

# Research on Subtitle Translation of *Turning Red* from the Perspective of Multimodal Discourse Analysis

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**Abstract:** As a common carrier of cultural communication, film has been highly valued by various cultural communication and exchange organizations for its function of conveying diverse information and enhancing cultural exchanges between countries. Because of its great influence in the field of cross-cultural communication, the accuracy of subtitle translation of film and television works is particularly critical. Based on the theory of multimodal discourse analysis, this paper analyzes the subtitle translation of Disney's animated film *Metamorphosis of Youth*. Based on the theory, this paper will study and analyze the subtitle translation of *Youth Metamorphosis* from four perspectives: culture, context, content and expression, with the aim of providing audiences around the world with the opportunity to enjoy excellent film and television works, promoting people around the world to understand each other's cultures, and providing suggestions for domestic film and television subtitle translation and cross-cultural communication.

**Keywords:** Subtitle Translation; Multimodal Discourse Analysis; *Turning Red*.

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## 1. Introduction

With the advancement of contemporary media, film and television productions increasingly exert an important influence on cultural education across diverse contexts. The frequency of cross-cultural communication facilitated by these media has risen, leading to a greater output of productions that incorporate various cultural elements. Consequently, the significance of subtitle translation in film and television has become increasingly pronounced. The accuracy and appropriateness of subtitle translations play a crucial role in effective cross-cultural communication, underscoring the necessity for high-quality translations in this domain. This paper aims to assist learners of subtitle translation by establishing a model that encompasses four key dimensions: culture, context, content, and expression. This framework is intended to inspire improvements in subtitle translation practices for film and television works, thereby enhancing the dissemination of Chinese culture. Disney's animated film *Turning Red* produced in the past two years has received a high evaluation of "Rotten Tomatoes" freshness abroad and domestic Douban score. The enthusiastic praise from the audience is enough to show the success of this animated film with Chinese culture as the core in cross-cultural communication.

## 2. Research Status of Film Subtitle Translation from the Perspective of Multimodal Discourse

In the field of systemic-functional linguistics, language is conceptualized as a representation of society, with other systems beyond linguistics serving as the primary sources of meaning. This perspective not only acknowledges the systematic nature of multimodal discourse but also posits that such discourse fundamentally parallels the symbols inherent in pure language. Systematic functional multimodal discourse analysis is grounded in the principles of systemic functional linguistics (Halliday, 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004;

Martin, 1992) and Social Semiotics (Halliday, 1978; Hodge & Kress, 1988; van Leeuwen, 2005a). Multimodal discourse analysis encompasses the utilization of various sensory modalities-auditory, visual, tactile, among others-through diverse communicative means such as language, imagery, sound, and bodily movements, all of which constitute a symbolic system.

The theoretical framework of this study is informed by the comprehensive theory of multimodal discourse analysis articulated by Professor Zhang Delu. Building upon the foundational principles of systemic-functional linguistics, Professor Zhang has developed an integrative framework for multimodal discourse analysis through systematic analysis and induction. This framework is categorized into four distinct levels: the cultural level, context level, content level, and expression level.

## 3. Research on *Turning Red* from the Perspective of Multimodal Discourse Analysis Theory

### 3.1. Features of Subtitle Translation of Film and Television Works

Film and television productions predominantly utilize sound and imagery as symbolic elements to express emotions and convey meaning, rendering their content more accessible and intuitive compared to traditional print media such as newspapers and books. Translation serves as a fundamental component in the realm of audiovisual production. Similar to other forms of translation, the primary objective of film and television translation is to facilitate the conversion between two languages.

### 3.2. Research on Subtitle Translation of *Turning Red* from the Perspective of Multimodal Discourse Analysis

#### 3.2.1. The Cultural Level

The cultural level is an important one that makes

multimodal communication feasible. As different countries and regions use different languages, as an important medium for people around the world to understand each other, accurate and authentic translation of cultural elements in film and television works has a great impact on audience's understanding of film and television works.

Example:

We are 4-Townies, remember? Ride or die!

Translation:

我们是四城乐队的粉丝记得吗？赴汤蹈火在所不辞！

The phrase "Ride or die" is a slang English expression that literally translates to "run or die." But in fact, this slang sentence in Chinese does not have the exact equivalent of the idiom as its translation. "Ride or die" comes from the colloquial language of American hip hop culture. It is a very romantic word. As a noun, it means someone who can do anything for them, that is, a very important person. As a verb, it means to do something crazy. Due to the differences in Chinese and English language expression, the translator chose the corresponding "go through fire and water" as the translation. This translation can also show Mei-Mei's determination to go to the concert, and pave the way for the future development of the story.

### 3.2.2. The Context Level

The study of film subtitle translation from the context level means that in the actual language environment, people's communication will be affected by relevant contextual factors, including a certain communication scene in the film, the era background, historical background, cultural context, and the context of translation. Therefore, translators should integrate the previous and the next in subtitle translation, adjust and add or subtract information appropriately according to the context.

Example:

Making my own moves, 24/7, 365.

Translation:

每一天，每一刻，都是我说了算。

The background of this sentence is that Mei-Mei feels that

she can make her own decisions after the age of 13 and do what she likes to do every minute. "24/7 365" in the original text literally

translates to "24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year." But this cumbersome expression is inconsistent with Chinese expression habits. Therefore, the translation here is simplified to "every day, every moment".

On the basis of retaining the original meaning, it also conforms to the Chinese expression habits, caters to the taste of the audience, and reduces the language differences caused by culture.

### 3.2.3. The Content Level

This level refers to the content level of the translator's understanding and processing of the meaning and form of discourse in the multimodal discourse analysis proposed by Professor Zhang Delu. In terms of meaning, translators should accurately express the meaning of the original text in the form of subtitles and ensure that the audience can understand the meaning.

Example:

--Uh, what's with the tuque?

--Uh...Bad hair day.

Translation:

--这绒线帽是怎么回事？

--今天的头发太乱了。

The background of this remark is that Mei-Mei wears a wool hat to cover her hair in order to hide her orange hair, which has not fully recovered from her transformation into a red panda. Mei-Mei's friend, curious about her new look and concerned about what had happened to Mei-Mei, asked about the hat in the small talk. A literal translation of the word "bad hair day" in the original text of the film means "bad hair Day." In order to conform to the original film's excuse for lying, the translator translated it as "today's hair is too messy", so that the translation logic is more smooth, but also in line with the relaxation of the oral dialogue when chatting.

Table 1. The Expression Level in Turning Red

Chinese subtitles without punctuation	Subtitles with "!"	Subtitles with other punctuation
Our temple is the oldest in Toronto. 我们的宗祠是多伦多最古老的宗祠。	You think you are so mature! 你认为你够成熟了!	You wanna see crass? 你想看看什么才是粗鲁吗?
Don't load up on junk. 别吃太多垃圾食品。	Stop moving like that! 不准那样扭动!	The farther you go, the prouder I'll be. 你走得越远...我只会越骄傲

### 3.2.4. The Expression Level

Language at the expressive level includes companion language and pure language, while non-language includes body and non-body. Subtitle belongs to the written form of language media in terms of expression. The size, color, abbreviated form, case and so on of subtitles are closely related to the translation work. In the translation of film and television works, translators should take into account the physical movements of the characters, the layout of the background environment, the environmental tone, the communication environment and other factors.

Example: (the table on the top of this page)

When translating the full stop in the original text into Chinese, the translator did not add punctuation marks in the Chinese subtitles. This saved the subtitle space, ensured the proper layout of the film space, and made the dialogue between the characters in the film more coherent. Use of "!"

"in the original text, "?"", the translator kept punctuation marks in the Chinese subtitles so that the subtitles echoed the characters' emotions. In "The farther you go, the prouder I'll be." A comma is used to link the sentence, but in the Chinese translation, the comma is replaced with an ellipsis to express the conflicting but relieved emotions of Mother and Mei-Mei.

## 4. Discussion and Reflection

### 4.1. Tell Chinese Stories Well, Take Root in and Innovate Chinese Culture

In the past Western cultural narrative, the image of China has always been objectified and otherized. In the long run, the image of Chinese culture in the international environment will be blurred.

Therefore, it has become an urgent task to integrate Chinese excellent traditional culture into literary works and write Chinese stories well. The translation of film and

television works is to convert the information acceptable to the general audience into the information acceptable to the audience in other countries by means of secondary coding. The inclusion of visual and auditory symbols in subtitle translation helps to build a more comprehensive understanding of the culture embodied in the film. *Turning Red* uses the conflict between Mei-Mei and her mother to show that Chinese filial piety is not a yoke for children, but an emotional bond of mutual understanding and respect between parents and children.

#### 4.2. Integrate Chinese and Western Cultures to Build Cultural Identity

Values are the deep factors affecting the construction of immigrant identity. Only by actively changing internal values can individuals finally form a new identity. The intrinsic characteristics of cultural identity include its constructiveness, pluralism, inheritance and development. *Turning Red* tells the story of a Chinese girl living in a North American cultural environment, and its plot is designed to skillfully blend Chinese culture with Western culture and strengthen the correlation between various symbols. The film not only shows the inheritance of traditional Chinese family culture, but also incorporates the courage of Western women to learn to embrace their true selves instead of parting with them. The reconciliation between Mei-Mei and her mother is the expression of filial piety, loyalty and kindness in the excellent traditional Chinese culture, as well as the inheritance and development of cultural identity. The fusion of Mei-Mei and the red panda in the heart is the manifestation of the Western self-spirit and the diversification of cultural identity. Under the influence of the immigrant country environment and the family environment with strong traditional customs, the Asian youth absorb the essence of Eastern and Western cultures respectively, and build a diversified cultural identity.

#### 4.3. Break the Stereotype and Break the Binary Opposition between East and West

Stereotype is a part of people's thinking activities, which mainly exists at the cognitive level. It is a kind of cognitive label, and its description of a person or a certain group may be positive or negative. For example, Chinese students do well in mathematics or Chinese women have low status and can only be attached to men. Under the perspective of multimodal discourse analysis, film and television subtitle translation is no longer limited to the isolated written text mode, but integrates visual and auditory modes to provide viewers with a more comprehensive and broad theoretical perspective, which helps to break foreigners' stereotype of Chinese people. In the family relationship of *Turning Red*, the mother plays the dominant role in the family, while the father is the participant. This relationship breaks the traditional stereotype of a Chinese family in which the father is the "head of the family" and the mother can only take care of the husband and children. The main character, Mei-Mei, also contradicts the restrained, conservative and bookish image of Asian teenagers in Western films. She dares to fight against the constraints imposed by traditional ideas, successfully generates a multicultural identity, and finds her true self.

### 5. Conclusion

Based on the theory of multimodal discourse analysis, this paper puts forward some solutions and provides some

experience for the translation of cross-cultural films and television works. Given that subtitle translation in film and television plays a crucial role in facilitating deep cultural communication and exchange, the quality of such translations is of paramount importance, particularly for films distributed in linguistically diverse countries. Employing various modalities of discourse analysis in subtitle translation can enhance the visual appeal of the film and facilitate audience comprehension of its content. The film in question portrays the familial narratives of Chinese families situated in diverse environments and cultural contexts, eliciting emotional resonance among viewers both domestically and internationally. In addition to promoting the rich traditional culture of China, the film incorporates innovative elements that emphasize family harmony. Its thematic narrative, expressive techniques, and underlying values offer valuable insights and experiences pertinent to the cultural communication objective of effectively "telling Chinese stories." By leveraging the cross-cultural narrative experiences presented in the film, translators of film and television subtitles should aim to subtly disseminate Chinese culture globally and cultivate a multifaceted and positive representation of China. Furthermore, it is essential for translators to integrate the emotions, cultures, and values of international audiences, rather than remaining solely anchored in local cultural contexts. This approach will maximize audience engagement and experience, thereby fostering the dissemination and exchange of China's esteemed traditional culture.

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