



# An Analysis of *Green Book*'s Subtitles and Dubbings from the Perspective of the Rhythmicity Principle

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## Abstract

With the development of globalization and the film industry, an increasing number of outstanding foreign films and television shows are becoming available in the Chinese market. As an Oscar-winning film, the subtitle translation and dubbing of *Green Book* meet high standards and are highly appreciated. From the perspective of the rhythmicity correspondence principle in film and television play translation, this paper analyzes and explores the translation quality of the subtitle translation texts and dubbing texts in *Green Book*, finding that there are still some optimization possibilities at the level of rhythmicity correspondence. The reference text guided by the principle of rhythmicity is also attached. The aim is to apply the "rhythmic unit of translation" in practice, enrich the relevant examples and arguments of this theory, and offer ideas and inspiration for future English-Chinese translation practices of outstanding Western films and television shows. Additionally, it aims to provide case materials for research related to the translation of films and television shows.

## Keywords

*Green Book*, Rhythmic unit of translation, Subtitle translation, Dubbing translation

## 1. Introduction

The movie *Green Book* is based on real people and events. With racial themes, the film revolves around a road journey across South America by Tony Lip Vallelonga, an Italian-American bodyguard, and Don Shirley, an African-American pianist. During the journey, these two people with different skin colors and different cultural backgrounds break the prejudice against each other, cross the racial barrier, and establish a deep friendship.

Since its release, *Green Book* has been deeply loved by a vast audience all over the world. It has not only high ornamental value but also high cultural value. In China, there were many scholars studied this movie. Still, most of the focus is on the film presentation ways like narrative techniques, metaphor tactics, or its cultural codes content such as American racial integration, civil rights movement, etc. On the whole, there are not many papers on film translation, which are mainly carried out from the perspectives of domestication and foreignization, adaptation theory, and the communicational translation model. However, there has been no research on translation strategies of subtitle texts and dubbing texts based on the translation rhythmicity perspective before. Therefore, based on the lines in the original film, this paper will evaluate the subtitle translation and dubbing translation in the Chinese mainland version of *Green Book* through specific and detailed textual analysis, explore the strategies and possible shortcomings of subtitle translation and dubbing translation in processing the dialogue rhythm, and provide a reference translation that is more in line with the rhythmicity correspondence principle.

## 2. Theory Outline

The translation of film and television plays not only contains the general literature characteristics but also has the characteristics of the screen: listening, comprehensive, instant, popular, and unannotative (Qian, 2001). In films and TV plays, pictures, voices, and characters interact at the same time to form specific scenes and plots, and plots and scenes are dynamically transformed. The most important thing is to take into account the psychology of the audience and try to make the translation easy to understand. This means that the task in film and television translation is not only to get the meaning right but also to say it well, so as to enhance the onscreen appeal. Especially for excellent classic international films, the translation should be carefully studied not only in meaning but also in external form.

Based on the universality and connectivity of language rhythm, and compared the corresponding relationship between English and Chinese rhythm, Professor Ma Zhengqi proposed the "rhythmic unit of translation" concept, linguistically comparing the similarities and differences about syllables and feet between English and Chinese languages respectively, and with the aid of the beat concept in the field of musicology, further explores the film translation language rhythm. The conclusion is that there is no direct correspondence between English syllables and Chinese syllables; the English foot can correspond to the Chinese natural foot; and the English sense group can also correspond to the "section" in Chinese (Ma, 2011). This conclusion undoubtedly provides a new perspective and theoretical basis for the film and television translation practice. At the same time, Ma also points out that the comparison of rhythm between English and Chinese is actually a static assumption in an ideal state, and in the actual translation process, more factors such as context and cultural background should be considered (Ma, 2011). In a word, rhythmic units of translation are a condition or standard for checking the consistency between the translation and the original rhythm. In other words, rhythmic units are a basis for selecting different translations. Based on this idea, this paper will start from the concept of a rhythmic unit of translation, and analyze with examples whether the translation of the film *Green Book* has reached the high standard of rhythmicity correspondence on the basis of accurately conveying the theme information of the film.

## 3. Text Analysis

Translation activities can be divided into interpretation, translation, dubbing, and subtitle translation according to the mode of discourse, that is, the way of information transmission (Li, 2001). With the improvement of Internet technology and internationalization, subtitle translation of films and TV dramas and dubbing translation of dubbed films occupy a considerable proportion respectively in the Chinese market. The essence of subtitle translation is the condensed written translation of the original spoken language, which contains three inseparable meanings: interlingual information transmission, simplification or concentration of text, and conversion of spoken language into written language (Luyken, 1991). While for dubbing translation, it emphasizes more on the dynamic equivalence of spoken language and conveys the meaning and flavor of foreign languages in local language through rhetorical reconstruction. In *Green Book*, the translation of many lines clearly reflects some obvious differences in rhythmicity, and specific examples will be analyzed in the following part. In order to better understand the Chinese translation meaning of movie lines, in the analysis process, based on the rhythm characteristics of the presented translation, the Chinese subtitle text, dubbing text, and reference text are all translated into literal translation in English, so as to reduce the comprehension barrier of non-native Chinese readers. The three examples of the analysis chosen are as follows.

### Example 1

[Source text]: Thank you all for coming to see us tonight. It's Saturday night in the Copa! We think that we're gonna have a great time tonight. We're gonna do our best to make sure of that.

[Literal translation of subtitle text]: Thank you all for coming tonight. It is the Saturday night in the Copa! I think that all of us will surely have a great time tonight. We will do our best to do that.

[Literal translation of dubbing text]: Thank you all for coming tonight. Finally, has welcomed the Saturday night in the Copa! Tonight, it will be another fascinating time. We'll make sure to provide you wonderful time.

[Literal translation of reference text]: Thank you all for coming tonight. It's Saturday night in the Copa! We're gonna get real high tonight. We're gonna do our best to serve you well.

These lines are from the film's very beginning scene. The audience's attention is usually very high at the beginning of the film, and the quality of the translation will directly affect the first impression of some audience. The original

text of this paragraph is uttered by a bar manager, accompanied by the background sound of a noisy band performance, he spoke these words with enthusiastic intonation, slightly exaggerated facial expressions, and body movements. In subtitle translation, the original text and the translated text have accurately corresponding meaning, but the first-person pronouns are used too frequently, which lowers the emotional color of the translated text, just like telling a story in a bland way, and thus the rhythm becomes sluggish; and in the dubbing version, it is obvious that the Chinese rhythm (sections) of the translation is more than the English sense groups of the original text. Such deviation will be obviously reflected in the inconsistent voice and mouth shapes of the actors in the movie situation. Taking the second sentence “We think that/ we’re gonna/ have a great/ time tonight” as an example, it can be divided into four beats according to the sense group, while in the dubbing text, the translation has five Chinese sound groups (I think that/ all of us/ will surely/ have a great/ time tonight). In addition, there is also a difference in the opening and closing of mouth shapes. In reference text (We’re gonna get real high tonight), the rhythm is consistent, and the mouth shape of the end rhyme is more synchronized. Meanwhile, there is no increase or omission in meaning, and the lively and enthusiastic context is properly displayed.

The task of a subtitle translator is not only to translate the source language into the target language but also to deal with the specific cultural information (Deng, 2001). In this process, we need to always adhere to the concept of serving the audience, which directly determines our translation strategy. The same sentence or even a word in the source language needs to be processed differently according to the situation (dialogue, monologue) or form (subtitle translation or dubbing translation) of the target language.

## Example 2

[Source text]:

-Do yourself a favor. Go home with your friends.

-Jesus Christ! Screw those! He’s out of his mind.

[Literal translation of subtitle text]:

-Just do yourself a favor. Take your friends and go back to your place.

-Jesus Christ! Screw those guys! He’s crazy.

[Literal translation of dubbing text]:

-If you are wise, just take your friends home.

-What an unexpected trouble! That old devil is crazy!

[Literal translation of reference text]:

-Don’t trouble trouble. Go home with your friends.

-The Jade Emperor! Screw those! The old devil is crazy!

These conversations in this example happen between the main character Tony Lip, and the pub troublemaker and his pub colleague. Dialogue is an important way to show characters' personalities in movies and TV plays, and it is also a text with high requirements on the rhythmicity of translation. If it is not properly handled, problems such as deviation from the original meaning or inconsistent sound and pictures will occur. For instance, the first sentence “Do yourself/ a favor. Go home/ with your friends.” has four rhythmic units if divided by English foot, but in subtitle translation, according to the division of Chinese natural foot, there are six rhythmic units (Just/ do yourself/ a favor. Take your friends/ and go back/ to your place.), obviously the rhythm is prolonged; Similarly, in the dubbing version, although the method of translating two sentences into one successfully keeps the same number of rhythmic units, it ignores the pause and breathing in the middle of the two sentences in the original text, which is also not a good treatment.

In the reference text, it is translated as “Don’t trouble trouble. Go home with your friends”. On the one hand, the translation achieves the functional equivalence by the negation translation, and at the same time realizes the corresponding rhythm, which is smooth and natural, and fits the character image and speaking situation. The following sentence is also in the same way because whether subtitle translation or dubbing translation, there is still a problem in rhyme either longer or shorter. Therefore, in the reference text, “Jesus Christ” is correctly translated into “The Jade Emperor”, so the complete alienation of “Jesus Christ” (god image in Western culture) in subtitle translation and the over-naturalization of “What an unexpected trouble” in the dubbing subtitles are avoided. Besides, the rhythm is also quite consistent. And translated the “Screw those! He’s out of his mind.” into “The old devil is crazy.” is based on the instant impression that the previous scene left in the audience's mind, which takes the principle of “personalization

of characters” into account and also achieves the synchronization in rhythmicity.

According to the linguistic adaptation theory put forward by Belgian linguist Jef Verschuren, that is language enables its users to make negotiated language choices within the range of possibilities provided to meet the needs of communication, context can be divided into linguistic context and communicative context (Verschuren, 1999). When seeking the rhythmicity correspondence of the translated texts, we should also consider these two different contexts namely, the linguistic context between the characters in the plot and the communicative context between the source language culture and the target language culture.

### Example 3

[Source text]: Whatever you do, do it a hundred percent. When you work, work, when you laugh, laugh, when you eat, eat like it's your last meal.

[Literal translation of subtitle text]: Whatever you do, do it a hundred percent. If you work, then work hard, when you laugh, laugh loudly, when you eat, you better take it as your last meal.

[Literal translation of dubbing text]: Whatever you do, do it with all your might. Work is work. Laugh loudly when you laugh. When you eat, just take it as your last meal.

[Literal translation of reference text]: Whatever you do, do it with all your might. When you work, work, when you laugh, laugh. Eat this one and forget the next.

These lines are what Tony says to Dr. Shirley when he drives the car on their journey. In these words, Tony is totally taking the initiative, and therefore in translation, it should be considered that the character's personality and speaking habits are fully presented in such a linguistic context, and meanwhile in a communicative context, because the discourse content involves a certain value and lifestyle, the translation should also focus on the audiences' acceptance of different cultures at the psychological level.

For example, in the sentence "Do it a hundred percent", here the percentage concept clearly accords with the Western logical thinking pattern. If translated directly, it will not only increase the cost of understanding for the audience due to the differences in cultural habits, but also cause the rhythm of the Chinese translation to be too long; but in the dubbing version "do it with all your might", the rhythmic unit is adjusted, and also is more in line with the traditional thinking of Chinese audiences. The latter line "When you work...eat like it's your last meal" more clearly reflects the characteristics of linguistic context and communicative context, that is Tony's language is concise and colloquial with a simple and rough mind and implies the value of *carpe diem* in western society. The subtitle translation and dubbing translation of this sentence both have inappropriateness in rhythmicity and context, so the reference text, in rhythm, retained the repeating rhetoric means and colloquial characteristics, at the same time, with a relatively colloquial form "Eat this meal and forget the next" avoids the extreme serious expression "your last meal" in subtitle and dubbing versions. Moreover, the antithesis dual structure also takes into account the particularity of the rhythm of the original text, and the original text and the translated text can basically correspond in terms of the specific number of words or syllables.

## 4. Conclusion

Line in movies and TV plays is different from dialogue in daily life, and its essence is a kind of language form processed and packaged by art and technology. Since the fundamental purpose of film and television translation is to serve the audience, the pursuit of rhythmical correspondence in both subtitle translation and dubbing translation has practical significance and artistic value. It can not only help the audience to convert language and generate meaning in the visual or auditory sense, so as to focus as much attention on the content of the film as possible in the limited space and time instead of understanding the lines or plot; at the same time, it can also endow the translation with rhythm aesthetic feeling and bring aesthetic enjoyment to the audience.

By analyzing the two modes of translated texts of the film *Green Book* with the help of the "rhythmic unit of translation", it can be seen that there are still some optimization possibilities in the rhythmicity corresponding level if only considering the translation of the film lines in terms of rhythm. However, it is important to note that in the actual process of translation, the rhythmicity principle (integrating sounds and scenes) is not the primary consideration, but is more suitable as a tool and standard to modify and polish the translation. Therefore, in this paper, in addition to the comments and analysis of subtitle translation and dubbing translation text, the reference text under the

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guidance of the rhythmicity principle is also attached, in order to apply the "rhythmic unit of translation" into practice and enrich the relevant examples and demonstration of this theory. Based on this idea, it can be seen that *Green Book* is a phenomenally Oscar-winning blockbuster, in addition to the story itself, which is rich in connotation and meaning, its relatively idiomatic and natural translation both in subtitle and dubbing also plays a certain role.

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