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Post-Print Visual Reconstruction of Subtitle Packaging for TV Variety Shows

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Abstract

The explosive growth of variety shows in recent years, coupled with the burgeoning popularity of web-native programs, has catalyzed innovation in subtitle packaging for variety shows. The aesthetic quality and distinctive characteristics of such packaging have emerged as pivotal pillars underpinning the identity and stylistic orientation of variety shows. Within the new media ecosystem, subtitle packaging for variety shows has acquired heightened value connotations, serving as a conduit for the aesthetic demands of the new generation, fostering cross-platform dissemination of internet culture, and augmenting program brand construction.

Full Text

Visual Reconstruction of Subtitle Packaging in TV Variety Shows

Abstract: In recent years, the explosive growth of variety shows and the popularity of web-native programs have driven innovation in subtitle packaging. The aesthetic quality and distinctive features of subtitle packaging have become crucial supports for the character and style of variety shows. In the new media environment, subtitle packaging in variety shows carries greater value connotations, transmits the aesthetic demands of new generations, facilitates cross-platform dissemination of internet culture, and contributes to program brand building.

Keywords: variety shows; subtitle packaging; entertainment

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In television programs, picture, sound, and subtitles constitute the three core elements. In the evolution of digital technology, subtitle elements in TV variety shows have continuously innovated their style and content, becoming a narrative text that integrates visual elements such as text, graphics, and animation. This has produced significant effects on program brand building, content excavation, and advertising medium enhancement. In the current environment of popular and internet culture, subtitles no longer merely serve explanatory or illustrative functions but increasingly function as visual packaging. Through bizarre and diverse subtitle imagery, they construct entirely new visual effects, profoundly influencing audience reception, attitude transmission, emotional expression, and behavioral extension in variety shows.

1. Types of Subtitle Packaging in Variety Shows

Early variety show subtitles functioned similarly to those in TV dramas, films, and documentaries, primarily appearing as text-based direct communication symbols that supplemented and explained the visuals. With the development of digital technology, symbolic and graphic subtitles have become commonplace, enhancing packaging and aesthetic functions while offering greater flexibility in positioning and timing. As triple-network convergence deepens further, internet culture has moved to the big screen, with images representing online cultural symbols such as “Martian language” and “Bao Zou” (rage comics), as well as danmaku (bullet comments), expanding the subtitle repertoire.

1.1 Text-based Subtitles

Text-based subtitles represent the original and core form of variety show subtitles, serving as the prototype from which static images, dynamic graphics, and danmaku later derived. Existing in the form of simple sentences and punctuation, they primarily convey characters’ subtext and directors’ directional comments. This includes both punctuation marks and textual annotations. For instance, when guests display expressions without accompanying dialogue, punctuation such as “???” , “!” , or “...” appears to express inner emotions intuitively. Alternatively, words like “speechless with grief” or “nervous” may appear to emphasize emotional coloring.

1.2 Graphic Subtitles

Graphics represent the primary means of diversifying subtitle visual effects. Graphics provide more intuitive impact than text, with playful illustrations and brightly colored symbols enhancing entertainment value. Some graphics rich in connotation make it easier for audiences to perceive directorial intentions and achieve visual unity. In programs like *U Can U Bibi*, *Where Are We Going, Dad?*, and *Running Man*, when certain figures or objects are mentioned, iconic graphics appear in coordination with the dialogue. For example, when host

Jin Xing is mentioned, her emoji appears. When Deng Chao is shown eating voraciously while Chen He's off-screen voice is heard, Chen He's cartoon avatar appears on screen.

1.3 Danmaku (Bullet Comments)

Danmaku originally referred to the dense network of bullets on a battlefield but now primarily describes real-time commentary subtitles that fly across video streaming sites. Danmaku is a product of sharing and interactive culture under the internet model, originating from online anime and later popularized across major video platforms as a key feature of online video. TV variety shows occasionally introduce this visual effect to create an illusion of mass commentary.

2. Functions of Subtitle Packaging

2.1 Supplementary and Explanatory Function

Compared with visuals, subtitles offer more direct and effective explanation. Entertainment programs emphasize storytelling, and reality shows in particular rely on subtitles to connect and supplement narrative elements such as time, location, game rules, and character identities. In *Running Man*, for instance, reminders about the name-tag ripping rules and character identity annotations appear repeatedly. Subtitles can also provide supplementary narration for specific plot points. In Season 3 of *Where Are We Going, Dad?*, when Hu Jun talks with his son Nuo Yi in the car but Nuo Yi remains in his own world, the decorative subtitle “Silence speaks louder than words” appears, perfectly capturing the subtext. Explanatory subtitle design must be based on visual and audio content and consider the audience perspective. Unnecessary decorative subtitles or text that influences audience subjectivity should be avoided, as screen-filling subtitles only create 反感 and disrupt program rhythm.

2.2 Decorative Function

Subtitles possess strong decorative power. Decorative subtitles that align with content can enhance visual aesthetics, fill visual voids, and complete compositional harmony. Subtitles function as ornaments for television visuals, outlining and depicting layout, composition, and structure. Different demographic audiences receive different layout styles. Relatively speaking, highly entertaining programs are “hard-hit areas” for decorative subtitles, with some 90-minute episodes containing up to a thousand screens of decorative text. Programs with rigorous, solemn styles feature lower subtitle density and may even abandon graphic subtitles altogether. Ultimately, the decorative function serves program content, and formal creation must not interfere with content delivery. Therefore, decorative subtitles must align with visual style without overwhelming the primary content.

2.3 Rendering and Enhancement Function

Diversified subtitles can heighten atmosphere, render themes, and strengthen narrative. Brightly colored fonts, exaggerated graphics, and cute animations serve as powerful tools for advancing plot and facilitating emotional transitions. Rendering subtitles do not interfere with audience comprehension of program intentions and emotions but rather emphasize the conveyed feelings. For example, when Wong Cho-lam in *Running Man* imitates host Jin Xing's classic "perfect" gesture, Jin Xing's cartoon image appears. Effective rendering requires subtitle designers' holistic understanding of program emotion and rhythm, as well as layered emotional control rather than uniform emphasis. Rendering subtitles must be purposeful and highlight key points; otherwise, special effects filling the screen will obscure audience vision and drown out the program's genuine emotional expression.

3. Creation Process and Methods

Subtitle creation constitutes a sub-textual narrative practice in film and television with considerable creative freedom. Strictly speaking, there are no fixed creative rules or requirements, and subtitle texts vary widely depending on creators' age, cultural background, aesthetic preferences, and creative style. Subtitle creation and production require systematic participation in program narrative expression based on holistic program understanding and design. Otherwise, it risks becoming narrative interference or visually ornate but superficial patches.

3.1 Creation Process

Subtitle creation for variety shows is a massive systematic project completed by teams with different divisions of labor, including copywriting, art design, and post-production. Subtitle packaging creation involves both copywriting, which lays the foundation, and visual presentation design, which ensures program style unity and serves a decorative function.

3.1.1 Interpreting the Narrative Text Variety show subtitle creation differs from that of films, TV dramas, or documentaries. Dialogue subtitles constitute only one part of variety show subtitle creation; far more subtitles are created "out of nothing" beyond the visuals. This requires subtitle teams to maintain macro-level narrative comprehension and deep emotional insight. Variety shows have short production cycles, and subtitle creation proceeds simultaneously with filming and editing. Unlike films or TV dramas that can be created holistically from scripts, variety show subtitles are developed by observing the overall style of the series and interpreting 1-2 episodes before reaching conclusions through communication with directors about overall style, plot conflicts, and visual effects. Subtitle teams also build subtitle material libraries based on main actors' "memes," their social media presence, and program tone. Consequently, vari-

ety show subtitle creation has a short shelf life, reflecting the fast-food culture characteristics of variety show production.

3.1.2 Determining the Creative Direction After deeply interpreting the program, the subtitle team leader must discuss overall subtitle packaging style and creative direction with the program director and producer, who also provide corresponding requirements. First, the copywriting style must be determined—whether light and fresh, heavy-handed, sharp and cynical, or subtle and brain-teasing. For instance, web-native variety shows like *U Can U Bibi* target younger audiences and allow more liberal subtitle approaches, while programs like *Where Are We Going, Dad?* adopt a light, cute route. Second, the functions subtitles will serve must be identified, including enriching storylines, highlighting conflicts, explaining game rules, shaping character traits, and decorating visuals. Third, subtitle density must be determined based on program style and narrative development. Generally, web-native programs feature high-frequency, high-density subtitles, while TV programs use them more sparingly for 画龙点睛 effect. Finally, the visual design style must be established, including font size, typeface, color scheme, graphic coordination, and motion effects.

3.1.3 Completing Sample Clips and Refinement After confirming the subtitle style with the director team, the subtitle creation group collaborates with the post-production editing team to produce 10-20 minute subtitle samples for director and producer review. Once approved, formal production and compositing begin. Finally, based on subtitles for 1-2 episodes, the entire program’s subtitle visual system is designed, forming templates and production standards for decorative subtitles.

3.2 Creation Methods

Subtitle creation employs two methods: online creation and offline creation. Simply put, online creation involves the subtitle team working directly on the unified editing project timeline alongside the post-production team, facing core creative personnel including pre-production directors, post-production directors, and producers simultaneously. Offline creation involves the subtitle team receiving roughly edited program samples or working directly on screenshots of samples, then delivering completed work to post-production. Online creation enables efficient communication about subtitle design and allows timely adjustments and revisions, but occupies editing resources simultaneously with post-production and may hinder team coordination. Offline creation allows greater creative initiative and freedom but suffers from low communication efficiency with the director team, making revisions frequent.

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