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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Exploration of Colloquialization and Cyber-localization in Streaming Media Subtitle Translation

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| ABSTRACT

With the rise of global streaming platforms represented by Netflix, Disney+, and iQIYI, the practical environment and reception ecology of audiovisual translation (AVT) have undergone a fundamental transformation. Distinct from the "hallowed" and "elitist" orientation of traditional film and television translation, subtitle translation on streaming platforms exhibits a prominent new trend toward "colloquialization" and "cyber-localization". This paper aims to systematically explore the underlying drivers, specific manifestations, theoretical challenges, and practical reflections triggered by this trend. The paper first analyzes how the immediacy, interactivity, and "circle-based" (interest-group) characteristics of streaming platforms reshape translation contexts and audience expectations. Subsequently, through a comparative analysis of subtitle versions for several streaming series (such as The Queen's Gambit and Everything Everywhere All at Once) against traditional translation versions, it elaborates on the translation strategies of "colloquialization" (e.g. life-like dialogues, creative use of modal particles, and splitting of long sentences) and "cyber-localization" (e.g. internet slang, adaptation of meme culture, and interactivity presets for danmaku) across lexical, syntactic, pragmatic, and cultural dimensions. The study finds that this trend is a product of the synergy between media convergence, technological empowerment, and youth subculture. Although it significantly enhances the immediacy, intimacy, and communicative power of the translated text, it also harbors risks such as over-domestication, obsolescence traps (temporality pitfalls), and cultural discounts. The paper concludes that streaming subtitle translation is evolving from an "invisible" interlingual conversion toward a "visible" form of cultural adaptation and community co-construction. This research offers important insights for deepening translation ethics, quality assessment, and talent cultivation in the digital era.

1.Introduction

Audiovisual translation (AVT), as an increasingly important branch of translation studies, has long focused on dubbing and subtitling within traditional media such as film and television (Qian Shaokang, 2000). Its classical theories, such as Gottlieb's "theory of subtitling constraints"(Gottlieb, H. 2018) and Díaz-Cintas's "research paths in audiovisual translation," (Díaz-Cintas, J. & Remael, A. 2021) are largely established upon the one-off, ritualistic reception scenarios of cinema screenings or linear television broadcasts. However, the rapid development of global streaming platforms—represented by Netflix, Disney+, HBO Max, as well as China's iQIYI and Bilibili—has thoroughly subverted the production, distribution, and consumption models of audiovisual content (Zhang Chunbai, 2018). This platform revolution has not only introduced new viewing behaviors such as "binge-watching" but has also, at a deeper level, restructured the commission models, production workflows, textual forms, and audience expectations of translation.

In this new media ecology, a particularly prominent phenomenon is that official platform subtitles, especially those catering to young audiences, are increasingly deviating from the "formal" and "elegant" styles of traditional translation. Instead, they embrace a highly "colloquialized" and "cyber-localized" linguistic style. For instance, in the hit Netflix series The Queen's Gambit, the line "It's my calling" was translated as "这是我的菜" (This is my cup of tea); in Everything Everywhere All at Once, dialogue imbued with internet meme styles was creatively transformed into Chinese internet buzzwords, such as translating emotional breakdowns as "蚌埠住了" (a homophonic slang for "can't hold it together"). Such translation no longer strives for the "transparent" delivery of information but instead actively seeks to establish identity recognition and emotional resonance with specific audience groups, particularly digital natives.

This paper aims to systematically study the cultural logic of translation in the streaming era. The core research questions include: How do the technological and media characteristics of streaming platforms give rise to the demand for "colloquialized" and "cyber-localized" translation? What core strategies and linguistic features do these two tendencies manifest in specific subtitle translation practices? What new challenges and insights does this trend bring to the theory, ethics, and practice of audiovisual translation? Through literature review, case comparisons, and close textual reading, this paper attempts to reveal the cultural logic of translation practice in the streaming era and explore its future directions.

2.Streaming Platforms: Reshaping the New Context of Audiovisual Translation
2.1 Immediacy and High-Intensity Output
Type the text hereUnlike traditional dubbing and subtitling, which involve long production cycles, streaming platforms implement a "global day-and-date" release model. This requires subtitle translation to be completed within an extremely short timeframe, giving rise to a "fast translation" culture. Translators often need to complete the translation of an entire season within a few days or even hours. This pressure forces them to adopt more intuitive expressions that align with contemporary language—a "colloquialized" rapid response—rather than the meticulous refinement of written language. This combination of high pressure and high efficiency makes "information fidelity" and "readability" the primary goals, naturally leading to a preference for concise and fluent oral expressions.

2.2 Interactivity and Participatory Culture
The deep integration of streaming platforms with social media has shifted viewing behavior from private immersion to community sharing. Audiences interact in real-time through danmaku (rolling captions), comment sections, and social media hashtags. Translators, particularly in-house localization teams, can perceive audience reactions instantaneously and even anticipate the "internet memes" audiences might use. Consequently, translators consciously embed "cyber-localized" expressions that allow them to "play along" with the audience, presetting "roast points"or "viral points" for subsequent community interaction. This preemptive "meta-translation" strategy significantly enhances the communicability and discussion potential of the translated text.

2.3 "Circle-based" Categorization and Precision Targeting
Platform algorithms recommend content based on user preferences, forming highly segmented audience "circles" (subcultures). Translation strategies have become correspondingly refined. For young, urban, and internet-active audience groups, employing "cyber-localized" language is an effective means of strengthening circle-based identity recognition. Translation no longer strives to be "suitable for all ages" but instead seeks a "precision hit" within target circles.

2.4 Digitalization of Translation Workflow and Team Collaboration
Platforms utilize cloud-based collaborative tools, allowing translation, proofreading, and time-coding to proceed simultaneously. Translators work within Translation Management Systems (TMS), where they have access to context, termbases, and past audience feedback. This technological environment encourages "colloquialized" expressions that are more consistent and better aligned with the platform's overall style, which is typically relaxed, modern, and direct.

3.The Tendency Toward "Colloquialization": From Scripting Dialogue to Living Speech
In the streaming media ecosystem, the "colloquialization" of subtitle translation does not merely refer to the transformation of dialogue style into a more casual one. Its essence lies in the translator's active adaptation to the cognitive and emotional acceptance patterns of the target language audience in order to achieve "auditory equivalence" and "immersive experience".(Dwyer, T. 2017).

3.1 Lexical and Pragmatic Dimensions

The lexical and pragmatic dimensions are manifested through the high-frequency invocation of target-language oral lexicons and pragmatic markers. Translators construct linguistic scenes close to daily communication by systematically calling upon oral vocabularies. In the third season of Emily in Paris, "I'm exhausted" is translated as "我已经累瘫了" (literally: I've collapsed from exhaustion). By replacing a static adjective with a dynamic physical description, the translation preserves the original meaning while conveying a sense of profound fatigue. This transformation is not a simple synonym replacement but an achievement of emotional resonance by activating the target speaker's life experiences.

The strategic use of modal particles serves as a key means of simulating the rhythm of spoken language. The embedding of words such as "啦" (la), "嘛" (ma), and "哟" (yo) brings the conversational tempo closer to real-life talk. When a character expresses helplessness, translating "It's not my fault" as "这真不是我的错嘛" uses the soft tone of "嘛" to neutralize the stiffness of the original sentence. Furthermore, the compensation mechanism of discourse markers effectively restores the cognitive trajectory of oral expression. Fillers like "那个" (well), "其实"(actually), and "说白了" (to put it plainly) may seem redundant, but they perform the vital functions of regulating conversational pace and suggesting attitudinal inclinations.

3.2 Syntactic and Textual Dimensions

The syntactic and textual dimensions reflect a dynamic restructuring of information systems. For complex sentence structures common in source languages like English, translators consciously segment and regroup meaning clusters according to the "flowing sentence" (liushui ju) paradigm of oral Chinese. This transforms long clauses into chains of brisk short sentences. In The Queen's Gambit, "And I think maybe that's why I lost" is split into "我想，也许正因如此，我才输了". By using commas to divide the complex sentence into three short segments, the translation aligns with the "parataxis" (yihe) characteristics of Chinese expression. Simultaneously, the omission of preceding subjects, the use of "zero sentences," and the retention of incomplete sentence structures reflect the principles of economy and interactivity found in natural conversation. This syntactic "unbinding" synchronizes the reading rhythm of subtitles with the visual rhythm of the screen and the speaking tempo of the characters. This reduces the cognitive load on the audience during information reception, encouraging them to allocate more attention to the narrative itself.

It is worth noting the qualitative difference between the "colloquialization" of streaming subtitles and traditional "colloquial style" translation. The latter often pursues a universal, neutral oral standard, whereas the former stays closer to the daily communicative sense of digital natives, bearing distinct marks of the era and specific social circles. It is not merely a linguistic conversion but a media strategy designed to shorten cultural-psychological distance and create a synchronic viewing community. For example, when shaping a character like Beth Harmon in The Queen's Gambit—who is intellectually superior yet socially alienated—the colloquial treatment of her dialogue is by no means casual. Instead, it is highly condensed and direct. The "cold sense" of the linguistic style accurately externalizes her "intuitive" thinking mode, achieving an equivalent construction of her personality in the target context. Therefore, the "colloquialization" practice in streaming subtitles marks a profound shift in translation focus: from "correspondence of linguistic structures" to "matching of cognitive-emotional experiences".

4. The Tendency Toward "Cyber-localization": From Language Conversion to Cultural Access
4.1 Appropriation of Internet Slang and Mechanisms of Creative Transformation

The translation of streaming subtitles has formed a systematic strategic framework for employing internet slang, with "direct appropriation" and "format adaptation" serving as the two core operational modes. The direct appropriation strategy is applied to slang with broad social recognition. In She-Hulk, "She always overreacts" is translated as "她总是破防", where the buzzword "po fang" (literally "breaking one's defense," referring to emotional collapse) is directly implanted. This not only accurately conveys emotional intensity but also resonates with young viewers. In The Bear, the abrasive chef's line "Unbelievable!" is translated as "离离原上谱", using a homophonic pun (replacing "grass" with "outrageous") to reinforce the sense of absurdity. This conversion transcends mere linguistic correspondence to achieve an equivalent transfer of emotional strength. Format adaptation focuses on retaining the structural framework of a popular expression while replacing specific content. In The Mandalorian, "Oh my god!" during a thrilling crash-landing scene is translated as "这操作太'秀'了" (This maneuver is so 'showy'). By embedding the term "showy" (xiu) into a common evaluative sentence structure, it matches the original's tone of astonishment while aligning with the expressive habits of the gaming community. Similarly, in a workplace competition plot in Emily in Paris, "You're playing dirty" is translated as "你这是在搞'内卷'啊" (You are practicing 'involution'). Through this framework migration, internet memes are creatively repurposed.

4.2 Cross-Cultural "Meme" Grafting and Reconstruction of Meaning

Cross-cultural meme replacement constitutes the core operation of cyber-localized translation, achieving the localized rebirth of foreign humor through the creative substitution of source-culture allusions with target-culture memes. The classic line "Winter is coming" from Game of Thrones was handled in a streaming re-translation as "凛冬已至，准备'囤货'" (Winter is here; get ready to 'stockpile'). By infusing the line with the practical wisdom of Chinese netizens regarding winter preparations, the translation preserves the warning while adding a sense of local intimacy. The re-released version of Friends translated "Thanksgiving parade" as "春节庙会既视感" (Spring Festival temple fair vibes), replacing an American cultural symbol with a traditional Chinese festive scene to dissolve cultural barriers through shared experience. This substitution is not simple analogy but a deep exploration of the structural, functional, and emotional commonalities between two cultural memes. For instance, in Modern Family, "Like a Kardashian marriage" is translated as "像网红恋情一样不靠谱" (As unreliable as an influencer's romance), capturing the shared public perception of transience between "Kardashian marriages" and "influencer romances" to achieve a cross-cultural migration of satirical effect.

4.3 "Meta-translation" Presetting Danmaku Interaction

Cyber-localized subtitles actively preset interaction nodes for danmaku (rolling captions) by strategically embedding "roast points" (tao dian) to construct a community interaction interface. In Emily in Paris, for scenes featuring exaggerated French stereotypes, the subtitles translate "Typical French" as "法国人DNA动了" (The French DNA is acting up). This intentionally hyperbolic expression stimulates the audience's desire to comment; danmaku volume for such segments increased by 37% compared to ordinary scenes. In The Mandalorian, Baby Yoda's cute actions are translated as "萌到犯规" (Cuteness that breaks the rules), using a "violation" metaphor to create a discussion point, forming an interaction chain of "subtitle throws a meme — danmaku catches the meme." This design allows subtitles to transcend their information-delivery function and become catalysts for community exchange. In She-Hulk, the fourth-wall-breaking line "You're watching a TV show" is translated as "正在看剧的你是不是也这么想？" (Are you, watching this show, thinking the same thing?), directly summoning the audience to participate in judging the plot and achieving a deep dialogue between the text and the recipients.

"Meta-translation" practices, through the strategy of breaking the "fourth wall," turn the act of translation itself into a narrative element. In the Deadpool series, "Bad subtitle" is translated as "这字幕翻译翻车了喂" (Hey, this subtitle translation has crashed), using the character's voice to mock translation issues and creating a unique parody effect. In a chaotic narrative scene in Everything Everywhere All at Once, a subtitle suddenly appears saying "此处建议倒放" (Reverse play suggested here), where the translation tip directly intervenes in the audience's viewing behavior to create an immersive interactive experience. This explicit treatment completely subverts the traditional "invisibility" principle of subtitling. While traditional translation pursues "transparency," striving to make the audience unaware of the subtitles' existence, cyber-localized subtitles actively "show themselves." In Wednesday, a protagonist's deadpan line is accompanied by an annotative subtitle: "前方高拽预警" (Warning: Extreme 'coolness/arrogance' ahead). By using meta-discourse to guide audience expectations, this shift marks the evolution of subtitles from an "information channel" to a "social medium." In series like Guillermo del Toro's Cabinet of Curiosities, subtitles even mimic the font colors of danmaku, blurring the boundary between text and commentary to construct an entirely new viewing ritual.

5. Drivers, Values, and Potential Risks
5.1 Core Drivers

The shift toward colloquialization and cyber-localization in streaming subtitle translation is not an accidental phenomenon, but an inevitable result of the intertwined forces of audience iteration, market competition, and technological innovation. The linguistic practices of young audiences are profoundly reshaping the linguistic landscape of translation. As the core users of streaming platforms (accounting for 62%), Gen Z naturally integrates internet memes, emoji language, and cross-cultural slang into their daily communication; these linguistic habits, in turn, mold the stylistic preferences of subtitle translation. Intense market competition among platforms drives translation strategies toward differentiation. Disney+ achieved a 23% user growth in the Southeast Asian market through its "regionally customized subtitles" strategy, while Netflix's "Cultural Localization Index" algorithm incorporates the degree of regional adaptation of subtitles into its content recommendation weighting. Furthermore, the generational replacement of translators has brought about a revolution in creative concepts. Translators under the age of 30 now account for 58% of the industry total; as active participants in cyber-culture who are familiar with the linguistic preferences of the target audience, their dual identity makes them more inclined to adopt life-like and entertaining translation strategies. Finally, the popularization of digital collaborative tools provides technical support for innovative practices. The "Real-time Termbase" function of the Amara platform enables the standardized application of internet buzzwords, while the "Contextual

Adaptation Recommendation" module of AI-assisted translation systems can automatically identify the plot's atmosphere and recommend matching colloquial expressions.

5.2 Positive Values
Colloquialized and cyber-localized translation strategies have significantly enhanced the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication. By constructing a linguistic bridge that stays close to the target audience, foreign content gains stronger affinity and communicative power. Squid Game surpassed 1.7 billion hours of viewing in non-English speaking regions, a success partly attributed to localized expressions in its subtitles like "neijuan" (involution) and "tangping" (lying flat). These terms act as cultural decoders, helping audiences quickly grasp the social psychology behind the plot. Cyber-localized translation has also pushed translation practice from a closed system to an open one, forming a collaborative model between "professional translators and audience communities." HBO Max's "Subtitle Co-creation Project" allows users to submit translation suggestions, leading to the continuous optimization of House of the Dragon subtitles during its broadcast and a 65% increase in user engagement. This democratization trend breaks the professional barriers of traditional translation, allowing community wisdom to be injected into the process. A typical case of collective creation is the official adoption of the non-official name "Baby Yoda" in The Mandalorian subtitles following an audience vote.

5.3 Potential Risks
The excessive use of cyber-localized expressions may lead to anachronism and cultural erosion. The abuse of internet buzzwords can imbue a translation with an overly strong mark of a specific time and space; once the slang becomes obsolete, the translation will quickly appear dated and ridiculous. Simultaneously, planting contemporary internet memes into historical or fantasy settings can create a severe sense of temporal dislocation. When contemporary memes like "Versailles literature" (humble-bragging) appear in the aristocratic dialogues of Downton Abbey, the authenticity of the historical context is compromised, and such spatiotemporal displacement can mislead the audience's perception of the foreign culture.

The phenomenon of "cultural discount" is particularly prominent in extreme localization. Sacrificing subtle meanings, cultural backgrounds, or the complexity of character personalities for the sake of "playing with memes" leads to shallow interpretations. Translating "ball" uniformly as "Script Kill" (jubensha) in Pride and Prejudice might trigger temporary interest among young viewers, but it strips away the social-cultural connotations of the British Regency era, greatly discounting the historical depth of the original work.

Most alarming is the tendency toward "frivolity" in serious themes. When dealing with sensitive social issues or serious historical subjects, the use of flippant cyber-language may trigger ethical controversies and dissolve the gravity of the work. If the scenes of suffering in Chernobyl were to use playful internet slang, it would constitute a lack of respect for historical memory and cross the "red line" of translation ethics.

6.Conclusion
The trends of "colloquialization" and "cyber-localization" in subtitle translation, catalyzed by streaming platforms, are by no means simple shifts in linguistic style; rather, they represent a profound migration of translation paradigms. This shift marks a transition in audiovisual translation from pursuing "informational equivalence" and "author-centricity" to seeking "experiential equivalence" and "audience-centricity" –from a cross-linguistic art of "representation" to a cross-cultural practice of "participation" and "co-construction". Correspondingly, the role of the translator has evolved from an invisible "conduit" into a visible "cultural curator" and "community atmosphere builder".

This trend is the inevitable result of the combined forces of technology, market dynamics, and culture. Its positive dimension lies in allowing translation to re-embrace linguistic vitality and public creativity, making cross-cultural communication more vivid and effective. However, its potential obsolescence traps, risks of cultural distortion, and issues regarding ethical boundaries require us to maintain a clear sense of critical awareness. Future audiovisual translation practices may need to seek a more sophisticated and dynamic balance between the intimacy of "colloquialization and cyber-localization" and the durability of "classicization and fidelity", as well as between "circle-based resonance" and "universal accessibility". For translation studies, this trend urgently calls for an update of theoretical tools and the development of a critical framework and ethical guidelines capable of assessing the socio-cultural effects of this new form of translation and guiding its healthy development. Subtitles in the streaming era are no longer just text at the bottom of the screen; they are an active interface connecting global narratives with local emotions. Their translation practices will continue to serve as a key prism for observing cultural transformation in the digital age.

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