

*Henrik Gottlieb (Copenhagen)*

# Multidimensional Translation: Semantics turned Semiotics

## Contents

- 1 Translation: more than just words
- 2 Textures of translation
- 3 Taxonomies of translation: Semiotics as perceived
- 4 Semiotic composition, perception and impact of screen translation
- 5 Ideals and realities in translation
- 6 Translation types compared
- 7 Conclusion: the human factor in translation
- 8 References

## Abstract

This paper seeks to expand the notion of translation in order to accommodate not only polysemiotic text types, e.g. film and TV, but also nonverbal types of communication. Without denying the importance of the spoken or written word, our aim is to promote a wider, 'multidimensional' understanding of translation. As a means to that end, conceptual tools are provided for dealing systematically with any type of translation encountered today, by establishing a semiotically-based taxonomy of translation. In addition to the strictly semiotic distinctions between various types of translation, a main distinction is found between inspirational translation (e.g. audio description) and conventionalized translation (subtitling and dubbing, for instance), yielding a total of 30 types of translation.

## 1 Translation: more than just words

Reflecting the ever-increasing communicational output – from cellphone text messages to live multi-media presentations – is the growing need for translation. Mass-media products as well as acts of communication with more limited audiences are being translated in unprecedented numbers, and recent decades have also witnessed a growing scholarly interest in the field of translation.

New media require new methods of translation, and audiovisual media, in particular, represent challenges to the translator not known before the invention of sound film back in 1927. But still, what we translate – whether we work as literary translators, interpret at conferences, localize computer software, or subtitle films for DVD – is, basically, words.

A primary aim of this paper is to expand the notion of translation in order to accommodate not only the nonverbal channels present in much modern communication, but also the types of communication not involving language in a traditional sense. Although much has been written on translation in recent decades, very few titles (e.g. Poyatos (ed.) 1997; Gambier and Gottlieb (eds) 2001) have been concerned with nonverbal factors in (verbal) translation, let alone nonverbal translation as such.

However, it is not my intention to diminish the importance of the spoken or written word, neither in original texts nor in translations. All I wish to accomplish is to contribute to a wider

understanding – through a multidimensional approach<sup>1</sup> – of the field of translation, so that the various features of (interlingual) translation so often discussed in Translation Studies will stand out more clearly against a background of translation in its totality.

As a means to that end, and taking as our point of departure the complex (polysemiotic) textual nature of film and television, this paper intends to provide conceptual tools for dealing systematically with any type of translation encountered in today's media landscape by establishing a semiotically based taxonomy of translation.

## 2 Textures of translation

Any kind of translation is a multi-faceted entity, and even the word 'translation' covers at least two dimensions: (1) time, including the semantics and temporal progression of the translational *process* and (2) space, including the semiotics and texture, or composition, of the translational *product*.

The process of translation involves a chain of disparate and consecutive entities, ranging from the conceiver(s) of the original text, via the text itself to the receivers of the translated version of it. Even the translational product is a complex notion. As a simultaneously presented synthesis of signs constituting either a mono- or polysemiotic text, the translated text encompasses much more than the rephrasing of original verbal utterances. Even in the case of 'words-only' – i.e. monosemiotic – texts, other factors than verbal semantics form part of translational products.

Below we shall have a close look at those parameters that constitute texts (in a wide sense of that word) as well as those that shape the profile of finished translations. Of special interest here is the semiotic composition of source vs. target texts, and the effect of non-verbal factors on the verbal rephrasing of polysemiotic texts – of which films and TV productions are among the most well-researched, yet not the only types deserving scholarly attention.

Traditional translation studies have almost exclusively dealt with texts that are seen as 'verbal only', whether written – e.g. literary or technical texts – or spoken, i.e. oral discourse to be interpreted. Although such texts communicate through one semiotic channel only, and thus deserve the label 'monosemiotic', they are not abstract verbalizations of a message just waiting for someone to read them, hear them, or translate them. As Patrick Zabalbeascoa, having studied the workings of dubbing, aptly puts it, "no text can be made entirely of verbal signs because such signs always need some sort of physical support." (Zabalbeascoa 1997:338).

Naturally, this 'physical support' gains semantic momentum in genuinely polysemiotic texts. The most prominent polysemiotic text type is the audiovisual text, defined by Frederic Chaume as "a semiotic construct comprising several signifying codes that operate simultaneously in the production of meaning." (Chaume 2004:16).

### 2.1 Translation in the web of semiotics: Distinctions and definitions

As semiotics implies semantics – signs, by definition, make sense – any channel of expression in any act of communication carries meaning. For this reason, even exclusively non-verbal communication deserves 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

---

<sup>1</sup> cf. also Jorge Diaz Cintas', Heidrun Geryzmisch-Arbogast's and Minako O'Hagan 2007

multi-channel (polysemiotic) texts. 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 (or vice versa, cf. Mathias Wagner 2007) – e.g. when a text in Braille is translated into a 'the same' text using alphanumeric characters – is certainly simpler and more rule-governed than the process of translating a printed text from one verbal language into another. Both, however, remain conventionalized, as opposed to, say, commentating a baseball match for radio listeners.

### 2.1.1 Defining the notions of language, text and translation

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.*" (Gottlieb 2003b:167). This implies that, in reverse, 'text' may be defined as "*any combination of sensory signs carrying communicative intention*".

Based on this communicative definition of 'text', an equally broad definition of 'translation' may be ventured, namely: "*any process, or product hereof, in which a combination of sensory signs carrying communicative intention is replaced by another combination reflecting, or inspired by, the original entity.*"

The colossal range of translational phenomena encompassed by this multidimensional definition<sup>2</sup> may be categorized according to the following four parameters:

- I) semiotic identity or non-identity between source and target texts, distinguishing *intrasemiotic* types of translation from *inter semiotic* types,
- II) possible changes in semiotic composition of the translation which may be (a) *isosemiotic* (using the same channel(s) of expression as the source text), (b) *diasemiotic* (using different channels), (c) *supersemiotic* (using more channels), or (d) *hyposemiotic* (using fewer channels than the original text),
- III) degrees of freedom for the translating agent, distinguishing *inspirational* from *conventionalized* types of translation, and
- IV) presence or absence of verbal material in source and/or target texts, creating a distinction between translations that (a) *remain verbal*, (b) *introduce nonverbal elements*, (c) *introduce verbal elements*, or (d) *remain non-verbal*

Before discussing the vast array of translational types, the four central juxtapositions listed above will have to be defined:

#### I) Intersemiotic vs. Intrasemiotic translation

- Ia) In *intersemiotic* translation, the one or more channels of communication used in the translated text differ(s) from the channel(s) used in the original text. In other words, the source and target text are semiotically non-equivalent.
- Ib) In *intrasemiotic* translation, the sign systems used in source and target text are identical; a case of semiotic equivalence. Whereas 'intersemiotic translation' is a notion directly borrowed from Roman Jakobson (1959), the term 'intrasemiotic translation' is used here as an umbrella term for Jakobson's 'interlingual' and 'intra-lingual' types of translation.

---

<sup>2</sup> For a definition of multidimensional translation cf. also Heidrun Geryzmisch-Arbogast 2007.

- *interlingual* refers to translation between two languages, while
- *intralingual* covers the following subcategories:
  - *diachronic* translation (between different historical stages of the same language)
  - *dialectal* translation (between different geographical, social or generational variants of the same language),
  - *diamesic* translation (implying a change in language mode; i.e. from speech to writing or vice versa),
  - *transliteration* (which involves a change in alphabet).

## II) Isosemiotic vs. diasemiotic, supersemiotic and hyposemiotic translation

- IIa) The prototypical translation, sometimes termed ‘translation proper’, is not only intralingual (and thus, by definition, intrasemiotic), but also *isosemiotic*, i.e. communicating through exactly the same semiotic channels as the original. Naturally, this embraces all sorts of printed translations – from translated novels to localized software manuals reusing the original illustrations while adapting the verbal text to foreign-language markets. Isosemiotic translation encompasses both monosemiotic text types (oral discourse being interpreted for foreign-language speakers) and polysemiotic texts (the most conspicuous example being dubbing, in which the original semiotic composition is maintained in translation).
- IIb) *Diasemiotic* translation is characterized by its use of different channels, while the number of channels (one or more) is the same as in the original text. A monosemiotic example of diasemiotic translation is written music (with notes representing musical sounds), while subtitling exemplifies diasemiotic translation of a polysemiotic text (with letters representing speech sounds)<sup>3</sup>.
- IIc) In supersemiotic translation, the translated texts displays more semiotic channels than the original – as when a novel is semiotically unfolded into a film.
- IId) Lastly, the term *hyposemiotic* translation implies that the semiotic ‘bandwidth’ of the translation is narrower than that of the original. When considering the translated *production*, we see this when, for instance, a mime artist performs a dramatical piece originally including spoken lines. However, when we focus on translation *reception*, audio-described stage plays for the blind, as well as TV shows captioned for the deaf fall into this category as well.

## III) Conventionalized vs. Inspirational translation

- IIIa) *Conventionalized* translation – with both intrasemiotic and intersemiotic types represented – uses some degree of formulaic conversion of the source text en route to the target text. Representing anything from strict conversion algorithms (as when translating between writing and Braille) to methods more resting on norms and conventions (as when dictionaries and other works of reference are used as tools in interlingual, written translation), conventionalized translation stays transparent by establishing a direct link between source and target texts, and criteria for evaluation are easily established – although not always totally agreed upon.
- IIIb) *Inspirational* translation covers situations where the existence – and reception, to be exact – of one text triggers the production of another based on the first one. The resulting text – no matter its semiotic composition – will relate to the original in a way

---

<sup>3</sup> cf. also Jan Kunold forthcoming

which is more free and less predictable than what is found in conventionalized translation. Following from this is the inability to reconstruct the original from the translated version, something which – to a certain extent – is possible with conventionalized translation.

The terms ‘conventionalized’ and ‘inspirational’ have been employed partly in order to pinpoint the difference between the two conceptual counterparts, partly to make room for a wider interpretation of the notion of translation than what is seen whenever ‘real translation’ and adaptation are juxtaposed. In a French-speaking context, the term ‘tradaptation’ has been suggested as a lexical bridge across the gap between translation and adaptation (Gambier 2004:179-180).

#### IV) Verbal vs. nonverbal translation

- IVa) Translations that *retain their verbal channel* include all intralingual and all interlingual translations, ranging from an American remake of a Japanese movie to the ‘Maltese’ transliteration of Arabic words into Latin lettering. Here we deal with verbal translation.
- IVb) Translations that *introduce nonverbal elements* include genres as disparate as to poetry turned into songs and non-smoking pictograms in bars and restaurants. These are all examples of *deverbalizing translation*.
- IVc) Some translations *introduce verbal elements*, as when a signer is interpreted into vocal language, or a text in Morse code is decrypted. These types are all examples of *verbalizing translation*.
- IIId) Finally, translations that *remain nonverbal* include both linguistic entities (such as interpreting between two sign languages) and non-linguistic ones, e.g. the drawing of a sculpture. Here we talk about *nonverbal translation*.

## 2.2 Translation in a nutshell: Establishing a general taxonomy

Following the four main distinctions (listed as points I-IV above), a taxonomy can now be established with the purpose of accommodating all existing and potential types of translation – categorized according to their semiotic qualities.

Based on the broad definition of ‘text’ provided above, the taxonomy categorizes the various types of translation from the end user’s perspective, and in doing so, encompasses four kinds of cognitive decoding activity:

1) translations acting as *text substitutes* for an audience who, due to either (a) sensory or (b) linguistic impairment are expected not to be able to decode the original. In the former case, signed news on television resemble – monosemiotic as this genre is – radio news for hearing audiences. In the latter case, for instance when DVD audiences lack the command of the foreign language heard on screen and select a domestic-language soundtrack, the resulting viewing experience emulates that of watching a domestic production.

2) translations as *text enhancers* (e.g. when a PowerPoint presentation shows numerical relations turned into graphics), thus boosting the impact of the original figures, which on their own terms may not be cognitively fully comprehensible to the audience,

3) translation *crossovers* (audiobooks on CD, for instance) that are enjoyed by ‘impaired’ and ‘non-impaired’ audiences alike, and finally,

4) translations that are cognitively *supplementary*, as audiences have simultaneous access to, and understand, the original text. This phenomenon is mainly found in the audiovisual

media, as multilingual audiences read subtitles while listening to the original dialog. In this mode of reception, widespread in ‘hardcore’ subtitling countries, the viewer processes dialog and subtitles as ‘diamesic twins’, while oscillating between (I) using subtitles as an aid to understand the original dialog, and (II) using the original dialogue to evaluate, and criticize, the subtitles.

Whereas reception modes 1 and 2 are intended by the translational agents (the translator, the publisher/broadcaster, etc.), mode 3 is a ‘free’ and unintended spin off from mode 1a; audiobooks, for example, are designed for visually impaired audiences, not for drivers. As far as mode 4 is concerned, this game of ‘spot-the-error’ has long become a national pastime in Scandinavia, the result being that in working from English, subtitlers – in constant fear of being accused of not giving the ‘precise’ translation of what is said – sometimes prefer unnatural-sounding constructions (Gottlieb 2001:216). Hopefully, when optional subtitles find their way from DVD to digital TV, reception mode 4 will fade out, leaving subtitlers with the degrees of freedom enjoyed by translators producing substitutional translations.

All translations – and, indeed, all texts – have an audience in mind – be that well-defined or of a more general nature. For this reason, the typological classification presented in tables 1 and 2 is based on *audience perception*, i.e. how each type of translation is cognitively processed by the intended audience. This means that types belonging to category (1) above would be categorized differently if the point of departure was text composition, not audience perception.

### **3 Taxonomies of translation: Semiotics as perceived**

In the two tables below, one random example is given for each translation type (i.e. each cell). In the section following the tables, each type represented in the taxonomy will be discussed, and the examples will be explained.

#### **3.1 The translational range explained through examples**

In the following sections, each of the 30 sub-categories (cells) of the taxonomy will be treated successively, the numbers are referring to the numbers used in the tables 1 and 2. Usually, only one example from each cell will be discussed, and while sometimes that example is one out of a limited number of types or genres in that particular cell, other cells may represent more types, or may have attracted more scholarly attention, or may seem more important to the reader. Still, I have tried to represent types from all thirty cells in a balanced way, since – judged from a semiotic point of view – all translational categories are equally interesting. It is my hope that with the aim and scope of the present paper, readers will share my point of view and readily join me in this exploration of the realm of translation.

TARGET TEXT SEMIOTICS	INTERSEMIOTIC TYPES					
	Inspirational translation			Conventionalized translation		
	Nonverbal	Deverbalizing	Verbalizing	Nonverbal	Deverbalizing	Verbalizing
<b>Isosemiotic (same channels as original)</b>	[0. Not possible: contradiction in terms]					
<b>Diasemiotic (different channels)</b>	1. Music based on sculpture	4. Poem into painting	7. Ball game on radio	10. Written music	13. Pictograms	16. Morse code decryption
<b>Supersemiotic (more channels)</b>	2. Animation film based on music	5. Screen adaptation of novel	8. Ball game on TV	11. Statistical pie charts	14. Acted stage directions	17. Interpreted sign language user
<b>Hyposemiotic (fewer channels)</b>	3. Sketch of bee dance	6. Play turned mime	9. Audio description on DVD	12. Notation of ballet	15. Manual in Braille	18. Charts mediated to the blind

Tab. 1: *Intersemiotic Types: Total Taxonomy of Translation as perceived by the intended target text*

TARGET TEXT SEMIOTICS	INTRASEMIOTIC TYPES					
	Inspirational translation			Conventionalized translation		
	Nonverbal	Interlingual	Intralingual	Nonverbal	Interlingual	Intralingual
<b>Isosemiotic (same channels as original)</b>	19. New musical arrangement of standard tune	20. Remake of foreign film	21. Contemporary adaptation of 'classic' film	22. Sign interpreting	23. Dubbed film	27. Trans- literation
<b>Diasemiotic (different channels)</b>	[None known to the author]				24. Subtitled 'exotic' film	28. Audiobook on CD
<b>Supersemiotic (more channels)</b>					25. Subtitled familiar- language film	29. Captioned commercials for hearing audiences
<b>Hyposemiotic (fewer channels)</b>					26. Live radio interpreting	30. Subtitling for the deaf

Tab. 2: *Intrasemiotic Types*

### 3.1.1 Intersemiotic translation

By definition, any intersemiotic translation would have to use a different set of communicative channels. Hence, this row of potential cells remains void.

#### Inspirational types

Non-verbal → non-verbal text

1. This first type of translation operates (by inspiration) between two different, monosemiotic types of expression (= texts), e.g. from a sculptural expression to a musical one.
2. A striking example of this type, in which the semantic texture is becoming more complex in translation, is the animated Disney cartoon *Fantasia* from 1940, which presents the musical works of Bach, Tchaikovsky, Stravinsky and others while at the same time reflecting the musical score in moving images.
3. A case of the opposite movement, that of semiotic simplification, is found when, for instance, a person draws a sketch of the way bees communicate. While the original ‘text’ is spatial and includes sound signals, the drawing is two-dimensional and mute, but still a fair representation – in a dictionary, for instance – of the original phenomenon.

Verbal → not (only) verbal text

4. Operating with very large degrees of freedom, replacing a poem by an illustration of it still produces a text of similar semiotic complexity as that of the original.
5. One of the only non-interlingual examples often discussed in translation studies belongs to this category: screen adaptation – in which a monosemiotic work (typically, a novel) is semiotically ‘unzipped’ and thus recreates the underlying (poly)semiotic structure of the dramatic work.
6. When, for instance, a play is turned into mime, vocal language is lost, and movements matter more than when they are counterbalanced by words. In this ‘concise’ category of translation, fewer channels must carry the semantic load formerly shared by more channels.

Non-verbal → verbal text

7. Verbalized texts in this category include phenomena that are relayed on to an audience bereft of the ability to comprehend the original text, i.e. a radio-transmitted baseball match, in which the natural sound effects are kept in the background, while the visual action on the field is substituted by verbal narration.
8. Representing the same ballgame on TV, however, would be a different type of translation. Here, the verbal layer added by the commentator (who does not have to explain the action as such, but fills in background information etc. in order to avoid producing intersemiotically redundant messages) supplements what the viewer already sees on the TV screen. In this way, apart from the missing ambience of the stadium, TV viewers get ‘more’ information than do the spectators at the stadium.
9. An example of the complexities of polysemiotic translation, audio description on DVD translates two channels – non-verbal image (pictorial content) and verbal image (existing captions and displays) – into one: a verbal depiction, presented (optionally) as an integral part of the film soundtrack, whether original or dubbed. Audio description is thus a modern-day version of the classic tradition of *ekphrasis*, in which “a verbal text describes a work of visual art” (Eco 2004: 110). The reason for placing what might be seen as an



additive type of translation in the ‘reductive’ category is that although some of the visual information of a film is represented through audio description, the fact remains that the entire film is now communicated through two channels only: the verbal oral and the non-verbal oral channels. The verbal visual and non-verbal visual channels remain inaccessible to blind audiences, who are the very *raison d’être* of this type of translation. (cf. Benecke 2004.)

### Conventionalized types

Non-verbal → non-verbal text

10. A classical example, literally speaking, is found in written music, in which each note in a sequence denotes pitch as well as duration. As with other types of conventionalized translation, there is some leeway of interpretation – not only going from written to performed music, but also when trying to translate live music to paper (cf. Jan Kunold forthcoming)
11. Instead of merely switching between channels of representation – as in the previous example – we are here concerned with adding new semiotic layers to the original text. Dealing with numbers, which although part of the alphanumeric reality of written communication can hardly be termed verbal, illustrating numerical relations by means of bar or pie charts while keeping the actual figures as part of the graphic whole is an example of this additive category of translation.
12. As opposed to the previous two categories, we are here talking about translations that operate through fewer semiotic channels than those present in the original – a case in point being ballet notation, in which complex three-dimensional movements in real time are represented on paper.

Verbal → not (only) verbal text

13. Pictograms, road signs and other non-verbal logos are examples of conventionalized translation of verbal entities. Interestingly, certain speech communities use these non-verbal messages a lot less than others. As regards traffic signs, for instance, the Anglo-American tradition is heavily verbal, with utterances like ‘Reduce speed now’ commonly seen on roads.
14. Translating stage directions into theatrical performance is a classic example of supersemiotic translation, in which what is exclusively verbal is ‘branched out’ into spoken lines plus body language and movements on stage (cf. Yvonne Griesel forthcoming).
15. Braille, an internationally successful tactile writing system for the Blind, replaces printed letters by a fixed combination of raised dots. Thus it represents extremely conventionalized translational procedures, yet it only caters for alphanumeric text elements. Thus, certain illustrations in manuals and textbooks would have to be left out or explained in Braille along with the verbal elements of the original book, thus replacing a polysemiotic original by a monosemiotic translation.

Non-verbal → verbal text

16. The encryption and decryption of Morse code, is a perfect example of diasemiotic translation, with the unique feature that a 1:1 relationship is found between original and translation, meaning that translating the same message back and forth will not in any way

alter the content. Morse code could be said to be the extreme exponent of conventionalized translation, with no ‘artistic license’ granted to the translator.

17. When perceived by ‘wrong’ target-language audiences, certain semiotic channels may yield little or no information. As a case in point, hearing persons who do not understand sign language and for whom a sign language user is interpreted into a vocal language, will experience two semiotic layers in the message addressed to them: the almost entirely incomprehensible (soundless) sign language and the spoken language – their own vernacular. So although this is a case of ‘more channels’ perceived by the user – providing that he or she is not blind or visually impaired – the original text (signing) remains nearly void of information. Here, the target user possesses the sensory capabilities for comprehension, but lacks the skills for encryption of the sign language code.
18. A typical example from this category, a ‘conventionalized’ parallel to category number 9, would be the graphics (pie charts including numbers) of category 11. When communicating the content of such charts to blind audiences, the information from two semiotic channels is condensed into one: oral communication.

### 3.1.2 Intrasemiotic translation

#### Inspirational types

Here we are dealing with what may be termed “reformulation of a given expression within the same semiotic system” (Eco 2004: 131). As is obvious from Tab. 2, many potential cells stay void, as no examples are expected to exist, partly for logical reasons. However, the empty cells do not represent a clear cut case of *contradictio in adiecto*, hence the label ‘none known to the author’.

19. A well-known exponent of the first sub-category, where translation takes place between nonverbal entities, is a re-interpretation in the form of a new musical arrangement of an existing work, e.g. a jazz standard. The result is a different textual expression within the semiotic confines of performed music.
20. In the interlingual sub-category, another phenomenon attracting a lot of public attention is remakes of films. Instead of merely translating the verbal elements (as in dubbing and subtitling, see below), a remake transplants the entire film, setting and all, into the target culture. The resulting film may appear to be an original work, but as it is based on an existing storyline etc., it is indeed a translation.
21. Remaining within the realm of film, an intralingual example of inspirational translation would be the adaptation, or remake, of a domestic film classic. With the exception of Shakespearean screen adaptations, such new versions of old films would either alter outdated elements of the script, or come with an entirely new dialog list.

#### Conventionalized types

Non-verbal → non-verbal text

22. When, for instance, American Sign Language (ASL) users are interpreted for Deaf audiences in Britain using British Sign Language (BSL), this is done through a bilingual sign interpreter – strictly within the confines of the semiotic system ‘signing’, in this taxonomy categorized as ‘non-verbal’.

Interlingual translation: L1 text → L2 text

23. To most non-experts and a few traditional translators, out of the thirty types offered in this taxonomy, only this category qualifies as translation. In traditional terms, interlingual, conventionalized and isosemiotic translation *is* translation. And, to be fair, this cell in the matrix of translation is packed with various translational sub-types and genres – and (over)represented in innumerable works on translation, ranging from short in-house manuals for technical translators to verbose academic treatises on literary translation. Apart from printed translations, also several types of interpreting, as well as dubbing, fit into this category. What is common to all these sub-types of translation is that they retain the semiotic composition of the original while recreating the semantic content in another (verbal) language.
24. In this taxonomy, subtitling – although diasemiotic – is still considered intrasemiotic. It could be argued, of course, that as part of the diamesic shift (from speech to writing) subtitling would qualify as intersemiotic. However, as what is verbal in the source text remains verbal, this movement from spoken lines to written text is considered intralingual, while the transfer from language 1 to language 2 – whenever foreign-language productions are subtitled – is what places ‘normal’ subtitling firmly in the interlingual column here. Another argument in favor of considering subtitling intersemiotic, namely that of pointing to the written subtitles as a semiotically foreign element in the translated film, must be refuted as well. The reason for that is that as (original-language) film and television make use of written signs – in the form of captions and displays – the semiotic *composition* as such is not changed through subtitling, although the semiotic *balance* is undeniably shifted from predominantly aural to predominantly visual text reception. The visual impact of subtitles is illustrated by the fact that interlingual subtitles are now the dominant written genre in Denmark, with the average person spending more than 37 minutes daily reading subtitles at home while watching television, videos or films on DVD. (Gottlieb 2003a). With time, and depending on national educational systems etc., the communicative power of the written subtitles may decrease as audiences pick up not only intonational cues, but also substantial semantic and stylistic elements in the original dialogue – especially, of course, if this is in English. In that situation, we will find ourselves in the next category.
25. Whenever – as is now the case in several parts of the world – major segments of target-language viewers understand the source language (as outlined just above), subtitles are no longer dialogue *substitutes*, but become *supplementary* in the reception of foreign-language productions (cf. the discussion in section 2.2). Thus, the polyglot viewer embraces more semiotic channels than those found in the original version – a phenomenon never found within strictly substitutional translation, such as dubbing. This doubling of verbal channels is also found when a DVD is played with both subtitles and soundtrack in the target language.
26. The reverse situation – where the final recipients have fewer semiotic layers available to them than the original audience had – is found when, for example, someone addressing his countrymen in L1 is interpreted on radio, or through other monosemiotic media, into L2.

Intralingual translation: L1 text → new L1 text

27. Not only monosemiotic entities – e.g. the transliteration of a printed text from Latin into Cyrillic writing, or from Kanji to Hiragana – are found in this category. Also linguistic conversions that form part of polysemiotic texts are placed here, as for instance new

dubbing tracks for classic movies – something that is often seen with animated films dating back fifty years or more.

28. The simplest example of this diasemiotic category of translation is transcription – which is a major element of intralingual subtitling. An ‘opposite’ example is the production of audiobooks. With the shift of medium – from paper to tape or CD – comes the perceptual shift from reading to listening. Aimed at visually impaired or dyslexic audiences, such intralingual book translations also satisfy a demand among normal readers for literature which is accessible while driving a car, doing household chores, etc.
29. It is a well-known fact in advertising that redundancy enhances the effect of a (commercial) message. What we talk about here could be termed ‘diamesic redundancy’, as a spoken message is supplemented by the same message in writing – sometimes expressed more concisely, but always presented in synch with the oral slogan. The same diamesic duplication is found when hearing audiences are watching domestic-language TV programs with subtitles intended for non-hearing viewers.
30. On the other hand, whenever Deaf communities watch domestic productions with optional (teletext or DVD) subtitles, what they perceive is a text which includes a smaller number of semiotic channels than the original. Whereas the original production spans four semiotic channels (images, captions, dialog and sound effects), information communicated by the two acoustic semiotic channels is represented by writing, and thus – in semiotic terms – merged with the caption layer of the original. Seen in isolation, the (few) instances where sound effects are rendered in the subtitles – as for instance “Doorbell rings” or “Waves washing ashore” – would qualify for membership of category 18: hyposemiotic verbalization. (For a discussion of subtitling for the deaf, see Kurz and Mikulasek 2004, cf. also Neves 2005).

### **3.2 On absolute categorizations and relative realities**

Having now established a supposedly total taxonomy of translation, in which no translational act or artifact should be deprived of categorization (an exception being the transfer of the visual to the haptic mode, cf. Mathias Wagner 2007). I must hasten to state that with semiotically complex entities such as various online texts and other electronic media products, categorization is not always a matter of course. Different foci may lead to different categorizations, or – more accurately phrased – as several text types are semiotic composites or mosaics, any categorization of such entities will have to consider the ‘odd’ parts of the text.

In the field of computer games, for instance, one may come across a game in which captions are translated while dialog is not (cf. O’Hagan 2007). Similarly, localized web pages often ‘forget’ to translate certain textual elements, anything from drop-down menus to videoclips (cf. Sandrini forthcoming).

Some audiovisual products may also be categorized differently according to which elements you are considering. An interesting case in point is found whenever Western films (with captions and displays in Latin letters) are voiced-over – an isosemiotic translation procedure – into languages using Cyrillic script. Not only will such written signs be read aloud by the narrator, which is a case of diasemiotic translation; even ‘untranslatable’ names will have to be read aloud, since they are encoded in an alphabet unknown to the common viewer – a case of transliteration. This means that different elements of, for instance, a Russian video version of an American movie may be referred to three different translational categories, a logical result of the intricate relations between the original polysemiotic mosaic and its translation.

## 4 Semiotic composition, perception and impact of screen translation

In the following sections of this paper, we will focus on screen translation while maintaining a primarily semiotic approach. Admittedly, the term ‘screen translation’ is not entirely self-explanatory, neither is the competing term ‘audiovisual translation’. As is often the case, the best term may be found in another language, in this case Danish. However, introducing the Danism ‘billedmedieoversættelse’ (literally: picture media translation) in English is not exactly practical, so ‘screen translation’ will do.

As this term, slightly imperfect as it is – especially in an exploratory context as this – may imply any kind of translation on any kind of screen, I will need to define screen translation as “the translation of transient polysemiotic texts presented onscreen to mass audiences”.

The label ‘transient’ is included in order to keep the focus on the classical notion of ‘moving pictures’. Without that definitorial limitation, static images with captions presented on screens would qualify as well. Accordingly, the notion screen translation includes translations of

- films displayed on ‘silver screens’ in cinema theaters,
- broadcast televised material on TV screens,
- non-broadcast televised (DVD) material on TV or computer screens,
- online audiovisual material on computer screens.
- As is seen, screen translation does not encompass translations of
- \*teletext pages on TV screens,
- \*written texts on computer screens (web pages, email messages, etc.),
- \*plays and operas performed on stage (surtitled productions).

Compared with earlier notions of screen translation, the definition suggested above implies that screen translation is not necessarily interlingual – with dubbing, subtitling and voice-over as three dominant types. Catering for special audiences, subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing and audio description (*intralingual* and *intersemiotic*, respectively), also qualify as screen translation.

In the following, a semiotic comparison of these five types of screen translation will be made, starting with an ‘objective’ juxtaposition of the impact on the target audience of each type.

	Original production (TV/DVD)	Subtitled version	Dubbed version	Voiced-over version	Deaf and HoH version	Audio-described version
Image	1	1	1	1	1	—
Writing	4	2	4	4	2	—
Sound effects	3	4	3	3	—	2
Speech	2	3	2	2	—	1

Tab. 3: Impact ranking of semiotic channels in screen translation

Tab. 3 gives a fairly uncontroversial ranking of the four basic semiotic channels used in filmic media.

- a) Image, including both composition (in space) and montage/editing (in time).
- b) Writing, including displays (as ‘seen’ by the camera) and captions (including credits, toptitles and subtitles).
- c) Sound effects, including on-location sounds and music as well as music and effects added in post-production.
- d) Speech, including ‘meaningful’ lyrics, but excluding inaudible background dialogue

The ranking is based on an average filmic production, one that is found toward the center of the field in which genres like sitcoms (some of which can be ‘enjoyed’ without watching the action), very ‘pictoresque’ films and transmissions from concerts place themselves in more marginal positions.

It should come as no surprise that while the two modes of revoicing – dubbing and voice-over – display the same semiotic ranking as that of the original, ‘normal’ subtitling skews the semiotic ‘division of labor’ in the viewer, while intralingual subtitling and audio description – as they are perceived by their core audiences – represent total shifts in the semiotic balance of the original production.

In the following table, I suggest a closer look at the cognitive semiotic changes implied by the intrinsic qualities of the five translational types: How much of the semantic load communicated to the audience is carried by each semiotic channel? Or, phrased in more market-oriented terms: What are the shares of attention for each channel?

This table – an attempt to quantify the rankings listed in Tab. 3 – shows the colossal difference in attention shares (and impact) between the various semiotic channels. Lacking available empirical studies on audience perception of various translation methods, let alone systematic comparisons of semantic content related to semiotic structure, I have based the figures in Tab. 4 partly on my personal experience as a subtitler, partly on theoretical studies by myself and others (cf. Gottlieb 1997).

As will be obvious from the above remarks, the figures in Tab. 4 are rough estimates that illustrate, among other things, how subtitles (for hearing audiences) distract attention from the image, and that of all semiotic channels, sound effects constitute the most ‘constant’ communicative factor. The fact that neither sound effects nor speech are listed as having any

	Original production (TV/DVD)	Dubbed version	Voiced-over version	Subtitled version	Deaf and HoH version	Audio-described version
Image	55%	55%	55%	40%	65%	—
Writing	2%	1%	0%	32%	35%	—
Sound effects	18%	18%	18%	18%	—	35%
Speech	25%	26%	27%	10%	—	65%

*Tab. 4: Relative impact of semiotic channels in screen translation<sup>4</sup>*

<sup>4</sup> Figures based on personal experience Gottlieb (1997)

communicative value in the Deaf and HoH column of course only applies for the primary target group for intralingual subtitling: the Deaf community. Likewise, the shares for audio description apply for truly blind people, who may not be the sole audience segment benefiting from that mode of translation.

Although making the exact research design is not going to be simple, empirical studies of audience processing of semantic information in various semiotic channels are much needed. A lot has been said concerning the relative qualities of, say, dubbing and subtitling, but little is yet known (cf. Koolstra et al. 2002 and the extensive bibliography in Gottlieb 2002b).

## 5 Ideals and realities in translation

Although many aspects of translation have been thoroughly investigated in recent years, we often lack empirical evidence or rely on uncorroborated assumptions in the field of translation studies – as I admittedly did in the previous section.

A few of these assumptions will be dealt with in the following two sections addressing, respectively, translation in general and screen translation in particular. Although several of the notions to be discussed do make sense in many contexts, I do not mind assuming the role of devil’s advocate here; what counts is that established notions be challenged.

### 5.1 Debatable common notions on translation

Among the many claims, credos and concepts that are commonly accepted in contemporary translation studies circles are the three notions listed in Tab. 5, to be discussed in the following paragraphs:

Notions	Counter-arguments
1) Translation strategies (as instrumental in translational work)	a) Translators often don’t make conscious choices b) Translators often see only one solution
2) Acceptability (as a guiding principle) in translation	‘Acceptable’ semantic or semiotic changes may betray the text
3) Original version	a) Basic version serves as template only b) Basic version is a translation itself c) Several languages coexist in basic version

Tab. 5: Debatable Notionas – Translation in general

#### 5.1.1 How strategic are translators?

Among the many notions that go almost uncontested, is the entity *translation strategies*. This concept – which most translation scholars, including myself, find very useful – is sometimes seen as the guiding principle behind all translational activity: “Each part or aspect of a translation can be perceived as the outcome of a process of choosing among various possible solutions in the light of all the operative factors of the moment” (Zabalbeascoa 1997:337). This is also implied in much theoretical work<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> cf. As an example Heidrun Geryzmisch-Arbogast/Klaus Mudersbach 1998

However, only very conscientious, gifted and imaginative translators are able to live up to such expectations. In much professional translation work – and whenever even talented translators work under time pressure, a common occurrence indeed – there simply is no ‘process of choosing among various possible solutions’ and no awareness of ‘all the operative factors’ involved. Often, translators are happy to be able to just hit on one solution to the problem at hand; conscious comparisons of the pros and cons of a whole series of alternative solutions is wishful thinking, rather than normal practice, in great parts of today’s translation industry.

Top-notch translators may, if asked to do so, list several solutions to a translational problem, but this is not their typical *modus operandi*: “Translators simply behave like polyglots, because in some way they already know that in the target language a given thing is expressed so and so. They follow their instinct, as does every fluent bilingual person” (Eco 2004:182; *emphasis added*).

No matter whether we look at technical or literary translation, film subtitling or conference interpreting, most translators see themselves as common soldiers in the battlefield, rather than armchair strategists calmly considering their next move.

### **5.1.2 How acceptable is ‘acceptability’?**

When the classical ideal of equivalence came under fire in the 1970s and later, the need for an alternative ideal in translation soon became obvious. One of the most acknowledged suggestions for a guiding principle in a ‘post-equivalence’ world turned out to be the notion of ‘acceptability’, by Gideon Toury (1995), who preferred *acceptability* (meaning that the translated text made sense in the target culture) to *adequacy* (i.e. the truthfulness of the target text *vis-a-vis* the source text).

Although the pragmatic attitude expressed by the proponents of *acceptability* was refreshing, and played well together with the multi-purpose potential of the *Skopos* theory launched by Hans J. Vermeer and others (nicely summarized in Vermeer 2000), the manipulations of the source text encouraged in the process may lead to major distortions of the original content and form. Whenever a fictional work – which, strangely enough, is the genre most often mentioned in connection with the *acceptability* principle – is translated, the target audience have reason to expect that what they are getting is a truthful representation of the original work, whose author is still featured on the front page.

As with the notion of ‘translation strategies’, we are once more confronted with a gap between theoreticians and practitioners: Very few literary or film translators take such liberties in their translations as those that would be possible within the paradigm of ‘acceptability’. And little wonder, when the target audience in most speech communities buy foreign-language books or films, they expect and accept the foreign culture to show.

In contrast to the ‘anything goes’ attitude that may be inferred from the *acceptability* principle, I suggest a revival of the principle of *adequacy*. Whenever that principle is deemed too foreign, narrow or naive for a specific translation, an honest alternative would be to produce an *inspirational translation*, as defined in section 2.1.1 above. That would grant full artistic license to the translator/author of the new text, without postulating that this is a *bona fide* translation (as the audience would understand it) of the original text.

### **5.1.3 What constitutes an original text?**

“Subtitles, I’d like to think, are a token of peace. *Toute l’émotion de la V.O.*” (Rich 2004:168). In subtitling, the concept of an original soundtrack is fundamental, and even the term ‘original’ is almost universal. Thus, in referring to a foreign non-dubbed film, the



French talk about a ‘version original’ (VO), while in German the similar term is “Originaltonband”.

Although in many ways a useful ‘shorthand’ concept, this notion of one ‘original’ behind each translation does not always apply. With manuals, for instance, the various versions available are often parallel versions loosely based on a template (which may never serve as a ‘real’ text) rather than translations of an original. When translating classical texts, including the Bible, several competing versions exist – either in the same language (as is the case with certain works of Shakespeare) or in a number of languages (cf. the Old and New Testaments).

It is probably no exaggeration to say that there exists no form of translation in which the notion of an ‘original version’ is completely sustainable. One often encounters cases where there is no genuine ‘original’, or where one man’s original is another man’s translation. In screen translation – from where the following examples are taken – this not only applies to language (“Which is the original language?”), but even to semiotics (“Which version should be considered the original?”).

One example of the latter phenomenon is found when a film subtitler must decide whether to translate from a script or directly from the soundtrack. In a chronological sense, the script represents the original (intention) of the film; as film dialog is written to be spoken. However, what really counts is what was recorded – and survived in the final version of the film – and what is now heard by the audience. Thus, whenever in doubt, the subtitler should follow the soundtrack, something which quite obviously is not always done.

The former phenomenon – that regarding which foreign language is the ‘original’ language – is often found in *bilingual* screen translation, common in countries with two or more major indigenous speech communities. Contrary to what might be expected by external observers, what we witness here is not two simultaneous translations of one original, but one translation of the original plus one translation of the other translation. In Israel, for instance, the one subtitled line in Arabic may be a translation of the other half of the subtitle block, i.e. the Hebrew subtitle, and in Latvia, the Russian subtitles are translated from – and even synchronized with – the (non-synchronous) Latvian voice-over, which acts as the de facto original, in lieu of the nearly inaudible ‘real’ foreign-language original.

#### 5.1.3.1. Multilingual originals

The phenomenon that original film dialogue increasingly spans several languages may have at least three reasons:

- the quest for authenticity, as sophisticated audiences no longer accept non-English characters – e.g. cold-war Russians – speaking (accented) English on screen. This trend became visible in mainstream Hollywood productions in 1990 when in the western “Dances with Wolves” the Sioux Indians spoke Lakota, meaning that the original American movie version displayed English subtitles whenever Lakota was spoken;
- the fact that due to recent immigration, a number of film-producing countries are turning multicultural and multilingual, with Germany as one example (Heiss 2004: 209); and
- the necessary step taken by many non-Anglophone countries to internationally co-produce films, in which ‘foreign’ locations and actors are often used. As a case in point, almost half of the Danish cinematic releases during the 1990s were co-productions, and many of them featured actors speaking other languages (typically Swedish, Norwegian and English). Accordingly, these films were screened with ‘original’ subtitles in cinema theaters, and later on DVD and TV (Brandstrup and Redvall 124-126).

Not allowing actors from various speech communities to perform in their mother tongue may have a disastrous impact on audience response to the film. An example of this is found when, in his report from the 2005 Montreal Film Festival, a Danish film critic said of the co-produced *The Headsman*: “the many different [English] accents in the film places it in a linguistic no-man’s land, which makes the entire setting and atmosphere of the film utterly unconvincing.” (Monggaard 2005: 24, my translation).

### 5.1.3.2 Relay translation

One final aspect worth mentioning in relation to the notion of originals in translation is *relay translation*. Down through history, translations from language A to language B have very often taken other paths than the straight line from A to B. Thus, several works by Shakespeare reached Danish and other audiences through French or German translations of the English originals, and – what is very often found today – translations from ‘minor’ into ‘major’ languages use ‘not so minor’ languages as relays. In fact, several English 19<sup>th</sup> century translations of the fairy tales of Hans Christian Andersen were translated from German versions of Andersen, rather than from the original Danish stories (Pedersen 2004:358).

Sometimes, the translation in the relay language (C) is not meant for the public in the C culture, but serves only as a pivot, or stepping stone on the way from A to B, hence the term *pivot translation*. Pivot translations, then, are relay translations whose only audience are translators; texts that are never meant to be end products, but merely props that enable translation from a language not (fully) comprehensible to the translator in question. (Grigaravičiūtė and Gottlieb 1999:46).

With film and television, the translator will normally work directly from the language A to language B. However, an increasing number of productions are translated via a relay version or a pivot script. Thus, in satellite-transmitted television in Scandinavia, the Swedish subtitle file often forms the basis of the Danish and Norwegian versions, and with cinema releases, film dialogue in ‘exotic’ languages is often subtitled by someone who does not speak those languages. This will inevitably lead to inconsistencies and downright mistakes in translation that would not have occurred in direct translation from the original version (ibid.:71 ff.).

## 5.2 Debatable common notions on screen translation

Though screen translation has already contributed to the discussion in the previous paragraphs, two ‘common truths’ specifically concerning screen translation will be scrutinized separately in the following paragraphs.

Notions	Counter-arguments
1) Semantic reduction cannot be avoided in subtitling	a) Viewers read faster than ever b) Writing is more concise than speech
2) Dubbing is not authentic	Dubbing represents semiotic equivalence

Tab. 6: Debatable Notions – Screen translation in particular

### 5.2.1 Does subtitling always imply reduction?

Elsewhere (Gottlieb 2005a:16), I have defined subtitling 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.

As is clearly seen, reduction in verbal content, a much-cited feature of subtitling – whether intra- or interlingual – is not considered a defining factor. There are two reasons for this:

(a) The ‘demand’ for text volume reduction in subtitling is neither semiotically nor technically motivated, the only reason being that the reading speed of viewers is supposed to be slower than the (average) speech tempo in the original dialog. Although contemporary empirical data on audience perception is lacking, viewers in today’s subtitling communities are probably faster readers than earlier generations. This is already presupposed by commercial TV stations and parts of the DVD industry, where the long-established ‘six seconds-rule’ – displaying some 12 subtitle characters per second (cps) – has been raised to 16 cps, an increase of around 35%. With more than thirty percent more time for subtitle exposure, the semantic and stylistic content of most spoken lines could be accommodated on screen – a farewell to the usual (quantitative) reduction figures of 20-40% (Gottlieb 1994: 72 and Lomheim 1999: 191).

(b) Even without challenging the established presumptions concerning audience reading speed and film comprehension, the idea of not reducing the text volume in subtitling would be counterproductive to optimal audience comprehension – and result in poor translation. The point here is that a large part of the reduction (still found) in subtitling follows directly from its diasemiotic nature; the deletion or condensation of redundant oral features is a necessity when crossing over from speech to writing – a language mode more concise than oral discourse.

Interestingly, the intersemiotic redundancy (positive feedback from visuals and soundtrack) in subtitling often secures that the audience miss less of the film content 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)

Still, among the oral features prone to condensation are also stylistically important ones like colloquialisms, slang, cursing, pragmatic particles and repetitions. It is obvious that the trimming of the discourse through the elimination of such propositionally redundant features 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. In this way, the oft-mentioned time-and-space constraints of subtitling may serve as a convenient excuse for leaving out controversial or cumbersome elements of the original film dialog. In conclusion, this only goes to show how potentially dangerous the notion of reduction in subtitling is for translation quality.

### 5.2.1.1 A simple example of quantitative, but not qualitative, reduction

As stated above, the economical nature of written language often means that quantitative reduction in subtitling need not imply semantic, or qualitative, reduction. A textbook example of this fact was found in the subtitling of the British documentary *Man's Best Friend* (Channel Four, 2002), broadcast by the Danish public-service TV station DR1 (November 17, 2004) as *Mandens bedste ven*, subtitled by Peter Nørgaard.

Tab. 7 shows the verbal content of a short sequence from this broadcast. In the first part of the original narrated sequence, represented by the first subtitle block, the subtitler has used three techniques for shortening the text volume, two of which are sheer convention (numbers for polysyllabic numerals, and an abbreviation of an academic title), while the third is highly creative: an exclamation mark in brackets for the adjectival phrase 'the improbably named'. Adding to this, the verb in the main clause ('invented', translated into 'opfandt'), is moved from segment 2 to segment 1, in accordance with Danish syntactic rules. This obligatory need for syntactic reshuffling is reason enough for condensing subtitle 1, as the rhetorical pause between the two segments is (as is customary in Scandinavian subtitling) used as a segmentation point by the subtitler.

The entire sentence (In ... bigger) lasts 8.9 seconds, 5.5 seconds of which is spent on the first segment (equivalent to subtitle 1), with the remaining segment (subtitle 2) lasting 3.4 seconds. Thus, subtitle 1, representing a quantitative reduction of the original 76 characters by 32 percent, has an exposure rate of 9 cps. In comparison, subtitle 2, which – although freed of the main verb – still takes up 49 characters, is 4 percent longer than the original. Thus, the resulting exposure time for subtitle 2 is 14 cps, slightly faster than the established norms, but not as speedy as the previously mentioned 'commercial' standard of 16 cps.

English narration	Danish subtitles	Back-translation
In nineteen eighty-six, a surgeon in China, the improbably named Doctor Long,	I 1986 <b>opfandt</b> en kinesisk læge, dr. Long (!), –	In 1986 invented a Chinese physician, Dr. Long (!)
<b>invented</b> an operation to make dicks look bigger.	– en operation, der fik penis til at virke større.	an operation that made the penis seem bigger.

Text volume of initial segment	Number of characters
<b>Uncondensed translation:</b> I nitten hundrede og seksogfirs opfandt en kinesisk læge, doktor Long, –	72 (against 76 in the English original)
<b>Danish broadcast translation:</b> I 1986 opfandt en kinesisk læge, dr. Long (!), –	47 (reduced by 25 characters, a 35 % reduction)

Tab. 7: Quantitative reduction with no semantic losses

### **5.2.2 Dubbing is not authentic**

Since the introduction of sound films in the late 1920s, all methods of translation have been under fire, and subtitling was seen by many as a step back, now that voices could be heard in the cinema. Still more critics were skeptical toward dubbing, which was seen as basically unauthentic. And to this day, most foreign-film aficionados have been strongly in favor of subtitling when forced to choose between the translation methods available. A key issue to those fascinated by subtitling – especially people based in major speech communities rarely exposed to foreign-language imports – is the additive nature of subtitling, giving viewers total access to the exotic original while being semantically safeguarded by captions in the domestic language. This thrilling experience, almost like watching dangerous animals from behind an armored glass screen in the zoo, is shared by many in the film industry. As expressed by Canadian film director Atom Egoyan: “Subtitles offer a way into worlds outside of ourselves. Subtitles embed us” (Egoyan and Balfour 2004:30).

Paradoxically, from a semiotic point of view, subtitling – although retaining the original soundtrack and thus creating a more authentic impression than dubbing – is less authentic than dubbing. Subtitling constitutes a fundamental break with the semiotic structure of sound film by re-introducing the translation mode of the silent movies, i.e. written signs, as an additional semiotic layer. Technically speaking, subtitling is a supplementary mode of translation.

Dubbing, on the other hand, represents a substitutional mode and is thus the only semiotically equivalent form of screen translation. (Its underdog competitor, voice-over, places itself between two stools by layering the revoiced soundtrack on top of the original dialog track).

Especially within the target-culture acceptability paradigm (although criticized above, this is still a defensible approach to certain types of translation) dubbing gets the upper hand by bravely trying to recreate the authentic cinematic (sound film) experience. And as surveys have shown (Kilborn 1993), major parts of the audience in dubbing countries – especially TV viewers – are happy with what they hear. Many non-English speaking viewers of American sitcoms, for instance, do not even realize that they are being manipulated by their local dubbing industry. The notion that it is impossible to recreate a filmic illusion in foreign minds is an illusion itself.

If dubbing did not work, why would TV stations spend so much money on post-synchronizing programs when they could have them subtitled for about one tenth of the price?

To be sure, the only semiotically 100 percent authentic type of screen translation would imply that one should not only alter the soundtrack in order to keep the semiotic balance, but also recreate all semiotic tracks of the original production. The result, a total remake, would only be recognized as a sort of translation by those who know the original production and speak the language used in it – not enough people to shatter the illusion of dealing with an original production.

## **6 Translation types compared**

This final section of the paper will present a juxtaposition of nine types of translation, including the three dominant methods of screen translation: subtitling, dubbing and voice-over. Following the semiotically-oriented comparison, the discussion will conclude by comparing six of the types analyzed with regard to a number of esthetic, linguistic and cultural parameters, in order to ascertain the diverse media-political implications of the various types of translation, and – in particular – the implications of the national preferences of screen translation method(s).

## **6.1 The stuff that texts are made of: Semiotics in translations**

In Tab. 8, various emblematic types of translation – all of them stamping their mark on the language communities in which they are common and favored, are compared. As parameters for this comparison I have used the five defining features of subtitling (listed in section 5.2.1).

The second column lists – for each type – the translational category in which it belongs, as stipulated in the taxonomy in tables 1 and 2.

The ‘ambiguous’ notation for voice-over in the third column indicates that this type of revoicing is sometimes made on the spot.

The void signs (Ø) in the third column from the right illustrate that the designation ‘synchronous’ is neither relevant to drama nor to literary translations. Both are presented to the public without any temporal links to the original works.

Finally, polysemiotic types in which one semiotic channel carries less than 5% of the semantic load (cf. Tab. 4) are considered to operate without that channel.

## **6.2 What translations do to people: Audience benefits of selected types**

Where Tab. 8 used pluses and minuses to indicate whether a certain requirement was fulfilled or not, Tab. 9 uses zeros and stars (asterisks, to be exact), as we are no longer dealing with binary oppositions, but rather with degrees on a cline between two extremes.

The zero sign (0) indicates total lack of the quality relevant to the particular column, while four stars represents the optimum. As a case in point, on affordability – a quite central parameter in the translation business – dubbing is rated a two-star enterprise, while its two rivals are handed four stars each. With dubbing ten times more costly than both subtitling and voice-over, one might find two stars a bit too kind; the reason, of course, is that domestic productions (whether remakes or original programs) are even more expensive: hence the single star in that cell.

As in the previous table, the void sign (Ø) indicates irrelevance. In this table it only appears once (in the foreign-culture mediation column) as an illustration of the futility in trying to estimate how ‘foreign’ a domestic program is likely to be. Naturally, some TV genres tend to be almost claustrofobically local, while other programs (documentaries, for instance) may contain more ‘exotic’ content than found in certain imports.

With these introductory remarks, I hope the tables will tell their tale of likenesses and differences, of assets and deficits of the selected specimens of the vast reservoir of translations that surround us.

<b>Translation type</b>	<b>Semiotic categorization</b>	<b>Prepared</b>	<b>Written</b>	<b>Additive</b>	<b>Synchro- nous</b>	<b>Tran- sient</b>	<b>Poly- semiotic</b>
'Normal' subtitling	Cell 24: Conventional, interlingual and diasemiotic	+	+	+	+	+	+ (4 channels)
Subtitling for the deaf	Cell 30: Conventional, intralingual and hyposemiotic	+	+	–	+	+	+ (2 channels)
Live subtitling for the deaf	Cell 30: Conventional, intralingual and hyposemiotic	–	+	–	–	+	+ (2 channels)
Voice-over	Cell 30: Conventional, interlingual and isosemiotic	+ / –	–	(–)	–	+	+ (3 channels)
Dubbing	Cell 23: Conventional, interlingual and isosemiotic	+	–	–	+	+	+ (3 channels)
Audio description	Cell 9: Inspirational, verbalizing and hyposemiotic	+	–	–	–	+	+ (2 channels)
Drama translation	Cell 23: Conventional, interlingual and isosemiotic	+	–	–	∅	+	+ (3 channels)
Literary translation	Cell 23: Conventional, interlingual and isosemiotic	+	+	–	∅	–	– (1 channel)
Simultaneous interpreting	Cell 26: Conventional, interlingual and hyposemiotic	–	–	–	–	+	– (1 channel)

*Tab. 8: Translation methods I: Semiotic qualities (intended audiences)*

Type of production	Affordability	Semiotic authenticity	Dialogue authenticity	Content mediation	Access to original	Foreign-culture mediation	Foreign-language training	Literacy training	Domestic-language boosting	Linguistic integrity (no trans-lationese)
Dubbed TV	**	***	0	****	*	**	0	0	***	*
Subtitled TV	****	*	****	**	****	****	****	***	**	**
Voiced-over TV	****	**	*	***	**	**	*	0	**	***
Domestic TV productions	*	****	****	****	****	∅	0	0	****	****
Translated drama	**	****	***	***	*	*	0	0	****	***
Book translations	**	****	***	****	*	***	0	****	***	***
Simultaneous interpreting	***	***	*	***	***	**	0	0	****	***

*Tab. 9: Translation methods II: Media-political qualities (general audiences)*

### 6.3 Translation methods, merits and national preferences

As is clearly shown in Tab. 9, the type of translation chosen may be just as important as what texts we are dealing with or what 'strategies' translators tend to choose. To circumscribe Marshall McLuhan: "the medium of translation is the message". This is true whether we look at audience-selected types of translation (as when someone prefers a translated novel instead of a subtitled screen adaptation) or consider situations where the choice of translation method has already been made by text providers (TV stations, etc.) as when, for instance, subtitling is preferred to voice-over in broadcasting a foreign comedy series.

I will refrain from discussing the contents and implications of the individual cells in the table – let alone draw any bombastic conclusions on the relative merits of the various types of translation represented here. Instead of, for instance, choreographing a final showdown between the three dominant (interlingual) screen translation methods, I will test whether the data in Tab. 9 will explain why all three methods are still very popular in their home constituencies.

In Europe, little has changed in the past decades as regards preferences in TV translation methods: although subtitling has gained ground in former voice-over territory (e.g. Estonia), and dubbing may have cemented its status in some major speech communities (especially Great Britain), roughly speaking, the situation is still as it was during the Cold War:

- 1) Western European speech communities with less than 25 million inhabitants prefer subtitling on TV. (from Iceland to Finland, and from Portugal to Greece, dubbing is only found in broadcasts for children.)
- 2) Western European major speech communities dub all foreign programs. (England, Spain, France, Germany and Italy never subtitle TV programs).
- 3) Eastern European speech communities are divided, with



- some countries (e.g. Slovenia, Croatia and Romania) preferring subtitles,
- others (e.g. the Czech Republic and Hungary) favoring dubbing, and
- yet others, including Latvia, Lithuania and Russia are in favor of voice-over.

### **6.3.1 The advantages of voice-over**

Based on the data in Tab. 9, it is fair to say that voice-over, the poor cousin of (lip-sync) dubbing, comes out as the winner of the two revoicing competitors not only in terms of affordability, but also when it comes to retaining some of the original flavor (cf. the 'access to original' quality) and – especially important from a puristic point of view, predominant in for instance Lithuania – with regard to linguistic integrity. Voice-over being non-synchronous (cf. Tab. 8), it neither has the need to emulate foreign (mostly English) syntax and lexis on local lips, nor does it allow the audience to follow the original dialogue and thus exert foreign influence that way.

### **6.3.2 The attractions of subtitling**

Whenever affordability, dialog authenticity, acquisition of foreign-language and reading skills are prioritized in audiovisual translation, subtitling is the obvious solution. Historically, what began as an economic necessity in minor European speech communities during the Depression in the early 1930s soon became a linguistic virtue, and there is no doubt that especially the knowledge of foreign languages has been boosted in the subtitling countries (cf. Gottlieb 2004). Thus, subtitling seems to be a sensible choice in relatively small countries, in which knowledge of foreign cultures is a basic condition for survival – as opposed to larger nations, which tend to be more culturally self-sufficient, in both senses of the word.

### **6.3.3 The assets of dubbing**

When money is not the option, and broadcasters emphasize semiotic authenticity, boosting of the domestic language and smooth content mediation (in other words: viewer-friendly and localized versions of foreign productions), dubbing is the undisputed choice. As a covert form of translation, dubbing strikes a comfortable balance between presenting foreign (TV) genres and interestingly 'exotic' settings and at the same time ridding viewers of two subtitling evils: listening to incomprehensible dialogue and having to read while trying to enjoy the action onscreen.

## **6.4 Linguistic integrity in translation**

In this final paragraph, I will briefly discuss the question of linguistic integrity in translation, this time comparing the three screen methods with drama translation, literary translation and simultaneous interpreting.

As is signaled in Tab. 9, what is hinted at with the term 'linguistic integrity' is the likeliness than a given type of (interlingual) translation will yield verbal discourse which is idiomatic and thus not prone to displaying features from the source language. In other words, types of translation which tend to contain many instances of translationese – these days typically Anglicisms, including calques, semantic loans, preference for English lookalikes, etc. (Gottlieb 2005b) – will obtain low scores in the far-right column of that table.

It may come as a surprise that the two dominant screen translation types score lower than both voice-over and their 'off screen' counterparts. To a large extent this is due to the immediacy of film and TV. The earlier-mentioned media-specific constraints of subtitling (the audible dialogue, forcing translators not to alienate their bilingual readers by straying too far

from the original syntax) and dubbing (the demands of lip-synchrony in close-ups) both produce a considerable number of features of translationese – in casu Anglicisms. (Herbst 1994; Gottlieb 1999 and 2001).

As mentioned above, the non-synchronous nature of voice-over is what maintains its relatively high linguistic integrity, thus placing it on a par with simultaneous interpreting (in which the interpreter has considerable freedom as regards the linguistic expression) as well as literary and drama translation. However, no type of translation obtains maximum points in this column, which reflects the fact revealed by several studies that even printed translations display several traits of translationese. (Gellerstam 1986 and Tirkkonen-Condit 2002).

While the linguistic integrity of both written and oral monosemiotic translation may be somewhat higher than that of the polysemitic types dubbing and subtitling, monosemiotic translation – represented in the tables by literary translation and simultaneous interpreting – display extremely high degrees of translational freedom. In doing so, the semiotic nature of these translation types makes it possible for translators to take great liberties with text content and style (cf. the low scores in the 'access to original' column). Whether translators choose to do so is a matter of personal integrity, something which is not the issue here – but certainly a topic deserving scholarly attention.

## 7 Conclusion: the human factor in translation

This paper has focused on the multi-faceted nature of translation, and on the plethora of translational types, all defined, discussed and compared against a semiotic backdrop. What has been addressed just in passing is the human factor. Although the notion of translational strategies, a well-established one in Translation Studies, was criticized for lending itself to conceptions of translators as near-omniscient beings consciously selecting solutions to translational conundrums, the role of the translator *is* central. The measurable importance of semiotic structures notwithstanding, the style and talents of the individual translator will always play a key role in shaping the translated text. With regard to inspirational translation, this is a matter of course, but even within conventionalized translation, this remains a fact.

As a case in point, a major empirical study on how various (national) language versions, dubbed and/or subtitled, dealt with punning concluded that "apart from the characteristics of the source-text sequence, the individual translator and his or her specific choices are the most decisive factor in the translation of language-play in film." (Schröter 2005: 367).

It is still my hope that with this paper I have contributed to refining the terminology and widening the conceptual framework of Translation Studies in a time in which humans increasingly communicate within highly complex semiotic structures.

## 8 References

- Benecke, B. (2004) Audio-Description, *Meta* 49 (1): 78-80.  
Brandstrup, P. G. & Redvall, E. N. (2003) 'Fra Babettes gæstebud til Blinkende lygter. Internationaliseringen af dansk film', in *Nationale spejlinger. Tendenser i ny dansk film*. Anders Toftgaard & Ian Halvan Hawkesworth (eds), 109-137. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press  
Chaume, F. (2004) 'Film Studies and Translation Studies: Two Disciplines at Stake in Audiovisual Translation', in *Meta* 49 (1): 12-24

- Díaz Cintas, Jorge (2007): “Back to the Future in Subtitling”. Proceedings of the Marie Curie Euroconferences MuTra ‘Challenges of Multidimensional Translation’ - Saarbrücken 2-6 May 2005.
- Eco, U. (2004) *Mouse or Rat? Translation as Negotiation*. London: Phoenix. (Original edition 2003.)
- Egoyan, A. & Balfour, I. (2004) ‘Introduction’, in Egoyan & Balfour (eds), 21-30.  
----- & Balfour, I. (eds) (2004) *Subtitles. On the foreignness of film*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press and Alphabet City Media.
- Gambier, Y. (2004) Tradaptation Cinématographique, In Orero (ed.), 169-181.  
----- & Gottlieb, H. (eds) (2001) *(Multi) Media Translation*, Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Gellerstam, M. (1986) ‘Translationese in Swedish novels translated from English’, in *Translation Studies in Scandinavia*, Lars Wollin & Hans Lindquist (eds), 88-95. Lund: Lund University Press.
- Gerzymisch-Arbogast, Heidrun (2007): “Multidimensional Translation“. Proceedings of the Marie Curie Euroconferences MuTra ‘Challenges of Multidimensional Translation’ - Saarbrücken 2-6 May 2005.  
----- & Mundersbach, Klaus (1998): *Methoden des wissenschaftlichen Übersetzens*. Tübingen – Basel: Francke.
- Gottlieb, H. (1994) *Tekstning – synkron billedmedieoversættelse*. [Danske Afhandlinger om Oversættelse 5]. University of Copenhagen: Center for Translation Studies and Lexicography.  
----- (1997) *Subtitles, Translation and Idioms*. University of Copenhagen: Center for Translation Studies and Lexicography.  
----- (1999) ‘The impact of English: Danish TV subtitles as mediators of Anglicisms’, in *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 47 (2): 133-153. (Reprinted in Gottlieb 2005a)  
----- (2001) *In video veritas: Are Danish voices less American than Danish subtitles?* In *La traducción in los medios audiovisuales*, Frederic Chaume & Rosa Agost (eds), 193-220. Castelló de la Plana: Publicacions de la Universitat Jaume I. (Reprinted in Gottlieb 2005a).  
----- (2002) "Titles on Subtitling 1929-1999 – An International Annotated Bibliography: Interlingual Subtitling for Cinema, TV, Video and DVD”, in *RILA (Rassegna Italiana di Linguistica Applicata)* 34, (1-2): 215-397. Online version: [www.unipv.it/wwwling/gottlieb\\_intro.pdf](http://www.unipv.it/wwwling/gottlieb_intro.pdf) (introduction)  
----- (2003a) ‘Tekstning – oversættelse for åben skærm’, in *Anglo Files. Medlemsblad for Engelsklærerforeningen for Gymnasiet and HF* 130: 44-53.  
----- (2003b) ‘Parameters of Translation’, in *Perspectives. Studies in Translatology* 11 (3): 167-187.  
----- (2004) ‘Language-political implications of subtitling’, in  
----- (2005a) ‘Texts, Translation and Subtitling – In Theory, and in Denmark’, in *Screen Translation. Eight studies in subtitling, dubbing and voice-over*: 1-40. University of Copenhagen: Center for Translation Studies.  
----- (2005b) ‘Anglicisms and Translation’, in *In and Out of English: For Better, For Worse?*: Gunilla Anderman & Margaret Rogers (eds), 161-184. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

- Griesel, Yvonne (to be published in 2007): “Are Theatre Surtitles an Adequate Mode of Translation? Towards an Integrative View of Translation in the Theatre”. Proceedings of the Marie Curie Euroconferences MuTra ‘Challenges of Multidimensional Translation’ - Saarbrücken 2-6 May 2005.
- Grigaravičiūtė, I. & Gottlieb, H. (1999) ‘Danish voices, Lithuanian voice-over. The mechanics of non-synchronous translation’, in *Perspectives. Studies in Translatology* 7 (1): 41-80. (Reprinted in Gottlieb 2005a)
- Heiss, C. (2004) ‘Dubbing Multilingual Films: A New Challenge?’, in *Meta* 49 (1): 208-220.
- Herbst, T. (1994) *Linguistische Aspekte der Synchronisation von Fernsehserien*, Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag.
- Jakobson, R. (1959) ‘On Linguistic aspects of Translation’, in *On Translation*, Reuben Brower (ed.). Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press. (Reprinted in Venuti (ed.) 2000: 113-118.)
- Kilborn, R. (1993) “‘Speak my language’: Current attitudes to television subtitling and dubbing”, in *Media, Culture and Society* 15: 641-660.
- Koolstra, K. & Peeters A. L. & Spinhof, H. (2002) ‘The pros and cons of dubbing and subtitling’, in *European Journal of Communication* 17 (3): 325-354.
- Kunold, Jan (to be published in 2007): “Translating Music”. Proceedings of the Marie Curie Euroconferences MuTra ‘Challenges of Multidimensional Translation’ - Saarbrücken 2-6 May 2005.
- Kurz, I. & Mikulasek, B. (2004) ‘Television as a Source of Information for the Deaf and Hearing Impaired Captions and Sign Language on Austrian TV’, in *Meta* 49 (1): 81-88.
- Lomheim, S. (1999) ‘The writing on the screen. Subtitling: A case study from Norwegian Broadcasting (NRK), Oslo’, in *Word, Text, Translation*, Gunilla Anderman & Margaret Rogers (eds), 190-207. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Monggaard, C. (2005) ‘Kunstnerisk udvanding’, in *Information*, September 7, 2005. Copenhagen.
- Neves, Josélia (2005) *Subtitling fort he Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing*. London: Roehampton University. PhD Thesis.
- O’Hagan, Minako (2007): “Multidimensional Translation: A Game Plan for Audiovisual Translation in the Age of GILT“. Proceedings of the Marie Curie Euroconferences MuTra ‘Challenges of Multidimensional Translation’ - Saarbrücken 2-6 May 2005.
- Orero P. (ed.), 83-100. (Reprinted in Gottlieb 2005a)
- (ed.) (2004) *Topics in Audiovisual Translation*, Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Pedersen, V. H. (2004) *Ugly Ducklings? Studies in the English Translations of Hans Christian Andersen’s Tales and Stories*, Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark.
- Poyatos, F. (ed.) (1997) *Nonverbal Communication and Translation*, Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Rich, B. R. (2004) ‘To read or not to read: Subtitles, trailers, and monolingualism’, in Egoyan & Balfour (eds), 153-169.
- Sandrini, Peter (to be published in 2007): „Website Localization and Translation“. Proceedings of the Marie Curie Euroconferences MuTra ‘Challenges of Multidimensional Translation’ - Saarbrücken 2-6 May 2005.
- Schröter, T. (2005) *Shun the Pun, Rescue the Rhyme? The Dubbing and Subtitling of Language-Play in Film*, Karlstad, Sweden: Karlstad University Studies.
- Tirkkonen-Condit, S. (2002) ‘Translatione – a myth or an empirical fact?’, in *Target* 14 (2): 207-220.

- Tomaszkiewicz, T. (1993) *Les opérations linguistique qui sous-tendent le processus de sous-titrage des film*, Poznan: Adam Mickiewicz University Press.
- Toury, G. (1995) *Descriptive Translation Studies – and Beyond*, Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Venuti, L.(ed.) (2000) *The Translation Studies Reader*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Vermeer, H. J. (2000) ‘Skopos and commission in translational action’, in Venuti (ed.), 221-232. (Translated by Andrew Chesterman, original edition 1989)
- Wagner, Mathias (2007): “How to Make a Haptic Device Help Touch Virtual Histological Slides“. Proceedings of the Marie Curie Euroconferences MuTra ‘*Challenges of Multidimensional Translation*’ - Saarbrücken 2-6 May 2005.  
[www.unipv.it/wwwling/gottlieb.pdf](http://www.unipv.it/wwwling/gottlieb.pdf) (main bibliography).
- Zabalbeascoa, P. (1997) ‘Dubbing and the nonverbal dimension of translation’, in Poyatos (ed.), 327-342.