

# Research on Film Subtitle Translation

## —A Case Study of *Hi, Mom*

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### Abstract:

As a consequence of the growing proximity between China and the rest of the world, Chinese films are becoming increasingly visible on the international stage, occupying a unique position as carriers of Chinese culture. It is therefore crucial to promote the export of Chinese films overseas through improved translation. It is projected that *Hi, Mom*, a time-travel comedy from Jia Ling, will become the second highest-grossing film in China, with an estimated final gross of RMB 5.17 billion (\$799 million), as estimated by Maoyan. This study analyses the methods used in subtitle translation in the context of it and explains the success of subtitle translation in the film, which has significant implications for the practice of film subtitle translation and the promotion of cross-cultural communication between China and other countries. This paper concludes that the English translation of subtitles in the context of comedy movies must be integrated with the language and context, and that the corresponding translation methods should be employed in accordance with the specific circumstances.

**Keywords:** subtitle translation, *Hi, Mom*, lines

## 1. Introduction

As China's communication with foreign countries grows closer, domestic films are inevitably moving towards the international market. Bilingual subtitle translation plays a crucial role in this process, and it is becoming increasingly clear to scholars that it is a vital aspect of Chinese films going out of China. Subtitle translation is an essential element in making films accessible to international audiences. To achieve this, translators must understand the content of the film and the linguistic habits of the target language audience. They must also employ appropriate translation strategies and methods to ensure the audi-

ence can understand the film and appreciate its spirit. *Hi, Mom* is based on a true story. In the film, Jia Xiaoling, a 'good-for-nothing' girl, has just been admitted to university when her mother, Li Huanying, dies suddenly in an accident. When Jia Xiaoling is devastated at her mother's bedside, she accidentally travels back in time to 1981, where she meets her young mother and becomes her best friend. Jia Xiaoling tries to make her mother happy by helping her queue up to grab a TV, play volleyball and find a date, doing touching acts that she thinks are important and hoping that these acts will change her mother's fate in the future. But in the end, the ending is reversed as Jia Xiaoling discovers through a patch

on her trousers that her mother has actually travelled back to 1981 as well, but instead of speaking out, she has been cooperating with her daughter to the fullest.

The film *Hi, Mom* is a comedy. Comedy, which is often based on a specific culture, including traditions, history, social issues and humour. These elements are often difficult for other cultures to understand. A joke about American politics may make Americans laugh, but not foreigners. Humour in comedy often relies on puns, homophones, rhythms and rhymes, which are difficult to preserve in translation. For example, a pun in English may not have a similar expression in Chinese, which can change the meaning of the joke. Humour also depends on body language, facial expressions, intonation, rhythm and so on. These elements cannot be translated directly and must be conveyed in other ways. Finally, audiences have different expectations and preferences for comedy. A comedy in one culture may not satisfy the sense of humour of an audience in another culture. However, these problems are effectively solved in the subtitle translation of this film.

This paper will study the characteristics of its subtitle translation, with the purpose of summarizing the reasons for its successful translation and providing examples for other Chinese films to export.

## 2. Translation Techniques in Film Subtitling

Subtitling is a special type of language conversion, which is the condensed written translation of the original spoken language. Subtitle translation has the following three characteristics.

In terms of space, the movie maximum of two lines, one line is best. When it comes to temporal duration, two lines should remain for a maximum of six seconds, while shorter subtitles should be displayed for a minimum of 1.5 seconds [1]. It is the responsibility of subtitling translators to consider these constraints at each stage of the translation process. They must exercise discernment in selecting which elements of the source text to retain and which to omit, ensuring that the target audience is not misled by the translation. The objective is to highlight the most pertinent information while maintaining the integrity of the original text.

From the perspective of language, the dialogue of the characters in the film is more colloquial language, clear and concise, easy to understand. It's really important to make sure that the translation is consistent with the source language in terms of both language and style. The film uses a lot of colloquial humour and also includes elements of the local languages spoken in Northeast China. So, it's

crucial that translators have a wide range of languages at their disposal during the translation process.

In general, films convey information about the culture of the source language. On the one hand, in the translation of other styles, annotation, footnotes and other effective translation strategies can be used to explain some complex cultural information. However, these methods cannot be used in subtitle translation. On the other hand, the expressions, gestures and actions of the characters in the film can also convey certain cultural information. Translators should make the best of their strengths and avoid their weaknesses so that the target audience can understand the message conveyed in the film [2].

## 3. Case Analysis

The following case study is based on the two aspects of language and context and examines the potential for bias in each line according to the actual situation.

### • Example (1)

Chinese subtitle: 我小铁榔头的名号,那不是白来的。

Translation version: They don't call me Little Iron Hammer for nothing.

„Iron Hammer“ is the title of Lang Ping, the former head coach of the Chinese women's volleyball team, which originated during the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, during the broadcast of the Chinese women's volleyball team. Renowned sports commentator Song Shixiong, in his analysis of the game, highlighted the exceptional spike power, precision, and ability of Chinese women's volleyball player Lang Ping. In recognition of these attributes, he proposed the „Iron Hammer“ as a fitting moniker for Lang Ping, drawing inspiration from her surname, „Lang.“ The title of „Iron Hammer“ is not only an apt description of Lang Ping's spiking abilities but also a fitting emblem of the women's volleyball team's indomitable spirit. This spirit is characterised by a fearless approach to formidable opponents and a bold, assertive style of play [3]. The sentence is spoken by Li Huanying to Wang Qin during a volleyball match. The translator has used semantic translation to maintain the style of the source text and to provide foreign viewers with insight into Chinese culture, the „Iron Hammer“ and Chinese volleyball.

### • Example (2)

Chinese subtitle: 我妈总会时不时地到学校接受老师的教育。

Translation version: She often came to get lectured herself.

Here is the humor created by „受教育“ semantic puns. The function of the school is the place of education, and the place where students receive „教育“. „my mother“ was called to school to be educated by the teacher, which

is obviously not a formal education, but criticism. The image currently displayed is of the mother receiving criticism. Given this, the audience can readily comprehend the situation, eliminating the need for further elaboration [4]. According to the real-time scene shown in the actual screen, the Chinese subtitle of „from time to time to receive the teacher’s education“ is simply translated into „get lectured.“ In this instance, the author has opted to utilise the subtraction method, which entails the removal of superfluous words, phrases, clauses or sentences from the source text in order to streamline the translation and ensure its equivalence with the original text in terms of both meaning and structure.

• Example (3)

Chinese subtitle: 只不过我耍了一点小心思。

Translation version: All it took was a little shenanigan on my part.

The context in which this sentence occurred was that Jia Xiaoling used a little thought to make her mother happy [5]. In Chinese, „小心思“ has two meanings: when used as a positive term, it describes a person who is meticulous and thoughtful; when used as a negative term, it means that a person has many bad ideas. In layman’s terms, it means that they use tricks that they think they are smart and that others cannot see through. According to the context in which this line appears, „小心思“ should take the meaning of a derogatory term here, and the translator translates it as „shenanigan“. The word first appeared in newspapers in San Francisco in the mid-19th century. The word „shenanigan“ comes from the Irish word „sionnachuighim“, which is interpreted in English as a devious trick used especially for an underhand purpose, which means „playing a fox and playing tricks.“ Such translation can not only make the target language easy to accept and understand, but also convey the cultural connotation behind the source language and make the translation express more authentic and natural.

• Example (4)

Chinese subtitle: 我闺女贾晓玲考上了个正经的一本。

Translation version: My daughter, Jia Xiaoling was admitted into a fine college.

„一本“ is a typical term in China’s education system, where parents want their children to be admitted to universities such as 985 and 211. In foreign countries, they do not divide the university in this way [6]. Most of the foreign audience may not know what the concept of „正经的一本“ is, if the translator directly translated, it is easy to cause foreign audiences to misunderstand the content of the film. The subtitle translator then skillfully translates it as „a fine college,“ which perfectly translates the meaning that the source language speaker wants to express. The choice of words in subtitle translation has a lot of choices,

and the translator needs to handle the language, while understanding the meaning, and replace concepts that are not familiar to the target audience, so as to make sure that the information is smoothly communicated and easy to understand.

• Example (5)

Chinese subtitle: 我就是个一无是处的纨绔子弟。

Translation version: That I’m just another spoiled rich kid. This sentence is Shen Guanglin in conversation with Jia Xiaoling, he guessed that Li Huanying thinks he is a dandy son of his father. The subtitle translation itself is Volkswagen, that is to say, its target audience is the general public. The content translated by subtitling translators should not be obscure and difficult to understand, but should be easily understood by the target audience. „纨绔子弟“ is a four-character idiom in China, which refers to those rich children who have no knowledge, no skills and no real work. Chinese people prefer to use four-character structures to express meaning, especially idioms. The Chinese are familiar with the phrase „纨绔子弟,“ but foreigners may find it hard to understand. Here, the translator, after clarifying the main meaning, leaves the SL shell and translates it as “another spoiled rich kid” , This translation is easy to understand, close to life, and let the audience quickly understand what Shen Guanglin is talking about, is conducive to foreign audiences to correctly understand the film content, improve the viewing experience [7].

• Example (6)

Chinese subtitle: 吃口饭我就过来了。

Translation version: Got here as soon as I can.

This sentence occurs at the beginning of the film, friend Yu Mei learned that Li Huanying was smashed after the first time rushed to the hospital. In Chinese culture, due to the influence of the old society, most working people live a difficult life, many people do not have enough to eat, so eating this matter has become the most concern among people [8]. Yu Mei’s words expressed his concern for his friend Li Huanying, At meal time to heard Li Huanying smash, put down chopsticks the first time to come over. If “吃口饭” is translated directly, it will not only make the audience feel difficult to understand, but also can not convey the original Yumei anxious mood. Therefore, the translator here will “吃口饭” omit, follow the principle of purpose and coherence, directly translate it as soon as I can, As fast as I can, I can not only express the emotion in the original text, but also help the target audience to relate to the context [9].

• Example (7)

Chinese subtitle: 你也太帅了。

Translation version: You are such a heroine.

In the film, Jia Xiaoling persuades her young mother

to take part in a fateful volleyball match. After a lot of hard advice, he returned to the United States without success, and was aroused by the threat of his opponent. Li Huanying promised to take part in the game, at this time Jia Xiaoling looked at the spirited Li Huanying and said happily „你也太帅了。“ But the handsome here is not to say that her younger mother is handsome, but to praise her younger mother’s unyielding ambition. So the translator treats the translation as you are such a heroine. In destination culture, the hero is often used to describe brave people, so this processing both follows the principle of destination, enabling the destination audience to have the same emotional experience as the original audience, and realizes the principles of coherence, enacting the destination viewer to deepen the context and smoothly connect the context.

• Example (8)

Chinese subtitle: 《你好，李焕英》

Translation version: *Hi, Mom*

The Chinese title of the film is “你好，李焕英”。The title functions as a gateway to the film, providing an optimal summary of the film’s content, and serves as the initial point of contact between the audience and the film. The translation of a film title needs to be thought and polished, not just the simple correspondence of words to words.

If the literal translation is adopted, „你好，李焕英“ should be translated as Hi, Li Huanying. However, the translator adopted a domesticated translation strategy, not literal translation, but translated as Hi, Mom [10]. The film is about the protagonist’s experience after traveling back in time and meeting his young mother. „Mother“ and „maternal love“ are the central themes of the film. The „Li Huanying“ in the film is a true microcosm of countless mothers in real life. For the English audience, Hi, Li Huanying has no meaning, and it is not much help for the audience to understand the plot. The title translated as *Hi, Mom* can let the English audience understand that this movie is about the mother and the mother’s love story, making people feel warm and warm, can arouse the audience’s interest in watching.

#### 4. Conclusion

It is of the utmost importance to remain faithful to the original text and to retain Chinese characteristics, while also taking into account the acceptability of readers and incorporating other cultures. This enables the audience to appreciate the film’s appeal through the translated footage. This paper sets out the case for combining the English

translation of subtitles in the context of comedy films with an understanding of language and context. It proposes that the corresponding translation method should be adopted according to the specific situation. It is also essential to take into account the cultural differences associated with the Chinese profession of translation in order to ensure alignment with the cultural and linguistic characteristics of the target language audience, thereby facilitating their participation in the narrative.

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