

PhD Thesis Abstract

Cultureme Translation in Film Subtitling

Jaebum Cho

Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Korea

1. Background

This research aims to identify the main strategies used in cultureme translation by analyzing the overall strategies employed in the English subtitling of Korean films. The importance of culture has been widely stressed in the field of translation, particularly when Snell-Hornby introduced the “cultural turn”(2006: 47), and research on the particular cultural elements or references (“cultureme”, in this dissertation) have been conducted.

The starting point of this research was the author’s personal experience in film subtitling in 2006 in which he witnessed a series of peculiar aspects in translating proper nouns of source text(ST). In the translation process some of the proper nouns were rendered, not in the form of maintaining the original forms, but in the form of substitution to enhance the understandability of the target culture(TC) audience. This phenomenon was not restricted solely to proper nouns, but observed in various forms of cultural expressions. Given the inherent nature of audiovisual translation(AVT), which includes the translation of non-verbal expressions such as images and sounds along with the verbal texts, the author came to believe in the necessity of an in-depth study on the translation strategy of culturemes in AVT.

2. Research Questions and Methods

In order to identify the features of cultureme translation in film subtitling, this research was conducted under two main questions:

- 1) What are the main strategies in cultureme translation in film subtitling?
- 2) What are the variables involved in cultureme translation?

To answer these research questions, the author employed a four-stage preparation process. To begin, he selected 12 Korean movies subtitled in English by the Korean Film Council, a quasi-autonomous non-governmental organization which strives to promote the introduction of Korean movies abroad, and analyzed a total of 11,704 subtitles. Secondly, the collected movies were analyzed to identify culturemes and the strategies used in translation. As a result, a total of 3,239 culturemes were detected, and these culturemes were categorized into four main groups: proper nouns(names of places, persons and buildings, brands, etc.), cultural expressions(traditional weights and measures, Korean foods, currency units, etc.), social expressions(vulgarisms, slang, insults, puns, etc.), and idiomatic expressions(proverbs, maxims, idioms, etc). Thirdly, the collected data were analyzed from the perspectives of preservation, substitution, and omission. Finally, the remarkable translation strategies used in cultureme translation were presented.

The translation strategies of the identified culturemes were divided into three main categories: preservation(literal translation, partial translation), substitution(addition of information, generalization, cultural substitution, and situational substitution), and omission. This analysis tool was prepared by modifying the model presented by Pedersen(2011) for the formation of the research.

3. Research Findings

3.1. Main Translation Strategies in Film Subtitling

Among the 3,239 culturemes, the share of social expressions was the highest(1,665) followed by proper nouns(1,294), idiomatic expressions(147) and cultural expressions(133). While preservation was mostly used with 49.1 percent in frequency, details varied by groups. For example, the proper noun group employed preservation the most with 75.2 percent, followed by substitution(14.9%) and omission(9.9%). However, substitution was found as the prevalent strategy for cultural expressions(54.1%), social expressions(48.1%), and idiomatic expressions(64.6%). At the same time, groups showed different preferences by subcategory. First, proper nouns used the translation strategies in the order of literal translation, omission, generalization, partial preservation, cultural substitution, situational substitution, and addition of information.

Second, cultural expressions used literal translation most often, followed by cultural substitution, generalization, omission, situational substitution, partial preservation, and addition of information. Third, the order of strategies used in social expressions is literal translation, omission, generalization, cultural substitution, situational substitution, addition of information, and partial preservation. And idiomatic expressions were translated in the order of cultural substitution, literal translation, generalization, situational substitution, and omission. The most commonly-used translation sub-strategy was identified as literal translation(which belongs to the category of conservation), and the preference of translation strategy varied significantly by each group.

3.2. Translation Variables in Film Subtitling

The variables engaged in the cultureme translation process were identified as follows: inherent constraints of AVT, multi-semiotic features, importance of ST cultureme, repetition, understandability of TT audience, and arbitrary decisions made by a translator. Basically, film subtitling is a translation of the spoken language into a written message, and therefore, a reduction in the translating process is inevitable. Hence, this feature is affected significantly in employing an omission strategy. Multi-semiotic features also influence the use of an omission strategy as in some cases, a sound or an image complemented the delivery of a message and enabled omission of ST in TT subtitles. The importance of ST cultureme was a starting point of the decision making: preserving ST in TT or not. Meanwhile, repetition was a feature influencing omission: the more the frequency of repetition appeared, so did the use of omission strategy. Understandability of TT audience affected the overall translation strategy where the translator decides the basic direction: domestication or foreignization. All of these features were seemed to be closely linked to the arbitrary decision-making of a translator, as it is the very translator who ultimately decides the translation strategy in the translating process.

4. Conclusion

As described above, this research was conducted to identify remarkable strategies in translating culturemes and variables engaged in the translation

process by analyzing the English subtitles of 12 Korean movies. The conclusions drawn from this research are as follows:

First, the frequency of translation strategies varied by the categories classified in this paper.

Second, inherent constraints of AVT, multi-semiotic features, importance of ST culturemes, repetition, understandability of TT audience, and arbitrary decision-making of a translator were presented as translation variables.

Third, the concepts of diachrony and synchrony were applied to expand the research area of cultureme translation. This research presented three types of cultureme translations from this perspective: maintaining synchrony, maintaining diachrony, and shifting from diachrony to synchrony. It is believed that a case of shifting from synchrony to diachrony was not found as film subtitling usually targets a contemporary general audience.

However, this research has some limitations. First, the corpus was limited to 12 movies and the analyzed movies were made during a specific period of time. If the number of movies and the scope of production time are expanded, more interesting results can be drawn. Second, this research was conducted without directly interviewing translators. Though it was a product-oriented research, such interviews would be helpful in more precisely identifying the translation process.

Despite these limitations, this research is meaningful for the following reasons: First, it is one of the first studies confining the research target to the culturemes in film translation. Second, the research can be useful in AVT training which will enhance the competence of translators focusing on the importance of cultureme.

References

- Aixelá, J. (1996). Culture-Specific Items in Translation. In R. Álvarez and M. África-Vidal, M. (eds.), *Translation, Power and Subversion*. Clevedon & Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 52-78.
- Agost, R. (1999). *Traducción y Doblaje: Palabras, Voces e Imágenes*. Barcelona: Ariel.
- Avruch, K. (1998). *Culture and Conflict Resolution*. Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press.
- Baker, M. (1992). In *Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Baker, M. (2006). Contextualization in Translator- and Interpreter-Mediated Events. *Journal of Pragmatics* 38(3): 321-337.
- Ballester, A. (1995). *La Política del Doblaje en España*. Valencia: Ediciones Episteme.
- Bennet, M. (1993). Towards Ethnorelativism: A Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity. In Page, M. (ed.), *Education for the Intercultural Experience*. Yarmouth: Intercultural Press, 22-73.
- Chaume, F. (2004). Film Studies and Translation Studies: Two Disciplines at Stake in Audiovisual Translation. *Meta* 49(1): 12-24.
- Chesterman, A. (1997). *Memes of Translation*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Choi, J. & Lim, H. (2000). An Overview of the Korean Translation Market. *Meta* 45(2): 383-392.
- Davies, E. (2003). A Goblin or a Dirty Nose? The Treatment of Culture-Specific References in Translation of the Harry Potter Books. *The Translator* 9(1): 65-100.
- Delabastita, D. (1990). Translation and the Mass Media. In Bassnet, S. & Lefevere, A. (eds.), *Translation, History and Culture*. London & New York: Pinter Publishers, 97-109.
- Díaz Cintas, J. (2001). *La Traducción Audiovisual: El Subtitulado*. Salamanca: Almar.
- Díaz Cintas, J. (2004). Subtitling: The Long Journey to Academic Acknowledgement. *The Journal of Specialised Translation*. January: 50-70. Retrieved on Aug. 17, 2011 from http://www.jostrans.org/issue01/art_diaz_cintas.php.
- Díaz Cintas, J. (2005). Back to the Future in Subtitling. *MuTra 2005-Challenges of Multidimensional Translation*, Conference Proceedings, 1-17.
- Díaz Cintas, J. (2008). Audiovisual Translation Comes of Age. In Chiaro, D. et al. (eds.), *Between Text and Image*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1-10.
- Díaz Cintas, J. (2010). Subtitling. In Gambier, Y. & Van Doorslaer, L. (eds.), *Handbook of Translation Studies*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 344-349.
- Díaz Cintas, J. & Remael, A. (2007). *Audiovisual Translation: Subtitling*. Manchester & Kinderhook: St. Jerome Publishing.
- Díaz Cintas, J. & Muñoz Sánchez, P. (2006). Fansubs: Audiovisual Translation in an Amateur Environment. *The Journal of Specialised Translation* 6: 37-52.
- Eggins, S. (2004). *An Introduction to Systemic Functional Linguistics (Second Edition)*. London: Continuum.

- Fawcett, P. (1996). Translating Film. In G. Harris. (ed.), *On Translating French Literature and Film*. Amsterdam & Atlanta: Rodopi, 65-88.
- Ferrer Simó, M. (2005). Fansubs y Scanlations: La Influencia del Aficionado en los Criterios Profesionales. *Puentes* 6: 27-44.
- Fodor, I. (1976). *Film Dubbing: Phonetic, Semiotic, Esthetic and Psychological Aspects*. Hamburg: Buske.
- Fong, G. (2009). The Two Worlds of Subtitling: The Case of Vulgarisms and Sexually-oriented Language. In Fong, G. & Au, K. (ed.), *Dubbing and Subtitling in a World Context*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 38-61.
- Gambier, Y. (ed.), (1998). *Translating for the Media*. Turku: Painosalma Oy.
- Gambier, Y. (2003). Screen Transadaptation: Perception and Reception. *The Translator* 9(2): 171-189.
- Gambier, Y. (2010). Translation Strategies and Tactics. In Y. Gambier. & Van Doorslaer. (eds.), *Handbook of Translation Studies*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 412-418.
- Geertz, C. (1993). Religion as a Cultural System. In C. Geertz. (ed.), *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. London: Fontana Press, 87-125.
- Georgakopoulou, P. (2009). Subtitling for the DVD Industry. In Díaz Cintas, J. & G. Anderman. (eds), *Audiovisual Translation: Language Transfer on Screen*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 21-35.
- Georgakopoulou, P. (2010). *Reduction Levels in Subtitling. DVD Subtitling: A Convergence of Trends*. Doctoral Dissertation. Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic.
- Gottlieb, H. (1998). Subtitling. In M. Baker. (ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*. London: Routledge, 244-248.
- Hall, E. (1976/2000). *Beyond Culture*. New York: Doubleday. 최효선 譯. 문화를 넘어서. 서울: 한길사.
- Hatim, B. & Mason, I. (1990). *Discourse and the Translator*. London: Longman.
- Homes, J. (1988/1995). The name and nature of translation studies. In G. Toury (ed.), *Translation across Cultures*. New Dehli: Bahri.
- House, J. (2006). Text and Context in Translation. *Journal of Pragmatics* 38(3): 338-358.
- Hurtado-Albir, A. (2001). *Traducción y Traductología: Introducción a la Traductología*. Madrid: Cátedra.
- Ivarsson, J. & Carroll, M. (1998). *Subtitling*. Simrishamn: TransEdit.
- Jakobson, Roman (1959/1966). On Linguistic Aspects of Translation. In Reuben Brower (ed.), *On Translation*. New York: OUP, 232-9.
- Jing, H. (2010). The Translation of English and Chinese Puns from the Perspective of Relevance Theory. *The Journal of Specialised Translation* 13: 81-99.
- Karamitroglou, F. (2000). *Towards a Methodology for the Investigation of Norms in Audiovisual Translation—the Choice between Subtitling and Revoicing in Greece*. Amsterdam & Atlanta: Rodopi.
- Katan, D. (1999). *Translating Cultures: An Introduction for Translators, Interpreters and Mediators*. Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing.
- Katan, D. (2004). *Translating Cultures: An Introduction for Translators, Interpreters and Mediators, Second Edition*. Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing.
- Kearns, J. (2009). Strategies. In M. Baker and G. Saldanha. (eds.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies 2nd Edition*. London: Routledge, 282-285.
- Lefevere, A. (1992). *Translation/History/Culture: A Sourcebook*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Leppihalme, R. (1997). *Culture Bumps—An Empirical Approach to the Translation of Allusions*. Clevedon, Philadelphia, Toronto, Sydney & Johannesburg: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Luyken, G. & Herbst, T. (1991). *Overcoming Language Barriers in Translation: Dubbing and Subtitling for the European Audience*. Manchester: European Institute for the Media.
- Mailhac, J. (2000). Subtitling and Dubbing, For better or Worse? The English Video Versions of Gazon Maudit. In M. Salama-Carr. (ed.). *On Translating French Literature and Film II*. Amsterdam & Atlanta: Rodopi, 129-154.
- Marti Ferriol, J. (2006). *Estudio Empírico y Descriptivo del Método de Traducción para Doblaje y Subtitulación*. Doctoral Dissertation. Castelló de la Plana: Universitat Jaume I.
- Mason, I. (1989). Speaker Meaning and Reader Meaning: Preserving Coherence in Screen Translation. In H. Prais, R. Kölmel and J. Paynel. (eds.), *Babel. The Cultural and Linguistic Barriers between the Nations*. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 13-24.
- Mason, I. (2001). Coherence in Subtitling: The Negotiation of Face. In F. Chaume. & R. Agost. (eds.), *La Traducción en los Medios Audiovisuales*, Castelló de la Plana: Publicaciones de la Universitat Jaume I.
- Mayoral, R. et al. (1988). Concept of Constrained Translation. Non-Linguistic Perspectives of Translation. *Meta* 33(3): 356-367.
- Molina, L. & Hurtado-Albir, A. (2002). Translation Techniques Revisited: A Dynamic and Functionalist Approach. *Meta* 47(4): 498-592.
- Molina-Martínez, L. (2001). *Análisis Descriptivo de la Traducción de los Culturemas Árabe-Español*. Tesis Doctoral. Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.
- Muñoz Martín, R. (2000). Translation Strategies: Somewhere Over the Rainbow. In A. Beeby et al. (eds.), *Investigating Translation: Selected Papers from the 4th International Conference on Translation, Barcelona, 1998*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 129-138.
- Nedergaard-Larsen, B. (1993). Culture-Bound Problems in Subtitling. *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology* 2: 207-242.
- Neves, J. (2005). *Audiovisual Translation: Subtitling for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing*. Doctoral Dissertation. Surrey: University of Surrey.
- Newmark, P. (1988). *A Textbook of Translation*. New York: Prentice Hall.
- Nida, E. (1964). *Towards a Science of Translation*. Leiden: Brill.
- Nord, C. (1997). *Translating as a Purposeful Activity*. Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing.
- Nord, C. (2003). Proper Names in Translation for Children: Alice in Wonderland as a Case in Point. *Meta* 48(1-2): 182-196.
- Orero, P. (2004). Audiovisual Translation - A New Dynamic Umbrella. In Orero, P. (ed.), *Topics in Audiovisual Translation* (pp. VII-XIII). Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Pedersen, J. (2007). Scandinavian Subtitles. A Comparative Study of Subtitling Norms in Sweden and Denmark with a Focus on Extralinguistic Cultural References. Ph. D. Thesis. Stockholm: Stockholm University.
- Pedersen, J. (2011). *Subtitling Norms for Television*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Pérez González, L. (2009). Audiovisual Translation. In M. Baker and G. Saldanha. (eds.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*. London: Routledge, 13-20.

Prieto del Pozo, L. (2006). *Los Alioculturemas en la Publicidad Europea*. Doctoral Thesis. Universidad de Granada.

Pym, A. (2010). *Exploring Translation Theories*. Oxon & New York: Routledge.

Reiss, K. (2000). *Translation Criticism: The Potentials and Limitations*. Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing.

Remael, A. (2010). Audiovisual Translation. In Gambier, Y. & Van Doorslaer, L. (eds.), *Handbook of Translation Studies*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 12-17.

Saussure, F. (1916/1979). *Cours de Linguistique Générale*. Paris: Payot. 최승연 譯. 1990. 일반언어학 강의. 서울: 민음사.

Saville-Troike, M. (1986). *The Ethnography of Communication: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Schroter, T. (2005). *Shun the Pun, Rescue the Rhyme? The Dubbing and Subtitling of Language-Play in Film*. Doctoral Dissertation Karlstad University.

Snell-Hornby, M. (1990). Linguistic Transcoding Or Cultural Transfer? A Critique of Translation Theory in Germany. In Bassnett, S & Lefevere, A. (eds.), *Translation, History and Culture*. London & New York: Pinter Publishers, 79-86.

Snell-Hornby, M. (2006). *The Turns of Translation Studies*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamin Publishing Company.

Sobchack, T. & Sobchack, V. (1997). *An Introduction to Film*. New York: Columbia University Press. 주창규 외 譯. 1998. 영화란 무엇인가-영화의 역사, 형식, 기능에 대한 이해. 서울: 거름.

Sokoli, S. (2011). *Subtitling Norms in Greece and Spain-A Comparative Descriptive Study on Film Subtitle Omission and Distribution*. Doctoral dissertation. Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.

Spencer-Oatey, H. (2012). *What is Culture? A Compilation of Quotations*. GlobalPAD Core Concepts. <http://go.warwick.ac.kr/globalpadintercultural>.

Taivalkoski-Shilov, K. (2008). Subtitling 8 Mile in Three Languages-Translation Problems and Translator License. *Target* 20(2): 249-274

Titford, G. (1982). Subtitling: Constrained Translation. *Lebende Sprachen* 27(3): 113-116.

Toury, G. (1995). *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond*. Amsterdeam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Toury, G. (1978), revised (1995). The Nature and Role of Norms in Translation. In L. Venuti. (ed.), *The Translation Studies Reader*. London: Routledge.

Trompenaars, F. (1998). *Riding the Waves of Culture (2nd Edition)*. New York: McGrawhill.

Vázquez Ayora, G.(1977). *Introducción a la Traductología: Curso Básico de Traducción*. Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press.

Venuti, L. (1995). *The Invisibility of the Translator: A History of Translation*. London: Routledge.

Vinay, J. & Darbelnet, J. (1958). *Stylistique Comparée du Français et de L'anglais*. Paris: Les Éditions Didier. 전성기 譯. 2003. 불어와 영어의 비교문체론. 서울: 고려대학교출판부.

Wang, N. (2008). On Cultural Translation: A Postcolonial Perspective. In Wang N. & Sun. Y. (eds.), *Translation, Globalisation and Localisation*. Clevedon, Buffalo & Toronto:

Multilingual Matters, 75-87.

Zabalbeascoa, P. (1993). *Developing Translation Studies to Better Account for Audiovisual Texts and Other New Forms of Text Production*. Doctoral Thesis. Lleida: Universitat de Lleida.

Zabalbeascoa, P. (2008). The Nature of the Audiovisual Text and Its Parameters. In J. Díaz Cintas (ed.), *The Didactics of Audiovisual Translation*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 21-37.

Author's email address

stephenjc@gmail.com

About the author

Jaebum Cho earned his PhD in Interpretation and Translation Studies from the Graduate School of Interpretation and Translation, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Seoul, Korea. He worked as an Assistant Professor at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Yongin, Korea, from 2012 to 2014, and has taught a variety of interpretation and translation courses(Consecutive Interpreting BA and AB, Technical Translation, Translation Theories and Practice, Mock Conferences, etc.) at Kyung Hee University, Hongik University, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Dongguk University, and Hansung University, all of which are located in Seoul, Korea since 2005.