

A Study on Subtitle Translation of the Film *Flipped* from the Perspective of Eco-translatology

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Abstract

In an era marked by intensifying global interactions in film and television culture, audiovisual works emerge as crucial vehicles for cultural dissemination. The quality of subtitle translation directly shapes cross-cultural audiences' comprehension and acceptance. Constrained by time, space, and cultural differences, subtitle translation often faces dual challenges of language conciseness and meaning preservation. This study employs the Eco-translatology as its framework and uses the film *Flipped* as a case study to explore how film subtitle translation achieves balance among linguistic, cultural, and communicative ecosystems through "multi-dimensional adaptation and selection". The research aims to provide practical reference for enhancing cross-cultural audiovisual communication effects and concretizing applications of Eco-translatology.

Keywords

Eco-translatology; *Flipped*; subtitle translation; three-dimensional transformations

1. Introduction

With the deepening of globalization, film has increasingly emerged as a pivotal cultural medium, serving as a bridge that connects the emotions of people from different countries and regions. Subtitle translation is a crucial aspect of international film dissemination, not only fulfilling the basic role of information conveyance but also playing a significant part in cross-cultural communication. In recent years, with the continuous development of translation theories, Eco-translatology, has provided new perspectives and methodologies for film subtitle translation.

Subtitle translators face myriad challenges. On the one hand, film subtitles are characterized by instantaneity and spatial constraints, requiring translators to accurately convey the meaning and emotion of the original text within limited time and space. On the other hand, as a cultural product, films contain cultural nuances and contextual dependencies. Translators need to fully consider cultural differences and

audience reception during the translation process to ensure the accuracy and fluency of the translation. The film *Flipped* is a highly acclaimed work that revolves around the protagonists, Julie Baker and Bryce Loski, telling a story about youth, growth, and love. The dialogues in the film are vivid, humorous, and philosophical, making the accuracy, fluency, and cultural adaptability of subtitle translation crucial for audiences to understand and accept the film. Through the case study of *Flipped*, this research demonstrates the practical application of Eco-translatology in subtitle translation, highlighting its dynamic selection and balance across linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions.

This thesis is composed of four chapters with the first one giving a brief introduction of the importance of subtitle translation and the film *Flipped*. Chapter two offers an overview of Eco-translatology, especially summarizing translation approach three-dimensional transformations. In chapter three, three-dimensional transformations are applied to analyze the cases in *Flipped*. Chapter four sums up the findings of the research and make a conclusion.

2. Theoretical Framework

From the perspective of Eco-translatology, translation is understood as a dynamic process of adaptation and selection. “Eco-translatology can be understood as translation research conducted through an ecological approach or from an ecological perspective” (Hu Gengshen 11). Guided by the principle of multi-dimensional adaptation and selection, translators predominantly prioritize the adaptive transformations within the linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions.

2.1. Definition of Eco-translatology

Eco-translatology is an emerging and interdisciplinary concept, aiming to conduct a comprehensive examination of translation phenomena from an ecological perspective. It emphasizes “ecological balance” and “harmonious coexistence” in translation, holding that translation activities involve the intertwined interactions of multiple factors at the linguistic, cultural, social, and other levels. Rooted in Hu Gengshen’s “three-dimensional transformation framework”, this theory posits translation as a dynamic process involving intricate interactions among linguistic, cultural, social, and communicative dimensions. “Eco-translatology can be regarded as an exploration of a new research paradigm for discovering and explaining the essence of translation” (Hu Gengshen 6). Firstly, from the perspective of the transformation of social civilizations, human society has begun to transition from industrial civilization to ecological civilization since the 1960s. This transition is not only reflected in the protection of the natural environment, but also profoundly influenced translation studies. Translation is increasingly being examined within the framework of cultural diversity protection, and scholars are beginning to focus on how translations can maintain the ecological balance between the original text and the target language. This focus on ecological environments and cultural diversity

provides an important social background for the emergence of Eco-translatology. Secondly, the transformation of modern philosophical thought also provides a theoretical foundation for the emergence of Eco-translatology. Since the 20th century, there has been a transition in philosophy from subject-object dichotomy to intersubjectivity, which has led people to regard translation as a complex process involving language, culture, communication, and other dimensions.

The theoretical core of Eco-translatology lies in the concepts of “adaptation and selection theory” and “translation ecology view”. The former emphasizes that the translator, as the “adaptive subject” in the translation ecology, needs to make selective adaptations in multiple dimensions such as linguistic features, cultural background, and communicative intentions; The latter views translation as an ecosystem influenced by multiple factors such as language environment, cultural context, and social history. “Transport is primarily concerned with destination” (Michael Cronin 28). Professor Hu Gengshen pointed out that the translation ecological environment not only includes the micro-textual context, but also covers the macro-cultural ecology. Translators need to achieve functional equivalence of the translated text in the target language ecology in the dialectical relationship between “adaptation” and “selection”

2.2. Three-dimensional Transformations of Eco-translatology

In terms of translation methods, Eco-translatology proposes the concept of three-dimensional transformations, including transformations along the linguistic dimension, cultural dimension, and communicative dimension. These three dimensions are interconnected and mutually influential, requiring the translator to comprehensively consider them throughout the translation process in order to achieve optimal translation results.

2.2.1. Linguistic Dimensional Transformation

The linguistic dimensional transformation within Eco-translatology represents a pivotal phase in the translation process. It demands that translators, while remaining faithful to the original meaning, thoroughly consider the expressive habits, grammatical structures, and lexical choices of the target language, thereby achieving adaptive transformations in linguistic form.

Language serves as the carrier of culture, and different languages possess unique modes of expression and cultural connotations. In the process of translation, accurately conveying the linguistic information of the source language constitutes the foundation for effective communication. Adaptive selection and transformation in the linguistic dimension enable the translated text to better conform to the expression habits of the target language while preserving the original meaning, thereby enhancing its readability and acceptability.

In translation practice, linguistic dimensional transformation involves transfor-

mations at multiple levels, including vocabulary, grammatical structures, sentence patterns, and rhetorical devices. These transformations are not isolated but interwoven and interdependent, collectively constituting a complex translation ecosystem. In subtitle translation, the linguistic dimensional transformation requires translators to focus on the adaptability of the translated text in terms of vocabulary, syntax, grammar, and stylistic register, ensuring that subtitles align with the target language's expression conventions and enhancing readability.

2.2.2. Cultural Dimensional Transformation

"Translation involves the conversion of languages, and language is an integral part of culture. Culture, in turn, is the accumulation of human activities, and humans are a part of the natural world" (Hu Gengshen 62). Cultural dimensional transformation, as one of the pivotal elements within the framework of Eco-translatology, transcends mere linguistic conversion and delves into the profound cultural exchanges and interactions between the source and target languages. This endeavor aims to ensure that the translation not only preserves the cultural essence of the original but also effectively conveys its cultural significance and function within the target cultural context.

Within the Eco-translatological paradigm, the practical strategies for cultural dimensional transformation prove particularly complex and nuanced. Firstly, translators must undertake thorough background research on the source text, encompassing its historical context, social structure, religious beliefs, and value systems. Secondly, translators need to keenly identify cultural differences between the source and target languages, which may manifest in language expression, modes of thinking, value orientations, social customs, and various other dimensions. Furthermore, the practice of cultural dimension transformation necessitates a focus on maintaining cultural authenticity. During the translation process, translators should refrain from excessive cultural interpretation or misreading of the original text, lest they undermine its cultural connotations and significance.

From an Eco-translatological perspective, cultural dimensional transformation is concerned not merely with the accuracy and readability of the translation but also with its ecological and sustainable nature. Through the practice of cultural dimensional transformation, translators can not only achieve greater accuracy in subtitle translation but also establish a bridge of communication between different cultures, facilitating cultural exchange and dissemination, and fostering mutual understanding and respect among diverse cultures. Additionally, cultural dimension transformation contributes to preserving cultural diversity and richness, driving the collective progress and development of human civilization.

2.2.3. Communicative Dimensional Transformation

In the framework of Eco-translatology, communicative dimensional transformation is not only the core element beyond linguistic conversion and cultural adaptation but also the linchpin for achieving translational ecological balance. Eco-translatology conceptualizes translation as a dynamic ecosystem within which translators, source texts, target texts, and translational contexts engage in continuous interaction and co-evolutionary adaptation, emphasizing ecological balance across linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions. Within this system, communicative dimensional transformation serves as a bridge connecting the intentions of the source text with the perceptions of target readers.

At the practical level, communicative dimensional transformation necessitates a series of intricate and sophisticated strategies on the part of translators. Firstly, translators must conduct an in-depth analysis of the source text, accurately grasping its communicative intentions, context, and cultural background, which serves as the prerequisite for effective transformation. Secondly, translators need to fully consider the cultural characteristics and linguistic habits of the target language, adjusting language styles and selecting appropriate vocabulary and expressions to make the translation more aligned with the reading habits and aesthetic expectations of target readers. In this process, translators must also flexibly employ various translation techniques such as literal translation, free translation, amplification, and omission to ensure the accuracy and fluency of the translation.

Communicative dimensional transformation plays a pivotal role in film subtitle translation. By deeply understanding the communicative intentions of the source text, adapting to the cultural environment of the target language, and flexibly employing translation strategies, translators can effectively align the intentions of the source text with the perceptions of target audiences. This not only contributes to enhancing the translation quality of film subtitles but also promotes understanding and respect among different cultures, fostering in-depth development of cross-cultural communication.

3. Case Analyses

The film *Flipped* is a highly praised classic. It focuses on the two main characters, Julie Baker and Bryce Loski, telling a touching story about youth, self-discovery, and love. Typical cases are analyzed from the perspective of three-dimensional transformations.

3.1. Analyses of Subtitle Translation of *Flipped* from the Perspective of Linguistic Dimensional Transformation

The linguistic dimensional transformation plays a crucial role in subtitle translation. It refers to adjusting the linguistic form, style, and expressions of the source text to fit the linguistic norms and features of the target language in translation.

All these will help improve the quality and effectiveness of subtitles, and promote cross-language and cross-cultural communication and understanding.

Example 1: Chet was a big help.

Translation: 柴特帮了大忙。

The translation of “帮了大忙” does not rigidly adhere to the structure of “adjective-noun” in English. Instead, it restructures the nominal phrase into a verbal construction based on the verb-centered characteristic of Chinese. The original sentence employs the typical structure of “subject-verb-object” in English, while the translation adopts a Chinese subject-predicate structure with “柴特” as the subject, “帮了” as the predicate, and “大忙” as the object. This transformation converts static description into dynamic narration, aligning more naturally with Chinese dynamic expression habits compared to a literal translation like “柴特是一个大帮助” which would sound rigid and unnatural in Chinese. The translation of this case has undergone transformations at the syntactic and word order levels, making it more aligned with the linguistic norms of the target language and embodying the adaptive transformation in the linguistic dimension within Eco-translatology.

Example 2: He was a wonderful saxophone player.

Translation: 他很会吹萨克斯管。

This line appears when Bryce's family had dinner with the July's family. Bryce's mother said to July's two older brothers that Bryce's father used to be really good at playing the saxophone. The original text employs the nominal structure “a wonderful saxophone player”, which reflects the characteristic of English's impersonal expression. The target language, however, converts it into the verbal phrase “be really good at playing the saxophone”, aligning with the syntactic ecology of Chinese that emphasizes actions over attributes. Chinese tends to use the structure of “Subject-Verb-Object”. This conversion makes the translation more in line with the cognitive framework of the target language. Moreover, the English judgment sentence structure introduced by “was” is restructured into an evaluative sentence of “be really good at playing saxophone” in Chinese. This shift from attributive judgment to ability-based statement adapts to the ecological environment of Chinese colloquial expressions, which tends to downplay copulas and emphasize actions. Compared with a literal translation like “他是个极好的萨克斯手”, the current translation aligns more closely with the ecological environment of Chinese colloquial expressions. It not only preserves the integrity of the information but also enhances the naturalness of the expression.

Example 3: What? He's afraid of being poisoned?

Translation: 什么? 他怕蛋有毒吗?

“Being poisoned” is a quintessential passive voice construction in English, employing the passive voice to emphasize the recipient of the action rather than

the doer. However, passive constructions are generally avoided in Chinese linguistic conventions. A literal translation like “他被毒” not only deviates from Chinese grammatical norms but also leads to semantic confusion. The translation “蛋有毒” transforms the passive voice into an active construction, representing an ecological restructuring of the original syntactic structure. Furthermore, the translation supplements the information of “蛋” rendering it more contextually coherent. Consequently, this translated sentence exemplifies the adaptive transformation in the linguistic dimension from English to Chinese through lexical amplification, syntactic restructuring, and pragmatic enhancement. In short, the linguistic dimensional transformation is neither a faithful reproduction of the original nor a one-way submission to the target language, but a dynamic and balanced constructed through ecological translation thinking in the three dimensions of semantics, pragmatics, and form. This transformation allows audiences from different cultural backgrounds to directly empathize with the characters and resonate with the narrative without the need for prior cognitive burden, thus witnessing the miracle of language transcending boundaries and culture bridging gaps in the small space of the screen.

3.2. Analyses of Subtitle Translation of Flipped from the Perspective of Cultural Dimensional Transformation

The translation of movie subtitles is not merely a linguistic conversion; it is also the transmission of cultural information. From the cultural dimensional perspective of Eco-translatology, subtitle translators need to deeply understand the cultural connotation of the original text and accurately convey it to the target language audience.

Example 4: Why don't you just make me eat lima beans for the rest of my life.

Translation: 干脆逼我余生都吃皇帝豆算了。

The sentences was Bryce's internal monologue after he declined Julie's invitation to climb a tree together. The translation of “lima beans” as “皇帝豆” exemplifies a masterful act of cultural-dimensional adaptation. Through localized reconstruction of cultural symbols, the translator erects an emotional bridge in the target-language ecosystem that functionally mirrors the original line's semantic-affective structure. This strategy not only bridges the cognitive gap between cultures but also enables the cross-cultural transplantation of emotional resonance.

“Lima beans” are a marginalized food item in Western cuisine, often shunned by children for their bland taste and limited culinary versatility. Chinese audiences, however, possess limited familiarity with lima beans, and a literal translation would be difficult to reflect that Bryce would rather eat bad food than climb trees with Julie. By rendering “lima beans” as “皇帝豆”, the translator taps into a cultural equivalence: in Chinese culinary parlance, “皇帝豆” refers to peas, which share a similarly mild flavor profile with lima beans and are thus equally unpopular. This

localized adaptation renders the term more culturally accessible to Chinese viewers. The translation thus embodies the translator's adept cultural-dimensional adaptation. Through culturally rooted semantic grafting, it preemptively addresses potential comprehension gaps for the target audience, who might otherwise feel alienated by the unfamiliar "lima beans". Instead, it ensures that both Chinese and Western audiences perceive the line through a shared lens of relatable aversion, preserving the emotional core of Bryce's defiance while grounding it in culturally resonant imagery.

Example 5: Why do they call it The Three Stooges?

Translation: 他们为什么要叫活宝三人组?

This sentence appeared in a conversation between Bryce and his friends, who were discussing why Moe, Larry, Curly, Shemp, and Curly Joe were known as the Three Stooges. The Three Stooges is a classic comedy group in the United States in the mid-20th century. It is famous for the actors' iconic antics, but if translated literally as “三个傻瓜” or “三个受气包”, it is difficult for Chinese audiences to associate it with “physical comedy” and “absurd farce” due to the lack of the original action comedy context and cultural support. This can lead to semantic distortion. The word “stooge” has a derogatory and comedic connotation in English, while “活宝” retains the comedic connotation of the original in the Chinese context, and by using the commendatory connotation of the word “宝” to weaken the derogatory connotation of “stooge” in English, it is more in line with the meaning of “no malicious funny” in the familiar comedy culture of Chinese people, making it possible for the target audience to understand without relying on cultural background. Therefore, in this case, the translator selected a cultural symbol that is functionally equivalent to the original in the target language ecology, making it localized and avoiding comprehension barriers caused by cultural differences, reflecting the transformation of cultural dimensions in the theory of Eco-translatology.

Example 6: But for the grace of God.

Translation: 幸亏老天怜悯。

“But for the grace of God” is an expression with strong Western religious culture. In Christian culture, “God” is the supreme being, and “grace” represents the mercy, compassion, and redemption that God bestows upon humanity. This phrase conveys a sense of gratitude for God's blessings, and its cultural connotation is deeply rooted in Western religious traditions. In Chinese culture, although there is no religious concept that corresponds exactly to the Western Christian God, “老天” is an image with similar supernatural power in Chinese culture, representing the power that dominates everything in the depths of the universe. It is often used to express awe and prayer for the unknown fate. The word “怜悯” also fits the Chinese culture's emotional expression of kindness and compassion. By translating “God” to “老天” and “grace” to “怜悯”, corresponding cultural images in the target language culture can be understood by the target language audi-

ence, achieving the adaptation and transformation of cultural images. The translation of “幸亏老天怜悯” fully considers the cultural background and acceptance of the target language audience, using common expressions in Chinese culture, allowing the target language audience to easily understand the meaning of the sentence, enhancing the acceptability of the translation in the target language culture. The cultural dimension transformation in Eco-translatology demands that translators act as cultural mediators who balance linguistic fidelity with cultural adaptability. Translation is not merely a component of language, but also an integral part of culture. The accurate conveyance of cultural connotations across different languages is precisely what the cultural dimensional transformation in Eco-translatology emphasizes.

3.3. Analyses of Subtitle Translation of Flipped from the Perspective of Communicative Dimensional Transformation

In the realm of film subtitle translation, the transformation along the communicative dimension is particularly crucial. This is because film serves as a medium for cross-cultural communication, where subtitle translation must not only accurately convey the literal meaning of dialogue but also ensure that the translation aligns with the plot, character traits, and cultural context. The communicative dimensional transformation emphasizes the need to focus on dynamically adapting the source text's communicative intent and ensuring effective reception within the target context during the translation process. Translators must accurately capture the communicative intent of the source text, such as humor, sarcasm, or seriousness, and appropriately reflect this in the translation to ensure that the target audience experiences emotional effects similar to those intended by the original text. Additionally, they need to fully consider the cultural background, linguistic habits, and aesthetic preferences of the target audience, making the translation more aligned with the reception habits of the target audience.

Example 7: I' m never coming down.

Translation: 打死我都不会下去。

The original sentence directly and strongly expresses Julie's determination not to climb down from the tree. In the situation at that time, Julie loved this tree deeply and hoped to stop the tree cutting through this firm statement. Julie was letting the other party clearly know her firm position of protecting this tree and would not change due to any persuasion or threat. The translation “I will never go down” also conveys this communicative intention accurately. A literal translation of “我永远都不会下去的” would not only misrepresent the narrative context but also fail to convey the intended emotional intensity. Such a rendering might inadvertently portray Julie as petulant rather than resolute, undermining the character's courageous determination to protect the tree. The phrase lacks the rhetorical force required to reflect Julie's defiance, as it neither emphasizes the life-or-death stakes

of her commitment nor the moral conviction driving her action. The word “打死” in Chinese has a strong sense of determination and resolute, vividly showing Julie’s determination to defend the tree to the death and never to leave it, allowing Chinese audiences to quickly understand the core message that Julie wants to convey, which is her firm attitude of protecting the tree. It is presented in a highly contagious way, which is in line with the Chinese audience’s perception of expressing strong emotions in daily communication. During the movie-watching process, the target language audience can intuitively feel Julie’s determination and bravery, thereby better integrating into the plot of the film, achieving equivalence with the source language in terms of communicative effects, and ensuring the effective transmission of information in the target language culture.

Example 8: I had completely misjudged her. She was always kind, and I had been blind to it.

Translation: 我之前真是大错特错了。她一直都很善良，可我却一直没发现。

The original line uses emotionally charged expressions like “misjudged” and “blind”, which reveal the speaker’s self-reflection and regret. The past perfect tense highlights a temporal gap between past perceptions and current realizations, emphasizing a moment of psychological turning point in the character’s development. Firstly, “大错特错” is more emotionally expressive and colloquial than the literal translation of “完全误判” aligning with Chinese conventions for expressing regret or self-reproach. Secondly, “却一直未发现” replaces the metaphor “been blind to it” with a more direct and accessible meaning, avoiding the potential cultural dissonance or metaphorical obscurity that might arise from a literal translation.

Example 9: One’s character is set at an early age. I’d hate to see you swim out so far you can’t swim back.

Translation: 三岁看老，我不希望你就这么迷失自我。

Upon learning that Bryce had thrown away the eggs thoughtfully delivered by Julie, Bryce’s grandfather offered him some words of advice. The original line “One’s character is set at an early age. I’d hate to see you swim out so far you can’t swim back,” consists of two parts.

The translation “三岁看老，我不希望你就这么迷失自我” demonstrates a highly communicative dimensional transformation. Firstly, the translation “三岁看老” is not a literal rendering, but it is culturally equivalent to “one’s character is set at an early age.” It is deeply familiar to Chinese viewers and conveys the same idea with concise clarity and cultural resonance, enhancing the efficiency of message transmission. The translation “迷失自我” replaces the metaphor of “swimming out too far”. While it omits the aquatic imagery, it communicates the intended message for “going too far to return”, which is more directly and accessibly to Chinese viewers. The translation ensures that pragmatic intent is realized to the greatest extent in a cross-linguistic and cross-cultural environment. By simplifying

complexity and achieving emotional equivalence, the translator not only conveys information but also preserves character dynamics and narrative coherence. The communicative dimension transformation in Eco-translatology underscores that subtitle translation is a pragmatically oriented, audience-centric adaptation. By prioritizing functional equivalence, cultural familiarity, and emotional resonance, translators enable cross-cultural communicative efficiency while preserving the original narrative's integrity.

4. Conclusion

This study systematically elaborates the theoretical framework of Eco-translatology and conducts an analysis of subtitle translation in the film *Flipped* based on the method of three-dimensional transformation. It explores how subtitle translation achieves ecological balance through adaptive selection and dynamic equilibrium across linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions.

In the linguistic dimension, the translator restructured long and complex sentences from the source text in the subtitle translation of *Flipped*, which suits the reading habits of the target audience. This linguistic adaptability ensures fluency and naturalness in the subtitles while retaining the original language's distinctive characteristics and tone. In the cultural dimension, the translator conducted analysis of cultural elements in the source text and employed appropriate translation strategies to ensure accurate comprehension and acceptance by the target audience. In the subtitle translation of *Flipped*, the translator adopted equivalent expressions in the target language to facilitate audience understanding. Such culturally adaptive choices foster cross-cultural exchange and dissemination. In the communicative dimension, the translator refined dialogue logic, emotional expression, and contextual adaptation through close examination of character interactions in the subtitle translation of *Flipped*. This communicative adaptability not only enhances the film's entertainment value but also effectively fulfills the goal of cross-cultural communication.

In conclusion, Eco-translatology offers a new analytical perspective for film subtitle translation. This thesis provides practical references for enhancing cross-cultural audiovisual communication effectiveness and facilitating the application of Eco-translatology in subtitle translation.

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