

Subtitle Analysis of *A Swing Maker* under Multimodal Discourse Analysis

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Abstract: Nowadays, movies have gradually become one of the main ways of global cultural communication, and movie subtitle translation has also become an important factor for foreign audiences to better understand the content of the movie, therefore, the study of movie subtitle translation is urgent. With the increasingly deepening of China's foreign exchanges, Chinese movies, as a carrier of Chinese culture, have gradually come into the international field of vision as an important way of spreading Chinese culture and promoting cultural exchanges. Therefore, the study of movie subtitle translation has become one of the main ways to better tell Chinese stories. Different from traditional translation, movie subtitle translation needs to take more factors into consideration, including movie images, speaker's character traits, and the influence of movie layout, etc. Therefore, this paper uses multimodal discourse analysis to analyze the subtitles of *A Swing Maker* in order to analyze the influence of movie images, movie plots, and character traits on subtitle translation. *A Swing Maker* mainly tells the story of Chinese oilmen, through the subtitle translation analysis of the movie, it is more conducive to the dissemination of the spirit of Chinese oil story to other countries, telling the story of Chinese oil well, and contributing to the dissemination of the story of Chinese oil.

Keywords: Multimodal Discourse Analysis; *A Swing Maker*; Subtitle Translation.

1. Introduction

Under the environment of global cultural intermingling and interoperability, TV and movies have become one of the main ways of global cultural communication, and multimodal discourse analysis refers to the phenomenon of using multiple senses such as hearing, vision, touch, etc., and communicating through multiple means and symbolic resources such as language, image, sound, and so on. The theory of multimodal discourse analysis is often used in multimedia discourse such as advertisements, posters, news, etc., but it is less used in movie analysis. But movies, as the main vehicle for telling China's story, have now become one of the most important ways to show the country's cultural and historical heritage, so the study of movie subtitle translation is urgent. This paper analyzes the subtitle translation of the movie *A Swing Maker*, combining multimodal discourse analysis and subtitle translation, therefore, better promoting the foreign dissemination of China's oil story. Based on multimodal discourse analysis, this paper analyzes the oil story, *A Swing Maker*, so as to disseminate the spirit of Chinese oil story to the outside world and tell the Chinese oil story well.

2. Multimodal Discourse Analysis Theory

The American structuralist linguist Zelling Harris proposed discourse analysis in the 1950s. However, various discourse analysis theories were limited to language itself, ignoring the influence of non-verbal forms such as visual images and facial expressions on semantic communication.[1] In the 1990s, Kress & Leeuwen first put forward the concept of multimodal discourse in the book *Reading Images*, arguing that image symbols have the same function of transmitting information as words. It also constructs a basic framework of visual images and uses visual image communication and media studies as the main elements of research discourse

analysis.[2]

In the past 30 years, multimodal discourse analysis has gradually entered the vision of scholars at home and abroad. The famous scholar Zhang Delu[8] proposed a comprehensive theoretical framework for multimodal discourse analysis based on the theory of systemic functional linguistics, which includes four aspects: culture, context, content and expression. This paper mainly analyzes the comprehensive theoretical framework of multimodal discourse analysis proposed by Zhang Delu.

3. Subtitle Translation of *A Swing Maker* under Multimodal Discourse Analysis

3.1. Introduction to *A Swing Maker*

A swing Maker is based on the real work and life of grassroots oilmen, tells the story of what happened to ordinary oilmen, embodies the dedication of the old generation of oilmen who are always on the front line of oil extraction, and reflects the efforts and sacrifices made by oilmen to guarantee the energy supply of the motherland. Through the study of its subtitle translation, it can better tell the story of China's oil, spread the spirit of China's oil, and better convey China's voice to the world.

3.2. Multimodal Discourse Analysis and Subtitle Translation

Snell-Hornby classifies multimodal discourse into four categories: multimedia texts, multimodal texts, multisymbolic texts and audio media texts. Movies are typical multimedia texts as they are disseminated through the technology of designing visuals and sounds as well as electronics, integrating text, sound and animation. Movie subtitle translation has different characteristics, belongs to the typical film and television discourse, and is different from other forms of translation genres, so it has higher requirements in terms of logic, artistry and infectiousness of

language.[13] The theory of multimedia discourse analysis breaks through the limitations of traditional film and television translation research to a great extent, integrating language with other meaning symbols, which can maximize the communication purpose expected by the original subtitles. Therefore, multimodal discourse analysis can combine plot, sound and picture to a great extent, and better guide the translation of movie subtitles.

3.3. Four Dimensions of Multimodal Discourse Analysis

3.3.1. The Cultural Dimension

The cultural dimension of multimodal discourse analysis is the key dimension that makes multimodal communication possible. [5] The cultural dimension reflects cultural connotations and is a prerequisite for the realization of communication. Communicative traditions, communicative forms and techniques are all determined by this dimension. Without this dimension, situational context loses its explanatory power. The cultural dimension includes human thinking patterns, ways of doing things, living habits and all the ideologies composed of subtle rules in a particular society. And this movie mainly tells the story of grassroots oilmen, so the language style in the movie is more simple, straightforward, and closely related to the characters and so on. Therefore, translators must resolve the cultural differences between China and the West and adopt appropriate translations to express the meaning of the source language subtitles with clear translation context.

Case 1: That we oilmen are like stones, half was carved into a Buddha, while the other half was made into stairs, the stairs were always trod by people who came to worship the Buddha. One day, the stairs asked the Buddha angrily: Since we were both made of stones why you deserved to be worshipped every day while I had to be trod on? The Buddha said, you were carved only once before you taking up your position, while I have suffered from thousands of cuts to become a Buddha.

Analysis: In the movie, the context of this quote is that Fan, a newcomer to the oil field, thinks of escaping because he is not accustomed to the harsh environment here, but after he falls off a cliff and is rescued, the main character, Huanrong, gives Fan words of relief and reveals that success can only be achieved after going through the process of refinement. This example compares oilmen to “stones”, some of which can be carved to become “Buddha”, but others can only become steps for people to step on when worshipping the Buddha, which implies that only by adapting to the hard environment of the oil fields can Fan achieve something, and also expresses the idea of “the oilmen perseverance and willingness to work hard”. The spirit of the oilmen is unforgiving and devoted. In this example, the concept of “Buddha” is mainly involved. In this sentence, Huanrong contrasts “step” with “Buddha”, which is also a more popular word in the West. Nowadays, “Buddha” is also a more widely known example in the West, so the translator does not make much explanation here and directly translates it as “Buddha”, but the word “Buddha” is not used in the same way. Secondly, because the traditional Chinese cultural spirit is “never giving up”, the translator translates it as “thousands of cuts”, which conveys the spirit of Chinese culture to the foreign audience. In addition, since this sentence mainly adopts the way of storytelling, the language of the translation is consistent with the style of the original text, using simpler words to convey

the idea of the original text in a more concise and precise way.

Case 2: Station master, this is the medical report for Master Liu issued by the hospital

Analysis: In Chinese cultural tradition, people with their own skills can be called “master”, which is a kind and respectful term in Chinese, but there is no word corresponding to “master” in English, so in order to better convey the idea of the original text, the translator chose the word “master”, which means “an artist of consummate skill”. Although it is difficult to achieve complete equivalence, the word “master” expresses the respect for “Master Liu” and the affirmation of his skills, and to a large extent, it can convey the meaning of the original text to the audience of the translated text. However, the shortcoming is that the translator may have translated it as “station master” for the sake of comparison, although “master” here corresponds to “master Liu” later, which may bring ambiguity to the audience of the translation. Therefore, although the translator takes into account the contextualization, he should also pay attention to the appropriateness of the words used to avoid bringing negative feelings to the audience.

3.3.2. Contextual dimension

Communication is subject to the constraints of contextual factors, including discourse scope, discourse tone, discourse mode and other contextual factors. These 3 contextual factors are also known as the 3 variables of situational context. Discourse scope refers to what is happening, what activities are being engaged in, etc.; discourse tone refers to who is talking to whom and the role relationship between them; and discourse mode refers to the role of language in the context.[8] The context of subtitle translation is the real communicative situation in which the dialogues in the movie take place. The macro-overall context involves the time background, historical background and cultural background in which the movie story takes place; the micro specific context is the context in which the subtitles are located. In the specific context of the movie, the specific behavior of the characters will also be constrained by the context. Therefore, the choice of specific vocabulary should also be examined in relation to different levels of context.

Case 3: “Haven’t seen you all day, never have guessed that you are making a swing here.”

“I have nothing to do. Rather than idle around, I thought it’s better to make a swing for you and Xiao Fan to have fun.”

Analysis: The background of this line is: Huanrong, an old oilman, is making a swing for Xiao Ke and Xiao Fan, who are newcomers to the oil field. This line of the movie mentions “making a swing”, which echoes the title of the movie, “*A Swing Maker*”. There are many references to the act of “making a swing” in the movie, but the translations are different. The author believes that the key words of the movie can be repeated appropriately, so as to deepen the audience’s impression. The translation of movie subtitles is the translator’s intention to convey the message so that the audience in other languages can also have the same feeling. At the same time, the word “swing” does not only refer to this simple action, but also represents a kind of spiritual inheritance, in which Huanrong, an old-generation oilman, passes his experience to the new-generation oilmen, such as Xiao Ke and Xiao Fan, which highlights the great dedication of China’s oilmen. Secondly, the meaning of “hiding” in the original text is different from that of “hide” in English, which is not really “hide”, but more inclined to a verbal term in Chinese. Therefore, the translator chose to delete it here to

avoid misleading the audience by translating it according to the original characters.

3.3.3. Content Level

The content level consists of two levels: meaning and form. The meaning level refers to the meaning of the discourse, while the form level designs the formal systems of the various modalities, i.e., the syntactic systems unique to the various modalities. At the level of discourse meaning, there are conceptual, interpersonal, and schematic meanings that are constrained by the scope, tone, and mode of discourse; at the level of form, the formal features of the different modalities are interrelated, and together they embody discourse meaning.

Case 4: French government asked workers of the refineries in the suburbs of Paris to stop their strike yesterday, but met with their refusal. The striking workers set up roadblocks to stop the traffic. Affected by the strikes 11 out of the major refineries owned by the French government are forced to shut down.

Analysis: The context here is the news broadcast by the presenter as Huanrong and other oilmen watch the TV together. The style of translation is also closer to the formality of the news, which is more formal than the casualness of translating the dialogues of the task. Different from the fixed text style of text translation, movie subtitle translation may have multiple language styles and characteristics, in which different characters have different expression habits. So here is a news broadcast screen, the subtitle translation style should be consistent with its style. News, as a non-literary functional text, has an overall objective and standardized language style, refined and accurate language, generally describes objective facts, and seldom involves personal opinions or emotional attitudes. Therefore, the style of the translation of this sentence is also more formal, for example, “French government asked workers”, “French government asked workers” and so on. are in a more formal style, which is consistent with the style of the original sentence, and at the same time restores the rigor of the news in the movie. It reflects the characteristics of movie subtitle translation, i.e., the translation style is appropriately adjusted according to different movie contents.

3.3.4. Expressive Dimension

The expressive level refers to the media level, which is the material form in which discourse is ultimately manifested in the material world, and consists of two major categories: linguistic and non-linguistic. The verbal includes pure language and accompanying language; the non-verbal includes physical and non-physical. The physical includes factors such as facial expressions, gestures, body postures and movements; the non-physical includes instrumental ones, such as PPT, labs, online platforms, practices, etc. Sound in movies, tone, music and songs can be regarded as sound symbols at the level of cinematic expression, the physical movements of the actors in the movie and the environment they are in can be translated as non-verbal media.

Case 5: In Jackson port, locating in Florida, bordering the Atlantic an oil depot called Shiduya exists. It has seven oil cylinders. On one night, a big fire suddenly broke out in one of the cylinders. The flames kept rising around the cylinder. The cylinders are very close to each other, if action was not been taken timely, the fire would soon spread to other cylinders, the seven cylinders would explode at the same time, which will even affect places that are miles away. What's worse, there are a lot of residents near the Shiduya oil depot, most of whom were still asleep, knowing nothing about the

tragic fate that is going to befall on them.

Analysis: The background of the story in this sentence is that the oilfield is conducting a safety education program, and the newcomer to the oilfield, Xiao Fan, who is not accustomed to the environment of the oilfield and is therefore not enthusiastic about his work here, does not take the matter of oilfield safety seriously. While Huanrong and other veteran workers were concentrating on watching the report, Xiao Fan was playing with her cell phone. The seriousness of the news report, the rigor of the old oilmen and the relaxed attitude of Xiao Fan form a strong contrast, and the different physical and behavioral expressions between the different tasks create the dramatic conflict of the movie. In the movie, the broadcast here is also in the form of news, so the translator translates it more formally when translating the subtitle, so as to better emphasize the dramatic conflict of the movie. The words “around the cylinder”, “the cylinders are close to each other” and so on vividly portray the urgency of the situation. “Affect places that are miles away”, “the tragic fate that is going to befall on them” and so on depict the consequences of failing to realize the situation in time. Meanwhile, here, the old oilmen's worried expression contrasts strongly with Xiao Fan's behavior of playing with her cell phone in boredom.

However, the translator here directly translated the name as “Shiduya Oil depot”, the author believes that this is slightly inappropriate, although in film and television dramas are common codification of people's names, place names, but according to the text before and after it can be seen, this oil depot is located in the Atlantic Ocean, and therefore it should have its own name in English, for example, in the oil and gas, the translator will be the Eagle Ford shale in the United States translated as “Eagle Ford”, so it can be seen that the translator here directly take the phonetic translation is inappropriate. Secondly, due to the influence of the movie format, the screen and projection are limited in length, so sometimes a complete sentence cannot appear at the same time, for example, the long paragraph here may be influenced by the clauses of the movie, and the translator translates it as a short sentence, which is not in line with the English custom to a certain extent, but due to the difference between the translation of the subtitles of the movie and the traditional translation, the subtitle translation of the movie puts more emphasis on the brevity, so the translator's treatment here is not appropriate.

4. Conclusion

This paper analyzes the subtitle translation of the Chinese oil film *A Swing Maker* based on the multimodal discourse analysis framework proposed by Zhang Delu. The author analyzed the subtitle translation of *A Swing Maker* from four levels: cultural level, contextual level, content level and expression level. At the same time, as movie subtitle translation is different from traditional translation in many ways, translators cannot just translate according to the previous standards, but should take more account of multiple modes, take care of the audience's viewing experience, and take the audience of the translated subtitles as the guide. It is necessary to accurately grasp the historical background and cultural ideology of the film story, but also to make full use of the artistic expression of the film, thus effectively promoting the continuous improvement of the quality of film subtitle translation. Secondly, when translating movie subtitles, translators can't just focus on the subtitles themselves, but also consider the influence of other modalities in the movie and combine them. There are fewer

studies on multimodal discourse analysis in movie subtitle translation, so it is necessary to continue to explore in this area, which will help Chinese movies to go out of the country and better disseminate the story of China's oil story to the outside world and convey the spirit of China's oil story.

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