Teaching Contextual Translation: Movie Subtitling

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Abstract

Considering the complexities of translation activities, it is necessary to think about the more interesting ways of teaching translation. Teaching translation contextually is supposed to be one of the ways to overcome such a case. Movie Subtitling is introduced to the students of translation class in order to get wider horizon in translation activities. Some procedures and requirements of ideal movie subtitling are introduced in this paper.

Keywords: translation, contextual, movie subtitling

Translation is widely known as a process of transferring the source language into the target language. It is definitely a complicated activity since it involves some language skills and language components simultaneously. The interference of some aspects beyond the language such as social and cultural background completes the complexities of translation.

Some translation theories noted that the study of proper principle of translation is termed as translation theory (Vallejo, 2007). This theory based on a solid foundation on understanding of how languages work. It recognizes that different languages encode meaning in differing forms, yet guides translators to find appropriate ways of preserving meaning, while using the most appropriate forms of each language. Translation theory includes principles for translating figurative language, dealing with lexical mismatches, rhetorical questions, inclusion of cohesion markers, and many other topics crucial to good translation.

Basically, there are two competing theories of translation. In one, the predominant purpose is to express as exactly as possible the full force and meaning of every word and turn of phrase in the original, and in the other the predominant purpose is to produce a result that does not read like translation, at all, but rather moves in its new dress with the same ease as in its native rendering. In the hands of a good translator neither of these two approaches can ever be entirely ignored.

Conventionally, it is suggested that in order to perform their job successfully, translators need three important requirements namely, familiarity with the source language, the target language and the subject matter.
Based on this premise, the translator discovers the meaning behind the forms in the source language and does his best to produce the same meaning in the target language using the forms and structures of the target language. Consequently, what are supposed to change are the form and the code and what should remain unchanged is the meaning and the message (Larso, 1984).

The translator should understand perfectly the content and intention of the author whom he is translating. The principal way to reach it is reading all the sentences on the text completely so that the idea in the target language can be achieved entirely. The most important characteristics of this technique are translating the message as clearly and natural as possible.

The translator should have a perfect knowledge of the languages from which he is translating and an equally excellent knowledge of the language into which he is translating. At this point, the translator must have a wide knowledge in both languages for getting the equivalence in the target language, because the deficiency of the knowledge of both languages will result in a translation without logic and sense.

The translator should avoid the tendency to translate word by word, because doing so is to destroy the meaning of the original and to ruin the beauty of the expression. This point is very important and one of which if it is translated literally it can transmit another meaning or understanding in the translation.

The translator should employ the forms of speech in common usage. The translator should bear in mind the people to whom the translation will be addressed and use words that can be easily understood.

Considering the complexities in translation, teaching translation class needs to be arranged in such a way so that it can encourage the students to produce their creativity maximally. One of the ways is by providing more contextual translation teaching in the what that the students can practice translation contextually based on the more practical forms of subject to be translated.

Teaching contextual translation is one of the ways of teaching translation using more applicable media. The activity is not only translating formal and theoretical texts provided by teachers but also translating media that is selected based on the students’ interest. This translation activity is more challenging because the students are not bored by translating a text which they do not like. Besides, exploring the students' skills in translating more various contexts will broaden their horizon of knowledge.
One of the ways to teach contextual translation is by practicing subtitling. According to Ameri (2007), subtitling is a linguistic practice that consists of providing, usually at the bottom of the screen, a written text that intends to account for what has been said (or shown in written form) in the audio-visual product. It can be either a form of a written translation of a dialog in a foreign language, or a written rendering of the dialog in the same language with or without added information intended to help viewers with or without hearing disabilities to follow the dialog. Sometimes, mainly at film festivals, subtitles may be shown on a separate display below the screen, thus saving the film-maker from creating a subtitled copy for perhaps just one showing. Subtitles usually convey what is meant, rather than being an exact rendering of how it is said, for example meaning is more important than form, for the sake of removing the cognitive pressure on the eyes and the mind of the reader.

Ameri (2007) introduced some techniques in subtitling such as the following:

1. The first task is the spotting (also known as timing or cueing) of the film, which is normally done by a technician. This consists of noting in the dialog list when subtitles should start and stop. Once the in and out times have been established, one can proceed to work out the length of the subtitles the translator has to write. According to the seconds and frames that are available, the subtitles will be graphically longer or shorter. In some instances, spotting has already been done by the company that provided the dialog list, in which case this document is known as a master list. When the timing has been done by a professional other than the translator, the latter’s freedom can be severely restricted. The imposition of a maximum permitted number of spaces for a text may not work equally well for all languages and that is why, if translators could do their own spotting, they could be more flexible and make a more rational use of the spaces needed for any given subtitle.

2. Once spotting has been done, the next step is to translate from one language to another, carried out by the translator.

3. The final stage consists in adjusting the length of the subtitles to the spaces available, paying special attention to the syntactical presentation of the subtitles and making sure that cuts and changes of scenes are respected. The person in charge of adjusting tends to be a different professional known, by some, as the subtitler. Nowadays there is a call for the unification of all these tasks (spotting, translation and adjustment) in the figure of the translator, since it is believed that
the combination of these functions in one person will help to reduce the risk of error. New developments in specialized computer software for subtitling, together with the designing of university modules where students are systematically taught all the necessary stages for subtitling, suggest the consolidation of this versatile professional in the very near future.

4. The dialogs of the characters can appear in different colors
5. The color of subtitle: for example in horror movies, it cannot be ark because locations are usually in the night.

In more practical procedures, the following steps of subtitling can be implemented in translation class:

1. Watch the movie at least twice
2. Transcribe all of the dialogues in a separate sheet
3. Make a list of the source and the target language
4. Translate the utterance in to the target language
5. Edit the language
6. Put the subtitles in the movie script

Further requirements of subtitling introduced by Ameri (2007) are the following:

1. A maximum of two lines of horizontal subtitles at a time
2. A maximum of 35 characters for each line
3. An average of 70 characters in two lines for a duration of about 6 seconds
4. The size of a subtitle is 1/12 of the total screen height
5. The subtitle projection has to be synchronized with the actual dialog and removed when the actors stop speaking
6. There has to be some time lag between subtitle projection
7. A subtitle should not run over a cut or change of scene
8. Recommended typefaces are “Helvetica” and “Arial”
9. Type characters should be colored pale white (not snow bright) because a too flashy pigment would tire the viewers’ eye.

Considering the complexities of teaching translation, there has to be some methods of teaching that can encourage the students to translate well. This procedure
of subtitling process can at least break the iceberg of teaching translation conventionally. In this translation teaching and learning, the students' creativity is arisen in order to get maximum comprehension in translation.
References

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