ResearchGate

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324921121

AN INTRODUCTION TO SUBTITLING: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES

Article *in* International Journal of Comparative Literature and Translation Studies · March 2016

CITATIONS
0

READS
8,237

1 author:

Bilal Khalid Khalaf
University of Anbar

5 PUBLICATIONS **5** CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:

Why and how the Translator Constantly Makes Decisions about Cultural Meaning View project

Traditional and Inquiry-Based Learning Pedagogy View project

All content following this page was uploaded by Bilal Khalid Khalaf on 03 May 2018.

The user has requested enhancement of the downloaded file.

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE, LITERATURE AND TRANSLATION STUDIES (IJELR)
A QUARTERLY, INDEXED, REFEREED AND PEER REVIEWED OPEN ACCESS INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL
http://www.ijelr.in

RESEARCH ARTICLE

INTERNATIONAL STANDARD SERIAL NUMBER INDIA
2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

Vol. 3. Issue 1.,2016 (Jan-Mar.)

AN INTRODUCTION TO SUBTITLING: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES

BILAL KHALID KHALAF
Senior Researcher / Translation Studies
University of Anbar, Al Anbar, Iraq

BILAL KHALID KHALAF

ABSTRACT
This study attempts to identify the main challenges for the translators during subtitling process, and what are the presented solutions 'strategies' by theorists to overcome them. In order to have full understanding of subtitling, it will start with defining what is subtitling? its types, classifications and then exploring the challenges which translators encounter during the subtitling process. Later on, it will show briefly how the subtitling related to Skopos functional theory. After all, the suggested strategies in the field of subtitling to overcome these challenges will be discussed like, Gottlieb (1992) and Schjoldager (2008) with related concepts.

©KY PUBLICATIONS

INTRODUCTION

From the 1980s onward, the interest in translation studies moved from the source text as the main factor in the transfer process between languages in the target text and its function on the receptors. So, it cannot be dented that translation as linguistic activity, it is a cultural one as well and the texts' function may be changed when they are translated (Cintas and Remael, 2010, p. 145). Translation has always been presented as the central part of communication between languages and cultures. Translation as a field of study is developed to formulate a new form of screen translation (O'Connell, 2007).

Globalization movement includes languages and cultures in the new world, such as films produced in English and subtitled for other languages in the Middle East. The rapid development in the field of technology has its effects on presenting more information on audiovisual format, such as CD, DVD, etc. which create interaction between language, culture and technology. Among these forms of development is subtitled which has been the key for communication with a wider range of viewers than before. Gottlieb (2001, p. 124) states that 'these DVDs provide options for either vertical (same language) subtitling of use to the hearing impaired or diagonal (different language) subtitling'.

What is subtitling?

Subtitling is a type of translation, particularly in the audiovisual filed which includes dubbing, voice-over and audio description. In other words, the audiovisual language of TV programs or films transferred with certain forms to be understandable by target audiences whom they are not familiar with its source language.

(Adopted from Graffitti Studio, 2014)

Baker (1998) states that subtitling firstly used in Europe since 1929 when the first talkies reached Europe. What is important is to give some theoretical clear definition of what is subtitling before going further in the challenges and strategies. Shuttleworth and Cowie (1997, p.161) define subtitling as 'the process of providing synchronized captions for film and television dialogue'. O'Connell (2007, p.169) defines subtitling as 'supplementing the original voice sound track by adding written text on the screen'. So, the main role for subtitling is to facilitate an access for the foreign viewers on audiovisual product in a foreign language.

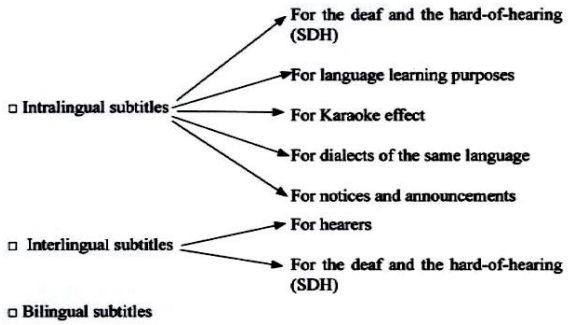
The criteria of subtitling

Subtitling differs from the translation of written texts. So, how it differs? Tornqvist (1998, p. 10) in his book *The problem of subtitling* mentioned four main differences between translating written texts and subtitling, which can be stated as the criteria of subtitling field and he states;

1- The reader of translated text does not compare the source text with the target, while in the subtitle, this comparison happens automatically especially if the viewer speaks the source language.
2- The translator of written text has more space to add explanations, footnotes, etc. when there is something difficult in the source text while the subtitler cannot do this.
3- The inter-textual translation involves translation from written text to written one, but subtitling involves the translation from spoken language into written text.
4- In subtitling, extended massages have to be condensed to subtitling requirements which written texts have more space to present them.

Types of subtitling

Theorists divide subtitling into three main types according to their linguistic point of view. Dries (1995) divides subtitling into the following types as shown in the diagram.



(Adopted from Dries, 1995)

Cintas and Remael (2010, p.19-21) add another two classification for subtitling;

1. According to time:

A. **Prepared subtitle** (offline subtitling): It is a complete work which is done before running the program or broadcast.

B. **Live Subtitling** (online subtitling): It can be done by interpreters who have a special skill in typing (Stenographer) or sometimes it is done by software of speech recognition during machine translation process.

2.According to technical parameters:

A. **Opened subtitle**: It is a stacked subtitle to the image and cannot be removed from it.

B. **Close subtitle**: It is the subtitle which can be add or removed from the program according to the desire of viewers.

Challenges

All types of translation have their own challenges 'difficulties'. Subtitling as a part of this field has its own formal (quantitative) and contextual (qualitative) restrictions. The textual restrictions are those which imposed on the subtitle by the visual context, while the formal deals with the way of presenting the subtitle (Gottlieb, 1992). Karamitroglon (2000, p.104) adds that 'the number of possible audiovisual translation problems is endless and a list that would count for each one of them can never be finite'.

There are many challenges which surround the subtitling process and it can be classified into three main types (Technical, Cultural and Linguistic) challenges.

A. Technical Challenges.

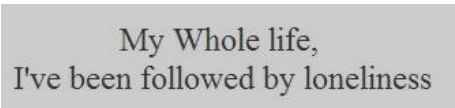
According to Leppihalme (1994) and Cintas and Remael (2010, p.19-21), this is the prominent type of challenges in subtitling process which causes some restrictions on the work of the translator unlike translating written texts. They classified them into:

I. **The space**: Translators are restricted with limited number of characters through subtitling process which are about (37 + , -) characters per-line with maximum two lines for one image. This number of characters may slightly differ from one language to another. The used syllables effect on this number such as using (mw) takes more space than using syllables like (li).

II. **Time**: Another technical limit that the allowed time for subtitle is no longer than six seconds on the screen, i.e. the content has to be cut down to fit the limits of characters as well as the time of shown the subtitle on screen. This may have an effect on how the viewers will be able to catch the subtitle and understand the content. Therefore, the correct word choice to present the content with possible limited number of words may help in this issue.

III. **Spotting**: The subtitle on the screen has to be carefully matched with the dialogue. However, subtitling may not include the dialogue of the characters or narrators only, but it may include other meaningful signs, letters or any other written words (Cintas and Remael, 2010).

IV. **Position on screen**: Pictures on the screen made of 720 pixels wide by 576 pixels high and the subtitle must be positioned between 10% from each frame edge to be in the central and at the bottom of the screen such in the following example;



(Cintas and Remael, 2010, p.87)

I. **Font**: The standard font type, size and colour have effects on the subtitles whether the character will be with or without shadowed background like;

A. Cultural Challenges.

Cultural bound elements present an extra challenge for the subtitler. The differences between cultural norms of different countries rise up through using language and translating from one language to another, especially during subtitling because it deals with audiovisual materials (Toury, 1995, p.38). All of this can be represented through the adopted style of the subtitler like using domestication, foreignization, functionalism, etc. for example names of famous places, characters, etc. which the audience is familiar or not familiar with;

Scottish high lands الاراضي الاسكتلندية العالية

Othello….عطيل

Smurfs … سنافر

Humor presents the most popular form of cultural challenges for subtitlers because sometimes laugher is more important than the meaning in certain TV series like American series 'Friends'. Humor can be classified into international jokes which can be translated literally and it is easy to understand. The local or national jokes and their sub community jokes represent the main cultural challenge for the translators such as;

The Irish are the blacks of Europe,

and the Dubliners are the blacks of Ireland,

the north side of Dublin are the blacks of Dublin.

(Cintas and Remael, 2010, p.33)

Taboo and swearing words are generally cultural related words which may be kept in some subtitles and deleted from others for many reasons for example it is forbidden in the target culture (bloody swear), heavy loaded expressions, etc.. Another example is the representation of people from particular field or who hold a certain position like 'MP' in Britain, the person who represent people in House of Commons, but in other countries they use 'Deputy' instead of 'MP' to refer to that person (Cintas and Remael, 2010, p.37).

B. Linguistic Challenges.

Cintas and Remael (2010, p.190-96) shed the light on the linguistic challenges which face the subtitlers and state that the linguistic choice in subtitling is not random, in other words, characters in audiovisual programs or films convey certain effects through their grammar, syntax, lexicon, annotation, etc. which carries connotative meaning in addition to the denotative one.

There are many linguistic constrains which related to subtitling. Cintas and Remael (2010, p.200-24) classify them into;

A. Accents and pronunciation which require special experience or skill for the subtitler to deal with them. For example;

I think I take my chicken into the lounge, ok?....Excusita, I eat my tchicken in ze lounche.

(Ibid., p.220)

- Dialects which are related to certain geographical areas like, Mancunain dialect.
- Idiolect which is a personal manner of speaking for some people.
- Sociolects which is related to a certain economic status like, south Manchester.

B. Other types of linguistic challenges are the grammatical mistakes in dialogue which have to be corrected in the subtitles as in the following example;

I ain't got no parents…..I have none of parents

(Cintas and Remael, 2010, p.223)

Skopos and subtitling

Before starting talking on the adopted strategies for subtitling let us clarify what is the purpose of subtitle? No one can deny that the subtitle is done for a specific function which is to make the audiovisual materials understandable by the audience whether they are hard hearing or from foreign languages. Here

comes the role of the Skopos when the subtitler implies a specific function on his/ her subtitling for a specific language audience.

Schjoldager (2008, p.166) states that the Skopos 'function' cannot be the same in the source 'the audiovisual' and the target 'subtitle'. Kristensen (2009) states that the sender of the source text does not have the same target audiences. Therefore, she insists that the Skopos can help the translator to decide which macrostrategy can be applied to certain subtitling translation.

Furthermore, the source may have different functions within the same language as well as in many other languages '… the designated Skopos will determine which one is more appropriate in a given situation' for specific subtitle (Schjoldager, 2009, p.152). All of this shows that subtitler has the main role in applying specific function within the subtitle for a certain purpose.

Strategies

There are many strategies for dealing with subtitling challenges. The first attempt to put standard strategies to overcome subtitling challenges was by Vinary and Darbelnet (1958) who displayed impressive subtitling strategies which developed later on by other scholars (Leppihalme, 1994, p.94). Subtitling strategies are classified into two levels, the macro-strategies and micro-strategies. Macro-strategies formulate the overall frame work of the translation, while the micro-strategies deal with individual translation problems on word and sentence levels (Schjoldages, 2008, p.89).

Macro-strategies

As presented previously, the skopos focuses on the function of the target text. Thus, the macro-strategies help the translator to decide how to translate the source text. Schjoldages (2008, p.70) states that there are two types of macro-strategies; the source oriented micro strategy which focuses on the source text and the target oriented which focuses on the target text. She represents the criteria of the macro-strategies as in the following table;

Source-text oriented macrostrategy	Target-text oriented macrostrategy
focus on the source-text form and contents	focus on the target-text effect
Communication instead of somebody else	Mediation between primary parties in a communication
Overt translation	Covert translation

Thomsen (2009) adds that if the subtitler 'translator' will focus on the form and content of the source such as in documentaries then the translation is source oriented. If the subtitler focus on the effects of the text more than the semantic meaning then the translation is target oriented. The subtitler as mediator between cultures or even in the case of intralingual subtitling has to convey to the target audiences the same information of the source and not that it had been adapted for the target receptors. For example, if American TV series from New York are subtitled to fit Danish culture, the translator has to find the equivalent street names, Cafés, etc. (Thomsen, 2009, P.23).

Micro-strategies

Once the macro-strategy had been decided, the level of micro-strategy can be shown up. There are many strategies on this level adopted by professional translators. Gottlieb (1992) proposes ten detailed subtitling strategies on the micro level as shown in the following table;

Types of strategy	Character of translation
1) Extension	Expanded expression, adequate rendering (culture-specific references)
2) Paraphrase	Altered expression, adequate content (non-visualized language-specific items)
3) Transfer	Full expression, adequate rendering (slow, unmarked speech)
4) Imitation	Identical expression, equivalent rendering (proper nouns, international greetings etc.)
5) Transcription	Non standard expression, adequate rendering (D; intended speech defects)
6) Dislocation	Differing expression, adjusted content (musical or visualized language-specific item)
7) Condensation	Condensed expression, concise rendering (mid-tempo speech with some redundancy)
8) Decimation	Abridged expression, reduced content (fast speech, low redundancy speech)
9) Deletion	Omitted expression, no verbal content (fast speech with high redundancy)
10) Resignation	Deviant expression, distorted content (incomprehensible or 'untranslatable' speech)

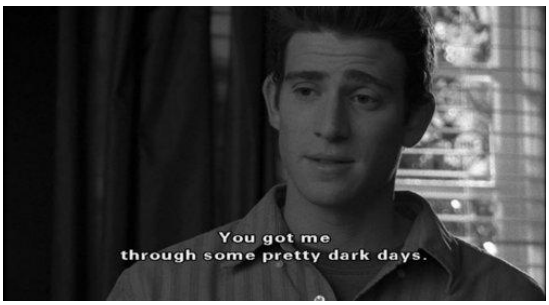
(Adopted from Gottlieb, 1992, p.76)

According to this table Gottlieb (1992) proposed that items (1-7) provides close translation for the segments involved. In addition, item no. (7) presents the proto type of subtitling, while items (8-9) can be used when semantic or stylistic contents do not fit to the subtitling process. Lastly, the resignation occurs in all types of verbal transmission. His proposed strategies are helpful in understanding why the translator has chosen to translate in a certain method.

Marfa (1999) runs a case study on Gottlieb's proposed strategies for subtitling films from English to Spanish language and Maryam (2012) did another case study for applying Gottlieb's strategies in subtitling Black English movies. All of these studies approved the success of those strategies in overcoming subtitling challenges on the micro level.

Moreover, Schjoldager (2008, p.92) develops Gottlieb's strategies and proposes twelve types of subtitling strategies on the micro level as the following;

1. **Direct transfer:** This strategy does not translate the source text words, but transfer them directly to the subtitle such as subtitling within the same language for hard hearing as in the following example;



2. **Calque:** This strategy presents translation for the source text words with very close structure of it. Sometimes it results the target text sounds 'unidiomatic' (Ibid, p.94) like;

Scottish high lands

Calque: الأراضي الاسكتلندية العالية

3. **Direct translation:** This strategy does not need for explanation because it represents a direct transfer of the source meaning to the target.

4. **Oblique translation:** It includes some similarity to direct translation, but with transference of whole source context. For example;

5. **Explicitation:** This strategy can make the implicit information in the source text as possible as explicit in the target one.
6. **Paraphrase:** It gives more freedom for the translator to formulate the meaning of the target according to his preference and preserving the main content of the source.
7. **Condensation:** This strategy allows the translator to shorten the subtitle according to the time and space limits to overcome the technical challenges. The condensation is sub-classified into two types;
   A- Condensation and reformulating at word level and it is classified into six types as showing in the appendix no. (1) with examples.
   B- Condensation and reformulating at sentence level and it is classified into nine types as showing in the appendix no. (2) with examples.
8. **Adaption:** This is used when source text contains word or reference which does not exist in the target for certain linguistic or cultural causes such as;

(RL Gang with Arabic subtitles)

9. **Addition:** It is not used widely in subtitling only when the translator wants to add something to the source text.
10. **Deletion:** This strategy is applied when an element from the source text is excluded for some technical, cultural or linguistic constraints. Deletion is sub- classified into two types:
    a. Deletion or omission at word level as showing in the examples in appendix no. (3).
    b. Deletion or omission at sentence level as showing in the examples in appendix no. (4).
11. **Substitution:** The translators use this strategy when they need to change the source meaning with another different one in the target. The translators do not prefer to use this strategy to keep the target 'subtitle' close to the source unless they do it for certain function.
12. **Permutation:** This strategy is applied when the translator includes some of the source items in the target for certain difficulties. This can be seen in humoristic elements and wordplays.

It can be concluded that subtitlers have to be aware of some extra concepts in order to present good works which can be classified with professional level. These concepts are:

- **The concept of culture:** The subtitler has to be aware of the cultural issues in his\her translation as a part of mediation between culture with full understanding and respect for their differences.

- **The use of translation strategies:** This concept varies at the macro and micro levels considering the sociocultural and ideological stylistic effects.
- **Norms Linking concept:** It is important for the translators to remember the link between translation norms and technical constraints especially with recent development in technology in internet downloading of films and subtitling software.
- **Written and oral concept:** This can be presented in the sociolinguistic role and the responsibility of subtitler for using writing conventions in subtitling which are adopted in specific language.

All of this shows that translation studies help to develop audiovisual researches by bringing them through relevance theory, Skopos theory, etc. to overthrow all standing difficulties on the way of subtitling.

REFERENCES

Baker, M. (Ed.). (1998). *Routledge encyclopedia of translation studies*. London: Routledge.

Cintas, D and Remael, A. (2010). Audiovisual translation: Subtitling. Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing.

Dries, J. (1995). *Dubbing and Subtitling: Guidelines for Production and Distribution.* Dü-sseldorf, Germany. European Institute for the Media.

Gottlieb, Henrik (1992). Subtitling – A New University Discipline. In: Dollerup, Cay and Ladegaard, Anne (red). Teaching Translation and Interpreting – Training, Talent and Experience. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Gottlieb, Henrik (1997): *Subtitles, Translation & Idioms.* Copenhagen: Centre for Translatio Studies, University of Copenhagen.

Gottlieb, Henrik (2001). Anglicism and TV subtitling in an amplified world. In Y. Gambier & H. Gottlieb (Eds.), *Multimedia translation: concepts, practices, and research* (pp.249-258). Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Karamitroglou, F. (2000). *Towards a methodology for the investigation of norms in audiovisual translation: The choice between subtitling and revoicing in Greece*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Kristensen, N. (2009). Available from :http://theses.asb.dk/projekter/research/oversaettelse_af_ sangtekster(219227)/ [Accessed May 12 2014].

Leppihalme, Ritva (1994): *Culture Bumps: On the Translation of Allusions*. Helsinki: University of Helsinki Publishing.

O'Connell, E. (2007). Screen Translation. In P. Kuhiwczak & K. Littau (eds.), *A companion to translation studies* (pp.120-133). Toronto: Multilingual Matters Ltd.

Schjoldager, A., (2008, 2009). *Understanding Translation*. Denmark: Academia Publications.

Shuttleworth, M., & Cowie, M. (1997). *Dictionary of translation studies*. London: St. Jerome. Publishing Company.

Thomsen, Jane E. (2009). *A Comparative analysis of macro- and micro-strategies in subtitling and dubbing*. Available from: http://theses.asb.dk/projekter/research/shrek%28217808%29/[Accessed May 13 2014].

Törnqvist, E., (1998). Ingmar Bergman Abroad: The Problems of Subtitling. Amsterdam: Vossiuspers AUP.

Toury, Gideon (1995): *Descriptive Translation Studies – And Beyond*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

View publication stats