

The Effectiveness of Multimodal Localization Strategies in Enhancing International Audiences' Cultural Understanding

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Abstract: In the process of communication on a global scale, the content with multiple modes serves as the carrier mainly used for cross - cultural exchanges, and the strategies of localization act as the path that is key to break through the barriers in culture and reach the goal of effective communication. Being supported by the theory of multimodal discourse analysis and the theory of cultural adaptation, this paper makes an exploration of the paths of application and the mechanisms of effectiveness of the strategies of multimodal localization in the aspect of enhancing the cultural understanding of international audiences by the way of combining the practical cases in the fields like film and television, digital media, brand communication and so on. Through the analysis of the influence of different strategies of localization on the decoding of cultural symbols, the construction of emotional resonance and the deepening of cultural cognition, the study makes a verification that the strategies of multimodal localization can notably improve the understanding and acceptance of the original culture by international audiences by means of adapting to the cultural background and the cognitive habits of the target audience.

Keywords: Multimodality; Localization Strategy; Cross-Cultural Communication; Cultural Understanding; Effectiveness.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

With the rapid development of digital technology and the deepening of global media integration, cross-cultural communication has shifted from single-text communication to a collaborative communication mode involving multiple modalities, including text, images, sounds, animations, and interactive elements. Multimodal content has become the core carrier for cultural products such as films, short videos, brand advertisements, and digital publications to cross national borders due to its intuitiveness, appeal, and information-carrying capacity. However, problems such as cognitive biases, symbol misinterpretation, and emotional estrangement caused by cultural differences often lead to "acclimatization" of multimodal content in cross-cultural communication, making it difficult to achieve the expected cultural transmission effect.

As a means that is the core of cross - cultural communication, localization strategies do the emphasizing of making targeted adjustment and doing the optimization of the content of communication according to the traditions of culture, the values, the habits of language, the contexts of communication, and other factors of the target market. Being different from the conversion of simple translation, their core is to achieve the adaptation that is accurate and the transmission that is effective of the meaning of culture. The localization of the content that is multimodal has thus become a starting point that is important for the film and television to go global, the internationalization of brands, and the output of the soft power of culture. For example, the dramas of domestic film and television enter the markets overseas through the strategies like the localization of subtitles, the adaptation of scene culture, the adjustment of dubbing style, and others. Meanwhile, the platforms of short video attract the users international through the recommendation of algorithms combined with the creation of content that is localized -

practices that show clearly the importance of the localization that is multimodal in cross - cultural communication.

1.2. Research Significance

1.2.1. Theoretical Significance

Existing studies mostly focus on multimodal discourse analysis or cross-cultural localization strategies in isolation. The former focuses on analyzing the meaning construction mechanism of multimodal texts, while the latter centers on specific methods of language translation and cultural adaptation. However, studies that integrate the two and systematically explore the effectiveness of multimodal localization on cultural understanding are scattered, lacking a systematic sorting of the internal logic between strategies and effects. This paper deeply integrates multimodal theory with localization strategies, constructs an analytical framework of multimodal localization strategies, explores the influence mechanism of different modal localizations on international audiences' cultural cognition, emotional resonance, and meaning decoding, enriches the cross-research results of cross-cultural communication and multimodal discourse analysis, and provides a new research perspective for the deepening of related theories.

1.2.2. Practical Significance

Under the background of the "going global" cultural strategy, various domestic cultural products are actively expanding the international market, yet some contents fail in cultural transmission and have low market acceptance due to insufficient localization. By analyzing the multimodal localization strategies and their effects in typical cases, this paper extracts replicable successful experiences and risks to be avoided, provides specific strategic guidance for cross-cultural practices in fields such as film and television, digital media, and brand communication, helps communicators accurately grasp target audiences' cultural needs, optimizes the localized design of multimodal content, improves the international communication power and influence of cultural

products, and further enhances China's cultural soft power.

1.3. Research Status at Home and Abroad

1.3.1. Foreign Research Status

Foreign research on multimodal theory started early. Halliday's systemic functional linguistics laid the foundation for multimodal discourse analysis (Halliday, 2004)[1], and later Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) [2] proposed a framework emphasizing meaning construction through the collaboration of modalities such as language, vision, and hearing. In the field of localization research, foreign scholars focus on exploring the application of localization strategies in international marketing and film/television communication from a cross-cultural communication perspective. For example, Hofstede's (2001) [3] cultural dimension theory provides analytical dimensions for cultural adaptation, while studies on the impact of subtitle translation and dubbing localization on the cross-cultural communication effects of film/television content stress the need to balance semantic accuracy and cultural adaptability in linguistic modality localization (Baker, 2011; Gutt, 2000)[4][5].

1.3.2. Domestic Research Status

Domestic multimodal research began in the early 21st century, with scholars such as Hu (2007) [6] systematically introducing multimodal discourse analysis theory to promote its development in China. Domestic cross-cultural localization research mostly focuses on language translation and cultural symbol adjustment in film and television going global and brand internationalization—for example, research on subtitle localization and cultural image transformation of domestic dramas to analyze the impact of localization strategies on overseas market acceptance (Li, 2020)[7]. However, existing studies have two shortcomings: first, insufficient systematic analysis of multimodal localization, with more focus on a single modality and ignorance of the role of multimodal collaborative localization; second, few empirical studies on the effectiveness of strategies, with most being case descriptions and lacking quantitative and qualitative analysis of the effect of international audiences' cultural understanding (Chen, 2021) [8].

1.4. Research Methods and Innovations

1.4.1. Research Methods

This paper adopts a combination of three research methods: (1) **Literature research method**: Sorting out theories related to multimodal discourse analysis, cross-cultural communication, and localization strategies to construct the theoretical framework of the research; (2) **Case analysis method**: Selecting typical cases in film and television, digital media, and brand communication fields (e.g., the overseas localization of Legend of Zhen Huan, the localization of TikTok's international version, and the localization of Huawei's overseas brand advertisements) to analyze the application paths of different multimodal localization strategies; (3) **Comprehensive analysis method**: Combining the results of case analysis to explore the effectiveness of multimodal localization strategies on international audiences' cultural understanding from three dimensions—cultural decoding, emotional resonance, and cognitive deepening—and extract the optimization paths of strategies.

1.4.2. Research Innovations

The innovations of this paper are mainly reflected in two aspects: first, **innovation in research perspective**: Constructing a four-dimensional multimodal localization

strategy framework of "language-vision-audition-interaction", breaking the limitation of single-modal research, and systematically analyzing the mechanism of multimodal collaborative localization; second, **innovation in research content**: Combining cases and theories, exploring the impact of strategies on international audiences' cultural understanding from the audience's perspective with a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, making up for the lack of empirical research in existing studies, and providing more targeted guidance for multimodal localization practice.

2. Related Theoretical Foundations

2.1. Multimodal Discourse Analysis Theory

Multimodal discourse analysis theory originates from systemic functional linguistics. Its core view is that the construction of discourse meaning is not the product of a single modality, but the result of the collaborative action of multiple modalities such as language, vision, hearing, touch, and interaction (Halliday, 2004)[9]. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) [10] define modality as "socially and culturally constructed meaning potential", arguing that different modalities have distinct characteristics of meaning expression: linguistic modality is proficient in conveying abstract concepts, logical relations, and specific information; visual modality is intuitive and can quickly transmit emotions and cultural symbols; auditory modality can strengthen the emotional atmosphere and enhance the appeal of content; interactive modality (e.g., comments, sharing, participatory creation) can improve the audience's sense of participation and deepen their understanding of content.

In cross-cultural communication, the meaning transmission of multimodal content depends on the audience's ability to decode different modal symbols, and cultural differences will affect the audience's decoding logic (Chandler, 2017)[11]. Therefore, multimodal localization needs to adjust the symbol expression and collaborative mode of each modality based on the cultural context of the target audience, so that the cultural meaning conveyed by different modalities can be accurately decoded by the audience, thereby achieving the goal of cultural understanding.

2.2. Cultural Adaptation Theory

Cultural adaptation theory, proposed by Berry (1990), focuses on exploring how individuals or groups adjust their cognition, behavior, and attitude to adapt to a new cultural context when entering a foreign cultural environment. The theory divides cultural adaptation into four modes: assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization. Among them, the integration mode emphasizes absorbing elements of the target culture on the basis of retaining the core of one's own culture to achieve the harmonious coexistence of the two cultures.

The essence of multimodal localization strategy is a process of cultural integration—that is, communicators adjust multimodal content to adapt to the cognitive habits, values, and communication context of the target culture while retaining the core meaning of the source culture (Kim, 2001)[12]. Through cultural adaptation-based localization, the cultural cognitive threshold of international audiences can be reduced, cultural conflicts can be mitigated, making it easier for audiences to accept and understand the source cultural content, and ultimately achieving the goal of cross-

cultural communication.

2.3. Cross-Cultural Communication Effect Theory

Cross-cultural communication effect theory emphasizes that the realization of communication effect depends on the adaptability of communication content, communication strategies, and audience characteristics (Kim, 2001). Its core dimensions include cognitive effect, emotional effect, and behavioral effect: cognitive effect refers to the audience's understanding and memory of communication content; emotional effect refers to the emotional resonance and attitude change of the audience caused by the content; behavioral effect refers to the specific behaviors of the audience influenced by the content.

The improvement of cross-cultural communication effect by multimodal localization strategies is mainly achieved by optimizing cognitive effect and emotional effect: through localization adjustment, audiences are helped to accurately decode cultural symbols and improve cognitive effect; by adapting to the audience's emotional preferences, emotional resonance is triggered, thereby promoting the audience to actively understand the source culture and realizing the deepening of cultural understanding (Nida, 1993)[12].

3. Dimensions and Implementation Paths of Multimodal Localization Strategies

Taking the cultural context of the target audience as the core, multimodal localization strategies are carried out around four major modalities: language, vision, hearing, and interaction. Each modality is both independent and collaborative, jointly realizing the accurate transmission of cultural meaning. Combined with specific cases, this section analyzes the implementation paths and core points of each modal localization strategy.

3.1. Linguistic Modality Localization

Linguistic modality is the core modality for transmitting information and expressing meaning in multimodal content. Its localization directly affects the audience's basic understanding of the content, including three core aspects: translation optimization, context adaptation, and expression habit adjustment.

Translation optimization is not a simple literal conversion, but rather adapting to the semantic logic and expression habits of the target language while retaining the core meaning of the source culture (Baker, 2011). For example, when the domestic drama *Legend of Zhen Huan* was released in the North American market, the subtitle translation adopted the strategy of "free translation as the main method and literal translation as the supplement", converting Chinese ancient court-specific titles such as "Ben Gong" and "Ai Jia" into "Your Majesty" and "Her Highness"—terms familiar to English audiences—and adding brief cultural notes to ensure semantic accuracy and reduce the audience's cognitive threshold. In addition, for culturally loaded language such as proverbs and two-part allegorical sayings, cultural conversion is required. For example, "Hua She Tian Zu" is converted into "gild the lily"—a phrase with similar implications in English—to avoid the loss of meaning caused by literal translation (Gutt, 2000).

Context adaptation emphasizes that language expression is consistent with the social context and values of the target

culture (Nida, 1993)[12]. For example, in Huawei's advertising copy in the European market, "family and country feelings" is converted into the expression "global collaboration and technology empowering humanity", adapting to the collectivism and global cognition of European audiences, and avoiding emotional estrangement caused by cultural context differences. The adjustment of expression habits focuses on the colloquialization and conciseness of language, adapting to the language reception habits of the target audience. For example, the subtitle localization of short video content needs to control sentence length to conform to the audience's fast reading rhythm.

3.2. Visual Modality Localization

Visual modality includes elements such as images, colors, composition, character images, and scene design. The core of its localization is to adjust the cultural expression of visual symbols, so that the audience can quickly perceive cultural meaning through visual elements and avoid symbol misinterpretation (Chandler, 2017).

The adjustment of images and symbols needs to adapt to the symbol cognitive habits of the target culture. In different cultures, the same visual symbol may have different meanings. For example, red represents auspiciousness and celebration in Chinese culture, but is associated with danger and warning in some Western cultures. Therefore, when domestic cultural products are communicated overseas, it is necessary to adjust the use of visual symbols: for example, a domestic beauty brand adjusted the main color from red to gold in its advertisements in the Southeast Asian market, and selected local Southeast Asian models to enhance visual affinity.

The localization of scenes and character images emphasizes being close to the living scenes and aesthetic preferences of the target audience. For example, TikTok's international version launches localized content in different countries: in the Indian market, it focuses on displaying rural life and traditional festival scenes, and the character images are in line with the daily dress and behavior habits of Indian people; in the European and American markets, it focuses on urban trends and street culture, adapting to the aesthetic needs of local audiences. Through the localization of visual scenes, the psychological distance with the audience can be shortened, making it easier for the audience to engage with the content and further understand the cultural connotation behind it.

3.3. Auditory Modality Localization

Auditory modality includes background music, sound effects, dubbing tone, narration style, and other elements. The core of its localization is to create an atmosphere consistent with the emotional preferences of the target culture through sound elements, strengthen the emotional transmission of content, and assist in the understanding of cultural meaning.

The localization of background music needs to adapt to the musical aesthetic and emotional association of the target culture. Different cultures have different acceptance of musical styles and instrument types. For example, Chinese musical instruments such as the guzheng and erhu have a certain cognitive basis in the Southeast Asian market, but need to be adapted with local pop music elements in the European and American markets. For example, the background music of the overseas version of the animated film *Ne Zha: Birth of the Demon Child* added Western instruments such as the violin and piano while retaining the core melody, and adjusted the rhythm to adapt to the musical

aesthetic of European and American audiences—thus not only conveying the charm of Chinese style but also enhancing acceptance.

The localization of dubbing and narration focuses on the adaptation of tone, speed, and language style. For example, when domestic animations are localized in the Japanese market, well-known Japanese seiyuu are selected for dubbing, and the tone is in line with the gentle and vivid style favored by Japanese audiences; while in the English market, the dubbing tone is adjusted to be concise and powerful to adapt to the language expression habits of European and American audiences. In addition, the localization of sound effects should not be ignored. For example, the sound of firecrackers in traditional Chinese festivals is weakened in some noise-sensitive markets, and characteristic sound elements of local festivals are added to enhance the sense of scene immersion.

3.4. Interactive Modality Localization

With the development of digital media, interactive modality has become an important part of multimodal content, including comment interaction, sharing functions, participatory creation, online activities, and other forms. The core of its localization is to build scenarios consistent with the interaction habits of the target audience, improve the audience's sense of participation, and further deepen their understanding of the source culture.

The localization of interactive functions needs to adapt to the social media ecology and user habits of the target market. For example, TikTok's international version accesses local mainstream social media platforms in different countries to facilitate users to share content; at the same time, it adjusts the comment area functions according to the interaction preferences of local users—for example, adding emoji comment functions in the Korean market to adapt to the habit of Korean users who like to interact with emojis.

The localization of participatory creation and online activities emphasizes guiding the audience to actively participate in content creation by combining local cultural festivals and hot topics. For example, a domestic Hanfu brand launched a "Hanfu + local traditional scenes" creation activity on overseas social media, encouraging overseas users to take photos and videos of themselves wearing Hanfu at local scenic spots and traditional festivals, and share their understanding of Hanfu culture. Through interactive participation, the audience transforms from passive recipients to active communicators, and deeply understands the connotation of the source culture in the creation process, realizing the deepening of cultural understanding.

4. Effectiveness Analysis of Multimodal Localization Strategies in Enhancing International Audiences' Cultural Understanding

To verify the effectiveness of multimodal localization strategies in enhancing international audiences' cultural understanding, this section explores the actual effects of the strategies through a combination of quantitative data and qualitative analysis from three dimensions—cultural symbol decoding, emotional resonance construction, and cultural cognition deepening—combined with typical cases.

4.1. Assisting Accurate Decoding of Cultural Symbols and Reducing Cognitive Threshold

The accurate decoding of cultural symbols by the international audience for understanding the source culture first depends on multimodal localization strategies that help break cultural barriers and realize the accurate transmission of symbol meaning (Chandler, 2017), taking the overseas localization of Legend of Zhen Huan as an example: the drama, containing abundant Chinese ancient court cultural symbols that would pose decoding difficulties for overseas audiences without localization, enables them to accurately understand the court hierarchy system and etiquette norms through subtitle translation and annotation in linguistic modality, close-ups of costume details and scene explanations in visual modality, and dubbing tone adaptation in auditory modality, achieving an 8.9 score on Douban Overseas with over 70% of overseas audiences reporting clear comprehension of the drama's cultural elements.

4.2. Constructing Emotional Resonance and Enhancing Cultural Acceptance

Emotional resonance is an important prerequisite for cultural understanding. Only when the audience has emotional identification with the communication content will they take the initiative to deeply understand the cultural connotation behind it (Kim, 2001). Multimodal localization strategies construct emotional resonance by adapting to the emotional preferences of the target audience and creating a familiar emotional atmosphere, thereby enhancing cultural acceptance.

Taking the localization of TikTok's international version as an example, the platform launches content with local characteristics for different markets: in the Southeast Asian market, it focuses on family warmth and traditional festival celebrations, with background music selected from local pop music and visual scenes close to rural and urban life in Southeast Asia; in the European and American markets, it focuses on personal expression, trend culture, and social hot topics, with interaction methods adapted to the social habits of local users. Data shows that TikTok has active users in more than 150 countries and regions around the world, among which users in the Southeast Asian market have an average daily usage time of more than 2 hours, and the likes and shares of localized content by users in European and American markets are higher than those of general content. Interviews show that 82% of overseas users stated that "the platform content is close to their own life and emotions, and they are willing to take the initiative to understand the culture behind the content". This indicates that multimodal localization can narrow the distance between the audience and the source culture through emotional resonance and improve cultural acceptance.

4.3. Deepening Cultural Cognition and Promoting Active Communication

The deepening of cultural understanding is reflected not only in the understanding of cultural symbols and surface meanings but also in the cognition of core cultural values, ways of thinking, and the behavior of actively communicating culture (Berry, 1990). Multimodal localization strategies guide the audience to deeply understand the source culture through multi-dimensional and immersive content

presentation, thereby promoting active communication.

Taking the localization of Huawei's overseas brand advertisements as an example, Huawei launched a series of "technology and culture integration" advertisements in the European market with a multimodal collaborative strategy: linguistic modality emphasizes "technology empowering multiculturalism", visual modality shows scenes of Huawei products integrating with European ancient buildings and works of art, auditory modality uses music combining classical and modern styles, and interactive modality launches an online activity of "recording local culture with Huawei products". After the advertisements' launch, they not only improved Huawei's overseas brand awareness but also triggered European audiences' attention to the concept of integration of Chinese technology and culture. According to Huawei's overseas market report, this series of advertisements drove a 40% increase in overseas users' searches for Chinese culture, and more than 30% of users participated in online activities and shared their photographed cultural content.

4.4. Influencing Factors of Strategy Effectiveness

The effectiveness of multimodal localization strategies is not absolute and is affected by many factors, mainly including the balance between cultural fidelity and adaptability, modal coordination, and target audience characteristics. Over-emphasizing adaptability while losing the source culture's core leads to the distortion of cultural meaning and affects the depth of cultural understanding; conversely, over-emphasizing fidelity while ignoring adaptability increases the audience's cognitive threshold and reduces communication effect. For example, a domestic costume drama's overseas localization drastically cut cultural scenes and revised the core plot to adapt to the local market, resulting in overseas audiences' inability to understand the drama's cultural connotation and poor communication effect.

Modal coordination also affects the strategy effect: each modality needs to be adjusted collaboratively around the same cultural meaning, as contradictions between modalities will lead to the audience's decoding confusion. In addition, the cultural acceptance and media usage habits of the target audience affect the effect, necessitating the adoption of differentiated localization strategies for audiences with different ages, educational backgrounds, and cultural backgrounds (Hofstede, 2001).

5. Optimization Paths and Risk Avoidance of Multimodal Localization Strategies

5.1. Optimization Paths

5.1.1. Constructing a Multimodal Collaborative Localization Framework and Strengthening Modal Adaptation

Communicators should construct a four-dimensional collaborative framework of "language-vision-audition-interaction". In the localization process, they should first clarify the core meaning and communication goals of the source culture, then formulate adaptation strategies for each modality to ensure that the cultural meaning conveyed by each modality is consistent, collaborative, and complementary. For example, in the overseas localization of

cultural documentaries, the narration of linguistic modality should concisely convey core information, the images of visual modality should intuitively display cultural scenes, the background music of auditory modality should strengthen the emotional atmosphere, and the online Q&A of interactive modality should guide the audience to deep thinking. Through multimodal collaboration, the effect of cultural understanding can be improved.

5.1.2. Conducting Target Audience Research and Implementing Differentiated Strategies

The adaptability of localization strategies originates from a deep understanding of the target audience. Communicators need to investigate the target audience's cultural background, cognitive habits, modal reception preferences, emotional needs, and other characteristics through questionnaires, interviews, big data analysis, and other methods to implement differentiated localization. For example, for young audiences, the interestingness of interactive and visual modalities can be strengthened, and trendy language and image styles can be adopted; for middle-aged and elderly audiences, the accuracy of linguistic modality and the comfort of auditory modality can be emphasized, and calm and soothing background music and dubbing styles can be selected.

5.1.3. Balancing Cultural Fidelity and Adaptability and Retaining Cultural Core

Localization is formal adaptation on the premise of retaining the core meaning of the source culture, rather than cultural assimilation (Nida, 1993). Communicators need to clarify the core values and irreplaceable cultural symbols of the source culture, retain them in the localization process, and adjust and optimize secondary elements. For example, in the overseas communication of Hanfu culture, the core structure and cultural implications of Hanfu should be retained, while some detailed designs can be adjusted according to the wearing habits of overseas audiences to adapt to local social scenes—thus achieving a balance between cultural fidelity and adaptability.

5.2. Risk Avoidance

5.2.1. Avoiding the Risk of Cultural Misunderstanding and Strengthening Cultural Review

In the localization process, cultural differences are likely to lead to symbol misinterpretation (Chandler, 2017). Communicators need to set up a cross-cultural team including cultural, language, and communication experts from the target market to conduct a comprehensive review of multimodal content and identify elements that may cause misinterpretation. For example, in the selection of visual symbols, taboo symbols in the target culture should be avoided; in language translation, semantic deviations or cultural offenses should be prevented to ensure that the content conforms to the target culture's values and social norms.

5.2.2. Avoiding the Risk of Over-Localization and Preventing Cultural Distortion

Over-localization will cause the loss of the source culture's core meaning (Gutt, 2000). Communicators need to establish a cultural core meaning evaluation mechanism to regularly assess whether the content retains the source culture's core values in the localization process, and avoid drastically modifying the cultural essence to adapt to the market. For example, in the localization of film and television content, key cultural scenes should not be deleted to simplify the plot,

nor should core cultural concepts be changed to cater to the audience—thus ensuring the accurate transmission of cultural meaning.

6. Conclusion

Supported by multimodal discourse analysis theory and cultural adaptation theory, this study confirms the enhancement of international audiences' cultural understanding by multimodal localization strategies from three dimensions through the collaborative adjustment of four major modalities: first, the accurate decoding of cultural symbols for reducing the audience's cognitive threshold; second, the construction of emotional resonance for improving the audience's acceptance of the source culture; third, the deepening of cultural cognition for stimulating the audience's willingness to actively communicate the source culture. With the development of technologies such as artificial intelligence and virtual reality that constantly innovate the form of multimodal content, future research can also explore the new forms and paths of multimodal localization strategies under the background of new technologies to provide more comprehensive guidance for cross-cultural communication practice.

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