

## A Study on Subtitle Translation of *The Battle at Lake Changjin II* from the Perspective of Multimodal Discourse Analysis

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**Abstract:** As the sequel to *The Battle at Lake Changjin*, *The Battle at Lake Changjin II* has garnered significant artistic recognition, winning the Golden Deer Award for Best Film at the 17th China Changchun Film Festival and the Best Visual Effects Award at the 9th Silk Road International Film Festival. The film vividly recreates the intense battle fought by the Chinese People's Volunteers at the Water Gate Bridge, serving as a crucial medium for conveying China's narrative to the world. Subtitle translation, as a key vehicle for cross-cultural communication in cinema, holds profound theoretical and practical significance. With the evolution of linguistic research paradigms, multimodal discourse analysis has introduced novel analytical perspectives and methodological foundations for subtitle translation studies. Guided by Zhang Delu's integrated framework of multimodal discourse analysis, this study systematically examines the subtitle translation of *The Battle at Lake Changjin II*, analyzing its multimodal characteristics across four dimensions: culture, context, content, and expression. The research aims to provide both theoretical foundations and practical insights for foreign-language film translation, facilitate the cross-cultural dissemination of outstanding Chinese films, and enhance the international influence of Chinese cinema.

**Keywords:** Subtitle Translation; Multimodal Discourse Analysis; *The Battle at Lake Changjin II*

### 1. Introduction

Multimodality is a fundamental aspect of human communication, where gestures, movements, and facial expressions have always played a complementary role alongside verbal interaction. With the rapid advancement

of the internet and multimedia technologies, communication has increasingly shifted towards digital and screen-based formats. In this evolving landscape, linguistic elements are no longer the primary mode of expression; instead, images and other sensory modalities have gained prominence. This type of communication, which engages two or more sensory channels simultaneously, is referred to as multimodal discourse.[1]

Subtitles, presented in textual form, function as transcriptions of dialogues, narrations, or other auditory information in audiovisual content. By nature, subtitles possess an inherently multimodal quality. The translation of subtitles enables audiences from different linguistic backgrounds to access and appreciate films from diverse cultural contexts, fostering cross-cultural communication and mutual understanding. Moreover, effective subtitle translation plays a crucial role in promoting Chinese culture on a global scale.

*The Battle at Lake Changjin II* is a historical war film set against the backdrop of the second campaign of the War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea, focusing on the intense Battle of Lake Changjin. The film vividly portrays the heroic sacrifices of the Chinese People's Volunteers at the Water Gate Bridge. Its subtitle translation extends beyond mere linguistic conversion; it serves as an essential medium for introducing Chinese history to international audiences and conveying China's historical narratives effectively. Therefore, employing a multimodal discourse analysis approach to assess the strengths and limitations of the subtitle translation in *The Battle at Lake Changjin II* is of considerable significance. Such an analysis not only provides insights for improving future subtitle translation practices in Chinese cinema but also contributes to enhancing the global reach and impact of Chinese films.

### 2. Linguistic Characteristics of Characters

### in *The Battle at Lake Changjin II*

The dialogue in *The Battle at Lake Changjin II* exhibits a highly militarized linguistic style, reflecting the wartime context and the film's historical authenticity. The characters' speech is marked by conciseness, directness, and an imperative tone, which is essential for battlefield communication. Orders are often delivered in short, forceful commands, emphasizing efficiency and urgency. For instance, lines such as "Head north!" and "Press ahead!" are direct and unequivocal, reinforcing the intense, high-stakes nature of the battle scenes.

Additionally, the film incorporates revolutionary discourse characteristic of the 1950s in China, aligning with the ideological framework of the era. Slogans such as "Resist U.S. aggression and aid Korea" and "Defend our country!" highlight the collective spirit, patriotism, and unwavering commitment of the Chinese People's Volunteers. Such expressions not only enhance the historical authenticity of the film but also serve to inspire national pride and solidarity among audiences.

Beyond its militarized and ideological tone, the dialogue also adopts colloquial elements to humanize the characters and create a sense of realism. Informal expressions and humorous remarks, such as "The Americans are very generous. They'll give us as much as we want." and "I myself am a cannon", add a layer of camaraderie and emotional depth to the characters. These linguistic choices make the dialogue more engaging while maintaining the film's serious historical undertones.

### 3. A Study on Subtitle Translation from the Perspective of Multimodal Discourse Analysis

With the advancement of multimedia technology, multimodal discourse analysis (MDA), which emerged in the West in the 1990s, has gradually become a significant field in linguistic research. As an essential domain within linguistics, MDA has evolved into a systematic framework for examining how multiple semiotic modes—such as language, images, and sound—work together to construct meaning.

One of the pioneers in multimodal discourse research was R. Barthes, who explored the interaction between images and language in meaning-making in his 1999 paper *Rhetoric of*

*the Image*. His study introduced several valuable concepts, particularly regarding the relationship between text and images. Building on these ideas, Kress and van Leeuwen proposed a theoretical framework for multimodal discourse analysis in their work *Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication*.<sup>[2]</sup> This framework focused on how visual, linguistic, and other semiotic modes interact to shape meaning in communication. Later, Kress and van Leeuwen further expanded this theory in *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, where they developed the "grammar of visual design" model, providing a comprehensive theoretical foundation for interpreting visual semiotics.<sup>[3]</sup>

Further contributions to MDA include Jewitt, who provided an extensive summary of multimodal discourse analysis in *The Routledge Handbook of Multimodal Analysis*, systematically introducing its fundamental methodologies and primary applications.<sup>[4]</sup> Jewitt highlighted the broad impact and practical value of multimodal research across various domains such as education, advertising, and journalism.

Compared to its Western counterpart, research on multimodal discourse analysis in China started relatively late but has rapidly developed into a theoretical framework with distinct local characteristics. Li Zhanzi examined meaning construction in multimodal discourse from a socio-semiotic perspective <sup>[5]</sup>, while Hu Zhuanglin explored the theory and practice of multimodal semiotics, emphasizing the interactive functions between different semiotic modes.<sup>[6]</sup> Zhu Yongsheng systematically expounded the theoretical foundations and research methodologies of multimodal discourse analysis, highlighting its interdisciplinary nature.<sup>[7]</sup>

A significant milestone in Chinese multimodal discourse research was achieved by Zhang Delu, who investigated how visual and linguistic modalities collaboratively contribute to communicative effectiveness. Drawing on Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) theory, Zhang developed an integrated framework for multimodal discourse analysis, which consists of four analytical dimensions: cultural level, contextual level, content level, and expression level.<sup>[1]</sup> This framework extends the application of SFL and has gained

broad academic recognition as a well-established theoretical model.

This study adopts Zhang's multimodal discourse analysis framework to examine the subtitle translation of *The Battle at Lake Changjin II*. By applying this approach, the research aims to offer insights into subtitle translation strategies and cross-cultural communication, contributing to the broader field of audiovisual translation studies.

### 3.1 Culture Level

The cultural level includes the ideology formed by human thinking patterns, philosophy of life, lifestyle habits, and all hidden rules of society, which is the key level that makes multimodal communication possible.[1] Professor Li Dasan, a renowned sinologist and comparative writer in the United States, pointed out that "every language gains life and nourishment from culture, so we cannot only focus on how to translate one language into another, but also strive to express the habits of both cultures in terms of thinking and emotional expression." [8] Therefore, in subtitle translation, translators not only need to translate one language into another, but more importantly, they also need to transform the implicit information in the source language into a form that conforms to the thinking patterns and expression habits of the target language population in the target language.

The film "The Battle At Lake Changjin II" is a patriotic film, which not only shows us the wisdom and courage of the ancestors of the volunteer army in attacking the strong with the weak, but also shows the spirit of the Chinese people's volunteer army in fearing difficulties and obstacles and defending the country. The translation of the film's lines is an important means of spreading the spirit of the Chinese people.

Original text: 第七穿插连
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Translation: the 7th penetrating company
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#### Figure 1. Example 1 for Culture Level

In the film "The Battle At Lake Changjin II", the term "the 7th Penetrating Company" in Figure 1 frequently appears in the audience's view, becoming a key element throughout the film. As a unique tactical formation adopted by the Chinese army during the Korean War, the mission of the "Penetrating Company" is

usually to penetrate deep into the enemy's rear to carry out raids, sabotage, and other operations, demonstrating high mobility and flexibility. It embodies extraordinary military wisdom. Typically, the Penetrating Company relies on its exceptional combat capabilities and fearless courage to penetrate deep into enemy territory to execute crucial missions such as raids and sabotage. This unique military formation reflects the wisdom and innovative spirit of the Chinese army in the face of a powerful enemy. When translating "the 7th Penetrating Company" into English, the translator chose the expression "the 7th penetrating company", of which the word "penetrating" serves as a fitting touch. "Penetrating" itself carries the meaning of "infiltration". Here, it vividly depicts the characteristics of combat operations behind enemy lines, and to a certain extent, it showcases the fighting style of our soldiers in battle. For foreign audiences, simple direct translation may not fully convey the special significance of "the Penetrating Company". However, through the plot development and subtitle translation in the film, they can quickly and accurately understand the heroic spirit and remarkable wisdom of the Chinese army during the Korean War.

Original text: 关键时刻，不要卡壳
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Translation: This is a critical moment. Get yourself together.
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#### Figure 2. Example 2 for Culture Level

The sentence in Figure 2 is spoken by the company commander. As the battle reaches its climax, the volunteer army faces significant losses while attacking the Shuimen Bridge, due to the US military's formidable firepower defense and complex terrain. At that moment, the company commander shouts to the soldiers, "This is a critical moment. Get yourself together.!" to urge them to maintain their fighting spirit, even in the face of heavy losses. In such a brutal battle environment, the term "Ka Ke" carries a profound and specific meaning. It doesn't merely refer to weapon malfunctions but rather denotes any hesitation, retreat, or mistake made by soldiers during combat. Facing the seemingly endless firepower of the enemy and watching their comrades fall one by one, coupled with the gruesome scenes on the battlefield, the soldiers are under immense psychological pressure.

Under such extreme pressure, they might show momentary timidity and hesitation, leading to indecisive actions, much like a weapon jamming, which could disrupt the battle rhythm or put them in a passive position, potentially affecting the overall battle situation and ultimate outcome. Well aware of this, the company commander warns the soldiers against the passive mood, implicitly reminding them to overcome these potential issues and maintain a steadfast fighting spirit. During translation, if the translator were to directly translate “Ka Ke” as a phrase related to weapon malfunction, foreign audiences might not be able to understand its true meaning in this specific context. Instead, the translator astutely opts for “Get yourself together” to convey the phrase “Ka Ke”, which signifies “pull yourself together and concentrate”. This translation precisely captures the emotional essence of the original lines, enabling foreign audiences to overcome language and cultural barriers. It allows them to genuinely sense the encouragement and expectations the company commander holds for the soldiers on the battlefield, and to appreciate the spirit of mutual encouragement and tenacious fighting exhibited by the volunteers in the face of adversity.

### 3.2 Contextual Level

The relationship between modality and context can be seen as the relationship between positive modality and negative modality.[1] In movies, images, language, and text are all important factors that drive the development of the story plot. They form a positive modal relationship with the context. In film subtitle translation, situational context dominates subtitle translation. Therefore, translators should make full use of the contextual information conveyed by the film and add or reduce textual information appropriately during translation.[9]

Original text: 快！敌机来了！ 快！都抬到洞里去！
Translation: Hurry! Enemy planes! Hurry! Carry them into the cave!

**Figure 3. Example 1 for Contextual Level**

The scenario of Figure 3 occurs during an emergency as the soldiers are briefly resting on the battlefield when they are suddenly ambushed by the enemy. In the picture, the

volunteer soldiers are urgently looking for a shelter. Countless shells explode on the battlefield next to the volunteer army, and the dust splashes everywhere. The sound of intense shellfire echo continuously around the battlefield. In this dire moment, the commander shouts, “Hurry! Enemy planes!” These hurried words, akin to a charge signal on the battlefield, guides the soldiers towards action. When translating this line, the translator adopts a strategy of abridged translation. Instead of translating “The enemy plane is coming!” as “Enemy planes are coming!”, it was simplified to “Enemy planes!”. From the perspective of language expression itself, “Enemy planes!” is concise and powerful, with only two words, but it can capture the audience’s attention in an instant. In the special context of film, such translation is organically combined with pictures and sound effects. The audience see the action of the soldiers in the picture, hear the fierce shell roar, and then see the concise subtitle “Enemy planes!”. The three responds to each other, without redundant words, it can let the foreign audience instantly integrate into the intense fighting atmosphere. This coordination of language, picture and sound effect in the context greatly enhances the audience’s sense of tension and immersion when watching the film, and makes them more deeply feel the cruelty of the war and the bravery of the volunteers in the war.

Original text: 二排的给我坚持住！
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Translation: 2nd squad, hold on!
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**Figure 4. Example 2 for Contextual Level**

The sentence in Figure 4 appears in the fierce and stalemated battle situation. The fighting pressure of the 2nd squad increases because they are suffering from the fierce attack from the enemy in many directions. The shout of the battalion commander reflects the encouragement and expectation of the 2nd squad of volunteers. In the movie, the 2nd squad tenaciously resist the enemy’s attack, constantly injured but still stick to the position, surrounded by gunsmoke, and the sound of guns is deafening. The translation of the line “2nd squad, hold on!” is concise and clear, but it also accurately conveys the core meaning of the original. “2nd squad” defined the target group of the command, so that the audience could clearly know the target group of the

battalion commander; “Hold on” is a concise and powerful expression of the meaning of “Jian Chi Zhu”, with a firm and powerful tone. The translation is concise but fully conveys the meaning of the original text. Through such translation and scene coordination, foreign audiences can understand the key role of mutual support and persistence between teams in the hard time of battle, as well as the command and cooperation relationship within the military. In the process of watching the film, the audience can see the picture of 2nd squad of fighters fighting tenaciously in the smoke of gunsmoke through the visual mode; Through the auditory mode, we can hear the deafening sound of guns and the eager shout of the battalion commander. Combined with the language mode represented by the concise subtitle translation of “2nd squad, hold on!”, the three modes cooperate and complement each other. The subtitle translation of example 4 fully combines the visual mode, the auditory mode and the language mode to achieve multimodal complementation. This multi-modal complementary presentation makes the audience feel as if they are in the scene, and more deeply understands the cruelty of the war and the courageous spirit of the volunteer army conveyed by the film.

### 3.3 Content Level

The content level can be divided into the meaning level and the form level. “On the level of discourse meaning, there are conceptual meanings, interpersonal meanings, and textual meanings constrained by the scope, tone, and mode of discourse. On the formal level, it refers to the interrelated formal features of different modalities, which collectively reflect the discourse meaning.”[1] On the level of meaning, when translating subtitles, translators can not only ensure that the target language is accurate, natural, and in line with the language habits of the target language audience, but also omit some repeated vocabulary, such as place names and titles, based on the interaction between language symbols, auditory and visual modalities. At the formal level, it includes language, images, sound, sensation, and so on. [1]

When translating movie subtitles, translators should combine visual and auditory modalities, fully consider the current scene, the

environment in which the characters are located, and the facial expressions and psychological states of the characters during communication, and convey the meaning and emotions conveyed by the original text through appropriate additions and deletions.

Original text: 你拿着这个! 替我看!
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Translation: Take this! Watch for me!
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#### Figure 5. Example 1 for Content Level

This sentence in Figure 5 comes from the mouth of Yu Congrong. At this moment, Yu Congrong and Yang Wenjian are embarking on an extremely difficult and crucial task. They plan to blow up the enemy’s storage area for shells in the distance. Yu Congrong is well aware of the urgency of time and could not afford any delay. While quickly handing over the crucial explosive device in his hand to Yang Wenjian, he eagerly says, “Take this! Watch for me!” A careful examination of the film reveals that the name “Yang Wenjian” appears multiple times in the dialogue before and after this scene. In order to highlight the close cooperation between the two and the importance of Yang Wenjian in this mission, the film also gives Yang Wenjian close-up shots multiple times. Therefore, by utilizing the complementarity between multimodal elements and utilizing close ups of characters in the camera, the translator omits the translation of titles. This not only does not affect the target language audience’s understanding of the plot, but also conforms to the principle of multimodal discourse analysis that repeated words such as names or places can be omitted at the content level. This processing not only simplifies the subtitle text, allowing the audience to quickly understand the core content of the dialogue, but also ensures the clarity of information transmission, fully utilizing visual information to supplement language simplification.

This sentence in Figure 6 deeply reflects the unique understanding and values of the volunteers towards heroes in the film. In the extremely harsh environment of the Korean War, despite facing severe cold, hunger, and powerful enemies, the soldiers of the Chinese People’s Volunteer Army still held their posts, not because they would not freeze to death or be killed, but out of their sense of duty as soldiers and pursuit of glory. In the film, scenes of volunteer soldiers holding their

ground in icy and snowy conditions, continuing to fight despite being seriously injured, and other scenes echo the dialogue, allowing the audience to deeply feel the ordinary yet great heroic image of volunteer soldiers. From a translation perspective, the translation “There aren’t any heroes who will never freeze to death, let alone ones who will never be killed. A soldier only lives for honor and glory.” accurately conveys the meaning of the original text. Through such translation, foreign audiences can also overcome cultural and language barriers, deeply understand the spiritual world of the volunteer army, experience the perseverance and selfless dedication of the volunteer soldiers in the war, and cherish the honor of the soldiers, so as to have a more comprehensive understanding of this magnificent history and feel the greatness of the Chinese People’s Volunteers.

Original text: 没有冻不死的英雄，更没有打不死的英雄。只有军人的荣耀。

Translation: There aren't any heroes who will never freeze to death, let alone ones who will never be killed. A soldier only lives for honor and glory.

Figure 6. Example 2 for Content Level

### 3.4 Expressive Level

The expression level is divided into linguistic media and non-linguistic media. Linguistic media includes accompanying language, namely sound, tone, font, and layout, and pure language, namely sound and text. Non-linguistic media includes the body movements of communicators and the nonverbal means used by communicators in expressing meaning, namely body language and non-body language.[1] In “*The Battle At Lake Changjin II*”, subtitle translation integrates multiple elements of linguistic and non-linguistic media, which interweave and work together. These elements not only give the narrative of the film fresh vitality, but also shoulder the important mission of accurately conveying the spirit of the Korean War and Chinese cultural values to global audiences in the context of international dissemination, profoundly influencing foreign audiences’ understanding and emotional resonance of the film.

After the soldiers successfully complete the bridge bombing mission, they hug and cheer

each other, with joyful and proud smiles on their faces. Some excitedly shout that we have done it just like the words in Figure 7. At this moment, the soldiers’ body movements and expressions fully convey the joy of victory and the cohesion of the team. Their hugs, jumps, and excited shouts echo the dialogue, allowing the audience to deeply feel the sense of achievement and joy of the volunteer soldiers after experiencing hardships. The combination of non-linguistic and linguistic media allows the audience to have a more comprehensive understanding of this exciting moment, enhancing the emotional resonance and infectiousness of the film.

Original text: 我们做到了！

Translation: We did it!

Figure 7. Example 1 for Expressive Level

Original text: 永别了，七连的兄弟

Translation: Farewell, 7th company.

Figure 8. Example 2 for Expressive Level

The sentence in Figure 8 is said by Yu Congrong. In order to annihilate the volunteer army, the enemy sends planes to project firebombs in the hidden mountains of the volunteer army, in an attempt to burn the army in the mountains. In order to protect the comrades of the 7th company, Yu Congrong run to the height alone and strafe the enemy’s aircraft in an attempt to attract the enemy’s attention. When he is about to be discovered by the enemy plane, Yu Congrong salutes the comrades hidden in the canyon under the mountain and says this line. After that, he is covered by the enemy’s incendiary bombs and trades his life for the safety of all the comrades in the 7th company. The translator chooses “farewell” instead of “goodbye”, because it has a more solemn sense, which echoes with slow motion and solemn music, and conveys the speaker’s heavy and farewell mood at the moment. “Qi Lian” translates “7th company”, which is concise and clear. For foreign audiences, they can directly obtain key information and know what the speaker refers to.

In the movie scene, this line is accompanied by rich non-verbal information. When Yu Congrong says this sentence, his eyes are full of reluctance, and the surrounding area is full of the dazzling light when the enemy’s firebombs explode. Under the illumination of the firebombs, you can clearly see that the

comrades of the 7th company are eye-fel and unbelievable looking at everything around, shocked by the fact that they shout out Yu Congrong's name loudly. From these pictures, we can feel the cruelty of the war, the bravery and firm patriotic heart of Yu Congrong who saves the whole company with one person's life, and the deep friendship between the soldiers. In the movie picture, Yu Congrong's eyes firmly run to the front, and behind him is a blazing firebomb. In the dazzling light and tragic music, he is gradually engulfed by the fire. If you only look at the translation "Farewell, 7th company.", the audience may not fully understand the profound brotherhood between them. But combined with the expression and action of the characters in the picture, such as Wu Wanli struggling to get rid of the control of the comrade and trying to save Yu Congrong and other body language, and the war scene full of firebombs around, the audience, to a certain extent, can feel the sad mood of losing comrades and Yu Congrong's deep patriotic heart.

#### 4. Conclusion

As human communication becomes increasingly multimodal, the complex interplay of images, language, and videos creates sophisticated channels for cross-cultural exchange. Subtitle translation represents an essential component of multimodal translation activities and plays a crucial role in effectively "telling China's story" to global audiences. While China produces numerous high-quality film and television works, subtitle translation directly impacts the pace at which Chinese cultural exports "go global".

This paper examines the Chinese-English bilingual subtitles of "*The Battle at Lake Changjin II*" within the theoretical framework of multimodal discourse analysis proposed by Professor Zhang Delu. The aim is to provide translators with valuable insights for exploring

more effective subtitle translation strategies. Film subtitle professionals must consistently understand the psychology of international audiences, faithfully preserve the original content of films, enhance viewers' experiences, and satisfy the cognitive needs of global audiences regarding China through diversified approaches.

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