Deconstruction of Audiovisual Works and the Re-Construction of its Translation

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Abstract
Rapid as the development of film industry in our country is, audiovisual translation plays an increasingly important role as a bridge of communication between the Chinese audiences and English films. However, the history of audiovisual translation in China is not as long as that in the West and the domestic researches on audiovisual translation, especially the theoretical researches, are not remarkable. Until today, the systematic theory of audiovisual translation has not been constructed. Therefore, the author intends to make a study on audiovisual translation from the perspective of adaptation theory to find out the five aspects that subtitle translator should focus on and the specific elements which the translator should adapt to.

Keywords: Adaptation Theory, Audiovisual Translation, Adaptation Elements

1. Introduction
Audiovisual translation plays an increasingly important role as a bridge of communication between the Chinese audiences and English films. It is a special translation mode, which has not only the general features of literature translation but also boasts its own peculiarities. In the process of audiovisual translation, the translator should take a series of elements into account, such as: contextual correlates, structural objects, spatio-temporal constraints, audience reception, character’s features and cultural factors etc. Facing plenty of the elements that should be adapted to, translator should be clear about how to make linguistic choices, namely which aspects in total he or she should take into consideration and what factors he or she should make adaptation to. So audiovisual translation actually involves two procedures: the deconstruction of Audiovisual Works and the construction of its Translation.

For the convenience of research, in this paper a new terminology “adaptation elements”, which refers to all the factors that translator should adapt to in the process of audiovisual translation, will be used.

1. Introduction to Vershueren and His Adaptation Theory
Jeff Verschueren, a Belgian linguist who was born in 1952 and graduated from the University of California, held the post of the researcher of Flemish Fund for Scientific Research and the professor of University of Antwerp. Professor Verschueren has got a lot of achievements, one of which is that he puts forward the famous “theory of linguistic adaptability”. In 1987, Jeff Verschueren, in the book Pragmatics as a Theory of Linguistic Adaptation, put forward the conception of “linguistic adaptability”, which was the rudiment of his afterwards famous “adaptation theory”. While in the year of 1999, Verschueren issued another book Understanding Pragmatics, in which he systematically improved and developed his “adaptation theory”. In accordance with Jeff Verschueren, language use is a process of continuous linguistic choice-making at different degrees of salience, consciously or unconsciously, for language-internal and language-external reasons (Vershueren 55-56).

The reason that we can make linguistic choice is owing to the three natures of human languages: variability, negotiability and adaptability, which are an inseparable and organic unit. It is the three properties that make our human beings use languages dynamically (Vershueren 14-15). Generally, variability refers to that language has a number of possibilities for human to choose, while negotiability means that the choice-making is conducted in accordance with principles and strategies which are highly flexible rather than in the mechanical way. Then the two traits of language: variability and negotiability essentially lead to the third property of language: adaptability, which refers to that human beings could flexibly make linguistic choice from a series of linguistic units to get the satisfaction of communicative needs.
2. Deconstruction of Audiovisual Works: Five Aspects

In this section the author firstly demonstrates the component elements of film, which consists of video, audio, culture and audiences, and then according to Mona Baker’s classification on video and audio of film the author divides them further into three aspects: pictures, sounds and screenplay to make a conclusion that in the process of audiovisual translation, translator should take five aspects into consideration (pictures, sounds, screenplay, culture and audience). The details are as follows:

2.1 The Component Elements of Audiovisual Works

Searching through one of the most authoritative search engines Wikipedia, the definition of audiovisual works is described below:

(1) A film, also called a movie or motion picture, is a series of still pictures which, when shown on a screen, creates the illusion of moving pictures;

(2) Films usually include an optical soundtrack, which is a graphic recording of the spoken words, music and other sounds that are to accompany the pictures;

(3) Films are cultural artifacts created by specific cultures. They reflect those cultures and, in turn, affect them.

Moreover, “audience” is the fourth component element of film, which is demonstrated below:

The film theorists and the grandmaster of semiotics of cinema, Christian Matz indicates in his book Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Imaginary Signifier that merely in the sight of spectators a film could be a film. They are one of the objective parts of film (45).

To sum up, according to the definition and peculiarity of audiovisual works, it can be concluded that the component elements essentially consist of video, audio, culture and audiences, which is showed in diagram as follows:

![Diagram of Film/Television Components]

2.2 The Further Classification on Audiovisual Works

Moreover, the professor of translation studies at the University of Manchester, Mona Baker thinks the audio and visual aspects of film or television programme can be classified further. In Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies, Mona Baker analyzed further the elements of audiovisual works in detail from the perspective of semiotic composition. She put forward that in film and television programmes, the translator has four simultaneous channels to consider:

(1) The verbal auditory channel, including dialogue and background voices, like lyric of a song;

(2) The non-verbal auditory channel, including music, natural sound and sound effects;

(3) The verbal visual channel, including superimposed titles (source-language subtitle) and written signs on the screen, like letter and poster etc;

(4) And the non-verbal visual channel: picture composition and flow, like figure and scene etc. (Baker 245)

Then, according to the description of Mona Baker, the tree diagram above could be developed as follows:
Through contrasting the meaning of dialogue and source-language subtitle, the author finds that the two things are essentially the same thing: screenplay (the original text of audiovisual translator).

Moreover in accordance with Mona Baker’s description, the non-verbal auditory channel, the background language and the dialogue mean the sound with some information, which could be put into the same class: sounds.

Meanwhile, the non-verbal visual channel and written signs refer to the pictures with some certain information, which do not belong to the source-language subtitle, and then the author puts them into the same class: pictures.

Thus, on the basis of the analyses above, it is clear that the auditory channel and visual channel could be classified further into three categories: pictures, sounds and screenplay, which is showed clearly in the tree diagram 3.3 as follows:
3. The Re-Construction of its Translation: the “Adaptation Elements” at Each Aspect

As analyzed above, the component elements of audiovisual works essentially consist of five aspects: pictures, sounds, screenplay, culture and audiences, which means that in the process of audiovisual translation, the translator should take these five aspects into consideration. However, at each of the five aspects what specific elements should the translator make adaptation to?

3.1 At the Aspect of Audiences

Eugene Nida has said that in film industry the successful translated-subtitle gets increasingly important; and for foreign-language films, a large number of profits depend on its successful audiovisual translation. Hence, audiovisual translation should abide by its commercial principles to attract more audiences to make more profits as much as possible (别尽秋 33). That is to say, audiovisual translators should try hard to get the film accepted by audiences, namely to adapt to the audiences’ reception.

3.2 At the Aspect of Culture

Television programme and films are cultural artifacts created by specific cultures. They reflect those cultures and, in turn, affect them, which means audiovisual translation is actually a cross cultural communication which involves an issue of cultural differences. Hence, in order to make audiences enjoy television programme and films well, translator should not only do the best to adapt to the cultural identity of the target audiences as much as possible, but also try everything to evade the cultural taboo of the community of the target audience. Therefore, on the basis of the relevant descriptions above, it is clear that the “adaptation elements” at the aspect of culture are the “avoiding cultural-taboo” and “cultural identity”.

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3.3 At the Aspect of Screenplay

The textual form of dialogue or voiceover is called the screenplay and then when the screenplay is superimposed on the screen, it is called the source-language subtitle. That is to say, dialogue and source-language subtitle are just two different forms of screenplay, the source material (source text) of translator. Therefore, according to adaptation theory, translator should try to dynamically adapt to the contextual correlates and the structural objects of the source text. Hence, it is clear that the “adaptation elements” at the aspect of screenplay are the “structural objects” and “contextual correlates” of source-language.

3.4 At the Aspect of Sounds

(1) Temporal Constraints of Sounds

According to Guardini, a famous Audiovisual Translation academic, the duration of subtitles depends on the duration of the utterance in the original version (Guardini 91). The subtitle of audiovisual works has its feature of instantaneity. Subtitle text is not like the normal text, such as books, magazines, and even electronic-books etc., which is constant and then its readers can read it the way they like (slowly, fast or repeatedly). Subtitle text can only stay on the screen for a short period of time. That is to say, the time during which the subtitle exists on the screen should be synchronous with the utterance in audiovisual works. Simply put, subtitle appears and disappears on screen following the appearance and disappearance of the utterance of the characters in an audiovisual works. Therefore, translator should adapt to the temporal constraints of sounds.

(2) The Information Loaded on Sounds

For audiovisual translator, besides the content of dialogue, the background sound of a film is also important. Some of the sounds have certain information which is closely related to the theme, plot or the content of a movie, and then it is necessary to translate those information which is loaded on some of the sounds to the audiences so as to help them understand the film or television programme better. Thus, the “adaptation elements” at the aspect of sounds are the “time constraints” and “information loaded on sound”.

3.5 At the Aspect of Pictures

(1) Spatial Constraints of Image

According to Fotios Karamitroglou, the space of the film is limited and generally subtitles can only occupy the bottom of the screen so that they cover an area of lesser importance to the general aesthetic appreciation of the target film (3). The subtitle could be one or two lines and the number of characters per line should not be more than 40 because an increase in the number of characters could reduce the legibility of the subtitles (Karamitroglou 4). As to some ideographic language subtitling, such as Chinese, it is said that each line of the subtitles allow no more than 13 Chinese characters (qtd. in 陈红萍:115). Therefore, translator should take these spatial elements into account and adapt to the spatial constraints.

(2) The Information Loaded on Objects

According to Guardini, audiovisual translation will be influenced by the visual information given on the screen (91). That is to say, when there is something on the film pictures with certain information related closely to the theme, content or plot, like written signs, letter and poster etc., translator should get these information and translate them into target-language subtitle for audiences to help them understand better the context and plot. Simply put, translator should adapt to those information loaded on objects in a film or television programme to convey as more useful information as possible to audiences.

(3) Characters’ Traits

There is a famous saying that “A bird is known by its note, and a man by his talk”, which indicates that everyone has his or her own characteristics of language using and to some extent the body languages could reflect the personality feature of the utterer. Besides, body language, like nodding and gestures etc. belongs to a part of audiovisual language. Thus, in order to avoid the contradiction between dialogue and characters’ body language, translator should try to adapt to the characters’ body language when translating.

4. The “Adaptation Elements”

To sum up, as analyzed above, in the process of audiovisual translation, there are five aspects that the translator should take into consideration and at each of the five aspects there are several elements that he or she should make adaptation to:

(a) The Aspect of Pictures: space constraints, information loaded on objects and characters’ body language

(b) The Aspect of Sounds: time constraints and information loaded on sound

(c) The Aspect of Screenplay: structural objects and contextual correlates
(d) The Aspect of Culture: cultural identity and avoiding cultural taboo
(e) The Aspect of Audiences: audiences’ reception

Moreover, it is worth mentioning that these “adaptation elements” at the five aspects of audiovisual works are inseparable. They are interrelated with each other to affect translator’s linguistic choice. In the process of audiovisual translation, translator should take them all into consideration to make linguistic choice properly so as to help the audiences enjoy the film or television programme better.
Reference


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