Subtitle Translation Methods of *The Good Wife* From Functional Equivalence Perspective

WANG Ya-kun, BAO De-wang

Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics, Nanjing, China

The Good Wife is an American TV series that focuses on women's independence, politics, and law. The drama has been remade in China, Japan, and South Korea. This research aims to use Nida's Functional Equivalence Theory to analyze the methods of its English-to-Chinese subtitle translation by considering social, cultural, and historic backgrounds between China and America. After data collection and case analysis, the study found that: (1) Five major translation methods are adopted in the subtitle translation of *The Good Wife*. They are free translation, variation, literal translation, addition, and omission. Among them, free translation is the most frequently used, while omission is used least. (2) The subtitle translation of films and TV series is limited by time and space restrictions, social-cultural differences, and other factors. When translating, translators should try to use humorous words, euphemism, intonation, and other ways, and combine different methods such as literal translation, free translation, variation, addition, omission, and other methods to seek equivalence both in the meaning and function of subtitles under the guidance of Functional Equivalence Theory.

Keywords: subtitle translation, Functional Equivalence Theory, *The Good Wife*, translation methods

Introduction

Nowadays, the number of overseas films and TV series is huge, the impact of subtitle translation on society is increasing, and the demand for subtitle translation is becoming larger and larger, and even in short supply. However, the quality of subtitle translation is not satisfactory. At present, there are four domestic subtitle translation institutions for imported films: Changchun Film Translation Studio, China Film Co., Ltd., Bayi Film Studio, and Shanghai Film Translation Studio, in addition to some subtitle translation amateurs. Problems of not strict proofreading, departing from the original work, departing from the plot, and staying in literal translation abound. In addition, the research on film subtitle translation is not systematic and in-depth. Although people's education level is constantly improving, people's dependence on film subtitle translation is still very high, and how to do a good job in film subtitle translation is particularly important.

This research aims use Nida's Functional Equivalence Theory to analyze the methods of its English-to-Chinese subtitle translation by considering social, cultural, and historic backgrounds between China and America. This research discusses the following questions: (1) What translation methods are adopted for the subtitle translation

WANG Ya-kun, Graduate, College of Foreign Languages, Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics, Nanjing, China.
BAO De-wang, Professor of Translation Studies, College of Foreign Languages, Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics, Nanjing, China.

of *The Good Wife*? (2) How does the Functional Equivalence Theory reflect in the subtitle translation of *The Good Wife*?

Case Analysis of Subtitle Translation Methods in *The Good Wife*

In this research, three different episodes are adopted from different seasons in *The Good Wife* and their PDF versions are made to compare the source text and the translated text. In this way, it is more convenient for the author to figure out the translation method used in the process of translation. The author analyzed each example sentence by sentence to recognize the translation method adopted and put the statistics that how many times the five major translation methods are used in table.

Table 1
Translation Methods Used in The Good Wife

Translation methods	Frequency Season 1 Episode 1	Frequency Season 2 Episode 1	Frequency Season 4 Episode 11	Total frequency
Free translation	27	29	16	72
Variation	5	7	4	16
Literal translation	2	2	2	6
Addition	3	1	1	5
Omission	2	0	1	3

The table above is the statistics collected to show the frequency of translation methods used in *The Good Wife*. The author lists five translation methods which are the mostly frequently used in *The Good Wife* and counts their frequencies in these three episodes. Free translation is used for 72 times, variation for 16 times, literal translation is used for six times, addition for five times, and omission for only three times. In the following part, five featured examples are provided to analyze each translation method in detail.

Free Translation

Season 1 Episode 1 [07:10]

ST: Yeah, look, I know we should be at each other's throats.

TT: 我知道我们俩会是竞争对手。

When he first arrives, Cary's first encounter with Alicia is full of fireworks, and his words are full of mockery and challenges to Alicia's scandal-ridden and mid-life job crisis.

Here the subtitle translation uses free translation, "at each other's throats" originally means (of two or more people, groups, etc.) to be fighting or arguing with each other, but here the translator very cleverly translates this kind of gunpowder smell into the noun "竞争对手", so that the target language audience can immediately resonate with the source language audience, and appreciate the spark between the two people's words here.

Variation

Season 4 Episode 11 [00:49]

ST: Diane: How's it going?

　　　Alicia: Pulling teeth.

TT: 戴安：进行的怎么样？

　　　艾丽西亚：剑拔弩张。

Here is Alicia dealing with the Atlanta Commercial Bank's swimming pool incident, where the bank's abandoned pool breeds mosquitoes that paralyze West Nile virus to Alicia's clients, and the Atlanta Commercial Bank refuses to acknowledge their responsibility. The case is so important because their firm needs to pay for some of their debts by using what they receive from winning the case. "Pull teeth" originally meant "拔牙", and here the translator creatively retranslated the idiom "saber rattling", re-assigning the tension of the action of pulling teeth to the meaning of the situation at that time, perfectly solving the obstacles that the audience could not understand after seeing "pull teeth" in the target language, while adding drama and watchability to the work.

Literal Translation

Season 4 Episode 11 [03:09]

ST: Mr. Canning: How's bankruptcy going?

　　Alicia: That which doesn't kill us makes us stronger.

TT: 坎宁先生：破产的事怎么样了？

　　艾丽西亚：杀不死我们的反而使我们更强大。

In this exchange, Mr. Canning asks about the bankruptcy of Alicia's law firm, and Mr. Canning wants to take the opportunity to ridicule Alicia. Alicia's answer in the translation adopts a literal translation method and this translation fits with the rhythm of Chinese slang by saying "杀不死我们的会使我们更强大", so the literal translation here can correctly transfer the tone what the source text intends to express.

Addition

Season 2 Episode 1 [09:02]

ST: Will: How long do I have to wait before I get my season tickets back?

　　Diane: A polite week.

　　Will: Happy days.

TT: 威尔：啥时能让我恢复给客户的季票礼物啊？

　　戴安：客客气气的第一周。

　　威尔：先礼后兵嘛。

This conversation happened in the situation that Will and Diane had agreed to cut those unnecessary but luxury costs used for the firm and that included the season tickets Will used to make close relationships with his customers.

In this situation, "happy days" not only emphasize the peaceful weekend Will and Diane had gone through, but also express the expression that Will wanted to fawn on Diane to come to an agreement. Therefore, the Chinese translation must add the meaning of ingratiation as "先礼后兵" and a mood word "嘛" to help the target language audience understood.

Omission

Season 4 Episode 11 [06:53]

ST: Politician: The Democratic Committee has a lot invested in your boy Florrick. We want to make sure he wins.

　　Eli: And you're worried he won't?

　　Politician: I'm worried the sun won't rise tomorrow, Eli. It's a visit. That's all.

TT: 政客：民主党委员会对你家福瑞克下了大注，我们要确保他能赢。

伊莱：你担心他赢不了吗？

政客：我这人就是忧心重，伊莱。拜访一下，仅此而已。

These conversations happened when one politician of Democratic Committee came to find Eli and make sure that Mr. Florrick would have no problem in the campaign.

We all know what "the sun won't rise tomorrow" means both in English and Chinese. However, the translated text chose to omit the information "the sun won't rise tomorrow" in the original, and concentrated on "I'm worried", and simplified the whole sentence into "我这人就是忧心重"; comparing with the literal translation "我担心明早的太阳不会升起来了", "我这人就是忧心重" sounds more flexible and smooth.

Method

The research is accomplished on the basis of empirical research, with rich examples and detailed analysis. At the same time, the study also uses literature research, statistical analysis, and critical thinking research methods to answer research questions.

The researcher first searches the resource of *The Good Wife* and finds that there are three subtitle versions of this TV series: TV version, DVD version, and internet version provided by yysub.net. Seven seasons of *The Good Wife* are downloaded in yysub.net and then the first five seasons are watched.

Data Collection

Data in this paper are collected from yysub.net. The reason why the YYe internet version is chosen is that this version provided by YYe subtitle groups, who are subtitle lovers, gives a commonly accepted version for viewers. Among all seven seasons, Season 1 Episode 1, Season 2 Episode 1, and Season 4 Episode 11 are chosen to be analyzed because events in these episodes are representative and their subtitle translations are more worthy to be studied. The PDF versions of these three episodes are respectively made through tables to compare the source text and the translated text so that the translation methods can be clearly studied. The translation plus the source text totals 41,803 words. Since the limited time does not support the research to analyze all episode, only observing the clips of a certain episode cannot represent the full picture of the translation of the show. Therefore, randomly selecting some clips of a few episodes can more fully represent the translation of the entire TV series.

Moreover, the research also counts the frequency of different translation methods used in those three episodes and a table is made to show the statistics.

Results

The results of this study are a general summary of the translation methods used in *The Good Wife*. The study found that: (1) Five major translation methods are adopted in the subtitle translation of *The Good Wife*. They are free translation, variation, literal translation, addition, and omission. Among them, free translation is the most frequently used, while omission is used least. (2) The subtitle translation of films and TV series is limited by time and space restrictions, social-cultural differences, and other factors. Transferring the information of the source text to the target language audience is not easy. When translating, translators should try to use humorous words, euphemism, intonation, and other ways, and combine different methods such as literal translation, free translation, variation, addition, omission, and other methods to seek equivalence both in

the meaning and function of subtitles under the guidance of Functional Equivalence Theory. Only in this way, the target language audience can get the same viewing experience as the source language audience.

The Functional Equivalence Theory can play its role by helping the translator choose different translation methods to make sure the target audience gain the similar experience like the source audience do. Since it's difficult to convey the authentic message to the target language audience, two or three translation methods might be used in most circumstances instead of using only one specific translation method. And we can also infer that an excellent work of subtitle translation must combine various translation methods. Therefore, in the process of translation, translators should try to combine different methods to guarantee the maximum functional equivalence in the meaning of subtitles according to the context, so that it can be guaranteed that the message which the source text intends to transfer can also reach the target language audience and be felt by them.

Conclusion

The research of subtitle translation in *The Good Wife* shows that five major translation methods are used in the selected three episodes. Among them, free translation is the most frequently used, which has been used for 72 times. And variation ranks second, literal translation third, addition forth, and omission is used least. Although the examples only analyze one specific translation method used in them, it is more common to use two or three methods in subtitle translation to achieve the best effect in target language audience. Translators should take different plots and cultural backgrounds into consideration to adapt and choose subtitle translation. Only in this way can the plot be accurately conveyed and can the audience enjoy the films and TV series without barriers, achieving the purpose of cultural communication.

According to the research above, it can be concluded that the Functional Equivalence Theory is often reflected in the subtitle translation by using humorous words, euphemism, and intonation. For instance, in example of addition, the interjection "嘛" fully express the ingratiatory attitude. Besides, translating the source language in a different way rather than in a straight way can also help the target language audience get the functional equivalence. It includes the way of turning the active voice into the passive voice or vice versa, condensing or expanding a sentence into a word or idiom, changing the order or structure of the source text, or simply finding another alternative expression. For instance, example of omission proves this point by using "忧心重" to replace the straight translation of "I'm worried the sun won't rise tomorrow".

References

Chen, Q. (2008). Characteristics and strategies of film subtitle translation. *Movie Literature, 51*(3), 123-124.

Feng, J. (2018). The application of Nida's theory of functional equivalence in text translation. *Modern Communication, 32*(12), 74-75.

Feng, Q. H. (2001). *A practical course in translation.* Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.

Huang, Z. L. (2012). A new perspective on translation—A response to Mr. Zhou Lingshun on "Translation Variation". *Foreign Languages Research, 29*(1), 81-84.

Huang, Z. L. (2015). A study on the alteration strategy in translation variation—Taking Yan Fu's translation of evolution and ethics as an example. *Language and Translation, 31*(3), 51-55.

Liu, Y. S. (2021). Revisiting manipulation and rewriting in film and television subtitle translation. *Journalism & Media Studies, 31*(7), 157-158.

Qian, S. C. (2000). Audio-visual translation: An increasingly important field in translation studies. *Chinese Translators Journal, 22*(1), 61-65.