



## The Application of Domestication and Foreignization in the Chinese Translation of English Subtitles----Take the Sitcom *Friends* for Example

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**Abstract:** As a special form of cultural transmission, English sitcom has won the favor of audiences all over the world with its humorous language. However, limited by language and culture, how to translate the verbal humor of English sitcom has become a difficult problem in translation field. In order to give Chinese audiences a better experience, domestication and foreignization, two important translation strategies, are often applied to subtitle translation of English sitcoms. In the process of subtitle translation of *Friends*, domestication and foreignization are complementary rather than antagonistic. This paper selects some subtitle clips from *Friends* to discuss the application of domestication and foreignization in The Chinese translation of English subtitle. This paper mainly explains the characteristics, principles and strategies of subtitle translation in sitcoms, and studies and summarizes the influence of subtitle translation on translators.

**Keywords:** Subtitle translation; *Friends*; domestication and foreignization.

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## INTRODUCTION

*Friends* is an American television sitcom that ran for 10 years. Since its debut in 2004, the play has gained numerous fans and has been nominated for Emmy Awards for many times. So far, it is still popular all over the world. The story of the series revolves around six friends living in Manhattan, New York. It describes the development of friendship, love and career between them, and the ten-year experience they have gone through together. Among the leading characters are Rachel, a central coffee waiter with a confused and fragile nature; the good archaeologist Ross; the restaurant chef with strong need for control, Monica; the company's head of tortuous emotional life, Chandler; and Phoebe, a whimsical masseuse. The series has successfully attracted a large number of fans in China with its humorous expressions, dramatic story and vivid American style. Throughout the factors of

its success, proper translation and accurate meaning have well conveyed the language activities of characters, which makes the audience feel and enjoy themselves.

Through the study of subtitle translation of *Friends*, we can master the application of domestication and foreignization in subtitle translation of sitcoms, learned about foreign cultures, and improved the translator's abilities in all aspects. For example, it improves the translator's aesthetic appreciation and bilingual conversion ability. During the study, by comparing English and Chinese, we can not only deeply feel the beauty of concise Chinese, but also better accept and appreciate the beauty of subtitle translation of sitcoms, so that we can be more proficient in bilingual (English and Chinese) conversion. It also promotes the cultivation of intercultural ability and

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the enhancement of encyclopedia knowledge [1]. Language is the carrier of culture. Through the study of subtitle translation of sitcoms of foreign cultures, we can not only understand the customs of foreign cultures, but also enrich encyclopedia knowledge, expand knowledge horizons, improve cultural accomplishment, and enhance the translator's critical thinking and comprehension. By study subtitle translation of sitcoms, we can understand the advantages and disadvantages of different subtitle translation methods, so as to enhance critical power and correction power, and finally improve the understanding of subtitle translation of sitcoms.

## **CHARACTERISTICS, PRINCIPLES AND STRATEGIES OF SUBTITLE TRANSLATION FOR SITCOMS**

### **Characteristics of Sitcom Subtitle Translation**

#### **1. Colloquialism**

Since most of the words in movies and TV plays are dialogues of characters, subtitles are colloquial. Meanwhile, subtitles should be translated in colloquial, rather than literary and written language. At the same time, colloquial subtitle translation can also make the audience better understand the plot and have a stronger sense of substitution.

#### **2. Comprehensiveness**

Subtitles do not exist independently. They need to be connected with the actions, sounds and even the surrounding environment of the characters in the drama, so that the audience can feel as if they are in the time and space of the characters in the drama [2]. In other words, subtitle translation should be based on the context, and change the wording without changing the original content appropriately, so as to achieve a more perfect drama watching experience.

#### **3. Instantaneity**

Due to the quick switching of scenes in films and TV dramas, subtitle translation should be concise and lively in order to make the audience understand the subtitle in a very short time and improve the viewing effect and experience.

### **Principles**

#### **1. Principle of faithfulness**

Faithfulness is the most important principle in translation. The translation theories of "faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance" proposed by Yan Fu, Fu Lei's spiritual likeness, Qian Zhongshu's transliteration, etc., are all based on faithfulness. Faithfulness means that the translator must be faithful to the original work. The principle of faithfulness ensures the existence of translation. However, this principle can also be adjusted to control, and is not required in every situation.

Adhering to this principle is conducive to better learning western culture, so as to improve the translator's understanding and appreciation, and also increase the accuracy.

#### **2. Principle of simplicity**

Sitcom subtitles are limited by time and space. Therefore, the Chinese translation of English subtitles must follow the principle of simplicity, and there can be no cumbersome information. In subtitle translation, this is a principle that has to be observed. After all, subtitle translation is substantially different from ordinary literary translation. The simultaneous appearance of film pictures and subtitles will distract the audience's attention. If subtitles is obscure, it can't help audience understand the film and TV play on one hand, and on the other hand it will hinder the audience from watching the film [3]. Therefore, simplicity is an important principle for subtitle translation. Following this principle is also conducive to improving the translator's thinking ability of western culture and practical translation learning ability.

#### **3. The principle of audience readability**

The main audience of Western sitcoms is the general public, whose knowledge reserves, education level, artistic accomplishment and many other aspects are uneven. Therefore, subtitle translation should make use of the most plain language to reduce the public's obstacles to the understanding of subtitle translation, that is, subtitle translation should make the target language easy to understand and be accepted by the Chinese audience. Adhering to the principle of audience readability is conducive to improving translators' interest in subtitle translation and facilitating translators' flexible application ability.

### **Translation Strategies of Domestication and Foreignization**

No matter what kind of text translators will translate, the first thing they should consider is translation strategies and methods. They will adopt different strategies and methods in different texts, according to the specific situation: mainly using domestication or foreignization, or domestication and foreignization being inextricably linked. With regard to the definition of domestication and foreignization, Venuti, a translator, believes that domestication means that the translator, from the perspective of the target language, makes the source language conform to the cultural values of the target language, brings the source language into the culture of the target language, takes the perspective of the target language readers as the destination, and adopts the expression mode that the target language readers are used to convey the content of the

original text. Foreignization is to accept the language and culture of the foreign text, bring the reader into the foreign scene, take the source language as the destination, try to maintain the language style and habits of the source language, and convey the content of the original text with the language characteristics and expression methods of foreign culture, so as to expand the perspective of foreign culture of the translator. Generally speaking, the advantage of using domestication in translation is that the translator retains the linguistic habits of the target language, so that the translation is smooth and easily accepted by the reader of the target language, thus enabling the translator to enhance the understanding and application of domestication [4]. The shortcoming lies in the loss of the image of the original text, which has become an obstacle to cultural communication. The advantages of foreignization lie in retaining the image of the original text, increasing the image of the target language, enriching the target language, promoting cultural communication and strengthening the translator's understanding of the foreign culture in the process of translation. However, its disadvantages lie in that the translation is not fluent, which is easy to be resisted by the target language readers.

In order to achieve a better translation effect, translators usually use domestication and foreignization as well as some translation skills, which are of great reference value to the translation of English subtitles [5]. These skills are reflected in the subtitle translation of *Friends*, for example: annotation, paraphrase, amplification, omission, shift of perspective, combination, and so on.

#### **THE APPLICATION OF DOMESTICATION AND FOREIGNIZATION IN THE SUBTITLE TRANSLATION OF *FRIENDS***

The plot of *Friends* is close to life and the dialogue is humorous. The characters in the play are vivid, and everyone has a unique view on things. The application of domestication and foreignization explains the content of the dialogue very incisively, making the plot of each episode coherent and smooth. In addition, the connotation of the play has been fully displayed. The translator can deepen his understanding of domestication and foreignization strategy, consolidate the knowledge he has learned, and put them into action in the process of selecting fragments of the play for translation.

Domestication is the main translation strategy in the Chinese subtitle translation of *Friends*, because its fundamental purpose is to enable the target audience to overcome the language and cultural barriers, understand the meaning of the original text, let the target audience understand the

plot, and achieve the effect of synchronizing information transmission between the TV series and the audience in the source language.

#### **Example 1**

Phoebe: Ursula, I had the most amazing news. I found our dad... John Glenn is not our dad...

Phoebe's twin sister Ursula thinks John Glenn is their father, but when Phoebe finally finds out their real father, she calls Ursula to tell her she made a mistake. Here, the translator uses the translation technique of annotation. Due to the cultural differences between English and Chinese, there are many cultural words in English that cannot be found their equivalent words in Chinese, which forms a gap in the meaning of words. Without explanation, it's difficult for readers to understand the original of those words. In order to solve this problem, the translator often needs to supplement the background, etymology and other relevant information with the annotation [6]. The *Friends* we studied is a classic sitcom. Due to the cultural differences between Chinese and English, most Chinese audiences do not know or even know John Glenn. In the United States, John Glenn is a well-known figure - the third person to fly in space in the United States, and the first person to circle the earth in the United States. He is a famous American astronaut. If there is no explanatory note to explain Glenn's identity, most Chinese audiences will assume that this is just a common name, and they will not be able to understand the joke that Ursula mistakenly thinks the celebrity is her father.

#### **Example 2**

Phoebe: How would you feel if you couldn't share your cooking? Or imagine how Ross would feel if he couldn't teach us about dragons.

Monica: Dinosaurs.

Phoebe: Potato, potahto.

Phoebe (a masseuse by trade) is upset when Monica invites someone over to her house to give her a massage because Monica said she doesn't like massages. The conversation comes after Phoebe asks why Monica won't let her do the massage and begs her for permission to give her a massage. In this case, potato and potahto are two words with different pronunciation and spelling in Phoebe dialect, but their meaning is potato, which is essentially the same. Therefore, the translator uses the translation skills of interpretation to translate this sentence into "有什么区别". Paraphrase means that in the process of translation, the meaning of the original text is directly translated without the specific images in the original text [7]. That is to say, words or sentences are explained in plain language, or a word or sentence is clarified in another way

acceptable to readers. Due to the cultural differences between Chinese and English, the literal translation can not make the readers understand the meaning, when translating some words and allusions with distinctive national characteristics. While, the annotation makes the translation lengthy and wordy, and the original text pays more attention to the meaning than the form, it is suitable to adopt the interpretation method. In this case, a literal translation would make the audience unable to understand the plot. This kind of situation is very common in American TV series.

### Example 3

Chandler: Rachel. Can I get some coffee?

Rachel: Sure.

Chandler: Thank you. ROSS: Hey, Rachel...

Rachel (to Chandler): Did you talk to him yet?

Chandler: No.

Rachel: Then, no.

Ross has had a crush on Rachel, but it's frustrating that Rachel doesn't seem to understand Ross's feelings for her until he gets a girlfriend and she starts to worry about it. She suddenly realizes that she likes Ross too, but just misses the opportunity because she's too reserved. This time, she wants to find out what Ross thinks through Chandler. She wants to ask him if he really likes Julie and if they have a chance to express their feelings again. But Chandler didn't have the right time to ask Ross, which made Rachel a little disappointed, so she said "then, No." to Chandler. Here, the translator adopts the method of amplification, also known as "amplification", which refers to the translation method of appropriately adding some words, phrases or sentences when converting one language into another language, so as to make the grammatical concepts of the original text more clearly expressed in the translation. It makes the sentences translated more in line with the expression habits of the target audience and easier to be understood and accepted by them. Because Rachel was working as a waitress at the coffee shop, "then, no" means that Chandler is not going to get his coffee because he didn't finish the job that Rachel told him to do. This sentence is translated into "那么, 没有咖啡" by using the method of adding words, which reveals the meaning of Rachel's words in the original text, and also makes the audience realize the sadness of Rachel's loss and the "punishment" brought to Chandler.

### Example 4

Monica: Sweetie! Edges! Fingers! Smudgy!

When Monica shows Rachel a picture of Joey and her at Ross's wedding, Rachel still can't believe Ross is getting married again. She can't calm

down. After taking the photo, she grabs the middle of the photo. Monica reminds Rachel not to grab the middle of the photo, but to grab the edge. While Rachel immerses herself in her inner world and doesn't care. At this time, she reminds her again of sweetie! Edges! Fingers! Smudgy! Here, the translator combines the omission, combination and amplification to translate it as "别抓中间, 指纹会弄脏照片". In order to make Chinese subtitles more concise, the translator cut the word sweetie. The edge is translated as "don't grab the middle." Merge "Fingers!" and "Smudgy!" into one sentence, and add the word "photo", so the sentence is translated into "Fingerprints can stain photos". In this way, the translation is more in line with the language habits of the Chinese audience, and at the same time, it can well express Monica's eager mood.

### Example 5

Rachel: How could this happened?

Neighbor: He must be sweeping. They found a broom in his hand.

Monica: That's terrible.

Neighbor: I know.

Neighbor: I was sweeping yesterday. Neighbor: It could've been me.

Ross: sweeping. You never know. Neighbor: Never know.

Mr. Huck, a neighbor upstairs, fainted when he was sweeping the floor. Ross and another neighbor were talking about it. When they said, "you never know", it is translated into Chinese by the subtitle as "天有不测风云". This translation fits the context very well, because Mr. Huck did fainted suddenly. If the literal translation is "you will never know", the Chinese audience will be a little confused. It's the same with the sentence "never know" repeated by the neighbors in the back. Here, the translator adopts the translation technique of adaptation to domesticate the parts that are difficult for the target language audience to understand in the original English subtitles and replace them with familiar idiomatic expressions with the same or similar meanings in Chinese, so as to make it easier for the target language audience to understand [8].

### Example 6

Monica: You've got to get over this.

When Chandler felt that he would be lonely and going crazy, Monica said to Chandler, "you've got to get over this." The subtitle translation of the sentence "you've got to get over this" should be "You have to take it easy". Obviously, subtitle translation is more smooth and idiomatic, and is more acceptable to the target language readers. The final subtitle version of the translation of "你必须想开一点" does not translate every word in the original

text. The pronoun "this" is omitted in the translation process, and "get over" does not have an object, while the object "this" is omitted, which is the embodiment of the subtraction in this sentence. As we all know, English is a hypotaxis language, using pronouns, conjunctions, etc., in order to achieve clear logical relations between sentences. In contrast, Chinese is a paratactic language, which rarely uses conjunctions or pronouns. In order to achieve better communicative effect, unnecessary conjunctions or pronouns are often omitted in translation. In this sentence, the translation of the pronoun "this" is omitted.

#### Example 7

Eddie: I uhm gotta tell you man, I mean, that's uhm, it's kinda out of the blue, I mean don't you think?

Chandler: This is not out of the blue, this is smack dab in the middle of the blue!

Chandler's friend Eddie stays at his house, but Chandler can't stand Eddie's behavior in his house. Eddie even sits around and watches him when he sleeps, which makes him feel unbearable. So he told Eddie to move out. Eddie also said that he would move out before Chandler came back from work the next day. But when Chandler came back from work the next day, Eddie still didn't move out. He seemed to forget what he said yesterday and told Chandler excitedly that he had bought another goldfish to keep in the aquarium. During the conversation, Chandler hinted several times that he wanted him to move out, but he was so focused on dehydrating the fruit he had bought that he didn't realize the deeper meaning of what Chandler was saying. Finally, Chandler couldn't stand to say it directly, but Eddie was surprised.

Here "out of the blue" means "unexpected, without prior notice", and it is appropriate to translate it into the idiom "突如其来", but in the following, Chandler changes "out" to "middle" to express his anger of "一点都不突如其来". In the process of translation, in order to make the translation conform to the expressions and habits of the target language, the translator often changes the parts of speech, sentence patterns and voice in the original sentence [9]. The translation also inherits the word "Lai" in the previous text, and adopts the shift of perspective method to change the prepositions of the original text by adding the Chinese Time Adverb "long time", which is similar to the original text and has the most humorous effect. It can be seen that the word games of idioms require the translator to carefully deliberate in order to retain both the meaning and flavor.

Foreignization plays an auxiliary role in translation, as well as in the subtitle translation of friends. Although Foreignization strategy is seldom used, it still plays an important role. Foreignization is mainly to retain the exotic charm of the source language and integrating it into the target language in translation, which contributes to the wide spread of the source culture and promotes the spread of western culture in the world [10].

#### Example 1

Monica: Aunt Syl, stop yelling! All I'm saying is that if you had told me vegetarian lasagna, I would have made vegetarian lasagna. Well, the meat's only every third layer, maybe you could scrape.

"Lasagna" (Italian lasagna) mentioned by Monica in the play is a loanword, which is a traditional pasta baked or marinated with lasagna as raw material, and is famous all over the world. It's made of layers of spaghetti stacked on top of each other, and then each layer is served with minced meat, bell peppers, Onions, sliced mushrooms and cheese, which is extremely delicious. In this passage, "lasagna" is translated into "Italian spaghetti" by using foreignizing translation strategy, which makes the Chinese audience immediately experience the characteristics of foreign food culture, and the strong foreign style is transmitted to the senses of Chinese readers for the first time [11].

#### Example 2

At the same time, in *Friends*, there are many examples of foreignization in the translation of food culture words, such as marinara sauce, rum, Rocky road (A kind of nut chocolate ice cream), cookie dough, western omelet, tart, vegetarian pate, Pretzel, and so on. The foreignization strategy is used in the translation of foreign food culture vocabulary, which retains the characteristics of the cultural elements of the source language, reflects the original exotic culture and customs, and at the same time lets the Chinese audience fully appreciate the charm of intercultural.

## CONCLUSION

As a beloved sitcom, *Friends* has brought a lot of joy and empathy to the audience. Domestication and foreignization are often used in subtitle translation of sitcoms in order to make audiences in the target language enjoy the same effect as those in the source language. They complement each other and give full play to their respective advantages. Domestication can make the translation smooth and easy to be accepted by the Chinese audience [12]. In the subtitle translation of *Friends*, the translator reasonably translates English subtitles into authentic Chinese expressions familiar to Chinese audiences according to the context, so

that they can truly integrate into the drama. On the other hand, the use of foreignization preserves the image of the original text, makes the target audience feel the charm of the foreign culture, broadens the horizon of the Chinese audience, and enables them to know more about the lifestyle and culture of the United States. Through the study on the application of domestication and foreignization in sitcoms, the translators have improved their aesthetic appreciation, bilingual conversion ability, cultural sensitivity, critical thinking power and critical power, thus enhancing their understanding of foreign cultures and enriching their cultural knowledge.

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