On Translation of Swearwords from English to Chinese

-- A Case Study on Subtitling Terminator I – IV

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Translation Studies

by

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June 2011
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DECLARATION

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original and my own, except as acknowledged in the text, and has not been submitted, either in whole or part, for a degree at this or any other university.

__________________________
SHEN Jin
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I wish to thank my supervisor Dr. James Li for giving me so many useful comments and fresh insights into the writing of this thesis as well as his guidance throughout the course of my MA studies. In fact, his help to me is much beyond this. My particular interest in audiovisual translation and the idea of choosing this topic for the present thesis are indebted greatly for his inspiration.

To other teachers of translation studies of the English Department, I would like to express my thanks, especially Professor Zhang Meifang, Dr Victoria Lei, Dr Vincent Wang and Dr Hari Venkatesan, for what they have taught me through their animated and inspiring classes. I have benefited enormously from their lectures and discussions with them on various occasions, which provided me with so much help and encouragement. I would also like to thank Professor Martin Montgomery, from whom I have learned a lot about how to do research over the past year, for his contribution and support to the shape of the present work takes.

I also wish to acknowledge my debt to my friends with whom I have discussed at various stages of the present study on the thesis and related issues, particularly to Jacy Pan, Sunny Qian and Trevor Wan, who have provided their insightful comments and suggestions on my research. And also to my classmate Bonnie Lei, who has spent a whole afternoon with me on styling the format of this thesis, I thank them all for their time and their readiness to help.

Being a beneficiary of the studentship offered by the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities of the University of Macau, I am deeply grateful for their generous funding on the entire degree course, which freed me of my financial predicament and
enabled me to dedicate full-time to my studies and research.

Finally, my special gratitude goes to my parents in the far north of the country for their never-failing understanding and support.
ABSTRACT

Swearwords, due to their intrinsically disturbing nature, have suffered from longtime academic avoidance in both western and Chinese contexts. However, with the verisimilitude of naturally-occurring swearing in American films imported in large quantity, how to render such taboo terms into Chinese has become an increasingly demanding issue for the translators. Against such background, the present study is mainly a qualitative investigation (with the support of statistical evidence) into E-C translation of swearwords in two Chinese subtitled versions of Terminator I-IV. The two different versions of subtitling are the authorized version with the official approval for public release and the fansubbed version openly available on the Internet. The main line of inquiry is: “what are the commonly used translation strategies and methods in E-C translation of swearwords in films and why? And what are the differences between the two versions and why?”

Instances of swearing collected are categorized according to their different semantic references coupled with their corresponding translations in the target texts. And then the investigation follows the framework of Jan Pedersen’s taxonomy of ECR (extralinguistic culture-bound reference) translation strategies with the aim of identifying the frequently used translation methods and strategies in different semantic categories as well as the commonly applied methods and strategies in each of the two subtitled versions.

As a whole, the results of this study show that the two versions are both TL-oriented with substitution and omission being the two most frequently used methods in rendering swearwords in films. The vulgarity and the degree of offensiveness of swearing in ST have been to a large degree euphemized in Chinese translations.
However the fansubbed version is relatively blunter than the authorized version in using more direct translations and being less restrained in choosing Chinese equivalent expressions. Subsequent discussion focuses on the possible explanations of why these methods and strategies are chosen by the translators and why there are remarkable differences between the two versions.

Key words: swearing translation, subtitling, cultural differences, political interventions
LIST OF ABRREIVIATIONS

ST: source text
TT: target text
SL: source language
TL: target language
TT1: target text 1 (authorized version of translation)
TT2: target text 2 (fansubbed version of translation)
BT: back translation
T1: The Terminator
T2: Terminator 2 Judgment Day
T3: Terminator 3 Rise of the Machines
T4: Terminator 4 Salvation
ECR: extralinguistic culture-bound reference
TM: translation method
SARFT: State Administration of Radio Film and Television
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