

Subtitling *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001) in a Chinese Context: The Transfer of Sexuality and Femininity in A Chick Flick

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how sexuality and femininity¹ are transferred in the Chinese subtitles of the chick flick, *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001). In order to address this question, the article is divided into three main parts. In the first section, a review of how the film is received in the Anglophone and Chinese markets is presented respectively, also including the challenges posted to the subtitlers, e.g. the translation of sexuality and swearing in the discourse of women. The second section offers a theoretical framework that structures the paper, adopting Ernst-August Gutt's (1986) "Relevance Theory" and Anthony Baldry and Paul Thibault's (2006) "Multimodality" to examine how the Chinese subtitles work for primarily the Chinese female audiences. What follows is a detailed analysis of two situational categories of recurrent features (swearing and sexuality) in the Chinese subtitles of this chick flick, specifically proving constructions of feminist ideology. The paper concludes that the Chinese subtitles articulates a relatively moderate version compared to the original explicit sexuality and taboo language. Such moderation reflects an increasingly improved entanglement of feminine identity in a contemporary Chinese context.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to discuss the Chinese subtitles regarding sexuality and femininity in a modern British chick flick², *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001)³, directed by Sharon Maguire. This paper will explore to what extent the novel feminist ideas in the film including sexuality, swearing and identity for women, etc., travel primarily to Chinese female audiences⁴ via the medium of subtitles. "Chick", according to Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young (2010, p. 98), refers to a middle-class, frequently college-educated woman in her twenties to early thirties. The term "chick flick", boomed since the 1990s (Cook 2006, p. 233), is a film genre that mainly contains themes that are familial and romantic intimacy of women designed to largely appeal to female target audiences (Cobb 2011b, p.31). Moreover, the chick flick genre derives from the parallel term "chick lit" which is a literary genre that characterises women and focuses on their social lives and relationships, and is predominately aimed at female readers who have similar experiences (Davis-Kahl 2008, p. 18). The phenomenal success of the chick lit *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996) offers new version of femininity and bursts onto the wake of chick flick (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 2006, p.488). Its "chick culture" features in both the independent sector

and mainstream society, underlining women's engagement with culture (Cook 2006, p. 33) and specifically "the tropes of freedom and choice which are now inextricably connected with the category of young women" (McRobbie 2009, p.11).

The film *Bridget Jones's Diary* is one of the landmark chick flicks of the 1990s⁵ (Luo 2015, p. III). Written by Helen Fielding in 1996, the novel created a new icon of contemporary femininity and "a recognisable emblem of a particular kind of femininity, a constructed point of identification for women" (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 2006, p.489). Bridget's impulsive, independent and foul-mouthed character contradicts the traditional female stereotype (Santaemilia 2008, p. 230). Released in 2001, the film adaptation utilised a female gendered language that constructed a feminine identity through the film and framed a wider recognition of gender ideology (Cobb 2011a, p. 28). This blockbuster was and is attractive to a broad demographic that brings older and younger women and transnational viewers together. As a result, the film transformation has moved from a narrow domestic fan base to a widespread global audience (York 2010, p. 5). Ashley York (2010, p. 10) argues that the success of the chick flick genre enables a female audience to experience the freedom and independence depicted in the film. Imelda

Whelehan (2002, p. 80) has argued, Bridget became regarded not only as a fictional character but as a representative of the zeitgeist of being true to oneself.

In addition, the language used in *Bridget Jones's Diary* contains a series of metaphors which evoke Western cultural expectations in relation to gender identity, including the gendered relationship of marriage and romance (Cobb 2011a, p. 29). When considering this metaphor, as the Chinese subtitles will show, it becomes clear that the Chinese subtitlers' activity is not restricted to simple linguistic transfer. Rather, they must engage in ideological translation or intervention for their receiving culture (Cobb 2011a, p. 29). Such are the differences in gender ideology between countries that cultural and linguistic transfer between them has always constituted a challenge to the translator (Longo 2009, p. 10).

Specifically, the challenges of subtitling *Bridget Jones's Diary* for a Chinese market lie in the translation of swear words and taboo concepts in China. As Eva Chen (2010a, p. 246) argues, apart from the vulgar language, the difficulties also involve portraying women as socio-economic consumers and sexual beings. Sexuality and gender remain the key issues of subtitling the film for a Chinese context. In this case-study film, sexuality typically refers to non-traditional female utterances of sexuality, and gender issue is centred on a manifestation of "a liberatory feminist achievement" reflected by these utterances (Von Flotow and Josephy-Hernández 2018, p.300). This paper will analyse how sexuality and gender are subtitled for a Chinese female audience in this English-language film. Long Yuan (2015) suggests that sexually taboo language is used in the Chinese subtitling of the television series *Sex and the City* (1998), which was released in China before *Bridget Jones's Diary*. There is, therefore, something of a precedent for the film. Sexually explicit words, as Yuan defines them, are "in essence, linguistic items used to express and exemplify the sexual habits and culture within a specific community" (2015, p. 100). In a manner highly relevant to this paper, Long Yuan explores how women's identity is portrayed and how significantly the conventional feminine gender boundaries may be transgressed by women's use of sexually suggestive words. This paper will also explore how feminine identity is projected to modern Chinese women in the subtitling practice of this film. Three research questions are thereby raised to discuss the key issues of sexuality and femininity in translation:

- (1) Why did the Chinese authorities select this film to be subtitled?
- (2) What translation strategies have been employed to translate the female gendered discourse of sexuality, swearing, and identity in this chick flick?
- (3) How do the subtitles make the transfer of sexuality and female gendered discourse (un)available to Chinese culture considering the linguistic and cultural constraints in mainland China?

BRIDGET JONES'S DIARY (2001) IN THE CHINESE CONTEXT

Long Yuan (2015) represents an entry point for this paper as he is the first scholar to systematically assess the processes of subtitling sexually explicit female narratives in a Chinese

context that has traditionally promoted a different female identity. Yuan (2015, p. 66) explains, by showing women using a sexual language that is traditionally considered as taboo in the Chinese context, modern Chinese women encourage to talk more openly about their sex lives and sexuality in general. This contradicts with the Confucian idea of becoming a "virtuous wife and good mother" (Yue 2009, p. 568), which is still of relevance today. Moreover, Yuan (2015, p. 189) underlines that, when subtitling *Sex and the City* (1998), a translational barrier is established in order to minimise explicit sexuality from the Anglophone culture to the mainland Chinese culture. The source text is thus altered or moderated by the subtitles to prevent wholesale sexual transfer to the mainland Chinese culture (Yuan 2015, p. 189). The subtitles thus might be seen to be powerful in that they convey the film's emancipatory source material, but they moderate it as they refrain from using coarse, sexually explicit expressions in Chinese by euphemising and metaphorising the linguistic register of the female characters (Yuan 2015, p. 189). As Han and Wang argue (2014, p.1), a harm-free effect might be suitable to the target culture and society when words considered to be swearwords or taboo will be rendered in the target language. As *Bridget Jones's Diary* arguably increases the visibility of sex and female choice in a Chinese context, it remains an unusual choice for the Chinese authorities to release and subtitle⁶.

A possible reason for the Chinese authorities to select *Bridget Jones's Diary* lies in its focus on a female audience. Film viewers both in the Anglophone world and in China are exposed to a commercial motion picture market dominated by action films (Salkowitz, 2018) such as *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* (2017), *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* (2018), *Fast and Furious 8* (2017), etc. which aim to provide a satisfactory viewing experience to a predominant male audience. There is a clear gap in the market for films which meet the growing socio-economic power of women in China. There are also intriguing parallels between Bridget Jones's concern about her single status and the phenomenon of late marriage among Chinese single women. In China, unmarried women pass what is considered their marriageable age (27 years old) are referred to as "剩女" (shengnv)/"leftover women" (To 2013, p. 2). This phenomenon of professional women marrying later is also found in other affluent Western societies. Anthony Giddens (1992) and Ulrich Beck (2002) state that, late marriage empowers women to decide their marital choices in patriarchal societies. It is worth investigating how marital issues are transferred to Chinese culture through the image of women promoted by speaking the sexual taboo as shown in the film via the Chinese subtitles of *Bridget Jones's Diary*. This is because it may reflect the revolutionised development led by women when talking sex relatively freely in public and such brave move will or will not be proved in the act of Chinese subtitles in this film.

Moreover, the release of *Bridget Jones's Diary* in China might be seen in the context of the Chinese government's endeavours to promote female activities in relation to education, independence and freedom. The Chinese government pays special attention to women's

rights such as the right to receive education; to have access to social networking; to conduct business; and to control property and to choose freely their marriage partner (Li 2007b, p. 8). Dorothy Ko et al. (2007, p. 19) call for the promotion of women's dignity and independence and has close affinities with the advancement of gender diversity offered by *Bridget Jones's Diary*. The film underlines that modern young women currently have more freedom to control their lives (McRobbie 2004, p. 265).

Finally, there is an increasing market demand in relation to women as socio-economic consumers and as sexual beings in modern China. Chinese female writers have produced a number of romantic stories concerning intimate relationships since the 1990s (McDougall 2005, p. 98), including Yu Luojin's 1982 novel 《一个冬天的童话》 (A Winter's Tale), Wang Anyi's 1987 novel 《锦绣谷之恋》 (Love in Brocade Valley), Lin Bai's 1994 novel 《一个人的战争》 (At War with Oneself), etc. Commercial publishers noted the market demand for women's fiction (McDougall 2005, p. 102). The global phenomenon of chick lit generally features young urban women who are in pursuit of independence, freedom and sexual pleasure, a vision traditionally opposed to that of the Chinese patriarchy (Chen 2012, p. 215). There are three key factors that may explain why feminism is portrayed in global chick lit. First of all, women's increased earning ability has enabled them to make their own decisions; secondly, female protagonists increasingly demonstrate their cleverness, confidence and knowledge; lastly, modern women have the leisure time to enjoy consumer experiences and the capacity to assert their sexual independence (Chen 2012, pp. 220-223). It is thus significant that globally chick lit has gained a popular appeal. As a genre, it constructs feminine identity that arguably transcends national borders (Chen 2012, p. 223).

The reception of *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001) in China bears out some of the arguments made above in relation to the Chinese government's decision to release the film. Although the genre is more successful in Europe and America, chick flick does attract a substantial audience amongst Chinese young people (Luo 2015, p. III). A growing number of chick flicks have been made in China to satisfy women's aspiration (Stevens, 2003, p.82). They tap into the phenomenon of new Chinese feminism in which young Chinese women are encouraged to take control of their love life and career (Luo 2015, p. III). Amongst the chick flicks made in China, the following stand out: 《杜拉拉升职记》 (2010) (Go Lala Go!), 《失恋33天》 (2011) (Love Is Not Blind), 《北京遇上西雅图》 (2013) (Finding Mr. Right), 《我的早更女友》 (2014) (Meet Miss Anxiety), etc. (Luo 2015, p. III). According to Ming-Bao Yue (2009, p. 568), Chinese women have been held to high standards of female chastity from the Qing dynasty to the present. In other words, loyalty and commitment to the family are basic requirements for Chinese women. There is therefore something of a clash between Chinese traditional thought and the rise of chick lit and the chick flick in China. Something of that clash is revealed in the chosen Chinese release title which emphasises Jones's romantic relationship by referring to her single status. The Chinese release title is 《BJ单身日记》

(BJ's Diary of Being Single). The word “单身” (“single”) has clear cultural currency. On the one hand, it has negative connotations of being lonely in a romantic relationship; on the other hand, it underlines the single status of the heroine and implicitly emphasises the status of being independent in relation to romantic relationships. The Chinese release title is relatively neutral about Jones's single status not clearly indicating either positive or negative connotation, but there are twenty-one⁷ of the twenty-seven articles written about the film in Chinese by both academics and journalists refer to Bridget Jones in relation to “剩女”/“leftover women”, evaluating them in terms of a more traditional ideology. Yang Li and Qing Liang (2016, p. 92), in contrast, offer a more powerful vision of the film. They argue that the freedom and credibility of female characters and their speech and demeanour to some extent elevate feminine identity in China. The film moreover has directly influenced gender in China. The term “BJ” (acronym of Bridget Jones) has become a synonym for unmarried women in China, representing an open-minded attitude for romantic issues for Chinese young women. Moreover, key expressions in the film now circulate in China in relation to the late marriage phenomenon such as “singleton” (单身族/“single race”) and “smug marrieds” (自鸣得意的已婚者/“arrogant married person”)⁸. These translational terms thus transcend the national boundaries between Britain and China and underline the cultural significance of the film *Bridget Jones's Diary*.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The section illustrates the theoretical structure of this paper by focusing on the transfer of sexuality and feminine gender in the Chinese subtitling of *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001). Two theories, Ernst-August Gutt's (1986) “Relevance Theory” in communication and cognition and Anthony Baldry and Paul Thibault's (2006) “Multimodality” in film text analysis, will form the theoretical framework of this paper. Taboo words lie at the heart of the film and their translations concerning sexuality and swearing will be the starting point in the analysis.

“Relevance Theory” in relation to its pragmatic and rhetorical meanings to communicate (Sperber et al. 1986, pp. 2-5) is a controversial part of the functionalist translation movement. It was coined as a concept by Ernst-August Gutt (1989, p. 147) who argued that to be successful, a translation must convey the contextual meaning to its audience. The translator must thus offer his or her audience communicative clues which enable them to comprehend the source text. Deirdre Wilson and Dan Sperber (1986, p. 163) state, “relevance theory” includes two intentions: first, the “informative intention” to provide information to the addressee; second, the “communicative intention” to communicate explicitly or implicitly a contextual manifestation with the recipient. Therefore, the fulfilment of communication requires not merely the mutual manifestation of the “informative intention”, but a rational interpretation in “communicative intention” (Wilson and Sperber 1986, p. 196). The comprehension of “communicative intention” is a complicated process involving not only verbal or non-verbal communication

but mental representation within the recipient. Ernst-August Gutt (1991, p. 27) argues that the target text needs only be relevant to the target audiences who will naturally modify the contextual assumptions in their communication act:

This requirement that the outcome of an act of communication has to modify some previously held assumptions in order to be found rewarding is an important one; it captures, for example, the intuition that the newness of information alone does not guarantee its appropriateness.

In other words, the translators were firstly able to craft a translation that suited the needs to the reviewing board or censoring body that kept the film virtually uncut in this case-study film. Then the institutions whose standards had to be met first in order for the translation to be considered successful and relevant to the suitability and appropriateness of the target text. The case study has sex-related language and vulgar words at its core. Such language and words cannot be as explicitly sexual and rude as the original for a Chinese audience. Instead, the translation moderates the degree of explicitness to make it appropriate for the receiving culture. Gutt (1989, p. 42) argues, the notion of semantic representations is used to refer to “mental representations that are the output of the language module of the mind”. Linguistic expressions are first dealt with by a component or module of the mind that physically interprets language blocks. This linguistic module is followed by a mental representation that uses pre-existing propositions or assumptions to read the context in question (Gutt 1991, pp. 24-25). This is relevant to this paper insofar as key film lines expressed linguistically in *Bridget Jones's Diary* are sexually suggestive and in vulgar style while the Chinese subtitles offer a mental representation intended to either tone down the vulgarity or to mediate the level of sexuality in Chinese culture.

Though the language module of the mind focuses on mental representation, “modality” also serves to communicate with the external environment of the communication act (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996, p. 160). According to Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (1996, p. 160), the notion of “modality” stems from linguistics and is able to convey “the truth value or credibility of (linguistic realised) statements about the world”. Anthony Baldry and Paul Thibault (2006, p. 210) further define “multimodality” as “the diverse ways in which a number of distinct semiotic resource systems are both *codeployed* and *co-contextualised* in the making of a text-specific meaning” (Baldry and Thibault 2006, p. 21). Key to this theory is the understanding of how different semiotic systems such as clothes, music, sound, gesture, movement, posture and spatial relations, etc. interact to make contextual meaning (Baldry and Thibault 2006, pp. 17-20). Theories of “multimodality” are essential to any study of subtitling and film⁹ as the subtitles do not operate in a vacuum. Rather, they are always accompanied by and working in tandem with the visual and auditory elements of the film.

The following case study will consider two situational categories: (1) swearing and (2) sexuality. In order to analyse each specified context of situation that is relevant to the Chinese subtitles of *Bridget Jones's Diary*, a definition of “context of situation” is imperative. Bronislaw Malinowski (1923,

p. 306) argues, the term “context of situation” is coined with a clear attempt to broaden the scope of context. Malinowski proposes that, on the one hand, the conception of context needs to be substantially widened to the situation in which a single word is dependent on its context; and, on the other hand, the conception of context must “burst the bonds of mere linguistics and be carried over into the analysis of the general conditions under which a language is spoken” (Malinowski 1923, p. 306). In the Chinese subtitling of *Bridget Jones's Diary*, the target culture and the situational conditions of the utterance will be considered as the “context of situation”.

A CASE ANALYSIS: TRANSFER OF GENDER, SWEARING AND SEXUALITY

In this section, the above theories will be applied to the case study to examine how the Chinese subtitles shape feminist ideology. Two situational categories characterise this chick flick. They are swearing and offensive language, and, sexual language. The term “context of situation” will be applied to the analysis, particularly on the sex-related language in *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001) and its transfer to the Chinese context.

Swearing and Offensive Language

According to Timothy Jay and Kristin Janschewitz (2008, p. 271), although female dialogue dominates the chick flick genre, the use of excessive swearing may jeopardise the social relationship with the audience. Swear words are taboo language which expresses the speaker's emotional state so that the embodied emotion can be conveyed to the listener (Jay and Janschewitz 2008, p. 267). Whether a swear word is or is not appropriate will depend on the context, on the speaker-listener relationship, on the social-physical context and on the particular word usage (Jay and Janschewitz 2008, p. 267). *Bridget Jones's Diary* offers the viewer an intimate glimpse into fictional girls' talk. One of the core assumptions on the Chinese subtitling of films is that it considerably tones down taboo language instead of taking the textual cohesion of the film plot into full account (Lung 1998, pp. 103-105). It is interesting to note that the actual images of *Bridget Jones's Diary* remain unchanged and the length of the Chinese version of the film is the same as that of the original. The level of offensiveness of the original in relation to language may be moderated by the Chinese subtitles. The film's images have not been altered or mediated. The company that distributes the film is Shanghai Xinhui Cultural Entertainment (Group) Co., Ltd. However, information regarding the subtitler's real name and the exact date on which the translation was produced have been untapped on the official DVD. The following theme in relation to swearing will explore how swear words are contextually transferred to the Chinese audience. (1) *Bridget Jones's Diary* (00:22:30-00:22:49)

Original dialogue:

BRIDGET: So how do you feel about this whole situation...

In Chechnya? Isn't it a nightmare?

DANIEL: I couldn't give a f*ck, Jones.

Now look. How do you know Arsey Darcy?

BRIDGET: Apparently, I used to run around naked in his paddling pool.

DANIEL: I bet you did, you dirty b*tch.

BRIDGET: What about you?

DANIEL: Same. Yeah.

Chinese subtitle:

你对车臣的局势有什么感想?

真可怕

-那干我屁事

布里吉特 我问你

你怎么认识马克?

-听说以前我爱在他的水池里裸泳

-我就知道你很放荡

-你呢?

-也一样

Back Translation:

BRIDGET: How do you view the situation in Chechen^{10?}
Really terrible.

DANIEL: It's none of my *rse business.

Bulijite, I am asking you

how do you know Make?

BRIDGET: I heard that I used to enjoy swimming naked
in his pool.

DANIEL: I know you are unrestrained in sexual be-
haviour.

BRIDGET: What about you?

DANIEL: The same.

In Example 1, Bridget's boss, Daniel Cleaver, is flirting with Bridget at a pub while criticising her potential admirer, Mark Darcy. The original film's dialogue contains clear rude swearing. In contrast, the Chinese subtitles moderate these swear words. Cleaver responds, "I couldn't give a f*ck" to Jones's icebreaking question regarding the situation in Chechnya. He redirects the question to ask how she knows "Arsey Darcy" ("Mark Darcy") with his flirtatious comment "you dirty b*tch". The Chinese subtitles to "I couldn't give a f*ck" remove the sexual vocabulary. Cleaver is using the term "f*ck" in a non-sexual context to mean that he does not care about the topic. The Chinese subtitles maintain a bodily image in their translation. But they lessen the level of profanity by referring to the Chinese phrase "屁事" ("*rse business"). In contrast to maintaining the f-word when it is enough to inform the viewers of Daniel's contempt and rudeness at this situation, the subtitles replace it with a less vulgar expression in Chinese.

When it comes to Jones's potential admirer, Mark Darcy, Cleave hostilely calls him "Arsey Darcy". "Arsey" is a particular word play on the phonetic similarity of "*rse" that is derived from his surname Darcy. "Arsey" refers to being "bad-tempered and uncooperative" and also "having an exaggerated opinion of one's own importance" (*OED*). The

Chinese subtitles completely omit the profanity contained within the alliterative "Arsey Darcy", though arguably the reference to "*rse" is already contained within the aforementioned "那干我屁事"/"It's none of my *rse business". The contrast between the subtitled content and the original contempt is clear. The phrase stands out both linguistically and structurally while the Chinese subtitles eliminate both meanings, merely maintaining his first name, "马克" ("Make"). The effect is totally lost in Chinese only with the rendering of his given name to represent him informally and neutrally.

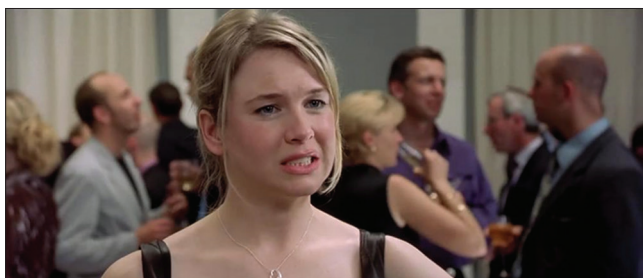
It is intriguing to note the subtitles' alterations to names. The original dialogue has Cleaver addressing Bridget by her surname "I couldn't give a f*ck, Jones". His use of her surname without any first name or title is an indicator of their informal and close relationship. Notice that this usually denotes men, not women in a professional or educational context, which seems to imply that Cleaver treats Bridget like a male colleague with respect. However, this extra layer of reverence coupled with the intimate relationship have been lost in the Chinese subtitles. Only the condensed and vulgar expressions "那干我屁事"/"It's none of my *rse business" have presented to the audiences completely omitting Bridget's first name. While such a use of a surname on its own is possible in Chinese, the subtitles instead prefer to use just Bridget's first name. They change the name used in the dialogue but they maintain a sense of informality.

Another key line in relation to the subtitling of swearing is the phrase "you dirty b*tch", uttered by a male character, Daniel. It is important to note that the connotation is very different from a female referring to another female, and from a male referring to a female, which leads to a gender issue. Though this is usually done to refer to a woman by another woman, in this case a sense of intimacy arises when Daniel talks to Bridget in a playful manner. This is clearly an ironic way of mocking Bridget and also has sexual implications in this particular context with Bridget's speech on nudity. The informality is another indicator of the close relationship between the interlocutors. The word "b*tch" in English has a complex history. It refers both to a female dog and is a highly derogatory term for a female. The Chinese subtitles explain the original remark in the Chinese phrase "你很放荡"/"being unrestrained in sexual behaviour" that contains stronger sexual implications than the original. They do not however translate the term "b*tch" and, interestingly, the phrase used is not gender specific and might easily be applied to either a man or a woman. Clearly, the subtitles opt for a neutral mediation of detailing the sexual habits instead of referring to women directly as a "dirty b*tch"/"婊子" (whore) to avoid the strong offensiveness targeted at females. Although the original remark is not meant to be demeaning to women but just mockery in context, the chosen word ("b*tch") is particularly demeaning to women in general. The Chinese subtitles thus use a neutral description instead of translating the direct insult attached to the word, which shows that there is a clear intervention. The translator's deliberate intervention in relation to veiling remarks that are demeaning

to women underlines the attempt to improve gender identity (Leonardi 2007, pp. 54-55). The Chinese subtitles do not use a gender specific word. In the context of reception, this is still unacceptable behaviour as sexually suggestive topics are less frequently found in the speech of Chinese speakers (Lung 1998, p. 103), but if reading in association with the “context of situation”, it would be self-explanatory in conjunction with the situational environment under which a language is spoken (Malinowski 1923, p. 306). The playful conversation with its sexual connotations is transferred in a manner more contextually appropriate to Chinese culture. In relation to the target culture’s mental representation (Gutt 1989, p. 26), multiple strategies are adopted to make the translation closer to audiences. In contrast, the next example makes clear accommodation for the need of the target audience.

(2) *Bridget Jones’s Diary* (00:18:33-00:18:48)

Screenshot of the Scene:



Screenshot -1- Bridget Jones’s reluctance by introducing her colleague



Screenshot -2- Perpetua’s surprised and embarrassed face

Original dialogue:

PERPETUA: Anyone going to introduce me?
 BRIDGET: ...Perpetua. Ha.
 This is Mark Darcy.
 Mark’s a prematurely middle-aged pr*ck.
 with a cruel-raced ex-wife.
 Perpetua’s a fat-*ss old bag...
 who spends her time bossing me around.

Chinese subtitle:

嘿 不替我介绍一下吗?
 -帕楚拉 这位是马克 达西
 马克是中年白痴 未老先衰
 前妻冷酷无情
 帕楚拉是个一天到晚
 管我闲事的老女人

Back Translation:

PERPETUA: Hey aren’t you introducing me?
 BRIDGET: Pachula this is Make-Daxi.
 Make is a middle-age idiot becoming senile before his age.
 His ex-wife is cold-blooded.
 Pachula is an old woman who sticks her nose into my business day and night.

In this example, Bridget is reluctant to introduce Mark Darcy to her colleague, Perpetua. The scene describes Jones’s imaginary conversation as she seeks to introduce people with “thoughtful details”. In an imagined situation reflecting Bridget’s mind, a humorous and ironic effect stems from Bridget’s reluctance and hatred by introducing her colleague Perpetua when audiences clearly see the embarrassment and surprise on Perpetua’s face as Screenshot 1 and 2 show. This seems to be a very funny scene precisely because it violates the taboo of being rude to someone’s face for the British audience. Two offensive words in relation to parts of human body, “pr*ck” and “fat-*ss”, are found in this line. “Pr*ck” is vulgar slang for a man’s sexual organ (*OED*) and also contextually refers to a contemptible male being. “Fat-*ss” clearly acts as an insult in this context. In the subtitles’ choice, the referential sense relating to the male’s sex organ, “pr*ck”, is completely omitted. While the original dialogue describes the insult to Darcy in a sexually offensive sense, the Chinese subtitles tone down the offensiveness and explain it. Though the subtitles omit “pr*ck”, a highly offensive word in English, they compensate for this reduction of insult by augmenting the insult in the same line relating to age. The word “pr*ck” is vulgar slang and offers a negative judgment on a person. Yet, it is rendered in the Chinese subtitles with a colloquial term “未老先衰”/“becoming senile before his age” used to mock those who act like elderly people showing signs of becoming senile in a relatively milder tone compared to the clear offensive “pr*ck”. Moreover, the Chinese subtitles in relation to “fat-*ss old bag” are softened as “老女人”/“old woman”. It is worth noting that, while in Example 1 (Arsey), we underline that images relating to bodily functions are often transferred in the film’s subtitles, in this instance, the corporeal image, “fat-*ss”, is completely omitted. The Chinese subtitles moderate both insults, marking them as much milder than the original. This may be due to the fact that Chinese culture is more cautious than the West in terms of taboo topics like sexuality and swearing (Elliott et al. 1996, p. 105). The subtitles’ choice is markedly similar when it comes to another swear word, “f*ck”, and its variations.

(3) *Bridget Jones’s Diary* (00:09:55-00:10:01)

Original dialogue:

SHARON: F*ck’em. F*ck the lot of them.
 Tell them they can stick f*cking Leavis...
 up their f*cking *rses.

Chinese subtitle:

去他的 去他的头
 去他的利维斯
 告诉他们去死吧

Back Translation:

SHARON: D*mn him, d*mn his head.

D*mn Liweisi.

Tell them to go to die.

Example 3 depicts that Shazza (Sharon's nickname), one of Bridget's close female friends, likes to say "f*ck" a lot. It is interesting to note that though off-colour language and swear words are more frequently used by male speakers and less used by female speakers (Allan and Burrige 2006, p. 89), this particular case contradicts the above argument in the context of pub conversation among close friends. A speaker is more likely to use taboo language accompanied with the same gender friends (Allan and Burrige 2006, p. 89). Moreover, males use off-colour words more offensively than females (Allan and Burrige 2006, p. 89). The highly frequent use of the swearwords by women throughout the film seems to be a gender projection, suggesting that women have the same freedom, independence, and rights as men do when using sexual expressions and swear words. Translating these swearwords uttered by women has implications for the notions of gender identity among audiences (Leonardi 2007, p. 57). In China, under Confucian culture, swearing and obscenity are perceived as far more repulsive in the speech of a woman than that of a man (Chia et al. 1997, p. 144).

The Chinese subtitles' choices in relation to their translation of the vulgar variations of "f*ck" is revealing in relation to the appropriateness of "context of situation" (Malinowski 1923, p. 6). In the English dialogue, Sharon aggressively and rudely insults the intellectual snobbery of those who push their knowledge of British literary critic F. R. Leavis in people's faces. In transcribing the name "Leavis" for a Chinese audience with no explanation or initials, the Chinese subtitles effectively remove the cultural reference. The Chinese subtitles also lessen Sharon's vigorous use of "f*ck" by avoiding direct swear words. The frequent use of f-words uttered by Sharon shows women's freedom of expression, though the Chinese subtitles moderate the intense emotion, such freedom has well maintained in the translation. They replace them with a fairly neutral alternative which underlines a sense of offense in relation to death but not profanity. The subtitles' choice of "去他的 去他的头...告诉他们去死吧" ("D*mn him, d*mn his head... Tell them to go to die"), is descriptive in relation to physical experience and resembles the original in that it offers an insult. The insult relating to death here is more formal compared to that of the original. The insult in question is adequately and contextually relevant to the audience, as Gutt (1989, p. 101) suggests in his relevance theory that is communicatively and mentally acceptable to the target audiences. This offensive language is used within the boundaries of what is considered situationally appropriate in discourse (Jay and Janschewitz 2008, p. 268).

In summary, target-culture oriented translation strategies are clearly adopted in the Chinese subtitles when it comes to the translation of swearing in *Bridget Jones's Diary*. When translating offensive comments about women ("you dirty b*tch"), the subtitles have to make alterations, recasting the

contextual flirtation and rendering the semantic representation ("你很放荡"/"being unrestrained in sexual behaviour") to resemble the original meaning without objectifying women. Additionally, when subtitling "arsey", "goddamn" and "f*ck" and its variations, the Chinese subtitles' choice is to interpret them with less vulgar and much milder description to convey insult but in a moderated way.

Sex-Related Language

In this section, reference is made to sexual taboo – closely associated with female speakers drawn from the film *Bridget Jones's Diary*. Sexual language, Ruby Rich (1998, p. 257) argues, has become a marker of female emancipation since the 1990s. It can be seen from the film that such female emancipation is on the rise through the medium of the English dialogues and the Chinese subtitles. Dennis Enright (1985, p. 59) states, thanks to the rhetoric of euphemism and colloquialism, people increasingly talk about sex with less embarrassment. Enright (1985, p. 68) concurs that the frequent use of sexual language by women promotes women's liberation movements. As Jinhua Li (2007a, p. 3) suggests, the use of gendered discourse in film narratives may be a means of promoting feminine identity. The process of "gender" never works in a social vacuum, it operates dynamically, as a result, the product of social practice:

gender doesn't just exist, but is continually produced, reproduced, and indeed changed through people's performance of gendered acts, as they project their own claimed gendered identities, ratify or challenge others' identities, and in various ways support or challenge systems of gender relations and privilege (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003, p. 4).

Holmes and Marra (2010, p.6) go further, "gendered discourse" entails "consideration of the interaction between individual agency and the larger constraining social structures within which that agency is enacted". This paper specifically examines feminine ideology construction through identifying and empowering female terms, expressions, and identity that are most enabling of women. At first glance, the analysis in this section will look at directly sexual language in sexual situations. However, there are clearly non-sexual discourse drawn from the film that are not directly related to sex or/and in an implicitly sexual situation. Association with "the general conditions under which a language is spoken" (Malinowski 1923, p. 6), the above indicated language becomes intentionally or unintentionally sexual because of the "context of situation". Therefore, this section will also consider the use of contextually sexual language in sexually suggestive situations.

(4) *Bridget Jones's Diary* (00:10:15-00:10:22)

Original dialogue:

TOM: Is that Cleaver chap still as cute as ever?

BRIDGET: Oh, God, yes.

TOM: Then I think a well-timed blow job's... probably the best answer.

Chinese subtitle:

那个丹尼尔还是那么英俊？
—是呀
我想及时地哄哄他 应该有帮助

Back Translation:

TOM: That Danni'er is still as handsome as ever?

BRIDGET: Yes.

TOM: I think comforting him in time would be helpful.

What Example 4 shows is that Bridget and her friends are drinking wine at a pub. Tom, a homosexual, is fantasising about a handsome guy like Daniel Cleaver. In Tom's discourse in English, we find that he flirtatiously suggests providing sexual services ("a well-timed blow job") when Bridget encounters difficulties with her boss, Cleaver. When rendering what is a sexual taboo subject in polite conversation, "a well-timed blow job", the subtitles downgrade the explicitly sexual expression via a contextual equivalent, "及时地哄哄他"/"comforting him in time". The sexually explicit message to which it is attached is transformed into a neutral expression which refers to providing comfort to someone who is upset. This translational approach clearly caters to the needs of the target culture. The expression in relation to the idiomatic translation means that "(1) the translation presents the linguistic structures of the RL [receptor language] and that (2) the recipients of the translation understand the message with ease", as developed by Beekman and Callow (1974, p. 34). Therefore, the Chinese subtitles use an abstract expression, "及时地哄哄他"/"comforting him in time" to avoid directly sexual references. They use a phrase which is linguistically and culturally appropriate in the Chinese context when translating sexuality. This is due to the fact that Chinese culture still regards sex-related references as morally and ethically prohibited (Santaemilia 2008, p. 246). Interestingly, the next instance opens debate towards the above argument in relation to employing implicit language to transfer sexually explicit messages.

(5) *Bridget Jones's Diary* (00:10:28-00:10:36)

Screenshot of the scene:

Screenshot -3- Tom's flirting with his admirer

Original dialogue:

BRIDGET: Tom...
Eighties pop icon
who only wrote

one hit record...
then retired because
he found that one record...
was quite enough
to get him laid...
for the whole of the Nineties.

Chinese subtitle:

汤姆 八十年代的歌星
只写了一首畅销曲就退休
因为他发现这足够了
让他在九十年代
得到充分的性满足

Back Translation:

BRIDGET: Tangmu, a singer from the Eighties
only wrote one hit song and then retired
because he found that this was enough
to ensure him complete sexual satisfaction
throughout the Nineties.

In Example 5, Bridget is introducing Tom who used to be a successful singer. At the same time, Tom is staring at another man with clear sexual desire. Instead of reframing and repositioning the ideology of the text in a sexually implicit way as the previous Example 4 does, the present example actively conveys the sexual language of its source. It is striking to note that while female sexual language or language relating to female sexual activities were moderated in the previous example, in this male context, the sexual language of the source is actively conveyed. What the dialogue underlines is that the translation of the source text "to get him laid" is linguistically rendered as "让他……得到充分的性满足"/"to ensure him complete sexual satisfaction". The sexual rewards are often part and parcel of being a male and homosexual celebrity and clearly convey to a Chinese audience. Though the meaning of homosexuality is completely left out in the Chinese subtitles, the way Tom behaves and talks imply he is gay as Screenshot 3 indicates, which has been well delivered to the viewers thanks to the combination of various semiotic modalities, the verbal message in the form of subtitles interacting with the visual and kinetic sources of meaning (Taylor 2003, p.191) co-interprets Tom's privilege as a male and homosexual singer that suffices his sexual desire. It is important to note that the sexual language in this example is uttered by a female that may promote feminine identity construction by freely talking about sexuality in public, which contradicts the traditional expectation of women in this regard (Holmes and Marra 2010, p.2). This is partly because homosexuality is not legally acceptable in mainland China that explains the omission of it in the subtitle. While the sexual content of the English language is translated, the subtitles alter the register. The slang term "to get laid" is explained in more formal terms in Chinese. Having discussed sexual language in non-sexual contexts, the following section is focused on contextually sexual language in sexual situations.

(6) *Bridget Jones's Diary* (00:26:51-00:26:58)

Screenshot of the scene:



Screenshot -4- Bridget answering the phone

Original dialogue:

BRIDGET: Bridget Jones, wanton sex goddess...
with a very bad man between her thighs.
Mum. Hi.

Chinese subtitle:
这是布里吉特
荡妇 性爱女神
还有个坏男人在她这儿
妈妈? 嗨

Back Translation:

BRIDGET: This is Bulijite.
An unrestrained-in-sexual-behaviour woman
and sex and love goddess.
Also there is a bad man with her.
Mum? Hi.

What Example 6 presents is that Daniel and Bridget are engaged in sexual activity. Bridget speaks frivolously when she answers a phone call from her mother. Before Bridget is answering the phone, Bridget and Daniel are engaged in sexual act. The way she speaks on the phone is playful, humorous, and sexually suggestive through the lines “wanton sex goddess...with a very bad man between her thighs”. The translation of the expression “wanton sex goddess”, referring to a woman who is sexually powerful and prolific, is clearly maintained in the Chinese rendering “荡妇 性爱女神”/“an unrestrained-in-sexual-behaviour woman and sex and love goddess”. The sexual reference and humour arise as Bridget speaks inappropriately and sexually to her mother. That is vividly transferred to Chinese culture via the image, as illustrated in Screenshot 4 when audiences watching them half-naked on the bed. In addition, without consulting the subtitles, audiences are able to understand the ongoing sexual act where Bridget’s laughter and Daniel’s titillating facial expression, and their partial nakedness are clearly shown in the actual scene. By presenting the sexually suggestive words from Bridget, the visual and auditory representation of the scene also invites the audience to be aware of the sexual act. Multimodality composites representations in manifold modes chosen from “rhetorical aspects or its communicational potentials” to interpret the truth or validity of the word within the depicted scene. If Bridget’s sexuality is subtitled in relation to “wanton sex goddess”, that relating to “a very bad man between her thighs” is not. This is moderated to a fairly neutral expression in Chinese, “还有个坏男人在她这儿”/“also there is a bad man with her”,

detailing less sexual connotation than the original. Bridget’s body in the sex act is taken out of the Chinese subtitles. Shifting strategies are thus employed in this section of dialogue (whether translating or lessening the sexual details of the original). They depend on the level of acceptance of the target culture concerning the translation of sexuality and offensiveness. They also appear to depend on the gender of the desiring subject.

Multiple translation strategies are adopted. Clear explicitness is employed to make the sexual transfer when translating “wanton sex goddess”, while a fairly implicit expression is used to avoid the transfer of details relating to the sexual act (“a bad man between her thighs”). A general substitution has been made to cater to the target culture’s norms in terms of sexual morality (Santaemilia 2008, pp. 222-226). But a clear attempt can also be seen to transfer sexual references for Chinese audiences when they relate to homosexual male desire: (“得到充分的性满足”/“to ensure him complete sexual satisfaction”) in the previous example. The next category is concerned with contextually sexual language in sexually suggestive situations which nevertheless have clear sexual overtones. As a wide range of translational approaches have been detected to bridge the gap of sexuality and femininity between both countries, the following categories offer an innovative insight.

(7) *Bridget Jones's Diary* (00:27:09-00:27:37)

Screenshot of the scene:



Screenshot -5- Embarrassing facial expression from the bystanders



Screenshot -6- The over-spray from the egg peeler

Original dialogue:

PAMELA: Ah, anyone else wants to have it off?
Haha. Don’t be shy, madame.
French. Have it oeuf. Ha ha! With the wisecrack egg
peeler.
Now, nice firm grip.

Put it in the hole. And...
 Up, down, up down.
 And off it comes in your hand.
 Oh! Mind the over-spray. Sorry.

Chinese subtitle:

还有谁想要试试看?
 别害羞 太太
 法国的 试试看
 用聪明剥壳器
 稳稳地握住
 把蛋放在洞里
 上下 上下 大功告成了
 哦 小心溅出来

Back Translation:

PAMELA: Who else wants to try?
 Don't be shy, Madame.
 From France, do you want to have a try?
 With this smart egg peeler.
 Grip it firmly.
 Put the egg in the hole.
 Up and down, up and down, and the task is
 accomplished.
 Oh, be careful with the overspray.

Example 7 comes in a situation where Bridget's Mum is selling an egg peeler and demonstrating how to use it. The original film's dialogue takes a clear approach to embodying sexual implication where sexual intercourse takes place through the metaphor of a demonstration of operating an egg extractor. The Chinese subtitles use a more neutral expression and have less sexual implication than the original. Multimodality enables the contextual interpretation (Baldry and Thibault 2006, p. 18). Audiences are easily to understand the sexual connotation of the scene thanks to the setting, sound and the titillating and awkward facial expressions on the characters' faces from Screenshot 5. The original dialogue contains elements of French, it uses the phrase "have it oeuf": phonetically, this is a play on words which relates to the sex act: "to have it off". The Chinese subtitles do not replicate this play on words or this move between languages and therefore this egg pun is omitted and its sexual overtone is lost in the subtitles. Another key passage, "nice firm grip...up, down, up, down...and off it comes in your hand...mind the over-spray" as Screenshot 6 clearly shows, underlines masturbation. The Chinese subtitles do not replicate the explicitly sexual message either. They become "稳稳地握住……上下 上下 大功告成了……哦 小心溅出来"/"Grip it firmly ... Up and down, up and down, and the task is accomplished... Oh, be careful with the overspray" in a fairly neutral way of demonstrating how to use an egg peeler. The titillating laughter and facial expression from the bystanders compensate for the loss of meaning communicated by the subtitles.

To summarise, while there are common approaches to the subtitles' translation of sexual taboo — target-culture directed approaches to downgrade the level of sexual explicitness —, so too are there instances in which sexual transfer is

made. Specific subtitles maintain sexually explicit messages by detailing the sexual description. It is intriguing however that, as this section has suggested, male discourse of sexuality is more directly transferred than instances related directly to female desire and sexual activity. As Cameron argues (2006, pp. 6-8), women's voice hardly be equally heard in the public context, in other words, female faces difficulties to participate on equal terms with men.

CONCLUSION

Using two situational categories of recurrent features (swearing and sexuality) in a chick flick, this paper has sought to analyse the specificities of subtitling for primarily female audiences in the case study of *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001). What it has revealed is that while explicitly offensive and sexually related language is frequently present in the film, the subtitles' choice tends to downgrade the explicitness of swearing and sexuality, taking the target culture into account. As the author of this article suggests "the identity-forming process of subtitling from English to Chinese, which is not a static one-way process, but rather, a multi-layered and multi-directional process" (Liang 2018, p. 244). That is, in the Chinese context there is principally a dual audience: the viewers and the authorities, as they are the gatekeepers and may prevent foreign content to be introduced to the Chinese viewers. Simultaneously, the authorities use the foreign culture to assist with the goal of reinforcing and strengthening domestic culture agenda (Liang 2020, p. 26). The historical, social and cultural contexts of the receiving culture further serve to explain the type of translations which are applied (Santaemilia 2011, p. 23) in order to convey this chick flick to Chinese audiences.

In the rendering of swearing and sexuality, the Chinese subtitles moderate potentially taboo topics, offering them in a less offensive and much softer style. The transfer of sexuality and gender drawn from the Chinese subtitles of *Bridget Jones's Diary* thus resonates with the repositioning of gender identity in a Chinese context with its culturally appropriate forms. The subtitling of this film underlines the negotiation of cultural differences between women in different societies as films move between nations and languages. In Santaemilia's (2015, p. 6) words, translating sex and gender tends not only to involve "cross-cultural transfer" but a "cross-ideological" one. The intersection of translation and gender/sex at the same time is both contradictory and multiple (Santaemilia 2015, p. 6) as gender and sexuality are transferred and ideologically mediated by state censorship. Although the Chinese subtitles clearly privilege comprehension in relation to sexuality and swearing, the shifting translational strategies either moderate or contradict explicitness on multiple levels to allow the film to cater for primarily Chinese female audiences. The Chinese subtitles make a gender and sexual transfer, but they make it more contextually appropriate for the receiving culture. Ultimately, the paper has presented a more complex projection of feminine identity in the Chinese subtitling process of *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001). This text has a feminine protagonist who attempts to break from "tradition" and move towards "modernity". My attempt is

to deconstruct the discourse of tradition and modernity to understand what kinds of negotiations are undertaken by female characters when discussing the sensitive topics such as sexuality and swearing in the Chinese subtitles. Such an examination is useful at a time when the growing importance of feminine gender has increased within larger discourse where their identity as women has increased significance in a contemporary Chinese era.

END NOTES

- 1 This paper uses the terms such as ‘femininity, feminism, feminist ideology, female gendered discourses, feminine ideology/identity’ to broadly illustrate the construction of female emancipation in Chinese society.
- 2 This term is generally considered derogatory, but this paper is not used the term “chick flick” as a derogatory term.
- 3 There are two subsequent sequels, namely, *The Edge of Reason* (2004) and *Bridget Jones's Baby* (2016) that have both received similar popularity throughout the globe, but the focus of this paper is on the first edition of its kind, *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001) because it is the benchmark success of chick flick genre.
- 4 This study mainly discusses how the discourse of women is subtitled for primarily Chinese female audiences because they are the target viewers of chick flick genre, with no implication that men do not watch the film.
- 5 The representatives of chick flick also include, for instance, *Legally Blonde* (2001), *Sex and the City* (2008) and *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006) (Luo 2015, p. III).
- 6 Rather than dubbing the film that allows translators to manipulate the source text which is completely replaced, the Chinese authorities adopt the act of subtitling since the founding of China in 1949 because subtitles economically and practically more appeals to Chinese audiences in terms of authenticity and originality of the source text (Yu 2015, p.496).
- 7 The above twenty-one articles regarding the film *Bridget Jones's Diary* and their Chinese translations are available at CNKI databases which store academic journals, papers and official materials in China.
- 8 A selection of the above twenty-one articles available from CNKI in relation to *Bridget Jones's Diary's* cultural impact in China are as following:
 Xi Huang. (2011). 论《BJ单身日记》中大龄单身女性生存境遇 [On Difficulties and Challenges for Single Women who Pass Marriageable Age from the Perspective of the Film *Bridget Jones's Diary*]. 时代文学 (上半月) [Contemporary Literature (First Half of the Month)] 02, 137-138.
 Anonymous. (2001). BJ《单身日记》——在夹缝中求生存的大女人 [*Bridget Jones's Diary: The Survival of Single Women who Pass Marriageable Age*]. 电影文学 [Film Literature] 10, 44-45.
 Xiangyuan Zui. (2008). 大龄单身胖姑娘的幸福生活——重温《BJ单身日记》系列 [A Happy Life of a Fat Single Girl who Passes Marriageable Age: A Review of the Series of *Bridget Jones's Diary*]. 家庭影院技术 [Home Theater] 02, 100-101.
 Qin Zhu. (2005). 《BJ单身日记》不完美女人的完美

生活 《BJ单身日记II: 理性边缘》 [Imperfect Women's Perfect Life: *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*]. 电影评介 [Movie Review] 12, 79.

- 9 For more details on how “multimodality” applies to film texts and genres, see Baldry and Thibault (2006, pp. 165-261).
- 10 Chechen is the phonetic form, or pinyin, of the Chinese character “车臣” (Chechnya). Pinyin belongs to the phonetic system of writing Mandarin Chinese, referring to the pronunciation of Mandarin characters (Liu and Wang 2002). Pinyin form applies to the following nouns in this case study: Bilijite (Bridget), Make (Mark), Daneil (Dani'er), Sheila (Xila), New Zealand (xinxilan), Richard (Lichade), etc.

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