

Analysis on the Intersemiotic Translation of Audiovisual Translation

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Abstract: Based on the kinds of translation including intersemiotic translation divided by Roman Jakobson and other theories concerning how translation is produced through different signs, this essay focuses on rethinking how audiovisual translation could be viewed as intersemiotic translation with multiple visual and aural signs involved in the source text and the target text of audiovisual translation. Audiovisual translation adopts these visual and aural signs to establish the temporality and spatiality in the target text according to the signs utilized in the source text, building the chronotopes of different frames for the target audience. The rebuilding or construction of the chronotope of audiovisual translation is a kind of intersemiotic and intercultural displacement, which places the temporality and spatiality of certain culture into another culture. These chronotopes are like intercultural enclaves, which are transferred into another cultural context with the transformation of intersemiotic translation.

Keywords: intersemiotic translation, audiovisual translation, sign, temporality, spatiality

Unlike the normal form of translation which only involves the source text and the target text with literary signs, audiovisual translation happens among intersemiotic signs including literary signs, visual signs and audio signs since the translation of visual arts needs to help the target audiences understand what is going on in the screen both visually and acoustically. According to the kinds of translation divided by Roman Jakobson, audiovisual translation is related to the category of

intersemiotic translation, which is the transfer or transmutation of the signs in one language to non-verbal sign systems (Jakobson, 2016: 9). Though Jakobson defines the signs in one language as the source text, and non-verbal sign systems as the target target, which is contrary to the direction of most of the audiovisual translation, audiovisual translation still belongs to the category of intersemiotic translation owing to the fact that there are different kinds of signs involved in the translation of visual arts. The intersemiotic translation is called as semiosic translation by Sergio Torres Martínez. He mentions that semiosic translation attaches itself conceptually to an extended notion of semiosis involving the transformation of any sign system into other sign systems (Martínez, 2015: 107). The transformation of sign systems is exactly what happens during the process of audiovisual translation. In addition, Sandra Bermann mentions that both the translation of verbal signs into non-verbal sign systems and vice versa could be viewed as translation (Bermann, 2009: 439). Under such circumstance, no longer could the normal concept of source text and target text in translation be applicable to audiovisual translation. Thus, this essay proposes to view audiovisual translation as intersemiotic translation, with typical examples taken from the English translation of Chinese TV series to explain how different signs could be studied under the framework of intersemiotic translation.

1. The Multiple Visual and Aural Signs Involved in the Source Text and The Target Text of Audiovisual Translation as Intersemiotic Translation

Apart from being the interlingual translation of one language into another language during the process of subtitling, audiovisual translation is intersemiotic with the source text demonstrated in the audiovisual materials in different forms of signs. In addition to the verbal signs in the subtitles, audiovisual materials contain the source text in the form of visual signs and audio signs, which is translated into the subtitle as additional part of subtitling. Since audiovisual translation is performed for target audiences living in different cultures, some of the visual signs and audio signs

in audiovisual materials needs to be regarded as the source text and translated accordingly. For example, In the English version of the Chinese TV series called *Perfect Her* (“完美的她” in Chinese), the visual sign, which is the content of the cellphone, is translated into the verbal sign at the top side of the screen, which goes as “Two people are sharing locations”. This piece of intersemiotic translation could help the target audiences of the English version to understand that the character in the screen is using the WeChat app on her phone to share the location with her husband. Being the main users of WeChat, Chinese audiences are familiar with its location sharing function, but for English audiences who do not use WeChat, the location sharing function in this screen may be completely unfamiliar. Therefore, it is necessary to translate the visual sign into the verbal sign here to help English viewers understand the content of the audiovisual materials.

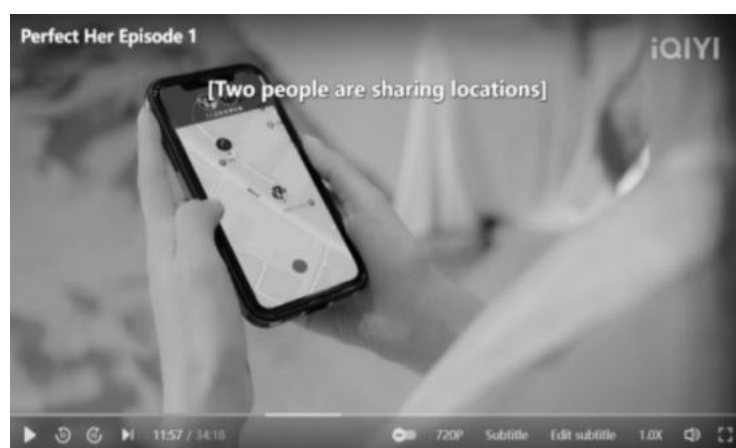


Figure.1 The intersemiotic translation of *Perfect Her*

Other than translating visual signs into verbal signs, audiovisual translation translates audio signs into verbal signs, especially when the audiovisual materials have background musics like songs with lyrics. Typically, the audio signs appear as the lyrics of the songs would be translated into verbals signs on either side of the screen. Taking the English version of the Chinese TV series called *Under the SkinII* (“猎罪图鉴 2” in Chinese) as an example, the audio signs of the lyrics of the background music is translated into the verbal signs as subtitles above the translated

actor's line "Right". With the aim to separate the translated verbal sign of the lyric from the translated actor's line, the intersemiotic translation here adds the verbal signs in the shape of the music notes both at the left side and the right side of the translated lyric as shown below. However, the translation of the lyric is not placed next to the Chinese lyric, which is arranged vertically on the left side of the screen. Thus, target audience of the English version might get confused by the Chinese lyric on the screen since they do not know Chinese. Owing to the fact that the actor's lines are not shown in Chinese as subtitles, target audience might guess that the Chinese on the screen is the lyric of the background music. Yet, it would be better if the audio signs translated could be placed by the side of the source text of it, which is the Chinese lyric on the screen.



Figure.2 The intersemiotic translation of *Under the Skin II*

Unlike subtitling, dubbing only contains the source text which is exactly the actor's line. Since the actor's line might appear in the audiovisual materials both visually and acoustically, the source text of dubbing is either visual sign or audio sign like subtitling. Moreover, like subtitling, dubbing holds the target text which is the verbal sign both visually and acoustically. Since dubbing deletes the original soundtrack of the audiovisual materials, target audiences are mainly attracted by the acoustical sign given by dubbing. Not to mention that some audiovisual translation pieces provide the target audiences with dubbing but no subtitles. With dubbing, the

intersemiotic translation of audiovisual translation mainly transfers the verbal sign visually or acoustically into the verbal sign acoustically. Thus, the target text of the intersemiotic translation of audiovisual translation also appears both visually and acoustically.

Judging from the analysis above, both subtitling and dubbing, which are the main two categories of audiovisual translation, own the source texts that is either visual signs or audio signs, while the target texts are always verbal signs visually or acoustically. Since the visual signs or audio signs of the source text are embedded in the audiovisual materials originally, it is natural that the source text of audiovisual translation could be presented in more forms of signs with images and texts as a piece of intersemiotic translation. However, the target text could only be verbal signs visually and acoustically owing to the fact that the process of audiovisual translation only add subtitles or dubbing in the form of verbal signs (Sometimes, signs like musical symbols might added while translating the lyrics of the background music. However, they are only small audio signs like comma or colon that even could be counted as verbal signs). Anyhow, it is impractical for the target text to be images, because such kind of transformation would change the original images of the audiovisual materials, leading to the damage of the original images and the whole piece of audiovisual materials. Moreover, in the post-industrial world, the proliferation of signs increase the component of sign-value or image embodied in the production, the circulation or the consumption of informational goods (Cronin, 2003: 15). Thus, the transformation of the aural signs and visual signs are even harder for translators of audiovisual goods since there are more values encompassed in the signs of the source text. All in all, the intersemiotic features of the audiovisual translation are demonstrated more vividly in the source text than that of the target text. The multiple visual signs and aural signs of both the source text and the target text in audiovisual translation carries the signifiers and signifieds to form both the temporality and spatiality of intersemiotic translation. As mentioned by Roland

Barthes, the signifier is empty, while the sign is full as a meaning (Barthes, 1991: 112). Though the sign is completely arbitrary (Wellek and Austin, 1977: 22), audiovisual translation needs to find signifiers and signifieds in the target text to replace the chain of meanings taken by the signifiers and signifieds in the source text during the process of intersemiotic translation. Based on Roman Jakobson's view goes as the meaning of any linguistic sign is its translation into some further, alternative sign (Pym, 2014: 105), the intersemiotic translation of audiovisual translation is beneficial for the expansion and enrichment of semiotic world as well.

2. The Temporality and Spatiality of Audiovisual Translation as Intersemiotic Translation

With different visual signs and aural signs, audiovisual materials could show the things happening in the past, present and future. Visual signs like what people wear, where people live and how people travel might tell the audience the temporal setting of the audiovisual materials immediately. Not to mention that the very beginning part of the films or TV series usually introduce the temporal setting with subtitles on the screen. However, since audiovisual translation usually happens among different cultures and languages, it would be hard for the target audiences to know the temporal setting immediately. Thus, it is necessary for the audiovisual translation to reveal the temporal setting with verbal signs in the intersemiotic translation. If there were already information relating to the temporal setting in the subtitles of the source text, audiovisual translation just need to translate the related subtitles into the target language as verbal signs. If not, audiovisual translation might need to add pieces of subtitles to provide the target audiences with the temporal setting so that they could fathom the audiovisual materials in a better way, especially when there are flashbacks with no subtitles. Anyhow, as intersemiotic translation travelling through languages and cultures, audiovisual translation is responsible for telling the target audiences the temporality of the audiovisual materials.

In addition to temporality, audiovisual translation has to reveal the spatiality of the audiovisual materials for the target audiences since they might not be familiar with the spatial elements presented in even strange forms of signs for them. Such kind of situations are common for the audiovisual translation of classical Chinese TV series as shown below in the TV series called *Guardians of the Dafeng* (“大奉打更人” in Chinese).



Figure.3 The intersemiotic translation of *Guardians of the Dafeng*

In the image above, there are plaques hanging on the doors with ancient Chinese characters, which are rather strange for target audience who have never visited the ancient Chinese buildings before. Although the subtitle translation of the video did not translate the Chinese characters such as “高山仰止”(its Chinese pinyin goes as Gao shan yang zhi, which basically means that something is admired by others greatly like high mountains) on the three plaques on the building, the words “Noble Character” were added at the bottom of the screen to explain the attributes of the Chinese characters in the video using a blurred translation method. In stead of translating “高山仰止” into English laboriously, the more ambiguous target text “Noble Character” translated here is enough for overseas audiences who are not familiar with Chinese culture to understand that the relevant context is a rather noble building here with noble characters written on the plaques. However, the ambiguous translation method here makes the target audience lose the opportunities to know more about ancient Chinese cultures. What they acquire from the ambiguous translation are only necessary context with no deep understanding of the Chinese culture itself. Yet, since

the source text, i.e., the visual signs of the Chinese plaques and buildings are rather complicated cultural elements, it is not easy for the target audience who are not familiar with the Chinese culture to fathom so much cultural matter. Therefore, the ambiguous way of translation of the spatiality in audiovisual translation is acceptable.

Apart from translating the source text relating to spatiality in an ambiguous way, audiovisual translation could translate the source text as it is in the target text as well, as long as the intersemiotic translation would be beneficial for the target audience to acquire as much information from the screen as the audience of the source text. Here, this essay takes the screenshot obtained from the Chinese TV series called *Love Song in Winter* (“冬至” in Chinese) below as an example.



Figure.4 The intersemiotic translation of *Love Song in Winter*

In the image above, there is a red road sign in the screen with Chinese characters goes as “幸福站”(its Chinese pinyin goes as Xing fu zhan, which means “happiness station”) on it. The audiovisual translation here translates the Chinese characters goes as “幸福站” into “Happiness Station” on the screen’s upper side with square brackets. Although the name of the road sign is not prominent in the screen itself, it serves to enhance the happy atmosphere of what is going on in the TV series. Therefore, the English translation of the visual sign, i.e, the road sign, is essential here, constructing the spatiality revealed in the source text and being useful for the target audience to acquire more information from the intersemiotic translation.

No matter how the spatial source text is translated, either ambiguously or concretely as mentioned above, audiovisual translation needs to establish the

temporality and spatiality in the target text according to the signs utilized in the source text. As shown by the audiovisual materials, the visual signs of images and verbal signs visually and acoustically build up the temporality and spatiality which form different spaces during different times with frames of different lengths. Accordingly, the intersemiotic temporality and spatiality are translated to meet the needs of the target audience so that they could try to immerse themselves in the chronotope constructed by the original images or frames of the source text and the subtitles added by the intersemiotic translation of audiovisual translation. The reason why some subtitles in forms of verbal signs are added in the process of intersemiotic translation lies in the fact that the target audiences do not know the source culture as good as the audiences of the original audiovisual materials, who could fathom the temporality and spatiality based on the images itself.

3. The Construction of the Chronotope of Audiovisual Translation as Intersemiotic Translation

With the formation of temporality and spatiality through the translation of multiple visual signs and aural signs, audio translation rebuild the chronotope of the source text in the context of the target culture as intersemiotic translation. Such kind of rebuilding or construction of the chronotope of audiovisual translation is a kind of intersemiotic and intercultural displacement, which places the temporality and spatiality of certain culture into another culture. Since there are many pieces of audiovisual materials that is created with imagination, forming the virtual chronotope, the chronotope of the source culture might not exist in the real world, but has its foundation rooted in its source culture (with the high level of cultural communication currently, it is possible that the imagined chronotope is made out of the combination of a variety of cultures). Anyhow, the chronotope described by the original audiovisual material has its own temporality and spatiality, while a piece of audiovisual material might contain many chronotopes since a film or TV series

usually demonstrate the things happening in lots of places during different times. Through audiovisual translation, these chronotopes are like intercultural enclaves, which are transferred into another cultural context with the transformation of intersemiotic translation. Owing to the fact that different cultures have different audiences and watching habits, the intercultural enclave of audiovisual translation needs to adapt itself into another cultural context by changing the visual and aural signs from the source text into the target text. With the aim to clarify the transformation of chronotopes during the process of audiovisual translation as intersemiotic translation, this essay draws the model below so as to have further discussion on redefining the concept of source text and target text in audiovisual translation.

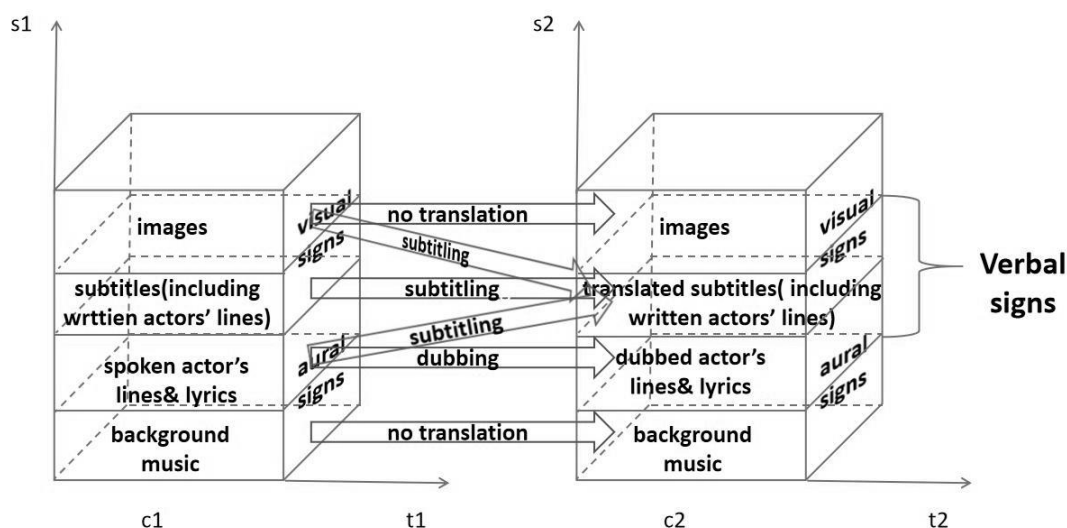


Figure.5 The model on the transformation of chronotopes during the process of audiovisual translation as intersemiotic translation

As shown above, the model on the transformation of chronotopes during the process of audiovisual translation as intersemiotic translation is a three-dimensional model encompassing the temporality and spatiality of the audiovisual materials. The two cubes above are named as c1 and c2, which are the chronotope of the source text and the chronotope of the target text separately. As for the X axes of the two

chronotopes, i.e., t_1 and t_2 , they represent the temporality of the source text and the target text. In terms of the Y axes, i.e., s_1 and s_2 , they symbolize the spatiality of the source text and the target text. The X axe and the Y axe form the chronotope during the process of audiovisual translation. Before audiovisual translation, the chronotope is made out of the visual signs and aural signs. In the chronotope of the source text, visual signs contain the images and subtitles including written actors' lines, while aural signs including spoken actors' lines, lyrics and background music. Here, actors' lines are divided into written actors' lines and spoken actors' lines since they belong to the semiotic categories of visual signs and aural signs respectively. Sometimes, there are even no written actors' lines in the audiovisual materials. After audiovisual translation, some of the images of the visual signs and the background music of the aural signs remain the same as that of the source text, because they do not go through any kind of transformation. However, through the process of intersemiotic translation, other parts of the source text are translated into other forms of verbal signs in the chronotope of the target text. First, some of the images of the source text is translated into subtitles, so that the target audience who are not familiar with the source culture could fathom what is going on in the screen. This process of subtitling translates the visual signs of images into the visual signs of verbal signs. Second, visual signs that are the subtitles including written actors' lines are translated into subtitles as verbal signs in the source text after subtitling. Third, the spoken actors' lines and lyrics as aural signs are either translated into visual signs as subtitles after subtitling, or translated into dubbed actors' lines and lyrics after dubbing as still aural signs. After dubbing or subtitling, audiovisual translation always turned the visual signs and aural signs into verbal signs visually or acoustically, constructing the chronotope in the target culture with temporality and spatiality according to the chronotope in the source culture. Generally, the chronotopes of the source text and that of the target text are basically the same. However, since some cultural matters concerning temporality and spatiality are hard to be translated into the target culture, there might

be some differences between the two chronotopes, providing the target audience with different viewing effects while being compared with the audience of the original audiovisual materials.

Translators of audiovisual translation are like tourist guides, who introduce the source text of the audiovisual materials to the target audience through the translated target text, while the tourist sights of the target audience are the intercultural enclaves translated by audiovisual translation as intersemiotic translation. These intercultural enclaves are filled with the translated chronotopes, with translated signs provided by translators to help the target audience to know something of the temporality and spatiality of the audiovisual materials. Judging from the anthropological perspective, the chronotopes translated through intersemiotic translation are the other for they themselves as the self. In addition, the self and the other could exchange their places since the intercultural communication happens not unilaterally. Human beings are like living in a fictional museum, while the act of translation is like a purposeless journey in this museum, wandering among different civilizations (Ricoeur, 1965: 278). Through the journey of translation, the target audience of audiovisual translation acquire the chance to view the temporality and spatiality of the other's chronotopes. However, like any kind of translation, audiovisual translation as intersemiotic translation cannot avoid transforming or distorting more or less parts of the source text into the target text. These transformations and distortions are caused by the cultural and linguistic matters that are difficult to translate as it is in another cultural context. Thus, the other's chronotope, i.e., the intercultural enclave, translated by the intersemiotic translation might be different from the chronotope in the source text to some degree.

Different as it is, the other's chronotope constructed by the intersemiotic translation calls for the audiovisual translation's translators efforts on translating the multiple signs relating to temporality and spatiality in an appropriate way. Only in this way can the translated intercultural enclave reveal the temporality and spatiality

of the source text as much as possible. The reason why the other's chronotope is named as intercultural enclave here is that after the process of audiovisual translation as intersemiotic translation, the visual or aural signs which form the intercultural enclave are translated into the target text with cultural and linguistic matters being the other for the target audience. Being immersed in their own cultures since they were born, target audience might find it hard to be accustomed to fathom the other's cultural and linguistic matters or signs. In other words, the other's chronotopes, i.e., the intercultural enclaves, translated on the screens are placed into the cultural contexts that are different from its own, which makes the other's chronotopes function like enclaves across cultures. Being the intercultural enclaves, the other's chronotopes need to be accepted by the target audience through breaking the cultural and linguistic barriers. According to Lewis, culture is the protective shell of a community, while cultural distinctions become, to some extent, an index of social identity (Lewis, 1976: 16). As culture is compared to protective shell, the intersemiotic translation of audiovisual translation needs to break through the protective shell both of the source text and the target text, so that the audiovisual materials filled with visual signs and aural signs could travel into another culture. In this process, the social identity of the source culture is introduced to the target culture. So are the temporality and spatiality of the source culture. Yet, since the protective shell of culture is not easy to be transformed or reconstructed in the target culture, leading to the intercultural enclave which is a deformed transformation of the source culture in the context of the target culture.

In terms of the deformed temporality and spatiality of the intercultural enclave constructed by audiovisual translation as intersemiotic translation, the translation of the spatiality seems to be harder than that of temporality. The reason lies in the fact that the period of time could be expressed with the Gregorian calendar. However, the temporality is not easy to translate since the time background is interwoven with the social background and development, which is difficult to be translated thoroughly

through the target text of limited verbal signs on the screen (unlike books or articles, the screen of audiovisual materials do not allow audiovisual translation to add too many verbal signs as subtitles on the screen, while the target audience would not be able to read too many signs as well). The same matter goes to the translation of the spatiality of the intercultural enclave. As shown in the third figure above, there are only two words “noble characters” as verbal signs in the subtitle to indicate that the space of that frame is a noble place with noble characters hanging on the doors, instead of a long string of words telling what those Chinese characters mean, which would be impossible for the target audience to read all of them in only a few seconds. This is enough for the target audience to fathom the spatiality of the intercultural enclave in that frame. Limited verbal signs being allowed to be put on the screen means that audiovisual translation need to be as concise as possible, so that the target audience could get a hint of the spatiality of the intercultural enclave within few frames. Due to the limited space left for translated verbal signs on the screen, the intersemiotic translation of the whole spatiality of the audiovisual translation becomes a hard task. Unlike museums, where the visitors could allocate their own time to read or listen to the introduction of the items collected, the intercultural enclave of audiovisual translation could not put introduction on every strange items on the screen for the target audience. Instead, translators of audiovisual translation could only introduce the most urgent and significant signs in the intercultural enclave.

With the seemingly limited space for verbals signs on the screen, audiovisual translation endows its intersemiotic translation with a chance to build the chronotope of the target text as an intercultural enclave to spread the culture of the source text to the audience of the target text in a more appropriate way. As shown in the screenshot below, such kind of intersemiotic translation is a hard task during the process of audiovisual translation.



Figure.6 The intersemiotic translation of *Moonlight Mystique Episode*

The English version of the first episode of the TV series *Moonlight Mystique Episode* translated “阿曦气数有异”(its pinyin goes as “a xi qishu youyi”) as “Xi has a special destiny”. Given that the term “气数”(its pinyin goes as “qishu”) is a unique term in traditional Chinese culture, it is impossible to find a direct equivalent of this term in English. Therefore, the English translation here translates “气数” as “special destiny”, which conveys the sense of destiny in the Chinese dialogue and the narrow connotation of “气数” referring to a person’s fate or the duration of their existence. However, “special destiny” cannot reveal the deeper cultural connotation of “气数”, a term that occupies an important position in traditional Chinese culture. Nor can “special destiny” show that “气数” broadly refers to the Chinese views on timing, laws of development and changes of things. In other words, the translation “special destiny” here makes this piece of audiovisual material lose the opportunity to show more of the traditional Chinese culture relating to Qi (this is how “气” is translated as a specific term relating to Chinese Neo-Confucianism and other Chinese philosophical principles currently) for the target audience. All in all, the complexity of traditional Chinese culture makes translation of some Chinese terms difficult in intersemiotic translation. Thus, it is not easy to spread the culture of the source text thoroughly in the intercultural enclave of audiovisual translation as well. During its process of intersemiotic translation, the original signifiers and signifieds are both

changed with the transformation of the signs travelling from one culture into another one. With the subjectivity given to the translators of audiovisual translation, they need to rebuild these signifiers and signifieds in the chronotope of the target text and construct the cultural connotations with temporality and spatiality as much as possible. As mentioned by Rey Chow, the other cultures purposely expose themselves to the Western gaze and construct the way they are to be looked at through films (Rey, 1995: 180). Rey's focus on the gaze of the target audience reveals the necessity for audiovisual translation to adapt the aural signs and visual signs to the chronotope of the target text in a user-friendly way for the target audience.

With the transformation of signifiers and signifieds of multiple aural signs and visual signs in audiovisual translation, the intercultural enclave constructed by the intersemiotic translation is the choronotope of the target text with deformed temporality and spatiality compared to that of the source text. As analyzed in the model on the transformation of chronotopes during the process of audiovisual translation as intersemiotic translation above, the translated chronotopes of target text are always in the form of verbal signs visually or acoustically through subtitling or dubbing, while the chronotopes of the source text include visual signs like images, aural signs like lyrics in the background music and so on. The temporality and spatiality of the chronotopes of the source text could be revealed in visual signs like images and verbal signs like subtitles. However, the differences among different contexts of cultures and languages makes it necessary for the translators of audiovisual translation to add subtitles to explain what is going on in the screen culturally for the target audience. Thus, translators of audiovisual translation are like tourist guides who introduce the temporality and spatiality of the intercultural enclave constructed by intersemiotic translation to the target audience. The gaze of the target audience on the intercultural enclave as the other makes it necessary for audiovisual translation as intersemiotic translation to adapt the signifiers and signifieds of the source text into the chronotope of the target text in a user-friendly way, so that the

more or less deformed intercultural enclave could break the protective shell of the target culture and function like an enclave to promote the communication of cultures through audiovisual translation as intersemiotic translation. Future studies could try to study how a piece of audiovisual translation could be analyzed as intersemiotic translation with the theoretical views mentioned in this essay, while deepening the theoretical discussion of the intersemiotic features of audiovisual translation through more examples among different languages.

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