

# A Study on the Interactive Mechanisms of Short Video Danmaku Translation from a Systemic Functional Linguistics Perspective

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## Abstract

With the proliferation of short videos and danmaku culture, danmaku has emerged as a vital medium for audience participation in cross-cultural interaction. This study focuses on the translation of danmaku in videos featuring foreign blogger “I Show Speed” visiting China. Grounded in Halliday's systemic functional linguistics (SFL), it examines how danmaku translation constructs information, sustains interaction, and organizes discourse from three metafunctional perspectives. Beyond evaluating specific translation issues, this study validates SFL's explanatory power for the dynamic, community-driven phenomenon of danmaku translation and explores new frontiers for its theoretical application.

**Keywords:** systemic functional linguistics, short videos, danmaku translation

## 1. Introduction

Short videos' derivative danmaku feature has evolved from a one-way commenting system into a participatory cross-cultural interactive text. Zhou and Jiang (2022) pointed out that danmaku translation features high interactivity and linguistic flexibility. Currently, most related studies treat it merely as an auxiliary factor in analyzing other cultural phenomena; research analyzing the interactive mechanisms of danmaku translation from an SFL perspective remains limited.

## 2. Methodology

This qualitative study analyzes danmaku from a corpus of five videos from “I Show Speed”'s China trip (total runtime: 30 minutes), sampled from Bilibili platform. We selected 200 danmaku instances (literal vs. optimized translations) based on high-engagement scenes (e.g., >1,000 views per comment cluster). Analysis applies SFL metafunctions via manual coding in NVivo software. Videos are used under fair use principles for academic analysis, ensuring no copyrighted material is reproduced verbatim.

## 3. Systemic Functional Linguistics and Short Video Danmaku

### 3.1 *The Metafunctions of Systemic Functional Linguistics*

Hu Zhuanglin (2007) notes that Halliday's pure functional theory encompasses conceptual, interpersonal and discourse functions. Sun Huijun (2000) summarizes: “Conceptual function manifests in sentence transitivity and voice; interpersonal function appears in tone, modality, and intonation; while discourse function is embodied in the anaphoric system, information structure, and cohesion.”

### 3.2 *Characteristics of Short Video Danmaku as a Special Discourse*

Danmaku primarily refers to an interactive format where audiences send comments while watching, synchronized with video playback (Gu, 2019). As a special discourse, danmaku exhibits immediacy, interactivity, communality, and multimodality.

#### 3.2.1 Immediacy

Online video users must send danmaku while watching, often commenting on specific lines, characters, or scenes. Any time lag not only diminishes the comment's value but also disrupts and confuses the audience's viewing experience (Gu, 2019).

#### 3.2.2 Interactivity

Danmaku serves as a hub connecting interpersonal and mass communication during information exchange in danmaku translation. This mode—inherent to its nature—is highly interactive and transcends temporal and spatial

constraints (Zhou & Jiang, 2022).

### 3.2.3 Community-Oriented Nature

New media platforms like Bilibili, characterized by openness and decentralization, lower barriers to audience participation and dismantle boundaries in information dissemination. This enables anyone to engage in both the consumption and propagation of content. Simultaneously, the emergence of new communication channels has fostered the formation of online communities, such as “fan circles,” “sports fan circles,” and “ACG” (an abbreviation for Animation, Comics, and Games) circles. (Du, 2020)

### 3.2.4 Multimodality

Kress (2010) comprehensively analyzed the sociosemiotic theory of multimodal discourse. This theory posits that effective communication cannot be confined to a single linguistic modality, asserting that “all signs in all modalities are meaningful” (Kress, 2010). Danmaku has expanded from text to incorporate multimodal discourse elements combining images, animations, and color.

### 3.3 *The Relationship Between the Two*

When analyzing the meaning conveyed by danmaku in the short video “Speed Visits China,” researchers can examine whether these comments achieve necessary balancing and adjustments through SFL. This involves assessing conceptual functions through transitivity, mood and modality in interpersonal functions, and information structure and cohesive devices in discourse functions.

## 4. Analysis of Interactive Mechanisms in Danmaku Translation Based on Conceptual and Interpersonal Functions

### 4.1 *Conceptual Function: How Danmaku Translation Constructs and Conveys “Shared Knowledge” and “Cultural Landscape”*

Conceptual function focuses on how language expresses experiences of the subjective and objective worlds. In danmaku translation, this manifests as how translators select processes within the transitivity system to transform events, character relationships, and cultural symbols in videos into “shared knowledge” and “cultural landscapes” comprehensible to danmaku audiences.

Take the scene where “Speed” tastes “Sichuan hot pot” in Chengdu:

Original video scene: Speed says eagerly: I wanna the spiciest hot pot in China.“ After eating the hot pot, he becomes speechless from the heat, exclaiming with exaggerated expression: “Oh my god! God damn!”

Literal Translation of Danmaku: “我要中国最辣的火锅!我的天 太辣了!”

Functionally Optimized Danmaku: “ 上最辣的锅(Bring the spiciest one!) 我去! .....这个锅看着感觉就在冒火! 真香!(Holy crap! ...this pot looks like it's on fire! So damn good!)

Analysis:

Process Conversion: The original text employs relational process (“I wanna the spiciest hot pot in China”) and psychological process (“Oh my god”, “God dame”). The optimized translation converts the relational process into the more colloquial Chinese imperative “上最辣的锅” and transforms the psychological process “Oh my god! God dame!” into the Chinese internet slang “我去!” This fusion of material and psychological processes vividly conveys the complex experience of transitioning from fearlessly seeking spice to being overwhelmed by it.

Cultural Context: “Sichuan hot pot” is a powerful cultural symbol. A literal translation would only convey the contrast in spiciness assessment, whereas “我去!”, “冒火”, and “真香” are highly codified cultural memes within Chinese online communities. “我去” serves as a highly colloquial interjection, vividly conveying shock beyond expectations; while “真香” becomes a masterstroke for depicting attitude reversal, precisely encapsulating the psychological shift of “setting oneself up for a fall.” By tapping into this shared cultural knowledge, danmaku translation transcends literal interpretation to activate collective memory, instantly bridging the gap between “cross-cultural experience” and “localized resonance,” thereby constructing a distinct “cultural landscape” for the danmaku community.

### 4.2 *Interpersonal Function: How Danmaku Translation Constructs “Virtual Presence” and “Emotional Community”*

Interpersonal function examines how language establishes and maintains social relationships. In Danmaku translation, this primarily occurs through tone and modality systems, creating a virtual sense of “being present” alongside the blogger and all viewers while building an “emotional community” rooted in shared feelings.

Consider the scene where “Speed” encounters Chinese and foreign player impersonators in Chongqing: Original video scene:

Upon seeing a passerby whose face beneath the mask closely resembles Ronaldo’s, he exclaims, “The Chinese Ronaldo!”

Literal danmaku translation: “在干啥呢？中国的罗纳尔多(What are you doing? China's Ronaldo?!)”

Functionally optimized danmaku: “抽象！难蚌！好活！家人们，甲亢哥懵逼了！”

(Abstract! Damn! Brilliant! Folks, “Speed” is baffled!)” Analysis:

**Tone and Address:** The optimized translation completely abandons the original's declarative and interrogative tones, replacing them with strong exclamatory phrases (“难蚌”“好活”!(“Damn!”, “Brilliant!”)). The use of ‘家人们(folks)’ conveys a strong sense of community belonging. This is no longer a cold relay of information, but a “live audience member” enthusiastically rallying the entire “clan” to join in.

**Mood and Emotional Resonance:** Words like “抽象”“难蚌”“好活” (“abstract,” “damn,” and “awesome”) carry intense emotional charge (mood). They aren’t merely descriptive—they share a collective, joyful viewing experience. As countless similar, playful yet supportive danmakus flood the screen, they create a powerful emotional field. Every user sending or reading these danmakus are no longer isolated individuals but members of the “family.” The danmaku translation serves as an “emotional catalyst,” transforming individual viewers’ feelings into a collective community emotion through highly colloquial, emotionally charged re-creation, firmly sustaining this “emotional community.”

## 5. Analysis of Danmaku Translation Dissemination Patterns Based on Discourse Function

### 5.1 Discourse Function: Coherence and Adaptation of Danmaku Translation in “Flowing Text”

Discourse function examines how language is organized into coherent discourse within specific contexts. Danmaku constitutes a “flowing text,” where discourse coherence manifests not only within individual comments but also through precise synchronization with the video timeline and intertextual relationships with other comments.

Consider the moment when “Speed” uttered “We are here in China!” during the Shanghai tour:

(As he opened his mouth) “来了来了 (Here it comes)”

(Simultaneously with “We are here in China!”) “江浙沪最兴奋的一集 (The most exciting episode for people from Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Shanghai!)”

(2 seconds after his exclamation) “我来瞧瞧梗 (Let me see what the meme is about)”

Analysis:

**Anchor-Information Structure:** The anchor in a danmaku is often the most visually prominent element on the screen (Speed’s expression). The information structure (new information) represents viewers’ instant interpretations of the scene. These three danmakus form a micro-coherent discourse chain of “prediction-occurrence- evaluation.” Though posted by different users, they constitute a complete narrative through shared visual focus and logical sequence.

**Coherence Devices:** Connections between danmakus primarily rely on “semantic cohesion” and “temporal cohesion.” “Here it comes!” foreshadows an impending event, “The most exciting episode for Jiangsu-Zhejiang-Shanghai” provides a specific interpretation of the Shanghai tour, while “Let me see what this is about” serves as a summary evaluation based on familiarity with Speed’s consistent style. Together, they weave a semantic web. Crucially, each danmaku must appear at the most precise “timing point”; appearing too early or too late disrupts coherence with the video stream, causing “discourse dissonance.”

### 5.2 Synergistic Relationship Between Danmaku Translation and Video Frames in Multimodal Contexts

Danmaku translations are not isolated texts but components that collaborate with video frames, audio, subtitles, and other modalities to convey meaning. Their discourse functions can only be fully realized within multimodal contexts.

Consider the scene where “Speed” learns to fry and taste stinky tofu:

**Video Modality:** A close-up captures him awkwardly frying stinky tofu, picking up a piece, carefully dipping it in sauce several times, finally succeeding in eating it, and then flashing a somewhat satisfied smile.

Danmaku Translation:

“恭喜甲亢哥解锁臭豆腐成就！(Congrats, “Speed”, on unlocking the stinky tofu achievement!)”

“臭豆腐：我当时害怕极了！（Stinky Tofu: I was terrified back then!）” “人类的悲欢并不相通，但干饭的快乐是相同的(Human joys and sorrows may not resonate, but the bliss of eating is universal.)”

Analysis:

The danmakus form a “narrative synergy” with the visuals. They transcend mere translation of his words, instead providing “plot commentary” and “emotional annotations” for his actions. The first comment frames his learning process through a gamified “achievement system”; The second employs personification, linking an object’s state to human psychology, amplifying the scene’s drama and humor; The third transcends the specific context, elevating to a philosophical level that connects individual experience to universal human emotion. Together, these comments and video footage weave a richer, more multidimensional, and captivating story, achieving a leap from “recording actions” to “creating narratives.”

## 6. Conclusion

The analysis shows that, from an SFL perspective, danmaku translation forms a dynamic, multifunctional social semiotic practice. It conveys information conceptually, builds communities interpersonally, and adapts to multimodal flows, validating SFL's explanatory force for emerging danmaku translation. This extends to implications for audiovisual translation (AVT) practices and AI tools in community-driven subtitling, such as real-time meme integration on platforms like TikTok. Future research could quantify SFL metrics across larger corpora.

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