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The Role of Sentence-Final Particles in Dialogue Translation: A Comparative Study on English-to-Cantonese and English-to-Mandarin Translations

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ABSTRACT

The current study investigates sentence-final particles, a distinctive means of expressing mood and modality in Modern Chinese. A movie dubbing corpus was categorized into eight fields of activity and analyzed for sentence-final particle usage and frequency proportions. Audiences' preferences were also examined through a respondent survey. This study conducted a comparative analysis of movie dubbing source texts in English and target texts in Mandarin and Cantonese from both statistical and reception perspectives. The analyses indicate that, while vacant in English, sentence-final particles have a significant role in both Mandarin and Cantonese, as they serve a variety of speech functions in different fields of languages, and are generally indispensable in conveying delicate moods of the dialogues. While the present Mandarin dubbings tend to employ a relatively low frequency of sentence-final particles, the Cantonese dubbings have better met the audiences' preference in this aspect. Such findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how sentence-final particles affect the quality of mood conveyance in translation practices, and may serve as a reference that sentence-final particles should be better employed based on the fields and contexts of the source texts. This study sheds light on the contributions of SFPs in conveying mood and modality in Mandarin and Cantonese dubbing translations.

Keywords: Sentence-Final Particles; Dialogue Translation; English-to-Cantonese Translations; English-to-Mandarin Translations

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1. Introduction

Sentence-final particles (SFPs) are a linguistic category commonly found in East and Mainland Southeast Asian languages ^[1]. This word class is also referred to as “sentence particles” ^[2], “modal particles”, “utterance particles” ^[3], or “illocutionary particles” ^[4]. In modern Chinese, SFPs are referred to as “句末语气词”. Regarding syntactic position, SFPs are placed at the end of a sentence or in positions where a pause occurs after the subject or adverbial. In terms of function, SFPs play an essential role in conveying the mood of sentences ^[5,6] and indicating tones (“语气”) ^[1]. As Xu indicates, tones consist of the manner of speaking and the associated grammatical categories ^[7]. Specifically, the manner of speaking corresponds to “modality”, conveying attitude, intention, and sensibility, whereas grammatical categories correspond to mood, expressing statements, questions, commands, exclamations, etc. The importance of SFPs is highlighted in modern Chinese where mood is prominently marked ^[8]. SFPs serve richer pragmatic functions ^[9] in interpersonal dialogues. They are pervasively used ^[3] in spoken Chinese and daily conversations to express mood, intention, emotion, cognition, stance, and attitude toward the subject matter ^[11].

The importance of SFPs in English-Chinese dubbing translations is particularly highlighted due to two aspects: the adherence of SFPs to the nature of dubbing translations and the role of SFPs in conveying tone.

As Chaume defines, dubbing is a technical exercise that substitutes the original soundtrack with one recorded in the target language ^[10]. This particular form of audiovisual translation is characterized as covert ^[11] by Díaz Cintas and Orero. These translation practices aim to create an illusion where the characters in the movie speak the same language as the audience. Previous literature points out that, in accordance with such an aim, synchronization is one of the key factors in dubbing translations ^[12]. The usage of SFPs adheres to all three generally accepted conventions of synchronization, namely lip-sync, isochrony, and kinetic synchrony ^[11,12]. Lip-sync refers to the consistency between the screen actor’s lip movements and the translated texts, while isochrony emphasizes the consistency between the duration of lip movements and utterances. As sound erosion ^[13] often takes part in the formation of SFPs, resulting in their incorporation of a neutral tone ^[14], SFPs are usually

short and brisk in pronunciation and the mouth movements are weakened accordingly. Thus, the addition or omission of SFPs does not affect the lip-sync and isochrony norm. Kinetic synchrony aims to ensure that the dialogue does not contradict the image. For example, the gesture of denial should be accompanied by a negative statement. As function words carry no lexical meaning ^[14], the use of SFPs does not alter the original kinetic synchrony of the translated texts.

While adhering to dubbing translation norms ^[10, 12], SFPs contribute to the quality of translation by being an important indicator of tone. The tone of speech plays an important role in the cross-cultural construction of interpersonal meaning ^[12]. The conveyance of tone affects the precision of translation, and in turn, may potentially influence audience reception and the popularity of imported English-language movies ^[5]. Both Chinese and English utilize the combination of various means to express mood ^[8], such as function words, adverbs or word order, a notable difference is the absence of a dedicated word class of SFPs in English. In Chinese, SFPs aid in differentiating subtle attitudes, such as imperatives vs polite requests, questions vs uncertainty, or facts vs imagination. As Luo states, “We found that in Chinese, there are words that can express the implicit intentions, allowing readers to feel the emotions and tones. These include SFPs like ‘了’, ‘呢’, ‘么’.... These words may seem insignificant because they lack specific referential meanings, but if translators overlook their function and fail to express the implicit intentions carried appropriately, the translation effect will be greatly discounted” ^[15].

In order to elevate tone equivalence in dubbing translations, the current study will compare the original dubbing with its translated Chinese versions, focusing on the SFP usage in the target dubbing. The study encompasses an examination of both the Mandarin and Cantonese versions of the same source dubbing. As two dialects of modern Chinese, Mandarin and Cantonese are comparable in SFPs as they share similar grammatical and functional features. Through the examination of two distinct dubbing versions, the study seeks to demonstrate that, despite variations in the wording of translations, SFPs with specific functions can consistently convey the intended tone of the source text. Prior research has established the similarities

between SFPs in Mandarin and Cantonese.

SFPs in Mandarin are mainly classified in two ways. Linguists such as Wang and Hu classify SFPs based on the moods they indicate, such as indicative, imperative, interrogative, or exclamatory mood ^[16,17]. Others, such as Zhu, use both functions and syntactic positions as criteria to further classify Mandarin SFPs, highlighting the sequential order of SFPs. Regardless of the classification norms, SFPs in Mandarin include single characters such as “的”, “了”, “呢”, “吧”, “吗”, “啊”, their combinations and contractions such as “的 / 了”, “的 / 吗”, “啦”, “呐”, and compound particles such as “罢了”. Conversely, the classification of words in Cantonese varies among linguists. Gao and Xu classified SFPs as an independent word class based on both the distinct grammatical characteristics and meanings ^[18,19]. In contrast, Cheung, Li et al., and Tang focused more on the grammatical characteristics of words for classification. Thus, SFPs are grouped into the larger category of “auxiliary words” ^[20,22]. SFPs in Cantonese, regardless of their classification placement, possess specific meanings and functions. According to Tang, SFPs in Cantonese can be classified into seven categories, indicating event, time, focus, modal, interrogation, imperative, and emotions respectively ^[22]. Common forms include single forms such as “㗎”, “㗎”, “㗎”, “㗎”, “㗎”, as well as double forms such as “㗎㗎”, “㗎㗎”, “㗎㗎”, and multiple forms like “㗎㗎㗎”, “㗎㗎㗎㗎”. Overall, the grammatical and functional features of SFPs largely align in both dialects. SFPs cannot stand alone and typically appear at the end, forming a syntactic unit with the entire phrase or sentence ^[20]. This is characterized by their utterance nature ^[22].

To compare SFP usages between Mandarin and Cantonese in dubbing, the current study first creates a corpus

from movie dialogue transcriptions. It then utilizes Matthiessen's registerial cartography system to categorize the corpus according to the eight fields of activity. This theoretical framework explores language variation ^[23] and systematically addresses the registers within a language. Register is a semantic concept, which links social context variables to language choice ^[23,24] and refers to a special situational configuration of field, mode, and tenor ^[25]. These three elements serve as parameters in registerial cartography, describing various aspects of the social context. Mode refers to the form of communication, while tenor pertains to the nature of participants ^[25]. Moreover, field refers to the nature of the social action ^[25]. It focuses on contents ^[24] and is defined as “the total event, in which the text is functioning, together with the purposive activity of the speaker or writer; it thus includes the subject-matter as one element in it” ^[26]. Since SFPs usually express speakers' attitudes towards the content ^[27], the corpus classification focuses on the parameters of the field. According to Matthiessen, the typology of field that stems from Jean Ure's index is based on the field of activity and mode. The field of activity, distinct from the field of experience or subject matter, serves as the starting point ^[22] for classification, showing “what's going on” in context ^[28,29]. The activity is primarily a process of interactive behavior or meaning exchange ^[23]. The typology also incorporates insights from Eggins and Slade on spoken language genres such as chat, opinion, teasing, and gossip ^[30], as well as Martin and Rose regarding written language genre models such as explanation, recounts, procedures, and narratives ^[31]. Matthiessen summarized the eight primary types of fields of activity as Expounding, Reporting, Recreating, Sharing, Doing, Enabling, Recommending, and Exploring ^[23]. The current study classifies the corpus according to these types as in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Classification of the Eight Fields of Activity.

Field	Activity	Examples
Expounding	Categorizing or explaining our experience of classes of phenomena according to theories that range from folk theories to scientific ones.	She was experiencing a respiratory infection that is probably a virus-caused flu.
Reporting	Chronicling, surveying or inventorying our experience of particular phenomena.	It is reported that thousands of people were hospitalized with winter flu last week.
Recreating	Narrating or dramatizing imaginary worlds that have some relation to the world of our daily lives.	This is what the world would be like if the flu never ends.

Table 1, Cont.

Field	Activity	Examples
Sharing	Sharing our personal lives, our experiences or personal values , as a means of interaction in personal relationships.	When I caught the flu, my temperatures were above 39 degrees Celsius for 4 days.
Doing	Collaborating on or leading social activities to achieve some tasks.	We should admit her and put her on drip.
Enabling	Instructing or regulating others regarding methods to undertake activities.	You should take two pills a time, and for three times a day.
Recommending	Advising or inducing others to undertake activities.	Why not take a leave for the afternoon if your flu is so bad?
Exploring	Exchanging opinions by reviewing commodities or arguing about positions and ideas.	I strongly disagree with Dr. Kwan and I believe that everyone should wear a mask in public to prevent the flu from rampaging.

This study aims to contribute to translation theories and practices through new perspectives and methods. Previous studies on dubbing translations often focus on general translation norms. Such norms can be over-generalized as specific characteristics of target languages are sometimes overlooked. Integrating previous studies with the mood-prominence characteristics of Modern Chinese, the study narrows its perspective down to mood-conveyance of dubbing translations. Key aspects of mood translation include sentence structures, extralinguistic cultural references and the colloquial mode. However, SFPs are often neglected. Accordingly, the study aims to describe similarities and differences in SFP usage between Mandarin and Cantonese translations. As Chaume states, both the focus on functions of texts and the viewers are essential to audiovisual translation ^[12]. Thus, the study will also compare SFP usages in official dubbings with the audience preferences through a reception study. We hypothesize that SFPs in official Mandarin and Cantonese dubbings within the same field will resemble each other in frequency and functions, while those in different fields will show significant differences. Furthermore, SFP usages in official dubbings may not match audience preferences, with larger gaps between audience expectations and official dubbings in Mandarin dubbings than in Cantonese dubbings. By comparing SFPs usage, the study aims to enhance understanding of the dynamics among tone, fields and SFPs from both descriptive and audience reception perspectives.

2. Materials and Methods

The study first builds the corpus through movie dialogue transcription. The transcribed dubbings are classified into eight types according to the fields of activity. T-tests are employed to analyze SFP frequency proportions, showing general characteristics of SFP usage in each field. The word choice preferences and functions of SFP in each field are then described. Audience reception is assessed through a respondent survey, with a focus on differences between SFP usage in audience preference and those in official dubbing.

2.1. Materials

In order to maintain consistency in English source texts for Mandarin and Cantonese translations, the study utilizes movie dialogues as the corpus, randomly selecting segments from *Frozen II* and *Zootopia*, which are award-winning English movies. Both movies have official Cantonese and Mandarin dubbing versions translated by professional dubbing crews, ensuring material quality. The original English dubbing generally aligns with the subtitles. Thus, for the source texts, the current corpus adopted the subtitle files with a plain review of consistency. For the target texts, the official dubbed soundtracks are transcribed into text into the current corpus. Notable differences exist between Chinese subtitles and dubbing scripts, especially

in the Cantonese versions, affecting word choice, sentence patterns, and special sound elements such as interjections and SFPs. Additionally, other crucial communicative elements in spoken language, such as turn initiators, filler/filled pauses, reactive tokens, and repairs, are less emphasized in traditional grammar^[32]. To focus on SFPs in spoken language, the transcription process captures the dubbing soundtrack in a word-for-word manner, ensuring no omission of any type of lexical items.

As punctuation marks are typically omitted in dubbing as well as subtitles, the transcribed text is segmented into entries based on dialogue breaks or transitions between speeches of different characters. The corpus consists of 806 randomly selected entries from both movies, with each entry containing three transcriptions, namely the original English dubbing, the translated Mandarin dubbing, and the translated Cantonese dubbing. Of the 806 entries, 805 are valid. One (“You know what”) was excluded because it was omitted with no corresponding translation in the Cantonese dubbing. The 805 official dubbing entries are then classified according to Matthiessen’s registerial fields.

2.2. Methods

First, the SFP usages in the official dubbing are analyzed. The SFP frequency proportions are calculated to compare the overall SFP usage between different fields and the two dubbing. Next, the proportions of SFPs appearing in entries of each field are ranked and compared. The equation is as follows:

SFP frequency proportion = Number of entries with SFP of the field / Total number of entries of the field.

Then, the choice of SFPs within each field and the mood they convey are described. These descriptions aim to provide contrasts between Mandarin and Cantonese SFP usages within the same field.

Afterwards, a survey was conducted to investigate audiences’ habits and expectations of SFP usage in movie dialogues. The results of the survey can further serve as a crucial index assessing audiovisual translation qualities. The survey was conducted through an online platform Wenjuanxing. A total of 71 responses were received, 70 of

which were valid. One was discarded due to an incomplete response. The respondents were students or graduates from prestigious universities in Guangdong province or Hong Kong, possessing sufficient knowledge of English, Mandarin, and Cantonese. Their dominant languages were also investigated through self-report. Of the 70 valid responses, 31 (44.29%) reported Cantonese as their more proficient language, while 39 (55.71%) claimed Mandarin. The survey consisted of 24 questions, each assessing audience preferences for one entry. Three entries from each of the eight fields were investigated. For each source clause, four potential choices of translation were provided, including an official Mandarin translation (MT), an official Cantonese translation (CT), an edited Mandarin translation, and an edited Cantonese translation. The edited translations were merely modified by the omission or supplementation of SFPs, while the rest of the sentence remained unchanged from the official translation. Respondents were not informed which choices were official and which were edited. They were required to rank the four choices according to their equivalence to the original English text in a descending order. This ranking can serve as an indicator of respondents’ preferences regarding SFP usage in each clause.

In the analysis, the source text and the edited sentences are labeled as follows:

ST: Source text;

MT-: Mandarin translations edited by omitting SFPs (corresponding official dubbing is with SFPs);

CT-: Cantonese translations edited by omitting SFPs (corresponding official dubbing is with SFPs);

MT+: Mandarin translations edited by adding SFPs (corresponding official dubbing is without SFPs);

CT+: Cantonese translations edited by adding SFPs (corresponding official dubbing is without SFPs).

3. Results

3.1. Analysis of SFPs in the Official Cantonese and Mandarin Dubbings

The SFP frequency proportion of each field in the two official dubbings is shown in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Frequency Proportions in the Official Dubbings.

Field	Number of Entries	Official Cantonese Dubbing		Official Mandarin Dubbing	
		Number of Entries with SFPs	Frequency Proportion (%)	Number of Entries with SFPs	Frequency Proportion (%)
Overall	805	433	53.79	221	27.45
Sharing	198	104	52.53	50	25.25
Doing	108	54	50.00	31	28.70
Reporting	97	43	44.33	23	23.71
Recommending	95	65	68.42	33	34.74
Expounding	80	39	48.75	16	20.00
Exploring	79	55	69.62	31	39.24
Enabling	77	43	55.84	20	25.97
Recreating	71	30	42.25	17	23.94

Overall, for SFPs in the same field, the official Cantonese and Mandarin dubbing exhibit similar tendencies. Regarding the tendency of frequency proportions, generally, the SFP frequency proportions in MT are approximately half of those in CT, showing a relatively large gap in the willingness to use SFPs between Mandarin and Cantonese dubbing translation.

Regarding the tendency of SFP functions, there is an overall consistency within each field between MT and CT. Specifically, in the field of Sharing, many of the SFPs used in both MT and CT have the function of indication. However, those employed in CT mostly have a heavier tone than those employed in MT. In the field of Doing and Enabling, the usages and frequency proportions of SFPs of the two fields show convergence in both CT and MT. The frequency proportions in both dialects are slightly higher in the “doing” context than in the “enabling” context. In the field of Reporting, MT uses the combined particle “*了₁ 了₂*” extensively, indicating both a newly appeared situation and an affirmative tone. Although CT in this field exploits SFPs featuring a much wider variety of word choices, including “*㗎*”, “*啊*”, “*啦*”, “*嘅*”, “*㗎*”, “*㗎*”, “*呢*”, “*囉*”, “*㗎*”, “*嘅*”, the SFPs are of the same functions as those in MT. In the field of Recommending, both CT and MT employed various SFPs. These SFPs are generally used to soften the tone and induce agreement on the stated actions. In the field of Expounding, CT uses a relatively high frequency of SFPs, the most frequently used being “*㗎*” (and its variations), “*啊*”, and “*呢*”. However, MT shows the lowest SFP frequency proportion. In the field of Exploring, both CT and MT have a relatively high SFP frequency

among the eight fields. SFPs in both dialects are used to either carry the interrogative tone or as an amplifier to enlarge and emphasize the original tone. “*了₂*” (and its variations) are frequently used in both MT and CT. In the field of Recreating, the SFPs added in MT are confined within the choices of the combined particle “*了₁ 了₂*”, “*呢*”, “*啦*”, and “*啊*”, which are simply tone amplifiers. The SFPs in CT show diversity in both word choice and functions.

3.2. Survey Results

The survey aims to test respondents’ preferences and provide a comparison of SFP usages between CT and MT. In order to compare the translations to respondents’ preferences, alignment rates were calculated for each clause in question. When a respondent ranked the official dubbing over the SFP added/omitted one, that official translation was considered “aligned” with the audience’s preference. The alignment rate was calculated as follows:

Alignment Rate = number of responses ranking the official dubbing over the edited one / total number of responses.

Theoretically, the higher alignment rate indicates a better accordance between the official dubbing and audience preference. Thus, a higher alignment rate in turn indicates a higher quality of SFP usage in the translation.

To rule out the potential confounding influence of dialect dominance on SFP usage preference, two independent t-tests were conducted to compare the surveyed alignment rates of Mandarin dubbings between Mandarin-proficient and Cantonese-proficient respondents across CT and MT

content, respectively. The first t-test analyzed MT alignment rates, indicating no significant difference in preferences between the Mandarin-proficient group ($M = 0.54$, $SD = 0.24$, $|z\text{-skewness}| < 1.96$, $|z\text{-kurtosis}| < 1.96$) and the Cantonese-proficient group ($M = 0.57$, $SD = 0.24$, $|z\text{-skewness}| < 1.96$, $|z\text{-kurtosis}| < 1.96$), $t(46) = 0.40$, n.s. The second t-test assessed CT alignment rates and also re-vealed no significant differences between the Mandarin-proficient group ($M = 0.67$, $SD = 0.16$, $|z\text{-skewness}| < 1.96$, $|z\text{-kurtosis}| < 1.96$) and the Cantonese-pro-

ficient group ($M = 0.67$, $SD = 0.22$, $|z\text{-skewness}| < 1.96$, $|z\text{-kurtosis}| < 1.96$), $t(46) = -0.09$, n.s. These findings suggest dialect proficiency does not systematically influence alignment rate preferences for either MT or CT. Consequently, the confounding effect was ruled out and the aggregated ana-lysis of alignment rates across dialect groups was applied in the following analysis. **Figure 1** shows the alignment rate of both CT and MT for the 24 surveyed clauses re-gardless of respondents' dominant dialect.

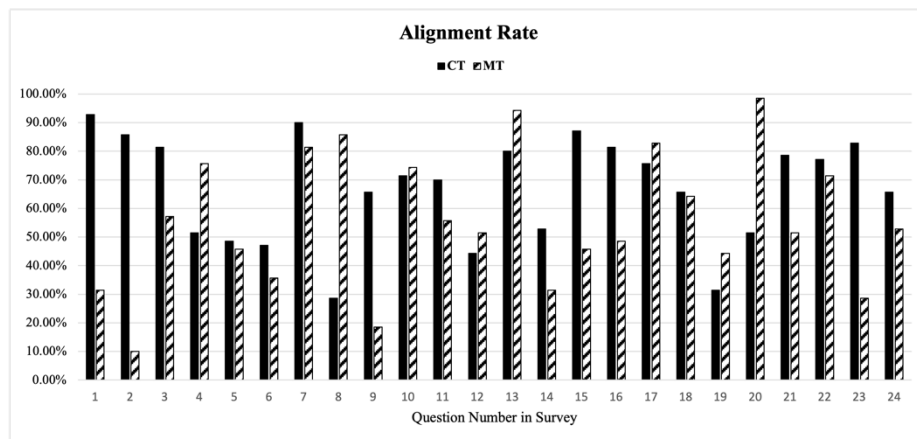


Figure 1. SFP Frequency Proportions of Audience Preference and Official Dubbings.

A paired t-test was conducted to measure the differences between CT alignment rate ($|z\text{-skewness}| < 1.96$, $|z\text{-kurtosis}| < 1.96$) and MT alignment rate ($|z\text{-skewness}| < 1.96$, $|z\text{-kurtosis}| < 1.96$). The results showed that CT exhibited a significantly higher alignment rate than MT, $t(23) = 1.73$, $p < 0.05$, indicating a significantly higher quality in terms of SFP usages, as they were closer to audiences' preferences.

4. Discussion

The aim of this study is to address two questions: (1) What are the similarities and differences in SFP usages between Mandarin and Cantonese translations? (2) Are there any gaps in terms of SFP usages between the official dubbing and the audiences' preferences? If so, are the aforementioned gaps for CT and MT significantly different? Accordingly, the study has examined and compared the frequency of SFPs occurrence in different fields of the two official dubbing, as well as their main functions. Addition-

ally, a respondent survey was conducted to compare SFP usages in official dubbing with audience preference. The following section will continue to explore the potential causes of SFP usage characteristics. Typical cases of SFPs in the official dubbing are drawn to demonstrate such causes. Then, the possible cause for the differences between SFP usages in official dubbing and audiences' preferences will also be provided.

4.1. SFPs in the Official Cantonese and Mandarin Dubbings

Despite that the SFP frequency proportions of each field show a relatively large difference between CT and MT, the SFP frequency proportions of the eight fields show a great similarity in their rankings between the two target languages (as shown in **Table 3**). This pattern indicates that both CT and MT exhibit clear distinctions in SFP usage across different fields. The rankings correspond with the characteristics of SFP usage in each field. The possible causes for these rankings and characteristics are discussed below.

Table 3. SFP Frequency Proportion Ranking of the Fields.

SFP Frequency Proportion Ranking of the Fields (Largest Proportion to Smallest Proportion)	CT	MT
1	Exploring	Exploring
2	Recommending	Recommending
3–5	Enabling	Doing
	Sharing	Enabling
	Doing	Sharing
6–8	Expounding	Recreating
	Reporting	Reporting
	Recreating	Expounding

Firstly, the field of Exploring exhibits the highest SFP frequency proportions in both CT and MT. Speech in these fields serves to propose and debate over public values and ideas^[23]. As such, source texts often convey a strong tone, using interjections such as “Oh” or adverbs such as “anyway”. Literal translations of these interjections and adverbs may lead to the violation of translation norms or translationese. However, the use of SFPs could solve this problem. For example, the ST “Oh, for goodness’s sake” is translated in CT as “咁太誇張喇”, instead of “哦, 咁太誇張”. For the ST “Oh, Stu (Stu as the name of a character)”, MT translated as “行了” instead of “哦, 斯图”. Meanwhile, translating adverbs literally may violate synchronization norms^[12]. For example, the ST “Why did Northuldra attack us anyway?” contains 11 syllables. If the CT translates “anyway” literally, it would likely be “嗰啲擲書特人究竟點解要襲擊我哋?”, which contains 15 syllables and harms synchronization. However, due to the short and brisk nature of SFPs, they are less likely to affect acoustic articulation. Hence, its verbalization wouldn’t affect synchronization. Replacing “究竟” with “啊”, the official Cantonese dubbing translated the sentence as “點解嗰擲書特人要襲擊我哋啊” to meet the synchronization norm. Thus, the high frequency of SFPs in the field of Exploring could be due to the conveyance of strong tones, without translating interjections or content words with more syllables.

Secondly, the field of Recommending exhibits the second highest SFP frequency proportions in both CT and MT. Speech in the field of Recommending focuses on advising on behalf of the addressees’ interest or inducing on behalf of the speakers’ persuading interest. This layer of

hinting and inducing may explain the increased frequency proportion of SFPs, as SFPs effectively soften tones and encourage agreements.

Meanwhile, as Matthiessen indicates, both the context of Recommending and Enabling are likely to foreshadow a “doing” context^[23]. Such overlaps in activities are reflected in the SFP usage of both CT and MT. SFP frequency proportions of the field of Doing and Enabling are ranked between the third and the fifth place in both CT and MT, closely following the field of Recommending. The slight differences in the frequency proportions and usages of SFPs between the field of Doing and Enabling may primarily arise from the emphasis on either commands or offers. This phenomenon can also be attributed to the distinct nature of the two fields. According to Matthiessen, the field of Enabling is likely to foreshadow a “doing” context^[23]. Whilst both fields indicate the context of performing activities, they differ in focus. The “doing” context focuses more on social interaction, including collaboration and direction. The “enabling” context emphasizes methodologies such as instruction on “how to” or regulations. Examples 1–4 illustrate four entries from both fields.

Example 1

ST: *Let's make a big snowman later*

CT: 我哋陣間整個大雪人啊

MT: 听完以后我们去堆个大雪人

Example 2

ST: *You are not going alone.*

CT: 我唔會俾你一個人去㗎

MT: 要去我跟你一起去

Example 3

ST: *I'll let you erase it, in 48 hours.*

CT: 我會畀你刪咗佢...不過係係兩日之後

MT: 给你 48 小时, 看你的表现咯

Example 4

ST: *No one tells me what I can or can't be.*

CT: 聽住啊, 我想做啲乜, 冇動物可以阿吱阿咗

MT: 还没有人, 能对我的未来, 说三道四

In both Cantonese and Mandarin, SFPs in these examples share a similar function of emphasizing imminent actions, conveying either a diplomatic or a commanding tone.

The sentence pattern in Example 1 is typical in the field of “doing”. The English structure of “let’s” in Halliday’s theory on imperatives is best interpreted as a wayward form of the subject “you and I”^[33]. It simultaneously expresses commands and offers. When translated into Modern Chinese, SFPs in these cases can be used to differentiate between the inclination of the speech functions, as demonstrated in the following adaptations.

CT: 我哋陣間整個大雪人啊 [offer > command]

CT-: 我哋陣間整個大雪人 [command > > offer]

MT: 听完以后我们去堆个大雪人 [command > offer]

MT+: 听完以后我们去堆个大雪人吧 [offer > command]

Example 2 is another typical case of the field of “doing”. The subject “you” implies a command on the surface, but denotes a speaker-addressee collaboration. Performing a zero substitution on CT in Example 4 would convey a more commanding and less collaborative tone.

CT-: 我唔會俾你一個人去

However, the MT in Example 4 chose precisely a more commanding tone without using any SFP. Adding an appropriate SFP would align the tenor of the clause with that of the CT.

MT+: 要去我跟你一起去呀

Examples 3 and 4, on the other hand, fall into the field of “enabling”, as they focus more on the “how-to” procedures or regulations. The SFPs employed in these cases can emphasize either offers or commands, as shown by the SFP “咯” in MT (Example 3) and the SFP “啊” in CT (Example 4).

The “咯” used in MT of Example 3 shows a speech function of offering. If omitted, the sentence would have a stronger commanding tone. Meanwhile, CT adds the SFP “喇” and the tone becomes closer to that of the MT.

MT: 给你 48 小时, 看你的表现咯 [offer > command]

MT-: 给你 48 小时, 看你的表现 [command > offer]

CT: 我會畀你刪咗佢...不過係係兩日之後 [command > offer]

CT+: 我會畀你刪咗佢...不過係係兩日之後喇 [offer > command]

The SFP “啊” used in MT of Example 4 shows a speech function of strong command. The CT itself is a clear demonstration of regulating the addressee, and by using the SFP, such tone is emphasized.

CT: 聽住啊, 我想做啲乜, 冇動物可以阿吱阿咗 [strong command]

CT-: 聽住, 我想做啲乜, 冇動物可以阿吱阿咗 [command]

Thirdly, regarding the field of Sharing, SFPs frequently express affirmation, indication, or exclamation. The frequency of SFPs is relatively high in both CT and MT. Their prevalence can be attributed to the interactive nature of the activities in this field. The purpose of dialogues often aims to influence listeners with shared personal values and strengthen personal relationships ultimately^[19]. Consequently, the SFPs are employed to show bond and affection based on shared experiences or values between speakers and listeners.

Fourthly, the field of Expounding exhibits the largest ratio of multiples in SFP frequency proportions between CT and MT. Such a distinct difference might be due to their different translation focus. MT prioritized field over tenor, whereas CT emphasizes tenor. Example 5 supports this deduction.

Example 5

ST: *And yet, change mocks us with her beauty*

CT: 你有冇聽過知否世事常變呢

MT: 秋日用她的美嘲笑我的天真

The ST is a character’s interpretation of the phenomenon “leaves fall in autumn”, using a commonsense folk theory. The preceding line, “How I wish this could last forever”, portrays the character’s longing for that specific moment. In ST, the transition in content and the slight self-deprecation are expressed with the phrase “and yet”. MT emphasizes more on the field than tenor, creating a relatively serious and poetic atmosphere. In contrast, CT considers tenor and opts for the SFP “呢”. A zero substitution can easily demonstrate its function:

CT: 你有冇聽過知否世事常變呢

CT-: 你有冇聽過知否世事常變

When the SFP “呢” is substituted or deleted, the mood of the clause changes drastically from a casual self-deprecation to a serious question.

As the field of Expounding focuses on the activity of categorizing or explaining, most content is scientifically or anecdotally factual. The factual nature of the content accounts for the lack of SFPs in MT. For example, for the explanation “it’s in their biology”, the Mandarin dubbing translated it as “这是动物的本性。” However, as most of the entries are dialogues between characters with personal relationships, the tone of speech may deviate from a matter-of-fact manner. Hence, CT employed SFPs to either highlight one’s certainty or maintain the conversation with in a friendly tone. For the same example mentioned above, the Cantonese dubbing used “㗎” at the end of the clause for emphasis.

Lastly, regarding the field of Recreating and Reporting, similar choices of SFPs are used. MT exploits the combined particle “了₁+了₂” and its variations, such as “了(啊)” especially. According to Matthiessen, Reporting involves chronicling, surveying or inventorying our experience of particular phenomena, while Recreating involves narrating or dramatizing imaginary worlds which have some relation to the world of our daily lives^[19]. Whether truthful or fantasized, the two fields are both narrations of events. For example, both “but something went wrong (truthful, reporting)” and “everybody’s dead (dramatized, recreating)” are event narrations, and the corresponding MTs used “了” and “了(啊)” to indicate the newly appeared situations and an affirmative tone.

Overall, there are clear distinctions in SFP usage between fields in both CT and MT. However, the results of the survey show that the SFP usage does not align with audience preference completely compared to official dubbing. The following section will discuss the probable causes for this discrepancy.

4.2. Comparing the Official Dubbings with Audience Preference

The survey results indicate that Mandarin dubbing generally deviates more from audiences’ preferences in SFP usages compared to Cantonese dubbing. The low frequency of SFPs in Mandarin dubbing may stem from two perspectives. On the one hand, from the perspective of translation studies,

it may be due to the effect of translationese, namely source interference and simplification^[34]. Regarding source interference, when translating English into Chinese, SFPs may be neglected due to the absence of a corresponding word class in the source language. Regarding the simplification tendency of translators, translators tend to use SFPs more frequently when the tone solely or mostly relies on the particles, such as using “呢” to indicate questions. However, audiences expect SFPs even when there are other indicators of tones. For example, for the ST “Let’s make a big snowman later”, both CT and MT have pointed out “我哋/我们” to indicate invitation. Most respondents in the survey still preferred the SFP employed versions of “我哋陣間整個大雪人啦” and “听完以后我们去堆个大雪人吧” instead of “我哋陣間整個大雪人” or “听完以后我们去堆个大雪人”. The simplification tendency of translators is also observed by Baños, as translators’ tendency for explication or simplification can also drive translators to omit or explicitly verbalize orality markers with utterances^[35]. However, it is crucial for audiovisual translators to select and preserve specific features of spontaneous speech that are widely accepted by the audience^[36], in order to preserve the “prefabricated orality^[37]” of movie dialogues.

From the perspective of the audiovisual translation industry, the procedures of Mandarin dubbing translations may have affected SFP usages and tone conveyance. As Yang observes, “the dubbing and subtitling versions were not translated separately”, instead, a translator first renders the original foreign language script into Chinese, then a dubbing director revises it and decides on a final version suitable for dubbing and subtitling, and “a shortcoming of this working practice is: when dubbing directors make revisions, they usually do not refer to the original text nor consult the translators”^[38]. In this working process, two problems may occur to undermine the translations: first, the translation with ST and TT does not discriminate between written and spoken Mandarin, thus neglecting the importance of SFPs in spoken Chinese. Second, when the dubbing directors make revisions, their adaptation of the TT may become less equivalent, without referring to the ST.

Nevertheless, SFPs have not been extensively used in dubbing translations. This shortcoming is also evident from a corpus-based perspective. The SFP frequency proportions of Mandarin dubbing texts are also relatively low

compared with the overall SFP frequency proportions of the native Mandarin dialogue corpus. For instance, in “*I Love My Family*” (《我爱我家》), 21856 out of 62680 clauses used SFPs and the frequency proportion was 34.87%^[39]. Other researchers have also stated that SFPs are used much less commonly in translational subcorpora than in non-translated ones^[38,40]. This also suggests that, in order to align better with audience preference, SFPs shouldn’t be neglected or simplified in dubbing translations.

Given the aforementioned discussions, it is proposed that during translation, SFPs should be given careful consideration when dubbing scripts are translated from English to Modern Chinese, especially in Mandarin dubbing. The appropriate deployment of SFPs may contribute largely to enhancing audiences’ satisfaction and maintaining tonal equivalence with the original text.

5. Conclusions

This study conducted a comparative analysis of movie dubbing source texts in English and target texts in Mandarin and Cantonese. It contributes to the current audio-visual translation practice from two aspects. Firstly, the study proposes that the specifics and uniqueness of the target language should be further considered while adhering to general dubbing norms. Secondly, the study shows that apart from literal conceptions, both statistical methods and reception perspectives are relevant to AVT investigation. The results of such analyses in turn guide AVT translation towards a higher quality in terms of tone equivalence. The study also contributes to the current translation studies as it integrates the analyses of SFPs with the registerial cartography system. Through such classification, a detailed account of how SFPs are used across the eight fields of activity is provided. The functions and significance of SFPs in the creation of the “prefabricated orality^[37]” are in turn demonstrated.

Overall, the analysis of this study indicates that both Cantonese and Mandarin, as dialects rich in SFPs, can appropriately employ SFPs for all eight fields. The SFPs in Cantonese and Mandarin tend to display similar functions within each field. The frequency proportion rankings of each field are also in similar places among the eight fields. The analyses of SFP usages in official dubbing are then compared to the results of the respondent survey. The com-

parisons highlight a significant difference between SFP usages in the official dubbing and audience preference, where audiences usually expect a wider use of SFPs in Chinese translations. The comparisons further indicate that the Cantonese dubbing better meets audience preferences for SFP usage compared to the Mandarin dubbing. These findings shed light on the contributions of SFPs in conveying mood and modality in Mandarin and Cantonese dubbing translations. The findings reveal that while SFPs are absent in English, they play a crucial role in Chinese dialogue across various fields of activity. The conclusion is in accordance with previous studies that emphasize the importance of SFPs in modern Chinese and dubbing translations. The study suggests that future translation practices should optimize SFP employment based on the source text’s context and field to enhance the quality of mood conveyance.

The current study still has its limitations. First, a difference in modality exists between dubbing scripts and the corresponding audio or video. Since the study concentrates on written scripts rather than multimodal content, deviations in respondents’ preferences may exist. Secondly, this study utilizes methods such as random sampling, surveys, and descriptive case studies. There might exist potential confounding influences such as individual differences, etc. For future research, it is suggested to expand the sample size and consider the multi-modality side of dubbing. In addition, the classification norms of registerial cartography could also be further exploited with the secondary types of fields and a more detailed classification of tenor. Such classifications may theoretically lead to a comprehensive account of SFP usages across different registers.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, J.L., and J.X.; investigation, J.X.; writing—original draft preparation, J.L. and J.X.; writing—review and editing, J.L.; visualization, J.X.; supervision, J.L.; project administration, J.L. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Informed Consent Statement

This study was conducted in strict adherence to ethical guidelines to ensure the protection and respect of all participants involved. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they were fully aware of the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. The confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were maintained throughout the research process, with all personal information securely stored and only accessible to the research team.

Data Availability Statement

The corpus supporting the findings of this study is available from the authors upon request. To access the data, interested parties should contact the corresponding author. Please note that while the data are not publicly accessible, they can be provided for research purposes upon reasonable request. Any restrictions or conditions on the use of the data will be communicated by the authors. This ensures that the data are used appropriately and ethically, in line with the study's objectives and confidentiality requirements.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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