

A Study on Subtitle Translation of City Publicity Video: *City for Life*

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Abstract

City publicity video spreads city images with strong visual impact, and high-quality subtitle translation builds a bridge for cultural exchange. So this paper takes the short video *City For Life* of Xiong'an as an example and bases on its stylistic features to discuss the strategies of sound and picture synchronization, discourse coherence strategies, and cultural value principles applied by translators in the process of subtitle translation. The translator should strive to achieve textual coherence and cultural transmission on the basis of the inherent characteristics of subtitles.

Keywords: City Publicity Video, Subtitle Translation, discourse coherence strategy, sound and picture synchronization.

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1. INTRODUCTION

As an important city card, city publicity video can convey cultural deposits, history, geography, and humanistic connotations within just a few minutes. As a typical vocative text, in order to be widely accepted by the target audience, it often depicts the unique characteristics and spirit of a city (Yao et al, 2018). *City For Life* creatively introduces the urban design and landscape planning of the start-up area of Xiong'an and interprets the new Chinese lifestyle of respecting nature with the guidance of the 24 solar terms in traditional Chinese culture. Taking *City for life* as a principle, the government aims to create a charming new district with a fresh and bright landscape and harmonious natural system.

As a living business card to show the image of Xiong'an, *City For Life* not only needs wonderful picture editing but also requires aesthetic subtitles which can guide the target audience to understand the cultural connotations of Chinese traditional culture. In essence, subtitle translation is the conversion of the subtitles from one language presentation to another (Chaume, 2020). In the case of city publicity video, the conversion process is affected by the language characteristics of the target language, and the technology of the transmission carriers. Influenced by differences between the two languages and the limitations of time and space of presentation, *City For Life* has the following problems: lack of logical coherence and cohesion, non-synchronous between the subtitles and pictures, missing interpretation of culture-

loaded words, which may cause misunderstanding and confusion for the audience. This article tends to analyze the above problems in detail and provide corresponding revisions.

2. Linguistic Features of *City For Life*

2.1 Conciseness with phrases and short sentences

Unlike literary works, which readers can read over and over again, the publicity video uses fleeting vocal language. In addition, the film covers a wide audience, and its language must meet the educational level of the majority. This contributes to the stylistic features that the film needs to use concise and simple language to maximize the dissemination of information within a limited time and space.

City For Life mostly uses four-character idioms and short sentences rich in the beauty of rhyme to highlight the key information and utilize the least characters to effectively complete the information transmission. Due to the slow speed rate, the long interval time of narratage, and relatively scattered sentences, it is important to achieve dialogue coherence and sentence correlation when translating such subtitles.

2.2 Rich Rhetorical Devices

City For Life is one of the gateways for the world to understand the planning and construction of Xiong'an. It shows the inner spirit and external charm of the city, carries out the concept of a smart city supported by science and technology, and fully interprets the ecological idea of harmonious coexistence

between man and nature. *City For Life* uses a variety of rhetorical devices and infectious language to enhance the artistry of expression and embeds humanistic feelings in people's hearts.

2.3 Strong Cultural Connotations with Chinese Characteristics

City For Life combines urban construction with Chinese traditional culture and human activities with 24 solar terms. Therefore, How to concisely translate concepts rich in cultural information in subtitles in accordance with target language expression habit becomes the core problem. At the same time, it is urgent to avoid the loss of cultural connotations and the misreading of the source language culture.

3. Strategies and Principles of Audiovisual Translation

3.1 Sound and Picture Synchronization

The translated subtitles of film and television works need to be shown at the same time when pictures and characters appear (O'Sullivan, 2018). When the monologue ends, the subtitles have to be removed immediately. Otherwise, the subtitles that stay on the screen for a moment may "cover" the flashback of the next scene (Chai, 2003). During the 1:00-2:00 period, the subtitles of *City For Life* were mismatched, which were not presented until one or two seconds after the monologue ended. This also caused a mismatch between the text and the picture, as well as difficulties in understanding the content of the video. From 6:03 to the end of the film, the subtitle is presented faster than the monologue of the characters, and the subtitle has disappeared before the sentence comes to the end, which affects the viewing effect of the audience.

Secondly, redundant expressions are used in the original translation, which makes the translation much longer than the original text. Therefore, translators should simplify some synonymous adjectives or adverbs as much as possible when choosing the correct word. When adjusting sentence structure, they can convert long sentences into short ones and complex sentence patterns into simple ones. Long sentences can be translated separately to achieve a concise and compact effect, reduce the screen time and realize the synchronous switching of text, sentence, and sound.

Example (3-1):

Chinese subtitle: 遵循自然的节气是现代中国人的气节

Original translation :

A NEW WAY OF HEALTHY CITY LIVING
GUIDED BY CHINA'S ANCIENT SOLAR
SEASONS (13 Chinese characters)

Revised version :

A HEALTHY LIFE-STYLE GUIDED BY
ANCIENT SOLAR TERMS
(8 English words)

By comparing the length of Chinese and English characters, it can be found that the English subtitles are much longer than the Chinese. The audience's attention was attracted by the subtitle. Long and complex sentences can lead to non-synchronous between sound and picture and destroy the communication effect, which requires the simplification and deletion of known information and minor components. In the revised edition, "A NEW WAY OF" and "CHINA" were deleted, and "CITY LIVING" was replaced with the compound word "LIFE-STYLE". The original has 13 Chinese characters, while the revised version include only 8 English words, which is approximately closer to the length of Chinese. Although the length of the original is reduced, the meaning conveyed is not missing.

Example (3-2):

Chinese subtitle: 启动区的核心由森林环绕孕育全新的经济

Original translation :

THE HEART OF THE START-UP AREA
SURROUNDED BY BUILDING FORESTS
SPARKS A NEW ECONOMY (14 Chinese
characters)

Revised version :

THE CORE AREA EMBRACED BY FORESTS
SPARKS NEW GROWTH
(9 English words)

Many definite articles and noun phrases, such as "THE HEART OF" and "The START-UP AREA", are used in the original translation, which makes the sentence relatively complex. Since the whole text introduces the planning and construction of Xiong'an start-up area, which is known to the audience, "The START-UP AREA" can be replaced by a simplified one. "BUILDING FORESTS" may arise negative associations. Different from other metropolises, Xiong'an emphasizes the coexistence of human beings with the environment and the environmental suitability for living and business. High buildings are not the focus of construction. The removal of "BUILDING" here makes the translation more concise and clearer, and it also embodies the environmental idea of this new area

Example (3-3)

Chinese subtitle:

作为雄安的门户

城际车站以置身于森林中的难忘到达体验 迎接世界
面向未来的门户枢纽

承接点对点按需式的自动驾驶交通系统

Original translation :

XIONG'AN'S INTERCITY RAIL GATEWAY
WELCOMES THE WORLD
WITH AN UNFORGETTABLE ARRIVAL
EXPERIENCE IN A FORESTED STATION

THIS TRANSIT HUB OF THE FUTURE
ACCOMMODATES NEXT-GENERATION
TRANSPORTATION
POINT-TO-POINT ON-DEMAND
AUTONOMOUS MOBILITY
(29 Chinese characters)

Revised version :

THE INTERCITY STATION WELCOMES THE
WORLD
WITH AN UNFORGETTABLE ARRIVAL
EXPERIENCE
THIS TRANSIT HUB ACCOMMODATES
POINT-TO-POINT ON-DEMAND AUTOPOLIT
SYSTEM
(18 English words)

Although the original translation is accurate enough, the syntactic structures are redundant and the rhythm can not achieve the effect of synchronization. There are many repeated expressions and redundant components in the sentence, so relevant adjustments and deletions have been made in the adaptation. First of all, both “INTERCITY RAIL GATEWAY” and “IN A FORESTED STATION” refer to the rail station. The following sentence mentions its status as a city gateway, and the station has been clearly shown in the picture, which belongs to the known information supplemented by the picture and can be omitted. Because the whole film mainly introduces the future planning of the city, “XIONG AN'S” and “OF THE FUTURE” can be omitted. The last sentence is just a simple list of nouns and adjectives. “NEXT-GENERATION TRANSPORTATION” and “AUTONOMOUS MOBILITY” overlap in semantic meaning. They mean the same thing. The former has a wider range, while the latter is more specific. As the original text tends to emphasize the technical advantages of autonomous driving systems, “autonomous mobility” is retained.

3.2 Discourse Coherence Strategies

The most unique feature of this publicity video is that it contains a large number of monologues. The narratage mainly consists of four-character words and short sentences. The logic is relatively loose and the grammar is not very rigorous. Considering these features, the translator should retain the original text's terse and forceful features and clearly express the associations implied between the lines, so as to conform to the target language norms and avoid fragmented expression (Mubenga, 2010). This requires adding coherent devices and improving the subtitle logic.

Example (3-4)

Chinese subtitle:

随着自然的韵律掌握蓝绿系统交织成网
控制雨洪清洁湖水
因地制宜的景观设计适应气候的更替变化
打造一个长久韧性的雄安

Original translation :

NATURAL SYSTEMS CONTROL
FLOODING AND CLEAN WATER
AS IT RISES AND FALLS IN THE
RHYTHM OF THE SEASONS
LANDSCAPE DESIGNED TO ADAPT TO
CHANGING CLIMATE
MAKING XIONG'AN RESILIENT FOR
GENERATIONS
(30 Chinese characters)

Revised version :

AS THE SEASON CHANGES
NATURAL SYSTEMS CONTROL
FLOODING AND CLEAN WATER
LANDSCAPE DESIGNED TO ADAPT TO
THE CHANGES
ALL THESE SHAPE A RESILIENT CITY
(24 English words)

“Blue-green system” in the original refers to the natural system of hydrology and vegetation. It is also the main body to “CONTROL FLOODING AND CLEAN WATER”. “The rhythm of nature” refers to the change of seasons. This video tends to express that the natural system and appropriate landscape design jointly create the urban system. The original translation only emphasizes the role of the landscape by using a concomitant adverbial. The expression is one-sided and lacks logic, so the adaption uses reference and demonstrative pronouns to enhance the coherence of the text. Because Xiong'an is the known information mentioned many times in the previous text, the revised version uses reiteration of lexical devices to replace “XIONG'AN” with the general word “CITY”. “THE CHANGES” in the revised version serves as a back-reference to the climate change mentioned above.

The original text is discussed in the chronological order of spring, summer, autumn, and winter. Different seasons are closely related to different living conditions. However, the translation lacks logical connectives to express this order, which can not reflect the emotional sublimation from technology, ecology, and humanity to the world. Due to the limited space and time, the revised version can not add too many logical connectives. The clause “as the season changes” indicates the sublimation. Singular, not plural, “season” emphasizes the change of each season in the whole year, which attempts to transmit the logic of the original text.

3.3 Cultural Value Principles

The realization of cultural value is usually achieved by fully understanding and accurately conveying the cultural information loaded by the original film, so as to avoid miss translation. Culture-loaded words reflect specific cultural and social customs, historical traditions, and values. They are the epitome of the social and cultural activities of the

Chinese nation for thousands of years. Culture-loaded words in film and television works are the essence of subtitle translation.

With a strong traditional Chinese cultural color, *City For Life* creatively integrates the 24 solar terms with the design idea of Xiong'an. However, the original translation ignores these solar terms, which may create an information gap. Foreign audiences cannot connect the terms with the lifestyle and concept. As an important concept conveyed by this film, the translation of these cultural terms needs to be improved.

Example (3-5)

Original translation:

雨水
惊蛰
春分
清明
谷雨
春唤醒充满机遇的新时代
AWAKENS A NEW ERA OF
OPPORTUNITY

Revised version:

雨水
RAIN WATER
惊蛰
AWAKENING OF INSECTS
春分
SPRING EQUINOX
清明
PURE BRIGHTNESS
谷雨
GRAIN RAIN
春唤醒充满机遇的新时代
THESE SOLAR TERMS AWAKENS A
NEW ERA OF OPPORTUNITY

Spring is the beginning of life and farming activities. From rain water to pure brightness, these solar terms record the process of warmer weather, the recovery of all things, and crop growth. They represent the hope and beauty of life and also contain the bright future of Xiong'an's development. However, the original translation lacks the translation of solar terms, which greatly reduces the communication effect. The revised version not only translates the meanings of the terms with strong cultural information, but also indicates their category—solar terms, which may be of great help for target audience to understand this video.

Example (3-6)

Original Translation:

立冬
小雪
冬延续着生活的温暖 祥和

XIONG'AN SUSTAINS LIFE
THROUGHOUT THE WINTER'S CHILL
大寒

利用地热与太阳能
HARNESSING THE WARMTH OF THE
EARTH AND SUN

Revised version:

立冬
BEGINNING OF WINTER
小雪
MINOR SNOW

冬延续着生活的温暖 祥和
XIONG'AN SUSTAINS LIFE
THROUGHOUT THE WINTER'S CHILL

大寒
MAJOR COLD
利用地热与太阳能
HARNESSING THE WARMTH OF THE
EARTH AND SUN

Beginning of winter is followed by a sudden drop in temperature. The text tends to emphasize that the cold season will not affect the warm life atmosphere of this city, highlighting the humanistic care for a happy life. However, winter is easily associated with heating and energy use. This text introduces Xiong'an's goal of using clean energy to achieve zero emissions, which is also different from the development pattern of other big cities. The revised version not only transmits the meanings of culture loaded words, but also highlights the environmental idea of this city.

4. Suggestions for Subtitle translators

Under the guidance of the sound and picture synchronization strategy, simple synonyms that express similar meanings are removed, and simple sentence patterns take the place of complex sentence patterns, so as to reduce the repetition of known information and achieve the purpose of reducing the length of subtitles.

Under the guidance of discourse coherence strategies, grammatical and lexical means are used to enhance coherence and cohesion between texts, avoid fragmented expression, and enhance the logic of the text.

Under the guidance of the cultural value principle, on the basis of grasping the cultural differences between the two languages, the maximum transmission of cultural information can be realized in a way acceptable to the target language readers.

5. CONCLUSION

Subtitle translation needs to achieve easy understanding, conciseness and fluency. Through the study of the translation of *City For Life*, this paper combines the strategy of synchronization of sound and picture, discourse coherence strategies, and cultural

value principles, and attempts to provide revised versions that can convey the original information in the limited time and space accurately, faithfully, smoothly and coherently. The revised version tends to eliminate the misunderstanding caused by cultural differences. It is hoped that the suggestions may benefit future researchers and subtitle translators to bring more excellent Chinese short videos to the world and help people with a different social background have a deeper understanding of Chinese culture.

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