Translation Strategies of Chinese Documentary from the Perspective of Eco-translatology: A Case Study of National Parks: The Kingdom of Wild Animals

Jin Xu, Meng Ou*, Ziqian Liao

School of Foreign Languages, Southwest Petroleum University, Chengdu 610500, China
*Correspondence Author

Abstract: As one of the important cinematographic forms, a nature documentary records nation geomorphic features and ecological environment of a country in an authentic way. It is also an approach to expanding visions of audience at home and abroad. Based on the eco-translatology, this paper analyzes the subtitle translation of the three episode documentary The National Parks: the Kingdom of Wild Animals, which was launched by China Central Television in 2021. Eco-translatology takes translation as a process of adoption and selection by the translator in the translation ecological environment that consists of the source text, the source language and the target language; it is a combination of language dimension, communication dimension and culture dimension. This paper analyzes the unity of the three dimensions of in the subtitle translation of The National Parks: The Kingdom of Wild Animals, in order to provide reference to future cultural communication.

Keywords: Eco-translatology, Documentary film subtitle translation, National Parks: The Kingdom of Wild Animals.

1. Introduction

China's traditional culture and current development situation have a profound impact on the process of global civilization. In micro aspects such as the Chinese history, foreign policy, environmental protection, housing purchase policy, to the macro planning of circular economic development, to citizens' daily life of reading and writing poetry, riding and sharing bicycles, and ordering single takeaways, all of the above things have constantly attracted the attention of Western countries. Restricted by practical factors, the number of foreigners who can visit China in person has decreased significantly. However, the rapid development of film and television works can enable people around the world to break through the time and space constraints, convey information and culture, and make outstanding contributions to global cross-cultural exchanges.

In recent years, all kinds of widely concerned documentaries are well produced and of high quality. They are important carriers of Chinese culture "going global" while entertaining the public. The original nature documentary National Parks: The Kingdom of Wild Animals which was created by China National Radio and Television in 2021 with the highest national standard, takes China National Park as the starting point, and truthfully records the unique geographical conditions, diverse biological landscapes and harmonious coexistence of human and nature in many national parks in China. Today, on the background of the global climate facing severe challenges, the documentary has played a positive role in spreading the Chinese ecological protection culture.

In the process of Chinese cultural transmission, translation plays an important role. In translation theory development which has lasted for centuries, translation theories of different schools in China and the West have blossomed, especially the translation theories in China have been constantly innovating. The ecological translation theory proposed by Professor Hu Gengshen of Tsinghua University is one of the representatives. Taking National Park: The Kingdom of Wild Animals as the research object, this paper applies the eco-translatology from three aspects: language dimension, culture dimension and communication dimension to analyze the translation of documentaries.

2. Overview of Eco-translatology

Professor Hu Gengshen combined translation theory with Darwin's "natural selection theory" and after years of development, he proposed the eco-translatology focused on "translation adaptation selection theory" at the international conference "Translation of global culture: towards interdisciplinary theoretical construction" in 2006 [1].

The eco-translatology studies "makes use of the isomorphic metaphor of the characteristics of translation ecology and natural ecosystems, takes the ecological holism as the concept, the oriental ecological wisdom as the return, and the translation ecology, the text ecology, the 'translation community' ecology, and the relationship between them as the research objects, to comprehensively view and describe the translation ecology as a whole and the translation theory ontology (translation essence, process, standards, principles, methods, and phenomena) from the ecological perspective" [2].

Professor Hu Gengshen believes that translation is a "translator's choice to adapt to the translation ecological environment", in which "translation ecological environment" refers to the whole world of the combination of source text, source language and target language, and is the linkage of language, communication, culture and other aspects [3]. Different from other "language use environments", the "context" involved in ecological translation theory covers a wider range, including the source language, the original text and the target language system. In short, translation is the translator's adaptation and choice. Eco-translatology is an interdisciplinary theory, "trying to find a translation paradigm
that has universal philosophical basis and conforms to the basic laws of translation” [2].

"Translation is the transformation of language while language is the carrier of culture, and culture is the precipitation of communication” [2]. This theory regards the whole process of translation as an “ecosystem”, and pays attention to the logical connection within the language from the three dimensions of language, culture and communication to maintain the balance of the three. Following the principles of "text ecology", "multi-dimensional integration", "multiple symbiosis" and "translator responsibility", the eco-translation focuses on "balance" and "harmony" of the original and the translated text in the language, culture and communication ecology "." the standard of the translated text is to achieve the adaptation and selection of the translated text integration in the new language, culture and communication ecological environment on the basis of maintaining the text ecology " "The symbiosis of multiple translation theories and different versions" and "the translator's responsibility and mission in the whole translation activity".

The role and importance of translators in translation activities is an eternal topic of translation theory. According to the theory of eco-translation, the translator, as an independent subject, plays a leading role in translation activities that cannot be ignored. In the face of two different cultures, the translator needs to comprehensively consider the cultural background knowledge, the characteristics of the source text, the target language audience and other factors to select the most appropriate translation strategy. The translator is the sum of all the "contradictions" in the translation process. "Translator centered" is to show the vivid, perceptual and creative translator, so that translation theory is based on the real and specific translator, extending the scope of the translator's research, improving the level of translation theory, and promoting the further improvement of the translator's own quality [4].

3. The Characteristics of Subtitle Translation

With the development of film and television works at home and abroad, subtitle translation has received more and more attention. Subtitle translators have problems not only on linguistic symbols, but also on the consistency of vision and hearing in film and television works. The problem is how to complement the translated text with the original audio-visual information and jointly realize the information function [5]. Generally speaking, subtitle translation should pay attention to the popularity of language and the synchronization of subtitles and pictures.

3.1 Easy to Understand

There are various types of documentaries, including news documentaries, historical documentaries and human geography documentaries. News documentaries select real-time news of different themes and conduct artistic processing with objective and rational text. Inspired by real people and events, historical documentaries have profound language, which can stimulate the audience's further thinking while explaining history. The documentary of human geography focuses on introducing the natural conditions and social customs of a certain region, exploring the flexibility of the nature and capturing the various forms of different species. As a mass media, documentary should push itself towards serving the general public. Subtitle translation is to make it a bridge for effective communication between different cultures [6]. However, the cultural level and background of the documentary audience are uneven. The translator needs to take into account the audience at different levels and backgrounds, try to avoid using obscure words and complex long sentences, and use more popular languages. The translation language is simple but not boring, and convey the film and television content to the audience in simple terms [7].

3.2 Synchronize with the Picture

The subtitles are matched with the pictures, thus, the information transmission should be completed in roughly the same time as the source language discourse [8]. Because documentaries involve professional expressions, culture loaded words and puns at a high frequency and audiences are used to understanding subtitles according to the content of the film screen, subtitle translation should be synchronized with the screen and dialogue as much as possible. If restricted by language channels and visual channels, the absorption of film content and culture will be greatly affected [9].

In most cases, the screen time of film and television works is relatively short, and the probability of the audience repeatedly watching and guessing a certain segment is small. In such a situation, subtitles are instantaneous, which is limited by time and space at the same time: they are synchronized with the screen and presented at the lower end of the screen. A subtitle can only occupy two lines of space on the screen at most [10]. This requires concise and accurate subtitle language, concise and expressive, and achieves the best communication effect under limited conditions.

4. General Situation of National Parks: The Kingdom of Wild Animals

National Parks: The Kingdom of Wild Animals shows the vitality of China's national parks to the world with the theme of multiple parks in China. It tells the way of Chinese people living in harmony with nature from a natural perspective, oriental aesthetics and international language. The film is equipped with Chinese and English subtitles to meet the viewing needs of domestic and foreign audiences.

The documentary is divided into three episodes. The themes of each episode are "Wild Paradise", "Prosperous Haven" and "Precious Homeland". Each episode lasts about 50 minutes. It shows the natural wonders and living creatures in 10 national parks, including Pudacuo, Sanjiangyuan, Qilian Mountain, Shennongjia, Hainan Tropical Rainforest, Amur Tiger and Amur Leopard, Giant Panda, Qianjiangyuan, Wuyi Mountain and Nanshan Mountain. Through the lens, the audience can see the beautiful Danxia landform, the fantastic karst landform, various precious Chinese herbal medicines, the hunting and growth records of Tibetan foxes on the ice and snow plateau, the golden monkey king leading the family to guard the territory, the red bellied golden pheasant sparing no effort to courtship, Hainan gibbon wandering the rainforest to find a new home, and so on.
It also intuitively represents the connection between human beings and nature: Pudacuo villagers feed Tibetan black necked cranes who have traveled more than 1600 miles to escape the cold here, the herdsmen in the Sanjiangyuan Prairie spontaneously organize a guard team to protect Tibetan antelopes who migrate along the way, the forest guards use sophisticated technology to protect wild Siberian tigers, people along Qianjiangyuan hold a "Baomiao festival" to pray for a bumper harvest Marine biologists plant and restore the ecosystem of coral reefs according to the self cloning ability of corals, and Wuyishan tea farmers bake the world-renowned Bohea tea according to the change of seasons and solar terms. 

The documentary is committed to conveying an idea to audiences at home and abroad that the Chinese people conform to nature and respect the laws of nature. At the same time, they are protecting rare wild animals and plants with unprecedented efforts, caring for rich and diverse gene repositories, and exploring the way out for harmonious coexistence between man and nature.

5. Adaptation and Selection in Documentary Subtitle Translation

In cross-cultural communication, the cultural background and cognitive context of the source language text and the target language audience are inconsistent, which may lead to cultural default, dead translation, over domestication and other problems. In order to retain the characteristics of the source language to the greatest extent and fully convey information, translators need to give full play to their initiative and make adaptive choices in the three dimensions of language, culture and communication under the premise of effectively mastering the context.

5.1 Language Dimension

The adaptation and selection of language dimension from the perspective of eco-translationology is "the translator's adaptive transformation of language form in the process of translation, which is in different aspects and at different levels" [4]. However, Chinese and English are two different languages. For example, Chinese tends to parataxis, while English tends to hypotaxis. Chinese is full of flowing sentences, while English is full of long sentences with complicated relationships. Active sentences and non subject sentences are often used in Chinese, while passive voice sentences are better in English; Chinese implies logical relations through context, while English frequently uses words to express logical relations, and so on. The fundamental difference between the two languages poses a challenge to translators to convey information smoothly and fully. Therefore, after clarifying the ecological environment of documentaries, translators should give full play to their subjectivity, adjust word order, use words flexibly, and avoid copying mechanically and rigidly according to their internal meanings.

Eg1

Source text: 中国的中部地区，湍流飞瀑与巍峨青山相映成趣，交织成一幅山明水秀的绮丽画卷。远观崇山峻岭，近看茂林修竹，这片大地孕育着本地特有的珍稀动植物。

Target text: With rugged mountains and deep valleys, the central region of China is a landscape carved and nourished by fast flowing water. Its forested peaks and secret bamboo-filled gorges serves as an ark plant and animal life found nowhere else on Earth.

The original is a description of the natural scenery of Shennongjia National Park. Shennongjia National Park is located in the west of Hubei Province, connecting mountains in the west and hills in the east of China. The highest peak, Shennongding Peak, is 3105.4 meters above sea level. There are six peaks above 3000 meters, known as the "roof of central China". It has the largest primeval forest in the central region. Influenced by geological processes such as dissolution and weathering, it has formed large undulating stone forests, steep river valleys and magnificent waterfalls.

This paragraph has distinctive characters: the use of neat and catchy four character words enhances the appeal of scenery description: “湍流飞瀑”，“巍峨青山”，“山明水秀”，“崇山峻岭”，“茂林修竹” describe the natural scenery, “相映成趣” and “绮丽画卷” express feelings about the beautiful scenery, but these phrases are difficult to find corresponding expressions in English. Some commentators pointed out that the translation of tourism texts, especially the description of scenery, should be “faithful but not muddy, lively without redundant”[11], which is also applicable to the introduction of scenery in film and television works.

In contrast, in the original text, “湍流飞瀑与巍峨青山”，the description of water comes first and the description of mountains comes last, but the translator first translated “巍峨青山”. This is the spatial order in translation, that the pictures come from far to near. Thus, the audience see mountains first, then waterfalls. In other words, is follows the logic of "mountains come first, waterfalls appear later". The original meaning of “巍峨青山” is lofty / majestic mountains, but in consideration of the subsequent “崇山峻岭” which shows tall and steep mountains, the translator put them into “rugged mountains and deep valleys”. Among them, “deep valleys” is an additional translation, which comes from the high mountains and valleys landmark here. “湍流飞瀑” is plunging waterfalls, which are combined with the word “(山明)水秀” as “fast flowing water”. In this way, there is also a natural foundation that Shennongjia is the watershed between the Yangtze River and the Han River in Hubei, which has developed many rivers.

And “崇山峻岭” and “茂林修竹” are translated together again as high mountains with lush forests and steep mountains with bamboo like “forested peaks” and “bamboo-filled gorges”. It is worth noting that the translator did not translate “峻岭” into “mountains”, “peaks” or “summers”, but into “gorges”, which is also the result of considering the special landform: mountains and forest here are high and dense while valleys are crisscross. On the other hand, “peaks” and “gorges” also form a contrast: “高山” versus “峡谷”. As for the two emotional words of beauty “相映成趣” and “绮丽画卷”, the translator only retains the word “画卷”(landscape). According to the translation, the beauty of natural scenery has represented to the audience through a number of descriptive
words.

In addition, the “远观……近看” of the original text is a corresponding sentence pattern, which is also one of the common writing techniques in Chinese. However, for translation, sentence pattern application is not the key point. Thus, the translator discards the complexity and keeps simplicity, use the conjunction word “and” to connect the far and near scenery.

It is inevitable that there will be some losses in translation, but compensatory translation is a common means to gain from what has been lost. The word “ark” here reminds the audience of the paradise of animals and plants, playing a prominent role in the theme - "wildlife kingdom".

Eg2

Source text: 为了保障国家公园的长期良性发展, 政府必须确保当地农民受益于经济和生态效益, 沈昌波参与了政府开展的大型生态系统修复计划，享受着退耕还林补贴。

Target text: For the parks to be a long-term success, the local people must see the economic as well as the ecological benefits. Shen has participated in a huge government backed re-wilding scheme, compensating locals who return hilly agricultural land to nature.

This case is still refer to the ecological environment of Shennongjia National Park. The term “退耕还林” refers to the Chinese project of stopping farming on the farmland with serious soil erosion and desertification and implementing afforestation and grass planting, including slope farmland afforestation and afforestation on barren mountains and wastelands suitable for afforestation. It is not only a unique ecological governance project in China, but also becomes a political term. Obviously, Chinese political terms are highly simplified. If they are simply translated literally, they would cause ambiguity and violate the principle of fidelity. The official translate the term “退耕还林” into “grain for green”. However, considering the context of the original text, it does not involve the content of “afforestation of barren mountains and wastelands suitable for forests”, as well as considering the receptivity of western readers, the free translation of “return hilly agricultural land to nature” is closer to the meaning and style of the original text.

Eg3

Source text: 如今，政府已经禁止在国家公园核心地带放牧，同时着手修复遭到破坏的栖息地。

Target text: Nowadays yak grazing is banned in the core area of the park, and eroded habitat is being restored.

Active sentences are often used in Chinese to emphasize the actor of an action, while passive voice is often used in English to emphasize the object. The translation of Example 3 is a typical example of adjusting words order to highlight the theme. The subject of the source text is “政府”, and the core message is “禁止放牧” and “修复遭到破坏的栖息地”。In the sentence, the theme (the leftmost element of the sentence or clause is the starting element) is the part that the author intends to stress, and the sentence is also around the theme [13]. If the translator does not converse active voice into passive voice, it would be translated as “Nowadays the government bans yak grazing in the core area of the park, and restores eroded habitat.” Although it is not hard enough for the target audience to obtain information, the reader cannot capture the most valuable information at the first time. Generally speaking, the ecological civilization policy is formulated and implemented by national government departments. Therefore, the translator has changed the relationship between the subject and the object according to the English language habits, omitted the subject “政府” in the source text, placed the Chinese government's ecological policy at the beginning of the sentence, and ensured the smooth reading of the audience in the limited subtitle space.

5.2 Culture Dimension

The adaptive transformation of cultural dimension requires that "translators should pay close attention to the transmission and interpretation of bilingual cultural connotation in the process of translation" [14]. Documentary films would inevitably involve local unique cultural information in the process of displaying a certain theme. Therefore, documentary film translation bears two important tasks of transforming language meaning and exchanging cultural connotation. However, due to the instantaneous and limited space of the subtitles, the translator cannot present all the information involved in the original text on the subtitles, so it is necessary to make a choice to adapt to the documentary language ecological environment.

Eg4

Source text: 在高山上，可以看到成千上万的经幡。风吹幡动，把人们的祈愿和祝福传到四面八方。经幡的每一种颜色代表着自然界的一种元素。人们相信他们的祈愿会得到巨大瑞兽的加持。

Target text: At the highest peaks, prayer flags can be found in their thousands. Here the wind will carry their prayers for protection, far and wide. Each flag color stands for an element of nature. And their prayers are helped by mighty creatures, mythical and real.

“Prayer flags” are cloth strips printed with Buddha's principles and the patterns of birds and animals. They have different shapes and colors, including blue, white, red, green and yellow, symbolizing good luck and prosperity. People sew the strips of cloth together and hang them on the long rope to pray for peace and prosperity and eliminate disasters. The prayer flag is one of the unique elements of the Tibet Plateau in China, with rich religious meanings. In view of the characteristics of subtitle translation and the degree of audience acceptance, the translator does not use a large amount of space to explain in detail what is the prayer flag, but extracts the form and meaning of it. Thus, foreign audiences can understand the text and pictures without obstacles when watching.

“瑞兽” are five kinds of animals and birds in Chinese traditional culture, including dragon, phoenix, turtle, unicorn
and pixiu. Except for the animal turtle, the other four beasts are not entities. They are all symbols of good luck and wisdom in Chinese traditional concepts. However, it may be difficult for foreign audiences to get to know them at length, especially the beast dragon. Because in Western culture, the dragon is a monster with thorns on its limbs, hard scales on its whole body and fire. Dargon is regarded as unlucky and death. If the translator explain each kind of “瑞兽”, may cause conflict with the cultural background of foreign audiences. It is impossible for western people to understand why the terrible monster is associated with “snake”, which praying for good luck. Therefore, the translator roughly explained that “瑞兽” are “mighty creatures, mythical and real”. Among them, “龙” “凤” “麒麟” and “貔貅” have the characteristics of “mythical”, while “龟” has the feature of “real”.

Eg5

Source text: 人们绑有尖刺的传统脚扎子，爬到20多米的树冠上采摘松塔。

Target text: Armed with traditional spikes lashed to the feet, they scale trees of more than 20 meters.

“脚扎子” is a common self-made tool for picking honeycombs or loosening towers in Northeast China, which is composed of sole binding plate, ferrule, and shoe neck fixing buckle. The middle of the sole binding plate is a 90 triangle nail, and the roll holes at the two ends of the binding plate are provided with ferrules to fix the vamp. The tool is easy to wear and take off, easy to carry, and has good anti-skid performance. As a traditional tool named after practical performance, it may be difficult for overseas audiences in terms of pronunciation when translated into “jiao zha zi” in Chinese Pinyin. Moreover, the shot of foot binding in the film flashes by, and the audience cannot carefully identify its morphological characteristics and understand its function. Therefore, the translator interprets “脚扎子” as “traditional spikes lashed to the feet”, which enables readers to receive more information about the unfamiliar tool as much as possible in the limited subtitle space. At the same time, the audience could appreciate the diligence and wisdom of the Chinese people from the tool.

5.3 Communication Dimension

Language is created for communication. For this reason, documentary translation should not only realize the transformation between the two language symbols and the cultural content they represent, but also realize the communicative function. Therefore, target language text and source language text are required to complete information transmission in roughly the same limited time.

Eg6

Source text: 中国有句老话: “靠山吃山”。

Target text: As the Chinese say goes, “Live by mountain, eat from the mountain.”

“靠山吃山，靠水吃水” is a famous Chinese proverb, which means to adjust living and farming measures according to local conditions. The source text “吃” is not a verb of its original meaning. It expresses the meaning that people in mountain areas use their wisdom and talents to explore and develop the local area according to the terrain conditions. It is a way of survival relying on nature. Therefore, in order for foreign audiences to better understand this sentence, the translator uses the preposition “by” with the meaning of “在……旁边的” to make the audience understand “靠山”。To comprehend the word “吃山” by using the preposition “from” to explain that the food comes from nature. Although the use of prepositions is insignificant, it plays a vital role in the communication of different cultures.

In Chinese culture, naming according to features are often used as one of the definition methods, which is easy to understand. While it is a cultural barrier that cannot be apprehended for audiences who are not familiar with Chinese culture.

Eg7

Source text: “看，这就是‘过路黄’，是止血的。”

Target text: “Here, this is called *Lysimachia christinae Hance*. It is for hemostats.”

“过路黄” also known as “金钱草”，is a Chinese herbal medicine usually lying flat on the ground, which has the effects of reducing dryness-heat, detoxifying, stopping bleeding and inflammation. It often grows on the roadside and gets name from its own yellow flowers that blooms in May and June which sprawls along the road. The narrator here is the mountain people who are good at picking herbs from deep mountains. With rustic living style, they naturally use to calling Chinese herbs by common names rather than scientific names. The original text also expounds the curative effect of this herb. Therefore, in order to achieve the purpose of communication, the translator directly translates this herb into international Latin name “Lysimachia christinae Hance”, which is not only convenient for effective communication, but also can promote the broad and profound Chinese medicine culture to be further recognized in the international community.

6. Conclusion

Based on Professor Hu Gengshen's eco-translatology, this paper chooses *National Park: The Kingdom of Wildlife* as the research object, and analyzes subtitle translation strategies in three dimensions of language, culture and communication. Ecological culture is an important part of Chinese traditional civilization and an important cultural carrier to promote the integration of modern civilization achievements and ecological wisdom. The translator, in the context of documentary, comprehensively considers the adaptation and transformation of the three dimensions, selects appropriate translation strategies, and conveys the information of the source text to the greatest extent, which plays a positive role in promoting China’s determination and initiatives for sustainable development. Translators of foreign artworks should actively respond to the call of “spreading the voice of China and telling Chinese stories well”, shoulder the responsibility of promoting the publicity of ecological culture.
so that the world could have a more comprehensive and profound understanding of China's natural ecology and human ecology. By doing this, people could spare no effort in spreading China's ecological wisdom to the world.

Acknowledgement

This paper is supported by the fund: SWPU Translation Research Center 2021 item “Translation Strategies of Chinese Documentary from the Perspective of Eco-translatology: A Case Study of National Parks: The Kingdom of Wild Animals” (TR202110).

References