

Research on the Subtitle Translation of Green Book from the Perspective of Register Theory

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Abstract: Subtitle translation, an important part of films, complements and explains the content of the film, performing an important role in cross-cultural communication. Accurate subtitle translation can overcome linguistic and cultural barriers and provide viewers with a premium cinematic experience, which is instrumental in the success of films. Taking register theory as the theoretical framework and the film Green Book as the research object, this paper is aimed at analyzing the guiding roles of the field, tenor, and mode in the process of subtitle translation and puts forward suggestions for some inappropriate subtitle translation to achieve the accuracy of subtitle translation. It is found that register theory emphasizes the importance of context, which not only enables subtitle translators to better identify the register of the source language and achieve register equivalence between the source text and the target text, but also helps to improve the quality of subtitle translation. The results of the study not only provides a new perspective for subtitle translation research and enriches the research achievements, but also helps the audience to appreciate films well and facilitates intercultural exchanges.

1. Introduction

Accompanying the rapid development of the film and television industry, subtitle translation, a new field in translation, has gradually thrived. The acceleration of globalization, the needs of multilingual and multicultural societies, and the advancement of technology have combined to drive the research of subtitle translation, which has emerged as a hot research issue in recent years [1,2]. Nevertheless, compared with the lengthy history of literary translation, the study of subtitle translation has not attracted sufficient attention from the academic community, and some scholars even argue that subtitle translation has no academic value and decline to consider it as a translation activity [3]. In addition, Liu et al. (2011) state that domestic scholars have not yet conducted systematic and comprehensive theoretical studies on subtitle translation, and the research perspective is narrow [4]. At present, a vast majority of scholars have studied subtitle translation based on relevance theory and Skopos theory, causing the phenomenon of replicated studies [5-8]. Furthermore, due to the lack of sound theoretical support, the quality of subtitle translation still varies, which to a certain extent affects the audience's appreciation of the film and reduces the role of the film as a cross-cultural communication interface. As such, it is necessary to study subtitle translation from a new theoretical

perspective that contributes to the quality improvement of subtitle translations and the establishment of a complete system of subtitle translation research.

Systemic functional linguistic is a theoretical model designed to solve problems, and is thus a problem-oriented theory. Si and Tao (2014) argue that the intrinsic property of translation is the special language use of reproducing the meaning carried by one language in another language, and systemic functional linguistics is grounded in the study of language use, so that the theory developed based on it has the most direct guidance and reference significance for the exploration of translation studies, which also belongs to the category of language use[9]. Systemic functional linguistics assumes that the essence of translation lies in the fact that meaning remains invariant when it is transferred from one language to another and that the meaning in this case contains three basic aspects, namely semantic, pragmatic and textual, so translation is the replacement of the source language with a semantically and pragmatically equivalent target language [10]. Register theory is of great importance in systemic functional linguistics, emphasizing the social and cultural contexts of language use. In other words, language occurs in certain contexts, and the interpretation of language can not be separated from specific contexts. Although this theory was not initially developed for translation research, it was attempted to be applied to guide translation research in the preliminary phase of the construction of the theory; applying this theory to the field of translation can help us successfully achieve meaning transformation [11]. However, register theory has previously been applied mainly to the translation of advertisements, legal texts, literary works, and business English, and only a few scholars apply it to subtitle translation research.

In view of this, this paper attempts to interpret the issues related to subtitle translation from the perspective of register theory by taking some selected dialogues from *Green Book* as examples, aimed at integrating register variables into the process of subtitle translation to explore how register analysis helps subtitle translators to gain a greater comprehension of the intended meaning and linguistic features of the source text for an accurate and tailored subtitle translation. This research is of great significance both in theoretical and practical senses. Theoretically, the theory and method adopted in this paper can provide references for future research and contribute to the enrichment of research achievements of subtitle translation. Practically, this study can effectively help the audience to appreciate the film, and further promote cultural exchanges to some extent. In addition, this study is of instructional value to EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners, which will not only stimulate their interest in enjoying films, but also improve their ability to use and appreciate the language.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Subtitling

Prior to delving into the research on subtitle translation, it is essential to be aware of the definitions and classifications in relation to subtitling, and in particular the characteristics of subtitling. It is the specificity of film language that contributes to the unique nature of film translation[3].

2.1.1. Definition of Subtitling

Subtitling has been defined by a large number of leading Western scholars. Nedergaard-Larsen (1993) holds that “subtitling is a special type of language transfer: a written, condensed translation of a predominantly spoken original” [12]. Asher and Simpson (1993) state that subtitles are the words printed or superimposed on a film in a foreign language translate the information on the soundtrack[13]. Shuttleworth (2014) identifies that subtitling can be defined as the process of providing synchronized subtitles for film and television dialogue [14]. Although these scholars have varied definitions of subtitling, their practical meanings are not very different. In other words,

subtitling is a textualization of the dialogue of films, usually appearing at the bottom of the screen. The purpose of adding subtitles is to help viewers to appreciate films, especially those who have difficulty in understanding the film's dialogue. It is thus evident that the accuracy of subtitle translation is of great importance.

2.1.2. Categorizations of Subtitling

According to different criteria, subtitling can be classified into different types. The traditional categorization criteria for subtitle translations are often varied and vaguely defined, resulting in a complex and confusing classification. Summarizing the types of subtitle translation will contribute to an in-depth study of it, which is beneficial to the development of the film industry and academic research. Language, technology, audience and specialization are four criteria that serve as effective guidelines for caption classification [15]. Of these, subtitle translation is closely related to language and technology, the two main elements of subtitle translation, which necessarily serve as classification criteria.

Taking language as a criterion, subtitling can be mainly categorized into intralingual and interlingual. Gottlieb (1994) argues that vertical subtitling takes speech down in writing, whereas diagonal subtitling, being two-dimensional converts source-language speech into target-language writing [16]. Specifically, interlingual subtitling, also called diagonal subtitling, means that the source language is translated into the target language and printed simultaneously at the bottom of the screen, preserving the original soundtrack. Intralingual subtitling, also known as vertical subtitling, refers to a shift in language mode that does not involve a change in language type, namely, does not require a conversion from one language to another. A distinction is made between open subtitles and closed subtitles, considering which technology is used and whether it can support the viewer's choice of subtitles. The main concern of this study is the interlingual subtitling, which is the translation of the original language displayed at the bottom of the film screen in synchrony with the picture. Interlingual translation is concerned with the use of one language symbol to interpret another language symbol. However, subtitle translators usually encounter linguistic and syntactic challenges, followed by appropriately cultural interpretations, thus making subtitle translation more difficult than a normal bilingual translation.

2.1.3. Features of Subtitling

Understanding the linguistic characteristics of films is of great importance for subtitle translation studies. Film translation, as a branch of literary translation, has parallels with literary translation and observes the general criteria for literary translation [3]. However, to a greater extent, subtitle translation is still subject to special features of the film. Some scholars have discussed the particularities of the film language, and there are overlaps in their studies, so the author integrates their views and summarizes four characteristics of the language of film.

In the first place, one of the characteristics of film language is popularization [3]. Film is a kind of popular art, and if it is to be promoted widely, one of the most important factors is that the subtitling should be in line with the literacy level of the general public, so its language should be understandable. If the language is obscure and difficult to understand, the audience is likely to lose their interest in watching the film.

In addition, the sense of brevity is another characteristic of subtitle translation, which is mainly due to time and space constraints [17]. Owing to the time constraint, subtitles appear on the screen for a short time and cannot be watched repeatedly like text reading; due to the constraint of screen space, the translation of films is limited in terms of the number of words and cannot be translated with too many notes. These two points conspire to the requirement that subtitle translation should be

concise.

Furthermore, the sense of character is the third feature of film language [18]. The use of language reveals the social status, occupation, educational background, and religion of a person. As such, subtitle translation should conform to the character's image, otherwise, it will affect the audience's understanding of the characters in the film.

Last but not least, the translation of cultural items is a great challenge in film translation [19]. Language is the carrier of culture, reflecting the behavior and the thinking pattern of different countries. There are some fixed expressions or slang that reflect the characteristics of different cultures. These terms play an important role in cultural exchanges. If the translation cannot be accurate, it will affect the understanding of the audience. The translator may use notes to clarify some information that is not easily understood in fiction, but this is not possible in film translation.

2.2. Previous Studies of Subtitle Translation

2.2.1. Studies Abroad

The subtitle translation research first started in the Western countries. Due to geographical reasons, the Western countries are closely connected. Combined with the advances in technology and the attention of academia, subtitle translation research has boomed vigorously. Nowadays, experts active in the forefront of this field are mainly scholars from the Western countries, especially from Europe, and it can be said that the subtitle translation theory of Europe has been in the leading position.

Istvan Fodor (1976) analyzes the translation and dubbing of film and television works from the unique perspectives of psychology, linguistics and aesthetics, which can be regarded as the foundation of Western film and television translation theory[20]. In 1995, the European Association for Studies in Screen Translation (ESIST) was founded, and this organization has promoted the systematization of subtitle translation research. Subsequently, numerous scholars commenced to conduct more in-depth studies on subtitle translation. In terms of subtitle translation strategies, Gottlieb (1994) writes quite a few works about relevant issues of subtitling, and systematically proposes many relevant theories to address theoretical aspects such as the definition, classification of subtitling as well as strategies of subtitle translation, including strategies specific to language, culture and media [16]. Hatim and Masion (2005) emphasize the importance of the pragmatic dimension of context and provide a comprehensive argument for subtitle translation studies[21]. From the perspective of quality control, James (2001), a subtitle editor in Wales, analyzes the different expectations of clients such as scriptwriters, producers and viewers and puts a premium on audience expectations, which means that viewers can easily follow the subtitles and have confidence in the subtitle translation[22]. Besides, some scholars conduct studies about multimedia translation, and one of the most representative figures is Gambier, who examines the employment of multimodal transcription to analyze audiovisual data. With the effort of many scholars, subtitle translation has a relatively systematic and sound research system in the Western countries, covering almost all the aspects [23].

2.2.2. Studies at Home

Compared with the thriving development of subtitle translation in the West, subtitle translation research in China is at a preliminary stage. Since China's reform and opening up, voluminous foreign films have been making their way to Chinese markets, and large-scale film translation activities have begun during this period due to the demand of domestic audience and the advance in technology. However, the study of film translation has lagged behind, but it is gaining increasing attention and has a promising future, and there are already some outstanding scholars engaging in subtitle translation research.

In the first place, some exceptional scholars are engaged in film and television translation and have rich practical experience, so they research related issues of subtitle translation based on their experience, among which Zhang Chunbai and Qian Shaochang are influential scholars. They are also the earliest scholars in China who pay attention to subtitle translation, and as leading figures in the field, their research has had a significant impact on the academic community. Zhang (1998) presents five differences between film translation and literary translation, and states that considering the particularity of film translation, while striving to maintain the original flavor, subtitle translators should follow the principle of liberal translation[18]. Qian (2000) points out five characteristics of the language of film, then summarizes seven experiences in film translation based on his own practice and indicates that “expressiveness” is the most important in film translation among three principles of “faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance”[3]. In addition, subtitle translation strategy is also the focus of most domestic scholars. Furthermore, numerous scholars study subtitle translation from different theoretical perspectives, mainly relevance theory and Skopos theory. From the perspective of relevance theory, Yan (2010) argues that the success of the subtitle translation of *Hero* is precisely due to the translator’s subjectivity in speculating the author’s intention and the reader’s expectation and then adopting appropriate translation strategies under the guidance of the theory [8]. From the perspective of Skopos theory, Deng and Meng (2010) consider that this theory is instrumental in dealing with linguistic and cultural issues in the subtitle translation of the sitcom *Growing Pain* [5]. Although foreign films have received more favorable attention in China over the years, relevant research is still dragging behind. Domestic scholars place emphasis on subtitling characteristics and corresponding strategies, and the theoretical perspectives adopted are relatively homogeneous, with obvious repetition of studies in the same period and mixed quality of subtitle translations, which to a certain extent affects the role of films as cross-cultural communication. Therefore, in-depth research in this area is imperative to advance the improvement of subtitle translation research.

2.3 Register Theory and Translation

The concept of register theory in systemic functional linguistics originated from Malinowski, who introduced the concept of “context of situation”, but he did not conduct an in-depth study of the relationship between situational context and language function. Later, Firth brought it into his linguistic theory, and Halliday continued the study based on their research, contributing greatly to the development of register theory. Notably, Halliday’s conceptual understanding of register is not static, but continuously developing. Originally, Halliday (1964) defines register as the variety according to use[24]. Then he considered that register can be defined as the configuration of semantic resources that the member of a culture typically associates with a situation type. When people study language in particular situational instances, the situation type is a “semiotic construct which involves the ongoing social activity, the role relationships involved and the symbolic channel” [25]. They refer to field, tenor and mode respectively, and are technically termed as register variables. Field, an abstract term, refers to the setting in which something is happening, and includes not only the subject-matter but also the whole activity of the speaker is participating. Tenor refers to participants and the relationship between them, and the various relationships between different people determine the words they use in communication, which means that the relationships between the participants influence the degree of formality of the language. Mode refers to the role that language plays. In actual use, mode is generally divided into spoken language and written language, each one of which has its own distinct characteristics.

In addition, Martin (1992), House (1997), and Baker (2018) have also made contributions to the advancement of this theory[26,10,19]. House (1977) first starts to apply this theory to translation research[27]. She develops a model of translation quality assessment to analyze the source and target

texts for the purpose of equivalence. House (1997) explicitly demonstrates that the theoretical basis of the model for assessing translation quality is the register theory[10]. Furthermore, many domestic scholars have studied register theory since it was introduced into China. Zhang (1987) introduces register theory in terms of its origin, characteristics and functions[28]. Wang (2000) analyzes the development of register theory, especially Martin's further research on this theory[29]. From a translation perspective, some scholars explore the relationship between register theory and translation, but only a few scholars have applied it to the study of subtitle translation.

As previously stated, translation is a process of interpreting and decoding the source text to achieve the meaning exchange. But what the translator needs to do in this process is not simply to translate the original text verbatim into the target language, but more importantly to present the style of the source text, that is, transcend the superficial form and find the underlying message and accurately represent the original author's intentions to the readers of the translated text. More specifically, register equivalence between the target language and the original language should be realized, which is an important factor in the translation process. Register theory places specific linguistic variants in specific situational contexts for study. By analyzing the register variables, the translator can more accurately grasp the characteristics of the source text, and thus successfully convey the meaning of the original language to the readers of the target text. The switching of scenes, transformation of topics and relationships between characters in film need to be taken into account in the process of subtitle translation. By considering the activities taking place, the relationships between characters and the channels of communication, namely, three variables of register theory: field, tenor and mode, subtitle translators can avoid subjectivity to the largest extent and produce qualified subtitle translation.

3. Research Material

Subtitle translation is generally an effective supplement to the content of a film, and because of the constant cultural exchange between countries around the world, it has become an essential tool for understanding foreign cultures. However, unlike traditional literary translations, subtitle translations have distinctive features due to the nature of the film itself, and these characteristics pose great challenges to the accuracy of subtitle translation. Therefore, from the perspective of linguistics, it is necessary to study subtitle translation to further improve the quality of subtitle translation.

The film *Green Book*, directed by Peter Farrelly, was based on a true story. It was premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival and won the People's Choice Award. What's more, the film also won three awards at the 91st Academy Awards. Due to the difference between Chinese and English linguistic and cultural aspects, the subtitle translation, as an important part of the film, has played a pivotal role in the success of the film, but many viewers have responded that the translation quality of the film has yet to be improved.

In this paper, 13 samples were selected from *Green Book* in order to conduct an in-depth study and thus improve the quality of subtitle translation and make the film more accessible to a wider audience. In order to ensure the reliability of the data, the selected examples were classified three times to serve as the basis for the final study. To this end, based on the previous studies, this study focused on the following two questions:

- 1) What is the role of register theory in the process of subtitle translation?
- 2) How does register theory support subtitle translators in achieving qualified subtitle translation?

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Findings of Field

As previously mentioned, the field is closely linked to the subject and setting of the conversation; the field of a text can be identified by the words used in the text and, conversely, the words used in a specialized text are governed by its field. The meaning of language, especially some polysemous or culture-loaded words, will have different meanings in different contexts, and their intended meanings can only be accurately interpreted under specific situations. In order to achieve the accuracy of subtitle translation, it is necessary to achieve the equivalence of field in the translation process, so that the scenes in which the activity takes place can be accurately reproduced.

4.1.1. Equivalence of Field

Example 1:

Source text: Don't worry about it, I took care of him.

The verb phrase “take care of” has a wide range of meanings, so the translation should be contextualized. Otherwise, its implication is very likely to be misunderstood. At the start of the film, Tony tipped the waitress to get Mr. Loscudo's hat in an attempt to impress the wealthy man by returning it. This sentence is one of the dialogues that Tony said when he returned the hat to this wealthy man. This phrase is often used to mean “look after somebody”, but in this context, the subject of the conversation revolves around “who stole Mr. Loscudo's hat and how to solve this matter”, so the source text “took care of” is translated into “*jie jue*” in Chinese, which is in accordance with the situation. Two meanings are accurately conveyed by it: firstly, the speaker has taken concrete steps to address the issue, combining with the character of Tony, the implied meaning may be that he has beaten up the man who stole the hat; secondly, he attempted to reassure Mr. Loscudo, eliminate his worry, and draw them closer to each other. This precise translation shows the character of Tony to the fullest and, more importantly, its meaning can be accurately understood by the audience of the target language.

Example 2:

Source text: Good luck! Break a leg.

Supposedly, the idiomatic expression “break a leg” comes from Shakespeare's stage tradition, and it is initially used in a performance or entertainment context such as theater or music as a jargon for a blessing. In the film, this is a statement from Graham Kindell, the general manager, who wishes Shirley a successful performance in Birmingham. However, a large number of Chinese viewers may not be familiar with this expression and therefore could be confused by its literal meaning. In addition, the meaning of this phrase has evolved over time and can also be used to wish someone a favorable exam or a successful interview. If the field is overlooked, both of the above aspects can affect the linguistic choices of the subtitle translator as well as the comprehension of the audience. The translation “*yan chu shun li*” indicates that the subtitle translator is aware of the subject of the conversation, and conveys the meaning of the sentence accurately in combination with the background.

4.1.2. Deviation of Field

Example 3:

Source text: Chubby Checker, Lil' Richard, Sam Cooke. I mean come on Doc, these are your people!

These characters were singers from the 1960s who were not necessarily familiar to many Americans, let alone Chinese viewers. In this context, the sentence “these are your people” is

translated into “these people are famous black singers”, which allows the audience to understand the identity of these characters, but deviates from the meaning expressed in the original text. Since the meaning of “famous” does not appear in the source text, moreover, the phrase implies more than just Tony’s perception that Shirley did not know these songs.

Considering these issues, the word “people” can be translated as “*tong bao*” to convey the underlying meaning. This term refers to people who share the same nationality or ethnic affiliation. More specifically, they share similar culture, history, and values as well as a certain sense of belonging and closeness. Tony thought that Shirley belonged to the same race as these famous singers and should therefore be very familiar with these songs, but contrary to this, Shirley did not have an appreciation for them, which shocked Tony to a great extent.

Example 4:

Source text: Always on the road like a carnival worker.

It is not appropriate to translate “carnival” to “*ma xi tuan*” in Chinese. Shirley believed that the nature of his career was the same as that of a carnival worker, and both are extremely occupied. Although translating it as “*ma xi tuan*” can also convey the basic meaning of a busy work schedule, it fails to accurately convey the connotation of the original text. The carnival was originally a traditional European festival, but has now evolved into a public entertainment event that includes large rides complemented by various forms of cultural and artistic activities, which is very different from the circus in China. Therefore, it is more appropriate to adopt the foreignizing translation and translate it directly as “*jia nian hua*”. Because “carnival” is not an unfamiliar term to many Chinese viewers, as it appears in many films set in the American countryside, it does not affect the audience’s understanding, but conveys the original and exotic culture.

4.2. Findings of Tenor

Tenor involves the status, occupation, and relationship of the interlocutors. Distinctions in the status and relationships of characters can affect an individual’s style of speaking. In the film, the relationships between the main characters and the intersections between the main characters and different secondary characters affect the language used, and the differences in the characters’ identities and social status are shown through their linguistic characteristics. Therefore, in the process of subtitle translation, the tenor of the original text can help subtitle translators to revive the characters in the film to the greatest extent.

4.2.1. Equivalence of Tenor

Example 5:

Source text: And he was sitting on top of a friggin’ throne all dressed up like the king of the jungle bunnies.

The phrase “jungle bunny” is an offensive term, which expresses Tony’s discrimination against black people. His attitude was shown at the beginning of the film in which he threw the cups used by the two repairmen into the trash. In addition, the phrase also reflects the social status of the character; he is an Italian-American living at the bottom of America and speaks more casually. There are many discriminatory epithets in this film, and this is just one of them. It reveals the relatively low social status of blacks in society at that time, and paves the way for the development of the film’s plot and the relationship between Tony and Shirley.

Example 6:

Source text: You keep your goddamn job? Then you do what I goddamn you to do, when I goddamn tell you to do it.

The personal pronoun “I” is translated into “*lao zi*” rather than “*wo*”. It is often an expression of

exasperation to represent one's identity by using this appellation. Having lost his way, Tony strayed into a sunset city and, as a result, both of them were taken to jail by the police. In desperation, Shirley had no choice but to call Bobby Kennedy, who then demanded the prison governor release them immediately. Although the governor was dissatisfied with the order, he had to compromise in the face of a higher level of power. But when he issued an order, one of his subordinates did not want to carry out the order, which is undoubtedly a challenge to his authority. If this pronoun is translated as "wo", it does not accurately express the relationship between superiors and subordinates and the outrage of the governor.

4.2.2. Deviation of Tenor

Example 7:

Source text: That's Tony.

As the Copacabana Club was being renovated, Tony's wife wanted to ask her relatives to lend a hand to her husband in a temporary job. At this point, one of the relatives said that Tony had a good job at the sanitation department before and it was because Tony beat up the foreman that he lost his job. This comment shows Tony's impulsive personality and is a mockery of Tony by his relatives. However, the word "*zuo feng*" in Chinese is more formal and refers mainly to the stable attitudes and behaviors that people display in their work or life, and is not suitable for use in this context.

Considering that this is a conversation between Tony and his relatives, it is more appropriate to present Tony's emotional and impulsive character traits and their intimate relationship in a more straightforward manner. An alternative is to replace the word "*zuo feng*" with "*feng ge*". In Chinese, the latter refers to a specific way or form that people use to express their thoughts, feelings or aesthetic views on a particular occasion or cultural context. In other words, the meaning of the phrase in this context is that there is a difference in the way Tony solves problems. Therefore, the translation of "*feng ge*" can accurately convey the relationship between Tony and these people, as well as the features of his character.

Example 8:

Source text: So if I'm not black enough, and if I'm not white enough, and if I'm not man enough, then tell me, Tony, what am I?

One thing to note in this sentence is the use of "what". Tony and Shirley have an argument later in the film. In fact, Shirley was very lonely and confused, and he doubted the meaning of his own existence. This is the outburst of his emotions, and instead of using "who" he uses "what" to represent himself, which expresses his inner feelings more strongly. The meaning of this sentence is very clear, so the principle of literal translation is adopted. The previous translation, although not erroneous in meaning, did not bring out the character's sentiments to the fullest. A subtle change can accurately show the close relationship between the two and Shirley's confusion, that is, translating the sentence "what am I" as "*wo shi shen mo*" to show this intense emotion.

4.3. Findings of Mode

The mode refers to the medium or channel of communication, which is generally classified into spoken text and written text depending on different situations. If the spoken form is converted into a written form, it will make the translation rigid, while the opposite will appear casual, so translators should carefully analyse the style of the original text and reproduce it in the translation. Due to the limitation of time and space, most film languages have the characteristics of brevity and colloquialism. If this problem is not realized, then the subtitle translation probably deviates from the language style of the source text, which causes the audience to misunderstand certain information.

4.3.1. Equivalence of Mode

Example 9:

Source text: Because my friends said that I was the best bullshit artist in the Bronx.

It is important to note that “bullshit artist” is translated as “*che du zi*” rather than its literal form “*yi shu jia*” or other forms. This conversation took place when Tony and Shirley were chatting and they had been together for some time, so the spoken language was used at this point. But the word “*yi shu jia*” is a rather formal expression, which does not fit the colloquial nature of the conversation between the two. This term “*che du zi*” was originally a northeastern colloquialism, but with the increasing influence of the Internet in recent years, it has become a buzzword, meaning that a person is always saying something unrealistic. But in Tony’s mind, the term was just a banter between friends and was not meant to be discriminatory. Actually, he was indeed a man adept at convincing others and a good problem-solver. Thus, this translation fits the dialogue scene at this time, brings Tony’s character traits to life, and conforms to the brevity of subtitle translation.

Example 10:

Source text: When I think of you...I’m reminded of the beautiful plains of Iowa. The distance between us is breaking my spirit.

Tony’s work required him to be away from home for long periods of time, so Dolores, his wife, asked Tony to write to her, insisting that it was cheaper than making a phone call, which was in accordance with their family situation. So Tony wrote to his wife in his free time, and throughout the film, he totally wrote five letters to his wife. The first two letters were mainly about his daily meals and some things about Shirley with bland language. But the above two sentences are selected from the third letter that Tony wrote to his wife with the help of Dr. Donald Shirley, which is closer to the expression in written form.

In particular, “breaking my spirit” is translated into the Chinese four-character idiom “*hun qian meng rao*”, which not only creates a romantic atmosphere, but also expresses Tony’s deep thoughts about his wife. The beautiful plain of Iowa is the place where they lived together, and although they were far apart, the distance could not stop Tony from loving his wife. This translation brings out the best of the two characters: Tony deeply loves his wife and Dr. Donald Shirley is incredibly talented.

Example 11:

Source text: Dear Dolores. Sometimes you reminded me of a house with beautiful lights on it where everyone was happy inside.

Under Shirley’s influence, Tony has changed from writing letters to his wife talking about the daily routine of life to confessing his deepest feelings to her. This example is taken from the fifth letter that Tony wrote to his wife. In this sentence, Tony uses the rhetorical device of metaphor, comparing his wife to a house with lights on. The light-adorned house represents a peaceful and harmonious life, implying the importance of Dolores in Tony’s heart.

In addition, the sentence also contains the expression technique of “*xing*”, a common technique in Chinese poetry, in which “the other thing” is used to draw out “this thing” that one intends to express. In other words, rather than directly stating the object, one might initially say something like a flower or other things, and then use the relevance between them to lead to what one wants to convey indeed. This is similar to the current symbolism, which uses a concrete image of something to express an abstract concept, thought and emotion based on some connection between things. A house, especially one that is light, represents the waiting of a lover at home and the warmth of life. This technique turns the more abstract spirit of Tony’s love for his wife and his expectations of a better life into a concrete and perceptible image, thus leaving a deep impression on the viewers.

4.3.2. Deviation of Mode

Example 12:

Source text: I'm meeting all the highly leading citizens of the town. People that use big words, all of them.

This is a sentence from a letter that Tony wrote to his wife about his experiences accompanying Shirley during his performance. The phrase "leading citizens" is translated into "yao yuan", which is not appropriate in this context. Because it is too narrow in meaning and does not convey Tony's meaning. The term "yao yua" mainly refers to a man who holds an important job in a business organization or an important official appointed by the government, but what Tony is referring to here is that the people at Shirley's performance were either rich or wealthy and of high social status, but not necessarily business leaders or government officials. And the term is too formal to be colloquial, given that this is a conversation between Tony and his wife and Tony's level of education. Therefore, taking into account the accuracy of the meaning and features of the language of films, the author reckons that "da ren wu", a more colloquial expression, is more fitting with the meaning of "leading citizens" to indicate the status of these people and in line with the feature of subtitling of popularity and colloquialism.

Example 13:

Source text: Bottom of the knife. Let's just get it over with and we can go home and get away from these pricks.

This sentence is selected from the dialogue between Tony and Dr. Shirley, after the host refused to allow Shirley to dine in the restaurant during the last show. The phrase "bottom of the knife" indicates an urgent situation, which is an informal usage for ordinary people. This would certainly confuse the audience if the phrase were translated literally, so it is appropriate to use the strategy of domesticating to find a corresponding word in the target text that conveys the meaning of the phrase, but the expression "shan shi shan zhong" is not appropriate. Tony had witnessed Shirley being discriminated against by many people along the way, and as their relationship changed, he came to understand the hardship of Dr. Shirley's situation. Thus, he felt angry about the injustice that Shirley had experienced, but this translation does not bring out Tony's angry emotions and contrasts with the latter expression. And this expression is also more towards the written text. Considering the context, the phrase can be translated as "kuai jie shu le" to show his eagerness to leave the place.

5. Conclusion

This paper takes the subtitle translation of *Green Book* as the sample of study to analyze the quality of subtitle translation under the guidance of register theory. Through the analysis of field, tenor and mode, it explores whether the subtitle translation of the film achieves the equivalence between the source text and the target text, and adopts corresponding translation strategies to improve some less appropriate translations under the guidance of the register theory. The application of register theory provides a new research perspective to conduct the study of subtitle translation, which focuses on the situational context in which language occurs. The equivalence of the discourse field is determined by the subject matter of the dialogue; the tenor of the discourse is closely linked to the participants and their status; for the film subtitle translation, the mode of discourse is primarily spoken. Taking into account the film plots, participants, and the language features, register theory helps subtitle translators to be aware of the equivalence of register between source language and target language in subtitle translation of *Green Book* and to make objective rather than superficial reasoning on the information, especially the translation of cultural items.

In recent years, with the intensive cultural exchanges among countries, the translation activities of film and television works have become more and more frequent, and the study of subtitle translation

has attracted the attention of more scholars. Systemic functional linguistics treats language as a meaning potential and focuses on language in actual use. The use of language is closely related to context, so the theory of register plays an extremely important role in the study of subtitle translation. The application of register theory in subtitle translation is fruitful. In the process of subtitle translation, the analysis of register helps to understand the linguistic features and main contents of the source text, which in turn helps subtitle translators to reproduce characters in the target language, maintain the original style and reshape the language features in order to promote the successful meaning transference, improve the quality of subtitle translation, and help cross-cultural communication. Therefore, this study provides a comprehensive explanation of the subtitle translation of *Green Book* from the perspective of register theory, which enriches the research results in this field, expands the previous academic views, and makes a wider range of readers aware of the necessity of subtitle translation.

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