

On an Analysis of Translating Humor for Subtitling in *Ice Age* from the Perspective of Relevance Theory

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Abstract

The past decades have witnessed a constant flood of overseas movies into China, making subtitle translation an irreplaceable role in Chinese market. To gain more people's attention, the element of humor originally implicit in the subtitles of movies turns to be much highlighted. However, the different understandings of humor among different countries increase the difficulty of translation owing to their discrepancy in culture and language. Therefore, it is imperative to discover a systematic and proper theory to guide subtitle translation. Relevance theory has a set of globally well-known hypotheses in the field of cognitive pragmatics. It regards human communication as an ostensive-inferential process. And it also stresses that, to make communication successfully, the shared goal between the speaker and the listener should be fully comprehending each other. Relevance theory has been widely used in many fields, such as linguistics, literature and translation. Therefore, it has a high interpretative power to interpret humorous utterance. Then, on the foundation of relevance theory, this article focuses on six specific techniques of humor translation in the subtitles of the movie *Ice Age* from two aspects—direct translation and indirect translation—with an attempt to raise the efficiency of translators who are engaging in subtitle translation in China and meanwhile, enrich the study of subtitle translation.

Keywords

Relevance theory, humor, translation techniques, *Ice Age*.

1. Introduction

General speaking, language is closely related to culture whose discrepancy can be embodied in corresponding language, for language, as the carrier of culture, is an inherent part of it. With regard to movies, they are a crucial and powerful means of the diffusion of national cultures, so from this sense the language displayed in movies is culture-loaded. Translation, as a special act in human society, plays an important role in conveying information among people, such as their emotions, feelings and different ethnic culture. Thus, when it comes to movies, it is inevitable to transfer exotic language into native equivalence in the course of the exchange of different cultures, namely, subtitle translation. Hence, under the background of globalization, subtitle translation turns to be a necessary portion of propagating domestic and overseas culture.

However, on account of the great differences in various culture and the peculiarity of the translation of movies, the task of subtitle translation is hard to get through successfully or correctly. Fortunately, not a few translation theories can be applied to subtitle translation, such as Nida's functional equivalence, skopos' teleology, and Gutt's relevance theory. Apart from the guidance of theories, translators also need to pay attention to the features of subtitle translation, and employ befitting translation approaches on the basis of good understanding of movies (Wu Wei, 2013).

Relevance theory, proposed by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson in 1986, was developed by Ernest August Gutt to the field of translation in 1992, roundly demonstrating what is translation and how to translate. The theory mainly holds that the communication of language is an ostensive-inferential process, which means the speaker should make his words explicit, and the listener should deduce the communicator's meaning according to his ostensive means (Sperber & Wilson, 1986). The theory also believes human cognition always goes for maximum relevance, while verbal communication for optimal relevance. This theory, as has been demonstrated in many previous studies (e.g., Wang Lei, 2008; Zhu Yan, 2007a), can work out many translation difficulties to the largest extent, and has been adopted to a variety of current translation researches, some of which explore the translation of humorous utterance with the use of relevance theory. For example, Huang Yangying (2009) analyzes the possibility of applying relevance theory into the translation of humorously satirical texts through some real cases and finally gives three advice about how to well maintain the original text's meanings during translating Chinese into Russian. Wu Di (2015) makes an elaborate analysis on a Chinese well-received novel, *Besieged City*, primarily focusing on its humorous language under the guidance of relevance theory. Similar to Wu Di (2015), Dong Ruochen (2023) also adopts relevance theory to probe into some translating methods and efficiency for humor in the novel *The Biography of a Stingy Man*. To sum up, we can easily see that numbers of existing researches have proved relevance theory is a good guidance for translation, and subtitle translation certainly should be included.

Nevertheless, although there are volumes of researches on translation, the majority of them tend to concentrate on the translation of literature instead of subtitle translation. Yet movie, as a crucial vehicle of culture exchange and communication, ought to be attached importance to in the field translation. At the same time, to audience, humor in films plays a great role in deciding whether they have the interest in watching the movies or they can fully understand the exotic culture in the film. So, the element of humor has a weighty place in films, particularly in comedy ones, then it is worthy of exploring the translation of humorous utterance in some hit movies. However, it should be also noted that different from literature, the frames of movies move very fast, rendering it difficult for audience to completely understand humor implicit in the films. Therefore, properly translating humor in the scripts of foreign movies is a big challenge for translators. There are countless popular films in the world among which *Ice Age* is the object of the current study. The movie is a typical, humorous and animated film produced by an American famous star, Ray Romano. *Ice Age* totally has five series, from the first season in 2002 to the last one in 2016, all of which are filled with amusing dialogues, providing lots of scripts for researchers to deal with. Moreover, the box office of its each season is far more than 0.8 billion, showing a fact that the film enjoys a great popularity all over the world.

In a nutshell, combining the above-mentioned information together, we can safely conclude that subtitle translation is a must-have in the work and research of translation although not so much attention has been given to it in the former researches, and more importantly, it is inevitable to cope with the element of humor while translation. From this regard, under the guidance of relevance theory, this article studies on the methods of subtitle translation in humorous utterance from two aspects: direct translation and indirect translation based on the movie *Ice Age*. It is expected to enrich the study of subtitle translation, particularly humor translation, and give some enlightenment for movie translators.

2. Relevance Theory

In 1986, Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson raised relevance theory that was subsequently applied into various fields, like linguistics, translation, literature and so on. Relevance theory, to be specific, is an inferential theory of communication with the view of interpreting how the hearer deduces the speaker's intended meaning. It argues that at any given circumstance the audience will not stop seeking for meaning until he finds the implication conforms to his expectation of relevance (Gutt, 2004, p.31). In a word, relevance theory regards human communication as an ostensive- inferential process through searching for relevance.

Then, what is relevance? According to Ernst August Gutt, a student of Sperber and Wilson who further enriches and applies relevance theory to translation, points out relevance does not have a specific notion, but it is defined under the following condition (Gutt, 2004, p.31):

“Extent condition 1: an assumption is relevant in context to the extent that its contextual effects in this context are large.

Extent condition 2: an assumption is relevant in context to the extent that the efforts required to process it in this context is small” (qtd. Gutt, 2004, p.31).

Therefore, first, we can find that relevance has various degrees. Second, relevance lies in the interaction of two basic elements: contextual effects and processing efforts. Third, now that those two factors are context-related, thus relevance is associated with context. In the second point, relevance theory mainly claims that the key to human communication is to create an expectation of “optimal relevance”, that is, the hearer hopes he can get “adequate contextual effects at minimal processing efforts”. Hence, at any given time, the listener will naturally and implicitly make such assumption that he can get enough contextual effects as much as possible without spending unnecessary efforts. Under above condition, Sperber and Wilson (1986) present “the principle of relevance”, namely, “Every act of ostensive communication communicates the presumption of its own optimal relevance (p. 158). So, most ostensive human communication goes for optimal relevance. In the third point, we should primarily figure out what context is. As the explanation of Sperber and Wilson (1986a), the context of an utterance is “the set of premises used in interpreting [it]” “a subset of the hearer's assumptions about the world” (p.15). In other words, relevance theory holds that context is connected to psychology, and refers to the “cognitive environment” mixed with a series of external factors which provide a number of information that can be processed by the hearer to interpret the speaker's utterance (Gutt, 2004, p.27-28). Thereby, we can say context has relevance, and relevance is dependent on context.

A crucial concern in relevance theory is how communicators successfully understand each other. Consider the various deductions processed by both side, it is difficult to communicate effectively. Nevertheless, there are a lot of evidences in life warranting that the addressee is able to infer the speaker's intention. According to Sperber and Wilson (1986), they state the reason is that ostensive-inferential communication usually takes advantage of certain cognitive principles—the mind generally speaking is apt to deal with relevant information.

To conclude, relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1986) thinks human communication is a process of ostension and inference, and a cognitive act governed by the principle of relevance as well as dependent on context. Human cognition regards the maximum of relevance as the guidance, while verbal communication is in charge of optimal relevance. In general, the hearer expects the best contextual effects with the smallest expenditure of processing efforts in order to understand the communicator's intended meaning.

2.1. The Appliange of Relevance Theory in Translation

In 1991, Ernst August Gutt firstly applied relevance theory to translation, and published the book *Translation and Relevance: Cognition and Context*, bringing in a huge impact on the research of translation.

In his book, Gutt gives a new account for translation that it is a dynamically ostensive-inferential process with the explanation of source language (SL). Gutt argues the object of translation study should be the mechanism of mind, because translation is a behavior of verbal communication, rather than purely code switching. For the purpose of the acquisition of certain communicative effects, the translator has to flexibly infer the meaning of a utterance so as to recognize the communicator's intention and thus convey it to the receiver. Similarly, the receiver also understands the addresser's intention by dynamical reasoning on the basis of his cognitive context. Therefore, in this process, the translator has two identities: first, the author and translator consist of two communicative parties, namely, the author is a communicator, providing source text, while the translator is an addressee, interpreting and inferring the author's wills by looking for "communicative clues". Second, the translator altogether with the reader/audience constitutes two communicative parties. In this case, the translator is the communicator, and the reader/audience is the receiver. The translator passes the author's meaning on the reader/audience via translation, so the receiver is enabled to comprehend the translation based on contextual assumptions. But the problem is that the translator should have enough knowledge of the audience, otherwise the text he translates may produce wrong information to them.

As a consequence, the role of translator is so important that he should make a correct judgment of the differences between source language (ST) and target language (TL) rooted in their diverse cognitive environments. In other words, in accordance with communicative intention, varying cognitive context and the expectation of the receiver, the translator ought to exploit appropriate translation approaches to pursuit for optimal relevance. In that way, the receiver can gain the greatest contextual effects at the minimal efforts, thereby the goal of translation being guaranteed. For this reason, optimal relevance is both the aim of translators and the criterion of translation (Su Yuanyun, 2010).

Apart from above thoughts, the ability to cope with "explicatures and implicatures" is rather vital for a translator as well. In relevance theory, "explicatures" mean those analytic implications which the speaker wants to present, while those contextual assumptions that the speaker intends to deliver are called "implicatures" (Gutt, 2004, p.40). So, to understand an utterance, we should make clear explicatures and implicatures. This requires the translator should try to recognize which implication belongs to explicatures and implicatures, so he can help audience understand the source text correctly. Then, how? The answer is still one: the principle of relevance (Gutt, 2004, p.40). That is to say, under the assistance of the translator and the principle of relevance, the audience can find out the original text's meaning expressed by the communicator and regard it as the first interpretation, instead of the second communication.

All in all, Gutt gives a new definition of translation, and considers optimal relevance as the principle of translation, which is meaningful to translation, especially to subtitle translation. Additionally, relevance theory's appliange in humor is also well-received and practicable among other schools in humor research. Yet, different from other translation, subtitle translation has its own unique features. A good translation should consider not only the guiding theory, but also the target text. In light with the research by professor Qian Shaochang (2000), the language of movies has five fundamental features: listening, comprehensiveness, instantaneity, popularization as well as non-annotation.

(a) Listening

It is known to us that movies are audiovisual and dynamic, whereas books are eyes-dependent. For audience, it is rather essential to listen attentively while they are watching the screen. Thus, translators should not take ignorance of a little piece of the details in subtitles. For example, the translation of “he” “she” “it” into Chinese is “他(ta1)” “她(ta1)” “它(ta1).” These three Chinese words that have different meanings respectively share the same pronunciation and pitch, which exerts no impacts on the understandings of readers but on audience potentially because of the limitation of the short time to read the subtitle. Hence, listening is one of the characteristics in subtitles.

(b) Comprehensiveness

Comprehensiveness refers to the integrity of a movie, including the performance of actors, the design of frames, the effects of music and so on. As for a translator, his work is to recognize the relationship between the dialogues of actors and their performance. At the same time, the discourse of performers is for the most part under the control of their performance. To be specific, their dialogues are restricted by body language, location, roles and so on. Thereby, translators should not only concern the scripts in movies but also the features and emotions of actors.

(c) Instantaneity

For the reason that a movie is dynamic and vivid, it does not allow audience to listen or watch it over and over again, or think it carefully in a short time. On the contrary, readers can discreetly reread a section in a book if they are not able to understand it clearly. In consequence, the target text of films should be fluent, logical as well as intelligible so that audience does not need to spend a lot of time to realize or think it, which is rather suitable for comedic movies.

(d) Popularization

It requires that dialogues in a film ought to be popular and easy to understand so that almost all audience, regardless of their distinction of educational background and age, are capable of comprehending movies. Hence, the translation of source text in a motion picture should also coincide to above requirements.

(e) Non-annotation

General speaking, notations rarely occur in a movie, for they may dizzy and confuse audience. Professor Qian (2000) suggests that there are two conditions which are difficult to translate without annotation: the first one is related to huge cultural diversity. For instance, many Chinese people acquaint themselves little with Christianity and Bible. If someone in a movie says, “he commits a crime in the sixth commandment of Bible”, and the translation is “他犯了圣经中第六诫,” Chinese audience will find it hard to understand this word, because few of them know the ten commandments in Bible. Another one is word games including pun. Pun might be the toughest one to be translated in word games, because it bears a heavy weight of culture. For example, “Hi, Jack.” The original meaning is someone greeting with Jack, but it can also refer to one who wants to hijack a plane. If it is explained by Chinese, such as “我要劫机,” “你好, 杰克” or “你好, 劫机,” the connotative sense of humor will not be manifested and audience will hardly understand it. So, without annotation, pun is difficult to be fully illustrated. Therefore, before translating subtitles in films, translators should attach importance to their features, thereby putting appropriate methods to use.

2.2. Understanding Humor with Relevance Theory

Humor, a special way of expression, possesses numerous interpretations in many related theories, whereas none of them can be the single one to decipher humor (Owen H. Lynch, 2002, p.425). But it is noted that relevance theory, among those schools, raises a new view of humorous utterance and its translation from the sight of linguistics. Although it does not define

humor precisely, but it explains how humor comes into being and how to translate humor, indicating the direction of translating humor.

It is known that in the general communication, the speaker tends to express his meaning frankly, so the hearer can establish the best relevance with the other side at the cost of least efforts. However, in humorous utterance, this routine is broken, and the speaker uses some seemingly irrelevant information to his words on purpose, thereby leading the hearer to a sense of incongruity. But it is the disparity that secures the receptor the information of humor, making him burst into laughter. Relevance theory stresses that the irrelevance only lives in the respect of semantics, which is still under the control of the principle of relevance. The mechanism of laughter-making by humor has two points:

(a). The distinctions between maximum relevance and optimal relevance in communicative meaning;

(b). The inverse ratio made up by relevance and processing efforts.

In (a), as relevance theory points out, human cognition is guided by maximum relevance, and communication by optimal relevance. Thus, the communicators always look for optimal relevance. When this expectation is not reached, the gap between the best and the large relevance will produce the effects of humor. As a result, a sense of disharmony triggers the audience's laughter. In (b), as mentioned in the last chapter, the degree of relevance hinges on two factors: inferential efforts and contextual effects. Meanwhile, the relationship of relevance with the former one is converse, and with the last one is matching. Therefore, with the indirect expression of the humor producer, the degree of relevance is low, so contextual effects are small and the receiver needs to spend more efforts to discover the relevance in order to exactly understand it. During this course, the extra investment of reasoning efforts will be compensated for added contextual effects, and then a sense of joy is generated after the understanding of humor.

To translate humor in communication, relevant inference is essential for understanding. Relevance theory holds that humor translation is a special case in translation, an interlingual interpretive utilization and a communicative act on the basis of ostension and inference, which still complies with the principle of relevance. In consequence, the translator should convey the author's intention (causing the audience laughing) to audience, and know how to realize the audience's expectation (being pleased). That is to say, the translator is supposed to make the connotations ostensive in SL as much as possible, namely, uncovering the inner factors that produce the effect of humor including the barriers resulted from the differences of culture & language or the likes, on the foundation of keeping the style and humorous effects of SL.

In a conclusion, relevance theory demonstrates the fundamental of humor, so its analysis on humorous utterance is effective for the translation of humor.

2.3. The Particularity of Relevance Theory

In contrast to other theories used in the field of translation and humor, relevance theory has more interpretive forces.

To begin with, in translation, relevance theory lays emphasis on the nature of translation, that is, communication. At the same time, the essence of communication is inference, and translation is a specific way of communication. Gutt (2004) suggests there are three communicators in the process of translation: the author in ST, the translator and the audience. Among these three characters, the translator has double roles: the addresser and the addressee. Compared with traditional dualism—source text (ST)& target text (TT), this statement has more advantages, because it takes the cognitive environment of audience into account, and enhances the flexibility of the work of translator. Moreover, relevance theory proposes two momentous principles: cognition and communication (the latter is highlighted), giving a new method for translation. More than that, it solves the crux of humorous utterance translation.

In the case of humor, in contrast to three traditional school in humor study (including superiority theory, release theory and incongruity theory), the uniqueness of relevance theory rests in its linguistic perspective, and exhaustive analysis on the generation of humor, as well as the methods to translate humor under the guidance of the principle of relevance. Limitations as it may have, it still enjoys the strong validity and interpretive forces.

3. The Techniques of Humor Translation

On the basis of relevance theory, Gutt (2004) gives a clear introduction about the concept of direct translation and indirect translation (in particular the former). He argues that these two notions come from Wilson and Sperber (1986)'s explanation of direct quotations and indirect quotations. Relevance theory interprets that the purpose of indirect quotations is to paraphrase the "prepositional form" of original utterance, namely, the basic meaning of source text, other than to retain the "linguistic properties" of it. So, its words and sentence structure can be changed, as well as its tone and voice. Hence, indirect quotations are an "interpretive use" of language (Wilson & Sperber, 1988). Different from indirect quotations, direct quotations require every word said by the speaker should be reserved, as if what the audience hears is all from the speaker. Thus, direct quotations must keep all "linguistic properties" of source text. Therefore, direct quotations are a descriptive use of language.

In light of the above statements, Gutt (2004) extends them into translation. He illustrates that indirect translation, equal to indirect quotations, makes a big adjustment of the content of source language. It aims at the retention of "resemblance in cognitive effects" (Gutt, 2000, p.133). As for direct translation, it is similar to direct quotations, depending on the "resemblance in linguistic properties" (Gutt, 2000, p.133). However, the properties of language do not have universality, so instead of making all linguistic properties of source text stay, it is better to reserve "communicative clues" which can guide the audience to discover the communicator's intention (Gutt, 2000, p.134). For this reason, direct translation is not a descriptive use of language, but an interpretive use of language (Gutt, 2000, p.171). So, translation, as mentioned before, is an inter-lingual interpretive use.

With respect to the relationship between direct translation and indirect translation, they consist of "a continuum" (Gutt, 2004, p.172). In this continuum, indirect translation occupies the majority, while direct translation the leaving. That is to say, in the course of translation, most cases belong to indirect translation, while few of them can use direct translation.

All in all, Gutt raises two strategies of translation based on relevance theory, which is beneficial to subtitle translation. With regard to the movie, *Ice Age*, in fact it is an American animated comedic movie, first produced in 2002. Following this film, there are four subsequent series including *Ice Age: The Meltdown* in 2006, *Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs* in 2009, *Ice Age: Continental Drift* in 2012, and *Ice Age: Collision Course* in 2016. The movie mainly shows the adventure of a sloth Sid, with a tiger Diego and a mammoth Manny in the period of ice era. What is worth mentioning is that all the series of this movie enjoy a continuously high popularity around the world. Except the excellent design of figures and actions, their dialogues are so laughable that the study of the subtitles on humorous utterance in this movie is significant and beneficial.

3.1. Direct Translation

Now that direct translation is the endeavor to interpretatively resemble the content of the original, translators should make the author's informative intention consistent with the audience's expectation with the foundation of the good understanding of source text. In this aspect, there are three techniques that can be employed: equivalent conversion with humor, puns for puns and annotation.

3.1.1. Equivalent Conversion with Humor

This approach refers to on the premise of keeping the effects of humor in humorous words, a translator can look for the target words which share the same meaning with the source ones. It demands that receptor audience can understand the intended humor even though it is translated straightly. The following example will make it much clearer.

A: Why not call it the Big Chill or the Nippy era? I am just saying how do we know it's an ice age?
(为什么不管这叫“大寒”或者“寒冷时代”? 我是说我们怎么知道这是“冰河世纪”?)

B: Because of all the ice. (因为四周全是冰!)

(*Ice Age* in 2002)

This dialogue is taken on the beginning of the first movie. They are two animals who are talking about the source of the name “Ice Age”. The discourse is humorous, because the questioner wants an answer conforming to maximum relevance, while the hearer does not reach his expectation but gives a response close to optimal relevance, thereby such difference generating the effect of humor. In this conversation, it is obvious that direct translation is adopted, for instance, “the Big Chill” and “Nippy era” are translated directly without any procession, including animal B's answer. With the usage of this method, it can be found that the effects of humor are still maintained. So, to find equivalent words to source ones with the retention of humorous effects is also a good method to use in subtitle translation.

3.1.2. Puns for Puns

Pun or wordplay, defined by Delabastita (1996, p.128), is “the common name for the varied literal phenomena where structural characteristics of the language(s) are used, to produce a communicatively meaningful confrontation of two (or more) linguistic structures with more or less semblable forms and more or less diverse meanings”(see also Delabastita, 1993, p.57). Meanwhile, “puns which contrast linguistic structures with different meanings are rooted in their formal similarity” (Delabastita, 1996, p.128, original emphasis). In addition, the purpose of puns is to render the speaker's utterance implicit or humorous, and sometimes to impress someone. Hence, In the course of translation, in order to equivalently convey the author's meaning to the audience without changing source sentence's form, the translator has to find the same way to express the author's humor, namely substituting puns for puns. The example is as follows:

Gutt: It has been a diversion.

这是调虎离山计。

Walrus: I know. I am having a blast.

嗯嗯，夸我们是老虎呢！我好开心。

Gutt: No, pinhead, they're stealing my ship.

不，笨蛋，他们要偷我的船。

(*Ice Age: Continental Drift* in 2012)

The piracy is fooled by the group of Sid so that they leave their ice ship. When they find the truth, the above dialogues happen. In the conversation, “diversion” is a pun, because “diversion” has two common meanings: one's attention is dispersed and entertainment. What Gutt understands is the former, while walrus the latter. In Chinese, the meaning of “调虎离山” is equal to “diversion”. In this word, “虎” can be a pun: if being put into the four-character structure, it means diversion; if being separated, it only means tiger, a fierce animal. Walrus thought he is described as strong as a tiger, so he is glad, whereas the true meaning is on reverse. So, the translation also has a pun in Chinese. Thus, this method is fit for puns in English.

3.1.3. Annotation

Some humorous utterances are full of ethnic features, which is hard to discover an equivalent word in target language correctly and effectively, regardless of the exploitation of direct or indirect translation. For instance, if a translator is unable to find a pun in TL to replace it in SL, he could add a notation in the subtitles of movies. But what should be noted is that in the consideration of non-annotation (one of the traits of subtitle translation), the extra remark should not be long (no more than five words). Here is an example:

Gutt: My name is Captain Gutt.

叫我格特船长。

Manny: “Captain Gutt”? Really? I have a little paunch, too, but I wouldn’t name myself after it. (格特(内脏)船长? 真的吗? 我也有内脏, 但我不会以此做名字。)

(*Ice Age: Continental Drift in 2012*)

The background of this dialogue is that the group of Manny comes across a flock of pirates whose leader is a monkey named Gutt. The pirate kidnaps and persuades Manny, Sid, Granny, and Diego to join them. The above conversation is the first part of “greeting”.

Here the word “Gutt” is a pun, for its pronunciation is close to “gut” meaning viscera. This is why Manny misunderstands it. Nevertheless, it is tough to find an equivalent pun in Chinese. So, in case that the audience cannot figure out the implicit humor, adding a notation after the name is not a bad idea. In this way, the audience may overcome the gap of the different culture through processing the information by themselves.

3.2. Indirect Translation

Compared with direct translation, indirect translation tends to be flexible and frequently adopted in movies in particular comedic ones. As stated by Gutt (2000, p.133), indirect translation presents not only the implicit meanings of ST, but also a more comprehensible way of humor for received audience with the same cognitive effects. There are three techniques of subtitle translation for humorous utterance: the injection of catchwords, the supplement with idioms and the conversion of sentence structures.

3.2.1. The Injection of Catchwords

This method requires translators replace common words of modern ones, especially those which are popular in the public. So, most of the catchwords are easy to understand, hilarious, or unforgettable. In the subtitle translation of a comedic film, it frequently takes advantage of buzzwords, because they can express the author’s intention clearly and vividly. Most importantly, the majority of the audience are capable of understanding it, so this way of translation is of great significance. For example,

A. Folks, be **the first** in the valley to have your very mobile home. (*Ice Age: Continental Drift in 2012*)

快来喔, **抢购**就可以带上跑着的家。

B. Escaping the flood is the perfect time to **shed those unsightly pounds**. (*Ice Age: The Meltdown in 2006*)

逃离洪水是最佳的**减肥**时机。

C. Hey, if you ever master hygiene, **try working on sensitivity**. (*Ice Age in 2002*)

不卫生就罢了, 不要这么白目。

D. Dude, you are **awesome, man!** You are like the brother I never had. (*Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs in 2009*)

哥们, 你太**酷**了, 你就像是我失散多年的兄弟。

...

In a word, the usage of catchwords is a vital means of subtitle translation to keep the same effects of humor.

3.2.2. The Supplement with Idioms

In general, the idioms filled with an ethnic culture are hard to be translated equivalently, while in fact they are common to be seen in Chinese movies. The most frequent one is words with four-character structure. In Chinese, they contain affluent meanings (including those of humorous feelings), so they can be applied to translation. See the following instance:

Sid: You know, my mother once told me that bad news just good news in disguise.

我妈妈曾对我说：赛翁失马，焉知非福

Diego: Was this before she abandoned you?

她抛弃你的时候说的吧？

Sid: But the point being that, even though things look bad, there is a rainbow every corner. And nothing but smooth sailing ahead!

反正我的意思是尽管看似山穷水尽，但总会柳暗花明，然后就一帆风顺。

Manny: This is what you said smooth sailing?

这就是你说的一帆风顺？

(*Ice Age: Continental Drift* in 2012)

The background of the conversation is that Sid, Diego and Manny are flooded to ocean on an ice rock. So strong the storm and waves are that they find it difficult to survive. Under this circumstance, they begin this chat. The translation in Chinese employs a large quantity of idioms, coinciding to the character of Sid (like showing off his knowledge and exaggerating) as well as increasing the distinction between the words and the reality. Thus, the effects of humor produce.

3.2.3. The Conversion of Sentence Structures

A sentence structure, like assertive and negative sentence, can be altered in the course of translation with the premise of not changing the author's original meaning. Sometimes, a person seems to affirm a fact, while actually he denies it. So, changing a sentence structure is very common in translation, and it is also adoptable in humorous utterance. For example,

Animals A: make you, sloth.

谁鸟你呀树懒。

Sid: make me, sir. It's all about respect.

叫我谁鸟你，先生。一点都不尊老敬贤。

(*Ice Age: The Meltdown* in 2006)

In this dialogue, an animal makes fun of Sid, although he is just a child. When Sid hears this word, he is a little unhappy. So the tone in "it's all about respect" can be transformed into denial, which increases the degree of humor as well.

In brief, there are six techniques that can be employed in subtitle translation in the aspect of humorous utterance.

4. Conclusion

This article focuses on the techniques of humor translation in the subtitles of the movie *Ice Age* from the perspective of relevance theory. It finds that relevance theory has a strong force in explaining the nature of translation and humor, so it is significant to use it to the analysis on subtitle translation. In relevance theory, the principle of relevance is the central idea of it, that is, cognitive and communicative principles are respectfully associated with maximum relevance and optimal relevance (Sperber & Wilson, 1986). Further, the hearer in general

expects the best contextual effects with the smallest expenditure of processing efforts in order to understand the communicator's intended meaning (Sperber & Wilson, 1986).

As for the source of humor, relevance theory states that humor comes from the gap resulted from diverse cognition and contextual separation where maximum relevance turns to optimal relevance and vice versa. In addition, in the understandings of humor, Chinese and English have a lot of differences mainly in three aspects: the distinction of the meanings of words or phrases, sentence structures and culture (Zhu Yan, 2007b, p. 203).

However, though humor is important in movies, not so many people study it in subtitle translation. Although it may be a little difficult to translate humor, the author finds that relevance theory can be a suitable tool to analyze subtitle translation of humorous utterance. It is also suggested that based on the good understanding of relevance theory, the translator should also comply with the law of faith when he is committed to the translation of humor language in movies. As for faith, it is elaborately explained in relevance translation theory by Gutt (see more in Gutt, 2004, p.41). Additionally, the current study puts forwards six concrete techniques of subtitle translation from two strategies of direct translation and indirect translation, including equivalent conversion with humor, puns for puns, annotation, the injection of catchwords, the supplement with idioms as well as the conversion of sentence structures. They can be usefully applied, as believed, to address the crux of translating humorous languages. Additionally, the findings of this article are also hoped to make up for the deficiency of current subtitle translation, especially its translation for the language of humor.

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