

What is Gained in Subtitling: How Film Subtitles Can Expand the Source Text

Tom Kabara
Nagoya University, Japan

The problem of translation and loss is a cardinal concern in translation studies. Conventional wisdom tells us that translation must necessarily entail loss. However, some translation studies scholars have argued that translation can yield significant originality in the target text. Christiane Nord, for one, argues that literary translators can claim authorial presence by actually causing the source text to “grow” in a way that is quantitative and qualitative. Although Nord’s idea applies mainly to literary translation, it raises questions about how this could apply to translations of other types of creative source texts, such as audio/visual translation. The format of interlingual subtitling between two disparate languages, such as English and Japanese, burdens translation with severe constraints and considerable loss text is taken for granted. But what is lost? Meaning? Nuance? This paper argues that these need not be lost in subtitling. In fact, by applying Nord’s model of source text growth to subtitling, we can see how subtitling produces new value to the source text. Through a close analysis of the Japanese subtitles of the 2007 film, *There Will Be Blood*, this paper will demonstrate that despite the severe constraints placed on the translation found in film subtitling, subtitles can promote “qualitative growth” by transferring the poetic function of the source text into new configurations in the target text, prompting target text viewers to interpret content in new ways.