

Exploring the Causes of "Mother Tongue Shame" When Watching Mandarin Dubbing of Non-Native Language Films and TV Programs

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Abstract. Cross-cultural communication has become easier and easier with the deepening of informationization, and film and TV dramas have been integrated into people's daily life as a medium and carrier of cross-cultural communication. However, people often feel "shame" and discomfort when watching the dubbing of non-native language dramas in their native language, that is, "mother tongue shame". This phenomenon is especially evident among the post-1990s and post-1990s generations. In this paper, the author used questionnaires and interviews to collect data from Mandarin university students and analyzed the causes of this phenomenon from the perspectives of psycholinguistics and cognitive linguistics. Inductive reasoning was used to analyze the data. Research shows that the reasons why people feel uncomfortable with Mandarin dubbing include both objective and subjective aspects. The objective aspects include the quality of Mandarin dubbing, the mismatch between Mandarin and the cultural environment portrayed in non-native film and television productions, and the differences in idiomatic expressions between Mandarin and other languages. The subjective aspect is mainly the audience's emotional reaction to the native language and the cognitive process of the non-native language.

Keywords: Mother tongue shame, Psycholinguistics, Dual system theory, Cultural assertiveness.

1. Introduction

Language, as an important tool for people to communicate and spread culture, has shone from the birth of human civilization to the present. Throughout thousands of years, the function of language has remained unchanged, while the carrier carrying it has always changed. In this era of high informationization and increasingly profound cultural exchanges between countries, film and television dramas have gradually become the main carrier of cultural communication and an important pillar of the cultural industry. Films and dramas in different languages and cultures are also penetrating into people's daily lives. A large number of Chinese dubbed versions of non-native language movies and TV dramas have been created to facilitate the viewers' understanding. However, the author often feels uncomfortable or "embarrassed" when watching Mandarin dubbed versions of non-native language dramas. After talking to people who feel the same way when watching Chinese dubbing of non-native language movies and TV shows, the author found that this phenomenon and its causes have rich research value and significance. The research theme of this paper is to investigate the causes of the psychological phenomenon of "mother tongue shame" when watching Mandarin dubbing of non-native language films and dramas. Addressing "mother tongue shame" can make Mandarin dubbing more emotionally resonant for viewers, thus creating high-quality Mandarin dubbed versions of non-native language dramas. This is not only the interaction between the audience and the drama itself, but also the interaction between culture and culture, which is conducive to the exchange and mutual appreciation between different languages and cultures and increases cultural diversity. Improving the cross-cultural communication ability of film and television from the aspects of film and television talent training, policy support, channel distribution and cultural value communication can help promote the integration of China's film and television products into the world and enhance China's cultural soft power [1].

2. Method

The main method used in this study was inductive reasoning. The author had already made some initial guesses and hypotheses about the causes of "mother tongue shame" before conducting the formal study. After a few years of observation, the author found that many others experience a subtle "discomfort" when watching Mandarin dubs of non-native films and TV shows. The author summarizes this discomfort as "mother tongue shame" and hypothesizes that it is universal. The author's hypotheses and observations were used as the starting point for the entire study, extending upward to a systematic theory.

A questionnaire has been conducted for a group of college students. Between January 15 and 18, 2023, a total of sixty-three students filled out the questionnaire, and they were all verified as valid. At the same time, interviews with four students were carried out. The details of the questionnaires and interviews will be described separately.

The theme of this study is to investigate the causes of "native language shame" when watching Mandarin dubbing of non-native language movies and TV shows. To address this theme, the author designed a questionnaire from six perspectives: whether they would watch non-native language dramas, whether they would choose the Mandarin dubbed version when watching non-native language dramas, the reasons for choosing the Mandarin version, their preference for the Mandarin dubbed version and the original version, whether they would feel shame when watching the Mandarin dubbed version and the reasons for the shame. To further understand the subjects' thoughts, the author interviewed a random sample of people and explored the underlying reasons in terms of different respondents' backgrounds in second language acquisition, their winters of watching non-native language movies and dramas, and their real feelings about Mandarin dubbing.

3. Result

Sixty-three subjects watched movies in languages other than their native language, and 57 subjects, or 90.48% of the total, would not choose the Mandarin dubbed versions of the movies they watched. The author conducted a brief interview with the six subjects who would choose Mandarin dubbing. Their reasons for choosing Mandarin dubbing included: their family members could only understand Mandarin; their favorite Mandarin dubbed actors were in the movie; and they would easily miss information by listening to the original movie while watching non-native language movies and doing other things. When asked about their preference between the original and Mandarin dubbed versions of non-native language films and TV shows, all 63 subjects chose the original version. Next, the author used the Arabic numbers 1-5 to indicate the sense of shame and discontentment when watching the Chinese dubbed version, with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest, and the following are the results of the survey given by sixty-three subjects.

Table 1. Level of Shame When Watching Chinese Dubbed Versions of Non-native Language Movies and TV Shows (1 being the lowest, 5 being the highest)

Level of shame	Subtotal	Proportion
1 (No shame at all)	1	1.59%
2 (A little bit of shame, but not much)	6	9.52%
3 (More shame)	14	22.22%
4 (Very shameful,almost unbearable)	20	31,75%
5 (Very shameful, totally unbearable)	22	34.92%

As seen from Table 1, nearly 90% of the subjects said that they felt more or less obvious shame when watching the Chinese dubbed version. The author will use a circular diagram to show the reasons for the subjects' choices.

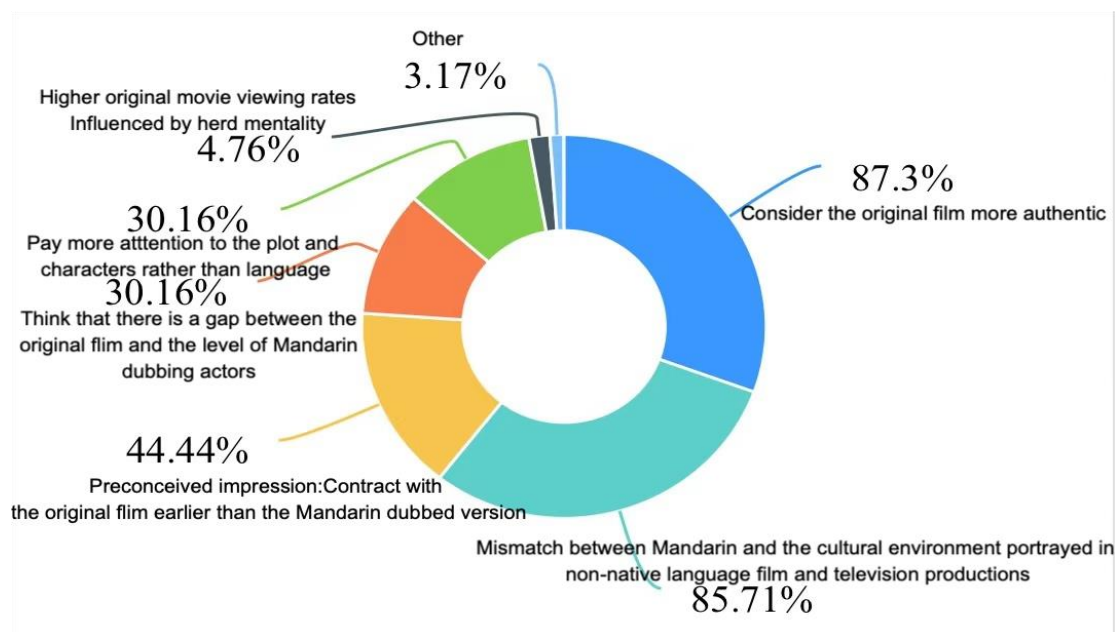


Fig. 1 Subjects' Reasons for Choosing the Original Film

Figure 1 shows that subjects are mainly influenced by subjective factors when choosing original films, and that they seek a higher level of "purity" of foreign films and dramas, i.e., the suitability of language to the plot and characters.

4. Discussion

Mother tongue shame is a feeling of "shyness" or "discomfort" when expressing in one's native language, or when seeing others expressing something in their native language. This occurs mainly in the areas of Mandarin dubbing for non-native language movies and TV shows, songs, etc. For example, some lines or lyrics may sound "normal" in a foreign language, but if they are replaced by a native language, they will be "awkward", "uncomfortable" and "out of sync". The main reason for this is that the lines and lyrics do not fit into everyday language habits. Since foreign languages are in the category of "extraordinary", even if there is something that goes against everyday language or values, the audience will automatically think that it is for the effect of the program. Moreover, the audience has a "membrane" in the process of comprehending the lines in a non-native language, which needs to be translated into the native language before they can understand the meaning. However, once the lines are translated into the native language they are used to, the "anomalies" and "shocks" in certain lines become particularly obvious.

4.1. Foreign Language Effect

One interviewee had been studying Japanese for some time, and she mentioned during the interview that every time she spoke Japanese, she felt she became a humbler and more careful person, which was very different from how she felt when she spoke English. This psychological phenomenon is actually very typical of her. In Japanese, there is "honorific language," (desu/-masu), which means that the structure and expression of the language changes according to the complexity of the situation, the relationship between elders and children, and the rank of the position. In his 2014 study, Sarah S. Meacham explored the mixing of honorific desu/-masu form and non-honorific plain or abrupt form during English language lessons in Japan. He argued that the routine alternation of these forms within mundane classroom interaction amounts to perspective-shifting practices that, in their different implementations, reflect and constitute different social class identities [2]. By speaking this language, people have a more direct sense of the relationship between people in terms of respect and inferiority. In contrast, there is no such system of expression in English, which is more free, direct and casual.

This experience of the interviewees is an example of the effect of learning a foreign language on a person's psychological state. Linguist Aneta Pavlenko once asked 1039 foreign language speakers, "When you use a different language, do you feel as if you become a different person [3]?" Sixty-five percent responded in the affirmative. In addition, there are many studies that confirm that exposure to a foreign language does have some wonderful psychological effects. When using a foreign language, people are more rational. Professor Costa calls this the "foreign language effect." Albert Costa said, "Decisions made by people when using a non-native language are less influenced by emotions and more inclined to be the result of rational analysis and reflection [4]." In the famous Albert Costa "Trolley Dilemma" experiment, two groups of subjects were asked to read the same question in their native language and in a foreign language: Should they push a person off an overpass to block an oncoming train and save the lives of five other people on the tracks? It was found that 20% of the native speakers were willing to kill one person in exchange for the survival of the other four, while 50% of the foreign speakers chose this seemingly immoral practice.

Table 2. Percentage of Utilitarian Decisions by language Condition [5]

Languages		Percent of utilitarian decisions	
Native	Foreign	Native	Foreign
Korean	English	0%	7.5%
English	Spanish	28%	44%
English/Spanish	Hebrew	10%	75%
English	French	20%	33%
Weighted Average		20%	33%

As shown in Table 2, people make more utilitarian decisions and have a lower sense of morality in a non-native language environment compared to their native language.

In her study published in July 2015, Janet Geipel of the University of Trento, Italy, said, "The use of a foreign language leads people to make more lenient moral judgments than their native language [6]." She argues that using a second language to explore emotional and moral topics can distance people from such topics. She had the participants read several stories. In these stories, no one was really hurt, but the content of the stories made people feel morally uncomfortable. For example, "A brother and sister have sex with the knowledge, consent and protection of both parties," or "People eat their dog after it is hit and killed by someone else's car. The study found that when participants read the foreign language version of the story, they felt less discomfort and were more likely to think that "the people in the story did nothing wrong" than when they read the native language version. The "discomfort" that people experience in reading is the presence of morality in human beings. The presence of morality is diminished when a foreign language is used.

4.2. Mother Tongue and Dual System Theory

In defining "mother tongue," UNESCO states, "Mother tongue usually includes the following: the language first learned; the language one identifies with or is considered by others to be a native speaker of; the language one is most familiar with and the language most used. The mother tongue may also be called the 'primary language' or 'first language' [7]." Mother tongue is the language people are first exposed to, and it marks our initial feelings, emotions and ways of seeing the world. People learn emotional responses during childhood, and it is also the period when people are heavily exposed to and learn their native language. But often the exposure to foreign languages comes at an older age. Therefore, the bond between the native language and emotional reactions can be deeper. The reaction due to the native language is more inclined to be considered a subconscious, instinctive reaction.

Analytic theory suggests that heuristic processing is parallel, rapid, and dependent on intuitive decisions, whereas analytic processing is sequential, slow, and controlled. Evans later adopted the core criterion of whether or not it takes up cognitive resources as a distinction between the two types of processing and adopted the more neutral system 1 - system 2 nomenclature. --- System 2 named

the two systems [8]. Researchers have also studied this issue for a long time to determine whether cognitive resource use is the ultimate criterion for classifying dual systems. Initially, researchers explored the relationship between ability and individual differences in reasoning, with Stanovich suggesting that System 2 is related to general intelligence while System 1 processing levels are independent of general intelligence. Researchers have generally concluded that high cognitive ability is better able to suppress belief bias, and Evans' experiments showed that although high cognitive ability performs more logically in reasoning tasks, belief bias affects them in the same way as low cognitive ability. Cognitive ability can help System 2 solve more complex, abstract problems [9].

In addition, dual system theory states that when people make judgments, especially moral judgments, two systems are involved, the emotional system (System1), which responds quickly and straightforwardly, and the cognitive system (System2), which responds more slowly and organizes the optimal solution among the many available options. When people use a foreign language, the effort of organizing the language causes them to use the cognitive system more, thus reducing the subconscious emotional response. In other words, people are more rational, calm, objective and dispassionate when people use a foreign language.

Some respondents said that when they watch non-native language movies and TV shows, even if they do not understand the meaning of most foreign languages, they can still feel the general meaning or even deeper, above the language, from the actors' mannerisms, movements and tone of voice. In contrast, Mandarin dubbing allows them to focus more on the language they can understand and ignore the deeper meaning behind the lines. The vernacular evokes the viewer's emotional system and helps them make intuitive judgments.

When watching a non-native language drama, the identity of the "audience" is very pure, and a membrane called "non-native language" separates the audience from the drama, allowing them to watch the drama more calmly and objectively, and figure out the characters and the plot. It is as if they have become another person with a non-native mind. When they watch the Mandarin dubbed version, this membrane is broken, and people will find that the dubbed actors describe scenes in their own familiar language that are completely different from their daily lives, and expressions that users hardly use in their daily lives. This sense of fragmentation is the main cause of "native language shame", and it is a testament to the unconscious emotional involvement of the audience when watching Mandarin dubbing in a non-native language.

Of course, a small number of respondents said that the level of Chinese dubbing actors was also an important factor in determining whether Mandarin dubbing would lead to "native language shame". An excellent dubbing work only allows the audience to understand the dialogue of the characters in the film, is far from satisfying the requirements of the majority of the audience for the integrity of film and television art, whether it is listeners or viewers, people cannot help but like a pleasant voice, more is willing to accept the kind of dubbing works that greatly play the characteristics of the original film characters [10]. It is well known that dubbing requires emotion and that the right amount of emotion contained in a Mandarin dub will resonate with a wider audience. It may even bring a deeper emotional experience to the audience than the non-native version.

5. Conclusion

At present, China's film and television have achieved higher and higher visibility in the international mainstream film and television market, but there are still some problems in cross-cultural communication. Besides, the mainstream of the Chinese film and TV drama market is still European, American, Japanese and Korean dramas, while Chinese local dramas are slightly declining due to technical reasons or lack of experience. At the same time, due to the lack of foreign language dubbing actors, it is difficult for the world to hear the voice of China. This has led to jokes about China's traditional culture being stolen by other countries. The author believes that China should vigorously support the cultural industry, train excellent Mandarin and foreign language dubbing actors, and tell the Chinese story well to the outside world while filling domestic youth with a sense

of identity and belonging to Chinese culture and increasing everyone's cultural confidence. The phenomenon of "mother tongue shame" will subside as the pride in the mother tongue and mother culture grows.

The method of investigation used by the author in this paper is inductive reasoning. However, this research method is deficient. It is impossible to exhaust all objects, and the conclusions drawn by induction are beyond the scope of the premises, and the conclusions are contingent in nature. In generalizing the commonality of things, the properties of things are seen as static, and it is difficult to generalize the development and future of things. The research the author has done is only a summary of the existing causes of "mother tongue shame," and it is not clear whether new causes will emerge as time progress. In order to improve this study, the author would like to improve it in the following ways. Firstly, the author will design a more detailed questionnaire by adding variable factors such as age, movie-going experience, and movie genre selection. Secondly, the author will increase the number of subjects and find subjects with different native language backgrounds to interview to verify whether this phenomenon is universal. Finally, the author will define the definition of "mother tongue shame" and expand the study to examine whether this phenomenon exists in other areas, such as dialects.

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