

A Multimodal Approach to the Subtitle Translation of Cruella

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Abstract: *The development and progress of society and science promote the emergence of multimodal discourse analysis. Compared with unimodal discourse, multimodal discourse analysis can improve the meaning of discourse expression and achieve better communication purposes. Film is a typical multimodal discourse, which combines a variety of symbolic modes such as image, music and technology. The complementarity of subtitles and these symbols is the key to convey information to the audience. Adopting a multimodal approach, this paper analyzes whether the subtitle translation of the film Cruella is successful in combination with multimodal theory from four aspects: context of culture, context of situation, semantics and form, and media.*

Keywords: *Multimodal Discourse, Subtitle Translation, Cruella*

1. Introduction

With the acceleration of social development, the development of science and technology has made remarkable progress. In the process of communication, people gradually get rid of the traditional single discourse mode. Various emerging elements, such as action, pictures, sound, etc., constantly appear in daily life. Therefore, the multimodal discourse that can carry and accept a variety of communicative elements was born. There are two criteria for judging whether a discourse has multimodality: one is to judge the number of modality types involved, such as vision, hearing, smell, taste, touch, etc.; the other is to judge the number of symbol system involved, such as technology, language, color, music, image, etc. According to the criteria, a discourse can be judged to be an unimodal discourse or a multimodal discourse (Zhu Yongsheng, 2007). Multimodal discourse is a kind of communication phenomenon, which refers to the process in which people communicate through perceiving shape, sound, smell, touch, and using symbolic resources and methods, such as sound, action, language and images (Zhang Delu, 2009). Its significance lies in improving the expression of the meaning, to achieve a better communication purpose. A film contains images, musics, technologies and other modes of symbols, which belongs to multimodal discourse. The complement of subtitles and these symbol modes is the key to convey information to audiences. Based on the theory of systemic functional linguistics, Zhang Delu proposed the theoretical framework of multimodal discourse analysis, which is composed of four levels: context of culture, context of situation, semantics and form, and media. From the perspective of multimodal discourse analysis and combined with these four levels, this paper studies the subtitle translation of the film Cruella. Hoping that subtitle translation can translate a more complete and accurate translation from a multimodal perspective, so as to provide a better viewing experience for the audience.

2. Literature Review

Systemic functional linguistics was founded by Halliday who is a famous British linguist. The related theories he proposed in this discipline became the most important theoretical reference and source of multimodal discourse analysis. Since the 1990s, the research of multimodal discourse analysis has never been interrupted. The multimodal theoretical model has been studied, analyzed, and gradually developed into a new discipline today which is widely used in media, teaching, art, architecture and other fields.

Foreign scholars with remarkable research achievements in this field are Kress & van Leeuwen. They adopt the viewpoint of systemic functional linguistics, arguing that visual structure is not only formal but also semantic (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). They constructed a set of grammatical

framework using visual images as the entry point. The representative domestic scholar in this regard is Professor Zhang Delu, who takes systemic functional linguistics as the theoretical basis and puts forward a set of theoretical framework for multimodal discourse analysis. This framework provides new ideas and theoretical guidance for domestic scholars to study multimodality, and has now been widely used. Other scholars have also contributed to multimodal research, for example, Harris and Luque extract Thibault's ideas (2000) and proposed that: the multimodal communication perspective interprets the text by integrating the meaning formation process of "language, gesture, action, image, and sound", producing the unique meaning of the text (Harris & Luque, 2009); they also agree with Adolphs and Carter (2007): Review, written, and spoken corpora do not represent language and communication hidden in the superficial meaning of words. Therefore, applying multimodal discourse to movie segment analysis is beneficial to focus on symbols such as movements and expressions, and can deeply study the gestures with information transfer functions.

Analyzing the subtitle translation of the film from a multimodal perspective can present a better translation and add diversity to the appreciation of the film. Multimodal subtitle translation fully considers the acceptability of the audience, which can make the audience get the best communication effect, and help them feel the culture, artistic conception and theme transmitted by different films. Therefore, the existence of different modes is to reflect the overall significance of the event, and the cooperation between the modes is the key to achieve the best communication effect of the film (Zhang Delu, 2009).

3. Case Analysis of Cruella

In June 2021, the film Cruella was released in China. The story background of this film is set in London, where the punk style prevails. According to this setting, the film uses British English pronunciation and the language and sound is vivid and funny. The narrator of the heroine Cruella draws the story forward. Classical and punk music runs throughout the film, highlighting that they are contradictory.

The film inherits Disney's exaggerated shooting techniques and magic style, bringing visual impact and enjoyment to the audience. Born in London in the 1970s, Estella's hair was half black and half white. She was raised by her mother. Once at Baroness Herman's ball, she witnessed her mother was attacked by a spotted dog and fall off a cliff to death. Without her mother, she had to live with two thieves and they became family. When she grew up, her talent in costume design was appreciated by Herman and then was hired as her assistant. She gradually discovered the truth about her mother's death. Revenge occupied her and she eventually became Cruella.

3.1 Context of Culture

Context of culture is the key level of multimodal communication. Without the context of culture, situational context cannot be properly understood. Nowadays, the phenomenon of international cultural export and penetration is very common, and there are more and more ways to understand the cultures of other countries. Among them, watching foreign films is the most convenient and vivid way. Disney series films have been deeply loved by the public because of their exquisite production, novel themes, strong colors and distinctive characters, and are indispensable for foreign films to output culture. Li Yunxing pointed out that film and television subtitle translation has the characteristics of simplified language, conversion of written language into spoken language, and progressive information promotion (Li Yunxing, 2001). When dealing with the paragraphs involving cultural differences, the translators should choose appropriate translation strategies according to different contexts. For example, they can use literal translation or liberal translation, domestication or foreignization, or add annotations behind the translation.

The difference between Chinese names and foreign names belongs to a kind of cultural difference. Translators more often use the principles of transliteration and literal translation to translate names, especially in subtitle translation. When the audience is familiar with the translation of the name, they can remember the name of the transliteration more quickly with dubbing. In considering of these facts, the translation of the heroine's name in Cruella has undergone three changes.

Example 1: That's cruel, your name's Estella, not Cruella.

The heroine's childhood name is Estella, this name is usually translated as "Aisi Daila" in Chinese. In order to conform to the Chinese language habit of pursuing symmetry, the translator translated it into

“Dai Yila”, which formed a formal equivalence with “Ku Yila”. This sentence is said by Estella’s mother because she is so naughty. It integrate the meaning of cruelty into Cruella, foreshadowing the end of changing name. After learning the truth about her mother’s death, in order to steal her necklace from Herman, Estella borrowed the name Cruella to attend the party. And since then she accepted the name for the first time.

Example 2: It’s Deville, mate, Deville.

The two friends who grew up with Cruella are called Jasper and Horace. One day after Cruella became famous, Horace drives a car called “Deville”, but he calls it “devil” and Jasper corrects him. Here, the dialogue between Jasper and Horace has shown the meaning of the discourse, and the translator can adopt the principle of literal translation. It set the tone for Cruella perfect her name into Cruella de Vil, echoing another version of the film’s title: Cruella de Vil. Both in China and in Britain, devils symbolize blood, darkness and doom, and people often resist it. The translator considered the cultural effect of “devil”, and made “Deville” a puns.

The translator translate names with transliteration and literal translation. The true meaning of the words “cruel” and “devil” is not mixed up with the source text. However, the blank is worth aftertaste. It not only retains the cultural characteristics of the British name and reflects the rebellious of London during the punk trend, but also conforms to the idea of the film. In addition, the translation of several slogans in the film also fully considers the cultural differences between Chinese and foreign countries as follows.

Example 3:

House of Baroness

EXCLUSIVELY AT Liberty OF LONDON

As Jasper and Cruella step out of the bus together, there’s a close-up shot: An advertisement for Baroness is printed on the side of the bus. The word “house” is translated into “Zhi Jia (the home of)” and “exclusively” is translated into “Zhuan Mai Dian (exclusive shop)”. The two expressions are ubiquitous in every corner of China’s commercial streets. These expressions are very human and fit the language of Chinese business culture and Chinese expression habits.

Example 4: SECONG TIME AROUND

This is a trade name of a clothing store. The translator did not literally translate it into “come here next time”, but adopted the translation strategy of free translation, separated from the text form of the original text, and fully retained the style of the original text. The translation is “Feng Cai Yi Jiu” in Chinese which means this store is elegant as before. The way of such expression full of literary charm which was in line with the background of the film and the language habits of China at that time.

3.2 Context of Situation

Context is divided into co-text, context of situation and context of culture (Hu Zhuanglin, 2007). Halliday once put forward that context of situation consists of three aspects: the field of discourse, the tenor of discourse and the mode of discourse. Among them, what role speakers play in the scope of discourse, the relationship between dialogue roles and what texts make discourse persuasive are the key to reflect the social meaning of discourse (Halliday, 1985). The stronger the situational dependence, the more obvious the multimodal nature of discourse communication (Zhang Delu, 2009). Therefore, subtling translators should combine modal factors such as the context of the dialogue, the situational context of the background and the cultural context involved to estimate whether the translation conforms to the context. In subtitle translation, the translation strategy of addition or omission is adopted to perfect or accurately express the meaning of the discourse.

Example 5: Oh, no. We’re starting here? Okay. From the very beginning, I’ve always made a statement. Not everyone appreciated that. But I wasn’t for everyone.

This is the first line of the film, in the form of a narration by Cruella. This statement is very British characteristics, and need to be combined with the context to give a proper translation. Recognizing that this sentence is a narration, “We’re starting here?” was translated into “Let me tell you my story start here”. So the audience can understand that “start” means here is where my story begins. The next one, “I’ve always made a statement.” can not be literally translated into “Sheng Ming (make a statement)”, it will make words inarticulate and difficult to understand. There is need to take situational context into

consideration: Cruella was born with black and white hair, and she was overwhelmed with crying. What happened next is also need to be considered: The weird color of Cruella's hair and her unapologetic personality got her into a lot of trouble and she almost got kicked out of school. These information come to one clue that Cruella's distinctive hair color and strong personality make the understanding "strong attitude" more appropriate. The last sentence "I wasn't born for everyone." It is difficult to express the personality of Cruella if literally translate it. The translator fully considers the influence of multimodal on subtitle translation and adjusts the translation according to the information given by the screen: After seeing Cruella's hair color, an old lady said that "That' unfortunate." Hence, the translation's meaning "I don't care about them either" is better. It shows the arrogant character incisively and vividly.

Example 6: Serious voice.

When Cruella and her mother drove up to Castle Herman, the luxury of the castle and the excitement of the party caught her eye, and she couldn't wait to get out and have some fun. At that time, her mother turned to her and stopped her with a hint of seriousness. In Chinese translation, a word "sudden" is added and it does not appear in the original text. The translator seized context factors such as the mother's sudden change of tone, her serious facial expression, and Cruella's expressions and acts. Trying to make the audiences feel the shock of Cruella immediately. The translator adopts the strategy of addition here to perfect the meaning of the discourse and help the audiences to understand and experience.

3.3 Semantics and Form

The level of semantics and form includes two features: discourse meaning and form. The discourse meaning refers to concept, interpersonal and textual meaning. The form refers to the different ways of realizing the meaning of a text, mainly realized by auditory and visual modes.

In order to convey the discourse meaning of the text, the translator should make appropriate addition and omission to the text. Considering the particularity of subtitle translation, omission should be the main strategy. For example, if there is no subject in the original sentence, the subject can be added to the translation; or if the information in the original text is too jumbled, a more concise language can be used with easy-to-understand words. The long and miscellaneous sentences can be abandoned as far as possible, and unnecessary modal words can be deleted.

In order to embody the form of discourse, the translator needs to make reasonable use of the modes such as narrator's monologue, actors' expressions, gestures and background music. These modes are interrelated and complementary. Through these modes, the audiences can understand the communicative meaning of the film more quickly and accurately (Chen Hongyan, 2011). This closely linked relationship is mainly reflected in the auditory and visual modes: neither of them is indispensable, and neither auditory or visual mode can achieve the best viewing effect. When the audience can not get accurate information from the visual, they can take advantage of hearing and be shocked by the sound effect; When they are not satisfied from the auditory sense, they can borrow the film pictures to enhance their feeling of the work (Li Yunxing, 2001). Therefore, only by properly handling the relationship between the strength and weakness of them, can the textual communicative meaning of the film be more accurately expressed and the audience have a more thorough understanding of the meaning of each frame of the film, so as to obtain a better viewing experience.

Example 7: "No, she did not." "Sorry. Slight tone delivery problem. I meant...No. She did not. Did she work for you?"

The conversation took place during a face-to-face discussion between Cruella and Herman. Cruella noticed that Herman was wearing the same necklace her mother had given her as a child. Herman claimed it was her family heirloom and had been stolen by an employee once. Cruella realized that the employee she was talking about was her mother. Without thinking, she defended her mother, and when she saw Herman's stunned eyes, she realized she had given the game away. So she changed the story immediately, which reassured Herman. "No, she did not." This sentence appears twice in this conversation, and the two translations are completely different. This is the translator's judgment based on Cruella's pause in speech, tone and intonation, as well as Herman's abrupt stop, puzzled expression and other symbolic factors.

Example 8: She'd go to prison for throwing someone off a cliff. Wrong someone, but there's something about poetic justice that's just so poetic.

This is a narration at the climax of the film. Cruella uttered this inner monologue as she witnessed Herman being escorted to a police van. The translator part the original text into five short sentences, avoiding complex and lengthy sentence patterns, making the form of sentences more concise, the meaning of sentences more complete, and the meaning of the text more clear.

3.4 Media

Media includes linguistic media and non-linguistic media. Linguistic media summarizes the factors such as mood, tone, sound and character. Non-linguistic media mainly include gestures, facial expressions and environmental tools of actors (Zhang Delu, 2009).

Subtitle translation has undergone a transformation from spoken language to text, and each sentence has a limited time, which must be switched with the length of dubbing and the switching of shots. Subtitles are placed at the bottom of the screen so as not to interfere with the audience's view of the film. As a result, subtitles take up limited screen space. Bilingual subtitles are mainly two lines, which can be used for reference by audiences who need them. In *Cruella*, the lyrics are translated at the top of the screen, and the Chinese subtitles for the dialogue are on top of the English subtitles, with a larger font. The space occupied by the subtitles of the film is reasonable and can be easily read by the audience. Restricted and influenced by these factors, the interpreters are required to provide the most effective and valuable information within the limited time and space (Li Yunxing, 2001).

Example 9: They say there are five stages of grief. Denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Well, I'd like to add one more. Revenge.

It was Herman who whistled three dalmatians to put Cruella's mother off a cliff. When she learned the truth, Cruella said nothing but stared at the ceiling. Her makeup, washed by tears, conveyed her sadness to the audience. The camera moves from the stifled night in the foreground to a close-up of Cruella's facial expression. The interpreter focuses on six emotional expressions: Denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance and revenge. Her expression changes with the six words in the narrator's voice. The audience can clearly see the evolution of Cruella's facial expression. Heavy background music and dark night set off a melancholy, deep, dark environment. This process is a key part of the plot twist, indicating that Cruella is about to take her revenge.

The combined effects of music and pictures in the above scenes emphasize the effect of non-linguistic media on textual meaning. It is also evident in the following clip: Cruella is tied to a chair by Herman and unable to move. As she struggled desperately in the flames, her vision became blurred until she slowly closed her eyes. Shot in slow motion, the film amplifies the sound of burning flames, and there are no words, just a soothing classical tune (Zhu He, 2021). This is enough to move the audience into a quiet sense of Cruella's desperation and unwillingness.

4. Conclusion

Multimodal advocates the use of linguistic and non-linguistic symbols for communication. Film is a kind of multimodal discourse, which mainly transmits textual information and communicative meaning to the audience through auditory and visual modes. The flexible application of the theoretical framework of multimodal discourse analysis provides a more comprehensive way of thinking for film subtitle translation: translators can more accurately convey the cultural spirit, intralingual and interlingual differences and ideological themes of the film by combining the significations of sound, action, image, expression and environment. In the subtitle translation of Disney film *Cruella*, the translator pays attention to the colloquial and conciseness of film language, fully considers the influence of multimodal factors on film discourse, and flexibly applies translation strategies such as transliteration, literal translation, free translation and addition. There is almost nothing arcane about the whole film's subtitle translation. It is a successful translation to show the audience the wonderful story of Cruella's character, personality, life change, her sorrow when she discovers the truth, and the joy of revenge.

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