



The Subtitle Translation of *Wolf Warriors* From the Perspective of Multimodal Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

With the rapid advancement of multimedia technology, multimodal discourse analysis has gradually become one of the linguistic research hotspots and it integrates the modalities of other fields such as images, sounds, colors and so on to jointly present the complete meaning of the work. The film subtitles are different from traditional paper texts, and their translation is not only a simple text conversion, but also involves complex factors of the transformation of source language and target language culture. From the perspective of multimodal discourse analysis, this paper studies the subtitle translation of *Wolf Warriors* by using Professor Zhang Delu's multimodal theory as a framework from cultural level, context level, content level and expression level to analyze how this theory affects the subtitle translation of the film *Wolf Warriors* and provides valuable suggestions for other film subtitle translation.

Key words: Subtitle translation; *Wolf Warriors*; Multimodal discourse analysis

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INTRODUCTION

As an indispensable entertainment approach in people's life, the film has already been deeply welcomed by many people. Also it has also aroused translator's passion to translate the subtitle of the film. The successful subtitle translation ensures that audience can get the clearest information with minimal effort. Subtitle translation should be simple and easy to understood, and fully express the meaning conveyed by the film. At the same time, it must also take into account the movements, facial expressions, emotions and background music of the characters in the film (Zhu, 2013). Wu Jing's film *Wolf Warriors* mainly tells the story of nobody who has encountered Waterloo of his life. Moreover, he has trapped in another crisis which affects the security of his motherland. And at the time of crisis in the motherland, he is brave to go forward to save the country and become the nation's lonely hero. It has been a boom at home and abroad with the box office exceeding 4 billion, creating a new history of box office. The war film has the features of fast-pace with strong emotions, which poses a huge challenge to film subtitle translation. This paper intends to study the subtitle translation of *Wolf Warriors* from the perspective of multimodal discourse analysis based on the multimodal theory of Professor Zhang Delu, and analyzes how the multimodality theory affects subtitle translation of *Wolf Warriors* to present the full meaning of the film together.

1. THE MULTIMODALITY THEORY AND FILM SUBTITLE TRANSLATION

In the early 1950s, the well-known linguistic expert Harris in the United States puts forward the new direction of

discourse analysis for the first time, which elaborated on the basic theory and effective methods of discourse analysis. But most of the approaches and theories of linguistic research take only language as the main body of study, paying little attention to other elements such as voice, color, animation, picture and so on which play an important role in the film or other medias. The first foreign scholar to study multimodality systematically was Bart, a French researcher. He explained the relationship between the basic theory of symbols and visual transmission, and discussed the role and internal relationship between pictures and languages in meaning construction. Also he pointed out that multimodality actually refers to the combination of various symbolic modes with each other to do effective communication, such as the effective combination of language and music. Since the 1990s, multimodal discourse analysis has gradually become one of the hotspots of systemic functional linguistics. The definition of multimodal discourse refers to using auditory, visual, tactile and other senses together to communicate with person by language, images, voice, movements and other multimodal resources. Biologists believe that people's five perception channels leads to the production of the following five communication modes: visual mode, auditory mode, tactile mode, olfactory mode and taste mode. Kress & Van Leeuwen defines multimodal text as a type of text that integrates multiple modes of communication (such as voice, text, image, etc.) to convey information. In 2003, Li Zhanzi introduced multimodal discourse analysis theory to linguistic field from the perspective of social semiotics, and he has is a pioneer in the theoretical research of multimodal discourse analysis in China. Then Zhang Delu developed this theory. He believes that Halliday's system-functional linguistics theory is a theoretical framework that is suitable for the study of multimodal discourse. Through the study, based on system-functional linguistics, he proposed a comprehensive theoretical framework of multimodal discourse analysis which can be divided into four levels as cultural level, context level, content level and expression level after the summary.

In short, the research on multimodal discourse analysis theory is still in its infancy in our country, but it has attracted more and more linguists' attention and research in many fields, including foreign language research, textbook discourse, poster discourse, as well as film discourse and other aspects. Multimodal discourse analysis has a good development prospect in China.

For the research on the subtitle translation, the scholar Doppa was the first researcher to research on the translation of subtitle in the film. Unlike other paper media, the film text is not produced by a single language symbol, but by a combination of verbal and nonverbal symbols such as images, sounds, music, movements, colors and other multimodal resources. When one of the modal discourses can't fully express

its meaning, it needs to be supplemented by another one. And the relationship between these modalities is called "complementary relationship" and the other one is called "non-complementary relationship". The most obvious feature in the film text is the complementary relationship between the modes. Film and television works are multimodal combinations with visual and acoustic effects that are easy to be understood by the audience. The various modes in the film and television works such as language, sound, color, light and dynamic picture, are mutually influential and complement to each other. The audience's understanding of the film requires a combination of multiple modalities. And the audience's lack of understanding of one of the modes can generally be compensated for by other modes. Thus, the function of the translation of multimodal text is far beyond the requirement of the general texts which are readability, acceptability, loyalty, and fluency required. Moreover, the subtitle translation requires the translator not only regards the translation principles for general text translation as the only relevant standard for film translation evaluation, but also considers subtitles as multiple modes in the film. The translation standard accepted by many scholars established in written and spoken language is not fit for the film subtitle translation.

In summary, the quality of subtitle translation directly affects the understanding of the film plot by foreign audience. In the specific translation of film subtitle, sometimes speech (written or verbal) is dominant in the plot and sometimes in the secondary state. Therefore, the translator needs to comprehensively consider the interaction between different modes, the length of the subtitle, the number of words, the emotional characteristics and other factors. Then he can start to complete the translation of his own. A good subtitle translation will make up for the defects of other modes such as sounds, images of film and so on so as to jointly present the complete meaning of the work.

2. TRANSLATION OF *WOLF WARRIORS* SUBTITLES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF MULTIMODAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

In the film *Wolf Warriors*, because of the characteristics of the war theme -- large-scale actual combat, fast pace, strong picture sense, outstanding patriotic sentiment, the special nature of battlefield dialogue and so on, different modes need to cooperate with each other more than other films. Therefore, the features of multimodality are particularly prominent in the film *Wolf Warriors*. So this paper intends to study the subtitle translation of *Wolf Warriors* from the perspective of multimodal discourse analysis, using Professor Zhang Delu's multimodal theory as the framework which can be divided into four levels -- cultural level, context level, content level and expression

level. The author aims to analyze the film *Wolf Warriors* on how to integrate the relationship between the various modes in the film to get the subtitle translation of *Wolf Warriors* using multimodal theory, so that the audience in different cultural backgrounds can understand and appreciate the film better and promote the charm of the characters in the film.

2.1 Cultural Level

Zhang Delu (2009) points out that the cultural level is the key aspect that makes multimodal communication possible. It determines the tradition of communication, the form and technique of communication. Because of this level, the contextual context has explanatory power. This level includes the ideology consisting of the human mindset, the philosophy and habits of life, the unspoken rules of all societies, and the communicative procedures or structural potentials that can be embodied in this ideology. In the subtitle translation, it will directly affect the audience's understanding and acceptance of the film on whether or not to consider cultural factors, so the cultural level is the key aspect of multimodal discourse analysis. Therefore, translators must not only follow the relevant translation principles in specific translation practice, but also pay attention to cultural phenomena in the translation process.

In the movie *Wolf Warriors*, it is not only a war-themed movie, but also shoulders the responsibility of intercultural communication. The film will involve parts of Chinese culture and Western culture. How to translate this part will directly affect the understanding of the film plots by Chinese and Western audience.

Eg. 1:

Wu: Who am I?
(我是谁?)
Kid: My Godfather.
(我的干爹。)

Eg. 2:

Wu: 好戏才刚刚开始。
(The show has just begun.)

There are a few concepts that need to be clarified here. Firstly, there is no such concept like "Gan Die" in the western culture. That is to say, in the West, there is no such thing as China to find an unrelated male as his second father while maintaining the original father-son relationship. But in Christian society, there is another similar tradition, that is, the godfather tradition. The "godfather" only refers to the members of the newborn who are guaranteed for the newborn when the newborn is baptized, and will impart the religious knowledge in the future growth of the child. In fact, although they are produced in different ways, the concept "Gan Die" in Chinese and the godfather in the Western Christian society, all bear a part of the care and education duties of the children, so it will be logical to translate "godfather"

into "Gan Die". In Chinese culture, the opera (戏) generally refers to operas such as Peking Opera, but it does not refer to opera in Chinese traditional culture. And it refers to a wonderful performance, soothe characters好戏 should be translated into "show" which is very in line with the understanding of Western audience. In the subtitle translation here, the translator fully considers the cultural differences between the Chinese and the Western, and also considers the different ways of thinking of the audience on both sides, which is a successful subtitle translation.

There are many subtitles like this in the film, for example "12年的卧薪尝胆啊，一朝战乱，全没了". And the translation version is "12 years of hard work, one war, and it's all gone." The phrase "卧薪尝胆" in the original sentence is a Chinese idiom, which has its own connotation. If it is translated literally, the foreign audience will not understand what it means. Translating this phrase "卧薪尝胆" into "hard work" not only explains the meaning of this phrase, but also combines the multimodality and subtitle translation effectively.

2.2 Context Level

In a specific context, communication is addicted to the contextual factors, including the scope of the discourse, the tone of the discourse, and the contextual factors determined by the discourse style (Zhang, 2009, pp.26-32). Hu Zhuanglin (2007) divides the context into the linguistic context, the situational context, and the cultural context. The characteristics of storyline in the film determines the context in the film, it involves all aspects above. The successful subtitle translation should consider the contextual relationship of all aspects, including not only the context in the film, but also the real social cultural background in which the audience is located. The translation of the context should take into account the role of the link. This requires the translator to do appropriate adjustments to accurately convey to the audience the author wants to express accurately in the specific context.

In this movie, there are some specific scenes like the battle and demolition. In one battle, Leng is doing a single battle. They are next to a tank. At this time, all the gunfire and fighting sounds around them disappear. There are only tight and intense background music and the lens that keeps changing between their fighting scenes. The multimodality factors works together to present this scene. At this time, Leng picks up the bullet necklace hanging around his neck, David instantly understands what it means, he knows the bullet is the one he shot on Leng's girlfriend and he said "Is that your girl?" Leng didn't answer, and David continued "She is pretty". Leng as the boyfriend of Long Xiaoyun is very angry, especially after hearing that David speaks in such a tone, he is even angrier. At this time, he uses all his strength to utter three words "Blood for blood". Here, the translator translates it into "血债血偿", just four words. There are few Chinese characters, but it is more in line with the context of the

time and the mood of the audience. The translation phrase “血债血偿” conveys Leng’s emotions very well. This short Chinese phrase contains more anger, and it can also resonate with readers. It can be seen that the translator combines the factors such as the context in which the scene occurred fully.

2.3 Content Level

Zhang Delu introduces there are two aspects at the content level: discourse meaning and form. The former mainly refers to the discourse meaning composed of conceptual meaning, interpersonal meaning and textual meaning. The formal level refers to different forms of systems of practical significance, including the relationship between the lexical grammar system, the visual ideographic form and the visual grammatical system, the auditory ideographic form and the auditory grammatical system, the tactile ideographic form and the tactile grammatical system, and the grammar of each modality.

Eg. 3:

Take cover. All crew below deck!
(进入船舱躲避!)

Eg. 4:

The chopper’s on its way, sir.
(直升机起飞了。)

Eg. 5:

我来当兵就是为了打仗。
(I became a soldier because I wanted to be in battles.)

Eg. 6:

在家都陪陪老婆孩子多好啊
(Much better to be at home with wife and kids instead.)

In these subtitles, it can be seen that the subtitle translation is changed according to the role of the subtitle. As to the two subtitles in example 3 and 4 -- “Take cover. All crew below deck!”, “The chopper’s on its way, sir”, the translator translates them into “进入船舱躲避” and “直升机起飞了”. The translator chooses to omit the persons’ names to lead audience to a nervous status. And this nervous status is achieved by lens. From the lens and background, it is usually to sense it. So in this situation, the omission of the names of people is a good way to present the whole meaning of the film. On the contrary, in the following example, the film aims to remember a hero in the plot, so the lens shows no much related to the subtitle and the subtitle becomes a very important role in this plot. Therefore, the translator decides not to omit anything and take the literal translation method to translate the subtitle. So it is very well fit in this plot to translate the texts “I became a soldier because I wanted to be in battles”. (我来当兵就是为了打仗) and “在家都陪陪老婆孩子多好啊” (Much better to be at home with wife and kids instead.).

2.4 Expression Level

According to Zhang Delu, the expression level is the material form in which the discourse is ultimately expressed in the material world, including both linguistic and non-verbal categories. Language includes two categories of pure language and accompanying language; non-verbal category includes both physical and non-physical aspects. Among them, the physical aspect mainly includes facial expressions, body gestures, movements; and non-physical one includes instruments, such as laboratory, network platform, simultaneous interpretation room and so on.

In this scene, Leng comes to the factory to rescue the factory staff, but because it is in the war, the United Nations can only deliver a helicopter to come to rescue them. But there are so many people that one helicopter can’t take them away. So the factory manager says that only Chinese people can climb aboard. Those African women who are married to Chinese and their children cannot be safely evacuated, and they have to stay here. Even if African women are pregnant, it is difficult to escape this fate. At this time, the picture lens is interspersed with the indifference and accusations of the factory manager, the hug and tears between the couples. The whole picture was quite touching. At this time, after seeing such a behavior, the daughter of Dr. Chen, the key rescuer, looked up and asked the doctor “Why?”. This sentence of subtitle translation text “为什么” is just good here. This sentence sublimates the film emotion. If there is no subtitle here, it is only the conversion of various lenses. The audience may not grasp the key point. On the contrary, it is only because of this subtitle that audience can think and resonate more and it can better convey the warmth of humanity in the film to the audience.

CONCLUSION

With the rapid development of multimedia technology, multimedia such as music and films has become more and more important in people’s life. Single-modal media can’t show its rich meaning in the fast life pace. It is not expressed by the language alone, but by images, sounds, words and so on. Therefore, multimodal discourse analysis research has become more and more important. Through the multi-modal analysis of the subtitle translation of *War Warriors*, this paper finds that in the subtitle translation, we must comprehensively consider the meaning of multimodal construction to achieve the best effect of subtitle translation comprehensively. According to the relationship between film subtitle translation and multimodality, the suggestions are as followings: when subtitles play a key role in constructing meaning, subtitles should be fully translated to use strategies such as literal translation or addition. When subtitles play a secondary role in the meaning construction process, the subtitle translation

should be clearly described in short, and strategies such as omission should be adopted. Besides, the cultural phenomenon should be paid attention to in the subtitle translation. Without this level, all the subtitle translation and multimodal discourse analysis is meaningless. Therefore, the interaction between film subtitles and other modalities build the overall meaning of a film.

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