

# Lyrics Translation Study of Movie Video Let it Go (Classical Chinese version) from the Perspective of Multi-modal Discourse Analysis

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**Abstract:** Let it Go, theme music of animated movie Frozen, issued by Walt Disney Studio in 2013 and was awarded “Best Original Song” at the 86<sup>th</sup> Oscars followed by a Movie Video (MV). MV, a multi-modal discourse integrating audio, video, and 3d animation which plays a crucial role in cross-cultural communication. The integrated framework of domestic multi-modal discourse analysis consists of the levels of culture, context, the content and expression (Lv, Wu, 2012: 36). This paper will study the lyrics translation of Let it Go (MV) from these four aspects, which can help the audience better apprehend and appreciate the song, and promote the the role’s charisma in the video.

**Keywords:** Multi-modal discourse analysis; Lyrics translation; Let it Go

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## 1. Introduction

Since 1980s, multimedia has achieved long-term development in the world. With the acceleration of globalization, multimedia giants like Walt Disney, Warner Bros and Universal were all in the competition of exporting multilingual film or television to gain a lion share of the market. Hence a huge demand of multimedia localization issues emerged from that time.

Frozen has been regarded as one of the most successful projects for it gained a high box office from many countries. Its theme music Let it Go has yet been translated into many versions including Chinese with a MV. From the perspective of multi-modal discourse analysis, this paper chooses the classical Chinese version of Let it Go (《如释冰》) as the target for case study.

Under multi-modal discourse analysis, this paper employs qualitative analysis and will discuss modalities like audio, visual and linguistic etc. as well as their roles and interactions’ impacts in the process of meaning construction.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Studies on Multi-modal

“Modal” was first derived from the field of life science, including visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory and gustatory modes (Hatim & Mason, 1990; Zhang, 2015). It later thrived into linguistics, referring to the channels and media of communication, including language, technology, image, color, music and other symbolic systems (Zhu, 2007). Multi-modal refers to “the combination of meanings from different symbolic systems.”(Kress, G&van Leeuwen, 1996/2006). In multi-modal communication, the modes do not only generate meaning themselves, they also generate meaning through interactions with each other (Kress, G&Leeuwen, 2001).

Jacobson, the earliest translation theorist, who tries to define translation by multi-modal. His “intersemiotic translation” is the milestone of multi-modal translation. In Kaindl’s classification, modes can be realized through different media, such as language becoming words through the medium of writing and sound through the medium of speech. And according to Kaindl, translation becomes a communicative act involving modes, media and culture, thus, “cross-cultural multi-modal communication”(Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001).

Multi-modal theory is also used as a methodological tool to analyze audio-visual translation, advertising translation, game translation, web translation, picture book translation, etc. Among them, audio-visual translation is most popular with translation researchers (Pan,2022).

## 2.2 Studies on Lyrics Translation

Lyrics translation belongs to literary translation, whose literary genre should be closest to poetry (Li, 2002). Generally, songs translation is only for the lyrics with unchanged tune or melody. On the whole, bilingual songs translation should be tied in the coordination between bilingual lyrics and tunes (Cao, 2011).

In China, translation of foreign songs began in late Qing Dynasty. At that time, lyrics translation often adopted ancient “GeXing” style with relatively free meter and flexible syntax. After the Revolution of 1911, translators preferred to translate lyrics with five, seven words or short and long sentences. After the May 4<sup>th</sup> movement, they translated poems in vernacular Chinese (Qian, 1999).

## 3. A Comparative Analysis of Lyrics Translation of Let it Go(MV) from the Perspective of Multi-modal Discourse Analysis

Professor Zhang Delu modified multi-modal discourse communication based on Halliday’s theory of “Systemic Functional Linguistics”, and proposed a comprehensive theoretical framework for multi-modal discourse analysis based on Lim’s research on multi-modal discourse formed by pictures and languages. The framework is divided into culture, context, content and expression. This paper will explore lyrics translation basing on these four aspects and compare the vernacular Chinese version (《随他吧》) with the classical Chinese version (《如释冰》) of Let it Go.

### 3.1 Culture

Professor Zhang Delu pays great attention to cultural elements in multi-modal discourse communication because translation of cultural elements directly affects the audience’s understanding and acceptance of songs. Theme song with its MV, often represents the main idea of a film or the aspiration of the character. Hence, translators should not only follow relevant translation principles but also draw on cultural phenomena in translation process (Jin, 2007).

While Frozen is translated as 《冰雪奇缘》, its theme song Let it Go is translated as 《随他吧》. This paper holds a view that 《随他吧》 does not fully consider the cultural elements. The literal meaning of “let something go” is “随...吧”, but in English, it contains a meaning “to behave in a relaxed way without worrying about what people think of your behavior (source from Oxford Advanced Learner’s English-Chinese Dictionary)”. Compared with “随他吧”, “如释冰” combines the film content and integrates the theme essence into the song’s title, expressing the spirit of the heroine Elsa, who gradually accepting herself from being afraid of all masses because of her super ability.

Furthermore, “let it go” has been translated as “我如风, 任去留” and “我如虹, 任天阔”, and “风” and “虹” are such words in Chinese that refer to a great power which do not have to care about what others say.

### 3.2 Context

Professor Zhang Delu divides context into tenor, field and mode of discourse. While Professor Hu Zhuanglin divides linguistic context into contextual text, situational context and cultural context (Hu, 2007).

Context translation should fit MV pictures. It can be affected by time and space, thus it requires translators to make appropriate adjustments during translation to assist the audience understand film plot.

In MV, the original words says “Don’t let them in, don’t let them see” with literal translation “别让别人知道, 别让别人看到”, while the classical one changed into “勿近勿探, 阴翳犹在” which elucidates the inner thoughts of younger Elsa -- the public consider her as a weirdo that leaves a bad impact on her, and “阴翳犹在” presented her feelings out. The former translation do not point out the main subject of what makes Elsa so meeky while “阴翳犹在”, strengthened the connection between heroine and lyrics.

### 3.3 Content

Content level of multi-modal proposed by Professor Zhang Delu includes discourse meaning and form (Zhang, 2009). At meaning level, translators are required to accurately convey the content of characters to readers. At form level, translators need to properly translate some non-verbal elements, including narration, background music, movements, etc.

The word “cold” in lyrics not only refers to cold weather, it is a combination of cold weather, Elsa’s magic and the secular vision of public. Hence, the translation of “The cold never bothered me anyway” -- “严寒再也无法干扰我” lacks the heroine’s voice-over while “唯我,敢挑只身赴寒流” highlights the queen’s growing momentum, especially the word “挑”, empowers the whole picture of the music video.

### 3.4 Expression

According to professor Zhang Delu’s multi-modal theory, there are two main media forms to realize meaning transfer: sound and

writing symbol. MV lyrics belong to writing symbols on expression level and its corresponding translations should also be presented in form of writing symbols.

However, in process of translating SL into TL, translators should take into account the character of language media such as background music, font size and screen space layout.

At expression level, translators should not only consider the above factors, but also contact non-linguistic media to translate the SL. Non-verbal media for meaning expression includes characters' body language in MV and the non-verbal means such as environment or atmosphere.

In MV lyrics translation, correspondence of lip-synching is also important, otherwise, it will give the audience a feeling of weird. In classical version, “安”in“慰我心安”, “辕”in “血以荐轩辕”, “往”in “今时无往”, “风”in “我如风”, and “留”in “任去留”etc. all matches the mouth movements of heroine in MV, which won a high praise from audience.

When it comes to the matching-degree between translated lyrics and picture of MV, “驾寒宫, 划地为楼”(the translation of “here I stand and here I'll stay) reflects the plot better for that when the song comes with “驾寒宫”, a glorious ice palace grows from scratches, and “驾”expresses the great power of the grown Elsa. This translation, to some extent, unites the sense of sound, visual into one, and assists the audience better understand Elsa's growth and transformation.

#### 4. Conclusion

Multi-modal discourse analysis, as a means of analyzing linguistic modes and non-linguistic modes such as sound and image, provides a new approach for lyrics translation of MV.

Lyrics cooperate with sound and image, present the overall value of a text. Due to its closeness to poetry translation, its translation should not lose its original beauty because of being too straightforward.

Through analysis, a little enlightenment is concluded for translating of MV lyrics: when it comes to a comprehensive presentation of background music, action, expression and other elements, the translation should enable the audience to basically master the background, context and plot of MV or even the whole movie as well as the content and ideas to be expressed.

By applying the theoretical framework of multi-modal discourse analysis proposed by Professor Zhang Delu, the author analyzes the classical Chinese translation of Let It Go from culture, context, content, expression respectively. It is considered that the translator has successfully delivered and expressed all the elements of MV to the audience, which is a very successful lyrics translation

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