The Importance of Downtoners in English Writing and Translation - with Reference to Chinese Movie Subtitle Translations

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Keywords : hedge; intensifier; downtoner; subtitling; chinese into english translation.

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The Importance of Downtoners in English Writing and Translation - with Reference to Chinese Movie Subtitle Translations

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Abstract - This paper reports on a study of the use of downtoners, an important hedging device, by Chinese translators when translating Chinese subtitles into English. The study was carried out by making a corpus-based analysis of patterns of using downtoners in a Chinese subtitle corpus and an English subtitle corpus. Features of overuse and underuse of downtoners in subtitle translation by the Chinese translators were also classified and further examined. The Chinese subtitle corpus consisted of the English subtitles of four Chinese movies produced by translators from the main Chinese-speaking areas: Hong Kong, the mainland China, and Taiwan. The English one contained the English subtitles of four authentic English movies. The study finds that compared with authentic English movie subtitles, the English subtitles of Chinese movies tend to overuse most of the downtoners except for diminishers, which leads to non-nativelikenss. In light of the corpus-based evidence, the paper argues for the importance of incorporating corpus-based findings into subtitle translation programs and general English writing programs and suggests ways to improve the translation and writing quality.

Keywords : hedge; intensifier; downtoner; subtitling; chinese into english translation.

I. Introduction

Lakoff (1973) introduces the concept of "hedge" from a semantics point of view to analyze words and phrases that are *fuzzy* in meaning, like *rather, largely, in a manner of speaking,* and *very.* He says these are 'words whose job is to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy'. He has categorized hedges in two groups:

First, the modifying hedge discloses the differences or discrepancies of a category. In a fuzzy set, an object is more than simply belonging to a set or not belonging to a set. Rather, it is, to a degree, an element of that set, which allows us to categorize it. Therefore, the object being described is, up to a certain degree, similar to the prototypical member of the category, but not the same as the prototype. Its fuzziness is determined by the semantics, not the discourse. If we isolate it away from the context, the fuzziness of the meaning remains. For example,

(1) A penguin is a bird.

(2) A penguin is sort of a bird.

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The meaning of (2) is fuzzier than (1). A penguin is a bird by some definition but not completely a bird. The penguin is a bird according to scientific facts, though not a typical one. (1) Did not express this fact but (2) pointed it out more precisely. Hence, (2) is more exact than (1) in expressing objective truth, albeit fuzzier in its semantics. Hedge uses fuzzy semantics that can more accurately express the meaning. Accuracy and fuzziness are contradicting ideas. However, within a certain degree of fuzziness, ideas become more accurate. Examples of hedges include *some, little, relatively, especially,* and *mostly.* The second category of hedges discloses certain structural information that implies certain traits. It is undoubtedly the most important characteristic of the context. For example, in "He is a regular fish", a man cannot be categorized as a fish under normal circumstances. Therefore, the sentence is not saying the man is a real fish, but rather that he has traits that resemble a fish.

Later on, linguists have further defined and categorized hedges. Gove (1981) thinks hedges are noncommittal or ambiguous narratives. Crystal (1997) defines it to be uncertain or conditional words or phrases, such as *sort of, more or less, I mean, approximately,* and *roughly.* Hedges include many categories of words, among which degree adverbs, such as *very, rather, quite, somewhat, pretty,* and *too* that precede adjectives, adverbs, and verbs to indicate the degree to which they apply have attracted a great deal of attention from researchers (Biber, Conrad, & Leech, 2002; Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, & Svartvik, 1985). By Quirk *et al.* (1985, p. 589)'s definition, these degree adverbs are called "intensifiers'. Quirk *et al.* (1985, p.591) further classify intensifiers into two subcategories: amplifiers and downtoners, with the former indicating an increase of force conveyed by the word and the latter a decrease of the force.

Quirk et al. (1985) then further classify amplifiers into maximizers (completely, absolutely), and boosters (very, highly) to denote the high degree of a scale, and downtoners into approximators (nearly, virtually), compromisers (fairly, quite), diminishers (slightly), and minimizers (hardly, scarcely) to denote the low degree of a scale. These subcategories are listed in the table below with some examples.

Categories		Examples	Categories
amplifiers	maximizers	completely, absolutely	amplifiers
	boosters	very, highly	boosters
downtoners	approximators	nearly, almost, practically, virtually…	downtoners
	compromisers	fairly, quite, kind of, more or less, rather, pretty	
	diminishers	slightly, mildly, partially, partly, somewhat…	
	minimizers	hardly, scarcely, barely, little…	

II. Literature Review

a) Importance of Intensifiers

The use of intensifiers has received a great attention from researchers (Biber, et al., 1999; Djatmika, 2009; Lorenz, 1999) . Studies have found that the use of intensifiers varies with spoken and written English, and the frequency of intensifiers is found to be higher in writing than in speaking (Biber, et al., 1999). The use of intensifiers is also found closely related with the quality of text. As stated by Partington (1993, p. 178).

The importance of intensification in the communicative process is that it is a vehicle for impressing, praising, persuading, insulting, and generally influencing the listener's reception of the message.

Though it may be argued that intensifiers are not so vital in syntax, they do play an important role in daily communication to convey different attitudes of the speaker or writer (Djatmika, 2009). Lorenz (1998) points out that the improper use of these intensifiers can often lead to non-nativelikeness of learner language, undercutting the effect of learner language, and exerting a negative effect on communication. As Lorenz (1999, pp. 26-27) says, „intensification is an important and, beyond the elementary level, intricate part of foreign language learning,"and „an investigation into learners" use of intensifiers can be expected to provide valuable insights into foreign language behaviour at its most committed".

Significant differences have been found between NS and NNS in the use of intensifiers in writing and speaking. For example, Liang (2004) investigates the use of intensifiers in a corpus of Chinese EFL learners" spoken English and compares it with that in an English native speakers" corpus. The corpus-based analysis reveals: a) that Chinese EFL learners use the booster word very far too much, and this results in a tendency of overstatement; b) that the overuse of some and underuse of other intensifiers, and the misuse of intensifiers as modifiers to non-gradable adjectives indicate a low accuracy of the learners" use of intensifiers; and c) that the learners often resort to the booster word very when maximizers and compromizers are preferred by native speakers. Lorenz (1998) found that the overuse of intensifiers by German EFL learners results in inaccuracy and exaggeration.

Among studies of intensifiers, the only corpus study focusing on downtoners known to the authors is that of Biber, Conrad and Reppen (1998). They have found that the most common downtoners have quite different distributional patterns across registers.

In conversation, the downtoner pretty is very common, while all other downtoners are quite rare. In contrast, academic prose uses a wider range of common downtoners, although none of them is extremely frequent.

It appears that in the current literature, studies of intensifiers mainly focus on amplifiers and studies on downtoners like Biber, Conrad and Reppen (1998), have not been done extensively. As an important category of the intensifier, downtoners appear worthy of further investigation in order to give a more detailed description of how non-native speakers use them in the production of English texts.

III. Research on Subtitling

In recent years, subtitling[1] has been widely used in the interpreter and translator (I/T) training as well as in general language teaching and learning. Research in these two fields has found that using subtitling may facilitate incidental learning, improve listening comprehension, increase motivation, help build student-controlled learning processes, and reduce student anxiety (Danan, 2004; Diaz-Cintas & Remael, 2007; Gambier, 2007; Kuppens, 2010; Lindgren & Muñoz, 2012; Vanderplank, 2010). Among these studies, Danan (2004) finds that subtitling could increase language comprehension and leads to additional cognitive benefits, such as greater depth of processing. Kuppens (2010) reports on the acquisition of a foreign language by children and adolescents when watching foreign language television. Lindgren (2012) further states that watching films is the most powerful exposure type for both listening and reading. Additionally, numerous studies find that subtitling improves students" listening comprehension in face-to-face interaction and communicative performance in specific oral and written communication tasks (Baltova, 1999; Neuman & Koskinen,

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[1] Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2007) distinguish two types of subtitling: intralingual and interlingual, the former referring to subtitling into the same language, while the latter referring to subtitling into a different language. Subtitling used in this paper refers to the interlingual only.

1992; Perego, Del Missier, Porta, & Mosconi, 2010; Winke, Gass, & Sydorenko, 2010).

However, some studies, for example Lommel, Laenen, and d'Ydewalle (2006), finds that contrary to vocabulary learning, using subtitling does not necessarily improve grammar learning, since grammar might be too complicated to acquire from a rather short movie presentation. Nevertheless, it appears that researchers generally agree that subtitling does play an increasingly important role in language and IT training.

Apart from studies on the effectiveness of using subtitling as a tool to facilitate student learning, researchers have paid a great deal of attention to the subtitling process and strategies taken by subtitlers. Pettit (2004) finds that subtitlers often alter their translations, resulting in the change of meanings from implied to explicit, and they prefer to standardize and simplify the dialogue. She also finds that some subtitlers would make substantial changes when intonation, accentuation and gesture dramatically change the verbal meaning. After identifying explicitation cases in her subtitle corpus, Perego (2003) even proposes a categorization of the types of explicitation found in subtitles. In addition to explicitation, some subtitlers have been found to take some „bold" approaches. For example, Baumgarten (2008) compares the subtitles of nineteen 007-James Bond series films and their German versions, and she finds that the subtitlers of the German versions tend to alter or add additional linguistics structures and devices when processing visual information. Zojer (2011, p. 409) finds that subtitles tend to leave cultural references untouched, "sometimes at the cost of the audience"s understanding and enjoyment". In addition, reduction and omission in subtitling has also been studied extensively since it is regarded as an inherent characteristic of subtitling (Diaz-Cintas & Remael, 2007; Gottlieb, 2004; Rosa, 2001).

As to why subtitlers take different approaches, Carvalho (2007) suggests that the subtitler's subjectivity is an important factor in the subtitling process, which should be taken into better account in order to understand the decisions made by subtitlers. Some suggest that pragmatic considerations might contribute to the choices of translation strategies (Mubenga, 2009; Ortega, 2011; Pavlovic, 2004). Having looked at the treatment given to the culture-bound terms present in the subtitles, Espindola and Vasconcellos (2006) and Delabastita (1990) suggest that subtitling is a cultural practice, in which power differentials between cultures play an important role in the subtitler's adoption of foreignization or domestication translation strategies. Of course, the subtitler's unawareness of cultural gaps and the absence of equivalent culture-pairs may also contribute to the problem of leaving culture-bound terms nontranslated, as found by (Zojer, 2011). As pointed out by Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007), Rosa (2001), and De Linde (1995), a number of factors may contribute to the

widespread reductions and omissions in subtitles. According to these authors, subtitling is subject to many constraints as it involves interaction of sound and visual components to synchronize subtitle texts, images and dialogues; it may also be constrained by the viewer "s reading speed, the display time of subtitles on screen, and the actual size of the screen; and the switch from oral to written discourse in subtitling may require spoken features to be omitted.

Some studies further look at subtitling training models. Martinez-Sierra (2010) provides a review of various subtitling modes and describes the role of these modes and subtitling in various countries. Danan (2010) suggests a subtitling training model centered on self-initiated, task-based learning. In his subtitling model, some of the most important components include vocabulary acquisition, register awareness, emphasis on concision, delivery practice, and mastery of paralinguistic elements. Mc Loughlin (2009) introduces a model that uses subtitles in translation classes, reflecting on the linguistic, semantic, and cultural issues involved, and he proposes a model of analysis for pedagogical purposes which enhances advanced students' translation competence.

Although these studies have enabled us to have a better understanding of subtitling, only a few empirical studies have been carried out to look at specific linguistic elements, such as the use of intensifiers, for example downtoners, in subtitling. In his study of factors that may affect Chinese subtitle quality, Chen (2004) raises the issue of using toning down as a method to increase the quality. However, his study was based on the reflection of his own experience and mainly focused on Chinese subtitling of swearwords in American movies. The lack of research on specific linguistic elements in subtitling has been realized by many researchers, who call for the translation studies community to pay more attention to subtitling research to enhance its role in IT training (Baumgarten, 2008; Chen, 2004; Martinez-Sierra, 2010).

In our study, Chinese into English subtitles were targeted, and thus an important methodological issue arises from the generally poor quality of subtitles. As pointed out by Rosa (2001), the inherent reductions and omissions in the subtitling process may lead to information loss and poor quality. According to some researchers, subtitles of movies from non-English speaking countries often suffer from serious mistakes that lead to inaccurate and misleading expressions, and even bring on the audience"s headaches and fears (Chen, 2004; Gottlieb, 1997; Qian, 2004; Vanderschelden, 2002).

As poor quality subtitles will jeopardize the results of the study, we have only selected movies accompanied with authentic English subtitles provided by the movie producer so that the subtitles in our study are at least of certain quality and are produced

according to the standard guideline approved by the producer. Additionally, our study only addresses downtoners at the lexical level so that the effect of the widespread ungrammaticality on the sentence level could be minimized.

Our study is aimed to investigate the general pattern of native Chinese-speaking translators' use of downtoners in subtitling Chinese movies, and the specific research questions are as follows:

1. What are the patterns of the Chinese translator's use of the four downtoners in movie subtitling? Are the patterns different from those of the subtitles of English movies?
2. Is there an overuse or underuse of certain downtoners in Chinese movie subtitles compared with English movie subtitles?

IV. Research Method

a) Research material

In order to compare the use of downtoners in movie subtitles, two corpora were built, one consisting of English subtitles of four Chinese movies: 霍元甲(Hou Yuan Jia), 小孩不笨 (xiao hai bu ben), 不能說的秘密 (bu neng shuo de mi mi), 刺陵(ci ling) ; and the other, of four English movies: Forest Gump, the Pursuit of Happiness, Three Idiots, and Good Will Hunting. The Chinese movie subtitle corpus consisted of 4957 lines and the English movie subtitle corpus, 7399 lines. Movie subtitles were chosen because they were considered as of the same genre and were thus characterized by similar discourse patterns and functions as pointed out by Kovacic (1998, p. 127).

b) Extraction of Downtoners

Word Smith Tools, a text analysis software package, was used to extract downtoners from the two corpora. We used the following downtoner keyword list (Table 1) as identified in Biber (1988) to search the corpora.

Table 1 : Biber(1988)'s list of downtoners

Approximators	Compromisers	Diminishers	Minimizers
Almost	kind of	mildly	barely
Nearly	sort of	partially	hardly
Practically	quite	partly	little
Virtually	pretty	slightly	scarcely
as good as	fairly	somewhat	in the least
all but	rather	in part	in the slightest
	enough	in some respects	at all
	sufficiently	to some extent	
	more or less	a bit	
		a little	
		least	
		only	
		merely	
		simply	
		just	
		but	

A total of 562 lines were extracted that contained the keywords in the list, and they were added into a SPSS data sheet. The records were then manually examined by the authors. Some records were excluded if the keyword found was not used as a downtoner in the sentences. For example, in the following sentences, the keywords (in bold face) were not used as downtoners, and they were excluded. A total of 487 records were left for further analyses.

a. I have no choice **but** to take action.
b. Everything I do is never **enough** for her.
c. When I was **little.**
d. What **kind of** account do you have?
e. Anything your **little** heart desires, I'm goin' to give it to ya.
f. One or two days **only**.

c) Data Coding

We then coded each record in the SPSS datasheet by the subtitle and downtoner types as follows:
Subtitle Type: 1=Chinese movie; 2= English movie.
Downtoner Type: 1= approximator; 2= compromiser; 3 = diminisher; 4 = minimizer.

d) Data Analysis

In order to answer research question1, a crosstabulation analysis was carried out to give a descriptive statistical account of the use of downtoners in both corpora, and a further Chi-square test was conducted to tell whether there were significant

differences between the two corpora in the use of downtoners. In the further analysis to answer research question2, a detailed comparison of the four categories of downtoners was made between the two corpora, and descriptive statistics on most frequently used downtoners were produced and graphically presented.

V. Results

a) Findings to Research Question 1

Research question 1: What are the patterns of the Chinese translator's use of the four downtoners in movie subtitling? Are the patterns different from those of the subtitles of English movies?

Table 2 crosstabulates the subtitles of Chinese and English movies with the four downtoner types. The results show that diminishers are predominantly used (68.3%) among the four types of downtoners in Chinese movie subtitles. The occurrence rate of compromisers (12.5%) runs next to that of the diminisher, and is slightly higher than that of the minimizer (11.7%). Approximators are least used among the four types of downtoners, only accounting for 7.5% of the total usage of downtoners in Chinese movie subtitles.

A comparison of the two corpora shows some similarities and differences:

1. The occurrence rates of all four types of downtoners in both corpora follow the same order from the highest to the lowest: Diminishers (68.3% and 81.5%), Compromisers (12.5% and 9.5%), Minimizers (11.7% and 6.5%), and Approximators (7.5% and 2.5%).
2. Diminishers are most frequently used in both corpora accounting for 68.3% of total downtoners used in the Chinese movie subtitle corpus and 81.5% in that of the English movies subtitle corpus. The preference to using this type of downtoners to the other three is predominant in both corpora.
3. The occurrence rate of Diminishers in English movie subtitles is much higher than that in Chinese movie subtitles (81.5% vs 68.3%), while the occurrence rates of the rest three types of downtoners in Chinese movie subtitles are higher than those in English movie subtitles: Approximators, 7.5% vs 2.5%, Compromisers, 12.5% vs 9.5%, and Minimizers, 11.7% vs 6.5%.

Table 2 : Crosstabulation of Subtitle Type and Downtoner Type

| | | | Downtoner Type | | | | |
			approximator	compromiser	diminisher	minimizer	Total
Subtitle Type	Chinese movie	Count	9	15	82	14	120
		% within Subtitle Type	7.5%	12.5%	68.3%	11.7%	100.0%
	English movie	Count	9	35	299	24	367
		% within Subtitle Type	2.5%	9.5%	81.5%	6.5%	100.0%

A Chi-Square Test was carried out to test the significance of the difference between the two corpora in the use of downtoners. The results (in Table 3) show that the difference is significant between the two corpora (p=0.007 < 0.01).

Table 3 : Chi-square Test

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	12.049	3	.007
Likelihood Ratio	10.934	3	.012
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.781	1	.182
N of Valid Cases	487		

b) Findings to Research Question 2

Research question 2: Is there an overuse or underuse of certain downtoners in Chinese movie subtitles compared with English movie subtitles?

The results to research question 1 have indicated that except for diminishers, the occurrence

rates of approximators, compromisers, and minimizers are significantly higher in Chinese movie subtitles than those in the English movie subtitles. When we look at approximators in details, it is found that only three approximators (almost, nearly, and as good as) have been used in both the Chinese and English movie

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subtitles, but in much higher frequency in the Chinese movie subtitles (as shown in Table 4 and Figure 1). This indicates that Chinese movie subtitlers may have overused approximators almost, nearly, and as good as.

Table 4 : Comparison of Approximators

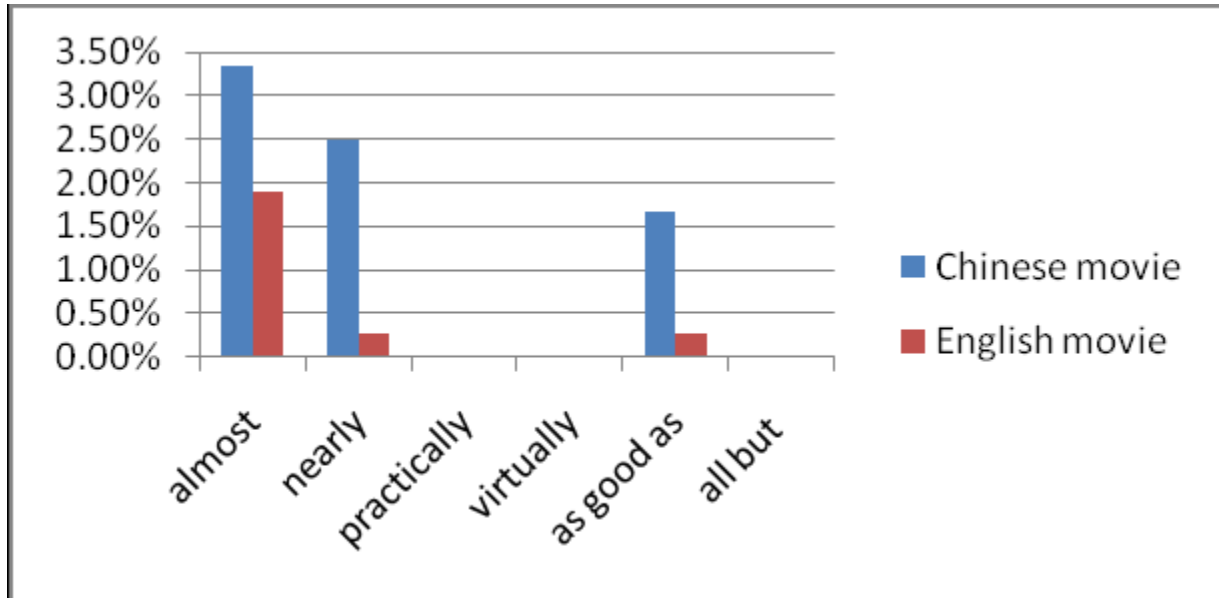| Approximators	Chinese Movie		English Movie	
Almost	4	3.33%	7	1.91%
Nearly	3	2.50%	1	0.27%
Practically	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Virtually	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
as good as	2	1.67%	1	0.27%
all but	0	0.00%	0	0.00%

Figure 1 : Comparison of Approximators

An examination of compromisers has found that Chinese movie subtitlers tend to prefer quite to rather in their choice of compromisers. Table 5 and Figure 2 show that the compromiser quite appeared twice in the Chinese movie subtitles while none in the English movie subtitles. In contrast, its synonymous downtoner rather appeared three times in the English movie subtitles but none in the Chinese movie subtitles. This result suggests that Chinese subtitlers may have overused quite and underused rather. In addition, the occurrence rate of the compromiser enough in Chinese movie subtitles is significantly higher that of in the English movie subtitles, indicating Chinese subtitlers may have overused enough.

Table 5 : Comparison of Compromisers

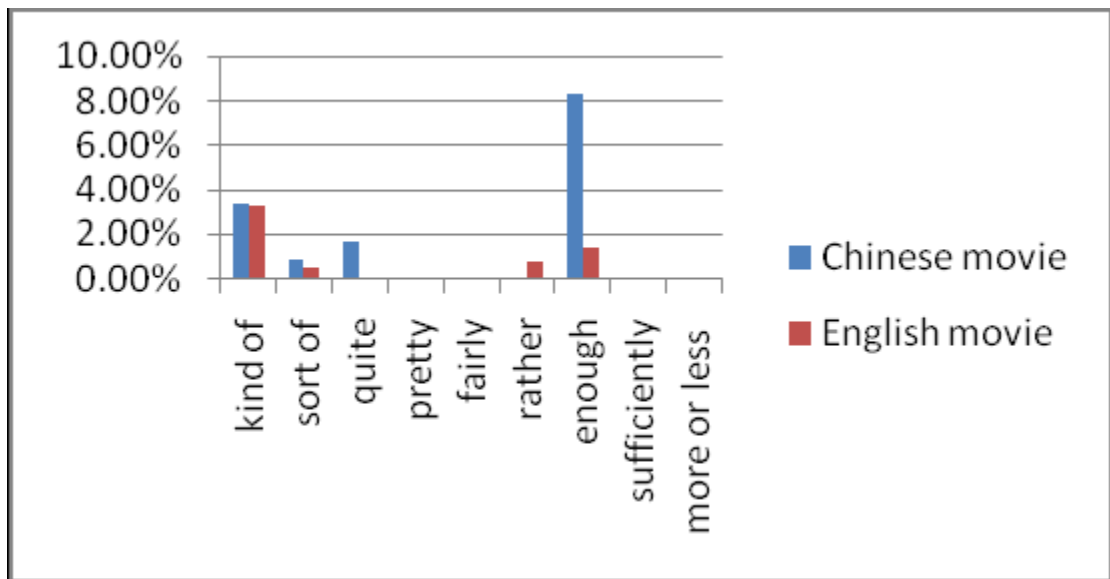| Compromisers	Chinese Movie		English Movie	
kind of	4	3.33%	12	3.27%
sort of	1	0.83%	2	0.54%
quite	2	1.67%	0	0.00%
pretty	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
fairly	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
rather	0	0.00%	3	0.82%
enough	10	8.33%	5	1.36%
sufficiently	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
more or less	0	0.00%	0	0.00%

Figure 2 : Comparison of Compromisers

While the findings of research question 1 indicate that the occurrence rate of diminishers in English movie subtitles is much higher than that in Chinese movie subtitles, a closer examination of diminishers has found that diminisher just could be the only contributor to the difference. Table 6 and Figure 3 show that just has been used 249 times in English movie subtitles, accounting for 67.85% of the total usage of downtoners, while it has been used 43 times in Chinese movie subtitles, accounting for 35.83% of the total usage of downtoners. This suggests that Chinese movie subtitlers may have underused just. In addition to just, diminishers a bit, a little, only, and simply are used in both English and Chinese movie subtitles. It appears that a little and only have been overused, and that there are only minor differences between the occurrence rates of diminishers a bit and simply in the Chinese and

English movie subtitles. It is interesting to find that among the 16 diminishers only half of them have been used in movie subtitles, and 5 of them (just, a bit, a little, only, and simply) have been used in both the Chinese and English movie subtitles.

Table 6 and Figure 3 show that the diminisher partially appeared 3 times in the Chinese movie subtitles while none in the English movie subtitles. In contrast, its synonymous downtoner partly appeared 13 times in the English movie subtitles but none in the Chinese movie subtitles. This result may suggest that Chinese subtitlers prefer partially to partly, indicating that partially may have been overused, and partly may have been underused by Chinese subtitlers. In addition, diminisher but has been used twice in the English movie subtitles but none in the Chinese movie subtitles. However, the difference is quite small.

Table 6 : Comparison of Diminishers

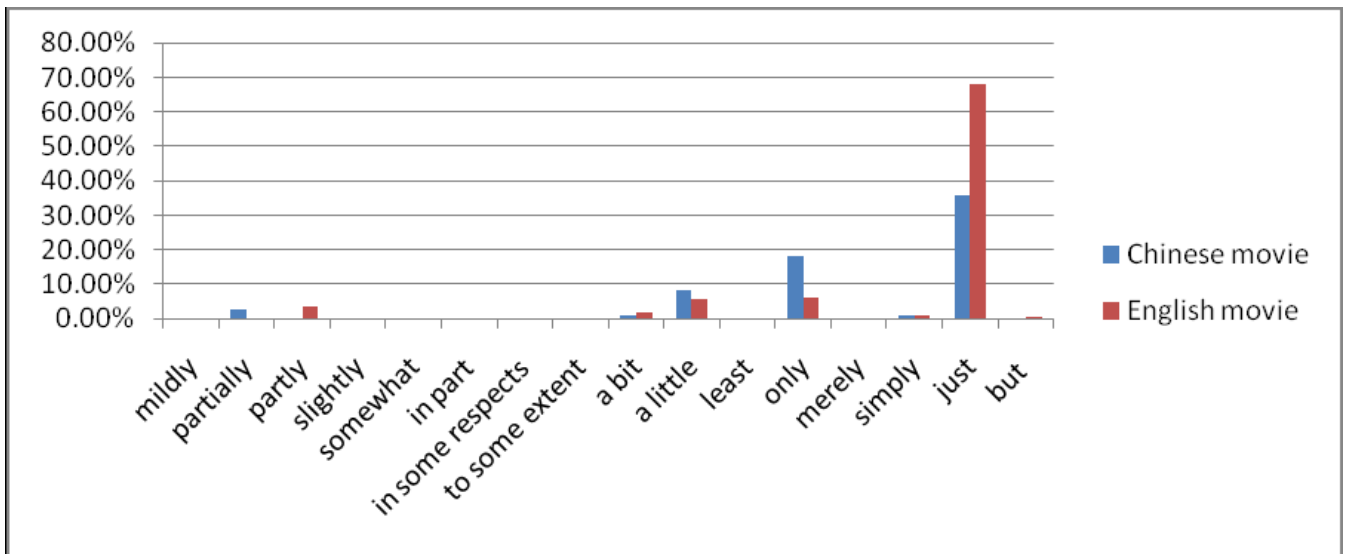| Diminishers	Chinese Movie		English Movie	
M ildly	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Partially	3	2.50%	0	0.00%
Partly	0	0.00%	13	3.54%
Slightly	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Somewhat	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
in part	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
in some respects	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
to some extent	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
a bit	1	0.83%	6	1.63%
a little	10	8.33%	21	5.72%
Least	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Only	22	18.33%	22	5.99%
Merely	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Simply	1	0.83%	4	1.09%
Just	43	35.83%	249	67.85%
but	0	0.00%	2	0.54%

Figure 3 : Comparison of Diminishers

Table 7 and Figure 4 show the differences between Chinese and English movie subtitles in the use of minimizers. Minimizer barely has been used twice in the Chinese movie subtitles but none in the English movie subtitles, indicating a characteristic of Chinese subtitlers to prefer barely.

In addition, it is found that only three minimizers (hardly, little, and at all) have been used in both the Chinese and English movie subtitles but with higher frequency in Chinese movie subtitles (as shown in Table 7 and Figure 4). This indicates that Chinese subtitlers may have overused all minimizers.

Table 7 : Comparison of Minimizers

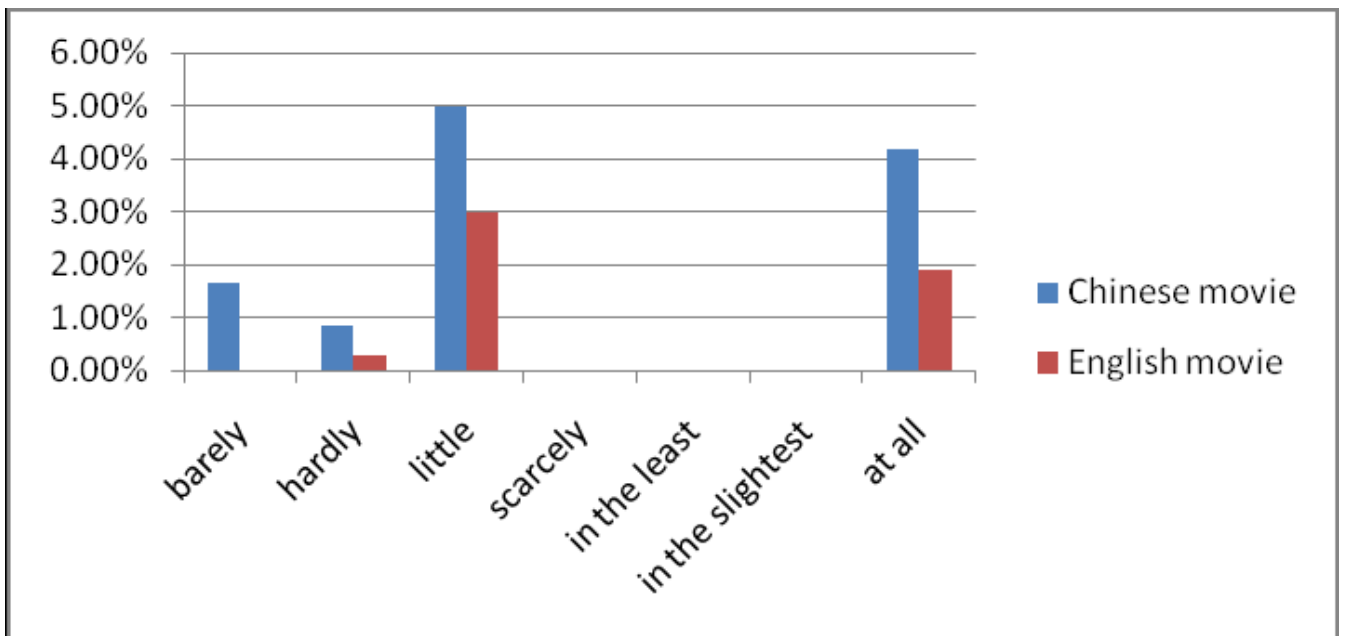| Minimi zers	Chinese Movie		English Movie	
Barely	2	1.67%	0	0.00%
Hardly	1	0.83%	1	0.27%
Little	6	5.00%	11	3.00%
Scarcely	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
in the least	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
in the slightest	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
at all	5	4.17%	7	1.91%

Figure 4 : Comparison of Minimizers

VI. Discussion

Previous studies have found that there are differences in the use of intensifiers between native and non-native English speakers (Liang, 2004; Lorenz, 1999; Perez, 2002). However, as an important part of intensifiers, downtoners have received little attention from researchers. The current study has found that the use of all types of downtoners except for diminishers is significantly higher in Chinese movie subtitles than in English movie subtitles. The major difference is that significantly more diminishers are used in English movie subtitles than in Chinese subtitles. Particularly, this study has identified diminisher just as the most important contributor to the difference. Table 8 summarizes the overused and underused downtoners in Chinese movie subtitles found in our study:

Table 8 : Overused and Underused Downtoners

Downtoners	Overused	Underused
Approximators	*almost, nearly, as good as*	
Compromisers	*quite, enough*	*rather*
Diminishers	*partially, a little, only*	*just, partly*
Minimizers	*barely, hardly, little, at all*	

Thus, we suggest that the subtitle of Chinese movies may read more like English movie subtitles if Chinese subtitlers could either replace the overused downtoners with underused ones, particularly with diminisher just or simply delete them where the meaning of the source text is not hindered.

It can be seen from Table 8 that some categories contain both overused and underused downtoners, suggesting that Chinese subtitlers may prefer diminisher partially to its synonym partly and compromiser quite to its synonym rather. In these cases we suggest that Chinese subtitlers may consider replacing partially with partly, and quite with rather so that their translation may read more native-like. The following Chinese movie subtitles extracted from our dataset are used to exemplify how the above translation strategies work.

Strategies to reduce approximators and compromisers

Source Text Sentences	Subtitles
1. 後來 還說 要拿 房子來 抵債 Later also said to bring the house to pay debt	The house was **almost** foreclosed.=> They talked about selling the house to pay the debt.
2. 對喔， 菜 我 忘了 Yeah, dishes I forgot	Right, I **almost** forgot! => Right, I ~~almost~~ forgot!
3. 柯兒 再堅持一下 馬上就到了 Keer, continue insisting, immediately arriving	Just hang in there a little longer. We're **nearly** there . => Just hang in there a little longer. We're ~~nearly there~~ coming soon.
4. 講完了 沒 啊 你? 差不多了。 Finished not ah you? Almost there.	Have you finished yet? Yes, **nearly**.=> ~~Yes , nearly~~ Not yet.
5. 跟 沒有交 有什麼 兩樣？ With no submission any different?	It's **as good as** not doing it. => It's ~~as good as~~ *just* not ~~doing it~~ done.
6. 你們兩個 現在 已經 死了 Two of you now already are dead	You two are **as good as** dead! => You two are ~~as good as~~ dead now!
7. 你 沒本事兒 你 會 死得 很慘 You are not good, you will die miserable	If you're not strong **enough**, you'll be destroyed by others. => If you're not strong ~~enough~~, you'll be destroyed by others.
8. 練好拳， 我要 報仇 Train hard in boxing, I want to take revenge	When I'm good **enough**, I'll take revenge. => When I'm ~~good enough~~ ready, I'll take revenge.
9. 應該 挺值錢的吧 It should be worth a lot of money	It must be **quite** valuable. => It must be ~~quite~~ *rather* valuable.

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In the above Examples1,3,4,6,7,8 approximators almost, nearly, as good as, and compromiser enough used in the original subtitle can be deleted without affecting the meaning of the source sentence. These changes will reduce the use of approximators and compromisers in Chinese movie subtitles. In Example 5, diminisher just can be used to replace approximator as good as, which will increase the occurrence rate of diminisher just. In Example 9, the compromiser rather, preferred in English movie subtitles, can be used to replace quite so that the Chinese movie subtitle may read more native-like.

Strategies to reduce diminishers except for just

Source Text Sentences	Subtitles
10. 但 為了讓 你們 這個賭局 更有趣 but, to let your this gamble more interesting	And to make it a little more interesting…=> And to make it a little more interesting...
11. 柯兒 再堅持一下 馬上就到了 Keer, continue insisting, immediately arriving	Just hang in there a little longer. We're nearly there. => Just hang in there a little longer. We're nearly there.
12. 你從來都是 站在 擂臺下面 看 You always stand below the ring watch	you've only... watched a fight from below. => you've only *always (just)*... watched a fight from below.
13. 她 測驗 考到 10 分咧！ She quiz score 10 points !	She only scored 10 marks! => She only scored 10 marks!
14. 洋人 瞧不起 我們 也確實 這麼多 Westerns despise us indeed so many 年來 我們自己人 總是 打來打去 。 years we ourselves always fight	The westerners despised us partially because we've been busy fighting among ourselves. => The westerners despised us partially *partly(just)* because we've been busy fighting among ourselves.

Again, in the above Examples 10-13, the compromisers a little and only used in the original subtitle are not necessary because the source sentence does not carry the degradable meaning. In fact, after the compromisers are deleted, not only the overall occurrence rate of compromisers in Chinese movie subtitles would reduce but the subtitles would read better. In Examples 12 and 14, diminisher just can too be used to further increase its occurrence rate in Chinese movie subtitles.

Strategies to reduce minimizers

Source Text Sentences	Subtitles
15. 收入 連 養家 都還不夠 Income even to feed family not enough	Income barely covers the household overhead. => The income barely doesn't covers the household overhead.
16. 可是 我爸爸媽媽 卻很少 稱讚 我 but my mom and dad seldom praised me	but Mum and Dad hardly praise me. => but Mum and Dad hardly (never) praise me.
17. 它們本身 都是 生長 於自然當中 They themselves, all live in nature 並 沒有 高低 之分 and no tall or short difference	All teas are grown in nature... with little discernable differences. => All teas are grown in nature... with little (without) discernable differences.
18. 和你現在的抱負 相比 我 那沽月樓 with your ambition compared my Gu Yue Lou 小小的 生意 就不 值得一提了 small business would not be worth mentioning.	My restaurant means little... compared to... your vision. => My restaurant means little (nothing)... compared to... your vision.
19. 我 一點 都不 覺得 好笑 I a little not feel funny	I'm not amused at all. => I'm not amused at all. (I don't feel funny.)
20. 你 還 是 那個鳥樣 啊 一點 都沒 You still are bird-like ah a bit not 變 changed	You're still the same. Haven't changed at all. => You're still the same, nothing changed at all.

Examples 15-20 contain minimizers barely, hardly, little, and at all. The results of this study have found that minimizers are overused in Chinese movie subtitles. Since the minimizer denotes the lowest degree of the force conveyed by the word it modifies, the substitute of the minimizers in the above examples by negation words never, without, and nothing will directly reduce the overuse of minimizers in Chinese subtitles with minimum change of the meaning of the source sentence.

In addition, Chinese movie subtitlers could also add the underused diminisher just to subtitles when necessary. For example, in the following Chinese movie subtitles, although no downtoner has been used, the degree adverb in the source sentence (in bold face) calls for a downtoner in the translation.

1. 你做事情要專心一點 Pay more attention! => Just pay more attention!

2. 小聲一點，小雨在聽音樂 Try to be quiet, Rain is listening to music. => Just be quiet, Rain is listening to music.

3. 只是覺得蠻好聽的 It sounded beautiful. => It just sounded beautiful.

4. 有啊，我只是不想讓你分心而已 Yeah, I didn't want to distract you. => Yeah, I just didn't want to distract you.

Adding diminisher just to the subtitles makes them not only read more natural but also more accurate, as the meaning of the adverbs in the source sentences omitted in the original subtitling process can now be brought back to the reader.

While it is right to say that omission is an inherent characteristic of subtitling resulting from many constraints (De Linde, 1995; Diaz-Cintas & Remael, 2007; Rosa, 2001), the above examples show that the omission of downtoners is not always due to constraints since the subtitles would still be shorter than the source sentences even after the downtoner just is added to them.

Our study has also found that among the downtoners listed in Biber (1988)'s study only a small number of them have been used in English and Chinese movie subtitles, fewer used in both. For example, among the 16 diminishers listed in Table 1, only half of them have been used in movie subtitles, and 5 of them (just, a bit, a little, only, and simply) have been mutually used in Chinese and English movie subtitles. In addition, Biber et al. (1998) have found that pretty is the most common downtoner in conversation, while all other downtoners are quite rare. However, pretty is not used in any one line of subtitle we have retrieved from the 8 Chinese and English movies. These results thus suggest that more research is needed to further investigate downtoners in the genre of movie subtitles, and that future research may need to use corpora of larger sizes.

Previous research has implied that a closer look at the learner's use of intensifiers may provide useful pedagogical information for English learners (Djatmika, 2009; Liang, 2004; Lorenz, 1999). The different patterns of using downtoners between English and Chinese movie subtitles found by this study thus provide some simple and practical guidelines for Chinese movie subtitlers. It is expected that these guidelines may also be useful for today's English teaching and learning especially where subtitling has been increasingly employed as a training tool.

Many researchers have rightly pointed out the widespread poor quality of subtitling (Chen, 2004; Gottlieb, 1997; Qian, 2004; Rosa, 2001; Vanderschelden, 2002). The Chinese movies subtitles used in our study also contain various errors apart from the inappropriate overuse and underuse of the other downtoners. However due to the limitation of this study, we have only focused on the latter. As stated by Lorenze (1999), even subtle differences in the use intensifiers may cause negative impact on communication. Therefore, we argue that the differences between the subtitles of Chinese English movies in their use of downtoners may, to some extents, contribute to the poor quality of Chinese movie subtitles.

VII. Conclusion

Chinese translators tend to overuse most of the downtoners leading to a lack of accuracy and naturalness in their translation of Chinese movie subtitles. The overuse of downtoners by Chinese translators is primarily attributed to the overuse of approximators almost, nearly, and as good as, compromisers quite and enough, diminisher partially, and minimizers hardly, little, and at all, in situations where no downtoner is required. Chinese translators have also been found to significantly underuse diminisher just in their subtitling process, which adds to the lack of native-likeness and accuracy of their movie subtitling production. English learners and Chinese translators who translate into English need to be made aware that underuse or overuse of downtoners can lead to improper intensification as well as poor quality of writing and translation. It is hoped that our study of the patterns of using downtoners in Chinese and English movie subtitles may provide useful information on proper intensification for language and translation teachers who use movie subtitles as teaching material.

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