



The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies

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Abstract. With the deepening of economic globalization and the widespread dissemination and popularization of films worldwide, films have become an important form of cultural exchange. During this cultural exchange process, subtitle translation is playing an increasingly significant role and has become one of the important methods for spreading different cultures. As time goes by and society progresses in China, foreign movies are being favored by more and more Chinese audiences. Thus, the translation quality and accuracy of it will absolutely influence information exchanges and cross-cultural communications. Therefore, this article will further study the translation strategies in movie subtitles based on multimodal discourse analysis theory, taking the proofread subtitles of *The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies* (The Hobbit 3) as an example. The study found that, based on the theoretical framework of multimodal discourse analysis, this subtitled translated version of The Hobbit 3 has been very well received for its flexible translation strategy and its use of different modalities in the movie to convey the message of the movie to the audience as much as possible, received highly praise and popularity.

Keywords: subtitle translation, multimodal discourse analysis, *the hobbit*

1 Introduction

Nowadays, with the continuous development of the global film industry, movies have become a culturally significant and expressive art form that transcends national borders and cultures. More and more Hollywood blockbusters and foreign films are being introduced into the domestic market. Good film subtitle translation will directly affect the quality of the film. It is particularly important in order to ensure that the audience understands the film well and to improve the quality of the viewing experience. The purpose of this paper is determined to analyze how *The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies* (The Hobbit 3) was successfully translated and subtitled and received high popularity nationwide and what role did the subtitle translation play in this movie.

Subtitle translation is also one of the main ways in which the culture of a film is communicated, and good subtitle translation not only allows the audience to receive the meaning of the film but the different cultures behind it. On the one hand, movies have

toward thoughts, values, ethics and morality through various forms of visual and auditory impacts. On the other hand, subtitle translation is a direct influence on the quality of the film, enhancing the audience's experience and the transmission of ideas. With good subtitle translation, it can better convey the ideas and deeper meaning of a movie to the audience, attracting and communicating profound messages. It plays an important role in enhancing international cultural exchange and communication. For example, for the dissemination of Chinese film and television works abroad, if there are professional foreign language subtitles, foreigners can understand Eastern culture more easily. However, subtitle translation is not so simple. Due to the cultural differences between different language groups and differences in verbal expressions, subtitle translation requires careful polishing by the translator. For high-quality and well-produced artistic works, high-quality translations are needed to achieve both their cultural and content transmission function. Good movie subtitle translation can make the movie more popular with consumers and better convey the ideas expressed in the movie. As a relatively new field in translation, Professor Qian Shaochang once pointed out that "the number of audiences (viewers) for translations now far exceeds the number of audiences (readers) for translated literary works, and the impact of film and television translation on society is by no means inferior to that of literary translation"^[1].

There are a number of studies that look at subtitle translation of related famous movies or TV shows, based on multimodal discourse analysis theory, aiming to find out the translation strategies that are up-to-date, overcoming linguistic differences as much as possible. Daijing studied the cultural terminology translation in *The Hobbit III*, which helped explore the translation strategies of cultural terms in film and TV subtitle translation^[2]. Xu Huamei studied the gains and losses in the use of four-character characters in the Chinese translation of subtitles in *The Hobbit III*^[3]. The translation strategies they proposed are helpful in improving the quality of film and television subtitle translation and providing effective solutions for translation difficulties. Based on these related researches, a research direction, as well as a relevant theoretical foundation, is provided for this article.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Multimodal Discourse Analysis Theory

With the development and widespread use of modern science and technology, especially computers, multimedia and media technology, multimodal discourse is becoming increasingly apparent. Simultaneously, the images, sound, text, color, space and movement appeared as well. As humanity enters a new era of multimodality in social semiotics, multimodal perception, multimodal reproduction and multimodal interaction will receive special attention in future research^[4].

As for multimodal discourse analysis, it refers to the simultaneous use of symbol resources for discourse and communicative categories. It can achieve the purposes of discourse and communication through one or more types of mediums. Here, medium refers to the material resources used for symbol production and event creation, including tools and materials used. Specifically, the perceptual modalities for sensing the

outside world, such as visual, auditory, and tactile, are considered modalities of perception, and the tools people use, such as eyes, ears, and hands, are referred to as mediums. Multimodal discourse analysis (henceforth MDA) is an emerging paradigm in discourse studies that extends the study of language per se to the study of language in combination with other resources, such as images, scientific symbolism, gesture, action, music and sound [5].

2.2 Framework of MDA

Multimodal discourse analysis is based on Halliday's systemic functional linguistics [6], and Professor Zhang Delu points out that multimodal discourse refers to the phenomenon of communication through multiple means and symbolic resources. Zhang Delu put forward the synthetic theoretical framework of multimodal discourse analysis, which mainly consists of four levels: culture, context, content and expression. This paper is going to apply this framework for analysis [7].

2.3 Textual Interpretation

Taking the Fine-tune subtitle translation of *The Hobbit III* based on the Shijiwenjing version (Deng Jiawan translated) released on the Bilibili video platform (cultural communities and video website highly popular among the younger generation in China) as an example, this paper aims to discuss the application and embodiment of multimodal discourse analysis in English fantasy film subtitle translation and analyze its translation strategies.

As for the analyzed text, *The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies*, the final chapter in *The Hobbits* series of magical adventure films, adapted from Tolkien's novels, who is known as the "father of fantasy literature" because of the influence of his works, which broke new ground in the field of fantasy literature. This film is mainly about a final big war in middle-earth involving 5 different races and also tells the ending story of the hobbit and his expedition friends. The fantasy blockbuster 'The Hobbit' series has entered the national consciousness and has been well received by audiences; and has created an extraordinary response in China even years later after it was first released. The reason for its success and popularity in China is closely linked to subtitled translations.

3 Multimodal Discourse Analysis of the Movie *The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies*

3.1 Effects of Various Modes on the Culture Level

The cultural level is the key factor that is able to make multimodal communication possible [8]. The traditions, forms and techniques of communication are decided by this factor. Without it, the situation context has no ability to explain. At this level, it concludes people's thinking modes, philosophy of life, living hobbits and ideology, which

is composed of every social implicit rule, and it can specifically realize its ideological communication program or structural potential, which can be called genre. Domestic audiences view foreign films as an important channel for understanding foreign cultures. Therefore, the discourse of movies can show domestic audiences the native human landscapes and customs of foreign countries. Interpreters play an intermediary role in disseminating culture and promoting cultural exchanges between domestic and foreign audiences. In specific translation practices, interpreters should not only satisfy the demand of foreign audiences for understanding the culture of the source country but also take into account the acceptance and understanding ability of foreign recipients, fully considering the audience's subjective status. In Tolkien's series of fantasy novels, there is a worldview and values similar to those of the Western world.

For example,

22:01 -Thank Durin, you're alive! –感谢都林 你们都活着！

1:44:12- Durin, be with you, brother. – 愿都林与你同在，兄弟

1:53:36- By Durin, you've lost your ax. – 都林在上，你那斧子没有了

In these subtitles, the word 'Durin' was also preserved in its phonetic translation in the translation subtitles, allowing movie-going audiences to understand the distinctive messages in films from different cultural backgrounds. In these cases, 'Thank Durin/By Durin' have the same expressive function as 'Oh my God'. It is the same way for individuals of different cultures to express their gratitude, happiness and surprise. However, in the values of Middle-earth in the Hobbits, the identity of god or heaven (in Eastern cultures) did not exist in that particular worldview, and thus, people in books only prayed good wishes and blessings to their ancestors or to a person of prestige. Durin, whom they pray for, was the surname of the royal lineage in the dwarf clan, which definitely showed the loyalty and respect of the dwarf to their king. By directly translating the concept of Durin, the author presents the viewer with a different worldview and, at the same time, enhances the presentation of literary content in film and television.

3.2 Effects of Various Modes on Contextual Level

In specific contexts, communication is restricted by contextual factors, including speech norms, tone, and discourse modes^[9]. Movies consist of a series of dynamic images, each frame of which has a logical connection to the previous one. Therefore, movies have a strong dependency on context and possess multimodal characteristics. When translating subtitles, it is necessary to fully consider the impact of contextual factors, including both linguistic and non-linguistic factors such as context, time, space, situation, object, and presupposition. Certain appropriate translation strategies, such as faithful translation, addition or omission, must be carefully considered and adopted in order to fit the original context.

Example 1

17:46 – I begged. I pleaded. -我又恳请 又求情

In this scene, the character Alfred, the deputy of the mayor of Long Lake, is desperate to explain his innocence when being attacked by a group of angry citizens. He was quite flustered because if he could not persuade this angry crowd, he would apologize

for his death. Thus the author cleverly uses the conjunctive usage of the source language ‘又...又...’(both...and...), which can vividly show the anxiety of Alfred in his words and is highly fitting with the characters’ expression, enhancing the audience’s viewing experience effectively.

Example 2

1:44:44 – I am too old for this. 我也老得太厉害了

In this situation, this line is spoken by an aged character in battle when fighting, and at the time of saying it, he is using equipment to repel the enemy. Therefore, the phrase has a double entendre: one means that he is old but still killing enemies in battle, and the other means that he is very familiar, good, and even experienced in the use of equipment. In this case, the author was hard to handle the meaning behind this word. Instead, the author omitted the objects to which the phrase refers but brought up the character’s pride in himself literally, letting the audience understand the double entendre for themselves.

Example 3

46:18 – (Bard)We are glad to find you alive beyond hope.

您自无望中生还 我等甚为欣喜

– (Thorin) Why do you came to the gates of the King Under the Mountain...armed for war?

你为何来到山下之王的大门之前...还全副武装?

– (Bard) Why does the King Under the Mountain fence himself in...like a robber in his hold?

那为何山下之王要自拥藩篱之内...如同寨中的劫匪?

Here is a dialogue where the chief representative of the human race and the dwarf king try to negotiate under the castle. This is a slightly serious occasion, and antithesis is also applied in the source subtitles, which portray two characters locked in a fierce battle of negotiation over the distribution of benefits. In subtitle translation, the author also uses formal language and tone, using the honorific of ‘we’ and ‘you’ and also applying four-character expressions of the target language, which also maintains the style of subtitles in both translation and original subtitles, putting the audiences in the scene of tense negotiation.

3.3 Effects of Various Modes on Content Level

At the content level, there are semantic level and form levels. At the semantic level, there are conceptual meanings, interpersonal meanings, and discourse meanings constrained by discourse scope, intonation and mode ^[9]. Different forms of patterns are mutually correlated to reflect the meaning of discourse. At the form level, each modality has its own form system, such as visual grammar, auditory grammar, tactile grammar and more.

Example 1

17:49 – (The crowds) Let’s do away with him! Tar him! 把他赶走! 办了他!

In this scene, the angry crowd wants to bring Alfred to justice. Among the subtitles, there is a statement ‘tar him’. According to the dictionary, ‘tar’ means coat with tar, as

it can be clearly seen that it's a kind of specific penalty. Considering the different expressions between the target language and the source language, the author chose to omit the subjects in the subtitle translation and converted them to more general and easily understood terms 'let's do away with him- drive him away' and 'tar him- got him', which ensured consistent expression of content in both English and Chinese. This depicts the anger of the masses rising up to attack in a more concise and easily understandable manner, bringing forth a vivid portrayal once again.

Example 2

31:03 – You should've stayed dead. 你们根本不该苏醒

In this subtitle, the author added a negative statement to convert the meaning of 'stayed dead', for Chinese is a language that describes actions. 'Stayed dead' means to keep a dead condition, and the direct translation does not match the language expression of the target language, and the audience will feel very strange and stiff when they read it. Therefore, the addition of negative statements making the subtitle easier to understand as 'You should never have woken up'.

Example 3

26:34 – You are to return to him immediately. 命你即刻返回他的身边

In this case, here is a messenger from the Elven King to Prince Legolas with an order. Although it's expressed as an oral message, the translation style and choice of words must reflect a superior's command to subordinates. The author changed the word order in the translation subtitle, which means 'order you to return to his side immediately', keeping the translated content consistent with the style and nature of the source subtitle.

3.4 Effects of Various Modes on Expression Level

The levels of expression of multimodal discourse refer to the forms of discourse presented in the material world, including 'verbal media' and 'non-verbal media' ^[10]. Verbal media include both 'pure' and 'quasi-verbal' forms; non-verbal media include 'physical' (facial expressions, gestures, body movements and other elements) and 'non-verbal' media include 'physical' (facial expressions, gestures, body movements and other elements) and 'non-physical' (for expression or specific contexts) media, which in the case of movies are manifested in the form of sound, voice size, pitch, frequency, accent, tone of voice, as well as the shape, size and layout of typefaces ^[10]. It aids, complements and reinforces the transmission of the meaning of language. Film subtitles take the form of textual symbols at the level of expression and correspond to the translated text as well. When translating the source language subtitles, the translation is not only a translation of what the characters are saying but also takes into account the linguistic media factors that play an important role in conveying the film's message, including the speed of the speaker's voice, the sound effects of the background music, the length and spatial position of the subtitles, etc.

Example 1

45: 58 – The heirlooms of my people are not lightly forsaken. 我族传承之物 断不会被轻易放弃

In this subtitle, the author cut this sentence into two shorter ones, which helps indicate the noble identity of the Elf King and his proud character; at the same time, the length of the subtitles has been shortened to make it easier for readers to understand. Also, some statements were also regulated, like the ‘heirlooms’ and ‘lightly forsaken’ were replaced by four-characters words in Chinese, making the expression of the Elf King more formal and noble.

Example 2



Fig. 1. The Dwarf King rushed out of the walls to fight with his handlers. From *The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies* (2016)

According to Figure 1, in this scene, the dwarf king and his warriors break out of the siege and fight together, shouting slogans in a language that Tolkien specially created in his series of novels. Therefore, when editing the subtitles of the film, special fonts were used to highlight this type of language specific to the race in the book. Moreover, in this majestic and exciting scene of hitting more with less, the author also added the lyrics (also the language of the dwarf race) sung in the background music in the upper left corner of the film. Combining the army rushing with their enemy troops, these have greatly enhanced the audience’s viewing experience, helped the audience interpret the scene and impressed them.

4 Discussion

After analyzing the subtitle translation of *The Hobbit 3: The Battle of the Five Armies*, we can conclude that (1) the content of subtitle translation has become more multimodal with the progress and development of the times. For example, in the film analyzed here, Tolkien’s original language is also kept in the subtitles and distinguished from ordinary subtitles; at the same time, the sound mode (like background music) of some specific scenes is also included in the subtitle translation. (2) the style of subtitle translation is flexible and versatile, catering to the taste of the public. Since this movie is produced and released by a video site with a high concentration of young Chinese, the style of subtitle translation is more suitable for young people’s preferences. Moreover, the

subtitle translation style will be adjusted according to the changes in scenes and different characters' personalities, which basically meets the basic requirement of "faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance" in translation.

5 Conclusion

In summary, the subtitles translator of the movie has done a good job of handling the relationships among different modes of multimodal communication. By combining various symbols such as film language, and sound graphics, the translator accurately conveyed the vivid character relationships and a fantasy world to Chinese audiences. The subtitle translation of the movie puts the audience at the center and coordinates the relationships among different modes, achieving simplicity and clarity while conveying the meaning of the film language as a whole to the audience. This paper uses the multimodal theory framework to analyze the subtitle translation of the movie *The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies* from cultural, contextual, content, and expressive levels, hoping to provide new references for China's film and television translation in the new era.

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