

A Feminist Translation Approach to Subtitle Translation Strategies of Myth of Love

Jingyi Zhang¹, Yutong He^{2,a,*}

¹Department of Foreign Language, Shanghai Ocean University, Shanghai, China

²Department of Chinese, Manzhouli College of Inner Mongolia University, Manzhouli, China

a. lindsay948475@my.yosemite.edu

*corresponding author

Abstract: Under the influence of globalization, different countries and regions in the world have diversified ways of cultural exchange, and film and television works of different languages and cultures have also been introduced into China. In this process, the translation quality of film and television works is particularly important. Due to the differences in language and culture of different countries and regions, the translation of film and television works plays a very important role in cultural communication and exchange. Excellent translation of film and television works not only enables people to better appreciate the works, but also enables people to feel the charm of different cultures and understand the differences between them and their own cultures. Taking the film *Myth of Love* as an example, this paper uses feminist translation strategies to analyze the translation characteristics of the target text. This article will employ the method of text analysis to analyze three major translation strategies of feminist characterization, feminist simplification and feminist awareness in the film *Myth of Love* under the framework of feminism translation.

Keywords: feminist translation, subtitle translation, *Myth of Love*

1. Introduction

Film and television subtitle translation is distinct from other forms of translation due to the need to ensure accessibility and comprehension, while also considering cultural and linguistic differences. The translation quality of film and television subtitles can even impact the audience's comprehension and reception of the work [1]. Consequently, the quality of subtitle translation in film and television works plays a vital role in the dissemination of film and television culture. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate subtitle translation in film and television works. The text serves as a medium for film and television subtitles, and the study of film and television subtitle translation must begin with the text.

In recent years, many subtitle translations of film and television works have begun to align with the growing influence of feminism [2]. The movie *Myth of Love* is an example of this trend. In most films directed by male filmmakers, female characters were often portrayed as being in a weak position in terms of gender constructs and gender gaze [3]. Male directors tend to shape female characters based on their perception of women, endowing them with characteristics such as tenderness, resilience, and selflessness. In these films, females are always in a passive position and

must wait for the male characters to rescue them [4]. However, *Myth of Love* breaks through the limitations by giving female protagonists strong personalities with delicate and unique female perspectives. The three female protagonists in *Myth of Love* are independent and self-esteem, and their handling of gender relationships is different from female roles in other Chinese films. They rely on themselves and do not depend on men, asserting their independence and control over their own lives. *Myth of Love* deconstructs the unassailable status of men through its unique narrative style, focusing on female growth and embodying the demands of feminism [5].

Myth of Love is a humorous Shanghai tale that portrays two middle-aged men, Bai and Wu, who appear to be the main male characters but are three women: Ms. Li, Gloria, and Bei Bei. Bai, a divorced painter, is introduced by a friend to Ms. Li, who is also divorced with a child; Gloria is one of Bai's students; and Bei Bei is Bai's ex-wife. They all break the prejudice against women in a patriarchal society, and their relationship with Bai can be both intoxicating and soberly cognizant. As a movie directed, written, and produced by a woman, *Myth of Love* presents the ideas of new-age women at a high level while demonstrating the power of neo-feminism among female filmmakers. The translator analyzes the subtitle translation of this movie through the perspective of bisexuality, to better convey the producer's feminist thoughts. The translation of *Myth of Love* embodies feminist translation strategies and translation methods in terms of feminist perspectives, and there are many feminist-rich examples in the translation, so this thesis only chooses a few examples for reference and analysis.

Feminism is a trend of thought against male hegemony and for women's independence formed against the background of the bourgeois patriarchal era. Women's issues are an area that requires attention and focus, just like translation issues, which have long been on the periphery of the field to which they belong.

Feminism in the West has risen earlier and its translation theories are quite fruitful. Shirley Simon, an advocate of female translation theory, points out in *Gender in Translation Theory* that feminist translation theorists should all insist on the ideological and political position of translation to create conditions for the construction of their gender identity [6]. This view of translation is a special view of women and reflects their cultural demands and political strategies. In *Translation and Gender: Translation in the Age of Feminism*, translator Flotow describes feminist translation strategies and their essential purposes and summarizes them as "additions", "adding preface footnotes", and "hijacking" [7]. By exploring the influence of feminism on translation theory, Gerdard suggests that feminist translation embodies the translator's agency by affirming gender differences and continually rereading and rewriting over and over again to more concretely represent women's aspirations.

Feminism in China developed late, coming to China from the West in the 1980s. Nowadays it is in the stage of continuous development, which makes the field of translation have richer theories. Feminist translation theory holds that "Feminist translation theory explores translation theory from the perspective of gender studies and is the embodiment of feminism in translation studies" [8]. Its theoretical research and practice focus on linguistically deconstructing the original text, eliminating male-centrism and sexism, and emphasizing the equal relationship between the translated text and the original text. The theory advocates a feminist translation intervention to realize the creative rebellion of translation and emphasizes the subjectivity of the translator, thus making women's and women's works visible in the language. According to some scholars in China, the main contents of feminist translation theory include: the elimination of discrimination against women in translation research and translation practice; redefinition of the relationship between translations and originals, where translations and originals should enjoy an equal relationship; and that translations also include many issues such as cultural ideology [9]. According to feminist translation theory,

translation by feminist translators is not only translation but also a kind of subjective writing with the right to speak in a sense [10].

Although subtitle translation and feminist translation are both developing well nowadays, there are fewer studies on the combination of the two today. Therefore, this article will examine how subtitling and feminist translation strategies can be better combined so that viewers can more accurately understand the intended message of the original film.

Based on the above discussion, this article will analyze the three major translation strategies of feminist characterization, simplification, and awareness in the film *Myth of Love* within the framework of feminism employing the method of textual analysis.

2. The Application of Feminist Translation Strategies in *Myth of Love*

The subtitles translation in the film *Myth of Love* employs three translation strategies to reflect the theoretical and conceptual perspectives of feminist translation: 1) feminist characterization, 2) feminist simplification, and 3) feminist awareness. This chapter will conduct an in-depth analysis of the feminist translation strategies used in the specific subtitle texts of *Myth of Love*.

2.1. Feminist Characterizations Translation Strategy

The feminist characterization strategy refers to the translator's approach from a feminist perspective, where the translator modifies the tone and personality of the character's dialogue in the subtitle translation based on their characteristics in the work. During the translation process, the translator often adjusts the degree of the characters' speech to highlight their personalities, thus creating more three-dimensional and well-rounded images, while also expressing their pursuit of gender equality and female dignity.

The three female protagonists in *Myth of Love* each possess unique and distinct female consciousness and personality traits, but this does not imply a convergence in character design. To allow the audience to intuitively perceive the differences in the protagonists' personalities, translators need to put effort into the translation of dialogues, highlighting the tone and choice of words to reflect the characters' traits and embody feminist ideas, adhering to the requirements of character differentiation in feminist literature. As can be seen in (1).

(1)男人脑子里的女人无非两种，一种多情女，一种清纯妹，一种是伤过他的坏女人，一种是像他妈一样的好女人，好到没有欲望。

Translation: That's the problem with male writers. To them, there are only two kinds of women. Sluts and virgins. One broke his heart. The other treats him like his mom does.

This passage discusses the alternating condemnation of Ms. Li and Gloria towards the stereotypical portrayal of women by the male director, Lao Bai. In Chinese, “多情女” refers to a woman who maintains ambiguous relationships with multiple men and manipulates their emotions, while “清纯妹” refers to a girl with a simplistic view of love and lacks romantic experience. The translator translates them as “sluts” and “virgins” respectively, expanding the semantic field from romance to sexuality, and further explains the meanings of “多情女” and “清纯妹” to convey the protagonists' disdain and contempt for such stereotypes. The two protagonists further elucidated the terms “多情女” and “清纯妹” in the subsequent scenes, employing the technique of free translation in the subtitles. This approach effectively conveys the connotations of the two terms, highlighting the characters' personalities and linguistic traits in a more visually perceptible manner. This also allows the audience to indirectly perceive their self-reliance and self-esteem as women. As can be seen in (2).

(2)你是个好人，但是一个女人不会因为一个男人是个好人就跟他在一起的。

Translation: You are truly a nice guy. But women never love a man because he's nice.

This passage describes Gloria's belief that Lao Bai has a good personality and is suitable as a romantic partner. However, she is aware that Mr. B does not have feelings for her, and continuing their relationship would only lower their moral standards as individuals. Therefore, when Lao Bai comes to see her again, she calmly utters this sentence and leaves. The original phrase “好人”(nice person) emphasizes the character aspect, while the subtitles translate it as “nice guy,” broadening the semantic scope to the gender level and emphasizing the differences between men and women. Additionally, the subtitles translate “一个女人”(a woman) as “women,” expanding the individual reference of Gloria in the original sentence to a general level, enhancing Gloria's gender identity as a woman.

Gloria is well aware of her and Bai's identities and fully understands the consequences of maintaining an ambiguous relationship without a foundation of emotions. More importantly, her self-esteem does not allow her to do so. In the original sentence, Gloria's mention of “在一起”(be together) is more superficial, emphasizing the romantic state. However, the translation in the subtitles explicitly portrays “love” as romantic feelings, intuitively expressing Gloria's self-esteem as a woman and reflecting the protagonist's clear perspective on love and values, allowing the audience to comprehend the rationality and self-identity of modern women.

2.2. Feminist Simplification Translation Strategy

Film and television subtitle text generally require simplification and space-saving. The subtitle text needs to be played simultaneously with the picture in the film and television work, so it should not be too long and the space occupied is very limited. The feminist translation strategy simplification considers these elements. In subtitle translation, the translator can analyze the text deeply from the female perspective, extract the main information, and simplify the translation to make the translated text match the length of the subtitle text. As can be seen in (3).

(3) 女人嫁不掉，死蟹一只。

Translation: A woman would drop dead if she didn't get married.

Film and television works have a wide audience and are a kind of cultural form facing the public. The audience is different in education level, age, and stratum. Therefore, when translating film and television works, it is necessary to take into account the acceptability of the audience, pay attention to the colloquial language, and be easy to understand, concise, and clear, to minimize the differences between different cultures, to achieve cross-cultural communication purposes. At this point, the translation characteristics of subtitles in film and television works coincide with the feminist strategy of “concise”.

Here's Miss Lee and Gloria talking about how older single women are treated in today's society. In Shanghai, “a dead crab” means “helpless, the result is bad.” The translator did not translate it according to the literal meaning but translated it as “drop dead”, which both reduced the differences between different cultures and retained the colloquial language in the translation process. The audience can also feel the condescending examination of the traditional sexist ideology on the “unruly” women.

This phenomenon of men's love and evaluation of women stems from the fact that in the patriarchal social and cultural structure, men as subjects have the right to arbitrarily define women as objects and others. Secondly, these evaluations change from negative stereotyping to positive praise, which also reflects the complexity and variability of the personality and cognition of the round characters. The change process of men from objectifying women to understanding and appreciating women presented in the *Myth of Love* also indicates that when people eliminate gender

stereotypes and truly understand each other, there is the possibility of creating gender harmony from individuals to society. As can be seen in (4).

(4)我现在是最好的状态

Translation: This is my time to shine.

This remark is mentioned when Gloria and Bai talk about her husband. “my best time” was originally translated as “my best time”, but it was translated as “my time to shine”. Not only does it show the meaning of “best”, but it also uses the verb “shine” to show that Gloria is a lively and energetic woman, which shows the characteristics of a new-era woman. This simplified feminist translation strategy not only shows the vitality of women but also pays attention to the spatial limitations in subtitle translation. The film achieves the goal of pursuing gender harmony and embodies the life consciousness of transcending gender nature through the portrayal of the round character and the shaping of the harmonious life relationship between the sexes. The use of the word “shine” not only shows her new-age feminine glow but also shows her freedom and not being restrained.

2.3. Feminist Awareness Translation Strategy

To increase audiences’ attention to feminism, feminist translators often utilize their role as female translators to highlight the agency of women in the translation process. Feminist awareness strategies refer to translators employing their subjective consciousness to emphasize the translation strategy of “female consciousness” when translating the source text. This strategy has a wide range of applications, including the translation of voice-overs and hidden subtitles. Translators often employ this translation strategy to highlight the prominence of female consciousness and feminist ideology within the characters.

Although *Myth of Love* is narrated through the emotional line of Lao Bai, the core of the story focuses on the female protagonists. This movie addresses the most realistic gender issues, erasing gender stereotypes and embodying a strong female subjectivity. To convey this female consciousness in translation, the translator must exert their agency, leading to the embodiment of the subjectivity in the translated text, and the feminist consciousness strategy is the best choice for the translator. As can be seen in (5).

(5)我是讲原则的人，我外面再玩，家里我是永远摆在第一位的。

Translation: I’m a woman of principle. I may play games, but family always comes first.

After discovering that Beibei had an affair after marriage, Lao Bai wanted to divorce her. However, Beibei believed that she had only made a mistake that “every man would make” and strongly advocated that she also cared about the family and should not be criticized in such a way. The translator, by emphasizing Beibei’s female subject position, translated the word “人” as “a woman” instead of “a person,” highlighting her female consciousness.

The term “玩” in this context carries a negative connotation, indicating irresponsible and unreliable behavior. However, the subtitles translate it as “play games,” which downplays the original emotional tone. Furthermore, the use of “but” as a contrastive conjunction fails to convey the negative impact of the character’s actions, instead shifting the focus of the sentence to highlight the fact that Beibei, despite frequently going out to enjoy life, still cares about her family. This adds a positive portrayal of the female protagonist, Beibei. The translator demonstrates their conscious guidance and subjective role in the translation process, making Beibei’s basic female desires appear more reasonable and emphasizing her status as a female subject and her feminine spirit, in line with the characteristics of consciousness.

Feminist translators try to embody the role of female translators in the translation process, to show obvious female subjectivity. The strategy of female consciousness refers to the translation

strategy of highlighting the character's "female consciousness" by translating the original text. As can be seen in (6).

(6) 一个女人这辈子没有为自己活过是不完整的。

Translation: No woman is complete without living for herself.

"No woman is complete without a child," she said in the previous article. Gloria, as a representative of freedom in the film, rebelled against this patriarchal social concept: "A woman is not complete until she has dumped a hundred men in her life." In a follow-up discussion, Gloria uttered the phrase. The example sentence uses the method of free translation, rather than literal translation, through negation, emphasizing the unique views and opinions of women, expressing feminist views, and opposing the male-centered free translation method can deeply express the characteristics of the new era of feminism in the film. While highlighting the translator's subjectivity, the film also expresses Gloria's contempt and ridicule of stereotypes as far as the effect of the film is concerned. Meanwhile, the emphasis on female subjects is also essential in feminist views, so putting women in the subject position to emphasize is an exact form of expression.

3. Conclusions

As a film that represents the new era of women, *Myth of Love* deconstructs the concept of patriarchy. It not only eliminates the stereotypical image of women in patriarchal society, but also deeply explores women's subjectivity, thereby drawing attention to feminism. This article takes a feminist perspective and uses textual analysis to study the three translation strategies employed in the film *Myth of Love*: feminist characterization, feminist simplification, and feminist awareness. In the film, the characterization strategy effectively portrays the distinct personalities of the protagonists through translation, and utilizes the characters' dialogue to articulate feminist demands. The simplification strategy condenses the text and extracts the core feminist ideas, conveying them to the audience in a simple and understandable manner. The awareness strategy, on the other hand, showcases the feminist subjectivity in the subtitles through the translator's invisible role behind the scenes. These three translation strategies uncover the feminist ideas embedded in the film and convey them to the audience more intuitively through translation, promoting the development of feminist translation. Currently, there is limited research on the subtitle translation of Chinese films and television works from a feminist perspective. Therefore, this article analyzes the subtitle translation strategies of *Myth of Love* within the framework of feminism, to some extent filling the gap in this field and promoting the development of feminist translation. By integrating feminism into translation, it allows the audience to gain a deeper understanding of existing women's issues and translation problems, while providing reference and inspiration for future researchers in related fields. However, it should be noted that this article only analyzes the film *Myth of Love* and does not cover all aspects of film and television works, thus having limitations in its research scope. This article serves as a reference for the study of feminist subtitle translation in film and television works, and future research will continue to expand the scope and delve deeper into subtitle translation studies.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

References

- [1] Qian, S. C. (2000) *Film Translation—a Field Of Growing Importance in Translation*. *Chinese Translators Journal* 21(1): 61-65.

- [2] Li, H.Y. (2007). *Gender and Translation—An Overview of the Study of Gender Issues in Translation in China*, *Journal of Guangdong University of Foreign Studies*, 49: 49-52.
- [3] Ji, L. and Wang, Y. L. (2020). "The Other" in the Adversarial "Gaze" and "Anti-gaze" in Chinese Women's Films since the 1980s. *Contemporary Cinema*, 6: 141-145.
- [4] Lu, D. (2022). *Changing and Unchanging of Feminist Movies—From Love Education to Myth of Love*, 34(11): 77-81.
- [5] Qin, X. Q. (2022) *Myth of Love : A Rose with Thorns in the Post-Feminist Era*. *Contemporary Cinema* 2: 31-34.
- [6] Simon, S. (1996) *Gender in Translation: Culture Identity and the Politics of Transmission*. London: Routledge.
- [7] Flotow, L.V. (1997) *Translation and Gender—Translating in the "Era of Feminism"*. Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing.
- [8] Wang, D. (2013) *The Application of Feminist Translation Theory in the English Translation Study of Water Margin*. *Jian Nan Wen Xue* 10: 266.
- [9] Jiang, X.H. (2004) *Influences of Feminism upon Translation Theory*. *Chinese Translators Journal* 4: 12-17.
- [10] Xu, L. (2004) "Rewriting" in the Name of Feminie—*The Significance of the Feminism Translation Theory in the Study of the Translator's Subjectivity*. *Chinese Translators Journal* 4: 18-21.