

# Strategies for addressing language and cultural barriers in intercultural film screenplays

Junliang CHEN

Cheongju University, Cheongju-si 360-764, Republic of Korea

**Abstract:** With the deepening of globalization and increasing frequency of cross-cultural exchanges, film, as an important cultural carrier, plays an important role in promoting the understanding and communication between different cultures. However, the creation of intercultural film plays faces many challenges due to the existence of language and cultural differences. Starting from language and cultural barriers, this paper discusses the issue of cross-cultural film script writing, and puts forward corresponding solution strategies. Research has certain guiding significance for promoting the creation of cross-cultural film scripts and improving the quality and communication effect of cross-cultural films.

**Key words:** cross-cultural film; language and cultural barriers; solution strategies

## 1 Language barriers in cross-cultural film screenplays

### 1.1 The cultural connotation of a language is difficult to translate directly

Difficulty in literally translating the cultural connotation of the language is another language barrier in the cross-cultural film script writing. Each language is deeply rooted in its own cultural soil and carries its own unique cultural connotation. Domestic scholars say: "Language is the carrier of culture, and culture is the content of language. Language and culture are interdependent and influence each other [1]. Many words and expressions are closely linked to specific cultural traditions, values and historical backgrounds, and their meaning is difficult to be completely conveyed through literal translation. For example, the Chinese idiom "broken mirror reunion" contains the yearning for a successful marriage in Chinese culture, but the English literal translation of "breaking a mirror and reuniting" is difficult to convey its implied cultural meaning. For another example, the English idiom "Achilles' heel" originated from the ancient Greek mythology and symbolizes the fatal weaknesses, but the literal translation is difficult to express its rich cultural heritage. In this regard, in addition to supplementing the cultural background in the translation, the screenwriters need to deeply understand the cultural connotation contained in the language and convey the essence of foreign culture through clever transformation. Just as the scholar Li Hongyu said: "The translator should fully understand the external meaning of the original text, understand the cultural phenomenon and implied cultural information, and strive to reproduce the cultural connotation of the original text in the translation." This puts forward high requirements on the writers' cultural perception and language control ability.

### 1.2 Cross-cultural transmission of a language sense of humor

The cross-cultural transmission of language humor is a big problem in the cross-cultural film script writing. Humor is a complex language art, often relying on a specific language word games, homophonic stems, cultural allusions, etc., so it

has a strong cultural specificity. When humor crosses cultural boundaries, its effect is often greatly reduced, or even completely lost the point of laughter. For example, Chinese humor likes to use homophonic stems to make jokes, such as "careless" homophonous with "hairless thorn", which is based on Chinese homophone and is difficult to replicate in English. For another example, British humor often uses serious irony, such as "I am not young enough to know everything." It seems to be self-modesty, but in fact it satires young people's arrogance. However, this delicate language expression is easy to be understood as sincere self-modesty in the Chinese context. Moreover, humor often depends on cultural context empathy. The same joke may have completely different effects in different cultural contexts. A British mockery of a particular historical figure may be meaningless to the Chinese who do not know the history.

## **2 Cultural barriers in cross-cultural film screenplays**

### **2.1 Differences in cultural values**

The difference in cultural values is a major cultural obstacle in the creation of cross-cultural film scripts. Each culture has its own unique value concept system, which has a profound influence on people's way of thinking, code of conduct and aesthetic taste. When the values of different cultures collide in the film script, there is often misreading, misunderstanding and even conflict [2]. For example, the cognition of the relationship between man and nature also varies significantly between cultures. In Western culture, the relationship between man and nature is conquering and being conquered, and the idea of "man can conquer heaven" is deeply rooted; in Eastern culture, especially Chinese culture, the idea of harmonious coexistence between man and nature and the unity between man and nature has a long history. This cognitive differences may allow disagreement and misreading of film plots and themes focusing on man-nature relationships in cross-cultural contexts. Therefore, how to prudently deal with the differences in cultural values and effectively coordinate different cultural perspectives in the film script creation is a difficult problem in front of the cross-cultural film script writers.

### **2.2 The treatment of cultural customs and taboos**

The treatment of cultural customs and taboos is another thorny cultural barrier in cross-cultural film screenwriting. Customs and taboos constitute the code of conduct and moral bottom line of a culture, but different cultures of customs and taboos are very different, sometimes even completely opposite. In the cross-cultural context, how to properly present and deal with these differences is not a small challenge for the screenwriters. In terms of customs, for example, in Chinese cultural traditions, festivals to visit relatives and friends and sit on the ground is a common cultural custom, which contains a strong taste of family affection and reunion implication. However, in the context of western culture, this custom may make people feel too formal and lack of personal space and privacy. In Indian culture, for example, some head shaking movements often indicate affirmation, while in many other cultures the opposite is true. If the writers lack sensitivity and improperly handle this custom difference, it may cause discomfort and misunderstanding among the audience in the cross-cultural communication. Prohibitions, such as in Islamic culture, drinking, eating pork, women not masked are strict cultural taboos, while in many other cultures these are common daily life. For example, in the context of Chinese culture, saying brothers with elders is a serious violation of the concept of seniority, but there is no taboo in western culture. If writers do not grasp these taboo differences, and rashly put the taboos in a certain culture directly into another cultural context, the consequences will be unimaginable.

## **3 Strategies to address language and cultural barriers**

### **3.1 In-depth understanding of the target culture, and grasp the essence of the culture**

Extensive reading of the target culture is an important way to understand the target culture. Literary works are a spiritual crystallization of culture, bearing many elements of cultural values, ways of thinking, aesthetic taste and so on. By extensively reading the literary classics and contemporary masterpieces of the target culture, the scriptwriter can appreciate

the spiritual outlook of this culture in an all-round and multi-level way, feel its emotional context, and then deeply grasp its cultural essence. For example, reading the works of Russian literary giants Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy, we can deeply feel the compassion and redemption in Russian culture; reading the works of American writers Mark Twain and Hemingway, we can see the spirit of gold rush and personal struggle in American culture. By reading a large number of these literary works, the screenwriter can feel the charm of a culture between the lines, and then internalize the culture in a subtle way, laying a solid foundation for cultural understanding in the cross-cultural film script creation.

In-depth communication with people of the target culture is the third important strategy for a deep understanding of the target culture. Culture is essentially created by people, so the most fundamental way to understand a culture is to communicate with the people who create and inherit this culture. Through in-depth communication with people from all walks of life in the target cultural countries, especially those in the cultural, art and academic circles, the screenwriters can have a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the historical origin, development context, era style of this culture, and understand the true meaning of its cultural spirit. For example, by discussing Confucian culture with Chinese Confucian masters, we can deeply understand the essence of Confucian "benevolence" and "harmony", and by talking with Indian yoga masters, we can understand the true meaning of the "compassion" and "ethereal" realm of Buddhism. Through the in-depth dialogue and ideological collision with people of the target cultural countries, the screenwriter can improve the understanding of this culture to a new height, correct the one-sided cultural cognition, further grasp the essence of the culture, and establish a deep cross-cultural communication channel, which is of great benefit to the cross-cultural film script creation.

### 3.2 Flexibly processing language conversion, and retaining the original flavor

Moderately retaining the characteristic expression of source language is an important strategy to flexibly handle language transformation and retain the original flavor. Each language has its own unique way of expression, carrying a specific cultural color. In order to retain the cultural flavor of the source language in the cross-cultural film script creation, the scriptwriter needs to moderately retain the characteristic expression of the source language, such as idioms, and proverbs in the process of language transformation. For example, when translating a foreign language into Chinese, some idioms of the foreign language can be moderately retained. And the literal translation of French "Il pleut des cordes" to "rain under the rope", although it is contrary to the habit of Chinese expression, it vividly reproduces the exaggerated expression of French. For another example, when translating Chinese into a foreign language, some images of Chinese idioms can be skillfully preserved. The translation of "changing sea" means "great change", which not only conveys the vividness of Chinese images, but also conforms to the expression of foreign language. Moderately retaining the characteristic expressions of these source languages can make the audience fully feel the exotic customs of the source language and culture, and enhance the cultural charm of the film. Of course, this retention needs to be weighed to avoid overuse leading to unclear expressions that are difficult for the audience to understand [3].

The cultural connotation of language is often difficult to translate directly, which requires scriptwriters to exert creativity and skills. For example, when a foreign language is translated into Chinese, the cultural vocabulary in the source language can be skillfully transformed according to the context, or translated into similar Chinese vocabulary to highlight its cultural connotation, or add cultural background information to help the audience understand, so as to avoid literal translation and lose the cultural connotation. For another example, when the Chinese language is translated into a foreign language, some Chinese words can be flexibly processed according to different contexts, or its cultural connotations can be highlighted through free translation, or explanatory translation can be added to help the audience grasp, so as to avoid literal interpretation and misinterpreting its cultural connotation. The clever transformation of the cultural connotation of

these languages can make the audience accurately grasp the rich cultural implication carried by the source language vocabulary, and truly understand the exotic customs and humanistic spirit conveyed by the cross-cultural film script. This transformation requires the screenwriter to have a deep understanding and grasp of the two languages and cultures, and have excellent language creativity.

The sense of language humor often relies on a specific cultural context, which is difficult to be directly copied across cultures. Therefore, screenwriters need to unleash their creativity and find expression methods that can trigger similar humorous effects in the target language and culture. For example, the literal translation of a witty expression in the source language is difficult to reproduce the original flavor, but it can be creatively translated through free translation, which not only conveys the witty humor of the original sentence, but also conforms to the expression of the target language [4]. For another example, some humorous jokes based on homophonic sounds in Chinese can be creatively treated as rhetorical devices such as alliteration and antithesis in the target language, so as to convey the sense of humor of the original sentence as much as possible. This creative transmission requires screenwriters to give full play to their imagination and language control ability, and to explore and create humorous expressions that can resonate on the basis of their deep understanding of the two languages and cultures. Only in this way can the sense of humor of the source language cross the cultural barriers, glow with a new splendor, and bring a heartfelt smile to the audience.

### 3.3 Put the cultural elements carefully to avoid overuse

In cross-cultural film script writing, it is a crucial strategy to put cultural elements carefully and avoid overuse. First, screenwriters need to carefully select representative cultural elements, such as iconic cultural symbols, typical customs, unique values, etc. By presenting these elements in a targeted way, the audience can quickly identify and grasp the cultural themes shown in the film and feel the charm of foreign cultures. Second, the scriptwriter should appropriately integrate the cultural elements, and weave them naturally into the plot, so that the cultural elements can become an organic part to promote the development of the plot, highlight the characters and render the atmosphere of the story, avoiding rigid attachments that affect the fluency of the story [5]. Third, the screenwriter needs to provide necessary cultural background explanation at an appropriate time to help the audience understand the cultural elements in the film through character dialogue and voice-overs, but this explanation should be concise and meaningful, avoiding excessive narration and affecting the viewing experience. The careful placement of cultural elements needs writers to strike a balance between the breadth and depth of culture, not only allowing the audience to appreciate the profound culture through representative elements, but also allowing the audience to freely immerse themselves in the story through moderate integration to truly achieve the harmonious unity and mutual benefit between cultural elements and stories.

## 4 Conclusion

Cross-cultural film script writing is a challenging but far-reaching artistic practice. In order to overcome the obstacles caused by language and cultural differences, screenwriters need to understand the target culture and grasp its essence; handle language transformation flexibly and strive to retain the original flavor; put cultural elements carefully to avoid excessive use. Through extensive study of different cultures, improvement of cultural sensitivity and language competence, and the courage to innovate and practice, screenwriters can create excellent cross-cultural films that are both popular and well received, building a bridge for the understanding and communication between different cultures.

### Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

## References

- [1] Yang XY. 2023. The language characteristic analysis of the film script of *Luohu and Su Zi* from the perspective of computer style study. *Masterpieces Review*, 26: 14-16.
- [2] Zhang XF. 2019. Cognitive space construction in film screenplay writing. *Journal of Beijing Film Academy*, 8: 74-82.
- [3] Huang XL. 2022. Analysis of cultural barriers in English language translation. *Journal of Harbin Vocational & Technical College*, 2: 164-166.
- [4] Cui SJ. 2023. The language and cultural characteristics of poetic style film. *News Communication*, 22: 48-50.
- [5] Qin JM. 2021. Analyzing film language from the perspective of language and literature. *Writers and Artists of China*, 3: 33-34.