A Semiotic Model for Audiovisual Text Analysis –

Cultural Signs in Ang Lee’s Films and the English Subtitles

Lynn Tsai, Ya-chi Yang, Andrew Chiu

Department of Translation and Interpretation Studies
Chang Jung Christian University

Abstract

The audiovisual text (AV text), differing in many aspects from the traditional notion of a linguistic text, requires new approaches to analyze its translation, i.e. subtitling. In this study, we propose a semiotic model for subtitle analysis, and apply the model on three English subtitled Chinese-language films directed by Ang Lee. The model is built to first examine the interplay among various semiotic resources, non-linguistic as well as linguistic, in an audiovisual (AV) text, and then to determine the combined effects of all semiotic resources in a final AV product. After comparing the sum semiotic effects between the source text and the target text, we identify the discrepancies and examine whether they present meaning loss during the subtitling process. Using this model, we analyzed three of Ang Lee’s films, Push Hand (《推手》), The Wedding Banquet (《喜宴》), and Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon (《臥虎藏龍》), with a specific focus on cultural-specific signs in these Chinese films and their corresponding English subtitles, if existing. Lastly, we propose an inter-semiotic complementation strategy to serve as a remedy for meaning loss during the subtitling process.
Keywords: audiovisual text, subtitle, screenplay, culture, film, semiotics, translation strategy, inter-semiotic complementation strategy