



A Study on the Construction Mechanism and Sociocultural Motivations of Gendered Semantics in Film and Television Title Translation

Hui Zhang¹, Zhengjie Guo²

School of Foreign Studies, Hebei University, Baoding, China

Email: zhanghuiorb@163.com

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Abstract

As a key medium of cross-cultural communication, translated film and television titles carry distinct cultural values and gender narratives in their semantic construction. Adopting Leech's seven categories of meaning as the theoretical framework, this paper analyzes more than twenty representative translated film and television titles from home and abroad via qualitative textual analysis and comparative research. It explores gender-based semantic shifts across seven categories during Chinese translation, namely conceptual meaning, connotative meaning, social meaning, affective meaning, reflected meaning, collocative meaning and thematic meaning. The results reveal that Chinese translations of film and television titles selectively amplify, downplay or restructure meanings at different levels, thereby shaping narrative frameworks that stereotype female characters by overemphasizing their appearance, framing them as subordinate roles and limiting their diversified portrayals. Such gendered semantic construction arises from the interplay of traditional gender norms, audience expectations, market consumption logic and translation conventions. While it serves as an adaptive strategy in cross-cultural communication, it also reinforces gender stereotypes to a certain extent. On the basis of objective phenomenon analysis, this paper proposes translation strategies that pursue dynamic balance among all semantic dimensions and uphold gender sensitivity, aiming to offer theoretical and practical references for more accurate and inclusive cross-cultural translation of film and television works.

Subject Areas

Linguistics

Keywords

Film and Television Title Translation, Title Translation, Gendered Semantics, Leech, Cultural Communication

1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of ongoing globalization, cross-cultural exchanges have become increasingly frequent. While China strives to promote and disseminate its traditional culture worldwide, Western cultures have also entered the country through diverse channels and exerted influences on people's daily lives, with film and television culture standing out as a prominent example. As an integral part of the cultural system, film and television culture undertakes vital functions including cultural communication, innovation and identity building amid the coexistence and development of diverse contemporary cultures. It also exerts direct and indirect impacts on politics, economy and society, boasting distinctive political, social, cultural and entertainment values [1]. The success of an international film hinges on proper decontextualization and skillful translation. The core of relevant translation theories lies in acknowledging cultural disparities and respecting source cultures [2]. Serving as the first impression audiences gain of a production, translated film titles play an irreplaceable role in meaning reconstruction. Title translation is never a mere conversion of linguistic symbols, but a recreation of cultural connotations [3]. Within this process of meaning reconstruction, drawing on Schmitz's [4] conceptualization, gendered semantics is characterized by the asymmetric semantic associations or inherent "male bias" within linguistic forms, where even seemingly neutral or generic terms exhibit a higher degree of semantic similarity to one gender over the other. This study identifies gendered semantics by analyzing how translators selectively manipulate Leech's seven categories of meaning (conceptual, connotative, social, affective, reflected, collocative, and thematic meaning) to emphasize, diminish, or restructure gender-specific attributes and narratives in the target language.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Previous Foreign Research on the Translation of Film and Television Titles

Since the early 21st century, the translation of film and television titles has remained a popular research topic in academic circles. International studies in this field initially focused on the application of translation theories to title rendering. For instance, Nida's [5] dynamic equivalence theory has been widely adopted to examine how translated titles achieve equivalent effects between source and target languages. Bassnett [6] put forward the cultural translation theory, which highlights the need to reconcile cultural differences and opens up new research perspectives. In recent years, relevant studies have expanded to the translation of spe-

cific cultural elements, adaptive strategies and narrative reconstruction. Chen [7] conducted a comparative analysis of character names in Hayao Miyazaki's animated films across different languages, summarizing the characteristics and rules of such translation practices. Gehin and Fernandes [8] adopted feminist theories to explore how translation strategies for sexual discourse reproduce gender power relations. Furthermore, Khan [9] addressed gender inclusivity in audiovisual translation across global practices, emphasizing that achieving fair representation in media environments requires not only linguistic expertise but also profound cultural sensitivity and ethical professional practice. Ali *et al.* [10] investigated the rendering of Saudi Arabian slang in English subtitles and analyzed the features and effects of translating culture-specific expressions. Lu [11] further enriched this field by adopting a multimodal framework to investigate the application of literary translation to film subtitles, revealing how subtitles interact with other multimodal resources to construct meaning in film adaptations. Zhang and Osborne [12] studied Chinese and English titles of films directed by Zhang Yimou and Jia Zhangke. Their research reveals that translated titles reconstruct narratives through selective appropriation, plot arrangement and relational framing, with remarkable divergences resulting from cultural, social and even censorship factors. These studies have enriched research on the cross-linguistic and cross-cultural dimensions of film title translation, and provided valuable references for understanding film titles as cultural intermediaries.

2.2. Previous Domestic Research on the Translation of Film and Television Titles

Domestic research on film title translation has been carried out from multiple perspectives, mainly covering translation principles, strategies and cultural contexts, and has formed a comprehensive set of theoretical frameworks and practical discussions. Guided by dynamic equivalence theory, Zhang and Wu [13] established four evaluation criteria for film title translation, namely information delivery, cultural representation, aesthetic value and commercial appeal, to guarantee translation quality. Starting from differences in readers' horizon of expectations, Zhu [14] pointed out that translators in different regions adopt distinct adaptive strategies to cater to audience cognition. Taking the title and subtitle translations of *The Flowers of War* as research samples, Yu [15] centered on translation orientations and strategies and emphasized the primacy of conveying cultural values. Based on Sino-Western cultural differences, Yang [1] discussed how domestication and foreignization balance cultural uniqueness and audience comprehension. Xiao [16] analyzed the influences of thinking modes and values on title translation, and proposed four core principles covering information transmission, artistic aesthetics, commercial value and cultural communication. In recent years, domestic scholars have conducted in-depth multi-dimensional explorations, focusing on adaptive strategies, communication effects and practical problems of translated film and television titles. Their findings offer theoretical support and practical insights to enhance the accuracy and inclusiveness of Chinese films' interna-

tional outreach [17]-[20].

Nevertheless, existing studies predominantly concentrate on theoretical issues such as translation principles and strategies, while paying insufficient attention to social ideologies embedded in translated titles. With the growing awareness of gender equality in recent years, gender discourse has drawn increasing scholarly attention across cultural fields. As key texts for cross-cultural communication, translated film and television titles carry implicit narrative tendencies regarding gender roles in their semantic choices. Many original film and television titles feature neutral or ambiguous gender references, whereas their Chinese versions present distinct gendered leanings. In particular, translated titles for female characters are often marked with stereotyped labels. Such gendered semantic transformation essentially stems from translators' selective interpretation and reconstruction of original meanings. It involves not only semantic choices at the linguistic level, but also reflects cognitive biases towards gender roles rooted in society and culture. Against this background, this paper employs Leech's classification of seven types of meaning and analyzes typical translation cases to systematically explore the construction mechanisms of gendered semantics in title translation and the underlying sociocultural connotations. It aims to reveal the fundamental driving forces behind gendered expressions in translated film and television titles, and provide references for more sophisticated translation practice in cross-cultural communication.

3. Theoretical Framework

In Leech's work *Semantics* published in 1974 [21], he argued that the meaning of linguistic symbols consists of seven interrelated dimensions: conceptual meaning, connotative meaning, social meaning, affective meaning, reflected meaning, collocative meaning and thematic meaning. These dimensions jointly shape the expression of linguistic meaning, and translators may selectively strengthen or weaken each of them in the process of translation.

3.1. Conceptual Meaning

Also known as rational, denotative or logical meaning, conceptual meaning refers to the basic and universal sense of a word and serves as the core of linguistic communication [21]. It features relative stability, universality and clarity, remaining consistent across different individuals [22]. As the most fundamental and essential component of a word's literal sense, conceptual meaning occupies a central position within the linguistic system, against which all other types of meaning are interpreted [23]. For instance, the seventh edition of *The Contemporary Chinese Dictionary* defines the Chinese term for "female" [女性] in two ways:

- 1) One of the two genders of human beings, characterized by a slighter skeletal structure, higher vocal pitch, abundant subcutaneous fat, as well as the possession of vagina, uterus and ovary that produces ova;
- 2) Women [24].

Dictionary definitions typically correspond to conceptual meaning. The above entries illustrate the objective and stable basic sense of the term “female”, which acts as the reference standard for all other expressions associated with this concept.

3.2. Connotative Meaning

Connotative meaning denotes the communicative value attached to a word beyond its purely rational content [21]. It is an additional and non-standard layer of meaning built upon conceptual meaning and conveyed through the referent of a linguistic unit. Rather than being fixed, connotations vary across cultures, social settings and individual perceptions, encompassing associative ideas related to the non-essential attributes of a referent, such as emotions and value judgments. The seventh edition of The Contemporary Chinese Dictionary defines the term for “young girl” [少女] as follows:

- 1) An unmarried young woman;
- 2) The youngest daughter in a family [24].

Beyond its literal reference to young females, the term commonly evokes cultural associations of purity, innocence and vitality. It also carries implications of being protected and symbolizes hope in social and role-related contexts.

3.3. Social Meaning

Social meaning reflects the social context in which language is used, highlighting contextual information embedded in linguistic expressions [21]. Regional dialects, historical periods, occasions of use and social strata all leave distinctive social imprints on language. As Lyons [25] noted, social meaning primarily functions to establish and regulate interpersonal relationships and define social roles. The seventh edition of The Contemporary Chinese Dictionary lists five definitions for the term “madam” [夫人]:

- 1) A polite address for married women;
- 2) The title for the wives of feudal lords in ancient China;
- 3) An honorific title for female court officials in ancient times;
- 4) A respectful form of address for one’s own or others’ wife, widely used on diplomatic occasions;
- 5) Concubines of Chinese emperors in history [24].

In modern usage, this term is generally linked to the social identity of married women who are positioned in a dependent relationship with men.

3.4. Affective Meaning

Affective meaning embodies speakers’ personal feelings and attitudes towards listeners or the topics under discussion, including fondness, dislike, praise and criticism. It is essentially dependent in nature, incapable of existing independently. Instead, it is expressed via conceptual, connotative or social meaning, as well as through paralinguistic elements such as tone, voice quality and interjections [21].

The seventh edition of The Contemporary Chinese Dictionary defines the term for “shrew” [悍妇] as follows:

A fierce and unreasonable woman [24].

This word evidently carries derogatory connotations toward women who display strong personalities.

3.5. Reflected Meaning

Reflected meaning arises when one sense of a word echoes another sense of the same lexical item [21]. Mutual mapping among different semantic entries of a word in specific contexts generates reflected meaning, which can be either direct or indirect. It reveals how words develop diverse and flexible interpretations in varied contexts and associative relations. The seventh edition of The Contemporary Chinese Dictionary provides four definitions for the term “beauty” [红颜]:

- 1) Rosy complexion typical of young people;
- 2) Young men;
- 3) Specifically referring to a woman’s beautiful facial features;
- 4) Beautiful women [24].

The reflected meaning of this term is embodied in the interplay of its multiple senses. For example, the third entry referring to a woman’s attractive appearance indirectly connects with the fourth entry denoting beautiful women, extending the description of physical features to reference the female subjects themselves.

3.6. Collocative Meaning

Collocative meaning refers to the unique semantic associations a word acquires from its regular co-occurrence with other words. Long-term linguistic practice has formed fixed collocations, which endow words with additional semantic nuances. Leech held that collocative meaning consists of associations derived from the senses of accompanying words [21]. The seventh edition of The Contemporary Chinese Dictionary defines the term “women’s headwear” [巾帼] as follows:

Scarves and hair ornaments worn by women in ancient times, figuratively referring to women in general [24].

Originally describing traditional female head decorations, this term has developed a stable extended meaning of outstanding and responsible women due to its frequent collocation with phrases such as “heroine” and “women proving equal to men”.

3.7. Thematic Meaning

Thematic meaning is conveyed by speakers or writers through the organization of information, including word order, emphasis devices and the arrangement of information focus [21]. Sentences with identical propositional content may deliver distinct thematic meaning when they highlight different information points. In English, the choice between active and passive voice shifts the focus of a sentence and thus creates variations in thematic meaning.

4. Data Collection and Analysis

To ensure the systematicity and generalizability of this study, this paper adopts qualitative text analysis and comparative research methods and selects more than 20 typical Chinese translations of film and television titles as the research corpus. All translated versions are officially released and widely adopted on mainstream Chinese video platforms including iQiyi, Tencent Video and Bilibili, ensuring authoritative and credible sources. Samples are primarily screened based on high online popularity and great cross-cultural communication influence, with random sampling adopted to avoid selection bias. The specific selection criteria are as follows: 1) The original titles contain neutral, ambiguous or explicit gender references, while their Chinese translations undergo observable semantic adjustments and gender transformation in conceptual, connotative and social dimensions; 2) The corpus covers the late 20th century to the 2020s, including multiple languages such as English, Korean and German, as well as diverse genres including drama, comedy, biography and history, which guarantees full coverage of different language sources, thematic types and distribution markets. Balancing typicality and randomness, the corpus ensures scientific and robust analytical results, and specific versions and sources of all translations will be specified in subsequent case analyses.

5. Manifestations of Gendered Semantics in Film and Television Title Translation

In the cross-cultural translation of film and television titles, translators do not merely conduct literal word-for-word conversion. Instead, they selectively amplify, downplay or restructure different semantic layers of original titles in light of the target cultural context, communication objectives and audience acceptance. Such deliberate semantic adjustments turn the neutral or ambiguous gender references in numerous original titles into a consistent gender bias in their Chinese translations. This tendency is particularly evident in the narrowed portrayal, physical objectification and subordinate framing of female characters.

5.1. Gender-Oriented Semantic Choices in Conceptual Meaning

As the core logical and denotative sense of words, conceptual meaning is objective, stable and universal, constituting the foundation for translation equivalence [21]. Nevertheless, in real-world title translation practice, when an original title carries no explicit gender markers, Chinese versions often alter its gender connotations through lexical selection. By either narrowing down or obscuring gender cues, translators reconstruct the conceptual meaning along gendered lines.

5.1.1. Narrowing Neutral Concepts to Female References

Some original film and television titles adopt neutral concepts with broad abstract implications, yet their Chinese translations are intentionally tied exclusively to female figures. This narrows the original inclusive scope to a female-specific cate-

gory. Though such practice reduces the generality of the original concept, it generally aligns with the core plot and helps audiences quickly identify the narrative focus.

Take the American drama *The Power* as an example. Its original title literally means “power”, a fully neutral term with no gender implication and broad interpretive potential. The series depicts a fictional world where teenage girls are the first to develop the superpower to generate electric shocks through their hands. They can pass this ability to other adult women via physical contact, while all men remain unaffected. This phenomenon eventually triggers a fundamental transformation of the existing gender power structure in society. The official Chinese title *Dian Ji Shao Nü* (Girls with Electric Powers) narrows the abstract notion of “power” down to the electric superpower possessed by young girls. By employing the explicit gender-specific word “girls”, the translation confines the original universal concept to the female group.

From the perspective of conceptual restriction, this rendition redefines the general idea of power as an ability exclusive to women. In terms of thematic expression, however, this narrowed interpretation fits closely with the core storyline. For one thing, teenage girls stand at the starting point of the superpower awakening and serve as central characters driving the plot forward. The gender-specific title immediately highlights the protagonists and the root of conflicts. For another, this semantic narrowing echoes the overarching theme of female empowerment. By emphasizing gender attributes, the translated title strengthens audience understanding of the core setting, acting as a natural link between a neutral concept and a gender-focused narrative.

5.1.2. Obscuring Female References through Neutralization

Contrary to the above practice, titles that explicitly feature female characters are sometimes rendered into neutral expressions in Chinese translation. This approach partially conceals the original gender identity of female roles. While it is intended to broaden thematic resonance and evoke empathy among diverse audiences, it may also weaken the gender-based narrative embedded in the original work.

The film *Young Woman and the Sea* is adapted from the true story of Trudy Ederle, the first female swimmer to cross the English Channel. Defying social constraints and prevalent prejudices of her era, she braved rough waves and jellyfish stings to accomplish this remarkable feat. The entire narrative revolves around the growth and breakthrough of this female protagonist.

Its mainstream Chinese title *Yong Zhe Zhi Xin* (The Heart of a Swimmer) replaces the phrase “young woman” with the neutral noun “swimmer”, which highlights the character’s core identity and behavior. The additional character “heart” places emphasis on her inner spirit. In terms of translation strategies, the word “swimmer” accurately captures the protagonist’s defining trait, enabling audiences to instantly associate the story with swimming and challenges. This conforms to the paratactic structure and concise style characteristic of the Chinese

language. Meanwhile, the focus on “heart” dilutes explicit gender markers, lending universal value to the film’s tribute to courage and perseverance, so that viewers of all genders can relate to its message.

Neutralization of this kind has sparked debates nonetheless. The female identity highlighted in the original title forms an indispensable part of the narrative context. Trudy Ederle’s achievement represents not only a victory over nature, but also a challenge against the widespread prejudice that women were incapable of such strenuous undertakings. By comparison, the title adopted from certain regions *Zhui Lang Shao Nü* (The Girl Who Chases the Waves) retains the clear gender reference of “girl”. The phrase “*Zhui Lang* (chasing the waves)” echoes the maritime setting and conveys a proactive and enterprising spirit, staying truer to the original gendered narrative. The contrast between these two versions clearly demonstrates how translators in different cultural contexts make divergent choices regarding gender information embedded in conceptual meaning.

5.2. Gendered Associations Embedded in Connotative Meaning

Built upon conceptual meaning, connotative meaning refers to additional associative implications shaped by culture, society and individual perception, hence subjective and fluid in nature [21]. In film and television title translation, translators tend to draw distinctly different connotative associations for male and female characters. Female roles are frequently linked to physical appearance and gentleness, while male characters are more often associated with competence and authority.

5.2.1. Appearance-Focused Associations with Female Characters

For films and television productions featuring female protagonists and exploring themes of gender breakthrough or self-fulfillment, translated titles often carry connotations tied to characters’ physical features and prevalent social perceptions. Such associations may align with certain plot details or resonate with the work’s central themes.

The comedy film *She’s the Man* centers on a teenage girl Viola who challenges gender stereotypes. Passionate about football, she is forced to give up the sport after her school disbands the girls’ team. To pursue her dream, she disguises herself as her twin brother and joins the boys’ football team. While defying the bias that women are unfit for football, she stays committed to her aspiration, and her hidden identity also gives rise to a string of amusing episodes. Fundamentally, the play humorously subverts rigid stereotypes about gender and capability.

Its widely accepted Chinese title *Zu Qiu You Wu* (The Football Beauty) adopts the term *you wu*, which in Chinese generally refers to an exceptionally attractive woman and evokes associations of striking looks and charm, yet it also carries subtle derogatory undertones in certain contexts. From a translational perspective, the word matches Viola’s lovely appearance and fits the lighthearted tone of this youth comedy. Its colloquial appeal easily arouses audience curiosity and facilitates cultural reception. Nevertheless, this appearance-oriented association de-

viates from the original core theme. The paradoxical expression “She’s the Man” delivers the idea that capability has nothing to do with gender. By contrast, the translated title overemphasizes the female lead’s physical charm and dilutes the film’s underlying advocacy for gender equality.

5.2.2. Competence-Focused Associations with Male Characters

Unlike female characters, who are commonly framed through physical attributes, male roles in translated titles are more likely to acquire connotations related to talent and achievement. Such associations correspond to conventional perceptions of masculinity and highlight male characters’ social value through deliberate lexical choices.

The film *Sherlock Holmes* follows the renowned male detective, who solves a succession of intricate cases with extraordinary logical reasoning and meticulous observation. The original title is merely the character’s name, without any explicit value judgment. Its Chinese counterpart *Da Zhen Tan Fu Er Mo Si* (The Great Detective Sherlock Holmes) adds the epithet “great detective”, which endows the character with connotations of outstanding expertise and authoritative status. The word “detective” directly indicates his occupation and core competence, while the modifier “great” further affirms his exceptional abilities.

This translation serves clear purposes. On one hand, the phrase “great detective” accurately captures the character’s defining traits and conforms to mainstream social perceptions of male roles, allowing audiences to immediately form an impression of a brilliant male protagonist. On the other hand, this associative meaning is fully consistent with the plot, in which Sherlock Holmes takes charge of investigations and demonstrates overwhelming intellectual superiority. The supplementary connotations reinforce the character’s dominant position and authority, explicitly reflecting popular understandings of men’s social roles.

5.3. Gender Role Framing Embodied in Social Meaning

Social meaning conveys information about social contexts, interpersonal relationships and cultural norms embedded in linguistic symbols [21]. In film and television title translation, this semantic dimension is frequently employed to define gender roles. Female characters are often placed in subordinate and dependent relational frameworks, whereas male characters are portrayed as independent agents and authoritative figures. Such framing shapes audiences’ initial perceptions of social relations and power dynamics depicted in the productions.

5.3.1. Framing Female Characters as Subordinate Figures

When female characters hold public power or possess independent social identities in films and television works, Chinese translated titles often diminish their agency through words carrying specific social connotations, confining them to subordinate positions defined by their connections with male counterparts.

The film *Evita* is based on Eva Perón, a highly influential political figure in Argentine history. It chronicles her life journey from an ordinary citizen to the

spouse of the president, and showcases her public influence and social contributions on the political stage. The original title uses her given nickname *Evita*, which emphasizes her individual identity and historical prominence. By contrast, the standard Chinese title *Madam Perón* reshapes the character's social meaning via the term "madam". In the Chinese cultural context, this address primarily refers to a married woman whose social status is closely tied to her husband. While this rendering follows traditional Chinese conventions for addressing married women and helps audiences quickly recognize the historical figure, it considerably downplays Eva Perón's value as an independent political actor. It reinforces the long-standing social convention that a woman's identity is largely defined through her male family members. This pattern of framing women as subordinates is quite common in translated titles featuring female historical figures.

5.3.2. Reinforcing the Agency of Male Characters

Unlike the subordinate portrayal of female roles, the social meaning of male characters tends to be amplified in translated titles, which directly highlights their independent status and power without linking them to other characters.

The film *Dangal* revolves around Mahavir Singh Phogat, a former wrestler. Having failed to win a national championship himself, he pins his hopes on his children. After discovering his daughters' natural talent for wrestling, he challenges prevailing gender prejudices and devotes himself to training them into champion athletes. The narrative highlights both the father's guidance and the daughters' personal growth and breakthroughs. Its widely used Chinese title *Let's Wrestle, Dad* identifies the male protagonist through the kinship term "dad", with the word "wrestle" pointing to his professional background and core actions. In Chinese society, the term "dad" carries implicit social associations with household authority and decision-making power. This title strengthens Mahavir's central role within the family narrative and immediately conveys his dominant position to audiences, aligning with traditional social expectations that men serve as leaders within families. Nevertheless, this approach has its limitations. The emphasis on the father may overshadow the daughters' agency, and viewers unfamiliar with the plot may focus primarily on the father's aspirations rather than the young women's growth and achievements.

In comparison, one translated version, *My Champion Daughters and I* adopts a parallel structure combining the first-person pronoun "I" and the phrase "champion daughters". While retaining the father's perspective, it fully acknowledges the daughters' accomplishments and strikes a better balance between the two generations in the narrative. The two versions clearly reflect divergent approaches to handling social meaning across different cultural contexts.

5.4. Gendered Semantic Choices in Other Meaning Dimensions

Beyond conceptual, connotative and social meaning, affective, reflected, collocative and thematic meaning also demonstrate evident gendered tendencies in film and television title translation. Through lexical selection, cultural association and

narrative emphasis, these semantic layers further perpetuate power relations and role expectations embedded in traditional gender perceptions.

5.4.1. Gender Bias in Affective Meaning

Affective meaning embodies translators' emotional attitudes and evaluative stances toward the referents, and it usually relies on other semantic categories to take effect [21]. The South Korean film *So-won* serves as a typical case. Its original Korean title literally means wish, and the official English title *Hope* also adopts a neutral word to convey positive expectations. By contrast, the Chinese version directly uses the victim's given name *Su Yuan*, which creates a notable shift in affective orientation. This choice directs audience attention exclusively to the individual victim, rather than the perpetrator or the underlying social issues. Given the film's grim plot centering on an underage girl who suffers severe assault, the name Su Yuan has become closely associated with trauma, agony and misfortune in public discourse, turning the victim's personal identity into the dominant symbol of the entire incident.

This translated title has sparked widespread controversy. It keeps public focus fixed on the victim, so that whenever the title is mentioned, people tend to dwell on personal suffering instead of condemning the crime or reflecting on institutional flaws. While "wish" and "hope" carry uplifting connotations, the title *Su Yuan* narrows the narrative to the victim's pain. Though it evokes deep empathy among audiences, it may also inflict secondary harm on the victim. Such bias in affective meaning essentially reflects divergent approaches to trauma narratives across different cultures.

5.4.2. Traditional Associations Embodied in Reflected Meaning

Reflected meaning arises when one sense of a word echoes another, resulting from the interplay of multiple semantic entries within specific cultural contexts [21]. The film *Cleopatra* portrays the life of Cleopatra, Queen of Ancient Egypt. The plot revolves around her political wisdom and power struggles. She formed a cross-continental alliance through her marriage to Julius Caesar, and later built political and emotional ties with Mark Antony after Caesar's assassination. The character is depicted as a figure combining extraordinary charm and astute strategy. Its Chinese title *Ai Ji Yan Hou* (meaning Egyptian Seductress Queen) carries layered implications. The character *yan*, meaning glamour and beauty, aligns with the protagonist's charisma and her influence over Roman political figures, while the term *hou*, or queen, clearly marks her royal status, conforming to conventional ways of addressing renowned female rulers in Chinese culture.

From a translational perspective, this title follows established naming conventions for historical female royalties in China. The association triggered by the word *yan* enhances the character's recognizability and helps attract audiences for commercial promotion. Nevertheless, this lexical emphasis leads to biased information delivery. The spotlight on physical glamour tends to overshadow her political acumen and maneuvers in power games. Consequently, some audiences re-

duce the complex figure to a stereotype of a woman who achieves her goals merely by virtue of her looks, which stands in stark contrast to the original title. Using only the ruler's proper name, the original version maintains neutrality and highlights her historical standing.

5.4.3. Stereotyping in Collocative Meaning

Collocative meaning derives from words that regularly appear together and generates additional associative implications. In collocations combining gender markers with occupations or social identities, translated titles for female characters often carry explicit gender labels, whereas equivalent references to male characters generally omit such modifiers. This distinction is particularly prominent in films themed around professional work.

The American television series *Rizzoli & Isles* takes the surnames of its two female leads as the original title. It showcases the professional capabilities of Jane Rizzoli, a detective, and Maura Isles, a medical examiner based in Boston, whose seamless teamwork exemplifies effective professional collaboration between women in the workplace. Its Chinese title *Brilliant Female Detectives* adopts the collocation pairing “brilliant female” with “master detective”. The phrase “brilliant female” not only identifies their gender but also accentuates their personal charm, echoing the portrayal of the two women who possess both professional competence and distinctive personalities, and helping audiences quickly form an impression of female law enforcement officers. Even so, this collocation carries biased associations. The prominent gender label weakens the primacy of their professional identities, implicitly suggesting that women working as detectives need special gender annotation. This differs sharply from translated titles for male detective characters, such as Sherlock Holmes, which require no gender markers. The contrast reveals the tendency to frame women's professional identities as exceptional in collocational usage.

5.4.4. Gender Imbalance in Thematic Meaning

Thematic meaning highlights narrative focus through syntactic arrangement and lexical choices. In translated film and television titles, female characters are often relegated to marginal narrative positions while male roles are given greater prominence. Such an imbalance is commonly seen in productions with historical or coming-of-age themes.

The German drama *Unsere Mütter, Unsere Väter* gives equal billing to “mothers” and “fathers”. Set against the backdrop of World War II, it follows five German friends, including female characters, and depicts their disparate wartime experiences. The Chinese title *Our Elders of Past Generations* removes the reference to mothers and retains only the term for the older male generation. As a customary collective reference to predecessors in Chinese, this simplified title lowers audience comprehension barriers by directly evoking memories of wartime elders. However, this revision erases female characters' wartime journeys, including their struggles and tough choices amid the chaos of war. It tilts the thematic focus to-

ward male-dominated historical narratives, departing from the balanced perspective of the original work and diminishing women's place in history.

The original title of *Heidi* centers on the young heroine's growth. The story traces her transition from a free-spirited life in the Alps to adaptation to urban life in Frankfurt, with its core lying in Heidi's self-discovery and her influence on people around her. The Chinese title *Heidi and Her Grandfather* adds the figure of the grandfather. As an important family member, the grandfather constitutes a key narrative thread, and this addition foregrounds the bond between the two characters and allows audiences to grasp core interpersonal relationships at a glance. In terms of thematic emphasis, though, the insertion of "and her grandfather" dilutes the portrayal of Heidi's independent growth. The narrative focus shifts toward interactions between the granddaughter and grandfather, undermining the female protagonist's subjectivity established in the original work.

6. Analysis of Motivations behind Gendered Semantic Transformation

The formation of gendered semantics in film and television title translation stems not from a single cause, but from the dynamic interplay of diverse sociocultural factors and practical translational constraints. Rooted in deep-seated cultural perceptions, this phenomenon is also shaped by real-world demands in cross-cultural communication. Drawing on the cases discussed above, this chapter examines the major driving forces of gendered semantic transformation from four perspectives: traditional culture, audience cognition, market logic and translation norms. It further proposes viable approaches to achieve a more balanced translation practice.

6.1. Constraints Imposed by Ingrained Traditional Gender Norms

Traditional Chinese culture has long upheld a patriarchal framework of gender roles, encapsulated in the prevailing norms that "men manage external affairs while women attend to domestic duties" and "men take charge while women remain subordinate". Such perceptions have been perpetuated and reinforced through linguistic practices, exerting a profound influence on translators' decisions regarding meaning selection and reconstruction [26]. In title translation, this cultural inertia leads translators to follow conventional gender expectations subconsciously. For female characters, translators tend to downplay their independent agency and attach connotations related to physical appearance, subordination and emotional traits. For male characters, greater emphasis is placed on their authority, competence and leadership.

This deep cultural underpinning manifests in translations of both historical and contemporary productions. For instance, *Evita* is rendered as *Madam Perón*, a title that ties the protagonist's social identity to her husband and diminishes her public stature as an independent political figure. Similarly, the Chinese title *Egyptian Queen of Beauty* for *Cleopatra* activates reflected meanings associated with the age-old stereotype that women leverage their charm to gain political influence.

While these translations comply with conventional Chinese forms of address, they perpetuate the traditional rule that women's social identities are defined primarily through their male relatives, standing as a fundamental cultural driver of gendered semantic transformation.

6.2. Strategic Adaptation to Audience Gender Perceptions

As a vital medium for cross-cultural communication, translation must take full account of the target audience's cognitive habits and receptive psychology to ensure effective information exchange. Based on the theory of readers' horizon of expectations, Zhu [14] argues that translators adjust their strategies in accordance with the audience's existing knowledge and cultural background, so as to reduce comprehension barriers and boost communication efficiency. In constructing gendered semantics, such strategic adaptation is embodied in the use of widely accepted gender stereotypes.

Distinct gender labels such as "young girl" and "stunning beauty", as well as phrases like "great detective" that accentuate male authority, help audiences quickly form impressions of characters and grasp storylines, making titles more appealing and memorable. This practice is particularly prevalent in commercial media. Though it may reinforce gender stereotypes to some extent, it remains a pragmatic approach for translators to deliver information efficiently across culturally diverse contexts. It reflects a process of adaptive negotiation between the source language and the target language in title translation.

6.3. Driving Force of Market Consumption Logic

Given the commercial nature of film and television works, translated titles are required not only to convey core content, but also to arouse audience interest and boost market recognition. Film title translation needs to balance commercial value by employing symbolic language to enhance appeal. Driven by market imperatives, gender markers are frequently exploited as a practical tool in title creation, thanks to their intuitiveness, emotional resonance and high recognizability.

Titles featuring female characters tend to highlight physical features or emotional traits to cater to mainstream aesthetic tastes and lower acceptance thresholds. In contrast, translations for male characters generally emphasize competence and independence to craft positive heroic images. While such market-oriented choices help boost box office performance and communication reach, they may also oversimplify characters and lock them into fixed stereotypes. The combination of commercial logic and gender symbolism thus constitutes a key practical driver of gendered semantic shifts in translation.

6.4. Constraints of Linguistic Features and Translation Norms

The inherent characteristics of the Chinese language and established translation norms further amplify the aforementioned influences. Chinese film titles prioritize succinctness, parataxis and rhythmic flow, which encourages translators to

adopt concise lexicon rich in cultural associations. Furthermore, the fixed collocation pattern of “gender marker plus occupation or identity” has become deeply entrenched in Chinese usage, whereas gender labels are usually omitted when referring to male figures. Such linguistic conventions conform to the principles of linguistic economy and public acceptance in Chinese, and also align with long-standing translation norms [27]. These linguistic traits interact with cultural values, audience expectations and commercial demands, collectively shaping the prevalent patterns of gendered semantics in current film and television title translation.

To conclude, gendered semantic transformation arises from the continuous negotiation among traditional cultural inertia, adaptation to audience cognition, market demands and linguistic norms. It represents an adaptive strategy in cross-cultural communication, yet simultaneously reproduces existing gender stereotypes. To construct more balanced and inclusive meanings, translators should strive for dynamic equilibrium across the seven categories of meaning proposed by Leech. They may retain necessary cultural adaptation and commercial considerations while fostering stronger gender sensitivity in translation practice. For example, preserving original gender cues at the level of conceptual meaning helps respect the core narrative, while adopting neutral and diversified vocabulary in handling connotative and social meaning can expand the interpretive scope of character images. This balanced approach can improve the cultural accuracy and artistic expressiveness of translated titles, enhance the international communication of film works, and provide solid linguistic support for Chinese films going global.

7. Conclusions

This study adopts Leech’s seven types of meaning as the theoretical framework to systematically examine gendered semantics in the cross-cultural translation of film and television titles. Based on qualitative textual analysis and comparative research of over twenty typical Chinese and foreign works, it explores the mechanisms behind the selective reconstruction of original titles in Chinese translations across conceptual, connotative, social and other semantic dimensions.

The findings show that Chinese translated titles construct stereotyped narratives of female characters by narrowing or obscuring conceptual boundaries, adding gender-distinctive connotative associations, imposing fixed social roles, and introducing biases in other semantic aspects. Such representations tend to objectify women by focusing on their appearance, framing them as subordinate figures and attaching simplistic labels to them. Further analysis demonstrates that gendered semantics in title translation arises from the combined effects of traditional gender culture, audience-oriented communication strategies, market operation rules and the inherent features of the Chinese language.

Nevertheless, this research relies predominantly on textual analysis, with cases drawn mainly from European, American and several Asian productions, which

restricts the breadth of the sample. Large-scale empirical studies on audience reception have also yet to be conducted. Future research may expand the corpus to cover translated titles from more diverse cultural backgrounds. By adopting questionnaires, interviews and other empirical approaches, scholars can further investigate how gendered semantics shape the viewing perceptions of different audiences. The relevant results will provide valuable insights for delivering more accurate film and television translation in cross-cultural communication.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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