

## Subtitle Translation in *The Sinking of the Lisbon Maru* From Fusion of Horizons

REN Rui, ZHOU Xiaolong, LI Yutong, SUN Yujingjing  
Northeastern University, Shenyang, China

From the perspective of the director Fang Li, the film *The Sinking of the Lisbon Maru* tells the story of a shipwreck accident. It truly shows the persecution to England prisoners in the Lisbon Maru by the Japanese army during the second world war and praises the kindness Chinese fishermen who saved those prisoners. The director interviewed the survivors of the shipwreck and their relatives, the single Chinese fisherman who was alive during the film production, and the descendants of villagers to reveal the unknown history. A large number of interviews are accompanied by Chinese and English subtitles, which undertake two tasks: realizing the Chinese audience's understanding of foreign interviewers; helping the foreign audience understand Chinese interviewers. Translation is the key tool to these two understandings. Gadamer's hermeneutics advocates the fusion of horizons to realize a new realm of understanding and guides translators to think about the relationship between source language and target language. This paper explores translation methods of Chinese and English subtitles in *The Sinking of the Lisbon Maru* from the perspective of Gadamer's hermeneutics and analyze how it makes audiences at home and abroad have a new understanding from the perspective of the fusion of horizons.

**Keywords:** *The Sinking of the Lisbon Maru*, the fusion of horizons, translation research

### Introduction to *The Sinking of the Lisbon Maru* and Fusion of Horizons

*The Sinking of the Lisbon Maru* is a documentary released in September 2024. The content is roughly as follows: After the British army was defeated in Hong Kong in the Pacific War in 1942, the Japanese army transported nearly 2,000 British prisoners of war to Japan on the cargo ship Lisbon Maru. On the way, the attack of the American fleet caused the collapse of the ship. However, the British prisoners imprisoned in the cabin were not rescued by the Japanese army. They were trapped by an intentionally massacre. The prisoners broke through the Japanese blockade with strong will and power. When the ship was destroyed, they fell into the sea. Chinese fishermen in Dongji Island showed great humanitarian care, rowed their own boats to rescue the prisoners in distress, and gave them living guarantee. In order to re-construct the real history, Fang Li interviewed a large number of people involved in the incident, including the surviving prisoners and their relatives, American troops who shot down ships, the alive Chinese fisherman who saved prisoners, Japanese military participants and military scientists. The film uses the most authentic historical materials to restore this history with the seven-year

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REN Rui, M.A., associate professor, Foreign Studies College, Northeastern University, Shenyang, China.  
ZHOU Xiaolong, MTI candidate, Foreign Studies College, Northeastern University, Shenyang, China.  
LI Yutong, MTI candidate, Foreign Studies College, Northeastern University, Shenyang, China.  
SUN Yujingjing, undergraduate, Foreign Studies College, Northeastern University, Shenyang, China.

of efforts by its creative group. The film was highly praised and won the 2024 Golden Rooster Award for Best Documentary.

As one of the most important contemporary philosophers, Gadamer greatly promoted the development of hermeneutics with his groundbreaking theories. “Fusion of horizons” is the key factor in his theory to enhance the mutual understanding between two different perspectives. In his book *Truth and Method*, he mentioned “The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point” (Gadamer, 2013, p. 313). It means that everything we can see from that point is included within the horizon. Gadamer continued to explain this point: “We speak of narrowness of horizon, of the possible expansion of horizon, of the opening up of new horizons, and so forth” (Gadamer, 2013, p. 313). A person with a horizon acquires the information of what he sees and what he thinks to things in front of him. With the notion of horizon, Gadamer put forward the new conception of “fusion of horizons”, which means the integration of more than one horizons. He referred: “Part of real understanding, however, is that we regain the concepts of a historical past in such a way that they also include our own comprehension of them. Above I called this ‘the fusion of horizons’” (Gadamer, 2013, p. 382). This point shows the process of fusion of horizons and gives the key point of this phenomenon “understanding”. The behaviour of understanding could easily take place in a conversation, which is the most common place for the fusion of horizons. However, this behaviour also happens between one horizon and another art work. The creator of the particular work instills emotions and value to the art work. The person who appreciates the work reads it with his own understanding. The connection between the work and its appreciator stands for the spiritual interchange between the creator and the appreciator. This could be called as fusion of horizons. Gadamer claimed that “to acquire a horizon of interpretation requires a fusion of horizons” (Gadamer, 2013, p. 415). “A horizon of interpretation” means a sort of new understanding produced by the fusion of horizons.

What method shall we adopt when the fusion of horizons? Gadamer took a further and put forward the way of effective. He mentioned “Whether we are expressly aware of it or not, the efficacy of history is at work” and “But on the whole the power of effective of history does not depend on its being recognized” (Gadamer, 2013, p. 312). History has become a subject which could be explained. Yet, no matter how many explanations to one event, there is only one truth. It is possible that the recognized explanation of history is not the truth of history. However, history will never be changed and plays its own role invariably. Also, gaining a more accurate understanding is not about trying to set aside our own horizon of meanings and trying to put ourselves in the position of the other (Martineau, 2012, p. 168). Therefore, we are supposed to understand history events by trying to avoid the disturbance of time and opinions and view them with authentic materials to pursue an objective comment.

When history events are transformed as a documentary, the authenticity of materials is quite important. At the beginning of *The Sinking of the Lisbon Maru*, director Fang Li claims that “This movie is completely created based on authentic materials”. It means that the director has tried to decrease the impact of his subjective motions and respect the basic principle of a documentary. Fang Li only demonstrates his creative process and does not disturb all interviewees with his emotions. His purpose and method of the film production are matched with the points of Gadamer. In the word of Gadamer, Fang Li tries to achieve the fusion of horizons as regard to the shipwreck event in the film. Therefore, the horizons of him, interviewees, and audiences are all considered. As a documentary, the subtitle translation is so important as it is a key to guarantee the accuracy of materials. The

contemporary missionary as a translator is situated within her own historical context and culture (Prince & Kikon, 2028, p. 259). Then, she could help to make the fusion of horizons of different sides. The following part of this paper analyzes the concrete methods Fang Li uses in the subtitle translation to achieve the fusion of horizons.

### Analysis With Examples

As regard to the English conversations, Fang Li interviewed several alive crew of Lisbon Maru and their relatives. They are English speakers. For those who were once prisoners, they are unwilling to refer to that history again as they suffered a lot through the shipwreck. For those relatives, though many of them even never or seldom see their families sacrificed in the event, they hold infinite affection and try to reveal this history. Their horizons should be demonstrated as much as possible by the translator in order to improve the fusion of horizons between them and Chinese audiences. For this purpose, some translation methods are used.

#### Addition

##### Example 1

Source text: There was never a day went by without Kenneth was not mentioned.

Target text: 我们家没有一天不提他的名字。

This sentence comes from the relatives of Kenneth Hodgkinson, one prisoner in the Lisbon Maru. In this sentence, “我们家” is an added part. In Chinese, “家” has a special meaning. It is not only a place for living, but also a spiritual home full of love and inclusiveness. Chinese audiences could understand the affection of interviewees easily and build an emotional connection to them. The horizons of both the interviewees and Chinese audiences are considered. This fusion of horizons makes Chinese audiences detect quickly the emotions of the interviewees.

##### Example 2

Source text: We were there from January until September.

Target text: 我们被关在战俘营里，从一月一直到九月。

This sentence comes from the interview to Dennis Morley, one survivor in the Lisbon Maru. From the narrator of the movie, we know that the sinking of Lisbon Maru is a painful memory for those survivors. Some of them even got mental diseases after that. Therefore, it is a hard process for them to recollect the event process and details. Therefore, some of their languages are quite simple, which does not mean the decrease of negative impact of the event. Therefore, addition is necessary under this condition. “被关在” is an addition which shows their unwillingness of being trapped. This translation implies their negative conditions in the old barracks. This translation could guide audiences to imagine the cruelty of Japanese army and the miserable conditions of those British soldiers. Thus, a connection between the details of history and audiences is built. This translation unveils the implications of Dennis Morley to Chinese audiences and shows his horizon more comprehensively. The process of understanding this translation means the fusion of horizons between Dennis Morley and audiences. It gives audiences a vivid scene of what Morley experienced then and more reflections about this unknown history.

##### Example 3

Source text: Everybody then was able to go up this ladder one by one.

Target text: 他让大家有序地爬上梯子。

This sentence came from the interview to Dennis Morley. He was recollecting how Japanese stopped them to escape from the shipwreck and how Captain Cuthbertson tried to keep the order in the vessel. When Japanese

army tried to shoot the British soldiers who escaped hurriedly, Captain Cuthbertson managed to organize his soldiers to control those cruel Japs and maintained the order of soldiers still waiting for escape. The addition part “他让” shows his courage and calmness. This addition also makes the whole translation more coherent. Also, it gives more space for audiences to imagine how urgent the circumstance was and how Captain Cuthbertson showed his talent, reputation, and decisiveness. This translation builds a fusion of horizons between audiences, Dennis Morley, and Captain Cuthbertson. The audiences could figure out the truth of history and envisage how prisoners and their leader helped each other

### Uses of Four-Character Idioms

#### Example 4

Source text: It all brings tears to my eyes.

Target text: 我泪流满面。

Four-character idioms are very special in Chinese. They have diverse forms and uses. Often a four-character idioms play a more important role in describing the scenes and delivering emotions than two two-character words. Four-character idioms are also common in the daily talks of Chinese people. Therefore, the use of them in subtitle translation is more acceptable for Chinese audiences. This sentence comes from the tape record of Jack Hughieson, one survivor of the shipwreck. This record comes from the meeting of survivors of Lisbon Maru. The American submarine mechanic, Garfield Kvalheim also came to that meeting to apologize to those survivors. He did not know there were British soldiers in the Lisbon Maru as Japanese army did not hang relevant flags and he ordered to attack the ship. Jack was also moved and cried. “泪流满面” indicates that a person cries violently. It shows how Jack was affected by the sinking of Lisbon Maru. This translation could quickly catch the heart of Chinese audiences and achieve the fusion of horizons between Jack and Chinese audiences who may have more understanding to emotions of soldiers and Garfield. It also guilds audiences to contemplate the cruelty of the war and the viciousness of the Japanese army.

#### Example 5

Source text: As children, you would just come into the house and say, without thinking, “I am starving. I need some food”.

Target text: 小时候我们总是一进家门就不假思索地说：“我饿死了，我要吃饭”。

This sentence comes from the son of John Borg, one British soldier in Lisbon Maru. He was recollecting how angry his father would be when they referred to the word “starving”. John Borg suffered from extreme hunger during that event which left lifelong horror to him. So, even though it is common for children to ask for food after going home, John was sensitive to words like “hunger”, “starve”, and so on. The direct translation of “without thinking” is “没有思考”. The translator uses “不假思索”, which is more acceptable and literary. This translation creates the fusion of horizons between John Borg and Chinese audiences. It also creates a vivid life scene, which is more familiar to Chinese audiences.

#### Example 6

Source text: Before it was scrambling over and falling down onto the bottom of the ship.

Target text: 本来大家都是争先恐后地往上爬，有人掉进船舱深处。

This sentence comes from the interview to Dennis Morley. He was describing how panicked the scene was when soldiers got an opportunity to escape the ship. It is easy to imagine how excited those soldiers became when they saw sunshine and breathed the fresh air. Therefore, the translator uses “争先恐后”, which means the mood

of trying best to move forward and getting afraid of lagging behind. This is quite common in the horizon of Chinese. Through the fusion of horizons between Morley and audiences, we could better envisage the scenes then and have a deeper understanding to this event.

As regard to the Chinese conversation, Fang Li interviewed the single alive fishermen and relatives of other fishermen. They helped the director by recollecting this event. There are some obvious differences between Chinese and English. Therefore, some translation methods are used to guarantee the fusion of horizons between those interviewees and foreign audiences.

### Conversion of Voice

#### Example 7

Source text: 有些不会走了，搀扶着他走过去。

Target text: Some could not walk and were therefore assisted.

This sentence comes from the interview to offspring of those great fishermen. Passive voice is often used in English. However, it is not used frequently in Chinese as the word “被” often means something negative. This sentence describes how Chinese fishermen helped those injured British soldiers. The translator uses the passive voice to indicate the relation between the helped soldiers and the fishermen. This translation is matched with the reading habit and the thinking pattern of foreign audiences. Therefore, this information will be digested by them smoothly. This creates the fusion of horizons between offspring of fishermen and foreign audiences who could better imagine how their elder generations were helped by Chinese fishermen.

#### Example 8

Source text: 挑了十五个身手最好的人。

Target text: 15 skillful escorts were chosen.

This sentence comes from Xin Yuanyin, the interpreter who helped the three prisoners leave Dongji Island. It describes how the three prisoners who escaped the search of the Japanese army left the Dongji Island. This expression could be easily and quickly accepted by foreign audiences. They can have a clear understanding to the condition at that time. In a nutshell, the use of passive voice is matched with the thinking pattern and language habit of foreign audiences, which creates a coherent fusion of horizons between Chinese interviewees and them.

### Repetition

#### Example 9

Source text: 所以我就能想象当年那几天几夜这三个人就藏在这个石缝里面。

Target text: I cannot help but thinking the days and nights when the three POWs hid in this slit.

This sentence comes from Fang Li. It describes the life conditions of three British soldiers who were saved by fishermen and avoided the search of Japanese army. In Chinese, there are many forms of those British soldiers, such as “他们”, “这三个人”, and so on. But in the English translation, they are often “POWs”. This repetition is used for the sake of clarity and emphasis. This creates the fusion of horizons between foreign audiences and the director.

### Conclusion

*The Sinking of the Lisbon Maru* not only reveals the unknown history, but the opportunity to enlarge the international influence of Chinese films. It shows the kindness of Chinese fishermen with real materials, which reveals the lies of some Japanese experts who rationalizes the cruelty of the Japanese army. The subtitle

translation is quite important in guaranteeing the accuracy of this film. With the analysis of its subtitle translation, we could learn some concrete methods used in the translation practices under the perspective of the fusion of horizons. Although a horizon marks the limit of sight at any moment, it is not an insurmountable limit (Vessey, 2009, p. 527). The fusion of horizons could be a complex process which allows the existence of different versions of translation. It enlightens us to keep diligence, honesty, and accuracy of the documentary translation. Also, translators in the new era could find their tasks to enlarge our international and cultural influence by our translations of all kinds of art works.

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