

## A Research on the English Version of *A Bite Of China* From The Perspective of Skopos Theory



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**ABSTRACT:** *A Bite of China* is a documentary about Chinese food culture. It not only describes China's rich food, but also shows the colorful rural life and spiritual connotation of Chinese people. It could be a window to show foreigners the beauty of China and the cultural traditions in every part of it. But the language in movies and TV shows has its distinctive features: the language in movies and TV shows is sound and fleeting, so the translation of movie subtitles must be appropriate and easy to understand. Skopos theory holds that the audience is the most important factor in determining the translation purpose. Therefore, the translation criterion under skopos theory has changed from "equivalence" to "appropriateness", which enables translators to have greater autonomy in determining subtitle translation strategies on the premise of respecting the original text, thus not only achieving the communicative purpose of the target text, but also enabling the audience to understand the original film and television works.

Firstly, the paper analyses the skopos theory and current translation studies of *A Bite of China* through literature review. Then based on the subtitle translation of episode 5 of *A Bite of China*, it discusses the methods and strategies that can be used in subtitle translation from the perspective of skopos theory with the hope of finding out the appropriate translation strategies and methods as well as enriching researches on the English version of *A Bite of China*. For example, addition, deletion, etc., which can not only preserve and promote Chinese cultural characteristics but also meet the target audience's reading habits and thinking modes without losing the communicative intention.

**KEYWORDS**-skopos theory; coherence rule; Chinese food; *A Bite of China*; subtitle

### I. INTRODUCTION

*A Bite of China* is a food documentary that was directed by Chen Xiaoqing. The theme of this programme centers around the Chinese people's eternal pursuit of food and life, and it tells the food ecology in different parts of China with concrete stories. It's said in Lin Yutang's novel (*My country, my people*) that Chinese people's idea of life is to enjoy their life and harmonious relationship with others in this world. According to director Chen, the film's general director, the target audience of this documentary is not only "foodies" who like delicious food, but also targeted at ordinary normal people. He said the purpose of this programme is to serve Chinese food as a window to show foreigners the beauty of China and the cultural traditions in every part of it.

Since the documentary *A Bite of China* got popular in and out of China, the diversity of Chinese culture began to catch people's sight all over the world. The biggest problem of promoting our culture is the subtitle. In China, the research on subtitle translation technology is out of touch with the development of the industry, lagging behind the technological development of the times, lack of technical attention, and publications. The lack of theoretical system construction of subtitle translation technology is particularly obvious (Huashu, Wang, 2020: 82). The previous translations of it mainly focuses on the translation of general meaning and neglect the traditional terms and customs in every city, which is a fresh point to start over the whole translation (Ying, Huo, 2015: 19). The shortage of this translation of *A Bite of China* also reflects the loss of the traditional custom among our younger generations. The restart of the translation can open a door for those who want to have a better understanding about Chinese and its marvellous culture through the greatest object in human history up to now---food. The translation version used in the thesis mainly focuses on the cultural-loaded words, customs and local areas names from the perspective of skopos theory. The previous translation ignored the part that could be discussed.

The significance of this C-E translation of Chinese traditional food culture documentary is to foster cultural self-confidence among Chinese people as we always ignore our traditional treasures. China is a country with a splendid food culture, which is a kind of intangible cultural heritage that should be protected. What's more, be massively propagandized. The spreading of Chinese

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can initiate Chinese' confidence in our traditional culture and carry forward our local customs and magnificent scenery. So Chinese food culture can be seen in all corners of the world, and also attracts more foreigners to see the diversity of food culture.

There are several ways of doing a research, the author chose the case analysis method to discuss the documentary subtitle translation under the guidance of skopos theory. The author chose specific words, sentences and paragraphs and applied the three translation rules: skopos rule, coherence rule and fidelity rule. So as to better achieve the aims and purposes of the director of the programme. Second, literature research method. The author collected and applied literature and materials reasonably through various channels, so as to obtain concise theoretical knowledge.

The thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter One introduces the background information of this amazing documentary, research purposes and significance, and the organization of the thesis; Chapter Two outlined the literature review about the previous studies on skopos theory and the translation of the documentary *A Bite of China*; Chapter Three presents the overview of subtitle translation consists of the characteristic of subtitle translation, the classification of subtitle translation and the purpose of subtitle translation; Chapter Four mainly focuses on case analysis including two major parts which are faithfulness and smoothness on translation and translation of cultural information, and the translation is summarized and discussed before conclusion; Chapter Five provides a conclusion on the previous translation contribution and shortage, limitations and relevant questions are also discussed at the end of the thesis.

## **II.LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **A. Introduction to the Documentary *A Bite of China***

*A Bite of China* is a documentary with the theme exploring the relationship between Chinese people and their food in daily life. It described China in an interesting and delicious way, and allowed the world to experience Chinese ideas of life, social changes and even cultural heritage.

This paper chose episode 5 “The mixture of five flavour”. Taste is always the soul in Chinese food, different seasonings, different methods and different cooks can lead food to a delicious way. This episode aims to explore the different seasonings that Chinese people need to cook for all kinds of flavors, to show the production technology of seasonings and to enjoy the superb seasoning technology of Chinese people. Ten stories, involving four basic cuisines of Sichuan, Shandong, Guangdong and Huaiyang, and representative regional cuisines such as Xinjiang and Yunnan, tell the real life of Chinese people and express their true feelings by displaying rich and colorful cooking culture. The subtitle translation can give those who are not familiar with China an opportunity to understand China easily and accurately. In the translation based on skopos theory, the target audience is the essential factor that decides the translation purpose..

### **B. Previous Studies on the Translation of *A Bite of China***

With the developing of global economy, the communication between the countries came to be prosperous. In the process of it, film and television works is playing an important role, so translation is a vital essence to connect the author and the receivers. The earliest essay about the translation of the documentary *A Bite of China* is in the year of 2012, Liang's report adopted Nida's functional translation theory to guide the translation and analysis of the translated text. According to Liang Lina(Liang, 2013) , she explains the translation of dish names under the guidance of skopos theory. While Jia Hui (Jia, 2015) compares the English version and French version of *A Bite of China* from perspective of translation aesthetics. Xin Yangzi (Xin, 2017) produced a translation report about *A Bite of China* about saying and poem translation in particular. But as one of the most famous documentary in China, it never loses popularity among its audience.

All in all, the study on the subtitle translation of *A Bite of China* mainly involves the literal translation of the whole text or the translation study under the guidance of a specific translation theory such as Functional Equivalence Theory, while lacks the study of culture-loaded words in this documentary and some specific sentence translation analysis. Under the wave of Chinese documentaries and other film and television works, as an unexplored research field, there are new requirements for translation methods and strategies of specific words with cultural traditions such as culture-loaded words and more translation researches at the lexical and syntactic level of this topic.

### **C. Previous Studies on Skopos Theory**

Throughout the history of translation, people have encountered many problems and have made constant thinking and exploration on them, thus forming different translation theories and research schools. In the 1960s and 1970s, the linguistic tendency in translation studies was challenged, and the school of translation functionalism came out. Skopos theory, as the core theory of functionalism, is a relatively new translation theory model developed by German translation theorist Hans Vermeer. Basically, this theory is an external study of translation, which focuses on the choice of various purposes in the process of translation, so it can undoubtedly make up for the deficiency of translation studies, thus adding a new research perspective to the multi-disciplinary exploration of translation.

The formation of skopos theory has four stages. First of all, Katharina Reiss put forward the prototype of functionalism theory in her book (*Possibilities and Limitations in Translation Criticism*) published in 1971. On the one hand, she insists on the equivalence theory centered on the original text; on the other hand, she finds that equivalence is impossible to achieve in some

specific conditions, and sometimes we should not pursue complete equivalence. In this case, Reiss believes that translators should give priority to the functional features of the translated text rather than the principle of equivalence. Since then, Reiss's student Hans Vermeer has put forward skopos theory, which has freed translation studies from the original-centered theory. According to this theory, translation is a purposeful act based on the original text, which must follow a series of rules, of which the skopos rule is the first. Vermeer believes that the supreme rule in translation should be the "skopos rule". As Vermeer wrote, the purpose of translation activities is different, the strategies used in translation are different, which provides a good explanation for realizing formal equivalence or dynamic equivalence (Vermeer, 2000: 50)

Justa Hotz-Mantari put forward the theory of translation behavior, and further develops the functionalist translation theory, which regards translation as the interaction between people driven by purpose and oriented by translation results. This theory and skopos theory have a lot in common, and Vermeer later integrated them. Christina Nord systematically expounded for the first time in English the internal and external factors to be considered in text analysis in translation, and how to formulate translation strategies suitable for translation purposes on the basis of the functions of the original text (Nord, 2001:12). Christina Nord combed the theories of functionalism and proposed that translators should follow the guiding principle of "function plus loyalty", thus perfecting the theory.

### III. PAGE STYLE OVERVIEW OF SUBTITLE TRANSLATION

Compared with traditional literary translation, the audience of film and television media translation is wider, the number is larger, and the social effect is more extensive. However, the attention paid to film and television translation by Chinese translation circles and even the whole society is far less than that of literary translation.

#### A. Characteristic of Subtitle Translation

English subtitles of movies are completely different from written works: colloquial, fashionable, service-oriented. (1) colloquial. Most of the languages used in film and television dramas are simple and easy-to-understand everyday spoken language. The target audience are mainly housewives and they get familiar with the characters through oral expression. (2) timelines. TV programs and documentaries always keep up with the trend of the times. The language used in the program will naturally contain a lot of Chinese traditional words and words with cultural meanings. For example, with the constant development of the Internet, many words will spring up due to spreading of TV programme. (3) service-oriented. Unlike written works, English subtitles do not exist independently. It must be combined with pictures and sounds of film and television work to be meaningful. If a part of the subtitle translation is extracted, the meaning of and behind it will not fully understood.

#### B. Classification of Subtitle Translation

Linguistically, subtitle translation consists of intra-lingual subtitle and inter-lingual subtitle translation. Subtitle translation does not need to convert one language into another, but to convert discourse into text, which changes the form of thinking and speaking, but the language itself does not change.

Inter-lingual subtitle translation is the process of translating the source language into the target language in the form of subtitles at the bottom of the screen while retaining the original sound and picture. Sometimes, this subtitle translation is also called "diagonal subtitle translation". Methods like literal translation and free translation to help the translators to do translation according to different situations, which correspond to the skopos theory..

#### C. Purpose of Subtitle Translation

The documentary mainly talks about the traditional food in all parts of China and the target audience is normal people, so the language it uses should be more colloquial and easy to understanding. The caption uses simple words and short sentences in order not to cause any trouble to understand. "A documentary and its captions should complement each other. The captions will convey a new atmosphere and a new feeling in the form of the narrator. So captions are required to be vivid but should not go beyond the realistic feature of documentary" (Xihua, Chen. 2012: 166). Semantic translation is an essential method to translate the original language of film and television works into a language that the target audience can understand.

Semantic translation revolves around words, while subtitle translation is a form of communicative translation, which is related to the speaker's intention to express the content. This purpose is the ultimate goal of subtitle translation, and more accurately reflecting the speaker's purpose is more important than accurate semantic translation. This purpose perfectly fits the translation theory founded by German functionalist translators Hans Vermeer and Katherina Reiss. Vermeer innovated from the limitation of equivalence theory, came up with the translation criterion of text purpose, and put translation into the structure of behavioral theory and cross-cultural communication. He believed that translation was not simply a transformation based on the original text, but a kind of information transmission to the source culture in the purpose, which was a cross-cultural communication behavior. The purpose determines the translation method. As long as the translation purpose can be achieved, the original text can be translated literally, completely rewritten, or any translation strategy in between. This is the primary purpose principle of this theory. It emphasizes "suitability" rather than "equivalence".

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Readers' unique cultural background, reading needs and other factors affect the translator's translation behavior. From the perspective of readers, translators should choose appropriate translation methods and strategies, and selectively translate from the multi-source information provided by the original text to achieve the purpose of translation.

### IV. CASE ANALYSIS

The subtitles in the documentary *A Bite of China* carried a lot of cultural information and the caption itself showed Chinese simple idea of life: the pursuit of happiness and the harmony relationship with the family. Some words and phrases used in the documentary implied meanings that only Chinese can understand, which expressed unique Chinese style of humour. The author will express the most accurate meaning by using traditional sayings or idioms. The previous authors chose translation theory such as functional equivalence theory to better achieve the goal of translation words to words, sentences to sentences and paragraphs to paragraphs (Ying, Huo. 2015:14). The author will make specific analysis in the following three parts of translation.

#### A. Words Translation

**Translation of Culture-loaded Words:** Lu Xun has always advocated literal translation faithful to the original works. When talking about the translation of *Dead Soul*, he said: "Before writing, we have to solve a problem: do our best to make it domesticated, or do we try our best to preserve the foreign flavour?". Lu Xun's answer to this question is very clear: translation should preserve foreign flavour as much as possible (Jinlan, Zhang. 2004: 37).

The purpose of the translation is to show the simple beauty and diversity of Chinese food, so the translator should be faithful to the source text and be responsible to the target audience.

Example ST: 锡帮菜

TT: Wuxi Cuisine

According to the connotation of the skopos rule, when facing the foreign audience, the translator should consider the foreign cultural background and translate the original text according to the foreign audience's language habits, so that the translation results can meet the requirements of the foreign audience.

In China, the word “帮” means in certain areas, a group of people gathered together as a gang group. During the change of time, it turned into the description of the cuisine. For example, “杭帮菜” means Hangzhou Cuisine; “本帮菜” means Shanghai Cuisine. For foreigners who don't know much about China, the diversity of area names will confuse them a lot, since there are so many cities names in 23 provinces. The translation here should be simple and direct, these unimportant information will not affect the audience' experience.

The Northeast area of China also showcases this kind of Chinese language skill. In their language “柿子” means tomatoes, while in Mandarin it is persimmon. In Inner Mongolia, China, people drink milk a lot as their daily supplement, and they call every kind of milk “Naizi”. In other areas of China, it implies breast in a rude way. There are multiple examples like these happening in different parts of China due to a reason we all know: culture. Culture refers to the living habits and characteristics of a group, which can be a person, a nation or a country, and is often observed by people in a specific region (Yang Jingru, 2015: 18). For these regional terms, we can simply replace it with the direct meaning of word so that the translation can best represent what the author wants to convey.

When the translator does his or her translation, he or she must have a thorough understanding about the two countries and contain a database about these culture-loaded words. There are no two identical leaves in the world. The cultural differences caused during thousands of years could be a huge challenge for language researchers. Our job is to minimize the ambiguity, mistakes or omissions of the original expression in the process of translation, and to be as close to the language habits of the target language as possible while restoring the original intention and ideas.

**Translation of Cuisine Words:** The body of the level-3 section immediately follows the level-3 heading in the same paragraph. For example, this paragraph begins with a level-3 heading. Food is an eternal topic in Chinese people's lives. We take an old but famous saying as our tenet: “民以食为天”, which translates to “Bread is the stall of life”. The various dish names are also symbols of China. The audience can appreciate the beauty of food and the culture it contains. “Food is for many the most sensitive and important expression of national culture” (Newmark, 2001: 97). In *A Bite of China*, it reveals the sincere idea of life for Chinese through the most unaffected food.

#### Example 1

ST: 糖葱薄饼

TT1: sugar onion pancake

TT2: onion-sugar pancake

According to the coherence rule, the meaning of the translated text must be equivalent with the the original text, so as to realize the faithful imitation of the translated text to the original text to the greatest extent. The expression of “糖葱薄饼” is actually a kind of pancake, “糖葱” is the name of an onion-shaped sugar, which is a long strip with many through holes in the middle, such

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as several onion holes stuck together side by side. Qualified onion-sugar must have sixteen big holes, and there are sixteen small holes around each big hole. The color is white, so it is called onion-sugar. The translated term is smooth and easy to understand. Such amazing cultural words can't be easily understood if you are not Chinese, and translation plays an essential role in promoting our culture.

### Example 2

ST: 陈皮鸭

TT1: dried orange peel duck

TT2: Chen Pi duck

In this situation, Chen Pi is one of the most traditional medicine in China, considering its production technology and unique flavour, it's better to translate it in transliteration. When we have to keep source culture clear, it's time we follow fidelity rule. We transliterate certain words to lead to a better understanding.

Throughout the documentary, a considerable part of the dish names describe how to cook and the ingredients of the dish. Having the words about cooking actions or techniques is very helpful for the translation of cuisine words. Take “陈皮鸭” for an example, Chen Pi is a widely used medicinal material in China. Its raw material is very simple, that is, dried orange peel, so the proper name of Chen Pi should be dried tangerine peel. But in this condition, we don't use this as a dish name, it sounds strange and loses the citrus aroma it carries of the original name. Chen Pi Duck is a famous traditional dish in Guangdong Province, belonging to Cantonese cuisine.

### Example 3

ST: 盐焗鸡

TT1: salt-baked chicken

TT2: Yan Ju chicken

TT3: salted and steamed chicken

Guangdong province has always been a place full of delicious cuisine, and “盐焗鸡” is one of the representative foods. “焗” in dialect, a cooking method, uses steam to ripen food in a closed container. It's similar to baking in English. The translator should consider the most accurate translation of different words in different countries and make adjustments according to dialects. Any translation's purpose is to realize the equivalent transferring of meaning of the source text, which is totally, the task for every translator. . The translation of “盐焗鸡” aims to showcase the cooking technique, so according to skopos rule, the purpose of the translation lead to liberal translation.

Cantonese has its own unique flavor in terms of coffee. “沙” is "sugar"; “奶” means "milk" or "evaporated milk", which is commonly called “飞沙走石”, that is, coffee without sugar or milk (only coffee powder). “飞沙走奶添石” means frozen coffee. The English word for “石” is "rock", so “添石” means adding ice.

## B. Sentences Translation

The captions in the documentary are mostly about cooking methods and dish names, but it's the story that made this programme meaningful. Translators need to solve four pairs of contradictions to make satisfactory subtitle translation: length and content; Words order and pictures; Localization and internationalization; Transliteration and semantic translation . Sentences can express different information in Chinese.

### *Sentence Translation Based on Skopos Rule:*

Example 1

ST: 苦尽甘来是中國人在味覺上對“苦”的辨證，更是在逆境中習慣堅持的信念，他們相信，最完滿的人生總是五味雜陳的。

TT: No sweet without sweat is Chinese dialectic of “bitterness” in taste. Moreover, it is the faith they get used to sticking to in adversity. They believe that the most satisfactory life is always all sorts of flavors.

Chinese people use different flavors to describe their lives, sweet, sour, bitter, spicy. The old but famous saying proves this point most directly: No sweet without sweat. (苦尽甘来). Life is sweet when you feel good, simple but vivid. In westerners' idea, they believe in god and the life hereafter. They silently endure the pain of this life, regard the suffering as atonement, and look forward to a new self in the next life. Their thoughts are quite different from Chinese. We Chinese don't complain about the pain and we believe the pain won't last forever. The better future in this life will come if we live our life seriously and hopefully. That is what the director wanted to tell people in hard time. In these translation occasions, suitability is more important than accuracy, the skopos rule focuses more on the target audience because they are the decisive factor of translation.

### *Sentence Translation based on Coherence Rule:*

Example 2

ST: 在四川，許多婦女都象素瓊這樣開朗、堅韌、果斷，漢語里人們用“潑辣”來形容這種性格。



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TT: In Sichuan, many women are as cheerful, tenacious and decisive as Suqiong. In Chinese, people use “pungent” to describe this character.

In Chinese culture, we not only use flavors to describe life, but also people. We used spicy taste to describe a person's personality a long time ago. In *A Dream in Red Mansions*, there is a famous character called Lady Wang. She is a rigorous person who does everything fast and perfectly. Local people called her “风辣子”, which contains the word “辣” to express she is not easy to handle. In Hunan province, young girls are called “辣妹子”. It's part of the local characteristics. According to the coherence rule, the translation must be readable and acceptable so that it can have meaning in the audiences' culture environment, so the word pungent can perfectly describe this kind of personality.

### *Translation of Cuisine Words Sentence Translation based on Fidelity Rule:*

#### Example 3

ST: 那种滚烫、滑嫩的质感划过舌尖流向喉头的享受，正是四川菜得以征服全中国乃至世界的绝技。

TT: The hot, smooth texture that flows across the tip of the tongue to the throat is the unique skill of Sichuan cuisine to conquer the whole of China and even the world.

Sometimes words can give us a better visual experience than the movie. That's because our brain mobilized the previous memories after seeing the words, including sight, smell, hearing, taste and so on. There are so many words describing food in Chinese which make it more vivid. “Skopos theory stipulates that the translator must translate consciously, consistently and according to the specific principles of the translation. The theory does not explain what the principle is, which should depend on the specific situation”(Vermeer, 2000: 50). As to the fidelity rule, the translation must be correspondent to the source text in order to better promote the author's ideas. The original meaning of the sentence is not special, but the picture is worth imaging.

### C. Paragraphs Translation

According to the previous research results and the author's practical experience, the biggest feature of subtitle translation is that it is concise, easy to understand, instant, synchronous and unobtrusive(Jian, Guo. 2015:18). Due to the limitation of time and space, subtitle translation can't be completely faithful to the original text in content and form, just like other literary translations, so as to achieve equivalent. During the translation, the translator should use the reduction strategy wisely. When the information given is cluttered and unfocused, unimportant or even irrelevant information can be deleted and abridged to highlight the essential information. As in this documentary *A Bite of China*, there are lots of words that won't affect the audience without them, so as qualified translators, we should emphasize the important information.

#### Example

ST: 从原料、汤料的采用到烹调技法的配合，麻辣火锅使荤与素、生与熟、麻辣与鲜甜、清香与醇厚恰如其分地结合在一起。这也正是中国人对五味调和的理解。中国的烹饪手段千变万化，滋味层出不穷。既能像麻辣的川菜一样，如此凶猛地侵略我们的味觉，也能润物细无声地让我们的舌尖领略鲜味的美好。

TT: From the adoption of raw materials and soup ingredients to the coordination of cooking techniques, spicy hot pot makes meat and vegetables, raw and cooked, spicy and fresh, fragrant and mellow properly combined. This is also the Chinese understanding of the harmony of five flavors. Chinese cooking methods are ever changing, and tastes appear one after another. Like spicy Sichuan cuisine, it can invade our sense of taste so fiercely, and it can also moisten things silently and let the tip of our tongue appreciate the beauty of fresh taste.

Sichuan spicy hot pot is a kind of famous food in China. The taste is like the people there. As an old Chinese saying goes “一方水土养一方人”, the unique features of a local environment always give special characteristics to its inhabitants. The differences brought about by the geographical environment are also reflected in the foods that people have the most daily contact with. There are many basins in Sichuan, with heavy fog and humidity all the year round. People eat spicy food to get rid of moisture in the body, and at the same time, accelerate the metabolism of skin, Sichuan girls are always famous for their good skin.

## CONCLUSIONS

By analyzing the English version of *A Bite of China*, this thesis gets the following findings: First, the language in film and television works are different from the common written language such as general literary works or business documents. The subtitle translation must be simple and easy to understand and is not merely translating the language itself. Second, the direction of skopos theory and a concrete analysis of these translation strategies based on the three rules in skopos theory-the skopos rule, the coherence rule and the fidelity rule provide an angle to study the translation of *A Bite of China*. Documentary subtitle translation can more faithfully achieve the purpose and intention of the director, convey the cultural connotation in the source language to the target audience, keep the language fluent and natural, achieve the best viewing effect, and help foreign audiences better understand film and television works, thus achieving the purpose of cultural exchange and dissemination. Third, the methods of addition and deletion used in sentence translation; the methods of diversification and simplification used in paragraph translation needs more empirical researches and could be use in more documentaries and other kinds of subtitle translation. And at

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the lexical level, tradition-loaded words are closely related to history, culture, language and characters, which needs further development and study on translation.

This thesis aims to serve as reference for the further study of subtitle translation, the strategies usage research under the perspective of skopos theory in China is still relatively lacking, so we should further broaden the depth of the subtitle translation research, and constantly make creative theoretical research of subtitle translation by learning from and absorbing western research theories, so as to promote the development of subtitle translation in China.

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