

## E-C Translation of Hollywood Film Titles

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### Abstract

The title is the essence of a film, the business card of the film. Different from ordinary textual translation, film title translation conveys specific purposes. The quality of film title translation is directly related to the acceptance of the film in market. Under the background of commercial marketing, maximizing the box-office return and restoring, highlighting or even optimizing the brand effect in the process of title translation is not only the concern of interest stakeholders, but also the new mission for every translator. Based on Nida's Functional Equivalence Theory and the Skopos Theory, the paper first analyzes functions of film title. Then, it explores the translation methods of Hollywood film titles translation in order to provide a new perspective for the film title translators. Some traditional translation methods are adopted in film title translation: amplification, literal translation, transliteration and free translation; while some creative strategies including adaptation/revision and parody are applied to achieve a film title's functions.

**Key words:** Film title translation; Hollywood films; Translation methods

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### INTRODUCTION

Since the release of *The Fugitive* in mainland China in 1994, Hollywood films have become synonymous with

blockbusters in the Chinese film market. As the world's second largest film market, China has even surpassed the North American market at the box office of some Hollywood films. Behind the fabulous development of Hollywood industry, audiovisual translation theory has evolved for decades. In traditional studies of film title translation, literal translation is considered as the best while amplification and omission take the second place. Free translation goes last with least credit (Li, 2002). Those traditional theories are getting obsolete since they neglect the particularity of film title's functions. As Mr. Du argued in *Basic Literacy in AV Translation & Research* (2013), from the function of texts, film title closely resembles advertisement (Du, Li, & Chen, 2013). Its translation should be centered on the response of the target audience. This paper discussed the realization of commercial value of a film in its title translation through analysis particularly Hollywood blockbusters in China Market.

### 1. FUNCTIONS OF FILM TITLE TRANSLATION

Functional equivalence put forward by Nida highlights the communicative function of translation by putting equivalence of response at a relative high level for the need to achieve purpose. (Nida & Taber, 1969) Under the dimension of communicative function, film title is the carrier of business intellectual property, showing the Identity of the whole cast and production team of the film.

In the Skopos Theory, translation is an intentional, purposeful human action happened in a given situation. The prime principle determining any translation process is the purpose, which means translators could adopt more creative methods and provide more possibilities for cultural transmission. The concept of adequate translation is upon the adequacy between translation and requirement of translation brief (Reiss & Vermeer, 1984). Film as a product of prosperity in both material and spiritual civilization, the adequate translation of its title could

be more flexible to realize multiple purposes, which is consistent with Newmark's idea: the main purposes of using language is its functions (Newmark, 2001).

In 1981, Newmark suggests that the translation should rely on the functions of the original text. As a special type of commercial, film title bears the following three main functions:

### Informative Function

Film title translation serves an informative function when used to show audience basic knowledge on the film directly, shadowing the topic and basic tone. By applying different translation strategies, film title in target language could better express the story theme and help readers understand general information.

### Vocative Function

The informative function is the premise, while the vocative function serves as the ultimate goal (Zhu, 2018). For foreign films in China market, the translation of their titles is an appellative logo with strong sense of vocative function for the purpose of attracting and stimulating the target audience of heading to cinema and buying tickets.

### Aesthetic Function

Aesthetic function is an integral part of films as fine art. One intrinsic aim of film title translation is to spread and transmit the beauty of the film to target language countries. Film title translation plays an important role to keep the value of original film language aesthetics.

## 2. ACCEPTANCE AND BRANDING OF HOLLYWOOD FILMS IN CHINESE MARKET

According to *White Paper of China Film Market* in 2018, the gap between the China and mature markets such as North America is narrowing, as the former has enormous potential in overall domestic market. Thus, improving audience stickiness is new breakthrough due to the future demographic dividend. Box-office returns are an important measure of the overall performance of one film (Handel, 2014). In 2017, 89 imported films were released in the Mainland China including 32 from Hollywood who won a total box office of 19.29 billion RMB, making up a significant share (74%). As a result, the overall acceptance of Hollywood films in the Chinese market is on the positive rise.

Corporate Identity System (CIS), a brand marketing strategy in Hollywood, contributes a lot on the high acceptance of Hollywood films. In the system, three types of identities are emphasized: mind identity refers to the soul of the Hollywood ideals such as superpower; visual identity is the Hollywood image serving on its aesthetic function, especially high-edged visual effects; and behavior identity is persuasive way to promote Hollywood like celebrity cast package (Sun & Rong, 2018).

Title translation, to a large extent, influences Hollywood branding and economic returns. Take film *Catch Me If You Can* (2002) as an example, It flopped at box office in mainland China with translation 《我知道你是谁》 while performed pretty well in Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan regions of China with translation 《逍遥法外》 or 《猫鼠游戏》. Obviously, the former translation lost the original wit and humor, failing to realize its functions. Following the guide of CSI, Chinese translation of Hollywood titles tends to be more expressive in order to establish its identity vividly.

## 3. TRANSLATION METHODS OF FILM TITLES

Hollywood film titles, usually concise and plain, could be divided into the following types: name after a place or hero of the film such as *The Bridge of Madison* and *Dumbo*; summarization of the main plot such as *Find Nemo*; highlighter of theme implicitly such as *Love Actually*. One-word film titles such as *Seven*, *Up* and *Zootopia* take a very large part in Hollywood.

Because of the specific functions of film title, some unusual strategies are adopted in order to achieve purposes. Hollywood films have created its own identity especially visual identity and behavior identity through branding of title translation.

### 3.1 Amplification

Translators use amplification to add more information in translated text for the completion of meaning. For one-word film titles, whose literal translation could lead to the lack of important information, amplification could bridge the cultural differences between American audience and Chinese audience resulting from the diversity of religious beliefs, social code and food culture etc.

Film *Seven* is translated as 《七宗罪》, which means seven deadly sins. The translated title adds noun "sins" implying the main theme of the film. Film *Bambi* is translated to 《小鹿斑比》 meaning a little deer named Bambi to point out the protagonist of the story. *Chocolate*'s Chinese translation 《浓情巧克力》 adds the adjective "浓情" showing the strong sense of romantic love to modify *Chocolate*, so that Chinese audience could grab the thread and keynote of love story immediately. *Speed* is translated to 《生死时速》 rather than 《速度》 to create a more picturesque tension of the desperate situation, making a powerful spur to attract audience.

### 3.2 Literal Translation

Literal translation means following the words of the original text exactly, with few consideration of the general meaning and style of the text. In order to maintain the exotic flavor of original texts, literal translation is adopted

in film title translation. With original title available for consultation, this is a easier method for translator.

For film titles with relatively complete subject or keynote, literal translation is a common way to highlight the identity of intellectual property. *The Lion King* is translated to 《狮子王》. With the popularity of the film, “狮子王” and “lion” have become a exclusive figure for Hollywood, which could lead to success in branding.

The translation of Hollywood films is undergoing a transformation from domestication to foreignization due to the development of globalization (Xiao, 2017). Cultural exchanges and integration are deepening and the maintaining the features of original title has become a new prominent trend. Take *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* as an example, it is translated directly as 《加勒比海盗：黑珍珠号的诅咒》. The Pirate is a unfamiliar group for most Chinese who have lived on the Asian continent since ancient times with little maritime culture. However, literal translation here could foil the sense of mystery and inspire target audience’s curiosity. And the original title itself has narrated the main plot of the film.

### 3.3 Transliteration

Transliteration is another translation technique, by changing letters into corresponding characters of another alphabet or language. For Hollywood films with proper nouns as the name of the main characters, or the place or landmark where the story happens, the simplest translation method is transliteration. The film *Titanic* is translated to 《泰坦尼克》, for it was a huge piece of news, which shocked the world. Another example goes to film *Casablanca* which is transliterated to 《卡萨布兰卡》. It is the Chinese transliteration of this seaport city of Morocco with quite melodious rhyme and beautiful exotic style, along with classic music with the same title, which accomplished the functions of film title wonderfully. For *Avatar* which is transliterated to 《阿凡达》, it meant to create parallel planes of existence never mentioned ever. This could not only satisfy people's curious psychological needs and thirst to mysteries, but also make a lead to fiction film identity.

However, there are still many film titles that should not be transliterated. *Thelma and Louise* uses the names of the two leading heroines as the title. But the direct transliteration of the title 《塞尔玛和路易斯》 is astringent for reading and recognizing just like two ordinary foreign names, which leads to the lost of the three roles of film title as an advertisement. The final translation of the film 《末路狂花》 meaning crazy sexy ladies at the end of the day literally summarizes the main plot of the film adequately. The term “狂花” uses mad flowers to refer to sexy ladies in wildness metaphorically indicates the protagonists’ unusual situation with a vivid image.

### 3.4 Free Translation

Free translation is to transfer the meaning and spirit of original text without trying to reproduce the original form. For Hollywood film titles containing American culture-loaded expressions, cultural differences between American English and the Chinese could be eliminated by free translation. In the film title *Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, “the cuckoo nest” doesn’t refer to the nest of birds cuckoo, but its extended meaning -- lunatic asylum. So the proper translation for this film should be 《飞越疯人院》. Translators must fully understand the meaning instead of copying mechanically. Here is a thriller *The Others* translated to 《小岛惊魂》 explicitly tells audience that it is a scary story which could frightening watchers out of their wits happened on a separated island. The phrase “the others” means other persons, representing a sense of fear in American culture. Free translation is adopted to reproduce this feeling to Chinese audience.

For film *Top Gun*, the original title refers to the U.S.A School of Navy Fighter Weapons. Its Chinese translation 《壮志凌云》 meaning the magnificent ambition beyond sky, fully demonstrates the hero’s pride in soaring in the sky. And another good example of free translation is *Flipped* as 《怦然心动》. Although it is a one-word title, “flipped” is full of profound meanings. It has subtle differences from “pit-of-the-stomach” (usually translated to “小鹿乱撞” in Chinese) and “fall in love at the very first sight”(usually translated to “一见钟情” in Chinese). The title “flipped” represents the feelings of the hero and heroine both at the age of puberty towards each other. They are like innocent playmates with budding love, corresponding racing heartbeats of pure love. The Chinese translation 《怦然心动》 points out the gentle but earnest love in “flipped”.

### 3.5 Adaptation

Adaptation is a type of translation technique applied in the light of aesthetics of reception. It seeks to transmit the purpose of the original text and the intentions of the original writer by revising the translation. Hollywood films in China market always have the zeal to establish their own kind of texture as a new type of convention, Hollywood - produced identity in other words. Adaptation is used to pursue the identity in film title translation. Hollywood who is sensitive to market finds that film series work very well in China like *Wolverine series*. *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* translated to 《金刚狼》 by omission is the first of the series. After the big heat of the first, the next two films *Wolverine* and *Logan* are translated to 《金刚狼2》 and 《金刚狼3》, by which the identity of superhero wolverine is confirmed to carry the inertia of watching the following 2 films.

*Hobbs and Shaw* is named after the two heroes of the film, but its Chinese film translation goes to 《速度与激情：特别行动》 which applies the famous series *Fast & Furious*’s conventional Chinese translation “速度与激



情” as it is an extra chapter story of that series. This type of adaptation is to attract the fans of *Fast & Furious* and fulfill the whole series' identity. Just like translators would like to adopt “虎胆” (as brave as a tiger), “威龙” (as fierce as a dragon) and “夺命” (as dangerous as fighting death) in Hollywood action film translation, the translation of Hollywood animated films in Chinese market also shows a general trend of collectivization for creating their own identity characteristics.

Since *Toy Story* (1995) translated to 《玩具总动员》 won a great success in China, for animated films with large team of characters and theme in unity and cooperation, their Chinese title translation usually ends with “总动员” meaning general mobilization such as *Finding Nemo* as 《海底总动员》, *Cars* as 《汽车总动员》, *WALL·E* 《机器人总动员》, *Ratatouille* as 《美食总动员》, *The Incredibles* as 《超人总动员》. For Hollywood animated films with theme in happiness with lively plots would like to have a Chinese title with “疯狂” meaning “crazy and vivacious” as a pre-modifier, such as *The Croods* as 《疯狂原始人》 and *Zootopia* as 《疯狂动物城》 while “环游记” meaning “travel all around the dream place” is a preferable choice for magic adventure-themed animated film title translation such as *Up* as 《飞屋环游记》 and *Coco* as 《寻梦环游记》. In princess fairy tale films, “奇缘” meaning “romantic and miraculous fate” is applied to the title translation such as *Pocahontas* as 《风中奇缘》, *Frozen* as 《冰雪奇缘》 and *Cinderella* as 《仙履奇缘》.

The Hollywood title cluster effect created by adaptation gives the audience a natural impression that all films with such titles are wonderful and worth watching. It has to be said that Hollywood has achieved its branding and identity creation with such marketing gimmicks. The functions those titles bring about are beyond imagination.

### 3.6 Parody

Parody refers to writing intended to amuse and salute to classic by imitating and copying the style of writing used by somebody else. Chinese translation of some Hollywood film titles imitates the characteristic style of traditional ancient allusions of Chinese literary works to accomplish their vocative functions and aesthetic functions. Excellent parody should reach the equivalence of form and meaning. It poses great challenges to translators while could create excellent match sometimes.

*Forest Gump* is translated to 《阿甘正传》 by modeling its style after that of 《阿Q正传》, a novel by Chinese writer Lu Xun (1881-1936). The name “Forest Gump” is translated to “阿甘” in this Chinese translation, which suits his nature of innocence, simplicity and honest. As 《阿Q正传》, a lot of plots in *Forrest Gump* are from experiences of historical figures, serving a bantering taste.

*Lolita* is translated to 《一树梨花压海棠》 with Chinese literary tune, parodying one line in Chinese poem to the original American story. “一树梨花压海棠”

, meaning “ a tree of pear blossom pressing a bunch of begonias”, is from a poem written by Su Shi, a Chinese literary giant in Northern Song (960-1127). A poet Zhang Xian, a good friend of Su Shi, married an eighteen-year-old girl as a concubine at the age of eighty. After hearing about this, Su Shi made a poem to tease Zhang Xian: 十八新娘八十郎，苍苍白发对红妆。鸳鸯被里成双夜，一树梨花压海棠 (Yang. 2005). “Pear blossom” is a metaphor for old man with white hair, and “Begonia” refers to the young girl's pink tenderness. Because the allusion behind this poem coincides with the plot of *Lolita*, taking a sentence of the poem as the translation integrates Chinese culture into the identity of the Hollywood film.

Film *Waterloo Bridge*, named after the place where the couple fall in love, is translated to 《魂断蓝桥》. It would be translated into 《滑铁卢桥》 by literal translation, which lacks both informative and aesthetic functions of the original sobbing love story. 《魂断蓝桥》 is a parody to the a Chinese legend “蓝桥相会” meaning lovers' meeting at Blue Bridge literally (Du, 2013). The legend happens in Tang Dynasty, telling a love story of a scholar named Pei Hang and a girl named Yunying at Blue Bridge. Pei fell in love with Yunying at the first sight, and finally gained love through various tests. The translation of title borrows the allusion of “蓝桥相会”, which makes the translation beautiful and unforgettable in terms of profound cultural connotations.

## CONCLUSION

Film title, resembling a trademark of the work, has the informative function of expressing the content and theme, aesthetic function of making people enjoyable and vocative function of attracting target audience. Seeking the adequate link between its cultural and commercial purposes adequately is film title translation's ultimate pursuit.

The high acceptance of Hollywood in the Chinese market reflects that its translation strategies have built the adequate link well, along with Hollywood's brand identity being more brilliant. For different types of Hollywood film titles, different translation methods are applied to make maximum effects. Through reading, readers can have a basic understanding of Hollywood film translation with CIS branding in the Chinese market, which is conducive to the introduction and promotion of other excellent foreign films. In addition, it can be used for reference to innovate the translation strategies of Chinese film titles, help shaping their own brand identity and competing in overseas markets.

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