, free translation, phonetic translation, and creative translation, as well as different translations of film titles in a post-colonial perspective, and argues that appropriate translation methods can effectively disseminate Chinese culture. Li Jia (2013) analyses the English translation of Stephen Chow's film titles based on translation units, and the translation of film titles based on the chapter is a suitable method for Chinese films to go global. Song Pingfeng and Yi Lijun (2014) proposed translating the titles of Chinese cinema with a persuasive strategy. Feng Quankong and Hong Danying (2015) argue that Chinese film titles should be rhetorically transformed when translated into English. Zhao Dongmei and Wu Biyu (2017) argue that in terms of international narrative strategies for translating Chinese film titles, the conventions and norms of the target language should be the focus of translation consideration. Based on a quantitative analysis of Hollywood's high-grossing movie titles, Guo Jing (2018) proposes a rhetorical translation strategy for the English translation of Chinese movie titles, which can also use the translation strategies of direct translation, retranslation, and creative translation. Generally speaking, these translation strategies and methods revolve around the angles of domestication and foreignization, and there are no more diversified translation perspectives.

Translation theories are the second. Limited space, general purpose, translation equivalence, and business-oriented operation are the four features of Chinese film title translations as analyzed by Song Hong (2006) in the context of "communicative translation theory" and Naida's "dynamic functional equivalence theory." They discuss the need to combine translation theory and film translation practice to standardize the translation of film texts and analyze many misunderstandings in English translation, including the ambiguity of purpose and the incorrect positioning of the target audience, the lack of functional equivalence and the loss and mistranslation of cultural connotation. Zhao Yuxiang and Jin Punsun (2007) elaborated on the strategic choice of the English translation of Chinese film titles from the standpoint of Skopos theory, which has specific guiding relevance for the English translation of Chinese film titles. Ren Junhua (2011) proposed to apply the conceptual metaphors of the grammatical metaphor theory to the English translation of film titles, which can help audiences understand the themes of films. Tao Jiawei (2014) analyses individual cases from Eco-translatology to provide a new theoretical basis and practical approach for film titles. Wu Biyu, Rao Shuguang, and Wang Jianguo (2014) provide a theoretical basis for the English translation of titles of ethnic minority films from the perspective of "language conformity theory." Zhao Zhenhua (2015) explores effective ways to reflect Chinese cultural values and cater to the aesthetics of target-language audiences through the lens of "reception aesthetics theory." Liu Hongmian (2015) explores and considers the English translation of Chinese film titles from the perspective of "translation modality theory." Zhan Liwen (2016) uses the "prototype" theory in cognitive science to explore prototype thinking and its conceptual framework transformation effect in the translation process of film titles. There are also studies on the translation of English translations of film titles from cross-cultural theories. (Wang, Qiaojie, 2013; Gao, Yan, and Tang, Lixia, 2014; Guo, Qiang, and Zhang, Shun, 2017; Xiao, Ju, 2019; Lei, Jing (2020) analyzed the English translation of Chinese film titles based on the data of the Chinese and English corpora and used "complexity theory" to study the contextual fit path of the English translation of film titles. Many academics have contributed to the evolution of Chinese film titles in English from various theoretical vantage points. Further study is required on the practical outcomes and testing procedures of the English translations of film titles under various theories because the same film may appear radically different under diverse theoretical directions.

The third is the perspective of English-Chinese film title translation comparison. Liu Keran and Xiang Wei (2009) focus on the problems in the translation of Chinese-English film titles and summarize three main issues in the translation of film titles, namely, confusion in the translation of titles, low quality, and the co-existence of alienation and assimilation. The translation pattern of Hollywood blockbusters is over-imitated. And they suggested that translators should consider the personality and characteristics of the original film and refer to the cultural background to strike a balance between the information function, aesthetic function, and commercial function. Lu Zhijun and Qin Jianguo (2017) comprehensively combed 31 papers on film title translation from 1984 to 2015, summarized the four development stages of Chinese film title translation research, pointed out the achievements and shortcomings of current film title translation research, and suggested that a bilingual film title corpus should be used to provide corpus support and practical reference for film title translation to improve the credibility of translation. We think that more data are required, and the comparison's elements can also be deeper to undertake a more in-depth analysis of movie titles.

The viewpoint of the translator is the fourth. The translator's subjectivity in the English translation of Chinese film titles is the focus of Nie Shaofeng's 2009 book. It includes translators' pursuit of accuracy, their adaptable command of translation techniques, and translators' consideration of the audience's expectations. However, there is still room for domestic researchers to thoroughly examine the translators who provided the English translations of Chinese film titles, including through case studies of title translators, studies on the behaviors of title translators, etc., and by incorporating and utilizing foreign methods of translator research.

3. Concluding remarks

The film is a medium for disseminating cultural images and bears the burden of building the national picture. Film translation is a necessary way to promote China's national image and Chinese culture internationally (Jin, Haina, 2015: 120). As the first window through which a film comes into contact with the audience, film translations play an essential role in advertising, secondary selling, and brand building of film products (Hu Qingqing, 2011). In July this year, the State Administration of Radio and Television (SARFT) released the Specification for Translating Chinese Radio, Television, and Network Audiovisual Programmes into Foreign Languages, which will make the English translation of film titles more standardized and conducive to their quality out of the country. The study of translation theories, translation strategies, and translation methods is a major focus of domestic scholars' research on the English translation of film titles, which is summarized in this paper. However, there are few studies on the possible far-reaching effects of film title translation on social and cultural behaviors. The amount of research on the topic is also lower abroad, making it impossible to take a more thorough approach to the problem of English translation studies of film titles. In this paper, Future study can, in our opinion, be done in the areas listed below: First, to expand the scope of the English translation of movie titles using corpus research techniques; second, to promote the study of translators; and third, to advance the development of translation theories; Fourth, to study on effects of movie titles towards the general public; fifth, to study on the factors that affect how movie titles are translated into English, such as what producers and international distributors think; sixth, to study on various cinema titles and subject matters; and seventh, to promote the study of how film titles are treated from Chinese and Western viewpoints; since there is less study in this area abroad, we can carry out more communication, exchange, and cooperation; and eighth, to study the translation of film titles into English from an interdisciplinary perspective. For example, research can be conducted in communication, psychology, economics, linguistics, and so on. All these issues could be the focus of future research, aiming at promoting Chinese films internationally.

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