

Study on Subtitle Translation of Documentary *Ben Cao Zhong Hua* Based on the Domestication and Foreignization Strategy

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ABSTRACT

Due to the expansion of globalization, China has developed more cultural and social exchanges with countries around the world. In addition, following the COVID-19 outbreak, Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) has made an important contribution to the fight against COVID-19. At present, mass media has been the main communication medium, and TV programs have made a great contribution to the international communication of Chinese culture. *Ben Cao Zhong Hua* is a documentary about TCM culture. This documentary is an envoy that can accelerate the "Going Global" of TCM culture, and can help people worldwide deepen their understanding of TCM. The translation of subtitles is a very crucial part in the transmission of TCM culture. Therefore, this article analyzes the subtitle translation in *Ben Cao Zhong Hua* with the strategy of domestication and foreignization, and proposes suggestions for English translation of TCM-related subtitles.

Keywords: *Ben Cao Zhong Hua*, Domestication and foreignization, TCM, Internationalization.

1. INTRODUCTION

The fight against COVID-19 pandemic has become a common challenge worldwide since its outbreak. China's anti-COVID pandemic experience gained reputation from the world and created a good opportunity for TCM to go global. In order to seize this opportunity, the National Administration of TCM and the Office of the Leading Group for Promoting the Construction of Belt and Road Initiative jointly issued *the Development Plan for Promoting High-Quality Integration of Chinese Medicine into the Belt and Road Initiative (2021-2025)*, which will drive the integration of TCM into more mainstream medical systems in the "Belt and Road" countries. It means that TCM will enhance its own voice and influence in the international traditional medicine field with its strength.

It should be noted that TCM will face many difficulties in the process of promotion. Firstly, the translation of TCM terminology has been a major problem in the process of TCM's foreign communication. Secondly, the unique cultural context between Chinese and Western cultures has

led to the difficulty of Chinese medicine translation, as well as the promotion of Chinese medicine culture. Thirdly, the abstract and professional nature of TCM and its unique culture create a major obstacle for TCM translation. At the same time, the subtitle translation of TV programs can be limited by factors such as time and space, and the diversity of audience groups. The above factors make the translation more difficult. Therefore, the above-mentioned issues must be fully considered when analyzing the translation of the Chinese subtitles of *Ben Cao Zhong Hua*.

The translation strategy chosen in this article of domestication and foreignization was proposed by the American translator Lawrence Venuti, in which foreignization means that the translator should try to get close to the source language's culture and retain the form and culture of the source language, so as to spread the content and cultural characteristics of the original text. While domestication means that the translator should incline to the target language, and the translation should meet in an idiomatic manner of the target language in order to facilitate the readers' understanding. This article applies this translation

strategy of domestication and foreignization to study and discuss the translation of the subtitles of *Ben Cao Zhong Hua*, and put forward relevant opinions.

The purpose of this article is to provide advice and reference for English translations of TCM in film, television dramas or any other mass media, and to promote the early unification of translation standards and norms of TCM.

2. INTRODUCTION TO *BEN CAO ZHONG HUA*

After COVID-19, the world is beginning to take TCM seriously. However, the overwhelming attention has also led to many problems, such as the origin of Chinese medicine culture and the question of its scientific nature are still misunderstood by many people around the world. And there are also problems in the development of Chinese medicine. Under the mission given by the era, *Ben Cao Zhong Hua* documentary has come out.

Ben Cao Zhong Hua is a domestic documentary about the culture of Chinese medicine. This documentary focuses on the special nature of Chinese medicine. And through simple footage and a narrative method full of stories and meanings, it searches for authentic Chinese herbs, restores the process of how to refine or decoct them and explains the principles of TCM.

TCM has a philosophy that has been extolled for generations: "Humanity has mercy and saves the sick and suffering on earth." This philosophy encompasses the passion, wisdom and conscience of every generation of TCM practitioners. This documentary, *Ben Cao Zhong Hua*, expresses this philosophy on camera, recording the humane feelings of the world and promoting the excellent traditional culture.

3. INTRODUCTION TO TRANSLATION RELATED TO TCM AND SUBTITLE TRANSLATION

TCM belongs to traditional Chinese culture. Chinese medicine culture is derived from China's profound philosophy, literature and history. It has a very high level of generality and profound abstraction. According to many translators, the English translation of TCM terminology should adopt the three principles of "Faithfulness, Expressiveness and Elegance" proposed by Yan Fu.

Therefore, for achieving these three points, translators have to grasp the standards of translation from a practical point of view. For example, in the process of translating Chinese medicine into foreign languages, translators need to pay attention to the professionalism, literature nature of TCM and cultural confidence in the translation of Chinese medical terms.

What's more, traditional Chinese culture has also had a keen influence on the terminology of TCM. And TCM terminology is mostly in the format of two or four characters, which is very concise in form but very profound in content. Therefore, when translating, it is inconvenient for translators to translate word-for-word, and they need to explain it. If possible, it is best to achieve unity in the form, to better reflect the characteristics of Chinese medicine culture.

Subtitle translation is a bridge of communication. A subtitle is a line or two of text located at the bottom of the screen, interpreting the dialogue, monologue or mirror image on screen. They must be presented and disappear at the same time as the screen. And the number of words must match the screen (one line of subtitles is optimal), so they are not the same as traditional text translation; that is to say, they are affected by time and space.

About the use of domestication and foreignization translation strategies in TV drama, it is said that all translations are basically said to be domestication and really begin in the domestic culture. The strategy of foreignization translation, on the other hand, refers to the practice of deliberately retaining certain foreign properties of the original text in translation, while deliberately not using the target language.

When using domestication and foreignization translation means for subtitle translation with unique characteristics, translators should mainly use foreignization translation for terms with cultural characteristics to retain the cultural meaning; while in other translations, domestication is the main focus to translate the content of the dialogue in a simple and clear way for the public to enjoy.

4. THE CASE ANALYSIS OF *BEN CAO ZHONG HUA*'S SUBTITLE TRANSLATION

The practical application of domestication and foreignization translation strategies in the

documentary of *Ben Cao Zhong Hua* is shown below.

4.1 Case Studies About the Subtitle of *Ben Cao Zhong Hua*

4.1.1 *Liberal/Free Translation Methods in Domestication Strategy*

Liberal/free translation: Free translation is a type of domestication translation strategy at the cultural level. The main purpose of free translation is to enable the translator to understand the content of the text, to make the translation as close to the audience's culture as possible, and to enhance the readability of the translation. Using free translation will result in a more suitable translation. And it contains paraphrase and idiomatic translation.

4.1.1.1 *Paraphrase*

Paraphrase is interpretation; it means that the translator explains the original text.

- Example 1

Source Text:

人参味甘、主补五脏、安精神、定魂魄

Translation:

Ginseng is sweet in flavor and is mainly used to supplement the organs, calm the mind, fix the soul.

4.1.1.2 *Idiomatic Translation*

Idiomatic translation is carried out by replacing the original words and sentences with the idiomatic terms of the target language. (Newmark,1988: 47).

- Example 2

Source Text:

主血结惊气，除寒热

Translation:

It mainly treats stagnant blood and fearful anger, dispel cold and heat pathogens.

- Example 3

Source Text:

活血化痰，除烦安神

Translation:

Invigorates the blood, dispel stagnation; alleviate frustration and calm the spirit.

Analysis:

In the above instances, the translations are brief and concise. Due to the existence of unique forms, translators often use paraphrase when translating such subtitles, thus deepening their understanding of the content of the original text. However, there are drawbacks and limitations in this kind of translation. This makes it difficult for audiences to understand the artistic characteristics of foreign cultures. The above three cases are all unique classic Chinese, which has a unique cultural connotation between sentences.

4.1.2 *Literal Translation, Transliteration and Word-for-Word Translation in Foreignization Strategy*

4.1.2.1 *Literal Translation*

The method of literal translation means that the form and content of the source language are preserved as much as possible. Literal translation and transliteration both are suitable ways to translate TCM terms that do not have corresponding English words.

- Example 1

Source Text:

人参和五参丸

Translation:

Ginseng and Five Shen Pill

4.1.2.2 *Transliteration*

Transliteration is a translation that is similar to its pronunciation in the target language.

- Example 2

Source Text:

养阴清肺

Translation:

Nourish the yin, clear the lungs

- Example 3

Source Text:

补中，益肺气

Translation:

Nourish the middle-Jiao, and benefits the lung qi.

4.1.2.3 *Word-for-Word Translation*

It is the translation of the original text into words without regard to the semantic and lexical differences between the two languages.

- Example 4

Source Text:

白芍药益脾，能于土中泻木

Translation:

White peony root improves the spleen and can remove wood element from earth element.

Analysis:

In the English translation of TCM, foreignization is adopted in the following two cases: First, there is a corresponding thing in both Chinese and Western medical languages, and this thing has a definite name in both Chinese and Western languages, and no ambiguity will arise, such as 肺 (lung), 血 (blood), etc. Second, these words are unique to TCM; and when the term has a strong cultural identity, the translation technique can be adopted in the direct translation of the phonetic translation, such as 气 (Qi), 阴阳 (Yin and Yang), etc.

4.2 *Problems Exited in the Subtitle Translation of Ben Cao Zhong Hua*

4.2.1 *Mistranslation of TCM Terms*

- Example 1

Source Text:

共成健脾益气 and 胃渗湿之功

Translation:

The spleen is strengthened, Qi is nourished, and the stomach is dehumidified

Analysis:

In this example, there is a mistranslation of 胃渗湿. What is meant here is that the spleen and stomach can now digest food as they would be in good health, and can continue to convert food into nutrients and transport them throughout the body. As a result, the water-dampness that had previously accumulated in the stomach is also dissipated through the function of osmosis. Therefore, the English translation should be “stomach is harmonized and dampness is drained”.

4.2.2 *Missing Translations in Subtitle Translations*

- Example 2

Source Text:

主补五脏

Translation:

It is mainly used to supplement the organs

Analysis:

Here the translation of “五脏” is “the organs”, which is a kind of general term for all the organs of the body. In the original Chinese medical text, the five organs refer to the heart, lungs, spleen, liver and kidneys. Therefore, the translation here should be Five-zang organs to avoid misunderstanding.

5. SUGGESTIONS FOR SUBTITLE TRANSLATION RELATED WITH TCM

From the examples above, both translation strategies are used frequently. The benefit of the domestication is that it allows the audience to understand its content better. However, when translating TCM terminology, translators usually need to translate classic Chinese into modern language, then from modern language to English, and finally into medical English. This process often results in the loss of content. One of the major disadvantages of domestication translation is that it leads to the loss of contextual culture and logic, as well as the inability of the audience to understand the specific terminology. Therefore, in the translation process, although the translator mainly translates from sense-to-sense translation, the translator needs to add the assistance of word-to-word translation so that domestication and foreignization can complement each other to ensure that audience can understand well while preserving the cultural characteristics of the source language.

Translation is a complex process in which the translator should make a conscious choice of means and methods of expressing the various elements of the original. Language and text are in fact only a form of conformity, but their form and content are consciously determined by human beings.

In the translation of Chinese medicine, translators need to build a bridge for the internationalization of TCM. In choosing a translation strategy, in order to preserve the cultural

and philosophical concepts of TCM, translators should choose foreignization. And in order to make readers better accept TCM, translators should choose domestication translation methods at the linguistic and medical level. As a translator of TCM, the first thing the translator needs to understand is why people need to translate TCM.

When translating Chinese medicine subtitles, translators need to pay attention to the fact that Chinese medicine has scientific and philosophical, medical and literary qualities. It is also important to recognize the three main characteristics of subtitle translation: time, space constraints and the diversity of the audience. Therefore, domestication is based on the use of free translation, while foreignization is represented by direct translation with notes or phonetic translation with notes.

The strategy of domestication and foreignization requires respecting the scientific and cultural aspects of TCM while serving the reader. The combination of these translation strategies was used to translate the subtitles of a documentary for the promotion of Chinese medicine abroad. This is to make Chinese culture, and the culture of Chinese medicine, accessible to audience from the world. Therefore, in order to help foreign audiences better understand the subtitles and recognize Chinese medicine, translators should adopt the transliteration of the foreignization strategy when encountering concepts unique to Chinese medicine. When encountering concepts unique to TCM but for which there is an agreed translation equivalent, the translator may adopt the direct translation of foreignization. In the case of medical terms that are unique to TCM and have an English equivalent, the translator may adopt a domestication translation. Whichever translation technique is used, the translator must be fully aware of the characteristics of subtitle translation and use concise and correct language.

6. CONCLUSION

In fact, the success of a translation depends largely on the reader. To this extent, domestication strategies are dominant in *Ben Cao Zhong Hua*. Although the English translation of TCM is special, its essence is still Chinese to English translation.

Whether domestication or foreignization, they all have their uses in the translation process. For example, if only foreignization is adopted, the audiences may be neglected and the original characteristics of Chinese medicine might be

retained too much in the translation, which making it difficult for the readers to understand the content; and then the effect of cultural transmission might not be achieved. And domestication translation may neglect the unique cultural style of Chinese medicine and ignore the existence of the author and the original cultural background. This can lead to cultural misalignment and seriously hinder the cross-cultural communication of TCM and the establishment of Chinese cultural confidence. Therefore, translators should make sure that any translation is the result of harmonization between domestication and foreignization. And translation should grasp the connotation of TCM and seek a balance between the similarities and differences of language and culture.

To sum up, the cultural differences between TCM and the characteristics of subtitle translation are the elements that need to be considered when translating subtitles of TCM films and TV works. When translating, translators need to fully consider the cultural differences between domestic and foreign cultures and then apply translation strategies flexibly. When using the domestication and foreignization translation strategies, translators need to ensure the unique characteristics of the works while making the translations close to the audience. The translators need to break through the barriers of science and culture and try to meet the audience's demands. In the process of transmitting traditional culture, domestication and foreignization translation strategies are also important ways to establish cultural identity.

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