



Subtitle Translation of *Kung Fu Panda 4*: A Contextual Theory-Based Approach

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Abstract

Globalization highlights the role of film and television in cultural exchange, and movie subtitles are critical to overcoming language barriers for intercultural communication. This paper examines *Kung Fu Panda 4* through the lens of contextual theory to explore effective subtitling strategies. Translation practice usually draws on linguistic, situational and cultural contexts, and the logical coherence of contextual language directly dictates the stylistic orientation of subtitles. Contextual theory emphasizes considering the original text's cultural background, social setting, historical period, purpose, and intended audience. This theory helps translators fully grasp the film's content, ensuring accurate and natural translations that better resonate with the target audience. Targeting cultural nuances, puns and dialects, this study explores subtitle quality enhancement methods to preserve the original's artistic integrity, advocates systematic cross-cultural film translation, and aims to bridge linguistic-cultural gaps and promote global cultural diversity.

Subject Areas

Literature

Keywords

Contextual Theory, *Kung Fu Panda 4*, Subtitle Translation

1. Introduction

Accelerated globalization highlights films' role as cultural bridges, making subtitle translation—critical to international distribution, audience comprehension and cross-cultural communication—of great theoretical and practical significance.

The *Kung Fu Panda* film series has won hearts globally with its unique blend of Eastern elements and humor. As the latest installment, *Kung Fu Panda 4* contin-

ues this legacy, innovating in storytelling and character development to strengthen its position in international animation. Beyond impressive box office numbers, the film's success lies in its excellent subtitle translations that transcend linguistic boundaries, showcasing captivating Chinese culture on the global stage. This has sparked international audiences' interest in and recognition of traditional Chinese culture, acting as a bridge between diverse cultures [1].

Contextual theory stresses considering the original text's context during subtitle translation, including cultural background, social environment, historical period, and the text's purpose and audience. Applying this theory helps translators gain a comprehensive understanding of the film's content, ensuring accuracy and naturalness in the target language. Contextual theory aids in addressing challenges like cultural differences, puns, and dialects, ensuring that translations are faithful to the original while adhering to the target culture's norms [2]. Given the deep-rooted Chinese cultural elements in many scenes and dialogues of *Kung Fu Panda 4*, the application of contextual theory is particularly crucial.

Through the study of subtitle translation of *Kung Fu Panda 4*, we observe the significant role of contextual theory in accurately conveying cultural nuances and enhancing readability and acceptance. Future research could explore practical applications of contextual theory to improve subtitle quality, enabling more people to appreciate the artistry of cinema without language barriers [2]. This paper aims to investigate the subtitle translation of *Kung Fu Panda 4* using contextual theory, aiming to distill strategies and methods that enhance subtitle translation quality.

By adopting contextual theory, this research seeks to provide guidelines for translating cross-cultural cinematic works, highlighting the importance of preserving the original work's artistic integrity and emotional expression while bridging linguistic and cultural divides. It promotes a deeper appreciation and understanding of different cultures, contributing to the richness and diversity of global cultural exchange [3].

2. Contextual Theory and Its Adaptability to Translation Practice

Contextual Theory is an important concept in linguistics, anthropology, and sociology, emphasizing that language use and comprehension are inseparable from specific environmental factors [4]. Its core tenet posits that meaning is not solely determined by vocabulary and grammar but is profoundly shaped by contextual conditions. It mainly includes cultural context, communicative context and affective context, as elaborated below.

The important concept of cultural context was put forward by the scholar Bronislaw Malinowski. In the languages of the local residents of the Trobriand Islands, there was a great deal of content closely connected with their own culture, way of life, social customs, and traditional beliefs. It was precisely based on such in-depth observations and reflections that Malinowski first proposed that the meaning of language should be understood in combination with the context of

culture. He emphasized that the cultural context was like a huge “information repository”, providing rich references and support for the use and understanding of language. Language is not just a communication tool, but also a carrier of culture. It reflects the values, ways of thinking, and life experiences of a nation or group. Malinowski’s theory urged scholars to pay more attention to the close connection between language and culture, thus promoting the continuous development and progress of fields such as cross-cultural studies and sociolinguistics. Since then, numerous scholars have conducted more in-depth and extensive research on the role of cultural context in language understanding based on Malinowski’s work, further enriching and perfecting this important theory. Cultural context is highly adaptable to guiding *Kung Fu Panda 4* subtitle translation. It helps translators tackle culturally-loaded elements like Chinese martial arts terms, Taoist philosophy (e.g., “Wu Wei”), and folk humor in the film [5].

The theory of Communicative Context was put forward by two giants in linguistics, John R. Firth and M. A. K. Halliday. In the middle of the 20th century, linguistic research gradually shifted from simply focusing on the structure of language to paying attention to the functions and meanings of language in practical use [6]. Building on Firth’s research, Halliday further elevated linguistic research to a new height and developed systemic functional linguistics. Halliday emphasized that language has three core functions: the ideational function, the interpersonal function, and the textual function. The ideational function helps people construct their cognition of the world and describe various experiences, events, objects, etc., through language. Communicative context—encompassing speaker-hearer roles, interaction goals, and situational dynamics, is highly adaptable to *Kung Fu Panda 4* subtitle translation.

The concept of Affective Context was put forward by the famous linguist Dell Hymes, whose theoretical contributions have played an important role in the field of linguistics, especially in the study of the interaction between language and social culture [5]. In the 1960s, Hymes proposed Communicative Competence theory, which aims to break the limitation of traditional linguistics which only pays attention to the correctness of language form and extends the perspective of study to the use of language in actual social communication. Affective Context plays a key role in language communication. It not only affects the effect of information transmission, but also affects the relationship between the two parties and their cognition of each other to a large extent. This concept makes people realize that when studying language communication, we should not only pay attention to the surface form and semantic content of language, but also deeply explore the emotional factors hidden behind language. Affective context—centered on characters’ emotions, tones and conversational moods—proves highly adaptable to *Kung Fu Panda 4* subtitle translation.

3. Stylistic Features of Subtitles of *Kung Fu Panda 4*

The film *Kung Fu Panda 4* is aimed at audiences with different cultural back-

grounds and educational levels around the world, and it is necessary to consider formal and informal language styles in subtitle translation. Characters with different identities and personalities use different levels of formal language in various scenarios [6]. Elders such as Master teach apprentices with formal language to show authority, while lively characters such as Po use informal language in daily life. Through such subtitle translation, the character image can be accurately shaped. At the same time, formal language has strong appeal when expressing serious and solemn emotions, which helps the audience feel important plots and profound themes, while informal language is good at expressing relaxed, humorous and cordial emotions, enhancing the fun and warmth of the film, making the audience laugh in the funny scenes and feel the heart of the characters in the touching moments. Therefore, the formal level of language is considered in the subtitle translation. It can well meet the needs of different audiences and enhance the effect of emotional expression [5].

3.1. Formal Style

The subtitle translation for *Kung Fu Panda 4* had to take into account the formality levels present within the dialogue, reflecting the varied tones and styles used by different characters and in different situations. The classification of subtitles based on formality can be divided into two main categories: formal style and informal style. Each style serves a distinct purpose and contributes to the authenticity and emotional depth of the film's translation [5].

Formal style subtitles also play a crucial role in conveying the meaning and idea of the characters. Formal style subtitles often appear in scenes that elaborate on important missions, grand background settings, profound philosophies, and so on. Formal style subtitles are characterized by their use of polite, respectful, and sometimes elevated language that conveys authority or tradition. In *Kung Fu Panda 4*, this style is particularly appropriate for characters such as Master Shifu, Zhen, and other figures who embody wisdom, leadership, or historical significance. When translating scenes involving these characters, it's crucial to maintain a tone that reflects their status and the reverence they command.

For instance, Master Shifu and Po are discussing Po's future direction. At this time, as the Dragon Warrior, Po is proposed by Master Shifu to choose a successor and take on a new mission to become the Spiritual Leader of the Valley of Peace. In this scene, Master Shifu looks serious, and Po is confused about the new mission. The two sides engage in a conversation around responsibility and inheritance. For example, “你要收个徒弟继承你的衣钵” (It is time for you to choose your successor), “成为新的神龙大侠” (to be the next Dragon Warrior), “如今你将迎来新的使命，爬上一段新的台阶” (And once again, destiny calls for you to take the next step on your journey.) Expressions such as “choose your successor”, “be the next Dragon Warrior”, and “destiny calls for you” are used. The words are formal and the tone is solemn, highlighting the great significance of the inheritance mission. This is consistent with Master Shifu's status as an authoritative

elder and the seriousness of this scene regarding Po's future development plan. Such formal-style language makes the audience feel the importance of this moment for both Po and the entire Valley of Peace. When the origin and functions of the Staff of Wisdom are being described, the background is that Po used it to cut the ribbon for his family's noodle shop, and Master Shifu points out that this is not its proper use. This plot revolves around the mysterious power and special mission of the staff, laying a foreshadowing for the development of the story. For example: “这个天慧法杖是乌龟大师亲手送给我的。传说得此法杖者便可得通天法力，自由穿行于三界间，能开启那扇通往灵界的封印之门。” (The Staff of Wisdom was personally bestowed upon me by Master Oogway himself. It is said that whoever possesses this staff has the power to travel between the realms. The power to unlock the long-lost Sealed Gate leading to the Spirit World.) Expressions like “personally bestowed upon”, “It is said that”, and “has the power to” are used. The tone is formal and has a mysterious flavor. This kind of language not only matches the setting of the Staff of Wisdom as a mysterious treasure but also creates a solemn and mysterious atmosphere, highlighting its special status and powerful power in the story. It enables the audience to have a deep understanding of the importance of the staff. The Chameleon utters these words when she is hatching her ruling plan. At this moment, she has the situation under control and is revealing her grand goals to her underlings, exuding ambition and self-confidence. “我的地盘将从刺柏城扩张拿下每一个城镇每一个村落，直到拿下和平谷乃至全天下，到时我魅影妖后的大名将无人不知无人不晓。” (“My dominion shall expand from Juniper City, conquering every town and every village until Peace Valley falls under my reign, and ultimately the entire world. When that day comes, the name of the Phantom Enchantress Queen will resound throughout all lands, leaving none who have not heard its dreadful echo.”) Vocabulary and sentence structures such as “My dominion shall expand”, “conquering every town and every village”, and “falls under my reign” are grand in word choice and firm in tone. They demonstrate her extreme ambition and powerful presence. This formal style is consistent with her identity as the main villain, highlighting her determination to rule the world and her overweening arrogance. It enables the audience to keenly sense the threat she poses to the Valley of Peace and the entire world.

3.2. Informal Style and Colloquial Style

Informal style subtitles also play a crucial role in conveying the emotional journeys of the characters. Informal subtitles are often used in characters' daily dialogue, humor, and emotional expressions [5]. Informal style subtitles adopt a more relaxed, conversational tone that mirrors everyday speech patterns. This style is especially fitting for the dialogue between Po and his friends, as well as in scenes that highlight humor, camaraderie, or personal growth. By using colloquial expressions, idiomatic phrases, and even slang, translators can create subtitles that feel natural and relatable to viewers [7].

Po, being the protagonist and often portrayed as an endearing underdog, fre-

quently engages in witty banter and playful exchanges with his companions. Translating these interactions requires capturing the lighthearted and sometimes irreverent nature of his speech. For instance, when everyone was waiting for Po to attend the event, they showed concern and confusion about his long-awaited arrival. The atmosphere at the scene was relaxed yet somewhat anxious, and the conversations among the people were natural and casual. “阿宝，怎么还不来呀？按说这孩子早就应该到了才对。” (“Where is Po? He should’ve been here ages ago, don’t you think?”) “平哥，先别急，悠着点，别慌。” (“Take it easy, Ping. Steady now, no need to rush. Keep your cool.”) Expressions like “Where is Po?” and “He should’ve been here ages ago” are very close to what people would say in daily conversations when talking about someone being late. The tone is casual and natural, without deliberately formal wording, which is in line with daily conversation habits. Expressions such as “Take it easy, Ping. Steady now, no need to rush” are very colloquial. They show the casual care and comfort among friends, full of the flavor of life, reflecting the informal style. Po uses such words when interacting with some opponents or characters he meets. When ending the fight with the big fish and communicating with characters like the “seafood-like” one, the scenes are light-hearted and humorous. “大笨鱼，本大侠没功夫再陪你玩了。” (“Big guy. We’re really gonna have to wrap this up.”) “你这个海鲜，以后别上陆地上瞎转悠了。” (“Next time, stay off their turf when surfing the waves.”) This kind of style shows Po’s character with humorous language and increases the humorous effect.

Colloquial style uses language close to daily life, which is easy to understand, natural, and casual. It uses fewer complex sentence structures and rare words, just like people’s daily conversations, with a strong flavor of life.

For instance, it uses language close to daily life, which is easy to understand, natural, and casual. It uses fewer complex sentence structures and rare words, just like people’s daily conversations, with a strong flavor of life. Po’s daily words like “迟到了，迟到了。” (“I’m late. I’m late.”) “我哪慌了！” (“I am relaxed!”) Also, the conversations among people like “阿宝，怎么还不来呀？” (“Where is Po?”) “按说这孩子早就应该到了才对” (“He was supposed to be here hours ago.”). These languages are simple and straightforward, in line with people’s daily communication habits, natural and casual, full of the flavor of life, which is in line with the definition of the colloquial style.

3.3. Humorous Style

Humorous style uses exaggerated, witty, and comical language expressions, and creates a relaxed and joyful atmosphere through interesting plots, unexpected dialogues, or unique ways of expression, making the audience laugh [8].

For instance, Po is trying to find inner peace to solve a problem but is constantly interrupted by various ordinary and absurd thoughts. He and Zhen are on an adventure, casually snatching items and joking around. The situation is full of a sense of daily life and is relaxed and casual. Po’s chaotic inner thoughts like “豆腐

蘸水，蘸点啥好呢？” (“What should I dip my tofu in?”) “臭豆腐，加点芝麻酱就更香了” (“Snow peas? In a sesame soy glaze.”). These contents show the characters’ inner activities and interactions in a relaxed and humorous way, breaking the tense atmosphere and bringing joy to the audience with humorous words and actions, which is in line with the definition of the humorous and witty style.

3.4. Serious Style

The language expression is formal and solemn, with a serious emotional attitude. The content usually involves important missions, responsibilities, life philosophies, etc., conveying profound viewpoints and emotions, and prompting the audience to think about the key issues of the story [8].

For instance, the scene is when Master Shifu and Po are discussing Po’s future mission. Master Shifu looks serious, and his words revolve around Po’s significant responsibilities. Master Shifu says to Po, “你要收个徒弟继承你的衣钵” (“It is time for you to choose your successor.”) “成为新的神龙大侠” (“To be the next Dragon Warrior.”) “守护和平谷，为大家传道授业，传递薪火” (“Oversee the Valley of Peace, pass along wisdom, and inspire hope.”). Master Shifu’s words are related to Po’s identity transformation and his great responsibility to the Valley of Peace. The tone is formal and the attitude is serious, aiming to emphasize the importance of the matter and prompt Po to think seriously, which is in line with the definition of the serious and earnest style.

4. Strategies and Methods on the Subtitle Translation of *Kung Fu Panda 4* under the Guidance of Contextual Theory

Under the guidance of contextual theory, the subtitle translation of *Kung Fu Panda 4* uses a variety of strategies and methods to achieve the accuracy of language conversion and the effectiveness of cultural transmission. The process of subtitle translation for *Kung Fu Panda 4* requires a thoughtful blend of these strategies and methods [8]. The goal is to produce subtitles that accurately reflect the dialogue and enhance the viewing experience by maintaining the film’s cultural richness and emotional depth. These strategies and methods aim to enable the audience to overcome the language barrier, deeply understand the content of the film, and feel its charm. Through careful application of contextual theory, translators can bridge the gap between cultures, offering an authentic and enjoyable cinematic experience to a global audience.

4.1. Strategies

In the subtitle translation of *Kung Fu Panda 4*, contextual theory guides translators to balance domestication and foreignization, enhancing viewer engagement while preserving cultural authenticity. Translation strategies include domestication and Foreignization.

Domestication involves adapting the source text to align with the target cul-

ture's norms, making the film feel natural and relatable. This is crucial for idiomatic expressions or culturally specific references that might be unfamiliar to the target audience, ensuring they are accessible without losing their essence.

Foreignization retains elements from the source culture, offering an authentic experience and exposing viewers to unique cultural aspects. For a film deeply rooted in Chinese culture like *Kung Fu Panda 4*, this strategy preserves cultural markers such as kung fu terminology and traditional philosophies, providing a window into Chinese traditions. It respects the integrity of the original work and fosters appreciation for cultural diversity.

4.1.1. Domestication

Domestication is a critical strategy in subtitle translation that adapts the source text to align with the target culture's norms, ensuring the film feels natural and relatable to the audience [7].

At the cultural context level: Descriptive sentences with Chinese cultural characteristics are translated into expressions familiar to the target language audience. For example, “面条香浓好劲道，豆腐美味震山倒”，this can be translated into “Where the broth has kick and the bean curd's a knockout”. Using common English expressions to talk about delicious food, such as “kick” and “knockout”, translators can convey the attractive qualities of food and make it easier for audience to understand and feel. This conforms to the requirement of the cultural context level in the contextual theory, which is to transform culturally characteristic content into expressions familiar in the target language culture.

At the communicative context level: In terms of sentence structure and vocabulary choice, translators can adjust according to English expression habits. Like, “阿宝怎么还不来呀?” This sentence can be translated into “Where is Po?” This common questioning sentence pattern allows the audience to naturally understand its meaning, ensuring that the information is transmitted without obstacles, in line with the communication habits of native English speakers. This is exactly the manifestation of the communicative context level in the contextual theory, which emphasizes adjusting according to the expression habits of the target language to achieve effective communication.

At the affective context level: According to the specific emotional atmosphere, translators can choose the right words to enhance the appeal, so that the audience can understand the emotions of the characters more easily. For example, when the Queen is described, “口吐谎话，眼冒绿光的变色龙” can be translated into “the lizard of lies with the glowing teal eyes”. When the words “lies” and “glowing” are used, the evil image is clearly highlighted, so that the audience can feel the negative emotions of the character more directly. This conforms to the requirement of the affective context level in the contextual theory, which is to select appropriate words according to the emotional atmosphere to enhance the emotional transmission.

At the humorous style level: In the translation of humorous-style subtitles, in order to let the target-language audience also feel the humorous effect of the film,

image substitution and word-order adjustment can be used. For example, “豆腐蘸水，蘸点啥好呢？” is translated as “What should I dip my tofu in?” This direct and simple expression conforms to the daily spoken-language habits, allowing the audience to quickly understand its meaning. “臭豆腐，加点芝麻酱就更香了” is translated as “Snow peas? In a sesame soy glaze”. This translation, while retaining a certain sense of fun, makes it easier for the audience to understand the peculiarity of this food combination through the English expression habit compliant phrase “sesame soy glaze”, thus experiencing the humor in it. This is in line with the requirement of the communicative context in the contextual theory, which is to adjust according to the expression habits of the target language to achieve effective communication and convey a specific style.

At the colloquial style level, “迟到了，迟到了” can be translated into “I’m late, I’m late”. This simple and repetitive expression is close to the oral expression in daily English communication, and it reflects the communicative context in the contextual theory, so that the audience can deeply feel the relaxed and casual atmosphere.

By adopting domestication, the appeal and understanding of *Kung Fu Panda 4* to a global audience can be ensured, enhancing the viewing experience while maintaining the original charm and depth of the film.

4.1.2. Foreignization

Foreignization is a translation strategy that preserves the source culture’s uniqueness, offering an authentic experience to the target audience. This approach respects the original work’s cultural richness and educates viewers about different traditions [7].

At the cultural context level, the English subtitles retain the elements with Chinese cultural characteristics in the film. For instance, “神龙大侠”，“天慧法杖”，“和平谷”，“盖世五侠” and so on can be translated into “Dragon Warrior”，“Staff of Wisdom”，“Valley of Peace”，“Furious Five”. This translation reflects the cultural context in the contextual theory. The translators use direct transliteration or literal translation and retain the original flavor, so that foreign audiences can come into contact with Chinese culture.

At the communicative context level, the translators try to retain the expression style of the original text between characteristics in the dialogue. As Po often said, “走你”，it can be translated into “Skadoosh”. This translation reflects the communicative context in the contextual theory. The translators use free translation to retain the uniqueness, show the personality of the characters, and let the audience feel the language style of the original film.

At the Emotional context level, for some unique expressions that can reflect the emotions of the characters, the original features are retained. For example, “我可太爱哭了”，this sentence can be translated into “I just love kung fu”. This translation reflects the affective context in the contextual theory. Although there is a deviation from the original meaning, the combination of context can reflect Po’s love for kung fu, retain this emotional feature and let the audience feel the emo-

tion of the character.

At the formal style level: This kind of subtitle often appear in scenes that elaborate on important missions, grand background settings, and profound philosophies. In *Kung Fu Panda 4*, in plots such as when Master Shifu and Po discuss the inheritance mission and introduce the Staff of Wisdom, there are many elements with Chinese cultural characteristics. Lines like “你要收个徒弟继承你的衣钵” “成为新的神龙大侠” “如今你将迎来新的使命，爬上一段新的台阶” are translated as “It is time for you to choose your successor” “to be the next Dragon Warrior”. “And once again, destiny calls for you to take the next step on your journey.” The translators retained words with Chinese kung fu cultural characteristics like “successor” and “Dragon Warrior”, so foreign audiences can understand the unique concepts within the Chinese kung fu inheritance system. This translation reflects the affective context in the contextual theory. According to the specific emotional atmosphere, the translators adjust the translation to highlight the emotions of the characters, allowing the audience to feel those emotions. When the Staff of Wisdom is described, “这个天慧法杖是乌龟大师亲手送给我的。传说得此法杖者便可得通天法力，自由穿行于三界间，能开启那扇通往灵界的封印之门” is translated as “The Staff of Wisdom was personally bestowed upon me by Master Oogway himself. It is said that whoever possesses this staff has the power to travel between the realms. The power to unlock the long-lost Sealed Gate leading to the Spirit World”. Translations such as “Staff of Wisdom” and “Spirit World” preserve elements from Chinese mythology and kung fu culture. This reflects the cultural context aspect in the contextual theory and allows the film’s cultural features to be presented in their original form, enabling the audience to feel its mysterious atmosphere and unique charm. This foreignization translation strategy not only retains the Chinese cultural characteristics but also allows the target language audience to appreciate the profound cultural heritage contained in the film, enhancing the film’s cultural dissemination value.

When foreignization is employed, *Kung Fu Panda 4*’s fidelity to its cultural roots can be ensured, enriching audiences’ viewing experience by introducing Chinese culture and traditional elements to a global audience, while fostering an appreciation for cultural diversity.

4.2. Translation Methods

In the subtitle translation of *Kung Fu Panda 4*, by contextual theory, translators employ a range of methods to ensure that the subtitles not only convey the original meaning but also preserve the cultural richness. Through these methods, translators create subtitles that remain true to the original while engaging and educating a global audience, offering an authentic yet enjoyable cinematic experience that bridges cultural gaps.

4.2.1. Literal Translation

Literal translation is a method where the source text is translated word-for-word into the target language, aiming to preserve the original structure and meaning as

closely as possible. When dealing with some content with shallow cultural connotation, relatively simple language structure and corresponding expression in the target language, literal translation can retain the linguistic form and meaning of the original text. This approach is particularly useful when dealing with cultural terms, idiomatic expressions, or phrases that carry significant cultural weight [5].

For example, “我要把属于我的全都拿回来”, this sentence can be translated into “I have returned to take what is mine”. Tai Lung is stating his intention, emphasizing his determination to take back everything. It is used during communication. And this translation reflects the communicative context in the contextual theory. In the communication process, the literal translation makes the sentence concise and clear, which is in line with Tai Lung’s straightforward and tough speaking style. In a context full of conflict and confrontation, a simple and direct expression can better highlight Tai Lung’s momentum. Po anxiously says “迟到了, 迟到了”; this sentence can be translated into “I’m late. I’m late.” This translation reflects both the communicative context and the affective context in the contextual theory. From the perspective of the communicative context, he realizes he’s running behind schedule. This scene is full of the flavor of daily life. From the perspective of language style, it belongs to the informal and colloquial style. Po, with his distinctive and life-full personality, doesn’t use complex or formal language to express his situation in such an urgent moment. Instead of using a relatively formal expression like “I’m running behind schedule”, he chooses the simple and straightforward “I’m late”. This completely conforms to people’s language habits in daily life, appearing casual and natural. From the perspective of the affective context, repeating “I’m late” isn’t just for emphasis; it reflects how people express anxiety when being late in real life. It’s an instinctive way to vent nervousness. Po’s repetition makes the audience empathize quickly. So it belongs to colloquial style. The translator uses literal translation to let audiences understand this sentence easily. The rapid repetition of the short sentences shows Po’s urgency. When hearing this, the audience can picture Po hurrying and muttering, feeling his panic. This translation boosts the scene’s authenticity, helping the audience immerse themselves in the story and understand Po’s emotions and the plot better.

It allows English-speaking audiences to quickly understand the identity and characteristics of the character it refers to, clarifying the important status and abilities of this character in the story. By employing literal translation methods, translators ensure that *Kung Fu Panda 4* remains true to its cultural roots, offering an authentic and educational experience to international audiences. Each adaptation aims to respect the original content while fostering appreciation for the richness of Chinese culture and tradition. Through careful application of contextual theory, translators bridge cultural gaps, making the film both enjoyable and enlightening for viewers around the world.

4.2.2. Free Translation

Free translation is a method that prioritizes conveying the meaning and spirit of

the source text over its literal form, adapting it to suit the linguistic and cultural norms of the target audience. When the expression of the original text is difficult to correspond directly in the target language, or literal translation may lead to unclear meaning or not in line with the expression habits of the target language, free translation can flexibly convey the meaning of the original text [5].

For example, “悍娇虎去教训那群野鸡帮”, this sentence can be translated into “Tigress is taking on the free-range chicken gang”. This sentence appears in the scene where the characters discuss the respective actions of the Furious Five. It is used to describe the task that Tigress is carrying out, showing the different action lines of the characters in the story and reflecting their mission of maintaining justice and combating evil forces. “悍娇虎” can be translated into “Tigress” not verbatim, but using a familiar character name from the series, “教训” can be translated into “taking on”, which is more in line with English expression habits and conveys a sense of confrontation. This phrase is more in line with the daily English expression habits than directly using “teach...a lesson”, vividly conveying a situation of confrontation and challenge, allowing readers to feel the conflict and confrontation between Tigress and the chicken gang. It meets the requirement of accurate information transmission in the communicative context in the contextual theory. “面条香浓好劲道，豆腐美味震山倒” can be translated into “Where the broth has kick and the bean curd’s a knockout”. This sentence is a promotional description of the food in the Dragon Warrior Noodles and Tofu restaurant. It appears in the scenes related to the restaurant, aiming to highlight the deliciousness of the food in the store and attract customers. It is a rather exaggerated and infectious expression. There is no direct translation of “香浓好劲道” and “美味震山倒”, but “has kick” and “a knockout” are used to convey the delicious and attractive characteristics of food. This translation method not only conforms to English expression habits but also vividly shows the attractiveness of the food, enabling English-speaking readers to feel the deliciousness of the food and achieving a similar promotional effect as the original text. This subtitle allows the audience to feel the character’s emotions, which meets the requirements of the affective context in the contextual theory.

When free translation methods are used, it can be ensured that *Kung Fu Panda 4* remains engaging and comprehensible to a global audience while preserving the film’s emotional and cultural richness.

4.2.3. Combination of Literal and Free Translation

Subtitle translation for *Kung Fu Panda 4* often employs a combination of literal and free translation methods to strike a balance between preserving cultural authenticity and ensuring viewer comprehension. This hybrid approach respects the original content while making it accessible and engaging for an international audience [1].

For example, “让四山五岳，九江八河的人都知道，我大龙还活着”, this sentence can be translated into “Let it be known from the highest mountain to the lowest valley that Tai Lung lives”. The phrase “四山五岳，九江八河” is translated

as “from the highest mountains to the lowest valleys”, which preserves the spatial concept from high to low in the original text. This translation mainly reflects the communicative context in the contextual theory and helps to maintain the vividness and grandeur of the original expression. However, to better suit the English-speaking audience’s comprehension and English language usage habits, the overall sentence is adjusted through free translation techniques. By adding “Let it be known”, the intention of “让……的人都知道” is directly and clearly expressed. This combination of literal and free translation not only retains some of the original imposing manner but also makes the sentence more accessible to English-speaking viewers. They can easily understand that Tai Lung is making a far-reaching and forceful announcement of his return, effectively conveying the intended message in an informal and colloquial way.

Through these examples, it becomes evident how combining literal and free translation methods in the subtitle translation of *Kung Fu Panda 4* helps convey the cultural nuances of the original work while ensuring international audiences can smoothly understand and enjoy the film’s content. This translation strategy not only preserves the film’s artistic and entertainment value but also promotes cultural exchange and understanding [7].

4.2.4. Omission

In order to make the translation more concise and avoid repetition or redundant information, some content that does not need to be translated in the target language or will affect the expression effect after translation is omitted [1].

For example, “阿宝, 怎么还不来呀” can be translated into “Where is Po?” This sentence appears in the scene where Po’s family is waiting for him. His family is anxious about his long-awaited arrival and expresses their concern about his whereabouts through this inquiry. The family expresses their concern about his long-awaited arrival through this inquiry, which occurs in the daily communication situation among family members, reflecting the use of language in actual communication. So it reflects the communicative context in the contextual theory. In the communicative context, the translation focuses on adjusting the original sentence according to the English expression habits in daily conversations. The anxious tone expressed by “why not come yet” is omitted, and the core content “where is Po” is directly translated to make the translation more concise and clear. This approach makes the translation more concise and clear, in line with the English expression habit of directly asking about key information in daily conversations. It avoids the literal translation of too many emotional modifiers, allowing English-speaking audiences to quickly understand the core of the sentence. This sentence belongs to colloquial style and informal style. The sentence uses expressions close to daily life, which are simple and direct, in line with people’s daily conversation habits. There are no formal words or sentence patterns, and it is full of the flavor of life. “你看, 这么一擦好像, 更丑了” is what Po says after trying to wipe something and being dissatisfied with the wiping effect. The focus is on describing the bad result of the wiping. It is an expression that he communicates

with people around him, used to describe what actually happens, belonging to the daily communication scenario, so it reflects the communicative context in the contextual theory. It can be translated into “There, that’s much...worse.” It omits the expression “你看” which attracts the attention of the other people, and directly describes the result, making the translation smoother and natural. This treatment makes the translation smoother and natural, conforming to the English expression logic and directly focusing on the core content of the description: the bad situation after wiping. Po sees that there is something on Master Shifu or around him that needs to be wiped and wants to offer help. This sentence belongs to colloquial style and informal style. The expression is natural and casual, just like people’s casual comments on things in daily life. It uses simple words and natural expressions without the solemnity of formal language. “那什么” is a colloquial filler word with no real meaning, mainly used to introduce the subsequent wiping action. “那什么, 我帮您擦擦” can be translated into “Here, let me just”. It is the language used in the interaction and communication between people, reflecting the function of actual communication, so it reflects the communicative context in the contextual theory. Such colloquial filler words as “那什么” are omitted, so that the translation is more in line with the English expression logic. “我就奇了怪了” can be translated into “Just tell me one thing”. It omits the modal word expressing surprise and confusion, directly expressing the intention of “let me do something” conforms to the English expression logic, making the translation more concise and smooth and avoiding redundant information. This sentence is used when the speaker is expressing confusion. It appears in the daily conversation context, used to communicate ideas with others, which is the use of language in actual communication. So it reflects the communicative context in the contextual theory. The original sentence is very colloquial. In the translation, the modal words expressing surprise and confusion are omitted, and the intention is conveyed in a more concise and direct way, which is in line with the concise and casual characteristics of daily English communication and belongs to an informal language style.

Through these examples, we can see that using omission, translators can effectively streamline subtitles, ensuring they are concise yet informative [7]. This approach not only enhances the viewing experience but also respects the pacing and visual elements of *Kung Fu Panda 4*, making it accessible and enjoyable for a wide range of audiences. The use of omission allows for a balance between fidelity to the original content and the practical limitations of subtitle space and timing, ultimately providing a smoother and more engaging viewing experience.

4.2.5. Supplement

Subtitle translation for *Kung Fu Panda 4* involves not only conveying the original dialogue but also enhancing it with supplementary information to ensure that the subtitles are informative, engaging, and culturally appropriate. The combination of supplement methods allows translators to add context or explanation where necessary, enriching the viewing experience without overwhelming the audience with text [1].

For example, “面条香浓好劲道，豆腐美味震山倒” appears in the scene of describing the food in the Dragon Warrior Noodles and Tofu restaurant. It is an exaggerated promotion of the deliciousness of the food in the store, aiming to attract customers and highlight the unique charm of the food. This sentence can be translated into “Where the broth has kick and the bean curd’s a knockout”. “Where” is added to clarify the described scene, so that the sentence is more in line with English expression habits and the logic is clearer. Therefore, it belongs to the affective context in the contextual theory. In the affective context, language is used to evoke specific emotional responses. This example uses exaggerated language to arouse customers’ interest in and fondness for the food. And this sentence describes food using language that is close to daily life and easy to understand. “他把您生气的样子画的太形象了” appears in the scene where everyone sees a painting. It is an evaluation of the angry look of the Master Shifu in the painting, emphasizing the effect of the painting’s portrayal of Master Shifu’s angry expression, so it belongs to the affective context. In this context, language revolves around the emotional expression of characters and the perception of such emotional expressions. This sentence can be translated into “He really captured your disapproving scowl”. By adding “disapproving”, the translator conveys more accurately the dissatisfied emotion contained in this angry look, precisely depicting Master Shifu’s angry and dissatisfied expression. Compared with simply using “angry look”, it can better reflect the delicate emotions in the original text, making the translation more accurate and vivid. At the same time, this meticulous way of describing the character’s expression also has a certain serious style, as it focuses on depicting and evaluating the serious emotion of Master Shifu’s anger. “我有话跟你说” is used when Master Shifu wants to discuss important matters with Po, such as the topic of choosing a successor. As the opening of the conversation, it serves to initiate an important communication, reflecting the function of transmitting information and starting a dialogue in a specific communicative scenario, so it belongs to the communicative context in the contextual theory. This sentence can be translated into “We have to talk”. According to the context, “have to” is added to emphasize the necessity of speaking, so that the translation is more in line with English expression habits. A concise and direct way of expression is adopted, which is in line with people’s daily conversation habits and conforms to the characteristics of the colloquial style. Additionally, due to the close relationship between Master Shifu and Po and the relatively familiar conversation scene, although they are discussing important matters, the language expression still has a certain degree of casualness and intimacy, which is also an indication of the colloquial style. Meanwhile, since it involves important topics, it also has a certain serious style, emphasizing the necessity and solemnity of the conversation.

By adding information, the subtitles can accurately convey the cultural connotations, logical relationships, and emotional expressions in the movie. This ensures that the target language audience can fully appreciate the charm of the film and promotes cross-cultural communication through film subtitles.

4.2.6. Conversion

Conversion refers to the conversion of the parts of speech, sentence components and sentence structure in the original text according to the different modes of thinking, language habits and expression of the two languages, so as to make the translation more in line with the expression habits of the target language and smoother and more natural [5].

For example, “我好不容易找个事能干好” is uttered in the scene where Master Shifu suggests that Po choose a successor, which may change Po’s current role as the Dragon Warrior. Po says this to express his reluctance to part with the current situation and the difficulty he had in finding something suitable for himself. It conveys an emotional attitude, so it belongs to the affective context. In this context, Po’s words revolve around his own emotions, expressing his innermost feelings when facing a role transition. This sentence is simple and direct. It is full of the flavor of life, which is in line with the characteristics of the colloquial style. From the communicative context, Po and Master Shifu have a close relationship. This expression is casual and natural, without deliberate formal words, so it belongs to the informal style. “我好不容易找个事能干好” can be translated into “I finally found something I’m good at” and the phrasal verb “能干好” is converted into “I’m good at” to make the translation more consistent with the grammatical structure of English. This conforms to the grammar and expression habits of English and more clearly and naturally conveys Po’s meaning. “你这是想要干什么” is used during communication. Usually, it is a question raised when one person has doubts about the actions of another person. Its purpose is to obtain information about the other person’s intentions, and it plays a role in communication in actual dialogue scenarios, so it belongs to the communicative context in the contextual theory. It is a common way of asking questions during communication, reflecting the information-transfer function of language in communication. This sentence can be translated into “And what do you think you’re doing?” The simple question structure in Chinese is converted into a more common expression in English, and the addition of “do you think” makes the tone more natural. The English translation also adopts a concise and natural way of expression, which is close to daily conversation habits and conforms to the colloquial style. In general dialogue scenarios, this way of asking is rather casual and not formal. It is more like the communication between friends or acquaintances, so it also belongs to the informal style.

By using conversion, the subtitles can more naturally and smoothly convey the meaning of the original text on the basis of conforming to the Chinese expression habits, avoiding translation rigidity and making it easier for readers to understand. At the same time, it can help translators accurately convey the intention of the original text from different angles and prevent the inaccuracy of the meaning caused by language differences. In addition, the conversion method can enrich the expression of the translation, avoid the monotony of the translation, make the translation more vivid, and improve the quality and readability of the translation.

5. Conclusions

In the globalized era, film and television are key cultural exchange vehicles, and movie subtitles serve as a critical tool for breaking language barriers and facilitating intercultural communication. Focusing on the popular, culturally rich animated film *Kung Fu Panda 4*, this paper applies contextual theory to explore effective subtitling strategies amid its unique translation challenges and opportunities [5].

To better understand the subtitling strategies within the context of *Kung Fu Panda 4*, it is essential to have a clear understanding of the classification of subtitles. Subtitles can be classified based on formality, humorous style, serious style and colloquial style. By finely addressing these features, it ensures that global audiences can enjoy the charm of this work and promotes cross-cultural exchange and understanding.

Strategies for subtitle translation under the guidance of contextual theory include domestication and foreignization. Domestication involves adapting the source material to fit the norms and expectations of the target culture, making it feel more familiar and accessible. Foreignization, on the other hand, retains elements of the source culture, providing an authentic experience that educates and enriches the viewer. Both approaches have their merits and can be employed strategically depending on the scene and overall narrative goals [5].

Translation methods encompass literal translation, free translation, combination of literal and free translation, omission, supplement and conversion. These methods should be flexibly applied in light of specific contexts to accurately convey the authentic intent of the work and conform to the film's stylistic features.

In conclusion, the subtitle translation of *Kung Fu Panda 4* is a complex task that demands a deep understanding of contextual theory, by considering the cultural, communicative, and affective contexts. Careful classification of subtitles by formality and function ensures they complement the visual storytelling. Employing strategic methods like domestication, foreignization, and various translation techniques allows for a nuanced and engaging viewing experience. Ultimately, this research underscores the importance of systematic approaches in translating cross-cultural films, promoting a richer and more immersive experience for diverse audiences around the world. Through thoughtful and meticulous translation practices, *Kung Fu Panda 4* can continue to bridge cultural divides, bringing joy and inspiration to viewers everywhere.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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