

# Film Translation and Discourse Analysis: Perspectives from Text, Ideology and Power

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## Abstract

Film translation, an interdisciplinary area derived from comparative literature and translation study, has generally followed four phases in its development: namely, "Film Translation", "Screen Translation", "Audiovisual Translation", and "Multimedia Translation". Having a brief overview of the academic development of film translation and discourse analysis, it is expected to reveal that film translation studies are now developing from focusing on linguistic study into cultural context, or from focusing on literal analysis into focusing on discourse analysis. Based on different theoretic schools of discourse analysis, it calls for an interdisciplinary investigation in film translation, i.e. an integration of linguistics, translatology, and sociology in name of discourse analysis, or more specifically, from perspectives of text structure, ideological criticism and power construction.

## Keywords

Film Translation, Discourse Analysis, Text, Ideology, Power.

## 1. Introduction

Film Translation (also Screen Translation), now known as audiovisual translation (AVT) among professionals, is an emerging area developed from comparative literary and translation study [1, 2]. The emergence and development of film translation is an inevitable result of the rapid advancement of economy, technology, cultural exchanges and academic research. As a way of mass culture communication, the production and/or dissemination of film and TV broadcasting attract(s) wide attention and, correspondingly, the importance of film translation is self-evident. Translation Study, which has shifted its focus from linguistic study to cultural theory, simultaneously steps into a new stage that highlights discourse analysis. Based on a brief description of the general development of film translation and discourse analysis, especially that in China, this paper tries to identify the influence of existing discursive theories on film translation study; and specifically, in terms of text structure, critical ideology, and power manipulation.

## 2. Literature Review

It is generally believed that the study of film translation began in about the 1960s, boosted in the 1990s, and progressed dramatically in the past decade. In Western countries, especially in Europe, film translation studies have nearly gone through a process of four phases: "Film Translation", "Screen Translation", "Audiovisual Translation" and "Multimedia Translation" [3, 4, 5]. And historically, its discussion includes topics ranging from theoretical research and practical investigation to teaching study and ideological analysis [6].

In China, though a few achievements having been achieved with a focus in teaching, most of the film translation studies fall into the field of practical analysis. This is especially true for those researches from the early days, when English language audiovisual products were allowed to be distributed in China and some scholars and professionals began to summarize their own translating experiences after having finished their translation projects. These are the start of China's film translation research, which mainly focusing on the dealing tactics for dubbing and/or subtitling in a micro-linguistic level, including the discussions on audiovisual language characteristics (Zhang Chunbai, 1998), film translation's differences from literary translation (Qian Shaochang, 2000), applicable strategies for subtitling translation (Li Yunxing, 2001), contradictions in film translation (Zhao Chunmei, 2002), and the technical processing methodology in language coding (Ma Zhengqi, 2005) [1, 2, 3, 4].

In Europe, however, the research of film translation has generated a much more fruitful outcome, transferring its focus from a text-based linguistic study to a cross-disciplinary study which puts its emphasis in culture, ideology, identity, or the construction of power. Just as Harvey (2000) has pointed out, a deep analysis on translation of films and any other audiovisual products calls for "a methodology that neither prioritizes broad concerns with power, ideology and patronage to the detriment of the need to examine representative examples of text, nor contents itself with detailed text-linguistic analysis while making do with sketchy and generalization notions of context" [7].

Therefore, it is easy to see that the research on film translation should not be restrained at the level of linguistic analysis, language comparison or code switching. Some integrated studies from the perspective of text, ideology, or sociology need to be encouraged and discussed. Different theories in discourse analysis, for example, are good options for such integration with film translation study because they normally hold a comprehensive perspective from those disciplines as linguistics, sociology, ideology, and politics. Due to the varieties in academic backgrounds and areas of interests, different scholars provide different concerns or ideas in discourse analysis, which have gradually formed into different theories. According to their differences in theoretic origins and academic methodology, researchers in discourse analysis can be roughly divided into three major schools, namely: "the Anglo-American School" (also known as "School of Applied Linguistics"), "Foucault School" and "the School of Critical Discourse", who correspondingly based their researches on such theoretical frameworks as textual structurelism, power manipulation and ideological criticism [8] (Huang Guowen et al, 2006).

### 3. Film Translation and Text Analysis

Early structuralists from Saussure to Bloomfield paid a high emphasis to describe the internal structure of language. They viewed language as a static system and highlighted the analysis on morphology and syntax, but ignored the flexibility of speech acts or the correlation of meaning within a text. A pure structural analysis of the words and text cannot explain some linguistic cases or the full range of language application. More and more linguists have begun to acknowledge the nature of the context and abandon the method of studying the language out of context. Based on the challenges of traditional syntactic analysis, American structuralist Harris (1952) first proposed in his essay of *Discourse Analysis* that language does not occur in scattered words or sentences but exists in coherent discourse; which clarifies the essence of context analysis and speech research. Later on, some new techniques with contextual analysis came into view of structural linguists and they are generally applied in the fields of applied linguistics and language teaching in name of discourse analysis or text analysis[9].

According to new structuralism, the focus of text analysis includes the use of linguistic structures in specific contexts and genre analysis in cultural contexts. It calls for detailed study

on cohesion and coherence within a text, or in discourse. Halliday (1976) is the first to propose the concept of "cohesion", and he has put forward five important cohesive techniques: reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical cohesion[9]. The study of cohesion is a very important aspect of text analysis, film text is no exception. When it comes to coherence, discourse markers, the typical samples of discursive guidance, insertion, conversion, and supplementation, are also of special use in plot development and information transition in audiovisual works.

Therefore, text analysis can be used as a very useful attempt in film translation because it can bring many inspirations from the perspective of contextual discourse. Chaume (2004), for example, once conducted a quantitative research on discourse markers in film translation via a corpus analysis to identify their pragmatic functions. And he found that such words as "Now", "You know", "(You) See", "Look", "I Mean", are quite simple but convey a rather profound significance in their translated texts[9].

#### **4. Film Translation and Critical Discourse Analysis**

With the advent of mass media such as film and television, the development of sociology and linguistics such as Foucault school and functional linguistics, a trend of counter-linguistics ideology - critical linguistics began to rise. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as a sociolinguistic approach, was first introduced by Roger Fowler et al (1979) in his book *Language and Control* and then flourished in Europe and worldwide. Different from traditional structuralism or functionalism, many works of sociolinguistics were launched in term of CDA among which the studies from Stuart Hall (1980) and N. Fairclough (1989) are widely accepted as important cornerstones[10].

It is notable; however, CDA has always been closely related to film discourse study and popular culture criticism right from its beginning. Many criticisms of mass culture like TV broadcasting and films, either the Frankfurt School in its infancy or the British Cultural School in its development, revealed not only the screen culture's nature in ideology, but also the audience's dynamic interpretations of cultural symbols, as well as the reconstruction in social life made by audiovisual culture.

Since the 1980s, CDA, which embodies a variety of theoretical backgrounds such as linguistics, sociology, cultural studies, and anthropology, has attracted much attention because of its wide range of interdisciplinary horizon. According to Yue Ming (2006), CDA is widely used to analyze film discourse, or so-called "Media Discourse" in its broad sense [11]. Though having achieved tremendous accomplishments, however, CDA is also often questioned for its lack of objectivity and representativeness in case sampling or data analysis. Having considering this, some scholars try to adopt some quantitative approaches from the perspective of structural linguistics, functional linguistics, psycholinguistics, or corpus linguistics to support their ideology- or sociology-natured studies. In the 1990s, Stubbs et al tries to identify the relationship between language and ideology, with an integrated methodology of CDA and Corpus Linguistics. He succeeded in taking the advantages of both CDA and that of corpus linguistics and functional linguistics and presented us a vivid and reliable result about the influence of ideology upon film translations.

#### **5. Film Translation and Discourse Power Analysis**

Under the influence of Saussure's systematic assumptions, structuralists' ideas in linguistics, and Nietzsche's concept of power, Michel Foucault, an important post-structuralist thinker from France, proposed his theory on discourse construction and power order. According to Foucault, narrowly speaking, the popular understanding of discourse is the form of language. In a broad sense, however, discourse covers all linguistic forms and examples in social culture.

By a deep and full investigation of the history of human medicine and knowledge civilization, Foucault profoundly identifies the essence of the reconstruction of the social structure: discourse. He believes that discourse is completely a kind of speech practice, a form of power, a tool for knowledge transmission and power control and he is convinced that all power can be realized or constructed through discourse [12].

Different from the focus of linguistics, Foucault prefers to analyze discourse from the point of sociology, ideology and even politics. He is more attracted to discourse practice and power reconstruction. He is inclined to argue on discourse order, ideology and social relationships. Foucault's theory of discourse power profoundly reveals the ideological characteristics and the nature of power construction of discourse and knowledge, and lays the groundwork for the cultural studies and cultural translation studies of postcolonialism- from culture school, deconstruction school to feminism and postcolonialism.

Sociological and psychological concerns about discourse analysis, which brought by Foucault's theory and as well as CDA, are also helpful for the researchers to break through the boundaries between translatology, linguistics, or any other disciplines and to give implications for studies of film translation. Andre Lefevere (1985), for example, inspired by Foucault's discourse power analysis and Itamar Even-Zohar's (1976) poly-system theory, gives his proposal of manipulation and highlights the influence of cultural factors upon translation study. He explained the relationships between discourse and power in terms of poetics, ideology, and patronage. With Lefevere's theory of manipulation, Jin Haina (2017) has shown the dominant influence of different patrons on film translation strategies. When she examined the translation modes of early Chinese silent films, she identifies explicit effects of ideological manipulation, even in warfare [13]. Based on Foucault's discussion on discourse analysis and power construction, it is easy to have a further analysis on such sub-topics like source cultural discourse, target cultural discourse, translator's discourse, capital discourse, audience's discourse, identity construction, and self-awareness. With regard to power conflict between translator's discourse and that of the director, Linda Jaivin, a famous Australian translator of Chinese films "*Farewell My Concubine*", "*Heroes*", and "*The Grandmaster*", has once mentioned the directors' control and restrictions on her final translations [14].

## 6. Conclusion

In summary, different schools of discourse analysis, namely "the Anglo-American School", "Foucault School" and "the School of Critical Discourse", have their own emphasis in text, ideology, and power and thus, they can bring some inspirations for researchers who are interested in film translation research. Either from text analysis to ideological criticism, or from knowledge construction to power order, discourse analysis with dynamic focus is helpful for us to find some new approaches to translatology, which to some extent, may enrich the scope of film translation study and satisfy its needs in text structural analysis, ideological criticism, and power construction studies.

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