



# On the Application of Variation Means in the Subtitling of Short Videos

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Received: 07 Apr 2024; Received in revised form: 07 May 2024; Accepted: 16 May 2024; Available online: 25 May, 2024

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**Abstract**— Nowadays, short videos have played a crucial role in the spread of Chinese culture. However, the time and space limitations of short videos pose new challenges to translators. Although the traditional complete translation seeks to cover all aspects, it is not able to meet the requirements of short-video subtitle translation. In this paper, the author analyzes the use of seven variation means in the subtitling of short videos about Jingchu cuisine and explores how to use them to break the limitations of the English translation of short video subtitles.



**Keywords**— subtitle translation; variation means; Jingchu cuisine; short videos

## I. INTRODUCTION

Short videos are fascinating and have gradually become an important channel for Chinese culture to spread. However, in the process of short video subtitle translation, there are various limitations. Thus, the article will introduce the current situation of subtitle translation of Jingchu cuisine short videos, the constraints of short-video subtitling, and analyze the subtitle translation of Jingchu cuisine short videos with the variation translation theory to explore how to use variation means to break the limitations of short-video subtitling.

## II. CURRENT SITUATION AND CONSTRAINTS OF SUBTITLE TRANSLATION FOR JINGCHU CUISINE SHORT VIDEOS

Few Jingchu cuisine short videos have English subtitles on major short video platforms at home and abroad. Even if they do, they only have machine translations with

grammatical errors and improper wording, which fail to effectively spread Jingchu cuisine and culture and are not conducive to Chinese food and culture going global. To fill this gap, the author and her team members told the historical stories behind Jingchu cuisine by filming the process of making Jingchu dishes. The author also edited the Chinese subtitles according to online information and translated them into English.

The characteristics of short videos put subtitling under various constraints. “There are two main technical constraints imposed by the multi-media environment: time, and space” (Zoe de Linde, 2010: 9). “Two main constraints of them are time and space. Time refers to the time that each line of subtitles must remain on the screen long enough for viewers to scan it, usually two to three seconds. Space refers to the number of language symbols that can fit on the screen. Sometimes two lines of subtitles are used, sometimes one” (Li Yunxing, 2001: 39). The author found through practice

that the length of the short video and the speech speed of the voiceover staff have a limiting effect on the number of words in the subtitles and that a short video of one minute or so can accommodate about 240 Chinese characters or about 120 English words.

### III. VARIATION TRANSLATION AND ITS MEANS

“The criterion for differentiation of complete translation and variation translation is the degree of integrity of the content and form of the original work” (Huang Zhonglian, 2002: 5). “Variation translation is an activity in which the translator reproduces the contents of the original by means of such variation means as adding, omitting, editing, narrating, condensing, combining and altering according to the special needs of specific readers under specific circumstances” (Huang Zhonglian, 2002: 66).

Huang Zhonglian (2002: 67) points out that “adding refers to the increase of information on the basis of the original work; omitting refers to the overall removal of the information of the original work that is not needed by the readers in the translator's opinion; editing refers to the act of organizing and ordering the content of the original work to make it perfect or refined; narrating refers to paraphrasing the original content, which is to take the meaning from the original work; condensing refers to conveying the information of the original work in a very condensed way; combining refers to the combination of two or more parts of the same kind or with a logical relationship; altering means making obvious changes in the original work such as changing the content or form or even the style”.

### IV. VARIATION MEANS USED IN SUBTITLE TRANSLATION OF JINGCHU CUISINE SHORT VIDEOS

The limitations of short-video subtitle translation make the complete translation inappropriate for the subtitling of Jingchu cuisine short videos, so the author adopts variation means in translating ten dishes of Jingchu to break the limitations of short-video subtitling.

#### 1. Adding

Example 1: 湖北人习惯把“丸子”叫为“圆子”。

People in Hubei (a province of east-central China) call “meatballs” “yuanzi”.

Example 2: 据传当年关羽大意失荆州之后……

It is said that Guan Yu, a famous general during the Three Kingdoms period (220-280 AD), accidentally lost the three prefectures of Jingzhou.

Huang Zhonglian (2002: 94) points out that “the ways of adding can be divided into three kinds: interpretation, commentary, and writing. Interpretation means elucidation, which is the explanation of a certain part of the original work in the translation. The general reason for interpretation is that the readers of the translated language do not know much about certain contents of the information they receive”. Considering most readers of the translated language probably do not know information about Chinese places, historical figures, dynasties, and ancient texts, in the above two examples, the author adopts one of the methods of “addition”, “interpretation”, to explain Chinese unique words. At the same time, taking into account the time and space constraints of short video subtitle translation, the author only added the main relevant information of the words. For example, for the Chinese place name “Hubei”, the author only introduces its location in China, without describing more details about it. This not only allows readers to understand Hubei but also does not exceed the word count or length limit.

#### 2. Omitting

Example 1: 当地官员让厨师用莲藕做出“吃藕不见藕”的美味，其中一位厨师想到了将藕捣碎做成圆子的方法，精心烹饪后……

...local officials asked chefs to use lotus roots to make a delicacy with lotus roots invisible. One of the chefs mashed the lotus root and made it into balls.

Example 2: 他们趁夜色在城池边上构筑多条陷阱，并命军中厨师宰杀百只鸡在城墙边上用大锅烹饪，试图以鸡汤的浓浓香味引曹军将士连夜攻城。

They built traps beside the city wall at night and ordered chefs to cook a hundred chickens in a large pot to lure Cao Cao's soldiers to attack overnight.

“From the reality of translation, the need is the initial driving force of translation activities, and any information that directly or indirectly matches the reader's needs to a

high degree can be retained, while any information that deviates from it or has little relation with it can be discarded" (Huang Zhonglian, 2002: 95). In the author's opinion, what the original text wants to emphasize in Example 1 is how the chef made a dish of roots without seeing roots. Therefore, the specific practice of the chef is directly translated, but the translation of "想到了.....的方法" or "thought of a method of" and "精心烹饪" or "cooked carefully" are omitted. This allows readers to understand the key information through a concise translation. In Example 2, "军中" or "in the army" is what readers can think of according to the context, so there is no need to translate it. "宰杀" or "slaughtered" is also omitted as slaughtering chickens happens before cooking chickens and it is not such an important step as cooking. The "鸡汤的浓浓香味" or "the strong aroma of chicken soup" is omitted because it is mentioned again in the following text, and readers can easily understand by common sense that it is through the aroma of chicken soup to attract Cao's army to attack the city. From the above analysis, we can see that omitting can effectively break the constraints of time and space of short videos without failing to convey the key information of original texts.

### 3. Editing

Example 1: 据史书记载, 公安人很早就有喂养水牛和食用牛肉的习俗。三国时, 张飞所辖队伍总是上交稻谷最多, 其他将领问有何秘诀, 张飞诡言道: "公安地好、水好、草好。"有人问草与种水稻有何关联? 张飞哈哈大笑: "公安牛肉好吃.....", 公安牛肉的美名自此流传开来。

Edition: 据传三国时, 张飞所辖队伍总是上交稻谷最多, 其他将领问有何秘诀, 张飞哈哈大笑: "公安牛肉好吃.....", 公安牛肉的美名自此流传开来。

Example 2: 公安县是长江上一个重要码头, 过去码头工人搬运货物, 早上收工时就聚在一起喝酒吃火锅, 再回去休息, 因此慢慢形成了喝早酒、吃火锅的习俗。

编辑版: 在公安县, 过去很多码头工人搬运货物, 从晚上一直忙到天亮, 慢慢形成了喝早酒、吃火锅习俗。

Huang Zhonglian (2002: 95) points out that "the purpose of editing is to make the main idea more distinct, to make the content very clear and concentrated, to give a clear and deep impression, to make the content serve the center, and to organize the original material according to the needs

of the main idea". In example 1, "三国时" or "in the Three Kingdoms" can indicate that the people of Gong'an have a long history of eating beef, so the first sentence conveying the same information was removed in editing. The sentence "张飞诡言道: "公安地好、水好、草好。"有人问草与种水稻有何关联?" or "Zhang Fei said that the land, water, and grass of Gong'an are great. People asked him about the relations between grass and rice planting" is also removed while editing as it fails to clarify the link between grass, rice plants, and Gong'an beef. Instead, it weakens the link between delicious Gong'an beef and handing in the most grain. Thus, the author removed it to make the historical source of the delicious beef clearer and more explicit. In Example 2, "公安县是长江上一个重要码头" or "Gong'an County is an important dock of Yangtze River" is not very relevant to the modern dock workers' custom of drinking morning wine and eating hot pot, so it is deleted to make the story more focused and reduce the length of the original.

### 4. Narrating

Example 1: 自古以来流传着"长江的鱼, 洪湖的藕, 才子佳人吃了不想走"的美名。

It has been said that people don't want to leave after eating the lotus root from Honghu Lake, the largest pollution-free freshwater lake in Hubei Province.

Example 2: 有道是饮一口佳酿, 嚼一块干鱼, 鱼助酒兴, 酒释鱼味, 脆在嘴上, 美在心里。

There is a saying: "With a sip of good wine and a piece of dried fish enhancing each other's taste, you will find the fish crisp and the mood happy.

"The narration is based on the content of the original work, changing the form of the expression of the original work, and always using narrative language to convey the content, so there are extracts and edits, and more generalizations. It is characteristic to give up details and seek roughness" (Huang Zhonglian, 2002: 95). For example, in Example 1, the author does not translate "长江的鱼" or "the fish of the Yangtze River" and "才子佳人" or "gifted scholars and beautiful ladies" according to the original sentence, but translate the sentence into "people do not want to leave after eating the roots of Honghu Lake" to convey its core meaning. In example 2, instead of translating "鱼助

酒兴” or “the fish improves the joy of drinking wine” and “酒释鱼味” or “the wine reduces the fishy taste”, the author translates the meaning of the sentence, namely eating fish and drinking wine can make both fish and wine taste better. The details of how fish and wine interact with each other are omitted, but this not only conveys the main meaning of the original text but also ensures the brevity of the translation.

#### 5. Condensing

Example 1: “炸藕圆子”既能当菜肴入席，也可作平日小吃零食，是很有营养的素食小点。

It is nutritious and can be served as a dish or snack.

Example 2: 于是，人们便把鱼肚剖开，把肚子里面的脏东西掏出来，洗干净，用盐腌制，经太阳晒干后慢慢享用，这种晒干的鱼因此得名“阳干鱼”。

Therefore, they gutted, washed, salted, and dried the fish in the sun, hence the name “Sun-dried Fish”.

Huang Zhonglian (2002: 95) points out that condensation is “to introduce the core content of the original work in a very small space”. From the above two examples, we can see that the underlined translations convey the information of the original texts well in a condensed way. It is easy to find that the translations are much shorter than the corresponding original texts, which effectively breaks the time and space limitations of the short video.

#### 6. Combining

Example 1: “公安牛肉”，湖北省荆州市公安县特产，也叫“牛肉炉子”，“炉子”在公安方言中跟火锅的意思相近，是中国国家地理标志产品（2014年批准）。“公安牛肉”其实是当地人对“牛肉火锅”的统称……

Combination: “公安牛肉”，也叫“牛肉炉子”，是湖北省公安县对牛肉火锅的称谓，是中国国家地理标志产品（2014年入选）……

“One reason for the combination is that the original work is improperly structured and unrefined, lacking in organization, and what should be put together ends up in two cuts, mainly at the level of sentences, sentence groups, and paragraphs.” (Huang Zhonglian, 2002: 96). In the example, the last sentence is closely related to the first sentence, and both of them are about the name “Gong’an beef”, so they should not be divided into two sentences. The author thus combined them before subtitling to ensure the

correct and clear organization and make the original text short enough without leaving out the original meaning.

#### 7. Altering

“In general, the six means mentioned above are all included in the list of the alteration that is singled out as a category to emphasize its characteristics. To alter means to change, to make a significant change in the content or form of the original work” (Huang Zhonglian, 2002: 96). This translation practice is mainly about the change of content, which can be seen from the examples cited above. Thus, the author will not give more examples here.

## V. CONCLUSION

This paper introduces the current situation and the main limiting factors of the English translation of Jingchu food short video subtitles. It also analyzes the variation means used in the subtitle translation of the short videos with the variation translation theory. Through the above examples and analysis, it can be concluded that the variation means of adding, omitting, editing, narrating, condensing, combining, and altering can break the limitations of the English translation of short video subtitles effectively while retaining the main content of the short videos.

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