

# *A Study on Subtitle Translation of Turning Red from the Perspective of Domestication and Foreignization*

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**Abstract:** Translation is the process of changing spoken or written text into another language. It is widely considered that translation is not only a matter of language transmission but also a matter of cultural exchange between the two languages. This feature is especially evident in subtitle translation, which plays an important role in English films. With the development of cultural exchanges in recent years, films from different countries have been screened in different regions as a medium of communication, leading to an increase in demand for subtitle translations. And in the field of subtitle translation, Venuti's domestication and foreignization strategies are the dominant methods. Taking the film *Turning Red* as an example, this article studied different cases with their cultural background and had a thorough analysis of how the strategies are used in each case, including the comparison between different methods. Based on the analysis, this study concluded the similarity and difference between domestication and foreignization and stressed that the two strategies should be combined, in order to transfer information to audiences.

**Keywords:** Domestication, Foreignization, Subtitling

## 1. Introduction

According to Larson, translation is a change of form from the source language into the target language that refers to the actual words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs [1]. Larson's theory reflects the essence of translation. However, translation between two languages is beyond languages. The translation is also a process that promotes cross-cultural transfer. Hatim and Mason pointed out that mediators, purposes, and circumstances are all important attributes of English-Chinese translation [2]. This view has been echoed by most scholars. As a result, when translating, people should have a comprehensive consideration of the cultural background behind the texts in order to present the full information in the context.

As a culture carrier, films play an important role in transmitting cultural expressions. In especial, *Turning Red* is a film based on an ethnic Chinese girl and her adolescent life in high school. Facing culture shock in an exotic environment. She is absorbing western culture at school while maintaining traditional Chinese customs at home. In this circumstance, the translator is required to understand the meaning of culture-loaded words and phrases in the film and subtitle them with equivalent strategies.

Jorge and Pablo defined subtitling as "a translation practice that consists of the translation into a target language of the original dialogue exchanges uttered by different speakers." [3] The prominent purpose of subtitling is to let the target audiences know the general information within short syllables.

Therefore, Venuti's domestication and foreignization strategies are broadly applied in audio translation. The two strategies are used for either making the text familiar to the target reader or making target readers closer to the text. The proper use of domestication and foreignization helps audiences understand the context

Based on the translation strategies of domestication and foreignization, this passage discusses the application of two strategies in different contexts. By citing the definition of domestication and foreignization, this passage presents a general viewpoint on the relationship between the two strategies. In different cases, the author compared Chinese and English meanings of some specific culture-loaded words and explained how the strategies are used to express the precise definition. From the examples, the author summarized the similarities and differences and emphasized the combination of the two strategies.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. The Definition and Feature of Subtitling**

Subtitling is a form of translation that is most commonly used in the field of interlingual translation. Subtitling involves translating actors' dialogue and other important information into the target language [4]. It plays an important role in helping audiences understand the plot of a movie without a language barrier, and reappearing the context and semantics in the source language. Under the definition of subtitling, Qian concluded some features of subtitling, which include instantaneity, comprehensiveness, and colloquialism [5].

#### **1) Instantaneity**

Subtitles usually run at a maximum speed of 8 syllables per second for reading time [6]. And the time subtitle appears is related to the speed of dialogue and scene conversion. Therefore, the translation of subtitles should be succinct and clear, usually consisting of one or two lines.

#### **2) Comprehensiveness**

Subtitles appear simultaneously on the screen, together with picture sequences and sounds. Audiences receive the information audio visually. The subtitle translation needs to find a balance between the source language and target language, and correspond with different scenes.

#### **3) Colloquialism**

The function of subtitles is to transfer information to the maximum extent. In order to help audiences better understand the semantic meanings, the interpreter should choose words that are concise, coherent, and easy to be understood. And the style should also be consistent with the style of film or television itself.

Subtitling is the basis of transmitting both information and culture. According to Wang, the translation process involves both the transfer of language and culture [7]. When subtitling, the interpreter should be aware of cultural diversity. The cross-cultural transfer is required in order to prevent ambiguity and convey information accurately.

### **2.2. Domestication and Foreignization**

The notion of domestication and foreignization was first mentioned by Schleiermacher in his book *On the Different Method of Translating*. He pointed out that there are two approaches to translation: either the translator leaves the author in peace and moves the reader toward him, or he leaves the reader in peace and moves the author toward him [8]. He also stressed the relevance of translation and comprehensiveness. Although Schleiermacher didn't define the notion of domestication and foreignization, he explained the basic principle of translation. In Venuti's theory, he defined these two approaches as domestication and foreignization. Domestication refers to the target-culture-oriented translation in which unusual expressions to the target culture are exploited and turned into familiar

ones to make the translated text intelligible and accessible to the target readers. Foreignization is a source-culture-oriented translation that strives to preserve the foreign flavor as much as possible in order to transfer the source language and culture into the target one [9]. Venuti systematically summarized the two strategies of translation and emphasized the purpose of different orientations. However, at that time, there were debates over the use of two strategies.

Venuti was the advocator of foreignization. He claimed that the interpreter should resist the trend of the dominance of the target language, and be devoted to the original author [10]. By remaining in the literary and grammar form in the original text, foreignization retains the cultural differences between different languages to a large extent and requires readers to fit in the target language while reading. Venuti's theory enriched the form of the target language and promoted the status of interpreters, but it neglected the fluency and text type of translation. For the readers, the foreignization translation method caused a barrier to understanding in the source language. Although Venuti built up a relationship between language and culture, there were limitations in his theory.

Meanwhile, Nida strongly supported domestication. Based on the perspective of culture and society, he put the target reader in the first place. In order to let readers fully understand the text, the interpreter should transmit the grammar and vocabulary form from the target language to the source language, which appears to be natural and behavioral to the target readers [11]. Nida's theory emphasized target-culture-oriented translation. In this strategy, the target reader can absorb the message, which is a benefit for cultural exchange and transmission. However, due to the distinction between the two languages, there may be some omissions or errors in translation. Domestication is based on familiarity with the culture and customs in the target language. Without the contextual effect, the translation will also be influenced.

Foreignization and domestication strategies have their advantages and disadvantages. Nowadays, with the development of globalization, more and more interpreters realize that translation is related to the comprehensive consideration of cultural, poetic, and economic factors. Therefore, it is necessary for the interpreters to combine foreignization with domestication, in order to preserve the original meaning and simplify the semantic meaning for the target readers at the same time.

### **3. Analyze Domestication and Foreignization Strategies in The English-Chinese Translation of *Turning Red***

*Turning Red* is a typical film that is a combination of internal and external culture. The story took place in an ethnic Chinese family in Canada. The dialogues in the film possess both Chinese cultures related to the ancestors and local culture from the perspective of an adolescent. In translation, the translator uses foreignization and domestication strategies in different cases, in order to handle the culture shock flexibly, and ensure that the words explain and convey the correct information.

#### **3.1. Domestication strategy**

##### **3.1.1. The Definition of Domestication**

Domestication refers to the target-culture-oriented translation. According to Munday, by translating in a fluent and localized style, the foreignness in the text will be minimized [12]. The translator should absorb the literary features in English and turn them into Chinese expressions, especially some Chinese phrases and sentence patterns. It is feasible and easy for targeted Chinese audiences to understand the source language.

##### **3.1.2. The Case Study of Domestication in English-Chinese Translation**

###### **(1) Explication**

In this method, some adverbial words are paraphrased in Chinese. The two examples both used Chinese idiom to paraphrase, in order to give a clear expression.

They're the supreme beings who gave you life, who sweated and sacrificed so much to put a roof over your head. (SL)

他们是至高无上赐予你生命的人，含辛茹苦地给你一个栖身之所。(TL)

The dialogue happened when Meimei and her mother were in the temple, holding a ritual for their ancestor. In this sentence, the interpreter didn't use the strategy of a literal translation. If the phrase "sweated and sacrificed" was translated word by word, the audiences will not understand the specific effort of their ancestors, which may cause confusion. By using the corresponding Chinese idiom, the target audiences can better realize the struggle and hardship of Meimei's ancestors. At the same time, this strategy omitted redundant words and retained the information at the same time.

Mei, breathe. It's in the bag. (SL)

美美，深呼吸，我们十拿九稳了。(TL)

In this example, "It is in the bag" is an idiom in English. The phrase is mentioned when Meimei's friend claimed that they can raise the money for a concert. In this case, "It is in the bag" means the possibility of raising money is certain. The practical meaning is not the same as its literal meaning. Therefore, the use of an equivalent Chinese idiom can vividly describe the actual meaning in the whole text. It is feasible for the audiences to understand it. An idiom is also a short form of Chinese translation, which omits redundant information compared with a direct translation.

## (2) Equivalence

In this method, the translator found similar meanings and functions in the target culture, which makes it easier for the target audience to understand.

Oh. That's my little scholar. (SL)

哦，真是我的小秀才。(TL)

The dialogue happens when Meimei's mother asked how she was at school. After Meimei showed her high score in math, her mother called her "scholar". Scholar refers to a clever and hardworking student or a student who has been given a scholarship. When translating into Chinese, both the two meanings seem to be inflexible in the context. In order to fit in the informal and chaffing style, the interpreter applied the domestication strategy. In Chinese culture, "Xiu Cai" means one who passed the imperial examination at the country level. It is equivalent to scholar, creating a humorous contextual effect. It is also a reflection of Chinese culture. As Meimei and her mother belong to ethnic Chinese in Canada, the use of "Xiu Cai" corresponds with their habit and thoughts of standing out. This strategy also helps target audiences understand better on the line.

## (3) Adaption

This method can be seen as a form of equivalence. When a word has several meanings, it is required to choose the suited meaning in the targeted culture, which expresses the hidden connotation in the context.

Our family runs one of the oldest temples in Toronto (SL)

我们的家族在多伦多管理一家最古老，同时也是最独特的宗祠。(TL)

In the original text, the temple refers to the building used for the worship of gods. In western culture, the temple represents different kinds of buildings in different religions. But in the setting of the story, the building serves as a memorial area for their ancestor Sun Yee. And the word "temple" may cause confusion to the readers, and can't convey the exact definition. While in eastern culture, "Zong Ci" refers to the ancestral temple that is used to hold a memorial ceremony for the ancestors. This approach replaces the temple with the Chinese word "Zong Ci" so that it is more accessible to Chinese culture. The use of Chinese idioms conveys the actual meaning in a vivid description.

In the cases of domestication, the strategy of domestication is mainly used when the words are related with distinct meanings in Chinese and English. Since domestication is closely related to 'the

target culture, the interpreter should transform the English words into Chinese expressions to a great extent. After absorbing the whole context, the words with specific cultural symbols should be selected. By either using Chinese idioms or equivalent concepts in Chinese, the target readers can understand better in the original text. And the strategy can effectively simplify the words in the subtitle, which accords with the feature of instantaneity. The use of Chinese cultural expression also promotes intelligibility for audiences.

### 3.2. Foreignization Strategy

#### 3.2.1. The Definition of Foreignization

Foreignization refers to the source-culture-oriented translation. In this strategy, the translator should accept the cultural and linguistic differences between the two languages, and try to remain the original characteristic in the text with local expressions. Foreignization aims at presenting foreign culture to the target readers and retaining the source language in a dominance position.

#### 3.2.2. The Case Study of Foreignization in English-Chinese Translation

##### (1) Literal Translation

In this method, the phrases are directly translated word by word. It helps to retain the original meaning of the source text.

I was math champ in grade 8, you know? - Uh-huh. They called me the “Uncommon Denominator.”  
我在初中二年级的时候是数学竞赛冠军呢，知道不？他们称我为“不凡的分母”

After Meimei claimed that she can use a double-elbow to draw a circle, she began to recall her reputation in mathematics. In the dialogue, “Uncommon Denominator” was translated by words directly, which remains its literal meaning. It is used to describe Meimei’s outstanding as an ordinary person. The translation corresponds with the mathematical background in the text and reflects Meimei’s interest in mathematics. The target audiences can easily grasp the actual meaning behind the metaphorical phrase.

##### (2) Expansion

This method is often used in proper nouns. It is usually the added source information above the subtitle or the footnote, which explains the exotic words.

Your second-place spelling bee trophy. (SL)

拼字比赛第二名奖杯。(TL)

In this sentence, “spelling bee” refers to a kind of well-known spelling competition in North America. It is a phrase with a distinctly American style. From the perspective of an interpreter, “spelling bee” is a proper noun that can’t be translated from its denotation. Knowing its implication from reliable information is necessary. It is also required to add the supplementary definition in the script above the subtitle. From the perspective of target audiences, the strategy serves as a transcultural communication between the two languages and helps them better understand the meaning. It also consists of the culture shock in the whole film.

##### (3) Transcription

This method can be seen as a word-to-word production. It remains the original meaning and fits in the target context.

And I’ll beatbox. And I can bleach my hair too. (SL)

我玩节奏口技，我也可以漂染我的头发。(TL)

In this example, Meimei said that she can imitate the sound of the electronic drum. And “beatbox” is an exotic vocabulary in English. It is translated directly into Chinese without an alternative word. Because “beatbox” stems from western culture, which means producing electronic drum sounds with

rhythm. There is no appropriate explanation in Chinese, so the translator retains its original definition and recreated it by using the Chinese definition.

In the cases of foreignization, the strategy is mainly used when foreign words appear in the text. These words reflect English cultural characteristics and present specific meanings in the background. When translating foreign words into Chinese, the interpreter should translate literally, to retain the cultural feature as much as possible. By either transliterating the proper noun or giving a paraphrase as an explanation, the strategy of foreignization brings audiences closer to the exotic language and know more about the foreign culture.

#### 4. Conclusion

The translation of *Turning Red* applied both domestication and foreignization strategies. And the two strategies should be flexibly combined together in the process of translation. They both show the charm of Chinese traditional culture in foreign countries. From the whole passage, we can also conclude that there are some similarities and differences between the two strategies.

For domestication, the most prominent feature is bringing audiences closer to the original text and creating a Chinese contextual effect. The three examples of domestication provide us with a method of translation. By finding an equivalent concept in Chinese: either borrowing Chinese idioms or replace with culture-loaded words in Chinese, this strategy helps the translation vividly adapt to the domestic culture. In *Turning Red*, there are many Chinese elements. The translator retained these elements to the utmost, without changing the original meaning in the source language. And for foreignization, the most prominent feature is bringing the original text closer to the audience. The aim of foreignization is to disseminate exotic culture to the target audiences. So, the translator should try to explain the new definition in the translation. The theme of *Turning Red* is the life of adolescence in Canada, so there are still some foreign words. The three examples provide us with a different view. The literal translation is dominantly used in the text, in order to retain the meanings. Based on the literal translation, the translator also used paraphrase to explain the cultural terms. The added explanation is usually above the subtitles. This strategy promotes cross-cultural communication.

With the combination of both two strategies, the subtitles appear to be concise and distinct. In these examples, the subtitles are much shorter than the original text. The words are selected carefully, and some further information is also supplied to the target audiences. Instead of using domestication or foreignization, the translator used the two strategies in different cultural images. In conclusion, the subtitle of *Turning Red* consists of the basic feature of subtitling and plays an important part in cross-cultural communication for the audiences.

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