

Chinese Dubbing Translation from the Perspective of Metafunction Theory: A Case Study of *Mulan* (2020)

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Abstract

With increasing cultural exchanges between China and other countries, film and television works have become important media for intercultural communication. As an adaptation of the traditional Chinese legend of Hua Mulan, Disney's live-action *Mulan* (2020) incorporates various elements of Chinese culture and presents the story and cultural values of Mulan to international audiences. Taking the Chinese-dubbed streaming version of Disney's *Mulan* (2020) available on Tencent Video as the research material, this qualitative case study analyzes 12 English-Chinese excerpts through Halliday's ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions. Drawing on textual evidence from the selected excerpts and their audiovisual contexts, the study finds that the Chinese dubbing translation reconstructs ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings through lexical, grammatical, and discourse-level adjustments, contributing to coherent and contextually appropriate dubbed dialogue.

Keywords

Metafunction Theory, Dubbing Translation, Audiovisual Translation, *Mulan* (2020)

1. Introduction

Disney's live-action film *Mulan* (2020), directed by Niki Caro and adapted from the traditional Chinese legend of Hua Mulan, incorporates various elements of Chinese culture, including filial piety, family values, gender expectations, and martial-arts traditions. As a film with both Western production characteristics and Chinese cultural elements, its Chinese-dubbed version provides useful material for examining how meanings are reconstructed across languages and cultures.

Although Systemic Functional Linguistics has been widely applied to translation studies, much SFL-based translation research has focused on written and literary translation and on questions of textual equivalence. Less attention has been paid to dubbing translation from the perspective of the three metafunctions, especially to how ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings are reconstructed under audiovisual constraints. Unlike written translation, dubbing must coordinate linguistic meaning with timing, spoken delivery, character interaction, voice performance, and the development of the visual scene. Therefore, examining Chinese dubbing through Halliday's metafunctional framework may provide a more systematic understanding of how linguistic and audiovisual factors jointly shape translation choices.

Against this background, this study analyzes 12 English-Chinese excerpts selected from the Chinese-dubbed version of *Mulan* (2020) and addresses the following research questions: (1) How are ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings reconstructed in the Chinese dubbing of *Mulan* (2020)? (2) What linguistic adjustments are made in the realization of these three metafunctions? (3) How are these adjustments related to the communicative and audiovisual constraints of dubbing? By answering these questions, the study aims to extend the application of metafunction theory to audiovisual translation and provide a functional perspective for understanding meaning reconstruction in dubbing. The findings may also offer practical insights for audiovisual translators, dubbing practitioners, and researchers concerned with English-Chinese screen translation.

2. Literature Review

2.1. International Studies on Metafunction Theory

Systemic Functional Linguistics was developed primarily by the British linguist M. A. K. Halliday. Halliday's early work on transitivity and theme laid important foundations for the functional interpretation of language (Halliday, 1968). He later developed the metafunctional model of language, distinguishing ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings (Halliday, 1970). Halliday (1985) elaborated on the three functions—ideational, interpersonal, and textual—and analyzed them in detail from the perspectives of transitivity, thematic structure, information structure, and cohesion, providing a more systematic account of the metafunctional framework.

Since the 1990s, this theory has been increasingly introduced into the field of translation. Bell (1991) drew on functional linguistic concepts in developing a model of translation and emphasized the importance of semantic, communicative, and textual dimensions in translation analysis. Baker (1992) employed the theme-rheme theory and cohesion-coherence theory from SFL to discuss how equivalence at the textual level can be achieved between source and target texts. Munday (2001) discussed the correspondences between the three functions and register as well as lexicogrammar.

Kim et al. (2021) brought together the ideas of renowned scholars from both

SFL and translation studies to address key issues, challenges, and methodologies at the intersection of the two fields. The volume demonstrates that SFL provides an applicable model for text analysis and a useful framework for translation research across different contexts.

2.2. Domestic Studies on Metafunction Theory

In China, early applications of Halliday's SFL to translation studies were associated with scholars such as Hu, Zhu, and Zhang. [Hu et al. \(1989\)](#) pointed out that translation involves establishing equivalence between the source language and the target language, and that a good translation should achieve equivalence with the source text in three types of meaning: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. [Hu \(1994\)](#) proposed a multi-level model of cohesion, using SFL's contextual theory, transitivity theory, and theme-rheme theory to explore various ways and causes of discourse cohesion and coherence, thereby further developing the notion of textual meaning. [Li \(2001\)](#) expanded the framework of interpersonal meaning in functional grammar, focusing on the interaction between the multiple voices in discourse and the reader, as well as the separable yet interwoven linguistic resources that realize ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings.

In recent years, an increasing number of translation researchers have attempted to integrate translation theories with metafunction theory. Cross-disciplinary research between the two areas is mainly reflected in two aspects: translation quality assessment and translation practice. In terms of translation assessment, [Wang \(2008\)](#) discussed textual function equivalence in translational discourse from the perspective of the realization of thematic structure and cohesive systems in the target text, pointing out that any discussion of textual function equivalence must involve ideational and interpersonal functions, as the three functions do not operate in isolation but interact with one another. [Huang and Chen \(2014\)](#) used the metafunctional framework of SFL to explore metafunctional equivalence in clause-level translation, proposing that equivalence in the three functions could serve as an important criterion for evaluating translation quality.

At the level of integrating the three functions with translation practice, there are several representative articles. [Huang \(2002a, 2002b\)](#) applied Halliday's functional linguistics to conduct metafunctional analyses of Tang-dynasty poetry translations, aiming to verify the applicability and operability of functional linguistics in discourse analysis and translation studies, and to re-examine some long-standing problems in translation research from a new perspective. [Hu and Zhu \(2008\)](#) investigated explicitation in the Chinese translations of *Hamlet*, categorizing explicitation into ideational information explicitation, interpersonal information explicitation, and textual information explicitation. They found that all the translations tended to emphasize the explicitation of these three types of information in the source text, and that the degree of explicitation ultimately depended on the translator's judgment of the readership and the translation strategies and methods adopted. [Si et al. \(2017\)](#) and [Si and Pang \(2019\)](#) drew on abun-

dant case analyses from both Chinese-to-English and English-to-Chinese perspectives, explored the applicability of SFL in translation studies and the value of the theory in guiding translation practice. They analyzed the specific applications of the three functions in translation research from various aspects, including transitivity, mood, thematic structure, information structure, cohesion and coherence.

2.3. Audiovisual Translation and Dubbing Studies

Audiovisual translation (AVT) has developed into an established area of translation studies as audiovisual products circulate across languages and cultures. Dubbing and subtitling are among its most established modes, alongside other forms such as voice-over and audio description. [Díaz Cintas and Anderman \(2009\)](#) provide a broad account of language transfer in film, television, and other audiovisual media, including the cultural and technical issues involved, while [Pérez-González \(2014\)](#) systematically surveys major theories, research models, multimodality, and methodological approaches in AVT.

Dubbing is particularly constrained by the multimodal nature of audiovisual texts. [Chaume \(2004a\)](#) argues that audiovisual meaning is constructed through the interaction of linguistic and non-linguistic signifying codes, which need to be considered in translation analysis. In his study of synchronization, [Chaume \(2004b\)](#) further identifies phonetic or lip synchrony, kinetic synchrony, and isochrony as important constraints on dubbed dialogue. [Matamala \(2010\)](#) describes dubbing translations as dynamic texts that may be modified during the synchronization stage, showing that wording can change as translated scripts are adapted for audiovisual performance.

Studies of Chinese screen translation have likewise emphasized the specific conditions of dubbing. [Qian \(2004\)](#) reviews the development and status of screen translation in Chinese mainland, while [Zhang \(2004\)](#) points out that Chinese dubbing is shaped by requirements such as immediate comprehensibility and lip synchronization, together with linguistic and cultural constraints. More recently, [Yang \(2022\)](#), in a corpus-based comparison of Mandarin dubbing and subtitling, shows that translated orality can be influenced by institutional procedures, source-language interference, and simplification.

These studies provide an important basis for understanding the multimodal and performative constraints of dubbing. At the same time, functional linguistic approaches can help explain how particular translation adjustments affect different dimensions of meaning. [Pérez-González \(2007\)](#), for example, applies systemic-functional modelling to dubbed film conversation, demonstrating the relevance of functional analysis to interpersonal and sequential organization in translated dialogue. Building on these strands of research, the present study uses Halliday's ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions to identify changes in meaning and relates these changes, where relevant, to audiovisual factors such as timing, synchrony, voice performance, and scene context.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. An Overview of Metafunction Theory

Since its inception, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) has been widely applied in translation studies. Metafunction theory, as a central component of SFL, provides a systematic model for analyzing how different dimensions of meaning are realized in language and reconstructed in translation. Halliday (1985) distinguishes three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The ideational metafunction construes internal and external experience as well as logical relations; the interpersonal metafunction enacts social relations, attitudes, and judgments; and the textual metafunction organizes meanings into coherent messages. These metafunctions are primarily realized through systems such as transitivity and clause-complex relations, mood and modality, and theme, information structure, and cohesion, respectively. Although analytically distinguishable, the three metafunctions operate simultaneously and interact in the construction of meaning. From a metafunctional perspective, translation can therefore be examined in terms of how ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings are reconstructed in the target text.

3.2. Three Metafunctions of Systemic Functional Linguistics

According to Halliday, language is a system of meaning potential, and any act of speaking or writing simultaneously realizes three types of meaning: the ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions. Although each function focuses on a different aspect of meaning, they operate simultaneously in language and jointly contribute to the construction of meaning.

The ideational function concerns the representation of human experience and the construal of reality through language. It represents processes, participants, and circumstances and enables speakers to construe both internal and external experience. In translation, the ideational function is concerned with how experiential meanings are reconstructed in the target language through appropriate linguistic choices, so that changes in events, participants, and relationships can be systematically examined.

The interpersonal function concerns the establishment and negotiation of social relationships through language. It expresses speakers' attitudes, emotions, judgments, and communicative intentions while reflecting relationships between participants. In dubbing translation, interpersonal meaning is particularly important for conveying characters' emotions, attitudes, social relationships, and communicative purposes. Appropriate linguistic choices help reconstruct interpersonal relationships, attitudes, and emotional effects in the target dialogue.

The textual function concerns the organization of linguistic messages into coherent and meaningful discourse. It enables speakers to structure information and establish connections within a text. In dubbing translation, textual meaning is related to the coherence and organization of translated dialogue, as well as its coordination with the development of the film. Appropriate textual organization helps

ensure that the translated dialogue is natural, coherent, and consistent with the progression of the audiovisual narrative.

Although the three metafunctions are analytically distinguishable, they are closely interconnected in actual language use and operate simultaneously to construct meaning. In the present study, they are examined separately for analytical purposes to explore the different meanings realized through the Chinese dubbing translation of *Mulan* (2020).

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative case-study approach to investigate the Chinese dubbing translation of *Mulan* (2020). A qualitative design is appropriate because the purpose of the study is not to quantify the frequency of particular translation strategies, but to conduct close comparative analysis of selected English-Chinese excerpts and examine how different types of meaning are reconstructed in context. Halliday's three metafunctions provide the main analytical framework, while relevant audiovisual factors are also considered in interpreting the translation choices.

4.2. Data Source

The research materials were drawn from the Mandarin-dubbed streaming version of Disney's live-action film *Mulan* (2020) available on Tencent Video. Directed by Niki Caro and produced by Walt Disney Pictures, the film was released in 2020. The English source lines were manually transcribed from the original English audio track and cross-checked against the English subtitles, while the Chinese target lines were transcribed from the Mandarin-dubbed audio track of the Tencent Video version. All excerpts were checked against the audiovisual material. Timestamps refer to the playback counter of the Tencent Video version examined in this study and are provided for each excerpt to facilitate identification and verification.

4.3. Sampling and Selection Criteria

The English and Chinese versions were first compared throughout the film, from which 12 excerpts were purposively selected for close analysis. The selection followed three criteria: (1) the excerpts contain noticeable lexical, grammatical, or discourse-level differences between the source and target texts; (2) they illustrate salient translation phenomena relevant to metafunctional analysis, including changes in processes and participants, shifts in mood and modality, cultural adaptation, thematic reorganization, and cohesive adjustment; and (3) they involve translation and dubbing-related challenges such as culture-specific expressions, metaphorical or idiomatic language, timing, spoken delivery, emotional performance, or scene context. The 12 excerpts are therefore treated as analytically illustrative of salient translation patterns identified during the full-film comparison, rather than as a statistically representative sample of the entire film.

4.4. Analytical Procedure

Each selected English-Chinese excerpt was analyzed according to explicit criteria derived from Halliday's three metafunctions. For the ideational metafunction, the analysis examined process types, participant roles, circumstances, and shifts in experiential content. For the interpersonal metafunction, attention was given to mood and modality, particularly changes in declarative, interrogative, and imperative forms and in degrees of obligation, probability, and inclination. For the textual metafunction, the analysis focused on theme, information structure, and cohesion, including reference, lexical cohesion, and information sequencing.

The source and target excerpts were first compared to identify relevant lexical, grammatical, and discourse-level differences. These differences were then interpreted in terms of the metafunction or metafunctions primarily affected. Where relevant, audiovisual factors such as timing, synchrony, voice performance, and scene context were also considered in interpreting the translation choices. Synchrony is treated here as a contextual dubbing constraint rather than as a quantitatively measured variable, since the present study does not conduct phonetic or lip-synchrony analysis.

Not every excerpt exhibits changes in all of the above categories. The analysis therefore focuses on the metafunctional features most salient to each example, while acknowledging that a single translation choice may simultaneously affect more than one metafunction.

5. Case Analysis

Based on the framework described above, this section analyzes 12 selected excerpts to address the three research questions. The examples are grouped according to the metafunction they most clearly illustrate, while relevant audiovisual factors are considered where necessary.

5.1. Ideational Metafunction

The ideational metafunction concerns how experience is represented through processes, participants, and circumstances. The following examples illustrate how these meanings are reconstructed in the Chinese dubbing.

Example 1:

Source text: If you had such a daughter. Her chi, the boundless energy of life itself, speaking through her every motion. Could you tell her that only a son could wield chi? That a daughter would risk shame, dishonor, exile? (00:01:04 - 00:01:22)

Target text: 如果你有这样的女儿，她天生精力充沛，充满着能量，浑身散发着生命的活力。你会告诉她，只有男人才可以展示自己的力量？女人是不能这样的，那会被人耻笑的。

The concept chi is paraphrased as “精力充沛”，“能量”，and “生命的活力”，which are all expressions associated with vitality and life energy. The expression

“wield chi” is recast as “展示自己的力量”, meaning “show one’s strength”, replacing the culturally specific concept of chi with a more concrete representation of physical strength. The three consequences—shame, dishonor, and exile—are condensed into “那会被人耻笑的”, which reduces the severity of the social consequences represented in the source. The translation therefore reconstructs the experiential meaning through lexical expansion, simplification, and cultural adaptation, rather than reproducing the source content in full. The shorter and more colloquial formulation is also compatible with the limited speaking time and natural oral delivery in the scene.

Example 2:

Source text: Your chi is strong, Mulan. But chi is for warriors, not daughters. (00:05:21 - 00:05:30) [...] And it is time for you to hide your gift away. To silence its voice. (00:05:33 - 00:05:45)

Target text: 你的元气太旺盛, 木兰。这种元气, 那些士兵才需要, 女孩子不需要。[...]所以你现在要学会的是, 把才能隐藏起来, 学会让你的心安静下来。

Here, chi is translated as “元气”, a culturally familiar Chinese term, while “hide your gift away” becomes “把才能隐藏起来”. More significantly, the metaphorical “silence its voice” is rendered as “让你的心安静下来”, which changes the participant and process configuration: the source metaphorically construes Mulan’s gift as having a voice that can be silenced, whereas the target shifts the focus to Mulan herself becoming calm. The experiential meaning is therefore reconstructed through cultural adaptation and a change in process representation. The Chinese formulation is also concise and natural for spoken delivery, making it compatible with the timing and oral rhythm of the scene.

Example 3:

Source text: And it is my duty to fight for the kingdom and protect the emperor. (01:13:22 - 01:13:25) [...] Devotion to family is an essential virtue. (01:33:16 - 01:33:20)

Target text: 为足下的国土而战, 是身为勇士的荣耀。[...] 爱家视为孝, 难能可贵的品质。

In the target text, “duty” is translated as “荣耀” (honor), producing a clear shift in motivation. While “duty” construes military service as an obligation, “荣耀” presents it as a source of honor and prestige. In addition, “fight for the kingdom and protect the emperor” is compressed to “为足下的国土而战”, omitting the explicit participant “the emperor”, while “Devotion to family” becomes “爱家视为孝”, introducing the culturally specific concept of filial piety. The translation therefore modifies both experiential content and evaluative stance through condensation and cultural reframing. In both segments, the concise wording is also compatible with the solemn delivery and limited speaking time of the respective scenes.

Example 4:

Source text: Her skin is white as milk. Her fingers like the tender white roots of a green onion. (00:35:33 - 00:35:39)

Target text: 古诗有云，肤如凝脂，手如那个，那个春天的柔荑一样细嫩。

The source similes “white as milk” and “the tender white roots of a green onion” are replaced by the culturally familiar expressions “肤如凝脂” and “手如柔荑”. This substitution changes the imagery while reconstructing the description through conventional Chinese poetic associations. The hesitation “那个，那个” further contributes to the spoken quality of the target text, creating a spontaneous and slightly comic effect. From an audiovisual perspective, the hesitation is also compatible with the rhythm and performance of the scene. The example thus combines cultural reframing of experiential meaning with adjustment to spoken delivery.

Across Examples 1 - 4, ideational reconstruction is realized not through a single strategy but through different changes in experiential representation. Culture-specific concepts are paraphrased or reframed, information may be condensed or made explicit, and participant or process configurations may shift. These cases show that ideational adjustment in dubbing is shaped by experiential content, cultural accessibility, and the requirements of spoken delivery.

5.2. Interpersonal Metafunction

The interpersonal metafunction concerns how speakers enact relationships, express attitudes, and influence listeners through mood, modality, and evaluative wording. Halliday (1978) emphasizes the social nature of meaning-making, which is particularly relevant to the negotiation of roles, attitudes, and relationships in dialogue. In dubbing, interpersonal adjustments can reshape illocutionary force and relational dynamics in response to the communicative and performative context.

Example 5:

Source text: I ask you, what man will want to marry a girl who flits around rooftops, chasing chickens? (00:04:08 - 00:04:13) [...] They'll call her a witch. It's time you talked to her. (00:04:26 - 00:04:33)

Target text: 我就问你，哪个男人敢娶这样的姑娘，赶鸡都赶到屋顶上去了？ [...] 别人说她会巫术。你可得好好说说她了。

The interrogative “what man will want” becomes “哪个男人敢娶” (which man dares to marry), shifting the speaker’s stance from willingness to courage and intensifying the mother’s criticism. The statement “It’s time you talked to her” becomes “你可得好好说说她了”. The added modal expression “可得” (must) increases deontic modality, making the command more forceful and urgent, which aligns with the mother’s reproachful attitude.

Example 6:

Source text: The garrisons continue to fall to the Northern Invaders. We have been called to war, even though our training is not finished. We leave to de-

fend the Mountain-Steppe Garrison against the Rouran invader. (00:49:35 - 00:49:44)

Target text: 如今北方要塞连连失手，形势危急。你们虽操练不足，但也必须奔赴前线支援。我们即日出发保卫岭原镇，阻止柔然南下。

The Chinese version strengthens the commander's interpersonal stance through changes in modality and participant orientation. The passive statement "We have been called to war" is reformulated as "你们虽操练不足，但也必须奔赴前线支援", shifting the focus from collective circumstance to a direct obligation imposed on the soldiers. The added "形势危急", the strong modal expression "必须", and "即日出发" further increase urgency and authority. These compact expressions are also compatible with an urgent vocal delivery and the tense military context of the scene.

Example 7:

Source text: You saved them today and still they turned on you. (01:12:23 - 01:12:26) [...] You follow a coward. A leader who runs from battle. (01:12:40 - 01:12:43) [...] Join me. We will take our place together. I know my place. (01:13:03 - 01:13:18)

Target text: 今天你救了他们，还是被他们无情地抛弃了。[...] 贤臣择主而事，你的主人临阵脱逃。[...] 来，和我一起，为我们自己争取立足之地。我知道我该在哪儿。

"You follow a coward" is rendered as "贤臣择主而事，你的主人临阵脱逃", replacing the direct identity judgment with a culturally familiar maxim followed by criticism of the leader's conduct. The imperative "Join me" becomes the softer "来，和我一起", reducing command force and constructing Xianniang's stance as persuasive rather than authoritative. Mulan's "I know my place" becomes "我知道我该在哪儿", creating a lexical contrast with the earlier "为我们自己争取立足之地". The interpersonal opposition is thus reconstructed through mood, evaluative wording, and contrasting character stances. The compact turn-taking is also compatible with the contrast between Xianniang's persuasive delivery and Mulan's resistant response.

Example 8:

Source text: You are an imposter. You've betrayed the regiment. (01:09:55 - 01:10:00)

Target text: 你欺骗了所有人。你眼里还有军规吗？

The first declarative "You are an imposter" becomes "你欺骗了所有人" (you deceived everyone), which changes the identity attribution into an action process. The second declarative "You've betrayed the regiment" is transformed into a rhetorical question "你眼里还有军规吗？" (Do you have any regard for military regulations?) This change of mood from statement to question strengthens the confrontational interpersonal force, as the rhetorical question implies strong condemnation and challenges Mulan's adherence to military discipline. The addition

of “所有人” (everyone) expands the scope of deception, heightening the accusation. Thus, the translation intensifies the interpersonal hostility and moral indignation.

Taken together, Examples 5 - 8 show that interpersonal meaning is frequently reconstructed through changes in mood, modality, and evaluative wording. Such shifts may strengthen criticism and authority or soften commands into invitations, thereby reshaping character stance and relational dynamics. In dubbing, these interpersonal adjustments also interact with the emotional intensity and performative context of individual scenes.

5.3. Textual Metafunction

The textual metafunction concerns how discourse is organized through theme, information structure, and cohesion. In dubbing, textual adjustments can contribute to smooth spoken delivery, clear reference, and appropriate thematic progression.

Example 9:

Source text: Xiu gives me no trouble. The matchmaker will find a good husband for her. It is Mulan I worry about. (00:04:16 - 00:04:25)

Target text: 你看她妹妹阿秀多省心。将来媒人肯定能给她说明一门好亲事。让我放心不下的就是木兰了。

The target adds “她妹妹” (her younger sister) before “阿秀”, making the kinship relation explicit and strengthening referential cohesion. “The matchmaker will find a good husband for her” is reformulated as the culturally familiar “媒人肯定能给她说明一门好亲事”, while “让我放心不下的就是木兰了” places “Mulan” in sentence-final position, maintaining her as the main focus of the utterance. The Chinese version therefore reorganizes reference and information structure to create a clearer progression from Xiu, who causes little concern, to Mulan as the mother’s main concern. These adjustments also make referential relations more explicit in fast-moving spoken discourse.

Example 10:

Source text: There have been many tales of the great warrior, Mulan. But, ancestors, this one is mine. Here she is. A young shoot, all green, unaware of the blade. (00:00:44 - 00:01:01)

Target text: 有关花木兰的传说有很多，今天，我想说。小时候，她像麦苗一样，青涩稚嫩，不知道镰刀的锋利。

The source consists of short, fragmented sentences. The translation reorganizes them into a smooth narrative flow: “有关花木兰的传说有很多” establishes Mulan as the topic of the narration; “今天，我想说” shifts to the narrator’s present stance; “小时候” replaces “Here she is” with a temporal marker that links to the following metaphor. The omission of “ancestors” and the reformulation of “this one is mine” as “今天，我想说” also reduce the explicit address and personal ownership expressed in the source, showing that the textual reorganization is ac-

accompanied by interpersonal adjustment. The metaphor “a young shoot, all green” becomes “像麦苗一样，青涩稚嫩”，using a concise and rhythmic expression. The passage creates a more continuous information flow, with the temporal marker “小时候” explicitly linking the description to Mulan’s childhood. The addition of “青涩稚嫩” also creates lexical cohesion between the image of the wheat shoot and Mulan’s childhood state. The passage thus reconstructs textual meaning through changes in thematic organization, information sequencing, and lexical patterning, producing a smoother spoken narrative.

Example 11:

Source text: Tranquil as a forest but on fire within. The warrior yields to force and redirects it. (00:45:58 - 00:46:03) [...] Disadvantage can be turned into an advantage. Four ounces can move 1000 pounds. (00:46:22 - 00:46:33)

Target text: 抬手云淡风轻，落掌雷霆万钧。[...]要懂得借力打力，避实就虚。以迂为直，还要以患为利。四两拨千斤，方能转败为胜。

The Chinese version uses compact parallel and idiomatic expressions such as “云淡风轻”，“雷霆万钧”，“借力打力”，“避实就虚”，and “四两拨千斤”，creating a strong rhythmic pattern suited to oral delivery. Semantically related expressions such as “借力打力”，“以患为利”，“四两拨千斤”，and “转败为胜” also contribute to lexical cohesion by developing the recurring idea of redirecting force and turning disadvantage into advantage. The textual meaning is thus reconstructed through parallelism, lexical patterning, and information reorganization. The compact rhythm and balanced structure of these expressions are also well suited to spoken delivery within limited screen time.

Example 12:

Source text: In gratitude for your service and dedication. I invite you to take your place with our greatest decorated warriors as an officer in the Emperor's Guard. (01:32:00 - 01:32:13)

Target text: 你英勇无双，尽忠职守，朕想你加入护卫军，担任护卫军大统领一职，你可愿意与勇士为伍啊。

The target reorganizes the source sequence of gratitude, invitation, and role specification into evaluation, invitation, appointment, and a request for acceptance. More importantly, “an officer in the Emperor’s Guard” is rendered as “护卫军大统领”，assigning Mulan a more specific and senior command role. Ideationally, this changes her institutional status. Interpersonally, the imperial self-reference “朕” and the final question “你可愿意” strengthen the ceremonial hierarchy and the Emperor’s recognition of Mulan while explicitly soliciting her willingness. Textually, the foregrounded evaluation “英勇无双，尽忠职守” leads to the invitation, appointment, and final response-oriented question, producing a clear information progression. The example therefore illustrates primarily textual reorganization while also involving ideational and interpersonal shifts.

Across Examples 9 - 12, textual reconstruction mainly involves changes in reference, thematic progression, information sequencing, and lexical patterning.

These adjustments help organize the Chinese dialogue into coherent spoken units while accommodating the temporal and performative demands of dubbing. The cases also illustrate that textual choices may simultaneously affect ideational and interpersonal meanings, as particularly evident in Example 12.

6. Conclusion

Based on the analysis of 12 examples using Halliday's three metafunctions, this study finds that the Chinese dubbing translation of *Mulan (2020)* reconstructs ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings through various lexical, grammatical, and discourse-level adjustments. Ideationally, the translation adapts culturally specific concepts, replaces similes with conventional Chinese poetic expressions, and simplifies or explicates experiential details, while in some cases shifting the emphasis, motivation, or participant roles of the source. Interpersonally, the translation adjusts mood and modality and reshapes evaluative wording to reflect the emotional and relational dynamics of different scenes, for example through shifts from declaratives to rhetorical questions and changes in modal force. Textually, the translation employs cohesive devices and reorganizes thematic and information structures to support spoken coherence, rhythmic flow, and natural delivery compatible with the performance context. These functional choices can be understood in relation to communicative needs, cultural expectations, and audiovisual constraints such as timing, spoken delivery, voice performance, and scene context. The findings also indicate that a single translation choice may affect more than one metafunction. The study suggests that Systemic Functional Linguistics provides a useful and systematic framework for analyzing meaning reconstruction in dubbing translation beyond word-level equivalence. Practically, the findings may also offer insights for audiovisual translators and dubbing practitioners seeking to balance meaning reconstruction with the linguistic, cultural, and performative demands of dubbed dialogue. Nevertheless, this study has limitations: the corpus is confined to one film and 12 examples, and the analysis is qualitative. Future research could incorporate audience reception surveys or corpus-based comparisons to examine these patterns across larger datasets and from audience perspectives.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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