

A Study of Film Subtitle Translation from the Perspective of Cognitive Translation Studies - A Case Study of *Hi, Mom*

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Abstract:

Cognitive Translation Studies is an emerging paradigm in translation studies propelled by cognitive science. Grounded in the theories and methodologies of cognitive science, it uncovers the essence and laws of translation from a cognitive lens, conceptualizing translation as a dynamic cognitive activity undertaken by translators in specific contexts. It emphasizes the core role of translators' cognitive mechanisms—such as cognitive schemas, contextual construal, and conceptual integration—in the translation process. Taking the English subtitles of the film *Hi, Mom* as the research object, this paper systematically analyzes the cognitive processing mechanisms of linguistic phenomena in subtitle translation (including culture-loaded words, colloquial expressions, and emotional metaphors) based on the core theories of CTS (Schema Theory, Conceptual Integration Theory, and Relevance Theory). It explores how translators achieve the alignment between source language information and the target audience's cognitive habits through strategies like activating cognitive schemas, constructing cross-domain mappings, and pursuing optimal relevance. The study reveals that CTS provides a micro-level cognitive explanatory framework for film subtitle translation. Translators need to base themselves on the cognitive context of the source language and the cognitive capacities of the target audience, flexibly apply cognitive strategies, and on the premise of ensuring the accuracy of information transmission, reduce the audience's cognitive load to achieve cross-cultural emotional resonance.

Keywords:

Cognitive Translation Studies, Cognitive Schema, Conceptual Integration, Relevance Theory, *Hi, Mom*

1. Introduction

Driven by globalization and digital media, Chinese films and television works are going global at an accelerating pace. *Hi, Mom* has achieved remarkable box office success and overseas communication with its family-oriented theme and distinctive local cultural features. The cross-cultural communication of this film relies heavily on high-quality subtitle translation.

Traditional studies on subtitle translation mostly focus on macro theories and strategies. They pay little attention to translators' cognitive processes and audiences'

cognitive rules. As Wu points out in his research on the linguistic features and translation strategies of film subtitles, traditional subtitle translation studies tend to prioritize text comparison over the dynamic cognitive interactions between translators and audiences [11]. Cognitive translology, however, offers a new perspective for this field. It regards translation as a dynamic cognitive interaction and meaning construction process. Wang proposes that a cognitive linguistic approach to translation can effectively reveal the internal cognitive mechanisms of translation, which provides a new direction for subtitle translation research [2]. As Zhao argues in *A Cognitive Study of Translation*, CTS breaks through the limitations of traditional translation research by focusing on the internal cognitive processes of translators, which provides a solid theoretical foundation for this study [1].

This paper takes the English subtitles of *Hi, Mom* as the research object. Based on relevant theories of cognitive translology, it analyzes the cognitive mechanisms, application paths and strategic choices of subtitle translation. This study enriches the application of cognitive translology in film and television subtitles. It promotes translation research from text comparison to cognitive process analysis. It also provides theoretical references and practical guidance for domestic warm-themed films. These references help solve problems in cultural transmission and emotional resonance, and improve the effect of cross-cultural communication. Previous studies on subtitle translation, such as those by Li and Ma and Chen, have explored general translation strategies but rarely combined them with cognitive theories, which makes this study's focus on CTS particularly valuable^{[12][15]}.

2. Core Theories of Cognitive Translation Studies

Cognitive translation studies emerged as a research paradigm in the 1980s. Its core idea is that translation is an experience-based, cognition-oriented, and dynamically adaptive process involving multiple interacting factors [2]. The theory integrates findings from cognitive linguistics, psychology, communication, and other disciplines. It provides a micro-level cognitive framework for translation research. This section outlines three core theories closely related to film subtitle translation and explains their application foundations. Wang also emphasizes that cognitive linguistics can offer a new perspective on the translation process, which supports the theoretical framework of this paper [10].

2.1. Schema Theory

Psychologist F.C. Bartlett first proposed schema theory in 1932. Cognitive psychologist D.E. Rumelhart later refined it. The theory holds that schemas are cognitive structures stored in long-term memory, formed through accumulated past experience. They function as knowledge networks about specific topics [3]. Rumelhart emphasizes that schemas are dynamic, hierarchical, and flexible, and they play a crucial role in information processing and interpretation [3]. When people encounter new information, they activate relevant schemas to interpret, process, and integrate it. If existing schemas cannot match new information, people adjust or construct new ones.

2.2. Conceptual Integration Theory

Conceptual Blending Theory was put forward in the 1990s by cognitive linguists Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner. According to this theory, human thinking is essentially a process in which multiple mental spaces carry out conceptual blending

through cross-domain mapping. Fauconnier and Turner in their paper Conceptual Integration Networks detail the core structural model of the theory—the integration network, which is a dynamic cognitive network formed by mappings between mental spaces [4].

At the heart of the theory lies its core structural model: the integration network. This refers to a dynamic cognitive network formed by mappings connecting several mental spaces, which serves as the operational framework for meaning construction. The model consists of four key mental spaces: the source space, the target space, the generic space, and the blended space. Individuals select elements from the source and target spaces, map them onto one another, and integrate them. In this way, new conceptual meanings emerge within the blended space [5].

2.3. Relevance Theory

Pragmatists D. Sperber and D. Wilson put forward relevance theory in 1986. According to this theory, human communication is an ostensive-inferential process. The speaker conveys intentions through explicit expressions, and the listener infers the intended meaning. The core principle is optimal relevance. Listeners seek interpretations that achieve sufficient contextual effects with minimal cognitive effort [6].

3. A Case Study of Subtitle Translation in *Hi, Mom* from the Perspective of Cognitive Translation Studies

The English subtitles of *Hi, Mom* cover various linguistic expressions. These include culture-loaded words, colloquial phrases, emotional metaphors, and terms with distinctive historical features. The translator makes full use of core theories in cognitive translation studies. Strategies such as activating cognitive schemas, building conceptual integration networks, and pursuing optimal relevance are adopted. These efforts help align the source text information with the cognitive habits of the target audience. This section analyzes specific examples from the three theoretical perspectives. Tan argues that a cognitive translational perspective can effectively explain translator behavior in specific translation scenarios, which is exactly the focus of this case study [9].

3.1. From the Perspective of Schema Theory

Culture-loaded words and era-specific terms are shaped by particular cultural and historical backgrounds. They carry unique cognitive schemas. Foreign audiences often lack such schemas and may fail to grasp the implied meanings. Therefore, the translator must activate, adjust, or reconstruct these schemas. This helps the audience achieve cognitive compatibility. Yang and Rong note that the translation of cultural words in film subtitles is a key link in cross-cultural communication, and schema theory can provide effective guidance for this process [13].

3.1.1. Translation of Culture-Loaded Words: Activating Shared Schemas and Building New Ones

Culture-loaded words refer to words, phrases, and idioms that represent unique concepts or objects in a specific culture [8]. In translating such terms, the key is to help the target audience activate their existing related schemas, or help them form new cognitive schemas.

Example (1)

Source text: “接下来有请状元郎的母亲，李焕英女士。” (The host introduces Li Huanying at a graduation celebration.)

Translation: “Please welcome the mother of the prodigy, Ms. Li Huanying.”

Analysis

“状元郎” is a typical title from China’s ancient imperial examination system. It refers specifically to the top candidate in the ancient imperial examination. Its underlying cognitive schema links “top scorer in imperial exams” to “elite talent” and “honor”. Foreign audiences have no schema for the imperial examination system. But they share the schemas of “outstanding talent” and “child prodigy”. By translating “状元郎” as “prodigy”, the translator successfully activates the audience’s shared schema of excellence. The phrase “mother of the prodigy” also preserves the original sense of honor the mother feels for her daughter’s admission to college. This achieves good cognitive and emotional alignment. A direct transliteration “状元” would leave the audience confused due to missing schemas. A full explanation like “the top scorer in the imperial examination” would make subtitles too long. It would also increase the audience’s cognitive load and violate the principle of conciseness in subtitling.

Example (2)

Source text: “咱娘俩儿这缘分，真是天注定的。” (Line from the warm interaction between Li Huanying and Jia Xiaoling)

Translation: “The bond between us mother and daughter is truly destined.”

Analysis

“娘俩儿” is an affectionate term in Chinese for mother and daughter. It carries a clear cognitive schema: mother and daughter with close feelings. English has no exact equivalent, but audiences share the schema of “mother and daughter” and the emotional meaning of “bond”. The translator uses “us mother and daughter” to activate the audience’s existing kinship schema. The word “bond” further strengthens the schema of intimate affection. It accurately conveys the deep emotional tie between mother and daughter in the original line. For “天注定”, “destined” is used instead of “decided by heaven”. This avoids possible misunderstandings related to religious schemas. It instead activates the universal schema of “fate” shared across cultures. In this way, the cultural and emotional meaning is successfully conveyed across languages.

Example (3)

Source text: “我跟你讲，当年我在厂里可是三八红旗手！” (Li Huanying talks about her past with friends)

Translation: “Let me tell you, I was a Model Worker at the factory back then!”

Analysis

“三八红旗手” is a unique honorary title in China. Its cognitive schema centers on recognition for outstanding women workers. Most foreign viewers have no idea about this specific award. But they are familiar with the idea of a “Model Worker”. By using this term, the translator activates the audience’s shared schema of excellence and recognition. It keeps the core meaning of being an outstanding, praised employee. A

literal translation would only create cultural confusion. This choice achieves natural cognitive alignment.

Example (4)

Source text: “这孩子从小就懂事，真是个孝顺闺女。” (Neighbor commenting on Jia Xiaoling)

Translation: “This girl has been sensible since childhood—such a dutiful daughter!”

Analysis

Neighbors praise the girl for being thoughtful and caring. “孝顺” is a core concept in traditional Chinese culture. It refers to children respecting and caring for their parents. The academic term “filial piety” is too formal for spoken subtitles. The translator uses “dutiful” instead. It calls up the audience’s common understanding of being responsible and considerate to elders. The core meaning of xiao shun is clearly delivered. The expression fits daily conversation naturally, without awkward cultural translation.

3.1.2. Translation of Era-Specific Terms: Simplifying Schemas and Retaining Core Meaning

Hi, Mom is set in the 1980s. It contains many words with strong historical characteristics. Their cognitive schemas are closely tied to that specific period. When translating, the translator simplifies complex historical schemas. Only the core meaning is kept, so the audience can understand quickly. Guo and Wang suggest that subtitle translation should pay attention to the cultural communication of historical and contextual elements, which requires translators to properly handle era-specific terms^[14].

Example (5)

Source text: “我托人在供销社给你买了件新衣服。” (Li Huanying speaking to Jia Xiaoling)

Translation: “I asked someone to buy you a new dress at the supply and marketing cooperative.”

Analysis

A supply and marketing cooperative was unique to China’s planned economy era. Foreign viewers have little schema for this system. But they all understand the idea of a place to shop. The translator uses a literal translation. The context of buying a new dress helps the audience grasp its basic function. This preserves the historical flavor without extra explanation. It simplifies the schema and delivers the key meaning clearly.

Example (6)

Source text: “当年我要是嫁个厂长儿子，现在也不至于这么辛苦。”

Translation: “If I had married the son of a factory director back then, I wouldn’t have to work so hard now.”

Analysis

In 1980s China, a factory director held an important position. The English phrase “factory director” matches this meaning well. It activates the audience’s common

schema of a factory manager. The contrast in the sentence also implies higher social status and easier life. In this way, both the historical background and emotional meaning are successfully conveyed.

Example (7)

Source text: “那会儿结婚哪有现在这么多讲究，有辆自行车、一块手表就够体面了。”

Translation: “Marriage back then wasn’t as fancy as it is now—having a bicycle and a watch was considered respectable enough.”

Analysis

Li Huanying talks with Jia Xiaoling about marriage in her youth. She recalls how simple weddings were in 1980s China. Compared with today’s complicated customs, she feels satisfied with the past. Back then, a bicycle, a watch and a sewing machine showed a family’s financial ability. Having them meant a respectable marriage. This was a widely accepted social value.

From the perspective of schema theory, there is a gap between the source culture and the target audience. In 1980s China, bicycles and watches stood for wealth and social recognition. For foreign viewers, these are just daily items with no special symbolic meaning. A literal translation would not explain why these objects represent respectability. Most foreign audiences know little about the scarce supply of goods in that era.

The translator uses two key strategies: activating basic schemas and reconstructing meaning through context. First, “bicycle and a watch” is kept as it is. This lets the audience recognize them as common daily objects. More importantly, the phrase “respectable enough” provides necessary context. It activates the universal idea that certain items symbolize social status. Nearly all cultures share this cognitive pattern.

In this way, the original cultural schema is rebuilt for overseas viewers. They can understand that in that specific era, such simple items stood for decency and recognition. The translation keeps the historical feature while conveying the core meaning clearly.

Example (8)

Source text: “你爸当年可是村里的生产队队长，威望高得很！”

Translation: “Your dad was the team leader of the village production brigade back then—he had great prestige!”

Analysis

A production brigade was a basic production unit during China’s people’s commune era. It carries a specific historical and institutional schema. The translator uses the standard term “production brigade”. It keeps the key label of that historical system. At the same time, “team leader” activates the audience’s common understanding of a group manager. Foreign viewers can easily grasp the role and status of the leader. The complicated historical schema is simplified and clearly delivered.

3.2. From the Perspective of Conceptual Blending Theory: Translating Emotional Metaphors and Colloquial Expressions

Emotional metaphors and colloquial lines are key to conveying feelings and shaping characters in the film. They are essentially products of conceptual blending. The translator first identifies the conceptual blending network in the source text. Then a new network is reconstructed to fit the cognitive habits of the target audience. This ensures that emotional meanings are accurately delivered. Thomas argues that conceptual metaphor and cultural adaptation are closely related in film subtitle translation, and conceptual blending theory can effectively explain the translation of metaphorical expressions^[7].

3.2.1. Translation of Emotional Metaphors: Reconstructing Cross-Domain Mapping and Preserving Emotional Connotations

Emotional metaphors map abstract emotions onto concrete objects, actions or scenes. Their conceptual blending network usually involves a target domain of emotion and a source domain of concrete things. In translation, cross-domain mapping must be made reasonable. The target audience can then grasp the emotion through their own conceptual integration.

Example (9)

Source text: “我这辈子过得挺幸福的，你怎么就不相信呢？” (Li Huanying speaking her heart to Jia Xiaoling)

Translation: “I’ve had a happy life. Why can’t you believe that?”

Analysis

In the conceptual blending network of “这辈子”, the source domain is the length of a lifetime, and the target domain is life experience and emotional feelings. A literal translation “this life” might trigger religious associations with past and present lives. This would conflict with the film’s emotional tone. The translator reconstructs the blending network. The source domain shifts to life experience. The target domain of happiness remains unchanged. “I’ve had a happy life” directly expresses lifelong contentment. It avoids irrelevant conceptual interference and lets the audience feel Li Huanying’s satisfaction clearly.

Example (10)

Source text: “妈，我给你买了件新衣服，你穿上肯定好看，回头率百分百！” (Jia Xiaoling giving a new dress to Li Huanying)

Translation: “Mom, I bought you a new dress. You’ll look great in it. Everyone will turn to look at you!”

Analysis

“回头率百分百” is a vivid metaphor. Its source domain is people turning their heads frequently. Its target domain is being attractive and eye-catching. English has no exact matching metaphor. A literal translation would make little sense to foreign viewers. Their conceptual systems cannot form the same mapping. The translator rebuilds the conceptual blending network. The source domain becomes people’s act of paying attention. The target domain of looking good stays the same. “Everyone will turn to look at you!” uses a concrete action to show attraction. It keeps the original lively tone and fits native English cognitive habits. The audience immediately understands Jia Xiaoling’s sincere praise for her mother.

Example (11)

Source text: “妈，我心里堵得慌，总觉得对不起你。” (Jia Xiaoling apologizing to Li Huanying)

Translation: “Mom, my heart feels heavy—I can’t help but feel sorry for you.”

Analysis

The phrase “堵得慌” comes from a conceptual metaphor. It uses the image of something blocked as the source domain. The target domain is inner pressure and guilt. English has no exact matching metaphor. A literal translation like “blocked” would fail to connect with emotions. The translator reconstructs the blending network. It replaces the blocked image with the feeling of heaviness. “Heart feels heavy” follows English habits of making emotions concrete. It clearly shows Jia Xiaoling’s inner pain and unease.

Example (12)

Source text: “看到你过得好，妈这心里比吃了蜜还甜。” (Li Huanying comforting Jia Xiaoling)

Translation: “Seeing you live well makes my heart as sweet as honey.”

Analysis

This line uses sweetness as the source domain. The target domain is deep joy and satisfaction. English also uses “sweet” to express happiness. The two languages share a similar conceptual logic. The translator keeps the original metaphor directly. The mapping between honey and joy is fully preserved. It stays vivid and natural. It activates the audience’s existing association between sweetness and happiness. Emotion is passed across cultures smoothly.

3.2.2. Translation of Colloquial Expressions: Fitting Daily Cognition and Shaping Characters

Colloquial lines in the film are natural, vivid, and close to real life. Their conceptual blending networks are deeply rooted in everyday communication. The translator uses expressions that fit English conversational habits. This keeps characters consistent and dialogue smooth. Li and Ma note that colloquial expressions are an important part of film subtitles, and their translation should fit the daily cognitive habits of the target audience to ensure the authenticity of character dialogue^[12].

Example (13)

Source text: “你怎么这么轴呢？说好了一起去看电影，怎么又变卦了？” (Jia Xiaoling complaining to young Li Huanying)

Translation: “Why are you so stubborn? We agreed to watch the movie together. Why did you change your mind?”

Analysis

“轴” is a northern Chinese dialect term. It comes from the image of a fixed axis. It describes someone rigid and unwilling to change. English has no direct equivalent for this metaphor. A literal translation would be completely confusing. The translator reconstructs the conceptual blend. It uses the common English word “stubborn” to show the same personality trait. The audience immediately understands Jia Xiaoling’s complaint. As for “变卦”, it originally refers to changing divinatory trigrams. Its real

meaning is breaking a promise or changing plans. Translating it as “change your mind” follows daily English usage. It reconstructs a natural conceptual blend. The whole conversation becomes fluent and authentic.

Example (14)

Source text: “我宝，贾晓玲，考上大学啦！” (Li Huanying announcing good news to relatives at the graduation feast)

Translation: “My dear daughter, Jia Xiaoling, has been admitted to university!”

Analysis

“我宝” comes from a conceptual blend that treats a beloved child like a precious treasure. English has no identical pet phrase, but “dear daughter” carries a similar logic. It comes from the source domain of affectionate cherishing and targets the daughter directly. By using “My dear daughter”, the translator keeps the warm, loving tone. It fits spoken English customs for family address. It clearly shows Li Huanying as a proud and loving mother.

Example (15)

Source text: “你这孩子咋这么实诚呢？别人说啥你都信。” (Li Huanying teasing Jia Xiaoling)

Translation: “Why are you so straightforward? You believe everything others say.”

Analysis

“实诚” is a northern Chinese dialect term. It comes from the image of something solid and genuine. It describes someone honest, simple, and trusting. English has no exact one-to-one match. The translator chooses “straightforward” to rebuild the conceptual blend. It highlights the character trait of being open and not cunning. The expression is natural in spoken English. It keeps the playful, affectionate tone between mother and daughter. The core meaning of the original line is fully preserved.

Example (16)

Source text: “别瞎琢磨了，船到桥头自然直，事儿总会过去的。” (Li Huanying comforting anxious Jia Xiaoling)

Translation: “Stop overthinking—things will work out naturally; it’ll all pass.”

Analysis

“船到桥头自然直” is a common Chinese saying. Its source domain is a boat naturally straightening out as it reaches a bridge. The target domain is difficulties resolving themselves in time. English has no equivalent proverb. A literal translation would only confuse the audience. The translator reconstructs the conceptual blending network. The idea of problems solving themselves is directly expressed as “things will work out naturally”. This simplifies the complex metaphor. It keeps the comforting meaning and fits the way native speakers give reassurance.

3.3. From the Perspective of Relevance Theory: Balancing Brevity and Informational Completeness in Subtitles

Film subtitles are fleeting. Viewers must process images, sound, and text at the same time. Translators should follow the optimal relevance principle. They keep

information complete while reducing the audience's cognitive effort. This allows messages to be understood quickly.

3.3.1. Simplifying Sentence Structures to Lower Cognitive Effort

Spoken dialogue in films often uses flexible, elliptical sentences. Translators simplify complicated structures and cut redundant information. This helps viewers grasp the core meaning immediately.

Example (17)

Source text: “打排球得练基本功，垫球、传球、扣球，一样都不能少。” (Line from volleyball training scene)

Translation: “Playing volleyball requires practicing basic skills: passing, setting, spiking—none of them can be missed.”

Analysis

The original uses a clear parallel structure to list three basic skills. The translator keeps this structure in English. “垫球、传球、扣球” are rendered as standard volleyball terms: passing, setting, spiking. The whole sentence is concise and logically clear. It fits natural English expression. Viewers can match the terms with the on-screen action easily. They understand the training requirements with minimal cognitive effort. Optimal relevance is effectively achieved.

Example (18)

Source text: “吃了吗？没吃的话一起吃点啊。” (A casual greeting between neighbors)

Translation: “Have you eaten? Join us if not.”

Analysis

This is a typical daily greeting in Chinese culture. Its real purpose is to show kindness and offer an invitation, not just ask about meals. The translator keeps the key greeting “Have you eaten?” The second part is shortened to “Join us if not.” It avoids wordy expressions and reduces the audience's cognitive load. This translation follows the principle of optimal relevance. It also preserves the cultural flavor of everyday Chinese communication.

Example (19)

Source text: “我本来想着帮你找个条件好的对象，让你少受点罪，没想到你自己早就有主意了。”

Translation: “I originally wanted to find you a partner with good conditions to save you from hardship, but you already had your own plan.”

Analysis

The original is a complex sentence with layered meanings. The translator simplified the sentence structure. The phrase “to save you from hardship” replaces a longer clause and shortens the subtitle. The redundant conversational marker “没想到” is omitted. The conjunction “but” directly shows the contrast. This ensures full information and reduces the audience's cognitive load, fitting the fleeting nature of subtitles.

Example (20)

Source text: “咱们这个排球队虽然是临时凑的，但大家齐心协力，肯定能打赢比赛。”

Translation: “Our volleyball team was put together temporarily, but with joint efforts, we’ll definitely win the game.”

Analysis

The original expresses concession and progression. The translator used the passive voice to simplify “临时凑的” into “was put together temporarily”. “大家齐心协力” is rendered as the prepositional phrase “with joint efforts” instead of a full subject-verb structure. The translation remains concise and compact. It keeps the logical link between being a temporary team and winning through unity, matching the rhythm of the scene.

3.3.2. Omitting Redundant Information to Highlight Core Meaning

Film subtitles have limited space. Long lines distract viewers and increase cognitive effort. Following relevance theory, translators leave out unnecessary parts. Only the key meaning is kept clear.

Example (21)

Source text: “妈，我拉裤兜子了。” (Young Jia Xiaoling asking Li Huanying for help)

Translation: “Mom, I pooped my pants.”

Analysis

“拉裤兜子” is a northern Chinese colloquial phrase. Its core meaning is defecating in one’s pants. The word “兜子” is just conversational filler. The translator omits this redundant part. The direct translation “pooped my pants” is natural in spoken English. Viewers quickly understand Xiaoling’s embarrassing situation. They also catch the humor in the line. The translation achieves both clear communication and emotional effect.

Example (22)

Source text: “当年我要是再努力一点，说不定就能考上大学，让你过上好日子了。” (Jia Xiaoling expressing regret to Li Huanying)

Translation: “If I had worked harder back then, I might have gotten into university and given you a better life.”

Analysis

“说不定” is a casual expression of uncertainty. “了” at the end is just a modal particle. Both are redundant in English. The translator uses “might have” to keep the sense of possibility. The modal particle is left out completely. The phrase “given you a better life” is concise and direct. The sentence is tight and clear. It centers on Jia Xiaoling’s regret and her wish to give her mother a better life. Viewers take in the meaning with little effort. Optimal relevance is well achieved.

Example (23)

Source text: “哎，我说大妹子，你家晓玲可真有出息，考上这么好的大学。”
(Neighbor congratulating Li Huanying)

Translation: “Hey, your daughter Xiaoling is really promising—getting into such a good university!”

Analysis

“大妹子” is a casual form of address in Chinese. It serves only social etiquette and adds no real information. The translator leaves it out to focus on the key message: praising the daughter. “有出息” is translated as “promising”. It conveys the idea of being outstanding and bright, without overstating it as “successful”. The following phrase “getting into such a good university” provides clear context. The audience immediately understands what “promising” refers to. This achieves optimal relevance with minimal cognitive effort.

Example (24)

Source text: “那会儿没有智能手机，联系全靠公用电话和书信，想见一面都难。” (Li Huanying recalling the past)

Translation: “Back then, there were no smartphones—we communicated via public phones and letters, and meeting in person was hard.”

Analysis

The word “全” in “联系全靠” is just a conversational emphasis. The translator leaves it out and uses “communicated via” to show the way directly. “想见一面都难” is simplified into “meeting in person was hard”. The description of “wanting to see each other” is omitted. Only the factual difficulty is kept. The core information about old-fashioned communication is fully preserved. The subtitle stays short and clear. Viewers can quickly grasp the historical background while watching the scene.

4. Conclusions

This study draws on core theories of cognitive translation studies—schema theory, conceptual blending theory, and relevance theory. Taking the English subtitles of *Hi, Mom* as a case, it systematically analyzes the cognitive mechanisms and strategic choices in film subtitle translation. The conclusions are as follows.

Film subtitle translation is essentially a dynamic cognitive process carried out by the translator in a specific context. The translator’s schemata, ability of conceptual integration, and awareness of relevance adaptation are key factors affecting translation quality. Successful subtitle translation depends on whether the translator can align the source language information with the cognitive habits of the target audience.

Schema theory provides a cognitive framework for translating culture-loaded words and era-specific terms. Translators should activate shared schemas, simplify complex ones, or reconstruct new schemas. This helps the audience understand cultural connotations and historical features without cognitive barriers.

Conceptual blending theory effectively explains the translation of emotional metaphors and colloquial expressions. Translators must identify the conceptual blending network in the source language. They then reconstruct cross-domain mappings that fit target-language cognition. This ensures accurate transmission of emotional meaning and character images.

Relevance theory offers guiding principles for balancing brevity and informational integrity in subtitles. Translators can simplify sentence structures, omit redundant information, and supplement necessary context. These strategies reduce the audience's cognitive load and achieve optimal relevance.

Conflicts of Interest

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