

Subtitling Harry Potter's Fantastic World: Linguistic and Cultural Transfer from Britain to China in a Subtitled Children's Film

Lisi Liang
Cardiff University

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the way in which Harry Potter's made-upness is subtitled for a contemporary Chinese audience. It will specifically underline how the official Chinese subtitles¹ mediate the cultural specificities which characterise the transnational world of Harry Potter. Jerry Griswold's (2006, 1-2) findings on children's literature, which key characteristics including "scariness, smallness, flying, aliveness" serve compellingly to the majority of the children, will be applied to the categorisation of the representative instances in this case analysis. "Magic", as an extension of Griswold's category of "aliveness", will be also considered to analyse the quintessential cultural transfer between Britain and China. The paper concludes with the fact that a high level of creativity is required from the subtitler to bridge the considerable linguistic and cultural gap between both countries in relation to the subtitling process of witchcraft and wizardry in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (2001).

Key Words

Subtitling, Harry Potter, Linguistic and Cultural Transfer, Translating Culture.

¹ Different from fansubbing, the official subtitles offer a stable body of work. They also underline an extra layer of cultural intervention in keeping with André Lefevere's (2002, 14) writing on the cultural institutions which shape the process of translation because the subtitles in question have not only been filtered through the Chinese translator's perspective, they have also been mediated by the government office which oversees the films chosen for subtitling and the way in which they are subtitled.

Introduction

As this subtitled film is adapted with the intention of making it suitable for children, the paper will particularly focus on how the subtitles are mediated for a young Chinese viewer. It will draw on Jerry Griswold's (2006, 1-2) findings on children's literature since comparatively little has been written on subtitling for children and how children's literature actively engages in translation scholarship. Griswold's identification of specific themes in children's literature offers an innovative means of bridging cultures in the intricate process of subtitling. It is essential to investigate the subtitling process and the transferal of linguistic and cultural considerations. Such intricate processes reveal the ways in which the Chinese authorities interpret foreign language and made-upness of the source culture and thus can influence the understanding of the foreign language and culture amongst their target audiences. This interdisciplinary approach is also of significance in the further analysis of the mediation of Harry Potter's fantasy elements ("scariness, smallness, flying, aliveness and magic") in the Chinese subtitles. As J. K. Rowling's frequent play on words and hidden allusions make her work challenging to the subtitling, this study explores the contrasting and often incompatible translation strategies used to accommodate them to Chinese culture. Subtitlers creatively and flexibly shift the translation techniques in order to make the unique made-upness become a reality as well as to send specific younger readers into Harry Potter's world of enchantment in a contemporary Chinese context. By doing so, linguistic and cultural transfer is made accessible via the interaction of two distinctive cultures and geographies.

1. Why Harry Potter and Sorcerer's Stone?

Published by Bloomsbury in June 1997, the British author J.K. Rowling's first Harry Potter book became Britain's best-selling novel in 2001, selling 1.1 million copies (Feral 2006, 460). The Harry Potter sequels have been translated into sixty languages and read in over two hundred countries (Feral 2006, 460). The Chinese edition sold 10 million copies by mid-2007 (McElroy 2000, 23)

and had a clear impact across urban China². *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, with its domestic tales and legends containing ghosts, magic, and wizardry, offers an intriguing text to follow as it is subtitled into Chinese. The translated book offers a fascinatingly hybrid cultural artefact which is still slightly British even while being overwhelmingly domesticated for the Chinese audience (Erni 2008, 141). These books have been subsequently made into a hugely successful eight-part film series (Blake 2002, 2). As the most popular children's fantasy fiction series in China's history (Erni 2008, 139), the subtitling of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* represents a key study and it is highly revealing in relation to Chinese subtitling practices. The film, when subtitled into Chinese, demonstrates the challenges of translating British fantasy for young Chinese audiences.

Subsequently, a definition of fantasy is essential to this study's progress. As Frank Weinreich (1998) remarks, the genre of *fantasy* contains supernatural elements:

Fantasy is a story, movie, game or piece of art, which incorporates supernatural phenomena as an important part of its content, which can assume different roles, but without which it would not function.

What Weinreich does not point out is that fantasy is not only supernatural, it also often represents itself as transcultural, as an imaginary world is not located in a real time or geography. However, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* has a distinct national identity even in its fantasy, and the official Chinese subtitles

² John Erni (2008, 141) writes compellingly on the three-fold impact *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* had on Chinese culture in book form. Firstly, he identifies the fascinating way in which the novel was translated into Chinese, showing how domestic Chinese issues shaped the translation almost as much as the source text itself. Secondly, Erni underlines the way in which *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* resonated in the contemporary youth audience by offering a new and vital work of imagination to a consumer group thirsty for such products. Thirdly, Erni makes clear the strength of the *Harry Potter* effect in China by analysing the range of counterfeit *Harry Potter* works which were triggered by the success of J.K. Rowling's books. A fake edition of a fifth *Harry Potter* book: *Harry Potter and Leopard Walk up to Dragon* and its numerous pirated subtitled DVDs appeared (Erni 2008, 141). The above unauthorised version of *Harry Potter* fraud that masqueraded as works written by Ms. Rowling is a back translation from a Chinese version entitled 《哈利·波特与豹走龙》 (*Harry Potter and Leopard Walk up to Dragon*) by underground publishers who claimed to publish under the imprint of major Chinese publishing houses, about which the authorised publishers themselves said they have no knowledge (French 2007). The *Harry Potter* fakes not merely indicate an economic and legal dispute, but indeed a cross-cultural and multidimensional phenomenon (Henningesen 2006, 277).

engage with that British cultural identity, using a variety of translation strategies to mediate that identity for a Chinese youth audience. Specifically, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* and its fantasy represent a key case study because of the challenges that they pose for the subtitler: (1) It is culturally located in a British context; (2) It is also culturally non-specific as fantasy is, to an extent, transnational which tends to be less attached to national boundaries. As Brian Laetz and Joshua Johnston (2008, 163) argue, fantasy is universal as it represents “the very heights of imaginative expression” to all people. Therefore, as a case study, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* is at the same time national and transcultural and the challenge for a subtitler is to create a transnational, universal fantasy that fits in with Chinese culture.

The film also represents a key case study for Chinese subtitling because of the crazed consumption of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* in China which reveals the popularity of fantasy fiction in Chinese publishing history. It clearly resonated with young Chinese audiences due to the abundant magic found in its fantasy world (Erni 2008, 138). This enchantment fits into children's desirable tastes making them engage actively with the magical vitality (Davies 2003, 66). Young audiences, John Erni (2008, 140) argues, position themselves as the cultural intermediaries of globalisation that caters to China's new consumer society. After thirty years of China's one-child policy³, Chinese middle-class parents are able to provide their single child with a better education and enriched extracurricular activities (Erni 2008, 142). Therefore, the popularity of fantasy fiction is fuelled by the consumerist desire, which underlines a middle-class cultural consumption under the spell of globalisation (Erni 2008, 144).

This paper is constructed around a research question that relate to the process of a linguistic and cultural transformation in the subtitles of British children's fantasy to the receiving Chinese culture: How do the subtitles translate British children's fantasy for a young Chinese audience in this case study?

³ In order to control the population growth rate, the Chinese government introduced a one-child policy in 1979. It was stipulated that couples in China could only have one child (Bongaarts and Greenhalgh 1985, 587).

2. Translation Strategies Involved

The theoretical framework structuring this paper lies at the specific translation strategies and the complex combination of them, which offer a more nuanced reading of how the theories guide my argumentative analysis via the subtitling practice in this present case study. What the subtitled version of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* reveals is that the official Chinese subtitles make use of a dynamic range of translation strategies to convey and mediate the original film. The subtitles show that translation theories are not applied to subtitling in static, homogeneous blocks. According to Lawrence Venuti (1986, 20-21), translation practice applies either foreignisation or domestication strategies. Foreignisation, for Venuti, is the strategy whereby the translator allows elements of the foreign source culture to remain in the text. Domestication is the phenomenon whereby such foreign elements are mediated and recast for and in the target culture. However, in practice, as will be shown in this case study, subtitling is a far more dynamic process that records hybrid strategies such as domestication, foreignisation, neutralisation, transliteration and the combination of them. These strategies, when considered together, allow us to perceive the subtitles in new and exciting ways and to engage with the limits and fault lines of Venuti's binary vision which implies that translation entails a clear-cut choice between domestication and foreignisation (Venuti 1986, 20-21).

Specifically, domestication is the translator's manipulation of the SL, with an attempt to create a transparent and fluent translation in the TL (Venuti 1986, 1). Furthermore, Eugene Nida's "dynamic" or "functional equivalence" in translation seeks to achieve complete naturalness and closeness in order to retain the same response as assumed for the source language receptor (Venuti 1986, 21). As we shall see, Nida's fluent communication frequently operates in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (2001) in its subtitled form when the subtitler uses domesticating strategies to replace foreign otherness. Another core strategy applied in the Chinese subtitles is foreignisation, which maintains the cultural peculiarities of the foreign text in the subtitled film. Foreignisation, in other words, means that the translator who detects cultural diversity in languages consciously signals the sharp cultural disparities to the reader (Venuti 1986, 34). This process helps the audience to get a sense of the British elements of this transcultural film, while the subtitled version of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* occasionally foreignises, so too does it domesticate, as we will see, neutralise and transliterate. Neutralisation, another strategy frequently

found in the Chinese subtitles, has much in common with domestication. As the term suggests, neutralisation precisely neutralises otherness, placing it in a comprehensible context for the Chinese target audiences. Peter Newmark and Prentice Hall (1988, 103) argue, neutralisation serves as “functional or descriptive equivalent”, generalising the source language into a culture-free word for the receptor (Armat, Armat, and Googol 2012, 1298). The study of transliteration, as an evaluation of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* in subtitled form makes clear, is particularly rich in a Chinese context. Particular attention needs to be paid to the Chinese language, as its phonological form is an adapted logographic system. Thus, its phonetic system is not an immediate conversion of its writing system (Catford 1965, 68), but a phonological representation. Transliteration has been used to make phonetic equivalence from one language to another (Wan and Verspoor 1998, 1352). This process, in fact, tends to achieve only phonetic equivalence. To sum up, under the auspices of transliteration⁴, Chinese readers are given at least the phonetic equivalence of the cultural peculiarities in relation to personal names, sports’ names, magical spells, etc. in the context of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* (2001).

3. *Subtitling British Fantasy for Young Chinese Audiences*

The methodology of this paper combines close reading of the language of the officially released subtitles with cultural, historical, political, literary and technical analysis, as well as a selection of key examples relevant to the themes

⁴ According to Roman Jakobson (1959, 233), this translational act of articulation also known as “interlingual translation or translation proper” relates to an “interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language”. Furthermore, in Wan and Verspoor’s study on automatic English-Chinese name Transliteration (Wan and Verspoor 1998), they introduce an algorithm for mapping from English names to Chinese characters based on reflective relations between English spelling and pronunciation and phonetic equivalences between English phonemes and Chinese characters (Wan and Verspoor 1998, 1352). Their automatic transliteration mechanisms are developed from an English-language database containing descriptive information about museum objects (Wan & Verspoor, 1998: 1352, cited in Verspoor et al, 1998: 75-76). They assert that, for words with little or no semantic content such as personal and place names, a dictionary suffices where standard translations are provided. However, new names will occasionally emerge and automatically be introduced into the Chinese lexical system (Wan and Verspoor 1998, 1352).

of this paper for case analysis purposes. The paper's methodology is also deliberately multiple as it seeks to underline the multiplicity of subtitles as a creative artefact. While the paper does refer to the Chinese published translations of the *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* novel, it does not overly rely on them. While there are clear common strategies used in relation to the subtitling of names, for example, it is essential to highlight the published translations and the official subtitles as wholly distinct creative works. The time and space constraints of the subtitling process mean that the subtitles cannot adopt the same translation strategies as their published novel colleagues. It is also interesting to note that, in the Chinese translated book of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, it is claimed that this book is targeted at young readers between the ages of 11 and 14 (Rowling, Cao, and Ma 2000). This clarification justifies the child-like use of languages that map on to Griswold's (2006, pp. 1-2) key themes that particularly appeal to young readers. In his book *Feeling like a Kid: Childhood and Children's Literature*, Griswold suggests the common techniques in the construction of children's literature. He refers in particular to these five categories, "snugness, scariness, smallness, lightness, and aliveness" (Griswold 2006, 1-2), which, with the exception of the first one ('snugness')⁵, lie at the heart of the core of this paper that revolves in subtitling children specificities in this case study film. It will use them to assess the dynamic and different strategies the subtitles use to capture their source and mediate it. However, as *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* makes clear, there are cultural and linguistic considerations which are not encompassed by Griswold's argument. They are the incantatory children's spells. The following will explain the selected characteristics by Griswold and the complexities of other characteristics and then associate them with the instances of British children's imagination drawn from the Chinese subtitles of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (2001).

3.1. Scariness

Translating for children may present more challenges than translating for adults as preserving the child-appealing preferences needs special care in terms

⁵ Griswold (2006, 1) defines "snugness" as common activities that are popular among the young but hardly seen in adulthood. For example, children are more likely to play underneath a table or to make tents from blankets and chairs, etc.

of the “occasional obscurity, awkwardness or unnatural-sounding phrasing” which adults are more likely to be tolerant of (Davies 2003, 66). Griswold’s work makes specific reference to *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* in relation to one of his chosen categories, “scariness”. Scary villains draw children’s attention (Griswold 2006, 1-2). The world of children’s literature is not carefree; instead, it is a frightening realm where, for example, Voldemort stalks Harry Potter (Griswold 2006, 2). Consideration of the Chinese subtitles in relation to the theme of fear underlines that British and Chinese approaches to scariness in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* are markedly similar. In the Harry Potter films, humour is derived from the appellation of a scary monster in childlike cute terms. The horrible three-headed dog with its horrific appearance and innate violence is given a comically inappropriate name. Humour is generated by the mismatch between horrific objects and the sweet name given to it. Interestingly, the Chinese subtitles match this comic effect by means of cultural equivalence. They generate a comparable humour to the original film by giving the three-headed beast who guards the treasure for which the children quest an inappropriate name.

Example 1 Scary Animal: Fluffy

- (1) *Description of Scene: Harry Potter is explaining that Fluffy, a horrible three-headed dog, is guarding an invaluable stone. But Snape, one of the teachers, is seeking to steal it without anyone noticing.*
- (2) *Line: HARRY: Whatever Fluffy’s guarding, Snape’s trying to steal it.*
- (3) *Translation: 斯内普想偷毛毛看守的东西*
- (4) *Back Translation: HARRY: Sineipu wants to steal Maomao’s guarded item.*

J. K. Rowling links *Fluffy* to Greek mythology because he is like Kerberos⁶ who guards the entrance of the underworld and greets the dead but none escapes his guarding (Knight 1990, 131). Rowling’s three-headed dog is clearly intended to frighten child audiences. However, both the original novel and the Chinese subtitles humorously mismatch the savage nature of the animal with its cute

⁶ The three-headed dog figure derived from Greek mythology is known as *Kerberos* (*Cerberus*), which guards the gates of Hades, “the land of the dead, underworld”, and prevents the escape of the dead. According to the ancient Greek words *kér* and *erebos*, Kerberos means “demon of the dark” (Ganesan 1995, 132).

name. Humour here is a result of the disconnection between the cute name and the ferocious animal to which it is attached. The subtitles maintain both the word by finding an equivalent of *fluffy* and translating the associated comedic disconnection between animal and its appellation. The word *fluffy* itself means a creature covered with fur according to *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* (1989), which is retained in the subtitles, “毛毛” (literally means fur). *Fluffy* is a horrible creature in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* but the Chinese characters adopt childlike language for youngsters: “毛毛” in Chinese pinyin⁷ is “Maomao”. “毛毛 (Maomao)” means “relaxing look with fine fur” in *Chinese-English Dictionary (C-E Dictionary)* (2013). Apart from a humour generated by the disconnection between the nice name and the awful object it refers to, the subtitles also involve repetitive characters associated with childlike language and speech acquisition. They are, therefore, well suited for situations where children are the majority of the target viewers. Such subtitles may maximise the potential for child audiences to appreciate the essence of the original film effect (Linde and Kay 1999, 57). This translation adopts the strategy of replication to transfer both cuteness and scariness in a repetitive way for a young Chinese child audience⁸. Key to this paper's exploration of the subtitling of scariness is another figure, *Voldemort*.

Example 2 Scary Figure: Voldemort

(1) *Description of Scene: Voldemort, who is regarded as the most dangerous wizard, appears in a person with front and back faces and is trying to kill Harry Potter.*

(2) *Lines: VOLDEMORT: Let me speak to him.*

QUIRRELL: Master, you are not strong enough.

VOLDEMORT: I have strength enough for this.

⁷ Using the Latin alphabet, “拼音”, phonetically “pinyin”, belongs to the phonetic system of writing Mandarin Chinese. It accurately refers to the pronunciation of Mandarin characters (Liu and Wang 2002).

⁸ This Chinese example of replication in relation to *fluffy* sits in stark contrast to subtitling trends regarding this character in other nations. Anne-Lise Feral (2006, 460) notes that, in French versions of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, the subtitles tend to shift childlike language to an adult's point of view to conform to its ideological and cultural values. Feral (2006, 463-478) suggests that this is because the French subtitles seek to prioritise educational pedagogy over children's preferences.

Harry Potter...

...we meet again.

HARRY: Voldemort.

(3) *Translation: 让我和他谈谈*

-主人，你还没恢复力量

-我的力量足以应付得了

哈利·波特...

我们又见面了

-伏地魔

(4) *Back Translation: VOLDEMORT: Let me speak to him.*

QUIRRELL: Master, you are not fully recovered.

VOLDEMORT: I'm strong enough to deal with it.

Hali Bote...

We meet again.

HARRY: Hiding-under-the-ground monster.

The name *Voldemort* has widely been associated with “flight from death”⁹ (meaning escaping death) as *mort* is French for death (Bunker 2007). *Voldemort* is an unusual name in English and in other European languages as well, insofar it is a completely made-up name. Unless one is a French speaker, the connotation of death implicit in the name goes unrecognised. While the strangeness of the name is maintained in Chinese, the Chinese subtitle speaks the death which the English character name will not voice. In another contrast, whilst the English name, due to its French origin, can be associated with death, the Chinese subtitles move in the opposite direction showing a character

⁹ Harry Potter fans discuss different interpretations on *Voldemort* that are available from a couple of websites:

<https://www.quora.com/Why-did-J-K-Rowling-name-the-villain-Voldemort>;

<http://www.funtrivia.com/askft/Question102875.html>;

<https://scifi.stackexchange.com/questions/3218/etymology-of-the-name-voldemort>.

returning from death, rising from below the ground. Moreover, whilst *Voldemort* as a name triggers fear from its vague foreignness, the Chinese subtitles are significantly more specific, labelling the character as a monster: “伏地魔” / “Hiding-under-the-ground monster”. The strategy thus used is one of explanation and whilst a sense of scariness is conveyed by both names, that scariness functions differently.

To summarise, the above two examples illustrate that different translational and cultural strategies are used when conveying frightening factors in the source film. While equivalence was a key strategy when subtitling the name *Fluffy* into Chinese, equivalence was not ultimately achieved in relation to the subtitling of the name *Voldemort*, as the Chinese subtitles label and explain the name of a character which the film is so wary of speaking/naming.

3.2. Smallness

According to Griswold, “smallness” is a key feature of children’s entertainment. He writes in particular on the conflation of size, power, and the magical transformation from smallness to triumph (Griswold 2006, p. 53). The goblins who guard the vaults at Gringotts are small childlike characters who clearly belong to this category. Griswold’s focus on smallness privileges the small, often magical or mystical creatures which so often feature in young children’s literature. This section, however, will use Griswold’s term elastically to consider not just magical figures but a magical key, as well as children’s small pets.

Example 3 Miniature Creatures: Goblins

(1) *Description of Scene:* Hagrid is taking Harry to make a withdrawal, which was left by his parents. In Gringotts, the wizard bank, Potter first meets goblins, the staff at the bank.

(2) *Line:* HARRY: *What exactly are these things?*

HAGRID: *They’re goblins, Harry.*

(3) *Translation:* 那是什么怪物呀?

-那就是妖精，哈利

(4) *Back Translation: HARRY: What is that monster?*

HAGRID: That definitely is evil spirit, Hali.

The Chinese subtitles' choice in relation to their translation of the word *goblin* is revealing regarding the question of linguistic equivalence. That they seek equivalence is clear. They take an English word, *goblin*, defined as “a mischievous ugly dwarf-like creature of folklore” (*OED*) and they translate it as “妖精” / “evil spirit”. Chinese has no direct word for *goblin*, but the subtitles could have chosen an associated equivalence, “小妖精” / “small evil spirit”. The subtitles, however, in a manner interesting for Griswold's category of smallness, omit the first character meaning “small”. The meaning of the Chinese word thus changes to mean “evil spirit”. The omission of this word changes the nature of the item being discussed. Furthermore, the smallness of the *goblin* is visual on the screen, it can therefore be omitted from the subtitles without the loss of meaning. If goblins in English are mischievous cheeky creatures of folklore, the Chinese “妖精” / “evil spirit” casts the diminutive staff at Gringotts in a demonic evil light which is completely at odds with their protective responsible role in the bank. In the Harry Potter film, they are protectors against evil; in the subtitles, they are, in linguistic terms, the agents of evil.

Example 4: The Little Devil (A Key)

(1) *Description of Scene: A key is requested by the goblin from young Harry to make a withdrawal. Hagrid has this key on him.*

(2) *Line: HAGRID: Mr. Harry Potter wishes to make a withdrawal.*

GOBLIN: And does Mr. Harry Potter have his key?

HAGRID: Wait a minute. Got it here somewhere.

Ha! There's the little devil.

(4) *Translation: 哈利波特先生想要提钱*

-哈利波特先生有带钥匙吗?

-噢, 等等, 就在身上

小鬼难缠

(5) *Back Translation: HAGRID: Sir Hali Bote wants to withdraw money.*

GOBLIN: Does Sir Hali Bote have the key?

HAGRID: Oh, wait, definitely on me.

The lackeys are even more difficult to deal with.

In contrast to Example 3, this subtitle maintains Griswold's category and vocabulary of smallness. What it underlines is that the translation of the source text is not always merely linguistic but rather cultural. In the English film, the term *little devil* refers to the key which Hagrid is struggling to find. It is worth pointing out that the English expression *little devil* is a colloquial way of referring to an impish child (*OED*). In this scene, Hagrid personifies the key, referring to it jokingly as a little brat, because it has momentarily disappeared. However, the Chinese subtitles do make this colloquial and cultural transposition transferrable to the target culture into a Buddhist theological context, as Buddhism is the dominant religion of China. They translate *little devil* as “□ □ □ □”/ “The lackeys are even more difficult to deal with”. This Chinese idiom is a short-hand version of a fuller phrase which would be harder for the subtitles to accommodate; “□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □”/ “The lackeys are even more difficult to deal with than the Yama (Hindu god of death and lord of the underworld)” (*C-E Dictionary*). The subtitle transfers a casual colloquial expression (*little devil*) that goes largely unnoticed in the original film, with a culturally loaded reference (“□ □ □ □”/ “The lackeys are even more difficult to deal with”) in a Buddhist context. Having dealt with the small devils or difficulties in order to access his parents' vault, Harry will consequently have to meet this film's king of Hell, Voldemort as a result of the vault's contents. Thus, the subtitles engage with the language and cultural context of the receiving culture, moving away from the linguistic content of the original in a way which predicts and engages with the film's plot. If there is translation gain in cultural and linguistic terms in this example through the subtitles' reference to a Chinese idiom, there is clear cultural and linguistic loss in the subtitles' treatment of the section's next small character: Ron's pet rat.

Example 5 Small Animals: Scabbers

(1) *Description of Scene: Ron first met Harry on the train to Hogwarts' School of Witchcraft and Wizardry and they are sharing their refreshments. While they are*

talking, the rat Scabbers is stealing their snacks.

(2) *Line:* RON: *This is Scabbers, by the way.*

(3) *Translation:* 对了, 这是斑斑

(4) *Back Translation:* RON: *Yes, this is Banban.*

Scabbers, the name of the rat, is translated as “斑斑” / “Banban”. This back-translates as “scar scar” (the Chinese subtitle repeats the word for scar in order to form a name which is recognisably that of a pet). Pet names in Chinese frequently have a repeated syllable or structure. However, while the subtitles manage to capture the pet-like context of the animal, they are forced in the process of cultural transfer to lose some of the key overtones of the character’s name. *Scabbers* as a name derives from the English verb *to scab*, meaning in highly colloquial language “to bum, beg or ask for something for free” (*OED*). The noun *scab* refers to the “hard covering of dried blood that forms over a wound to cover and protect it as it heals” (Merriam-Webster 2004). Therefore, the Chinese use of “斑斑” / “Banban” (literally, “scar scar”) is in one sense appropriate. However, given the pilfering nature of the scene in which we first meet the rat (he is stealing sweets), it seems more likely that this translation loss is inevitable as Chinese does not have a word which encompasses the multiple meanings of the word *scab*. Unsurprisingly, the subtitles choose to translate the first meaning of the noun *scab* as defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989). The subtitles do not translate the lesser known, lower register, colloquial meaning of the verb *to scab*. The subtitles also do not translate this second meaning even though it is the more appropriate meaning in the context of the film and the character’s pilfering actions.

The subtitles regarding smallness indicate the range of cultural and linguistic strategies that the subtitles employ when translating. Interestingly, when translating J.K. Rowling’s magical goblin figures, the subtitles make alterations, recasting the fairly neutral English word *goblin* into a more evil Chinese equivalent. The terminology of fantasy thus does not cross national boundaries unaltered despite fantasy as a category often transcending national structures in its make-believe world. The category of smallness has also allowed us to underline the complex processes of cultural and linguistic loss and gain which frequently lie at the heart of the subtitling process in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*.

3.3. Flying

One of the five basic story mechanisms which Griswold (2006) suggests children find appealing in literature is “lightness (opposite of heaviness) or flying”. While his work focuses on the very different trends in children’s literature in different national contexts, “flying and lightness”, Colleen Gillard (2016) suggests, are universal in their appeal: “all part of the serious business of make-believe”. Griswold suggests that the British do children’s fantasy like no other nation, citing Harry Potter’s world, a tale in which flying reaches new levels (Griswold 2006, 75), thanks to the *Nimbus 2000* broomstick. Multiple instances of flying appear in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*, none, though, are as prominent as the *Quidditch* scene.

Example 6 Flying Sport: Quidditch

- (1) *Description of Scene: The students are having a Quidditch class, a wizarding flying sport played on broomstick. One of the students, Neville, falls on the grass and hurts himself, the teacher takes him to the hospital immediately. She commands the rest of the class not to play this sport before she comes back.*
- (2) *Line: MADAM HOOCH: The one riding it will be expelled before they can say Quidditch.*
- (3) *Translation: 那在他还来不及见识到魁地奇, 就得给我滚出学校*
- (4) *Back Translation: MADAM HOOCH: Then before he has not seen Quidiqi, one must get out of school.*

Although *Quidditch* is an invented sport and a made-up word in the Harry Potter’s context, there are clear overtones of Britishness in the original. *Quid* is slang for one-pound sterling, while *ditch* is also an English word for a narrow waterway at the side of a road or a field (OED). Therefore, the word sounds as though it could be English even while actually meaning nothing. The Chinese subtitles, when describing this magical flying sport, phonetically transcribe the word into Chinese. They are thus faithful to this nonsense word in strictly denotational terms, as the Chinese transcription has no lexical meaning. As the word *Quidditch* is a fantastical unknown entity in the source film, the subtitles foreignise by phonetic transcription. They create a word which, in its strangeness, the scenes of the film have to explain and embody. However, the

strangeness of the word *Quidditch* in English still has British overtones thanks to the presence and meaning of *quid* and *ditch*, even in their nonsensical association. Nonsense in this British word still paradoxically has some cultural meanings. The Chinese version, however, only finds meaning in its clearly very foreign nonsensical nature.

Example 7 Flying Items: *Nimbus 2000*

- (1) *Description of Scene: There is a newly released flying broomstick. The Nimbus 2000 attracts the attention of every student in Hogwarts' School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.*
- (2) *Line: BOY: It's a Nimbus 2000!*
- (3) *Translation: 那是光轮 2000!*
- (4) *Back Translation: BOY: That is light (opposite of dark) wheel 2000!*

The subtitle clearly underlines the cultural and linguistic challenges for the Chinese subtitles. The English word *nimbus* has multiple meanings. Its most obvious meaning is religious, “a bright cloud surrounding a deity” (*OED*). However, *nimbus* in English also refers to a series of research satellites. The satellite launched in 1978 was called *Nimbus 7*. By naming the flying machine *Nimbus 2000*, J.K. Rowling thus updates it to her contemporary era, transferring space-age technology to her children’s entertainment offering. Interestingly, most British viewers of the film would probably not have picked up the space reference, certainly not the child audience born long after the 1978 *Nimbus*. What this reveals is that J.K. Rowling’s work caters to multiple audiences, young and old in the choice of its language and cultural references. The Chinese subtitles cannot in this instance be as wide-ranging and multiple in their allusions. While there is a Chinese word for *nimbus*, “光圈” / “light (opposite of dark) ring”, the Chinese subtitles do not use it. Instead, they maintain the first character of the Chinese word for *nimbus*, “光” / “light” but add the character for the wheel, “轮” / “wheel”, in order to gesture to the speed of the broomstick. The Chinese subtitles offer the audience a description of the broomstick in a name which even while it has meaning in Chinese via its component part is ultimately made up. What the Chinese subtitles translate is children’s fantasy rather than the linguistic specifics of the original dialogue line.

Example 8 Flying Items: Different Balls in Quidditch

(1) *Description of Scene: A senior player, Oliver Wood, is explaining to Harry three different types of balls that are used in the wizarding game of Quidditch.*

(2) *Line: OLIVER: There are three kinds of balls.*

This one's called the Quaffle.

...Bludger.

...The Golden Snitch.

(3) *Translation: 总共有三种球*

这叫做鬼飞球

游走球

金色飞贼

(4) *Back Translation: OLIVER: In total, there are three kinds of ball.*

This is called ghost flying ball.

...Swimming and walking ball.

...Golden flying thief.

The Chinese subtitles adopt very different strategies both culturally and linguistically in relation to each of these flying balls. They take an English word which fundamentally has no fixed meaning, *quaffle*, and in its place they offer a name which is actually a description, “鬼飞球” / “ghost flying ball”, which alludes to the enchanted nature of the ball. *Quaffle*, as a word, sounds English even in its failure to mean anything specific. It sounds as though it references the English verb “to quaff”/ “to drink deeply” (OED). The Chinese subtitles neutralise the English sound of the noun, stripping it off its connotation, and offer a phrase which domesticates the *quaffle* into a Chinese context. They offer a word which, even while made up, insists on a meaning for the audience.

While *bludger* appears to make reference to “a hanger-on; a loafer” (OED), the nature of J.K. Rowling's description of this ball and its ability to knock players off their broomsticks mean that it has a closer association with the British noun *bludgeon* “a club with heavy end” or the verb *to bludgeon*, “to coerce” (OED). The *bludger* in Harry Potter's world is one of the most dangerous balls

because it is enchanted to attack the players and cause them to fall off their brooms. The Chinese subtitles neutralise entirely this violent linguistic meaning, conveying only the enchanted nature of the object.

While the first two examples in this ball section either domesticate or neutralise the meaning in subtitled form, interestingly a third example maintains both the cultural and linguistic meaning of the original. J.K. Rowling's snitch ball is the smallest and most powerful of the balls. Its name clearly derives from the English verb *to snitch*, meaning "to steal" (*OED*). While it is the seeker's job to steal this fast flying ball in order to win the game, the Chinese subtitles echo and translate precisely the vocabulary of theft, "金色飞贼"/ "golden flying thief". They maintain both the colour and the activity associated with this ball.

The flying objects so common in children's fiction, as explored by Jerry Griswold, lie at the heart of Harry Potter's fantasy. An analysis of their treatment of the Chinese subtitles is revealing. The Chinese subtitles adopt a range of strategies to cater to the needs of their audience. They transcribe *Quidditch* creating a nonsensical word which echoes the foreignness of the British original. They explain the *Nimbus 2000* and domesticate the *quaffle*. If they lose the violent overtones of the *bludger*, they choose to maintain the thieving nature of the *snitch*. What these subtitles cumulatively make clear is that it is impossible to generalise one translational strategy for any given category of subtitles. The subtitles work dynamically across the source text at times adding, at times losing the linguistic and cultural presence of the original text.

3.4. *Aliveness*

According to Griswold (2006, 103), children's literature differs from adult literature in the way in which objects and things are frequently and magically animated. "Aliveness" or the animation of inanimate objects is a key feature of both children's literature as a whole and the magical realm of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* in particular. This section will now turn to analyse the subtitling of this category.

Example 9 Moving Alley: Diagon Alley

(1) *Description of Scene: Hagrid is taking Harry to buy the equipment required by*

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

(2) *Line: HAGRID: Welcome, Harry, to Diagon Alley.*

(3) *Translation: 欢迎来到对角巷, 哈利*

(4) *Back Translation: HAGRID: Welcome to opposite angle alley, Hali.*

Griswold's category of "aliveness" is embodied in the moving walls of *Diagon Alley*, the inanimate objects which take on a magical life force to admit customers. The English name of the street is a cheeky play on words as *Diagon Alley* phonetically sounds out the English adverb "diagonally" as defined in *OED*: "joining two opposite corners of a square, rectangle, or other straight-sided shape". The Chinese subtitles convey the meaning of "Diagonal", but they lose the pun and play on words¹⁰. While it is arguable that many Anglophone readers might not pick up J.K. Rowling's word play in her naming of *Diagon Alley*, the spoken name in the film makes the allusion more noticeable or audible. The Chinese subtitles, given their written form, have to move further away from the play on words. They convey language content but not playful style.

Griswold's category "aliveness" marks the subtitling of the moving alley in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. The Chinese subtitles adopt a sense-for-sense translation as they convey the meaning of *Diagon Alley* but not J.K. Rowling's play on words. The subtitling strategy in relation to place names, albeit fictional ones, is markedly different from the previous example (*Quidditch*) which employed transliteration. However, only one example from this category has been located. More "aliveness" examples with particular reference to "magic" will, therefore, be discussed in my extended category.

Griswold's interpretation of children's literature does not include magic as a category. "Magic", though, might be seen as an extension of Griswold's category of "aliveness", the category we have just considered. Magic is the key to both the novel and the Harry Potter film. It is also key to the subtitling process because the film's spells offer a particular challenge in linguistic and cultural terms for the subtitler. Those writings on magic in literature identify starkly different strategies in the national literature of Britain and China. Chun-

¹⁰ Interestingly, a comparison of the Japanese and Vietnamese subtitles reveals a highly comparable strategy as meaning is conveyed at the expense of word play (Pringle 2007).

Chiang Yen (1967, 45) suggests that traditional Chinese stories tend to be rooted in folklore. Lee Simmons and Robert Schindler (2003, 102) suggest that, in Chinese culture and literature, there is an inner harmony between human activities, nature and the supernatural. In contrast, according to Colleen Gillard (2016), British culture is far more fantastical and open to embracing far-flung myths and legends that appeal to the furthest reaches of children's imagination. Harry Potter's world as a cultural object might therefore interestingly be seen as sitting mid-way between the trends of both China and Britain, for, while it depicts a magical supernatural world of fantasy and amazement, it is also resolutely situated in a domestic and known world, a world comforting in its Britishness. Despite the fact that the Harry Potter books and films are set against a very marked British cultural background, they clearly reflect an intracultural communication that is full of references to aspects of British life that were expected to be perfectly familiar to the original audience and, initially, to an audience of British children (Davies 2003, 67).

Example 10 Magical Spell: Water into Rum

(1) *Description of Scene: Seamus, one of Harry's classmates, is trying to do a magic trick to turn the water into rum. He is casting the following spell.*

(2) *Line: SEAMUS: Eye of rabbit, harp string bum.*

Turn this water into rum.

Eye of rabbit, harp string bum.....

(3) *Translation: 兔眼溜溜，竖琴悠悠*

把这清水变美酒

兔眼溜溜，竖琴悠悠.....

(4) *Back Translation: SEAMUS: Spinning rabbit eye, drifting harp sound.*

Turn this clear water into beautiful wine.

Spinning rabbit eye, drifting harp sound.....

The spells in the film challenge the subtitler. It is necessary not just to convey content but also style and the specific nursery rhyme structure of the original. Pauline Harris and Barbra McKenzie (2005, 2) argue that children engage more

fully with rhymes in which patterns and connections are intersected. Nursery rhymes are used to improve children's ability to read in the Chinese context (Taylor 2002, 8). In the English original, *rum* and *hum*, appearing at the end of two successive lines, tie the spell together, mark the speech specifically as a spell and deliver the pleasure of an aesthetic poetic sound. According to Harris and McKenzie (2005, 2), the sound builds on the assumption of a young audience's frequent encounter with lullabies and nursery rhymes. While the subtitles translate the rhyme scheme to mark the speech as a spell, they alter the spell's ingredients both to domesticate the spell's content for Chinese consumption and to ensure a rhyming structure in Chinese at the end of the subtitles, “溜溜” / “spinning spinning” and “悠悠” / “drifting drifting”. Repetition is often an integral part of Chinese rhyme structures to reinforce effect (Arleo 2006, 18). The Chinese subtitles thus create a repetitive effect to replace the end rhyme embedded in this source text (*hum* and *rum*). Interestingly, in so doing this spell acquires additional English cultural and Christian overtones. In the original dialogue, Seamus tries to turn water into rum. For reasons of rhyme and cultural familiarity, the Chinese subtitles substitute one alcoholic beverage for another. Seamus in Chinese tries, like Jesus, to turn water into wine. The transformation of water into wine at the wedding at Cana is the first miracle attributed to Jesus in *the Gospel of John*. When the wine runs out, Jesus shows his glory by making water become wine. Humour is thus generated in the Chinese version in a way it is not in the English original as, while Jesus showed his power turning water into wine, Seamus's endeavours meet nothing but spectacular failure. If the English *rum* is domesticated into the more prevalent Chinese character “美酒” / “beautiful wine”¹¹, so too is the harp. While harps do exist in Chinese culture, the subtitles domesticate the meaning of the original by transferring it into a specifically Chinese string instrument “竖琴” / “harp”.

In summary, the Chinese subtitles of incantatory spells in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* suggest distinct strategies and indicate that different approaches are frequently adopted even when translating instances relating to the same phenomenon in the film. Domestication was employed when Seamus tries to turn water into rum, as the subtitles bring British fantasy into the Chinese cultural context. The Chinese subtitles convey the strangeness and foreignness

¹¹ Sweet wine refers to many kinds of alcohol in China ranging from grape wine, rice wine, etc.

of the source spell via the similar structure of nursery rhyme while losing its cultural specificities.

Conclusions

Using four of the five recurrent themes in children's literature identified by Griswold (2006), as well as adding an extended category of magic, this paper has sought to analyse the specificities of subtitling for Chinese children in the film adaptation of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (2001). What it has revealed is that, while we teach and publish on translation theory in distinct and isolated blocks, the subtitles to Harry Potter's film adopt a more dynamic approach to the subtitling process in which a multitude of translation strategies are adopted flexibly and cumulatively given the priority to cater for young audiences. While it might be expected that they would domesticate heavily for their young Chinese audiences, multiple foreignising instances have been detected, particularly in the transliteration of names. Such acts of foreignisation via transliteration are, however, unlikely to unsettle the young Chinese audiences for they are part and parcel of Chinese subtitling norms. Moreover, such acts of transliteration are not only faithful to the sounds of the English original but also carry over the strangeness of the sounds, which applies equally to the English and the Chinese contexts. They echo the other-worldly fantasy of the original with its magical strangeness. J. K. Rowling's original is known for its play on words and their multiple meanings. While that play cannot often be translated by the Chinese subtitles, it is interesting to note the ways in which the Chinese subtitles in their frequent acts of transliteration gain multiple meanings of their own. Although subtitles clearly privilege comprehension on the part of their child audience, the subtitling process, shaped as it is by cultural, linguistic and technological constraints, at times creates subtitles which work on multiple levels and resonate for different audiences. In China, as in Britain, the audience for *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* is not solely confined to children. In a sense, the fantastical nature of J. K. Rowling's fictional world might be seen to make the subtitling task easier. Many of the names, places, processes, and nouns in the original British film are made up. Their made-upness empowers the subtitles to be similarly creative and inventive in their strategies to transfer meaning. In general, the findings will add to the evidence of the advantage of recreating Harry Potter's fantasy world via the Chinese subtitles, which provide imaginations and creativity, whilst

shaping a similarly creative communication amongst its film watchers, in particular to child audiences. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (2001) offers a key case study in subtitled form for the field of subtitling in the Chinese context. It does so as a result of its dual adult and child audiences and as a result of the fact that it is a film which is at once very British in its culture, almost supra-national in its fantasy and clearly accommodates for a Chinese audience in its subtitles. Therefore, it raises curiosity about the border between countries in subtitling practice.

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