

# An Analysis of Discourse Markers in the Audiovisual Translation

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**Abstract:** *With the rapid development of globalization and Internet, audiovisual translation plays a vital role in overcoming linguistic and cultural differences and promoting cross-cultural exchanges. Audiovisual texts are special text types expressed through images and sounds, which requires the translation to synchronize with the visual image and sound and to create orality in the dubbed language. In order to recreate a naturally-occurring and spontaneous-sounding dubbed text, due attention is paid to the translation of discourse markers. This paper analyzes five translation strategies of discourse markers in the English-Chinese dubbed version of the animated film *The Croods*, including change of personal pronoun, use of sense verbs, conversion to mental process, conversion to specific actions and syntactic transformation. The translation strategies help reproduce the naturalness and orality of dubbed dialogues while taking into account the dubbing constraints.*

**Keywords:** *Audiovisual Translation, Discourse Markers, Translation Strategies, Dubbing, Naturalness*

## 1. Introduction

With the rapid development of globalization and Internet, people have an easier access to various films and other audiovisual products from all over the world. Audiovisual translation rises in response to the need of cross-cultural exchanges and plays an increasingly vital role in overcoming linguistic and cultural differences.

Generally, there are two modes of audiovisual translation: subtitling translation and dubbing translation. Audiovisual texts, including films, documentaries or cartoons, are special text types that are expressed through images and sounds, which poses a challenge to translators. On the one hand, the translation has to synchronize with the visual image and sound, instead of focusing on verbal discourse alone. On the other hand, for prefabricated nature [1] and pretended spontaneity [2] of the dialogues in audiovisual texts, it's translators' top priority to create prefabricated orality in the dubbed language: spoken and seemingly spontaneous, yet planned and elaborated [3]. In order to recreate a naturally-occurring and spontaneous-sounding dubbed text, due attention should be paid to the translation of discourse markers. Discourse markers are an important device used in fictional language to help produce coherent conversations and increase the naturalness of dubbed language. However, there is no one-to-one correspondence between two languages in the field of discourse markers [4]. Discourse markers with the same meaning may have different pragmatic meanings, resulting in translation difficulties. In recent years, there is a new trend in film dubbed translation which attaches more importance to the naturalness of dubbed dialogues by imitating native spoken language. Thus, this paper attempts to deal with the translation strategies of discourse markers in the English-Chinese dubbed version of the animated film *The Croods*, including okay, you know and all right, so as to explore the issue of reproducing the naturalness and orality of dubbed dialogues.

## 2. Discourse marker

Discourse marker is a common linguistic phenomenon, such as well, so, you know, Okay, I mean and so on. When it comes to the definition and classification of discourse markers, there is disagreement among different scholars who define and classify discourse markers from different perspectives.

Schiffrin [5] analyzed 11 discourse markers in English, including oh, well, and, but, or, so, because, now, then, y 'know and I mean. Blakemore [6] described the conceptual meaning and procedural meaning of discourse markers from the perspective of relevance theory. Fraser [7] divided discourse markers into four categories according to the pragmatic function: (1) contrastive markers, such as though, but, on the

contrary, etc.); (2) interpretive markers, such as and, furthermore, in addition, etc.; (3) deductive markers, such as so, therefore, etc.; (4) subject change marker, such as by the way, etc.. Ran [8] divided Chinese discourse markers into 8 categories: topic-related markers, evidential markers, inferential markers, reformulation markers, manner-of-speaking markers, contrastive markers, self-assessment markers, locutionary performatives. Liu [9] defined Chinese discourse markers as a relatively closed functional category with a limited number of discourse markers and divided them into non-lexical discourse markers and lexical discourse markers according to their structural forms. Xie [10] defined discourse markers as expressions to mark discourse, held that they do not convey propositional meanings but have the textual function of organizing discourse and the interpersonal function of expressing mood, attitude and emotions, and divided discourse markers into 8 categories: exclamations, conjunctions, adverbs, adjectives, verbs, demonstrative pronouns, phrases and clauses.

The use of discourse markers in fabricated text helps increase the naturalness of the language. In order to reproduce a naturally-occurring and spontaneous-sounding dubbed text, translators have to deal with the discourse markers in an appropriate way. It poses a challenge for translators to translate the discourse markers and recreate the naturalness of the dubbed language, because many of the discourse markers have no equivalence in the target language. Thus, due attention should be paid to the translation of discourse markers in order to achieve naturalness and orality in the dubbed translation. Translators must analyze the pragmatic functions of discourse markers and select proper expressions with specific features of spontaneous conversation to achieve pragmatic equivalence and naturalness in the dubbed translation.

### 3. Translation Strategies of Discourse Markers in the Dubbed Text

This paper selects the official English-Chinese dubbed version of the animated film *The Croods* as the analysis corpus, calculates the frequency and percentage of discourse markers in the source text (Table 1), sorts out different translations of discourse markers in the dubbed text and analyzes the translator's translation strategies. The film tells a story about the Croods, a prehistoric family of cavemen, who survived by living accordingly to a strict set of rules. But they were forced to leave their home of shelter and security to find a new home because their home was destroyed by a disaster known as "The End".

It can be seen from Table 1 that twelve discourse markers are mainly used in the English dialogues of the film: *Okay, And, Well, So, Now, Yeah, Oh, You know, All right, I mean, Then* and *Look*. These discourse markers occurred 127 times. *Okay* is the most frequently used while *Look* is the least. Although the total number of discourse markers in the film is much less than that in real dialogues, these carefully planned and intentionally used discourse markers play an indispensable role in producing coherent fictional languages and increasing the naturalness and orality of film dialogues.

Table 1: Frequency and Percentage of discourse markers in *The Croods*

Number	Discourse Marker	Frequency/ Percentage	Number	Discourse Marker	Frequency/ Percentage
1	Okay	33 / 25.98%	7	Oh	8 / 6.30%
2	And	24 / 18.90%	8	You know	8 / 6.30%
3	Well	12 / 9.45%	9	All right	4 / 3.15%
4	So	11 / 8.66%	10	I mean	3 / 2.36%
5	Now	11 / 8.66%	11	Then	3 / 2.36%
6	Yeah	9 / 7.09%	12	Look	1 / 0.79%

By comparing the English discourse markers and the Chinese dubbed translation, we find that the translator mainly uses translation methods such as omission, literal translation and free translation. As for literal and free translation, there are different choices of words for one discourse marker, and the same discourse marker is translated into different versions with completely unrelated meanings in different dialogues. Thus, this paper focuses on different free translations of discourse markers, and finds that the translator not only pays attention to the discourse itself but also takes into account the dubbing constraints. That is to say, the translator matches the translation with visual images and sounds. In order to reproduce the naturalness and orality of the dubbed dialogues while taking into account the dubbing constraints, the translator uses five different translation strategies, including change of personal pronoun, use of sense verbs, conversion to mental process, conversion to specific actions and syntactic transformation.

### 3.1. Change of Personal Pronouns

Personal pronouns include first-person pronouns, second-person pronouns and third-person pronouns. Change of personal pronouns means replacing one of three “persons” with the other two “persons” or omitting the personal pronouns. When it comes to the translation of discourse markers, the second-person pronoun “You” can be replaced by a first-person pronoun “I” and a first-person pronoun “I” can also be omitted.

Let us take a look at an example.

Example 1: Grug: Make! Make it!

Guy: **You know**, you’re a lot like your daughter.

In example 1, the young man Guy saves the lives of the Croods by lighting a torch to disperse the birds. The torch arouses the curiosity of Grug and he violently urges Guy to make fire, which makes Guy embarrassed in front of all the family members. Since Grug’s tone and action are much like his daughter, Guy uses the discourse marker “You know” to draw attention and express the shared knowledge that Grug is like his daughter. Schiffirin [5] believes that “you know” appeals to shared knowledge as a way of converting an opponent to one’s own side in a dispute”. In this way, Guy can reduce his face threat. What’s more, Stman [11] believes that “you know” can help establish friendly relations between the speaker and the listener. In this example, Guy also uses “you know” to express goodwill and friendliness to the elders.

In the dubbed text, the discourse marker “you know” is translated into “I say” in Chinese, which reproduces the pragmatic function of seeking attention, saving face and expressing goodwill. The translator changes the second-person pronoun into the first-person pronoun, which is more in line with the Chinese language. If “you know” is translated literally, it will sound unnatural and awkward to the audience.

### 3.2. Use of Sense Verbs

Sense verbs are verbs that describe one of the five senses: vision, hearing, smell, taste and touch, such as look, hear, listen, sound, smell, taste, feel and so on. Since audiovisual texts are expressed through images and sounds, the target audience usually use at least two senses, i.e., vision and hearing, when they watch the dubbed film. As a result, the translator can not focus on verbal discourse alone but match the translation with the visual images and sound.

Example 2: Thunk: **Okay**. Do not walk on your hands. The hands do not help at all!

In example 2, the Croods have to walk through some pointy rocks on their way to find a new home. Their feet are hurt badly since they have no shoes to wear. Thunk tries to use his hands to walk on the rocks but it doesn’t work. Thunk uses the discourse marker “Okay” to signify confirmation that walking on hands does not help at all. “Okay” is a marker that demonstrates common understanding between the participants and can be used to signify approval, acceptance and confirmation. It also functions as an effective controlling device to dominate the behavior of others. In this example, after Thunk confirms that walking on hands is of little help, he uses “Okay” to tell others not to walk on their hands. He gives advice to help other family members avoid injury to their hands.

The translator does not translate “Okay” into its literal meaning, but adopts a sense verb “Listen” in Chinese. The translation is not only synchronized with visual images and sound, but also more more coherent with the utterer’s intention and the target linguistic tradition.

### 3.3. Conversion to Mental Process

Mental process, also known as mental function and cognitive process, includes perception, memory, thinking (such as ideation, imagination, belief, reasoning, etc.), volition, and emotion. Discourse markers with interpersonal functions are used to express speaker’s attitude and emotion and establish interpersonal relationship. When translating discourse markers, the translator can convert discourse markers into mental process and adopt mental words that express the emotion and attitude of discourse markers.

Example 3: Grug: Hey, wait!

Guy: **Okay**, she's up. We're good. I'm good.

In example 3, Guy helps the Croods make shoes to walk on the pointy rocks. When Eep puts on her new shoes, she can not stand still and falls down with Guy. Grug, Eep's father, notices it and comes to split them up. Guy uses "Okay" as a response marker to demonstrate his understanding of Grug's nervous feeling so as to calm down Grug. The use of "Okay" expresses Guy's intention to reduce Grug's worry about his intimate relationship with Eep.

The translator has obviously understood the mental states of both Grug and Guy, and "Okay" is rendered as "Take it easy" in Chinese, rather than the literal meaning. In this way, the dubbed translation is more coherent with the visual image and sounds more natural in the dubbed language. Besides, the speaker's communicative intention is also expressed.

### 3.4. *Conversion to Specific Actions*

Conversion to specific actions means that the translator converts a discourse marker to a specific action in accordance with the visual image in the film. This not only ensures that the translation is synchronized with the image and sound, which facilitates the audience to quickly understand the film without obstacles, but also better reproduces the naturalness and orality of the dubbed language.

Example 4: Thunk: **All right**, Dad! Get them. Go get 'em.

Now you get them right in the no....Oh man, there

In example 4, the Croods meet a monkey on their way to find a new home. Grug has a fight with it when the other family members watch them and his son Thunk cheers him on. The discourse made by Thunk is closely related to Grug's body movements. The discourse marker "All right" is put at the initial position, signifying approval, acceptance, or confirmation. When Thunk says "All right", he is very excited to encourage his father to fight the monkey back because it has started the war. It can be noticed that the verbal discourse is tightly connected to the non-verbal elements in the film. When translating, the translator takes into consideration both the verbal discourse and the visual image. Thus, "All right" is translated into a specific action "Go" in Chinese, which is consistent with the body action of the film character Grug. In this way, the translator recreates a naturally-occurring and spontaneous-sounding dubbed text, which is dynamic and easier to be accepted by the target audience.

In audiovisual translation, linguistic choices are influenced by both verbal and non-verbal elements. Therefore, the translator needs to take both verbal and non-verbal factors into consideration and convert discourse markers to specific actions when needed.

### 3.5. *Syntactic Transformation*

Syntactic transformation refers to the transformation of the grammatical structure of the source text in the dubbed translation, such as transformation of an affirmative sentence into a negative sentence or an interrogative sentence, transformation of the active voice into passive voice and transformation of a simple sentence into a compound sentence, etc..

Example 5: Guy: I'll take that chance.

Grug: **You know**, I wanted to throw you away ever since I met you.

In example 5, when the Croods and Guy are about to arrive at their new home, an earthquake causes a deep ravine on their way. Grug plans to throw all of the other members across the ravine because it is the only chance to survive. Guy volunteers to be the first one to be thrown, and Grug uses the discourse marker "you know" to maintain the on-going interaction. As is mentioned above, "you know" can be used to attract attention and appeal to shared knowledge. It can also be used to invite inference and save face. In fact, Grug's relationship with Guy is not good, but Guy is willing to be the first one to be thrown to the unknown danger, which changes Grug's attitude towards Guy and improves their relationship. Grug uses the interaction marker "you know" to develop common ground with Guy and show their intimacy.

In this case, "You know" is transformed from an affirmative sentence into an interrogative sentence "Do you know?" in Chinese, which has a weaker tone than its literal translation and fully conveys the speaker's attitudes and intentions. The dubbed translation facilitates communication between the interlocutors in the dubbed text and sounds more natural in the target language.

#### 4. Conclusion

This paper has calculated the frequency and percentage of discourse markers in the animated film *The Croods* and sorted out different translations of discourse markers in the Chinese dubbed text. Based on the analysis of five examples about free translation of discourse markers in the dubbed text, five translation strategies of discourse markers can be summed up, including change of personal pronoun, use of sense verbs, conversion to mental process, conversion to specific actions and syntactic transformation. In audiovisual translation, the translator has to take into account the translation constraints, match the translation with visual image and sound and adopt appropriate translation strategies to recreate the naturalness and orality of dubbed dialogues.

However, this paper has focused on only one case study of the translation of discourse markers. Due to the insufficiency of corpus, the application scope of translation strategies is limited. There are more unanswered questions to be analyzed in future research. First, a more in-depth corpus-based study is needed to demonstrate the translation strategies of discourse markers in both dubbed translation and subtitled translation. Second, a corpus-based comparison between discourse markers in the dubbed text and those in the source text and in naturally-occurring conversation is needed to analyze the naturalness of the dubbed dialogue.

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