



Chinese Translation of Film Titles from the Perspective of Textual Transplant—Taking *Waterloo Bridge* as an Example

Yating Wu

School of Foreign Languages, Gannan Normal University, Ganzhou, China

Email: 861668306@qq.com

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Abstract

Translating film titles into Chinese is a challenging and creative task that requires translators to maintain accuracy at the linguistic level while ensuring effectiveness at the cultural and communicative levels. This paper aims to explore the textual transplant features of translating film titles into Chinese, using the Chinese translation of the movie “*Waterloo Bridge*” as a case study for in-depth analysis. By examining the language, culture, and communication aspects, we will demonstrate how textual transplant influences the translation of film titles and how the emotional and cultural connotations of the original title can be preserved in the Chinese translation. Through this case study, people can gain a better understanding of the crucial role translation plays in film marketing and cultural communication.

Subject Areas

Culture, Literature

Keywords

Film Titles, Textual Transplant, *Waterloo Bridge*

1. Introduction

As a globally influential form of media, movies profoundly impact audiences in different cultures and contexts. Moreover, the film title, as a distinctive emblem of a movie, plays a crucial role in conveying information about the film and sparking curiosity. It serves as a catalyst, prompting potential viewers to seek additional details and ultimately influencing consumer decisions. Furthermore,

the film title also profoundly impacts the box office revenue of a movie. Giwoong Bae, in his paper, cites data indicating that a good film title can significantly save costs in movie production (Giwoong, 2019) [1]. However, translating film titles into other languages, especially across different cultural backgrounds, often poses significant challenges.

Text transplant, as a form of translation, involves not only the translation of words but also cultural elements, emotional factors, and the demands of the target audience. The task of translating film titles into Chinese is full of challenges, requiring accuracy in language while maintaining cultural and communicative effectiveness. The movie title serves as the first impression of a film, making the quality of its translation crucial.

This paper aims to delve into the characteristics of textual transplant in the Chinese translation of film titles, using the translation of “Waterloo Bridge” as a case study. Exploring linguistic, cultural, and communicative perspectives, the author will interpret how textual transplant influences the translation of film titles and how the emotional and cultural connotations of the original title can be preserved in the Chinese translation. This case study not only helps in understanding the complexity of translating film titles into Chinese but also provides valuable insights into the crucial role of textual transplant in film marketing and cultural communication.

2. Literature Review

Susan Bassnett, a translation scholar, in her academic work, mentions, “Certainly, poetry cannot be entirely transferred from one language to another, but it can be transplanted.” Additionally, scholar Li, in his published article, states, “Translation is a conditional ‘movement’.” (Li, 1988) [2] For example, transplanting a tree involves considering various differences in temperature, soil acidity, humidity, and more between the original and new environments (Lai, 2014) [3]. Adjustments are made to ensure the tree can survive and grow in the new environment. The movement of living organisms like this is conditional. Only by meeting these conditions can we ensure their survival and growth in the new environment. Similarly, translation needs to adapt based on differences in various aspects of the source language and target language environments to ensure the translated text can endure in the new context.

“Eco-translatology Theory” believes that translation, when viewed narrowly, can be regarded as “textual transplant” based on the source language ecology and target language ecology (Hu, 2020) [4]. Whenever translation occurs, the ecology of the source language is inevitably disrupted, encompassing language ecology, communicative ecology, and cultural ecology. Therefore, during the process of textual transplant, particular emphasis should be placed on the ecological transplantation of these three aspects to enable the transplanted text to endure in the new environment, representing the ultimate goal of translation activities (Hu, 2021) [5].

3. Research on Film Titles

The study of film titles not only reveals the influence of social, cultural, and historical factors on the naming of films but also provides guidance for the translation of film titles. This chapter aims to lay the groundwork for an in-depth analysis of the Chinese translation of the movie title “Waterloo Bridge” by exploring the naming methods of film titles, the functions of titles, and the fundamental principles that should be followed in translating film titles.

3.1. Naming Methods for Film Titles

The naming methods for film titles are diverse, usually chosen based on the content, target audience, style, and marketing strategy of the film. Here are some common methods for naming film titles:

Movie theme or plot: The title directly reflects the theme, plot, or core concept of the movie. This method helps the audience quickly understand the content of the film. Examples include the Chinese movie 《流浪地球》 and the English movie “Scent of a Woman”.

Main characters or character relationships: The title may include the names of the main characters or emphasize relationships between characters, especially common in character driven films. Examples include the Chinese movie 《你好，李焕英》 and the English movie “The Great Gatsby”.

Location or background: The title may involve the location or background of the movie, especially when the setting plays a significant role. Examples include the Chinese movie 《回廊亭》 and the English movie “Notting Hill”.

Symbolic or Metaphorical: The title may use symbolic language or metaphors to spark curiosity or add deeper meaning to the movie. Examples include the Chinese movie 《隐入尘烟》 and the English movie “La La Land”.

3.2. Functions of Film Titles

As one of the symbols of a film, the movie title serves three main functions: informative, aesthetic, and vocative. The following will provide a detailed explanation of these three functions of a movie title.

3.2.1. Informative Function

The film title plays a crucial role in providing important informational functions. It serves as the initial showcase of the movie’s content, offering viewers key information such as:

Movie themes and content: The title of a film typically reflects its theme, plot, or core content. Audiences can quickly grasp the story a film tells and the themes around which it revolves through its title. For example, the title “Jurassic Park” (《侏罗纪公园》) conveys the theme and plot, reminding viewers that it is a film related to dinosaurs.

Emotion and atmosphere: Titles can convey the emotion and atmosphere of a movie, providing viewers with an emotional expectation before watching. For instance, the title “Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind” (《美丽心灵的永恒阳光》)

光》) communicates emotional complexity and romantic themes.

Genre and style: Film titles often hint at the film's genre and style. Audiences can judge whether a film is a comedy, romance, action, sci-fi, etc., based on the title. For example, the title "The Matrix" (《黑客帝国》) suggests a sci-fi and tech-related film with virtual reality elements.

Time and place: Titles may include the time or place where the events of the movie occur, allowing viewers to understand the story's temporal and spatial background. The title "12 Years a Slave" (《为奴十二年》) informs viewers of the time span of the film and its historical theme of slavery.

Main characters or relationships: Sometimes, titles involve the names of main characters or emphasize relationships between characters, aiding viewers in understanding their significance. For example, the title "Thelma & Louise" (《塞尔玛和路易丝》) introduces the names of the main characters, indicating a story revolving around these two female characters.

In summary, film titles play a key role in conveying information to the audience, aiding in the decision of whether to watch the movie and setting expectations regarding content and emotion.

3.2.2. Aesthetic Function

The aesthetic function of film titles refers to their role and value in aesthetics and art. Film titles are not just tools for conveying information; they also showcase aesthetics through unique features and artistic design, enhancing the film's atmosphere and raising audience expectations. This includes:

Artistic and creative expression: Showcasing creativity and depth of thought from the movie production team. They may employ unique vocabulary, coined words, wordplay, and other artistic techniques to enhance their artistic quality. For example, the title "Blade Runner" (《银翼杀手》) uses a unique combination of words, reflecting the film's science fiction and futuristic themes.

Symbols and symbolic meaning: Film titles may contain symbols and symbolic meanings, conveying deeper themes or significance through abstract or symbolic vocabulary, stimulating audience contemplation. An example of symbolic and metaphorical aesthetics is the title "Birdman" (《鸟人》), where the symbolic terms represent the film's themes and depict the protagonist's desire for freedom.

Sound aesthetics and rhythm: The phonetics and rhythm of a movie title can create aesthetic effects, making it more appealing and memorable. Some titles may use musical rhythm, repetition, or rhyme to generate phonetic aesthetics. For instance, "Singin' in the Rain" (《雨中曲》) includes rhythmic repetition between "Singin'" and "Rain", presenting the film's musical and dance themes.

Language artistry: Film titles can showcase language artistry, including language use, vocabulary selection, and sentence structure, making them artistically sophisticated and charming. An example of literary reference and profound aesthetics is the title "No Country for Old Men" (《老无所依》), which emphasizes the film's profound reflections on morality and reality.

Emotional resonance: Carefully crafted film titles can evoke emotional resonance, enabling audiences to emotionally connect with the film and enhancing its attractiveness. For instance, “Schindler’s List” (《辛德勒的名单》) carries emotional weight related to history and morality, eliciting emotional responses from audiences regarding Oskar Schindler and his list during World War II.

3.2.3. Vocative Function

The vocative function of film titles refers to their ability to capture audience attention, evoke interest and emotions, guide focus toward the movie, and prompt related associations and emotional responses. This function helps highlight the movie in a competitive market and draw the audience’s attention. It includes:

Garnering attention and interest: An intriguing, unique, or memorable movie title can immediately capture the attention and interest of potential viewers, prompting them to become interested in the film. For example, the title “Inception” (《盗梦空间》) is exceptionally unique, piquing the interest of potential viewers because it is not a common term, prompting people to want to learn more about the movie’s content.

Stimulating curiosity: Film titles can stimulate audience curiosity, making them eager to learn more about the film and encouraging them to watch it to satisfy their curiosity. For instance, the title “Who Framed Roger Rabbit” (《谁陷害了兔子罗杰》) includes a question, sparking the curiosity of the audience and making them want to find out the answer to who framed Roger Rabbit.

Triggering emotions and resonance: Film titles may contain elements that trigger audience emotions and resonance, allowing them to emotionally connect with the film. For example, the title “Life Is Beautiful” (《美丽人生》) conveys the emotional themes of love and hope in the movie, evoking the audience’s emotional support and resonance for the protagonist.

Creating a sense of urgency: Film titles can sometimes create a sense of urgency, prompting audiences to want to watch the film quickly so as not to miss out on its exciting content. For example, the title “The Day After Tomorrow” (《后天》) carries a sense of urgency, hinting at significant events that may occur in the film and urging viewers to watch it promptly.

Interaction with the audience: Film titles can interact with the audience, sparking thoughts, discussions, and sharing among viewers. For instance, the title “Dead Poets Society” (《死亡诗社》) engages the audience in thought and discussion through its symbolic imagery, fostering interaction with the film’s themes.

In summary, the vocative function of film titles involves attracting attention, evoking interest and emotions, stimulating imagination, and actively involving the audience. This function is crucial for movie promotion, marketing, and audience attraction.

3.3. Basic Principles of Translating Film Titles into Chinese

The saying goes, “Know yourself and know your enemy to win every battle.” To

translate English film titles into Chinese, translators need to understand the characteristics of both English and Chinese film titles and consider cultural differences and the acceptability of translations. To ensure that the translated movie title has broad dissemination and strong vitality, the following basic principles should be followed:

Fidelity to the original meaning: Translated film titles should faithfully convey information relevant to the original movie. The Chinese translation should strive to maintain the original intent and theme to ensure the audience understands the core content of the film.

Adaptation to the target audience: Consider the cultural and linguistic background of the target audience to ensure that the translated title is meaningful and appealing in the Chinese context. Cultural adaptation may be necessary to make the title more easily understood.

Clarity and conciseness: Chinese translations of film titles should be clear and concise, avoiding overly complex or lengthy translations to ensure that the audience can easily remember and understand them.

Maintain phonetics and rhythm: If possible, translated titles can maintain the phonetics and rhythm of the original title to make it more attractive and memorable.

Convey emotion and atmosphere: Translated film titles should convey the emotional tone and atmosphere of the film, adding emotional elements if necessary to attract the audience.

Avoid ambiguity: ensure that translated film titles do not cause confusion or mislead the audience, preventing misunderstandings about the movie's content.

Prudent use of transliteration: In some cases, transliterating the original title may be appropriate, but it should be done cautiously to avoid confusing the audience.

These principles help ensure that English film titles, when translated into Chinese, maintain their attractiveness and expressiveness while conveying the core information of the movie.

4. The Chinese Translation Exploration of “Waterloo Bridge”

The chapter will outline the background of the film “Waterloo Bridge” and delve into the Chinese translation of the film's title from the perspective of textual transplants. Specifically, it will explore the principles and practices of text transplantation, focusing on the linguistic, cultural, and communicative aspects of translating “Waterloo Bridge”. This case study aims to elucidate how text transplantation influences the translation of film titles and how the emotional and cultural connotations of the original title can be preserved in Chinese translation. Through this case study, readers can gain a better understanding of the crucial role of translation in film marketing and cultural communication.

4.1. Background of “Waterloo Bridge”

The movie “Waterloo Bridge” tells the story of Army Captain Roy who unex-

pectedly meets dancer Myra on the “Waterloo Bridge” during World War I. The two fall in love at first sight and soon plan to get married. But at this moment, Roy was summoned back to the army and the two hurriedly parted ways. Afterwards, due to Mara’s absence from an important performance, she was fired and became an unemployed wanderer. In addition, she mistakenly believed that Roy had died in action, which was a heavy blow. Afterwards, Mara became like a walking corpse, forced to make a living, and she and her friend were forced to become prostitutes. However, fate played tricks on people, and Roy either returned. Mara was mixed with sadness and joy. Mara, who felt that everything was irreparable, chose to commit suicide on the “Waterloo Bridge” where she first met (Wang, 2014) [6].

The English title of “Waterloo Bridge” is literally translated as “Waterloo Bridge”. Waterloo is located in central Belgium and is famous for Napoleon. Nowadays, people often use Waterloo as a metaphor for a painful failure. The author’s choice of “Waterloo Bridge” as the title of the film has profound connotations, implying that the love between Roy and Mara cannot avoid a failed ending.

If the title is translated literally, “Waterloo Bridge” will be translated as 《滑铁卢桥》, and the emotions of this story cannot be felt from the title. And the translation of 《魂断蓝桥》 is very clever! The term “蓝桥” can be associated with many poignant and touching love stories from ancient times. There are many versions of related stories, one of which is said to be from “Zhuangzi” (Wang, 2013) [7]. According to records, during the Spring and Autumn period, there was a man named Weisheng. One day, he made an agreement with a woman to meet under a bridge, but the woman failed to make the appointment and encountered a rising river. Seeing that the river was about to engulf Weisheng, he kept his promise and refused to leave. In the end, he was drowned alive. According to historical records, the bridge they agreed on was located on the Blue River in Lantian County, Shaanxi Province, so it was named “蓝桥” (Li, 2018) [8]. This allusion is generally used to describe those sincere and beautiful but tragic love stories. In the film, Roy is still looking forward to his wedding with Mara, but he is unaware of Mara’s heartache. He is already riddled with wounds and ultimately chooses to end his life on the bridge where he meets. This is also a tragedy of dying for love.

4.2. From the Perspective of Textual Transplant

This section delves into the Chinese translation of the film “Waterloo Bridge” from the perspective of textual transplant. Specifically, it explores the Chinese translated title of “Waterloo Bridge”, elucidating the principles and practices of text transplantation through the lens of language, culture, and communication.

4.2.1. Linguistic Level

The linguistic aspect of a film title involves translation accuracy and expressiveness. At this level, the translator must consider how to preserve the original

meaning of the title while ensuring the translated name is smooth and easily pronounceable in Chinese. The Chinese title 《魂断蓝桥》 for “Waterloo Bridge” has following advantages from a linguistic perspective:

Maintaining key cultural elements: The translation successfully retains the crucial cultural element of “Bridge” by using “蓝桥”, accurately conveying the main setting and background of the original title.

Conciseness and expressiveness: The four character structure of the Chinese title, “魂断蓝桥,” is concise, easy to understand, and carries a rhythmic flow. “魂断” and “蓝桥” are simple yet poignant words, allowing the audience to quickly grasp the emotional and thematic elements of the movie.

Emotional resonance and atmosphere: The term “魂断” conveys a sense of deep emotion and sorrow, aligning with the themes of love, separation, and the wartime background of the movie. The symbolic nature of “蓝桥” may evoke associations with memories or separation, enhancing the emotional atmosphere.

Rich imagery and memorability: The combination of “魂断” and “蓝桥” creates a vivid and imagistic background, capturing the audience’s interest and leaving a lasting impression. This contributes to quick recognition and recall, essential for promotional materials.

4.2.2. Cultural Level

Considering the cultural aspect is crucial because different cultures have varying interpretations of symbols, signs, and metaphors. At this level, the translator needs to contemplate how to integrate the cultural background and themes of the movie with the target culture. For the film “Waterloo Bridge”, which narrates a romantic love story while carrying the backdrop of World War I, selecting a Chinese translated title that conveys both the romantic sentiment and historical context becomes essential to resonate with the audience.

Retention of original cultural elements: The Chinese title “魂断蓝桥” successfully preserves the key cultural element of the original title, emphasizing the significance of the bridge in the story’s cultural background.

Emotional and symbolic conveyance: The term “魂断” effectively communicates deep emotions, likely connected to the movie’s themes of love and war. The term “蓝桥” may carry symbolic significance, potentially linking to memories or separation, resonating with the audience.

Cultural adaptation: The Chinese title demonstrates cultural adaptation by incorporating familiar Chinese vocabulary and emotional elements, making it more accessible and relatable to the Chinese audience.

Literary and artistic value: The Chinese title 《魂断蓝桥》, holds literary and artistic value by carefully selecting words and conveying emotions, enhancing its appeal within the cultural context.

4.2.3. Communicative Level

At the communicative level the advantages of the Chinese title 《魂断蓝桥》 for the film “Waterloo Bridge” are as follows:

Emotional resonance: The Chinese title successfully establishes emotional resonance through the terms “魂断” and “蓝桥”, creating a connection with the audience and fostering a deeper understanding of the film’s emotions and themes.

Curiosity elicitation: The title 《魂断蓝桥》 not only conveys emotions but also sparks curiosity. The audience might be intrigued to understand why the soul breaks at the blue bridge, encouraging them to watch the movie to find answers.

Interactive connection with the audience: The title initiates an emotional connection with the audience, leading to discussions and sharing of interpretations, fostering interaction and promoting the film effectively.

Conveyance of emotional atmosphere: The Chinese title effectively communicates the emotional atmosphere of the film, presenting a story full of emotions and drama.

Overall, the Chinese title 《魂断蓝桥》 successfully establishes a connection with the audience on the communicative level through emotional resonance, curiosity stimulation, interactivity, and emotional conveyance. It sparks the viewers’ interest and provides strong support for the successful dissemination and promotion of the film.

5. Conclusions

The interpretation of film titles in Chinese translation represents a challenging art of textual transplant, demanding translators to achieve a delicate balance on the linguistic, cultural, and communicative levels. This paper conducts an in-depth study by examining the Chinese translation of the film title “Waterloo Bridge”, illustrating the significance of textual transplant. Textual transplant involves not only linguistic accuracy but also the inheritance of culture and resonance with the audience. The translation “魂断蓝桥” perfectly encapsulates the essence of this film, reflecting a Chinese interpretation of romanticism. The transformation from “滑铁卢桥” to “魂断蓝桥” mirrors the romanticism of Chinese love in foreign works, showcasing the reinterpretation of Western literary images by Chinese translators using their wisdom.

Combining the principles of the three-dimensional transformational and textual transplant, the success of future film title translation lies in the comprehensive application of these principles by translators (Wang, 2023) [9]. Firstly, emphasis on textual transplant involves preserving the emotional essence and meaning of the original while adeptly incorporating elements from the target language and culture to align the translation with the aesthetic preferences and cultural background of the target audience (Li, 2014) [10]. Secondly, employing bidirectional thinking between the source and target language cultures recognizes that film title translation is not a simple linguistic substitution but an artful cross-cultural creation. In-depth understanding of the nuances of both cultures enables translators to accurately convey the cultural information embedded in film titles. Lastly, considering the sustainability perspective of ecological transla-

tion, translators should actively advocate values such as environmental conservation and social responsibility. Selecting sustainable language and cultural elements contributes to the sustainable development of cross-cultural communication. These guiding principles are expected to help film title translation strike a better balance between linguistic expression and cultural preservation on a global scale, offering audiences a more profound and extensive cultural experience. This comprehensive approach is poised to drive the development of future film title translation practices, enabling them to adapt more effectively to evolving cultural and linguistic landscapes.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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Appendix (Abstract and Keywords in Chinese)

电影片名汉译的文本移植性诠释——以《魂断蓝桥》为例

摘要：电影片名汉译是一项既富有挑战性又充满创意的任务，它不仅需要译者在语言层面上保持准确性，还要在文化和交际层面上保持有效性。本文旨在探讨电影片名汉译的文本移植特性，以电影 *Waterloo Bridge* 的片名汉译为例进行深入分析。通过从语言、文化和交际层面的角度研究，笔者将展示文本移植如何影响电影片名的翻译，以及如何在汉译中保留原名的情感和文化内涵。同时通过这个案例研究，人们可以更好地理解翻译在影片营销和文化传播中的关键作用。

关键词：电影片名，文本移植，《魂断蓝桥》