

Subtitle Translation Strategies of The Broke Sisters Season 1 Episode 3 from the Perspective of Multimodal Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

With the in-depth development of cross-cultural exchanges, many excellent foreign film and television works are popularized in China, and the correct translation of movie subtitles ensures the accurate transmission of the information in the cultural products. Therefore, subtitle translation is becoming more and more important in the translation world. The Broke Sisters is a very characteristic humor comedy, which leaves a deep impression on people. But very often, the audience may not understand the plot of the drama, so excellent subtitle translation is essential. Based on Zhang Delu scholars' comprehensive theoretical framework of multimodal discourse analysis, this paper interprets the subtitles of The Broke Sisters from four dimensions: culture, context, content, and expression, aiming to analyze how the translator applies the theory of multimodal discourse analysis and combines language with visual, auditory and other modalities in the hope of providing more lessons for the cause of subtitle translation in China.

Keywords

Multimodal Discourse Analysis, audiovisual translation, The Broke Sisters.

1. Introduction

1.1. Multimodal Discourse Analysis Theory and Subtitle Translation

The term "modality" refers to the "symbolic resources formed in society and culture to create meaning", which expresses the way of interaction between human beings and the outside world; the interaction with a single sense is called unimodal, and the interaction with three or more senses is called multimodal. In today's society, with the rapid development of media technology and short video multimedia technology, the way of information dissemination is gradually becoming networked and videoized, and multimodal discourse analysis, as an emerging discipline, has a wider application. Multimodal discourse refers to the phenomenon of using multiple senses, such as hearing, vision, touch, etc., to communicate through language, image, sound, movement, and other means and symbolic resources. Based on the theory of systemic functional linguistics and the comprehensive multi-symbolic model framework, Zhang Delu proposes a comprehensive theoretical framework for multimodal discourse analysis, consisting of four dimensions: culture, context, content and expression. The four levels are interrelated: cultural, context refers to the whole cultural background of language communication, context refers to the specific environment of language communication, and cultural context is composed of countless situational contexts. Situational contexts determine discourse forms, and discourse forms are reflected in discourse meanings. In language communication, all modal material forms are attributed to the two systems of linguistic media and non-linguistic media.

Since the proposal of a comprehensive theoretical framework for multimodal discourse analysis, more and more scholars have developed multimodal discourse research from the four levels of culture, context, content and expression. Yin (2020), Liang Yanzhi (2016) launched a

study on movie subtitle translation, Miao Ju (2019); Sun Xichen (2020) studied audiovisual translation using interviews as a corpus. From the results of previous studies, the selected corpus is mostly speeches, news, advertisements, movies, etc., and there is not enough research about subtitle translation of TV dramas.

1.2. Synopsis of *The Broke Sisters* Season 1 Episode 3

The first few episodes of the first season focus on telling the main background of the show. The show tells the story of two urban girls with completely different backgrounds who work together. Max·Black comes from a poor background and works as a waitress at a diner in Brooklyn, New York. Caroline·Channing is a rich girl from a wealthy family who has fallen on hard times after her father was jailed for rigging a Ponzi scheme. The two become coworkers and roommates, working together in a restaurant while working on their dream of opening a cupcake store. Their colleagues include the dark-haired, spunky Max, the small Asian owner Han Lee, the dirty-talking cook Oleg, and the senior cashier Earl; Caroline, a tall, blonde, celebrity-esque woman who doesn't fit in with the restaurant's class; and Max, who questions Caroline's identity, learns that she used to be one of Manhattan's true rich and famous. In the third episode, Max inadvertently learns that Caroline used to be a real Miss Manhattan, but after her father's bankruptcy, she was forced to work in the store to survive. Max, who has a soft heart, takes in the homeless Caroline. At this time, they are still unfamiliar with each other, and there are more frictions and contradictions, so excellent subtitle translations can better help people realize the effective pursuit of the drama.

2. A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Subtitle Translations of *The Broke Sisters*

2.1. Cultural dimension

The cultural dimension involves the composition of the original culture's ideology, living habits, historical traditions and so on. What the translator has to do is not only to convert the source language to the target language but also to construct a way of transition from one culture to another through the process of translation. This way is usually embodied in conceptual metaphors in order for the audience to better understand the connotations of the culture. According to Zhang Delu (2009), "the cultural dimension is the key dimension that makes multimodal communication possible," which determines the traditions of communication, the forms and techniques of communication, including the ideology and the genres that can concretely express this ideology. Therefore, the translation of cultural elements in subtitles directly affects the target audience's understanding of subtitles. *Bankrupt Sisters*, as an American sitcom, has some differences in its cultural background, including language usage habits, with those of Chinese audiences, and some cultural phenomena may not be well known to Chinese audiences. Therefore, in the translation process, the translator should think about what techniques or strategies to adopt to translate these cultural elements according to the specific situation, such as adopting naturalization or alienation to reduce the comprehension barriers caused by cultural differences.

Example 1. Hot food from a hot man.

Translation: 猛男主厨 美味出炉

This is what Oleg says to Max at the serving window at the beginning of episode three. Oleg's character is a chef who is a narcissistic gold-digger with a penchant for puns and a dark sense of humor that no one else has, but who is also kind, hard-working, and helpful. The "hot" in Oleg's mouth is a sign of narcissism about his looks and figure, as well as a sign of "confidence" in his identity as a chef. Therefore, the subtitle translation adopts the naturalization treatment

in content, and keeps the same form with the original text, retaining the meaning of the original text to the greatest extent possible, while the expression can be easily understood.

Example 2. Never doubt me.

Translation: 姐是有两把刷子的。

This one comes from a conversation between Max and some customers. After Max served the whole meal, the customers thought that she had forgotten some of the ingredients for the main course, so these customers "questioned" Max one by one; but the result was that Max took them out of her body, and from the customers' surprised expressions, Max said this sentence, which could have been expressed as an Italian translation if it were translated directly. However, there is no humor in the translation, so the subtitle translation adopts the naturalization treatment, together with Max's confident expression at that time, the comedy effect is perfectly displayed.

2.2. Contextual level

Context refers to the reliance on the contextual relationship to understand the meaning of the following or the implicit meaning of the discourse. The context of subtitles in a movie can be understood as the situation in which the content of the movie takes place, or the overall context and tone of the movie, which involves the time, history and culture in which the events take place. The context in the multimodal perspective implies that translators should take care of the context and match with the background of the movie, so translators need to choose the appropriate expression with the context. Zhang Delu points out that in specific contexts, communication is governed by contextual factors, which are determined by discourse scope, discourse tone, and discourse mode. Among them, discourse scope refers to the scope involved in the speech activity; discourse tone refers to the role relationship and communicative intention between communicative participants; and discourse mode refers to the medium or channel of communication. The dialogues in the drama take place in a certain communicative situation, so when translators translate subtitles, they should also pay attention to the composition mode and the meaning of the composition of each modality according to the context of the film and television work, flexibly choose the target language expression, and fluently connect the emotional color, character psychology, audio-visual language, and other elements of the work to convey to the audience.

Example 3. Han: Spread the words.

Translation: 赶紧广而“搞”之吧。

Max: word.

Translation: 是“告”啊。

Han: word!

Translation: “高”啊。

To understand the punchline here, you need to know a little bit about the background of the show's characters: Han, a Korean-American and the owner of the Bankrupt Sisters' part-time restaurant, is often laughed at by the waitresses, cashiers, and cooks because he is short and dresses in old-fashioned clothes. He always tries to tell a joke but is told it's not funny; always tries to be fashionable but often makes a fool of himself, and counts every penny of profit but loses out in front of Max's sharp tongue. The humor here lies in Han's phrase "Spread the words", which is correctly paired with "Spread the word" to mean "Spread, spread the word! The correct word is "Spread the word", which means "spread the information". Instead, Han uses "words", which is meant to show his humor in the future, but it is then "mercilessly dismantled" by Max. This subtitle translation is more relevant to the characters in the show and gives a more dramatic expression.

Example 4. What's the smell ?

Translation: 这是什么味儿

Max: It's gonna be your smell from now on.

Translation: 这股穷酸味儿以后就是你的味儿。

The plot here is that Max takes Caroline shopping in a thrift store. The context here is to relate to Caroline's family's bankruptcy, and due to the contrasting back and forth, she is overwhelmed and shocked by such a small store. Therefore after entering she says this to Max, who in turn leaves the sentence unforgiving. The use of augmented translation here adds a "poor and sour flavor" that not only reflects Max's "venomous tongue", but also highlights Caroline's huge psychological gap at this time, and smoothly connects the emotional color, character psychology, audio-visual language and other elements of the work to the audience. The emotional color, character psychology, audio-visual language and other elements of the work are smoothly linked together and conveyed to the audience.

2.3. Content Level

Zhang Delu divides the content level into meaning level and form level. The former includes the conceptual, interpersonal and schematic meanings of the discourse, while the latter refers to the interconnectedness of the formal features of different modalities, such as visual grammar, auditory grammar, tactile grammar and so on, which together embody the meaning of the discourse. Film and television works are a kind of multimodal discourse jointly constructed by images, sound effects, actors' lines, subtitles and other modes, and reading this kind of multimodal discourse requires mobilizing different senses such as visual and auditory senses at the same time. This requires the translator to pay attention to not only linguistic modalities but also non-linguistic modalities such as background sound effects, screen composition, actors' expressions and so on in the process of translation. The subtitle translation of *Bankrupt Sisters* mainly combines the auditory structure of speech, sound, music and other elements with the visual structure of images and subtitles, and at the same time takes into account the overall tone of the film and television work, trying to convey the conceptual meaning of the lines intertwined with the other modalities.

Example 5. Hard to hear.

Translation: 万箭穿心啊!

The plot here is that Han, the owner of the restaurant, wants to add Max's social contacts, and Max refuses to go through and pretends he's listening to a song with his headphones on. But Han instantly calls Max out on his behavior. The helplessness on Max's face, Caroline's puzzled "rolling of the eyes" and Han's persistence in pursuing him are all brought out in a long shot, which, together with the audience's laughter, conveys the overall tone of the play.

2.4. Expressive level

The expressive level refers to the form of media, which is the material form in which discourse ultimately ends up in the material world, including both verbal and non-verbal media. At the level of verbal media, meaning is mainly transmitted through sound symbols and written symbols. In the non-verbal media level, meaning is mainly transmitted through the communicator's body and tools, environment and other non-verbal means. Expression level, also known as the media level, includes two categories: verbal and non-verbal. Among them, the linguistic category includes pure language and accompanying language. The main forms of media that realize the transmission of linguistic meanings are: sound symbols transmitted by sound waves and written symbols generated by writing and so on. Sound effects, lines, background music, etc. belong to sound symbols, while Chinese and English subtitles belong to written symbols. The non-verbal category includes both physical and non-physical. Actors' body movements and expression changes belong to the physical ones.

Example 6. Yay, shoes! I can't believe I just said "yay" in Goodwill.

Translation: 好哎！鞋子！真不敢相信我居然在二手店欢呼。

The episode takes place as Max and Caroline continue to shop at a thrift store, and Caroline can't help but gasp in amazement at the number of shoes she sees in the store. Later, Caroline laughs at herself when she thinks of her current situation and says the following sentence. This is a direct translation strategy, which emphasizes Caroline's helplessness in accepting her situation. The laughter of the crowd in the background, the dingy thrift store environment, and Caroline's body movements and facial expressions all blend together to create another great scene in the show.

3. Conclusion

As a kind of multimodal discourse, film and television drama works contain a variety of modes and various relationships between them that assist, cooperate and influence each other. Using Zhang Delu's multimodal discourse analysis framework, this paper appreciates the subtitle translation of the third episode of the first season of *Broke Sisters* from the cultural level, the contextual level, the content level, and the expression level. On the whole, the subtitle translation of the episode adopts the strategies and methods of naturalization, direct translation and augmentation, and collaborates well with other modalities to accomplish the task of explaining the background, laying out the story, and attracting the audience in the third episode of the film. The above study shows that the theoretical framework of multimodal discourse analysis has a certain guiding effect on documentary subtitle translation. In the interpretation process of multimodal discourse analysis, the interaction and coordination between the visual and auditory modalities and the subtitle text modality help the interpreter to interpret the deeper meaning from the source language to the target language. Let the information in the film subtitles and the multimodal information complement and unify in order to achieve the effect of multimodal information collaboration. It provides a new perspective of appreciation for the subtitle translation of movie and TV dramas.

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