TEXTS, TRANSLATION AND SUBTITLING – IN THEORY, AND IN DENMARK

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General outline

The aim of this paper is to focus systematically on the many faces of translation, (part I), and to give special attention to one of these faces: subtitling (parts II and III).

Part I: TEXTS AND TRANSLATION TYPES

1.1. Ultimate definitions

In everyday language, people use the term 'text' to refer to written documents, very rarely to spoken words. And in discussions of modern mass communication, non-verbal elements (i.e. images and sounds) are rarely considered part of the 'text'. However, very few multi-channel messages – in the following referred to as *polysemiotic* texts – make much sense when stripped of one or more of their (non-verbal) semiotic layers – those threads that together make up the texture of the message in question.

As semiotics implies semantics, any channel of expression in any act of communication carries meaning. For this reason, even exclusively non-verbal communication may deserve the label 'text', thus accommodating phenomena as music and graphics, as well as sign language (for the deaf) and messages in Braille (for the blind). In a Translation Studies context, the two latter categories representing strictly conventionalized communication may very well be considered along with verbal-only (monosemiotic) and combined (polysemiotic) messages. As opposed to what is true of music and graphics, relatively simple algorithms exist that would transform messages in Braille or in one of the world's many sign languages into a vocal language – either written or spoken. As a case in point, the intersemiotic process of translating from the tactile to the visual mode – e.g. when a German text in Braille is translated into a (German) text using alphanumeric characters – is certainly simpler and more rule-governed than the process of translating a German printed text into another verbal language, e.g. Slovene.

As not all languages are verbal, an all-encompassing definition of 'language' may read as follows: "*animate communicative system working through the combination of sensory signs.*" Based on this broad definition, the following taxonomy of translation can be established:[1]

Table 1: TOTAL TAXONOMY of TRANSLATION

TARGET TEXT SEMIO-TICS	INTERSEMIOTIC TYPES						INTRASEMIOTIC		
	Free			Conventionalized					
	☼ > ☼	V > ☼	☼ > V	☼ > ☼	V > ☼	☼ > V	☼ > ☼	V1 > V2	V> V*
Same channels as original	[Not possible: Contradiction in terms]						Inter-preting ASL - BSL	Dubbing English - Spanish	Trans-literation Cyrillic – Latin
Different channels	Music based on pix.	Poems into music	Ball game on radio	Writ-ten music	Picto-grams	Morse decryp-tion	[None known to the author]	Subtitled 'exotic-language' film	Audio-book
More channels	Silent movie with pianist	Screen adap-tation	Ball game on TV	Statis-tical flow charts	Acted stage direc-tions	Inter-preted signer		Subtitled film in 'familiar' language	Subtitling for the deaf
Fewer channels	Sketch of bee dance	Play turned mime	Audio descrip-tion (DVD)	Nota-tion of ballet	Manual in Braille	Charts mediated to the blind		Live inter-preting on radio	Subtitling for the Deaf

1.2. Text and translation: Working definitions

Table 1 presents examples of all possible types of translation between entities in the aforementioned 'animate communicative systems' – including both (partly) non-verbal texts (symbolized by a ☼) and all-verbal ones (V). However, in the following, only 'verbal to verbal' translation will be considered – however fascinating phenomena like bee dance, Braille and stage adaptation may be.

In other words, the working definitions of 'translation' and 'text' will be narrower than indicated above. As the basis of any translation is a text, I will start by specifying that entity – in the 'narrow' sense – as *any message containing verbal material*. By this definition, a novel is a text, as is any sound film containing dialogue, or any silent film with intertitles. Likewise, a lecture, a sermon or a song is a text, in which the words uttered, the way these words are spoken or sung, and the body language of the speaker all contribute to the totality of expression. The 'text' of spoken discourse, then, is not simply the wording as transcribed; it includes the immediate context in which these words are uttered.

This basic contextual – or pragmatic – approach means that when looking at a picture of, say, an American park bench with the sign "Wet paint" on it, the text *is* the

totality 'picture of a bench with a sign on it'.[2] A picture of the bench without the sign would no longer be a text, since it is devoid of verbal content.

By the term 'translation' I will refer to *any process, or product hereof, in which verbal elements in a text are rendered by other verbal elements in order for that text to reach a new speech community.*

According to this definition, translation covers highly diverse phenomena, including the process of rendering a French menu in Chinese, the task of the philologist who produces a Hungarian version of the Dead Sea Scrolls, an American dime novel published in Mexico, a Hindi version of a Japanese computer manual, and a Danish film voiced-over in Lithuania.[3]

As noted earlier, this definition limits the scope of translation from the widest interpretation of the concept – in the shape of the nine-column range presented in Table 1 above – to a narrower focus: the (interlingual) types represented in column 8 of that table. In this way, three categories will be disregarded:

a)   *All intersemiotic types* of translation (columns 1-6), even those verbalizing non-verbal elements, e.g. audio description (for the blind), in which a special (DVD) soundtrack presents a narrated interpretation of the visuals of the film in question.

b)   *Conventionalized intrasemiotic translation* (column 7), as interpreter-mediated communication between American and British Sign Language users.

c)   *Intralingual translation* (column 9), e.g. transcriptions of parliamentary debates.

We are now left with *verbal interlingual translation* only, consisting of:

A)   the *activities* of translating written texts, interpreting[4] oral discourse, subtitling or revoicing audiovisual material, localizing online messages, etc.

B)   the *results of these activities*: the literary or technical translator's written works, the interpreter's oral performance, the dubbed film, etc.

2. A typology of source texts

Different types of (verbal) translation are bred by different types of text, so before discussing and comparing translations, we should take a look at the potential range of sources to be translated. To this end, a number of source-defining factors will have to be identified, and a listing of twelve such 'source text parameters' is provided below. This list does not claim to be exhaustive, but is meant only a compilation of filters through which one will get a pretty exact multi-dimensional profile of any text (in the sense defined in the previous section). Apart from its possible usefulness for *intra*cultural studies (literary and semiotic studies etc.), the picture thus obtained may

serve as a valuable (*inter*cultural) tool for assessing the technical, communicative and receptive potentials of a translation of the text in question.

All possible text types can be defined via these parameters, and each type will acquire its own unique profile. However, related types will reveal their semiotic and other likenesses through partial overlap when their profiles are compared.

The distinctive effect of each parameter in Table 2 below is exemplified by two text types or titles that only differ in respect to the parameter in question:

Source text parameters **TABLE 2**	*Examples*
1. **Factuality**	
Falsifiable / Non-falsifiable text	Memoirs / Novel
2. **Function**	
Informative > Involving > Entertaining	Street map > Billboard poster > Cartoon
3. **Authority**	
Normative / Non-normative	The Koran / *Arabian Nights*
4. **Actual age of text**	
Recent >	Contemporary drama
> Aged > Classical	> Play by Ibsen > Greek tragedy
5. **Setting**	
Familiar > Exotic	English joke > Japanese joke
6. **Stylistic conventions**	
Shared conventions	Dialogue in US epic films
> Culture-specific conventions	> Dialogue in US action movies
7. **Text life**	
Permanent > Temporary	Poetry > Brief news items
8. **Semiotic texture**	
Monosemiotic (simple)	*Catch 22*: The novel
/ Polysemiotic (complex)	/ The film
9. **Language mode**	
Spoken / Written	Lecture on Freud / Paper on Freud
10. **Rhythm of reception**	
Real-time / Audience-defined	Film / Book
11. **Author identity**	
Known	Donald Duck story by Carl Barks
/ Unknown	/ Uncredited Duck story
12. **Audience**	
Private > Public	Personal e-mail > Spam

As is true of the *translation parameters* discussed later, all *source text parameters* (except no. 2) are one-dimensional, displaying either binary opposition between two entities (as shown by a slash: /) or a gradual transition from one pole to another (marked by a >). Thus, a source text may have a *more or less* permanent life (see parameter no. 7), while the statements of the text in question are *either* falsifiable *or* non-falsifiable (source text parameter no. 1).

2.1. *Explaining the source text parameters and the examples used*

1. **Factuality** – or falsifiability, to be exact – is a crucial text definer, even recognized by book stores and libraries in their distinction between 'fiction' and 'non-fiction'. The difference here is that while authors of memoirs (and producers of TV documentaries, even reality shows) are held accountable for what is presented as 'truths' in their works, novelists (and feature film makers) are allowed to spin yarns. However, in some respects a given novel may be closer to the 'truth' than somebody's memoirs. Still, by having chosen the fictional form of the text type 'novel', the author is beyond reproach as to the truthfulness of the events and statements contained therein – the exception being cases where, by accident, authors of novels operating on a factual frame manage to misrepresent important elements. A novelist who mixes up the history of Iraq and Iran is no longer covered by poetic license. Fictional castles cannot always be built on sand.

2. The parameter of text **function** is special because it occupies a two-dimensional field inside a triangle:

Informative

Involving   Entertaining
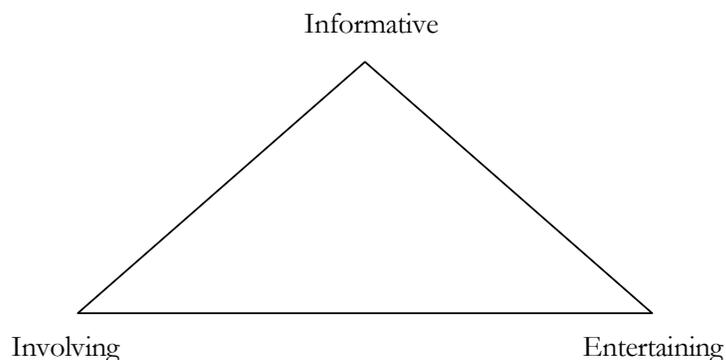
Most texts will belong in one of the three prototypical corners. The three examples chosen here all combine images and writing, but differ in their intended

function: while a street map gives you information, an advertisement tries to persuade you to buy – or think favorably of – a certain product or company. Finally, a cartoon (for example in a morning paper) is there to entertain you – and to break the monotony of the columns on the printed page. Of course, commercial texts are not the only involving texts around; religious and political works share this function by urging people to believe or act in certain ways.

3. The **authority** parameter deals with the status of the text. In this respect, normative texts, e.g. legal documents and religious scriptures, are contrasted by texts with no implicit normative power. Whereas the latter types may give the translator considerable leeway in interpretation, legal and religious documents offer fewer degrees of freedom. If, for instance, a text is supposed to possess divine provenance and authority, the strategies available to the translator may differ fundamentally from those used when dealing with a strictly mundane source (cf. translation parameter 1, below). The two best-known classic Arabic texts worldwide, *Arabian Nights* and the Koran, differ mainly in this respect, the former – a series of mundane stories – often abridged or otherwise changed in translation; the latter, with its canonical status within Islam, 'respectfully' translated throughout the centuries, if translated at all.

4. The actual **age** of a text about to be translated is one of the 'soft' parameters, as texts from previous periods may be – but do not have to be – treated differently than present-day works. Classical drama, for instance, has more translational options open to it than contemporary plays, as different dramatic devices, including the language, may or may not be updated – as is regularly seen in modern Shakespeare productions.

5. The **setting** of a text, in time and space, may also define what happens in translation. In certain types of text, for example the genre of jokes, a setting which is alien to the target audience – as in the case of a Japanese 'domestic' joke – may be modified in a translation for a European audience, whereas references to phenomena known in the target culture – as found in the English joke – will most often be maintained in a translation into, say, Dutch.

6. Similarly, the **stylistic conventions** of a text constitute a relevant parameter, as the style may be changed in translation, especially if the source text belongs to a genre or culture perceived as 'exotic' in the target culture. Thus, the heavy slang in American action movies is often toned down when these films are screened or broadcast in Eastern and Southern Europe, whereas the more urbane language in

American drama is replaced by language of the same stylistic quality as that of the original dialogue.

7. The parameter of expected **text life** is linked with what is traditionally labeled 'literary quality'. In sorting various texts according to their status as either permanent or temporary, one would place most factual texts and 'mediocre' – not to mention 'poor' – fiction close to the *temporary* end of the scale, while 'quality' fiction and a few non-fiction classics would be considered of permanent value. News items – no matter their quality – will be very short-lived, while good poetry, though hardly best-selling, may count on a rather long life span, and thus have a greater chance of being (re)translated at some later stage.

8. As for **semiotic texture**, simple text types (using verbal material only) form a very different basis for translation than the more complex ones, where the content of non-verbal channels has to be taken into account in translation. In the example chosen here, the novel in question tells the same story as the film based on that novel. But the message expressed monosemiotically in a novel, i.e. solely through writing, occupies four channels in a film: dialogue, music & effects, picture, and – for a smaller part – writing (displays and captions, plus in a few original films, even subtitles). A screen adaptation[5] of a 100,000 word novel may keep only 20,000 words for the dialogue, leaving the semantic load of the remaining 80,000 words to the non-verbal semiotic channels – or to deletion.

9. The **language mode** in question is of utmost importance. Whether the message to be translated is spoken or written (no matter the translation mode, cf. translation parameter 8) to a large extent defines the interpretation of the text at hand. Thus, a lecture not based on a script will differ considerably from an essay on the same subject written by the same speaker, simply because the cognitive processes of speaking and writing are different: the immediacy and implicitness of speech contrasts with the planning and explicitness of writing. Some polysemiotic texts are 'bi-modal' in the sense that they use both oral and written signs (an educational video, for example), but the large majority of texts to be translated include either speech or writing, not both.

10. From a certain perspective, the **rhythm of reception** parameter runs parallel to the parameter of language mode just covered. Most written text types can be read at whatever speed the individual reader may settle for, and even discontinuous reading is possible (reading the last pages of a novel before deciding whether to bother with the whole book is a common strategy for some people). This

audience-defined rhythm of reception is not possible in spoken discourse, be that natural conversation, radio announcements or film dialogue. Even some types of writing fall into this 'transient' category, such as certain Internet ads, and captions in films and on TV.

11. Knowledge of **author identity** cannot always be taken for granted, and the author persona – or anonymity – of a text will usually have an effect on the way that text is translated. As an example of this, the now deceased creator of Duckburg, Carl Barks, who for decades was just a nameless cartoonist on the Disney payroll, had some of his Disney comics (re)translated more reverently after his name was revealed to the public in the late twentieth century.

12. Whether the **audience** is private or public, i.e. known to the sender or not, is another factor influencing the way texts are translated. A text created with one specific source-language recipient in mind will, when translated, function more as a citation or documentation than as a text in its own right. This would not happen with a translation of a less 'private' text. In this way, while an 'exact' translation of a personal Russian business e-mail would not function at all when sent to a German addressee, a (freely) translated piece of Russian junk mail or spam might still serve its intended commercial purpose, even in Germany.

3. A typology of translation

In addition to this examination of the potential impact of source-text features on translation, we shall now discuss the features of translation itself.

Looking at the parameters presented in the table below, we find that – as was the case with the source text parameters – some parameters display an either-or opposition, (e.g. no. 3) while others establish a continuum between two extremes, such as no. 9. Finally, translation parameter no. 7, referring to text volume, presents plus-minus deviations from a default value.

Translation parameters   <u>**TABLE 3**</u>

Examples

1. **Purpose of translation**
Identical text function   Old Testament as pre-Christian tales
/ Altered text function   / Old Testament as part of Christian church Bible

2. **Direction of transfer**
Into translator's native tongue   Umberto Eco into Danish by a Dane
/ From translator's native tongue   / Peter Høeg into Italian by a Dane

3. **Route of transfer**
Direct / Relay translation   Translating into Finnish from Sotho / Via English

4. **Working basis**
Source text only   Translation of new text
/ Existing domestic translation(s)   / New translation of classic text

5. **Translator's responsibilities**
The entire translation process / Verbal phrasing only   TV / Cinema subtitling

6. **Time for preparation**
Pre-produced / Impromptu   Time-cued (taped) / Simultaneous (live) subtitling

7. **Verbal volume of translation**
Extended > Complete   Annotated volume > EU legal text
> Condensed > Summarized   > Subtitle > Abstract

8. **Semiotic fidelity**
Isosemiotic (language mode retained)   Dubbing
/ Diasemiotic (language mode altered)   / Subtitling

9. **Co-occurrence of original**
All semiotic channels present   Surtitled Greek stage play
> Some channels present   > Dubbed Greek film
> No part of original present   > Printed translation of the Iliad

10. **Status as translation**
Manifest (translator credited)   Adventure movies
/ Concealed (translator not credited)   / Adventure computer games
/ Invented (no original exists)   / 'Exotic' stories

11. **Verbal translator-audience two-way communication**
Impossible > Necessary   Conference > Community interpreting

12. **Diversification**
Individual / Mass reception   Optional subtitles / Standard subtitles

3.1. *Explaining the translation parameters and the examples used*

As with the source parameters, all translation parameters apply to all text types, yet few translators will meet them all in their professional lives. But in a scholarly context, we should not be limited by what types of assignments prectising translators are most likely to get, nor should we merely deal with the text types and genres usually discussed in Translation Studies.

1. As a rule, the **purpose** of a translated text is identical with that of the original. But sometimes, a functionally different translation of a text is desired. Especially involving texts are prone to serving new purposes. Some texts need not even be 'changed' in translation to do this: often, the best way to ridicule dictators in foreign lands is simply to translate their propaganda verbatim. The example used for this parameter is another involving text genre, religious literature. The question of what purpose to have in mind when translating sacred texts still exists, even in a society as secularized as Denmark. This was revealed some years ago in the heated debate on the Christological manipulations in the official Danish 1992 translation of the Old Testament.[6]

2. Among Western language professionals, it is almost undisputed that translators should work from a foreign language into their mother tongue. However, at many universities and business schools, students are still taught 'reverse' translation, that is, translation into a language of which they are not native speakers. And in several minor speech communities, e.g. Finland and Slovenia, it is deemed necessary to make do with local translators in a number of situations where the **direction of transfer** is *from* the domestic language, not into it. Looking at our example, to some Italian-speaking Danes it may seem easier to translate Peter Høeg's rather clinical language into Italian than to render Umberto Eco's intricate web of words in Danish. Nevertheless, judged by an Italian, the fluency of Høeg's text may go missing when the work translated by a Dane.

3. Normally, the translator will work directly from the source language into the target language, but for example with literature from so-called lesser-used languages, the **route of transfer** is less direct. What typically happens is that not until a novel in, say, Yoruba is translated into English or French does it stand a chance of being translated into languages such as, for instance, Icelandic – with the (English) relay version serving as a surrogate original in that process. Another type of relay translation is found in satellite-transmitted television, broadcast simultaneously with subtitles in a number of languages. Here, English rarely

functions as a relay language between source and target languages; in most cases, English *is* the source language. From English, the program is subtitled into one language only, e.g. Swedish. In this process, the Swedish subtitler saves the exact timing of all subtitles as part of his or her subtitle file.[7] Using this master file as a shortcut to new language versions, subtitlers in the other speech communities involved – Denmark and Norway, for instance – only have to retranslate, or rephrase, the words on the screen; no technical work needs to be done. Results are not always brilliant, especially when subtitlers forget to listen to the original dialogue. A striking example of this is the term 'frokost' ['lunch' in Danish] for English 'breakfast' popping up more than once in Danish TV3 subtitles. The reason for this: in the pivot file, the subtitle says 'frukost', the correct Swedish translation of 'breakfast', but a *false friend* all the same.

4.   Moving from a situation where the translator may find the original replaced or supplemented by surrogate versions, we will now examine the situation when a supplementary **working basis** may already be available in the target language. In other words, it makes a difference whether the translator is the first person to translate a given source text, or whether he or she carries on a tradition of retranslating the classics of Homer, Hugo, Dostoyevski or Dickens, to mention a few. In Denmark we recently witnessed a special case, in which two translations of the same classic (Cervantes' *El Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quixote de la Mancha* from 1676-1677) were launched almost simultaneously, by two competing publishers. While the two volumes of a more 'philological' translation, by Rigmor Kappel Schmidt, were published by Centrum in 1998 and 1999, a more "contemporary" one-volume (print-on-demand) version was published by Rosinante in 1999, translated by Iben Hasselbalch.[8]

5.   The parameter referring to the **translator's responsibilities** has special relevance to polysemiotic text types. But even in written translation, it makes a difference whether the translator is trusted with the layout of the final product, or this is left to others. As for film, DVD, video and TV, it makes a major difference whether – as in the case of dubbing and cinema subtitling – only the strictly verbal transfer is done by the translator, or whether he or she creates a complete target-language version, technically integrating the new verbal material with the non-verbal tracks of the original product. In most subtitling countries, TV translators perform all subtitling functions, including the time-cueing of each title, securing optimal linguistic and esthetic results.

6. Concerning **time for preparation**, interpreters used to be the only translators working in 'real time', that is, without having access to the entire source text before translating it. In recent years, however, a new type of translation, also lacking time for preparation, has emerged: *simultaneous subtitling.* As with 'simultaneous' interpreting, there is no synchrony between the original spoken discourse and the translation, but a time lag of at least four seconds, which partly ruins the viewer's chance of linking the words on the screen to the right speaker, who may not be visible any more.[9]

    Traditional interlingual subtitling remains synchronous; translators have had ample time to prepare their subtitled versions, as TV programs are seldom live transmissions. However, the subtitles for foreign items in news programs – although written in due time before transmission – are often inserted on the screen 'live', by the subtitler. Thus, delays of about one third of a second are common in subtitled news programs.

    Another aspect of (the lack of) time for preparation is found in the field of *book translation.* Due to market demands, literary translators are sometimes forced to work from uncorrected proofs, thus producing a series of discrepancies between final bound books and 'original' translations; a state of affairs worth taking into consideration when evaluating translated fictional works.

    Beside *simultaneous interpreting,* established during the post-second world war Nuremberg trials, perhaps the ultimate example of impromtu translation is *online translation* of electronically available texts. No surprise, such instant translation fails to honor normal quality standards, yet it does provide the individual user with some basic idea about the content of the foreign-language text in question.

7. As for the **verbal volume of the translation**, the normal state of affairs (reflecting a classical ideal) is a 'complete' rendition of the original verbal content, and this 'completeness' of a translation is indeed an important element when evaluating literary translation quality. However, some translated novels fall far from this ideal, a Danish example being John Grisham's *The Firm (Firmaets mand)*, translated – and compressed – in 1993. Looking at non-literary text types, norms as well as practices are often different, one extreme being scholarly translations of e.g. written documents from a bygone culture. Such annotated translations may include many philological or encyclopedic notes and comments, often increasing the verbal volume considerably. At the other extreme one finds texts like the abstract of a political proposition. Although the volume may be reduced by up to

ninety percent, I would consider such a text a translation, as long as essential source-language elements are adequately represented.

8. As far as **semiotic fidelity** is concerned, the 'default value' in translation is not found somewhere between the extremes of a continuum, but can be identified as one member of the binary pair *isosemiotic* vs. *diasemiotic* translation. 'Normal' translation is isosemiotic: speech is rendered by speech, and writing by writing. With polysemiotic texts, this is what happens when comic books are translated, and when films are dubbed, but subtitling is different. Instead of retaining the oral language mode and thus keeping the semiotic balance of the original, subtitling shifts this balance by placing written chunks of text – exposed for between two and seven seconds each – on top of the already complex flow of dialogue, sound and images. Naturally, this additive nature of subtitling changes the working strategies of the translator as well as viewers' strategies of reception, vis-à-vis dubbing.

9. In the translated versions of polysemiotic texts – typically those found in electronic media – one finds total or partial **co-occurrence of the original.** Here the translation is *overt*; the audience is likely to realize that they are not confronted with the original. Total co-occurrence is found when sub- or surtitles[10] are added to the original, or when collections of translated poems present the originals as well. Partial co-occurrence, a more common situation, can be found in e.g. dubbing and comic book translations, in which the visuals remain intact. Finally, no co-occurrence is found in the translation of all monosemiotic works, ranging from short stories to radio plays. In such *covert* translations, no elements of the original are physically present in the translation.[11]

10. In most cases, a translated text will appear to its audience as a *manifest translation*, that is a text with a confirmed **status as translation**. Thus, if the identity of the author of a novel is communicated to the reader (see source text parameter 11), the identity of the translator will most often be revealed too. Typically, in translated books the translator will be credited on the title page – with his or her name set in smaller print than the author's, however – and in most countries, subtitled cinema films and TV programs will usually credit their translators in a special subtitle. By contrast, genres like computer games and manuals for commercial products – often representing half a dozen languages in one booklet – will have neither the names of authors nor translators mentioned anywhere. Indeed, with such *concealed translations*, the notion of an original being translated may not always

be useful. In such cases, rather than retaining the 'original vs. translation(s)' concept, one might talk about 'parallel texts', each serving the needs of specific markets that use different languages.[12]

As opposed to the two cases outlined above, *invented* or *pseudo-translations* [13] are originals that fake being translations: In some cultures and genres, literary imports enjoy high prestige and can thus compete with *overtly* domestic products by claiming to be translations and to 'represent' an original. This is sometimes seen in women's magazines, for instance in Denmark, where exotic and romantic stories are published under English-sounding pseudonyms, their (non-existing) translators not credited.

11.   In most translational situations, **two-way communication** between translator and audience is not possible. This is true not only of all written translations, but of screen translation as well. To be precise, the term 'two-way communication' refers to immediate contact between the two parties involved; a letter to the publisher, for instance, complaining about a recently published translation, does not count. But for certain types of oral translation, verbal communication between audience and translator is indeed possible, even necessary. Thus, in community interpreting, the interplay between the parties involved is a *sine qua non*. Typically, we talk about three individuals here: an official, speaking only the majority language, an 'ethnic' client speaking a minority language, and the interpreter, often a native speaker of the minority language in question. Unlike almost all other translators, the community interpreter translates both ways within the confines of one 'text', that is one interpreting session. As a mediator, the interpreter is thus able to present questions to both parties concerning the interpretation – in a literal sense – of what was just said. The opposite is true of simultaneous interpreting. Here, the listening audience – typically conference participants – have no means of giving verbal feedback to the interpreter in the booth; a case of one-way communication.

12.   The last translation parameter, that of **diversification** refers to the (im)possibility of supplying different language versions to different members of an audience. Internationally, this is found when DVDs (Digital Versatile Disks) come with subtitles in more than a dozen languages. At a national level, however, the standard notion of 'one size fits all' is still a dogma with most text types – with two exceptions: special, abridged translations of novels and fairytales aimed at

children (or adults with slight reading difficulties), and subtitles for domestic language minorities, e.g. the recent Russian immigrants in Israel.[14]

Technically, it is quite feasible to take diversification a step further, providing a range of minority groups with their 'personal' TV translations. In this way, slow readers might select a heavily condensed version, language minorities could get subtitles in their native tongue, etc. With increased digitization of all media, including books, and with the good will of publishers, TV stations and other institutions involved, such optional translations ought to gain ground in years to come. Thus, the now-classical ideal of 'equivalence of effect', as expressed by Danish translator Thomas Harder,[15] may come close to being realized.

Part II: SUBTITLING – THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

4.1. The fundamentals of subtitling

In the context of translation, and expressed in general and rather technical terms, subtitling consists in

> the rendering in a different language (1)
> of verbal messages (2)
> in filmic media (3),
> in the shape of one or more lines of written text (4),
> presented on the screen (5)
> in sync with the original verbal message (6).

ad 1)   This basic sub-condition excludes intralingual subtitling, typically subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing.[16]

ad 2)   These verbal messages include not only speech (film dialogue, commentary etc.) but also *displays* (written signs, e.g. newspaper headlines and street signs, "seen" by the camera), and *captions* (superimposed titles indicating for instance the profession of interviewees, added in post-production).

ad 3)   Filmic media include cinema, video, television, laser disk and DVD.

ad 4)   Subtitle lines may be read left to right (e.g. with languages using Latin, Cyrillic or Greek alphabets) or right to left (e.g. with writing in Arabic or Hebrew).

ad 5)   Subtitles need not be *'sub'*. In some countries, TV stations accept subtitles on the top of the screen in cases where important visual information is found in

the lower fifth of the picture. Subtitles need not be horizontal, either. In Japan, vertical subtitles are sometimes used to supplement horizontal subtitling.

ad 6)   Normally, subtitles are cued in advance, allowing for absolute synchrony. With news items, and on TV stations not yet equipped with state-of-the-art subtitling units, subtitles – though prepared in advance – are cued *on air*, in real time. Due to human physiology, this causes a delay of approximately one third of a second. Still, such subtitling must be considered synchronous, as opposed to simultaneous subtitling, in which not only cueing, but also the phrasing of subtitles is performed in real time, leading to massive delay.

4.2. Subtitling: a unique type of translation

As a basis for comparison with other main types of translation, subtitling can be defined – semiotically – as

A.   **Prepared** communication
B.   using **written** language
C.   acting as an **additive**
D.   and **synchronous** semiotic channel,
E.   as part of a **transient**
F.   and **polysemiotic** text.

In the table below, subtitling and four other central types of translation – dubbing, (performed) drama translation, literary translation and simultaneous interpreting – are juxtaposed, using the six defining features – A through F – as a basis for comparison:

| Translation type	Prepared	Written	Additive	Synchronous	Transient	Polysemiotic
Subtitling	+	+	+	+	+	+
Dubbing	+	–	–	+	+	+
Drama translation	+	–	–	–	+	+
Literary translation	+	+	–	–	–	–
Simultaneous interpreting	–	–	–	0	+	–

In many ways a hybrid between classical forms of translation, subtitling shares the crucial feature B with literary translation – both operate in the written mode – and features E and F (real-time flow and semiotic complexity) with drama translation. All three types, plus dubbing, share feature A. As *artistic* types of language transfer, none of them are generated on the spot, in real life situations, as is simultaneous interpreting. The *pragmatic* nature of interpreting is also marked by the fact that style is largely

irrelevant, something one could hardly say of any of the artistic types, including subtitling.

4.3. Diagonal subtitling: from foreign dialogue to domestic writing

Literary translation and interpreting, the two traditional counterparts in interlingual communication, are *horizontal* types, moving in a straight line from one human language to another, without shifting language mode: speech remains speech, and writing remains writing.

Subtitling, on the other hand, can be either *vertical* or *diagonal*. Being intralingual, vertical subtitling limits itself to taking speech down in writing, whereas diagonal subtitling, being interlingual, 'jaywalks' (crosses over) from source-language (SL) speech to target-language (TL) writing, as illustrated below:

SL   SPEECH   Interpreting   TL

SL   WRITING   Literary translation   TL
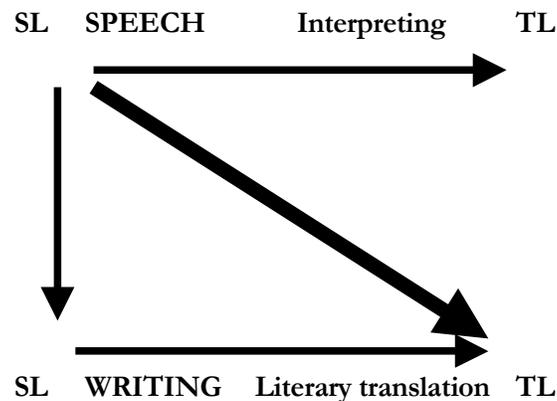
Due to its obliqueness, diagonal subtitling used to be considered an ugly duckling or even a non-translation. One of the pioneers of translation studies postulated:

> "*Translation between media is impossible* (i.e. one cannot 'translate' from the *spoken* to the *written* form of a text or vice-versa)."   (Catford 1965, 53)

I quite agree that in the everyday sense of the word – cf. our working definition in section 1.2 – you cannot translate from one medium to another. Accordingly, a novel, for instance, cannot be 'translated' into a movie. But by expanding the concept of translation, as Roman Jakobson, a contemporary of Catford, did (see Jakobson 1966), the term *intersemiotic translation* can be applied to the transfer between semiotically different entities – and a great number of intersemiotic translation types can be listed (cf. Table

1), one of the more well-known being screen adaptation, in which written stories or plays are transformed into films.

However, subtitling – vertical or diagonal – is *intra*semiotic; it operates within the confines of the audiovisual media and stays within the code of verbal language. The subtitler does not even alter the original; he or she adds an element, but does not delete any part of the audiovisual whole.

Still the problem remains that the graphemic subtitles should correspond with the phonemic dialogue which the subtitles should double. And the incompatibility of the oral and the written sub-codes alone can indeed act as a hindrance to the intended correspondence. In a handbook for British ('vertical') subtitlers, the dream of harmonious brotherhood between speech and writing is ruptured:

> "The attempt to achieve perfect subtitling has some affinity to the search for the Holy Grail. The differing design features of written and spoken languages dictate that a perfect correspondence between the two cannot obtain." (Baker, Lambourne and Rowston 1984, 6)

If we settle for something slightly less than perfect, we would have to locate the differences between the two verbal sub-codes involved as well as their differing contexts.

The features distinguishing spoken from written communication are:

1) The interlocutors are in direct contact with each other; via their dialogue they share a situation. This produces an *implicit language* where things can be taken for granted. Written sources usually need to explicate and extend the message, as the reader is unknown, or at least not present.

2) Spoken language has different *esthetic* norms, including a different categorization of certain stylistic features on the axes correct vs. incorrect, and formal vs. informal.

In addition, in *spontaneous speech* (genuine, as in talk shows, or acted, as in feature films) the subtitler will often find:

3) Pauses, false starts, self-corrections and interruptions.

4) Unfinished sentences and 'grammatically unacceptable' constructions.

5) Slips of the tongue, self-contradictions, ambiguities and nonsense.

6) Overlapping speech, a feature very difficult to render in writing.

Finally, it is characteristic of certain real or fictitious persons that:

7) Their language contains dialectal or sociolectal features that the established orthography is unable to cope with.

8) Their language contains idiolectal features, i.e. idiosyncrasies specific to the speaker.

9) Their pronunciation of certain words may be so indistinct that these words defy identification.

Thus, in diagonal subtitling, one must, on top of translating utterances from one language to another, transfer the dialogue from one sub-code (the seemingly unruly spoken language) to another (the more rigid written language). If this shift of sub-code was not performed as a fundamental part of the subtitling process, the audience would be taken aback by reading the oddities of spoken discourse. But as the dialogue is always re-coded on the way to the bottom of the screen, people only react if the other dimension of diagonal subtitling – the translation proper – seems imperfect.

However, evaluating subtitles as translation is not easy either. Because of the complex, polysemiotic nature of film and TV, a comparison between subtitles and (transcribed) dialogue will not suffice for making adequacy judgments. In the case of book translations, a simple verbal text comparison will work, if factors such as difference in time, place and readership are considered. But when dealing with subtitling, the synthesis of four synchronous semiotic channels (image, sound, dialogue and subtitles) should be compared with the original three-channel discourse. Severed from the audiovisual context, neither subtitles nor dialogue will render the full meaning of the film. So in judging the quality of subtitles, one must examine the degree to which the subtitled version *as a whole* manages to convey the semantic gestalt of the original.

4.4. Subtitling speech acts: words in the balance

Every translational act forces the translator to make priorities. Different media and different types of discourse naturally impose different constraints, or – to put it more optimistically – leave the translator with different sets of clues for dealing with the particular issues at stake. Thus, subtitling does not differ from literary translation in that it constrains the translator, but rather because the constraints of an audiovisual context are different from those of the patient, yet impotent paper.[17]

In rendering what human voices are trying to express, be that in literature, films or TV fiction, there are no absolutes, no canonized solutions. But this fact should not be taken as an easy excuse for claiming that any phrasing is as good as the next. In subtitling, as in all types of translation, no word should be accidental, and even good ideas should be tested against alternative solutions. There is always more than one answer to a (subtitling) question, but even more 'solutions' that miss the target. And in order to hit that target, all relevant linguistic, esthetical and technical means should be utilized, and both dialogue, film and viewers must be considered.

In subtitling, the speech act is in focus; verbal intentions and visual effects are more important than lexical elements in isolation. This gives the subtitler a certain amount of linguistic freedom.[18] But the adequate rendering must seem self-evident to the viewers: the audience is not served with memorials of the plight of the subtitler. Only the results count, not the hours spent translating a sequence that some might classify as 'untranslatable'.

As stated earlier, subtitling is an *overt* type of translation which, by retaining the original version, lays itself bare to criticism from everybody with the slightest knowledge of the source language. At the same time, subtitles are *fragmentary* in that they only represent the lexical and the syntactic features of the dialogue. The prosodic features are not truly represented in subtitles: added exclamation marks, italics, etc. are only faint echoes of the certain ring that intonation gives the wording of the dialogue. Furthermore, subtitling has to manage without well-known literary and dramatic devices such as stage direction, author's remarks, footnotes, etc. The audience will have to turn to the original acoustic and visual clues in trying to grasp the meaning behind the words of the subtitles. And even with source and target languages as different as, say, Italian and Danish, monolinguals in both Denmark and Italy should be able to pick up some of these extra-linguistic clues in the lines spoken in the opposite language.

4.5. Subtitle editing and the question of reduction

As the reader may have noticed, reduction in verbal content and form was not included among the defining features of subtitling discussed earlier in this paper (see sections 4.1 and 4.2). The reason for this is that most of the dialogue reduction represented in subtitles follows directly from the diasemiotic nature of subtitling. In other words, the deletion or condensation of redundant, oral features is a necessity when crossing over from speech to writing.

Still, subtitles are often condensed beyond this point. This may be a result of esthetic considerations – as when a subtitler wants to minimize the number of lines covering the action on the screen – or motivated by reading speed concerns.[19] Especially with up-tempo speech, the subtitler may choose to sacrifice close to 50% of the dialogue – measured in quantitative terms – in order not to exceed the normal television 'speed limit'. This limit, of some twelve subtitle characters per second (12 cps), means that a full two-liner should stay on the screen for at least five seconds. Before rushing out to declare subtitling a reductive translation mode after all, it is worth noting that the 12 cps limit is based on the assumption that 90% of the viewers should

be able to follow the subtitles. Acknowledging young people's increasing sensitivity to written messages onscreen, and knowing that already a generation ago around 50% of the viewers read a two-liner within three seconds, (Hanson 1974) it takes little effort to conclude that if subtitling speeds should reflect the present reading capacity of most viewers, no 'harmful' cuts were needed in subtitling for the general audience. Still, slow-reading poorly educated people without many foreign language skills still comprise a significant minority of the viewers in subtitling countries, and these heavy and loyal users of television should not be alienated by fast and complex subtitles. However, with digital TV just around the corner, an array of different subtitle versions could be transmitted simultaneously. In this way, slow and laid-back viewers could select a subtitle option pretty much like the one they are used to, while fast and curious readers could go for a more complete version, with hardly any loss of semantic and stylistic information in the subtitles. In part III of this paper, I will elaborate on this scenario.

Closing the discussion on reduction in subtitling, I will point to the fact that due to intersemiotic redundancy (positive feedback from visuals and soundtrack) much current reduction in subtitling is neutralized, so viewers miss less of the content of the film than a merely linguistic analysis might indicate. Put differently: in a polysemiotic context, semantic voids are often intersemiotically filled. Subtitle reading can be compared to a cloze test, in which "le spectateur (...) accepte de reconstruire mentalement ces parties des conversations qui manquent, mais dont la présence est virtuelle." (Tomaszkiewicz 1993, 267)

Sometimes seen as the epitome of subtitling, the tendency to condense speech is also found in other types of translation, e.g. consecutive interpreting and voice-over. Among the oral traits thus prone to condensation are colloquialisms, slang, cursing, pragmatic particles and repetitions. It is obvious that the trimming of the discourse through the elimination of such features in translation not only leads to quantitative reductions; it is also instrumental in *normalizing* the text, by presenting the target-language audience with a version less non-standard than the original. This in turn explains why subtitling is not the only form of translation displaying condensation of the original dialogue. The time-and-space constraints of subtitling are often just an easy excuse for leaving out 'controversial' elements of the original dialogue.

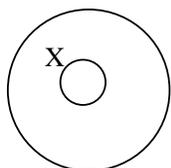### 4.6. Stylistic normalization: centripetal forces at work

Many subtitled films and TV programs show clear signs of normalization, which implies the replacement of non-standard verbal elements by standard ones, typically

resulting in reduced text volume. As has been proved by Olivier Goris (Goris 1993), such normalization is also commonly found in dubbing, a type of translation seldom in need of condensed solutions.

An interesting element in this global strategy of standardization is the commonly used local strategy of explicitation, often found even in subtitling – another reason for not considering condensation a defining factor in subtitling. By expliciting 'obscure' points in the original – sometimes beyond recognition – the translator may serve his audience well, but this strategy may imply sheer banalization of the text, which may in the end lose the very qualities that fascinated the source-language audience, and justified its translation in the first place.

Through the strategy of normalization, including explicitation, the translator moves the text away from its original and, literally speaking, often excentric position within its genre, pulling it into a position which is less extreme. In this way, both at a general level (the entire text) and at a more specific one (e.g. the individual sentence) 'excentric' originals are often sucked inward, toward the center of the genre in question. This phenomenon, which we will diagnose as the *centripetal effect in translation*, is best illustrated this way, the 'X' in the figures representing the text in question:

Original position in the genre: New position in the genre:
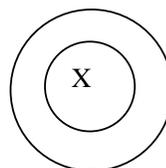
As a result of this 'law of culture', translated – and thus subtitled – products often come out as less emotional, less ambiguous and less bizarre than their original counterparts. This means that what we read in the subtitles is often less personal, less insulting or less funny than what the source-language actors said and meant.

In defense of the mainstreaming of many audiovisual products one may argue that without such normalization, the original film or TV series might have dropped outside the circle of acceptance in the target culture. And more often than not, mainstreaming may be better than condemnation. In the final analysis, however, subtitling *per se* is not to blame for watered-out dialogue; the target-culture norms and the individual subtitler will have to share the honor of normalization.

4.7. The different subtexts of subtitling

To all Scandinavians, subtitling is an integral part of their culture. This is due to the fact that in all "former" Western European speech communities with less than 25 million speakers, foreign-language films and TV programs are subtitled rather than dubbed.

In subtitling countries, reading subtitles while watching the action on the screen has become second nature to the literate population, i.e. some 92 percent of all adults and older children (Elbro 1989). Here, neither lip-sync dubbing (Herbst 1995) nor voice-over – a non-synchronous technique common in Russia, Poland and the Baltic countries (Dries 1994-95; Grigaravičiūtė & Gottlieb 1999) – are acceptable to viewers; revoicing of the original soundtrack is only found in material aimed at very young audiences.[20]

In some subtitling countries, even children's films come in subtitled versions. According to Greek subtitler Iannis Papadakis, "the subtitling tradition is so strong in Greece that Disney regularly releases excellent dubbed versions of animated films like "Lion King" and "Pocahontas" for young audiences, *and subtitled versions for the adult audience.*" (Papadakis 1998, 70, emphasis added.)

In dubbing countries – i.e. Spain, Italy and the German- and French-speaking parts of Europe – there is nothing "childish" about dubbing. In those countries, subtitling foreign-language films is the odd solution, reserved for special audiences, e.g. Woody Allen aficionados or Monty Python buffs. As foreign languages are hardly ever heard on TV or cinema screens in such (major) speech communities, subtitling is often seen as something alien, even by scholars in the field. In France, for instance, the term 'subtitling' – or rather 'sous-titrage' – has a set of connotations at odds with those found in countries where subtitling is a household word:

> Puisque le sous-titrage en France a servi depuis plus de 60 ans de seul critère objectif dans la classification de film "d'art" [...], le sous-titrage a fini par devenir label de qualité et signifier "cinéma d'art" même dans le cas de films que la plupart des cinéphiles ne jugeraient pas a priori particulièrement "artistiques".
> (Danan 1995, 277)

The semi-conscious linking of 'art movies' and subtitles mentioned by Danan is not found in countries where subtitling is the prevalent form of screen translation and where most cinema films and television series are imported.

In Britain and the United States, the two leading film and TV exporters, even the notion of 'foreign' films or TV programs, no matter how these are presented to the domestic audience, has an exotic ring to large segments of the population. Today, subtitled films may be even less attractive than a decade or two ago:

[...] subtitles are the sticking point for English-speaking audiences. The more literary style of foreign film is demanding enough, but it is made all the more challenging by the need to read along with the performance. The generation that Hollywood blockbusters are deliberately catering for, the 16- to 24-year-olds, is one that, in one distributor's words, is "growing increasingly lazy and unlikely ever to go back to subtitling". (Finney 1997, 8)

And in pro-dubbing Germany, even an *Anglizist* (with a profound knowledge of the linguistic pitfalls of dubbing) considers subtitling something outlandish; attractive at first glance, perhaps, but a practice that may lead unsuspecting viewers astray:

There can hardly be any doubt that, from a foreign language teaching perspective, subtitling is much to be preferred to dubbing [...], but it is equally clear that as far as translational equivalence is concerned, subtitling has obvious disadvantages. In particular *one must be very sceptical of any suggestion that listening to the original text in a language you do not speak yourself still enables you to get some idea of a character's personality* because you are, after all, listening to the original voices. Precisely because there are some important differences between what you might call the paralinguistic systems of different languages as well, the viewer might arrive at totally wrong conclusions. (Herbst 1995, 258; emphasis added)

The arguments above are irrefutable per se, but they rest on the assumption that the audience not only do not understand the language spoken on screen; they do not even know how to decode paraverbal elements in the dialogue, typically intonation patterns.

However, as mentioned in section 4.4. above, viewers in subtitling countries do indeed understand the paraverbal features in most of the languages they are ever going to hear on TV; they even manage to understand important parts of the dialogue in most subtitled films and TV episodes, since between sixty and ninety percent of all imported productions in subtitling countries are Anglophone – roughly the same percentage as that of English speakers in several of those countries.

Ironically, part of the reason that for instance most Scandinavians are now well-versed in English is the national preference for subtitling in their countries: keine Hexerei, nur Behändigkeit!

Part III: SUBTITLING IN DENMARK

5.1. Subtitles – the only genre read by all

In Denmark – as in the rest of Scandinavia – subtitling has established itself as one of the dominant written text types in public life: in 2002 the average Dane spent more than four hours (259 minutes) a week reading TV subtitles – an effort equating five English lessons each week (cf. Gottlieb 2003: 49). With TV, video and DVD consumption still on the increase, and with the heavy reliance of recent, commercial TV channels on foreign (= American) imports, most Danes are likely to read even more interlingual subtitles in the years to come. Several segments of the population (especially in the younger generation) have already shifted from reading newspapers, magazines and books to relying mainly on TV and the Internet for news and entertainment. To many Danes, the subtitles on TV is what keeps their reading abilities alive; an unintended, yet important, side effect of the choice of screen translation practice in Denmark.

5.2. "It's all Greek to me"– when subtitlers fail to understand

In Scandinavia, one rarely encounters film or TV dialogue in non-Germanic languages, and dialogue in most of the world's languages – even some of the official pre-enlargement EU languages – tend to represent a problem to subtitlers. An example of this was demonstrated some years ago by Sveriges Television, Sweden's public-service broadcasting corporation. In an episode of the renowned detective series *Inspector Morse,* set in Oxford – carrying the classical title *Greeks Bearing Gifts* – and broadcast in January 1993, a verbal exchange in Greek was left untranslated. Although the scene in question was of importance to the plot, the Swedish translator, apparently knowing no Greek, only managed to come up with one subtitle: a translation of some totally irrelevant lines uttered by the actors in a soap opera that one of the Greeks was watching on TV. The reason: those lines were in English, a language understood by all subtitlers in Scandinavia – and by most of their viewers.[21]

Another product of the sad, but common lack of source-language knowledge in subtitlers working with films from minor speech communities – in casu Greece – is found in the 'official' Danish video version of Theodoros Angelopoulos' *O Melissokomos* (the Beekeeper), in Danish *Biavleren,* distributed by the national Danish Film Institute. In this film from 1987, featuring the Italian (!) actor Marcello Mastroianni, most of the dialogue is in Greek, with French spoken in one of the scenes. Still, what the Danish audience gets, is English-sounding Danish subtitles, indicating that this film has not

been translated from Greek (and French), but from English – a case of pivot translation, with all the problems this implies (see section 5.4). Adding to this, the subtitler of *O Melissokomos,* apparently working from a script instead of a videotape, produced oddities such as using wrong gender (*det* instead of *den*) of objects clearly visible on the screen – a type of error bound to happen in careless translation from a language lacking the grammatical distinctions of the target language. In not checking their subtitles against the image, script-addicted subtitlers are prone to committing such mistakes, even if they know the source language(s) of the films they work with.

5.3. Silent movies, speaking titles

Although not as established as literary translation, which has existed for millenia, subtitling is certainly coming of age. Based on an ancient tradition of supplementing pictures with captioned text, the procedure of captioning film dialogue has now been around for almost a hundred years.

It all began with the *intertitles* of the silent movies. They first appeared in Edward S. Porter's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* from 1903.[22] In Denmark, which in the infancy of motion pictures held a strong position as a film nation, intertitles appeared on the scene in 1907.[23] These titles were photographed cardboard signs with printed text – often using beautifully elaborated letters – that were cut into the film itself, thus filling the entire screen. *Line titles,* the equivalent of sound film subtitles, were not found in the first silent movies. Instead, *epic titles* were used.

The Danish silent film expert, Marguerite Engberg, distinguishes between three types of epic titles: the commenting, the anticipating, and those simply indicating time or place. Epic intertitles could be used as a means of making a (sometimes awkward) cinematic description understandable to the audience. The director might comment on the action with the title "A difficult task well done", or anticipate the course of events with "Armand immediately falls in love". In case time or place could not be indicated with purely filmic effects, one had to resort to titles such as "One month later".

Already in 1909, the first line titles appeared in Danish movies. Throughout the years, until the appearance of the sound film in the late 1920s, line titles made up an increasing part of the intertitles. This was due to the filmmakers' greater mastery of the medium: many of the epic titles could be expressed through merely filmic devices, but the actors' lines often had to be rendered in words. Still, a good silent film of the usual c. 45 minutes could work splendidly with about 20 titles – some 5% of the amount one would expect in a modern (sound) movie of the same duration.

Outside of Denmark, directors such as Griffith and Eisenstein made films with far more intertitles; *October*, for one, had 270. But no matter the number and type of intertitles in a foreign film; they had to be translated. This was done by cutting out the original intertitles and replacing them with similar titles in the domestic language, often with the effect that imported films took an extra liking to snapping during projection.

It should be pointed out that even in the days of the silent film, writing was often found in the picture: Apart from inserts of letters, telegrams, names on doors, etc. – so-called displays – there were, in some cases, superimposed captions on the screen. For example, in a sequence of the French film *Judex* from 1917, a caption is placed on a wall, between two people. This is recorded in Guinness' *Movie Facts and Feats* as the oldest (French) example of movie subtitles.[24]

Perhaps the oldest example of an entire film being captioned, or subtitled, is the silent movie *Mireille* from 1922. In this film the titles were placed at the bottom of the screen, below the picture – which for this occasion was reduced – so they could be watched simultaneously with the film.

This very *synchrony* makes the crucial difference between the old intertitles and the new subtitles, which with the coming of sound ousted the well-known cardboard signs from the world of film.

5.4. The subtitling of sound films

The world's first sound movie, *The Jazz Singer* from late 1927 – starring Al Jolson – was shown in non-English-speaking countries with subtitles, though not until a few years later. The sequel to this film, *The Singing Fool*, also featuring Al Jolson and released in the US in 1928, reached Denmark before its predecessor.

Its first showing in Denmark was on August 17, 1929. The film was titled *Den Syngende Nar* and fitted with Danish subtitles. The following morning, in the major Danish daily, *Berlingske Tidende*, a journalist wrote:

> It is most annoying to have unsatisfactory Danish subtitles presented in the picture while the characters speak their lines in English [...] but, of course, we are only at the beginning.
> (Translated from Dinnesen & Kau 1983, 44)

In France, *The Jazz Singer* had had its first showing in Paris, on January 26, 1929, with subtitles in French. After the initial enthusiasm concerning this and other early (subtitled) sound films, the French audience grew increasingly dissatisfied with the whole idea of subtitling (cf. Danan 1996, 114). France soon turned to dubbing, as did

other major European countries, notably Italy, which had also had a flirt with subtitling in 1929 (cf. Quargnolo 1986). Already in January of 1930, Japan saw its first subtitled film. Among European nations, Holland – still a subtitling country – started subtitling in 1930, and in January 1932, subtitling made its debut in Great Britain (cf. Bruls & Kerkman 1988). By 1933, the method of subtitling had established itself internationally.

However, this breakthrough was not due to a wish to retain the original soundtrack so audiences abroad could enjoy the voices of the original actors. Neither was it due to a cosmopolitan view that it would be beneficial for people to hear foreign tongues. Whatever attitudes on language policy expressed later on in minor speech communities that are now opposed to dubbing, these countries originally favored subtitling due to economic necessity. Dubbing was simply not feasible.

In their monumental work, *Filmen i Danmark,* film historians Dinnesen and Kau state this fact without further ado: "The process was difficult, cumbersome, and far too expensive to be worthwhile in a small country like Denmark." (Translated from Dinnesen & Kau, 54).

In Denmark, as in many other countries, people had to live with subtitled movies – and they still do.

5.5. Subtitling on television

The TV medium followed closely in the footsteps of the film. On August 14, 1938 – a year before the outbreak of World War II – the BBC broadcast the German silent film *Der Student von Prag* (1913), with the inserted English cinema titles. According to a veteran BBC subtitler, it was "perhaps the first scheduled public transmission of a feature film in high-definition television history." (Minchinton1987, 282). Thus, even television started with intertitles, and only in countries that already subtitled sound films did TV broadcasting companies opt for subtitling in this new mass medium. In major speech communities, dubbing was preferred on TV as on the silver screen.

In Denmark, Julius Bomholt, then Chairman of the Radio Council, declared Danish television "on the air" on October 2, 1951, though for the first three years Danmarks Radio (DR) only broadcast 3 hours a week. All productions were broadcast live from a studio, and in the beginning, they were all in Danish.

Before introducing subtitling in 1955, DR had its first foreign-language productions translated by a film professor who read all the lines off-screen to the small, but enthusiastic Danish audience. However, this practice was canceled after the (male) professor had done his best to render three French girls in an agitated

exchange of words (Skaarup 1981). Then the director general of DR interfered, and since that day no feature films have been voiced-over on Danish TV.

Not only was the choice of translation method a challenge; the purchase of foreign films proved to be all but impossible, as the film industry did its best to prevent DR from broadcasting cinema productions. Thus, the foreign programs consisted of documentaries and short entertainment films.[25] These films – most of them only 30 minutes long – were the first programs to be subtitled on Danish television, as early as 1955.

In the long run, however, it turned out to be impossible for Danish cinema owners to keep feature films from reaching the magic TV screens. In 1956, DR began to purchase film rights from abroad, and the year after, the Danish film establishment lamented:

> October 3. was a day of sorrow for most Danish cinema owners. The national television had obtained Hitchcock's famous film *Foreign Corre-spondent,* with famous stars in the leading roles, the result being that most of those who had the option preferred going to the free cinema at home, while the real cinemas were empty.
> (Translated from *Biografbladet*, no. 11, 1957, 256)

It goes without saying that Danish film importers did not want to rub salt into their own wounds by offering DR their Danish subtitles for these foreign movies.

5.5.1. Danish TV subtitling: the first generation

The early years

DR had no other option but to establish its own subtitling procedures right from the beginning. Programs were purchased without subtitles. The steadily increasing staff of freelance subtitlers thus provided the translation, layout, and (later on) application of the Danish subtitles. Between 1955 and 1957-58, translators' subtitles were written onto cardboard cards (not unlike the cardboard signs of silent movies), which were then photographed onto a subtitle film strip, from which each subtitle could then be broadcast when it was cued.

This somewhat laborious procedure was replaced by a technique in which the subtitles were written onto subtitle signs photographed during transmission. These signs were then placed on three music stands, distributed like a deck of cards (e.g. no. 4 was underneath no. 1, etc.). By alternating between three cameras, the subtitles could be exposed in the correct order.[26] The subtitler directed three assistants, who had to turn

the used subtitles over manually and thus bring the new ones into focus. DR only used this slightly farcical method for about a year.

The technique in the '60s end '70s

In the winter of 1958-59 DR launched a new technique. During broadcasting, the Danish subtitles, typewritten on a paper roll, were projected onto the film picture. The subtitler had to advance the roll, subtitle by subtitle, and press a button that activated a camera that photographed the subtitle. This optical method – in those days called *electronic subtitling* – was used by DR right up till 1981-82, i.e. for 23 years. When it first appeared, the method was advanced, as even into the 1960s, several European broadcasting services were still using large index cards or signs for TV subtitling.

In those days, a number of countries broadcast the original cinema version with etched or superimposed subtitles. DR did this as well on a few occasions, giving rise to the well-known contrast problem: subtitles 'disappearing' against a bright background. This was also a problem for the 'electronic' TV subtitling produced at Danmarks Radio. To solve this, a black bar was inserted at the bottom of the picture during transmission. This so-called 'liquorice band' is completely transparent on a dark background, but the brighter the picture, the blacker the band appears. In this way, the necessary contrast to the white subtitle characters is provided.

For many years, Danish TV subtitles were centered, just as cinema subtitles were, and still are. But in the 1970s they became left-aligned, for cost-saving reasons! The fact was that in those pre-wordprocessing days it took the typists too long to center all the subtitles, line by line, on their electric IBM typewriters. The makeshift solution of left alignment has since become the norm, also for modern Danish electronic TV and video subtitling, even though the subtitler may now center all subtitles in a TV program within a matter of seconds.

In the early '60s DR had tried to feed subtitles automatically, but the method was soon abandoned. The technique was as follows: the subtitler had to mark those places on an audiotape where subtitles should appear and disappear. During transmission, the subtitle paper roll would automatically advance to the proper subtitles at the right moments, so that the camera could project them onto the film. The system was vulnerable, however, and if errors occurred it was impossible to return to the place where the subtitles failed. The film had to be rewound and played from the top, which wasn't too popular with the viewers.

5.5.2. Danish TV subtitling: the second generation

From paper manuscript to disk

In the summer of 1981, DR returned to automatic feeding, this time for good. Denmark was one of the first countries in the world to switch to actual electronic subtitling. For this method, the subtitler still wrote his or her subtitles on paper. Manuscript typists then transferred them manually to an 8-inch floppy disk. On this disk the subtitler would set the in- and out-cues of each subtitle, while playing back a time-coded U-matic videotape of the program. When the program was broadcast, the film signal – from a 2-inch broadcasting tape with time code – would automatically connect with the subtitles.

Now the subtitler could take time off during transmission, and the subtitling could have the technical, esthetic, and linguistic quality that he or she was able to give it. The system was reliable, though sometimes a technician might insert the wrong disk into the drive. The technique wasn't foolproof.

All-electronic subtitling

In 1988-89, Danmarks Radio introduced a new and fully electronic form of subtitling, as did several other European TV stations. With this method, all intermediate stages were skipped. The subtitles were fed in the same way as described above, but the writing, editing and cueing was now done in one procedure – on small, PC-based sub-titling units, many of which were still in use ten years later.

In October 1988, Danish TV 2 launched a wave of new Danish channels to hit the national TV screens. Still in 2004, most of the subtitles broadcast by these stations conform to the norms of DR, technically as well as in terms of phrasing and design (cf. Lindberg/Søndergaard 1997). As far as translational quality is concerned, some stations fare better than others. While public-service channels DR1 and DR2 and semi-commercial channels TV 2 and TV 2 Zulu keep a decent standard – using in-house subtitlers and agencies like Dansk Video Tekst, Subline and TitleVision – strictly commercial Danish channels display a somewhat poorer quality – which can be attested at special internet sites dedicated to subtitling bloopers.[27]

Today, most of the Danish subtitling industry uses Windows-based subtitling software, with sophisticated cueing facilities, spellcheckers, and – most recently – digitized TV input replacing video tapes. Subtitlers now have access to electronic dictionaries and Internet websites while using the workstations's own features. Alas, these technological wonders seem to have little effect on the overall quality of the

product: those subtitles that most Danes love to hate, and which they spend so much of their leisure time reading. The reason for this status quo is, of course, that working conditions in the business have deteriorated rather than improved, and underpaid jobs don't usually attract the most gifted people. In conclusion, the Danish stations criticized the most for their subtitles are not stuck with outdated technology – they just fail to realize that quality subtitles made by competent professionals might distinguish them in the competetive world of modern television.

5.6. The future: Pivot translation or personal subtitles?

A new potential source of errors in the world of electronic subtitling is found in the increasing use of pivot translations (as described in section 3.1). Satellite transmissions across language barriers make pivot subtitling a financially attractive method of subtitling major-language material for a series of smaller speech communities, often simultaneously broadcast – via satellite.

As with any pivot translation, pivot subtitling is used where the pivot language is closer to – or more well-known in – the target language (culture) than the source language is. But in the process of subtitling, where the translation proper only accounts for a part of the work and money invested, a prospective pivot language need not be particularly close to the target language in question: as long as the segmentation and cueing can be 'borrowed' from the pivot subtitles, time and money are saved. However, the practice of pivot subtitling implies four potential pitfalls which are not normally found in subtitling:

1) Repetition of translation errors present in the pivot subtitles;
2) Transfer of pivot-language features not acceptable in the target language;
3) Transfer of segmentation incompatible with target language syntax;
4) Transfer of subtitle layout and cueing inferior to existing national standards.[28]

Pivot subtitling is also found in the home video market, but rather than staying a somewhat grotesque exception to normal practices, it is gaining ground: already in 1993, TV3, the largest TV channel in Scandinavia, transmitting all programs from London via satellite, utilized this method in no less than 80% of its Danish programing, and by 1999, the pivot technique had spread to all non-public service TV channels in Denmark. The standard procedure is as follows: in Copenhagen the Danish subtitler receives the (master) subtitle file in disk format or via email, and then it is up to him or her to produce a Danish version. As the subtitler is not paid to do any cueing, the original – typically, Swedish – rhythm of segmentation, often different from Danish practice, is

followed (cf. type 4 above). This means fewer subtitles per minute, and consequently, heavier dialogue reduction than in normal subtitling into Danish.

The fact that the four above-mentioned types of errors are often documented on Danish TV screens turns modern teletext and subtitling technology into a mixed blessing. However, as well as giving owners of satellite-based commercial TV stations the opportunity to buy clusters of (poorly) subtitled versions at bargain prices, modern technology opens up an alternative scenario: *personal subtitling.* By using this term I refer to a situation in which, for the first time, the viewer is able to choose, not just between different target languages, but between different styles or levels of subtitling, by selecting different teletext pages on his remote control unit. With sets of optional subtitles broadcast simultaneously, viewers watching a foreign-language program could choose, for instance, 1) a no-subtitling option, 2) fast, uncondensed subtitles, 3) normal-speed subtitles, 4) special subtitles for slow readers, 5) pictogram-supported subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing, 6) subtitles in a domestic minority language, or finally, 7) foreign-learner subtitles in the source language.[29]

Depending on the individual program and its expected target audience, different clusters of options could be offered, should TV companies consider five or six subtitle versions per program too costly. But as dubbing is 15 times as expensive as subtitling,[30] even the full range of versions could be offered for just over one third of the language transfer price paid today in Europe's dubbing countries. Apart from sheer conservatism, the only obstacle to changing the present situation (with major speech communities dubbing all foreign-language programs and minor countries using 'one-size-fits-all' subtitles) is the fact that a substantial number of the existing TV sets lack the teletext facilities necessary for receiving optional subtitles. But this is just a matter of time; all TV sets sold in (Western) Europe nowadays come with teletext.

Since their debut in the late 90s, films on DVD have been multilingual, with several optional dubbing tracks and subtitle files. Technically, it is possible to include as many as 8 dubbed and 32 subtitled versions on one disk, but internationally, most DVD films are marketed with a more modest number of language options available to the buyer. While most Danish DVDs have nothing more to offer than Danish subtitles – which are not even optional and often lacking in quality if commissioned in the USA (Witting Estrup 2002a & 2002b) – most international (anglophone) DVDs come with a couple of added soundtracks in major dubbing languages, i.e. German, French, Spanish and/or Italian, plus subtitles in a dozen languages, totaling up to to twenty language versions.

With Digital Video Broadcasting (DVB) now being introduced, new standards for TV translation will be set, creating the foundation for personal subtitling à la DVD. However, whether such 'personal' subtitles will soon become available to television viewers is yet another matter; judging from today's financial priorities in the international subtitling and television industry, chances are slim. [31]

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Notes

[1] This taxonomy, with examples added for illustration, is inspired by Roman Jakobson's well-known tripartite model of translation first presented in 1959 (Jakobson 1966).

[2] A Danish translation of this text would be a picture of a Danish park bench with the sign 'Nymalet' (= just painted). Translating the American sign word-by-word – into 'våd maling' – would not be pragmatically acceptable. That is simply not what you would find on Danish newly painted objects. Our inclusive definition of 'text' facilitates an 'idiomatic' stance to translation; in discussing actual translations, it leads us to asking "Is this how 'similar' target-culture speakers would express themselves in a similar context?"

[3] The method and translational strategies of voice-over are described in Grigaravičiūtė & Gottlieb 1999.

[4] This term is used for both the process of translating speech into speech, and the product 'speech which is a translation of speech'. We refrain from using the confusing term 'interpretation' in this context, and reserve this for 'personal reasoning about the meaning of something' (in Danish *fortolkning*, as opposed to 'interpreting' = *tolkning*).

[5] Adapting a novel for stage or film purposes (see Table 1) is an example of a type of translation beyond the focus of this paper. The *intersemiotic*, but not *interlingual*, process of converting a strictly verbal 'original' into a polysemiotic text – in which most of what was verbal is transformed into nonverbal visual or auditive signs – does not conform with our working definition of 'translation', cf. section 1.2.

[6] This debate was launched by the students' magazine *Faklen* in the autumn of 1996 (Pedersen Herbener & Engelbreth Larsen 1996a & 1996b) and went on for months in the Danish printed news media. One outcome of the dispute was an alternative, 'neutral' Danish translation of the Old Testament.

[7] The technical and translational processes of subtitling are described later in this article, and in Lindberg 1997 (in Danish), Ivarsson & Carroll 1998 and Gambier & Gottlieb (eds.) 2001.

[8] Cf. the preface of a study of the two Danish versions of a novel by the Nobel prize-winning Spanish author Camilo José Cela (Flintholm 1998).

[9] Although simultaneous subtitling is mostly aimed at deaf and hard-of-hearing audiences, it does qualify as (interlingual) translation: in the Netherlands, President Clinton's testimony in the Lewinsky trial was subtitled live in Dutch (Karamitroglou 1999).

[10] Surtitling is used in foreign-language stage performances, typically drama and opera (Dewolf 2001). Surtitles are projected onto the proscenium above the stage in order to be visible to the entire audience. As no two performances of the same play have exactly the same duration, all surtitles have to be cued on the spot, often by a stage technician.

[11] For the terms 'overt' and 'covert' I am indebted to Juliane House (House 1981, 189 & 194) and K. Battarbee (1986).

[12] This kind of concealed translation is often referred to with the buzzword *localization* – the term itself indicating the priority of pragmatic and commercial considerations over the quest for verbal equivalence between translations and originals.

[13] The term *pseudo-translation* is taken from Gideon Toury (Toury 1995), who dedicates a whole chapter to this phenomenon.

[14] See Kaufmann 1998. In Israel, as in Finland and Belgium, most cinema subtitles are bilingual, with one subtitle row for Hebrew / Finnish / Dutch speakers, and the other row for those in the audience speaking Arabic / Swedish / French. On Latvian television, foreign-language programs are subtitled in Russian for Latvia's large Russian minority. The Latvian-speaking majority are catered for through what is considered a more prestigious type of screen translation: voice-over.

[15] To Harder, the translator of authors like Eco, Naipaul and Rushdie, the aim is to make sure that – as far as possible – translated text elements "carry the same potential for experience in the translation as in the original". (Harder 1995, 17, my translation.)

[16] For a thorough discussion of this type of subtitling, see De Linde & Kay (1999).

[17] The formal and textual constraints of subtitling are discussed in Gottlieb 1997, 72-74.

[18] When dealing with non-fiction material, in which terminology plays a greater role, the freedom is markedly reduced: some TV documentaries, for instance, are so information dense that finding adequate expressions in the target language is no longer the question; the problem is rather fitting these often lenghty and hard-to-read terms into the subtitles.

[19] In Britain, "the average reading speed of adult viewers is estimated at 66% of the average speaking speed", according to the Independent Television Commission (De Linde & Kay 1999, 11). This happens to coincide with the fact that in Europe, most subtitlers semi-intuitively reduce the dialogue by around one third, most of this reduction caused by the economy of the written code in comparison with speech.

[20] In recent years, however, some subtitling countries, e.g. Greece and Denmark, have witnessed the introduction of lip-sync dubbing on TV and video productions for general audiences. In Greece, certain soap operas are now dubbed on commercial TV (personal communication with Greek subtitling researcher Stavroula Sokoli, October 1999). In Denmark, beginning in 1994 with *Lassie,* dubbed versions of such family feature films as *The Borrowers, Flubber* and *Dr. Dolittle* have been introduced on the video market, often in a "two for the price of one" deal, with both versions (the dubbed and the subtitled film) on the same VHS tape. (Gottlieb 2001).

[21] Recent figures show that more than 80% of the adolescent and adult Danish population speak English (Davidsen-Nielsen 1998, 87). This does not mean, however, that a majority would be able to understand the English dialogue presented on Danish TV screens in the way native speakers do.

[22] According to Marleau 1982, 272.

[23] The source of this and much of the following information is Engberg 1977 (171-173).

[24] The information on French intertitles is mostly based on Brant 1984.

[25] For this and much of the following information, I am indebted to the late Peter Hansen, former technical manager of DR.

[26] A vivid description of this kind of subtitling and its problems is found in Skaarup 1981.

[27] As a supplement to their main list of subtitling bloopers (*Bøfsiden*), TitleVision's popular site (www.titlevision.dk/tvdkboeuf.htm.) offers special lists of bloopers broadcast by TV3 and TV-Danmark.

[28] To be fair, well-made pivot versions may clear the ground of semantic land mines, thus yielding better target-language results than might otherwise have been achieved, presuming that the target-language subtitlers are lesser talents. But without this presumption, pivot subtitling is not to be trusted as a safety net in the circus of screen translation.

[29] The potential of teletext for viewer-specific subtitling was explored already in the early nineties (Jørgensen 1992).

[30] In 1991, the average cost of dubbing a one-hour TV program was 11,000 ECU, as opposed to 740 ECU for subtitling the same program (Luyken et al. 1991, 105). Due to fierce competition in the subtitling industry, prices for subtitling services have remained low throughout the 1990s. Thus, today's gap between the costs of the two methods may have widened even further.

[31] Internationally, to most film companies and commercial TV stations, subtitles remain a necessary evil to be dealt with as cheaply as possible, cf. the newsletters of Danish Screen Translators's Forum: www.fbo-dj.dk. For further details on digital screen translation, see Karamitroglou 1999.