

Translation of culture specific verbal features in T.V programmes

Madjda CHELLI
Mentouri University
Constantine - Algeria -
supplication06@hotmail.com

Abstract:

With the exponential development in media technology and with the specific role of the screen as a primary vehicle of interaction between different peoples and cultures and languages of the world, audiovisual translation (AVT) has gained more importance in the last few years. AVT became one of the commonest forms of translation encountered in everyday life in contemporary societies.

Key words: Translation; Audiovisual; Culture; T.V programmes; Subtitling; Literal translation; Transcription; Meaning; Source audience; Target audience; Semantic; Pragmatic.

Introduction:

With the exponential development in media technology and with the specific role of the screen as a primary vehicle of interaction between different peoples and cultures and languages of the world, audiovisual translation (AVT) has gained more importance in the last few years. According to Petit (2004: 25): ' "screen" is a

primary vehicle for this interaction [between different peoples and cultures] and as a result the audiovisual translator has an increasingly important role to play'. AVT became one of the commonest forms of translation encountered in everyday life in contemporary societies. The term covers subtitling, dubbing, voice-over, subtitling the hard-of-hearing and surtitling for the opera and the theatre.

I) - Subtitling:

a) Definition:

A frequent modality of AVT is subtitling which is according to Shuttleworth and Cowie (1997: 161): 'the process of providing synchronized captions for film and television dialogue'.

Petit (2004: 26), from his part, provided a more explicit definition: 'Subtitling transposes spoken dialogue into written text the form of one or two lines at the bottom of the screen'

As to Szarkowska (2005), she further stated that subtitling is primarily done to the benefit of the target audience: "... Supplying translation dialogue into the target language in the form of synchronization on the screen is the form that alters the source text to the benefit of the target audience to experience the foreign and be aware of it".

Translation of culture specific verbal features in T.V programmes

Gottlieb (1992: 163) referred to different forms of subtitling: intralingual (within one language) and interlingual (between two languages); open (not optional shown with the film) and closed (optional shown via teletext). Television subtitling is prototypically interlingual and open (ie) SL linguistic material is transformed into TL subtitles that are broadcast simultaneously with the programme.

b) Characteristics:

Subtitling, as an AVT modality, is not expensive or time consuming. It involves a preservation of the original soundtrack in the form of two lines with a length set of 33 characters maximum. This modality can be used as an aid to language learning. The hard-of-hearing, deaf, immigrants and tourists are categories of people that can benefit from subtitling as is the case with the language learners.

However, this doesn't go without its disadvantages, for the subtitles clearly contaminate the image. Furthermore, there is a greater loss of information due to the compression of the original oral text and a distraction from the image since the viewers' attention will be split between the image, soundtrack and subtitle.

c) Constraints:

AVT involves both technical and contextual constraints also called formal and textual constraints (Gottlieb 1992: 164).

Formal constraints start from the very insertion of subtitles, technically called spotting, which requires very specific software tools. The division of subtitles is a long hard task that requires a lot of thought and dexterity as one must be able to – or at least try to – convey all the sense of the foreign text in the translated version. Cueing or timing is again a complex task that requires a synchronized piece of work at the same time as allowing for the subtitle to remain in the image for long enough to enable it to be fully read. These are space and time factors. Textual constraints, however, are those imposed on subtitles by the visual context of the film (or TV programme).

In fact, the visibility of the subtitle makes it an easy prey to criticism especially to viewers who have a command of both source and target languages. The original soundtrack in subtitling is the touchstone against which comparisons might flaw. Shochat and Stam (1985: 46) said in this respect that: subtitles offer the pretext for a linguistic game of 'spot the error'.

II) - The subtitle: a complex AV text:

As a viewer and even as a translation teacher, I frequently make the comment that this is a bad translation, subtitling though an objective thought instantly reveals the complexity of the audiovisual text. An audiovisual text which has different components: verbal and non verbal information, open and inferred meaning, rise in intonation and gestures accompanying the utterance. Thus, the textual constraints we talked about in the previous section are not purely linguistic; since the text (any text) can not be approached in isolation from extralinguistic factors. Gambier (2006: 06) referred to these as semiotic resources: 'No text is, strictly, monomodal, Traditional texts, hypertexts, screen texts combine different semiotic resources. Films and TV programmes co-deploy gesture, gaze, movement, visual images, sound, colours, proxemics, oral and written language and so on'. He further added that ' the traditional concept of linear and visual text cannot account for the range of multisemiotic textual phenomena'.

In the same context, Petit (2004: 26) talked about visual, auditory and verbal factors converging to make the message: ' what is said is only part of the message [] the way it is said, together with visual and auditory markers, form an integral part of the message'.

Chaume (2004) from his part, stressed this notion of the complexity of the AV text, which is to be taken into account by the audiovisual translator. He provided the example of the TV programmes, as a text type characterized by a complex mode of discourse, stating that this inherent characteristic makes it different from other genres in which the translator is allowed focus his attention on verbal discourse only.

III) - Culture in the Subtitle:

It is clear that in all the components of the AV text (here subtitle) culture could not be absent. In this respect Armelino (2008) said: 'the way in which people speak, construct their sentences, choose their vocabulary (according to the formal /informal situation they are in, to their geographical origin and so on) reveals much about their culture'. Armelino provided a three fold categorization of culture. The first category includes historical facts, people, objects... etc. the second category includes all the customs, usages, social structures, institutions, lifestyle and morality. As to the third one, it is about myths and traditions.

Taking all these specifications into account, the source text may be strongly rooted in the source culture. Due to the limited scope of this paper, we will focus only on culture-specific verbal features in subtitles and we will attempt to answer the following question:

Translation of culture specific verbal features in T.V programmes

How culture-specific verbal features are rendered in subtitles? Here I share Armelino's (2008) view that this is a very challenging task: ' One of the most challenging tasks for all translators is how to render culture-bound elements in subtitles'. This is a challenging; but important task. The European Association for Studies in Screen Translation ESIST in its code of good subtitling practice insists that translation quality must be high with due consideration of all idiomatic and cultural nuances.

To cope with this challenging task, Chaume (2004: 844) suggested the production of the same effect: ' And, precisely the main function of audiovisual translation is to produce a similar effect on the target culture audience as the source text produced on the source culture audience'.

One direct application of this suggestion might be the translation of humour which is an essential part of our everyday communication. According to Spanakaki (2007) humour: ' is rooted in a specific cultural and linguistic context; but it is also an indispensable part of intercultural communication and mass entertainment'. So producing similar effect, here, sounds reasonable. The humour sequence, thus, has to be concise and clear because if it is bizarre, the viewers will not have the opportunity to process and enjoy it after the subtitle is

flashed off screen. (For further details c.f Dimitris Asimakoulas, 2004: XLIX, 4).

But, can we talk about Chaume's production of similar effect for other culture-specific verbal elements such as names of objects, cultural references, idioms ... etc?

Furthermore, in a subtitled version, it is clear that the TV programme is foreign as we hear the original dialogue, read the subtitles and watch the picture i.e. the cultural signs transmitted by visual information complement the verbal subtext in the source text (Petit:2004). So to what extent does the audiovisual translator mediate between the verbal and visual culture-specific features?

The following part will try to practically answer both questions.

IV) - Rendering culture specific verbal elements in subtitles (case of a TV programme on MBC 4: Oprah)

a) Selection of corpus:

The selection of the corpus was neither arbitrary nor purely subjective. I tried to appease the constraints specific to subtitling so that they will not contribute to the translator's solution:

Translation of culture specific verbal features in T.V programmes

1- TV programme somehow a neutral genre as it allows a certain amount of culture and is at the same time impact-free. ' the genre creates a certain style of expression and consequently affects how the translator transposes the original dialogue congruency is to be established between the character we see and what (S)he is purported to be saying in the translation' (Petit: 2004: 26). Kovacic (1998: 127) in (Petit: 2004: 26) further explained the idea ' the genre partly determines the linguistic register to be used '.

2- In a TV programme, the speakers are closest to ' being themselves ' the conversations are spontaneous and natural; a TV programme may inform and entertain.

3- In a TV programme, the dialogue is the nucleus and thus more attention is to be paid to its translation.

4- In a TV programme (especially the one we chose Oprah); there is relatively slow succession of cuts and camera movements, so there is no specific challenge for the audiovisual translator.

5- Oprah (the presenter of the show) speaks relatively slowly and only one theme is broached in one show.

b) Presentation and analysis of Corpus:

According to Pedersen (2005), there are many strategies used by audiovisual translators in subtitling such as the use of an official equivalent, retention, specification, direct translation, generalization, substitution and omission. Though these categories are overlapping and subjective, they might prove an interesting starting-point for assessing the transfer and loss of information in subtitling. Thus, we will use these categories for the analysis of the present corpus wherever possible.

1) - Rendering culture-bound verbal elements: The following table includes the source example, its subtitled version, and the strategy used by the subtitler followed by a comment on the translation made:

English version	Subtitled version in Arabic	Strategy used
' Big Give '	برنامج ذا 'بيغ غيف'	Transcription of the name

The ' Big Give ' is a TV programme which is based on a game in which contestants are given a sum of money to be distributed to people in less than 48 hours (under special condition: no more than 100\$ per one person, no more than 500\$ per area, ...). This is a culture specific name as it refers to a TV programme in a specific source culture and directed to a source audience.

Translation of culture specific verbal features in T.V programmes

The name of the programme was transcribed in Arabic between brackets before the transcription, it was mentioned that this is a TV programme. The viewers were obliged to wait for few minutes before they could understand the nature of the programme when explanations of conditions of the game are presented together with live pictures of the contestants doing the task and commenting on their behaviour. The slogan of the is the transcription of 'بيغ غيف' programme later revealed that the 'Big Give'. When we read sequence of words, we assume that at its end we will understand it. What happened, here, is that the viewers deciphered the transcription looking for a possible meaning (i.e.) wasted time. Then discovering that that was in vain, they have to follow the 'now' more rapid rhythm of subtitles change. This led to a delayed understanding and a feeling of embarrassment on the part of the viewers. The transcription strategy used by the AV translator might be explained by the lack of an official equivalent. This could have been saved if a functional translation is provided instead. I suggest برنامج أعط بسخاء to translate the 'Big Give' because the programme is based on stimulating the contestants to think about possible targets as fast as possible. The semantic translation العطاء الكبير will introduce the whole issue, but ambiguities about ' who will do ', ' to whom ', ' why it is " big " ' will remain unresolved.

Notice that the famous programme's title the ' biggest loser ' had an Arabic version which is الرابح الأكبر (i.e.) the 'biggest winner' which is a better translation than the literal translation الخاسر الأكبر as the collocation أكبر + الخاسر in Arabic can in no way refer to winning at the end of the game; whereas أكبر + الرابح has this reference to winning at the end.

English version	Subtitled version in Arabic	Strategy used
GPS system	جهاز تحديد المواقع	Expansion of the abbreviation

GPS system was translated into Arabic by the expansion of the abbreviation into the semantic meanings of each letter. 'G ' stands for guiding; ' P ' for position and ' S ' for system. This produces the Arabic naming جهاز تحديد المواقع this was a successful strategy because the Arab audience is not acquainted with the abbreviation and very few are acquainted with the apparatus in question so this served to introduce the concept as a whole into the target culture.

English version	Subtitled version in Arabic	Strategy used
PMI	تأمين الرهن الشخصي	Expansion of the abbreviation

PMI is the abbreviation of Private Mortgage Insurance which is clearly a culture-specific name as it

Translation of culture specific verbal features in T.V programmes

refers to a specific institution in the source culture. The Arabic translation was an expansion of the abbreviation into 'تأمين الرهن الشخصي'. This is, as well, successful as the Arab audience is not acquainted with the abbreviation and in reality with the whole concept. In fact, the guest of the show tried to explain the characteristics of this PMI to the source audience. And one of the audience asked her to clarify some points, as they were linked to economic concepts.

English version	Subtitled version in Arabic	Strategy used
Obesity epidemic	وباء البدانة	Literal translation

This example ' Obesity epidemic ' is an expression which has specific connotations in the source culture. The use of 'epidemic' specially refers to a widespread and contagious nature. This can be explained by the high percentage of people who suffer from obesity in America. The Arabic rendering was a failure because the connotations of the expression are not known by the target audience. It is a fact that obesity is a phenomenon in USA; but not in the Arab world at least to the same extent (may be because we are so poor!). We, rather, consider obesity an illness. Thus, the Arabic rendering will be داء البدانة with the specification contained in the

English image that it is widespread in America (i.e.)
المستفحل في أمريكا

English version	Subtitled version in Arabic	Strategy used
Song	————	Deletion

The Song at the beginning of the show was not translated. This might be due to synchronization, space and time constraints. However, there were parts, which were relatively slow, and could have been summarized. We think this is important especially that the first five minutes of the dialogue were about the criticism to the wordings of the first sentence which is to be repeated throughout the whole song: الطيبون وحدهم يموتون صغارا
Only goods die young'. Thus, complete deletion, here, was not appropriate.

English version	Subtitled version in Arabic	Strategy used
rehab	مركز لإعادة التأهيل	expansion

This example is a shortening of rehabilitation center; a place where alcohol addicts are helped to recover was translated by مركز لإعادة التأهيل. The Arabic translation has special connotations that it is a center for young criminals who are under age to be sent to jail. A better solution will be to add: مركز لإعادة تأهيل المدمنين

Translation of culture specific verbal features in T.V programmes

English version	Subtitled version in Arabic	Strategy used
Rock and Roll	روك اند رول	transcription

This type of music typical to the American culture is translated by روك اند رول i.e. a transcription. The name is universally famous and thus the transcription rendered the meaning easily.

English version	Subtitled version in Arabic	Strategy used
The comfort table	ذا كامفورت تايبيل	transcription

The book's title was transcribed in the subtitle. The time spent in deciphering the meaning will hinder subsequent understanding. This could have saved if a functional translation has been opted for. I suggest مائدة الهناء as the last word has a double reference to a famous TV programme بالهناء والشفاء and one of the nuances of comfort

English version	Subtitled version in Arabic	Strategy used
To have a drink	احتساء الشراب	substitution

To have a drink was translated by احتساء الشراب as drinking is forbidden in our culture. In fact احتساء Collocates with coffee and has the connotation of

meeting and talking. As to الشراب it is a general word that escapes the taboo nature of alcohol and refers to any drink. The Arabic translation, then, escaped the direct taboo expression; but left room for a possibly true interpretation.

English version	Subtitled version in Arabic	Strategy used
That's what drink is good for	وهنا تتضح فائدة الشرب	Semantic translation

The humour in this example was successfully rendered due to its connection with previous talk about drinking. Billy Joel (the famous Rock and Roll singer) said that meeting his wife was the positive aspect of drinking; opposing in that way all the negative aspects and the reference to rehab Oprah talked about. The viewers could understand the humour and the semantic translation was a successful strategy.

English version	Subtitled version in Arabic	Strategy used
A paper car	سيارة من الورق المقوى	Semantic translation

Here again, the humour was successfully rendered. Billy Joel commented on the quality of Deux chevaux (the French car) that it was made from paper and that this was the cause of his last driving accident. Thus, semantic translation was successful.

Translation of culture specific verbal features in T.V programmes

2) - Mediation between the verbal and visual culture-bound elements.

It is evident that these culture - bound verbal features are to be accompanied by gestures, rise in intonation, pictures ... etc. So to what extent does the AV translator mediate between the verbal and visual culture-specific features? This table will summarize the information got.

English version	Subtitled version in Arabic	Visual context
' Big Give '	برنامج ذا ' بيغ غيف	Slogan picture behind Oprah

In fact, the choice of the transcription delayed understanding till few minutes later (since he was concentrating on the subtitle) and it was with the help of the picture that the viewers could notice that the Arabic transcription is meant for the English phrase ' Big Give '. so there is a congruence between subtitle and image.

English version	Subtitled version in Arabic	Visual context
GPS system	جهاز تحديد المواقع	Hand pointing to something small

Though the expansion in this example helped the viewers to understand the abbreviation; still the gesture pointing to something small further explained that this

GPS is a small apparatus not common in our culture. Here again, there is a congruence between subtitle and image.

English version	Subtitled version in Arabic	Visual context
PMI	تأمين الرهن الشخصي	No special connection

The guest, here, is busy explaining the economical concept. Intonation change marks the guest's points of focus. Oprah kept saying: 'oh is that true?' To help the audience concentrate; but there is no special visual connection.

English version	Subtitled version in Arabic	Visual context
Obesity epidemic	وباء البدانة	No special connection

Obesity epidemic was one of the problems the guest's advice will resolve. It as just an example accompanied with no special visual features.

English version	Subtitled version in Arabic	Visual context
Song	—	A gap between picture and subtitle

Translation of culture specific verbal features in T.V programmes

The deletion of the whole subtitled version and the image of the orchestra and Billy Joel singing gave the impression that this is an undecipherable song. The following discussion about parts and words of the song produced a real disconnection with the target audience.

English version	Subtitled version in Arabic	Visual context
'Rehab'	مركز لإعادة التأهيل	A visual contradiction

This was information about Billy Joel who is a middle man with grey hair entering a 'rehab'. In the Arab culture, the 'rehab' is a place for young 'criminals'. This produced a visual contradiction.

English version	Subtitled version in Arabic	Visual context
Rock and Roll	روك اند رول	No special connection

There are no special visual features as the camera focuses on the guest's face.

English version	Subtitled version in Arabic	Visual context
The comfort table	ذا كامفورت تايبيل	A picture of the book's cover with title

There was a picture accompanying the subtitle in this example. The transcription, however, was an obstacle delaying attention to picture and hence understanding. So transcription and picture did not fit together to help understanding.

English version	Subtitled version in Arabic	Visual context
To have a drink	احتساء الشراب	No special connection

There are no special visual features, here. Kitty (Billy's wife) talked about having a drink in a very spontaneous way which was joined by the spontaneity of the Arabic translation.

English version	Subtitled version in Arabic	Visual context
That's what drink is good for	وهنا تتضح فائدة الشرب	Audience laughed and applauded

The humour was successfully rendered both intra and interlingually. The audience applauded and thus the verbal and visual features fit together.

English version	Subtitled version in Arabic	Visual context
A paper car	سيارة من الورق المقوى	The audience laughed and applauded

Translation of culture specific verbal features in T.V programmes

The humour was successfully rendered both intra and interlingually here again. The audience applauded and thus the verbal and visual features fit together.

V- Conclusion:

In some of the examples we had, culture specific verbal features were rendered via expansion in the case of abbreviation example providing the semantic meanings of the abbreviated letters. Most abbreviations were names of objects or institutions specific to the source culture (GPS and PMI). Thus, expansion will introduce these objects or institutions to the target audience. In other examples, culture-bound features were rendered by literal translation. This, hoping to render some specific connotations of the expression, produced an exaggeration for the target audience. Thus, the image should have been linked to its geographical context. In a third category, transcription was the strategy used: برنامج ذا كامفورت تايبيل and ذا بيغ غيف . It did not offer clues for understanding and it engendered a feeling of embarrassment on the part of the viewers. A functional equivalent would have been possible in this case and would have saved time. The last category includes the functional and semantic translations of 'have a drink', 'that's what drink is good for' and 'a paper car'. These were successful translations and rendered the different nuances of meaning.

In a word, whether the translation is source audience oriented or not (depending on many factors), the AV translator's decisions must be in congruence with what the target audience knows and understands; not at the expense of the target cultural identity. Here, I join Gambier (2006:7) when he said: ' In this changing mediascape, translators have and will have a major role, if they really realize their socio-cultural function'

We have only studied if the subtitled version retained culture-specific verbal elements and maintained the semantic and pragmatic values of the original text and whether there is mediation between the verbal and the visual culture- bound features. More questions could be analyzed in further research.

Bibliography:

- 1- **Armelino, Elisa** (2008) 'Translating Culture- Bound Elements in Subtitling- An example of Interlinguistic Analysis: a scene from scent of a woman' in *Translation Journal*, 12(2).
- 2- **Asimacoulas, Dimitris** (2004) 'Towards a Model of Describing Humour Translation: a case study of Greek subtitled version of Airplane and Naked Gun' in *Meta*, XLIX, (4).
- 3- **Chaume, Frederic** (2004) 'Discourse Markers in Audiovisual Translation' in *Meta*, XLIX, (4).

Translation of culture specific verbal features in T.V programmes

- 4- **Dias, Fatima** (2006) *In English!* British Council.
- 5- **Gambier, Yves** (2006) 'Multimodality and Audiovisual Translation' in *Mutra- Audiovisual Scenarios: Conference Proceedings*.
- 6- **Gottlieb** (1992) from <http://www accurapid.com/audiovisualt/>
- 7- **Orero, Pilar**(Ed) (2004) *Audiovisual Translation*, Benjamins Translation Library.
- 8- **Pederson, Jan** (2005) ' How is Culture Rendered in Subtitles' in *Mutra- Challenges of Multidimensional Translation: Conference Proceedings*.
- 9- **Petit, Zoe** (2004)'the Audiovisual Text: Subtitling and Dubbing Different Genres' in *Meta*, XLIX, (4),
- 10- **Shuttleworth, Mark and Moira Cowie** (1997) *Dictionary of Translation Studies*, Manchester: St Jerome.
- 11- **Spanakaki, Katia** (2007) ' Translating Humour for Subtitling' in *Journal of Translation*, 11(2).
- 12- **Szarkowska, A** (2005) 'The Power of Film Translation' in *Translation Journal*, 9(2).