

Translating culture-specific items in films: the case of interlingual and intersemiotic translation

Loukia Kostopoulou

Translation is said to be a double act of communication involving both a hermeneutic and a rhetorical dimension. It also involves one or more cognitive acts (Sonesson 2014). In this sense, the translator is both the interpreter of a text and the creator of a new one (ibid.). He or she may 'adapt to the sender of his first act of communication or to the receiver of his second act of communication – or some combination of this' (ibid.). Both the activity of translating and translation as the result of this activity are closely related to the notion of culture. Torop posits that '[c]ulture operates largely through translational activity' in the sense that by the inclusion of new texts culture can both innovate itself and 'perceive its specificity'. In this paper I examine the specificity of films as a medium in which the translator mediates between languages and cultures. Film subtitles involve not only interlingual but mainly intersemiotic translation, where the visual message complements the verbal one and is sometimes preponderant. The research is based on the examination of culture-specific items (CSIs) in Tassos Boulmetis' film Πολιτική Κουζίνα/ A Touch of Spice (2003) and its English subtitles. The theoretical framework for this study is Aixelá's proposed translation strategies for the transfer of CSIs and the parameter of Polysemiotics proposed by Pedersen.

KEYWORDS Audiovisual translation; Interlingual subtitling; Intersemiotic translation; Culture-specific items; Translation strategies; Polysemiotics

Introduction

The first research attempts in the field of audiovisual translation (AVT) were made as early as 1960 and were concerned mainly with constraints involved in film subtitling. In 1982, Marleau underlines one of the key elements of subtitling, that of illusion. He posits that we have to create for the viewer the illusion that he/she can understand everything without even reading the subtitles. Back in the 1980s, subtitling was viewed as a 'necessary evil' (*un mal nécessaire*) with no artistic value. For this reason, Diaz Cintas (2003: 131) expresses the wish that the industry realize that subtitling is a consistent part of the artistic creation of a film. In 2007 Pedersen introduces the idea of 'a tacit contract of illusion'. Later on, he expands on this idea and proposes 'a tacit agreement, "a contract of illusion" [...], between the subtitler and the viewers to the effect that the subtitles are the dialogue, that what you read is actually what people say' (Pedersen 2011: 22). Thus the work of the subtitlers is usually as 'unobtrusive as possible' (ibid.).

Subtitling, be it intralingual or interlingual, is, according to Diaz Cintas and Remael (2007: 8), the translation practice during which translation appears in written form in the lower part of the screen. This practice renders not only the original dialogues, in a condensed way, but also other elements such as letters, signs, graffiti that are present on the screen. It also takes into consideration

the soundtrack of the film or voices that are not seen on screen. From this definition it is evident that audiovisual works, such as films, have three important components: image, the dialogues of the original soundtrack and the subtitles. Thus, during the screening process the viewer is focusing on both the images and the subtitles. To comprehend the film in its totality, he/she is supposed to decrypt the images and at the same time read the subtitles. This process is quite demanding.

In film subtitling the translator is called upon to find a balance between the soundtrack and the subtitles, as there should not be a clash between the subtitles and what is being projected on screen. Another significant element in the process of subtitling is that of redundancy. Subtitles should act as a supplement to the understanding of the film, and should by no means obstruct the reading of the images and the viewing process. Hence, redundant information is usually left out due to the spatio-temporal and technical constraints involved in film translation. Spatial constraints refer to the limited space of 35-40 characters per subtitle line depending on the medium (cinema, television etc.) on which the subtitles are projected. Time constraints refer to the time during which the subtitles appear on the screen. An average viewer is able to read a double-liner in six seconds (d'Ydewalle et al. 1987).¹ Finally, technical constraints refer to a maximum of two lines per subtitle that appear on the lower part of the screen.² Due to these constraints, subtitling has been characterized as 'constrained translation' (Tidford 1982; Mayoral et al. 1988).

The subtitler should bear in mind that events and references at the beginning of a film may reoccur in other sequences later on in the film, thus making even documentary films more attractive to the audience. For this reason he/ she should be careful what to delete or reduce.³ Gottlieb (1994: 269) defines subtitling as an intersemiotic or intermodal type of translation due to the change observed from the spoken to the written mode. This change of mode is critical to the rendering of the original dialogues and is considered one of the constraints of audiovisual translation. It is evident that subtitling, unlike other translation types, is ephemeral or transitory. Another peculiarity of subtitling is that the viewer has access to both the original text and the subtitles. This fact is emphasized by O'Connell (1998) who notes that subtitling is an overt type of translation, since it allows the viewer who knows the original language of the soundtrack to evaluate the subtitles.

In a later study, Gottlieb (1997: 141) suggests that subtitling is a part of a polysemiotic text. He notes that subtitling, contrary to other translation types, is additive since it adds information. The four semiotic channels that are present in polysemiotic texts (the non-verbal visual channel, the non-verbal audio channel, the verbal audio channel and the verbal visual channel) (ibid.: 143) 'carry semiotic information, and there is often a degree of overlap, or Intersemiotic Redundancy between them' (Pedersen 2005: 13). The notion of 'intersemiotic redundancy' was first introduced by Gottlieb (1997: 101). It actually suggests that although almost one third of the information in the original dialogue is lost when rendered in the subtitles, 'the viewers are compensated through other channels, so that the total loss of information is not as dire as the quantitative figures suggest' (Pedersen 2011: 21). Pedersen includes this parameter in his proposed model concerning the translation strategies used in subtitling. He refers to it as 'the parameter of Polysemiotics' (ibid.: 113). He notes that 'the greater the Intersemiotic Redundancy, the less the pressure for the subtitler to provide the TT audience with guidance' (Pedersen 2005: 13). 'Gottlieb's notion of intersemiotic redundancy is closely connected to the parameter of Polysemiotics. The difference is that Polysemiotics would be a more general notion regarding how semiotic channels interact' (ibid.). Polysemiotics aids the subtitler in deciding how much guidance the TT audience needs (ibid.). When an element is referred to in the dialogue and is simultaneously visible in the picture, then the subtitler may refer to it by using a pronoun. So to what extent does the parameter of Polysemiotics influence the transfer of culture-specific items in interlingual subtitling, and does it have an impact on translation strategies used by the subtitler? Before I endeavor to answer these questions, it is interesting to explore how semiotics and subtitling are related. In the following sections relevant literature from the semiotics of translation and AVT will be examined, in an effort to construct a theoretical basis for the analysis of the corpus.

Semiotics, translation, subtitling

Roman Jakobson (1959) in his famous work formulated a three-part division of translation. He named the first division *intralingual translation* or *rewording*, which is the interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language. The second division is *interlingual translation* or *translation proper*, whereby the verbal signs are interpreted by means of another language, and the third division is *intersemiotic translation* or *transmutation* which he defined as ‘an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems’ (1959: 261).

Translation is seen ‘as variation and difference, or rather as a process of transformation’ (Dusi 2015: 188). Dusi (2015: 183), referring to the work of Reiss and Vermeer (1984) and Koller (1995), mentions that intersemiotic translation is ‘not a simple transcodification, but a transcultural, dynamic and functional event caught between the requirement to remain faithful to the source and the need to transform it into a text that is understood and accepted in the target culture’. We are therefore dealing with dynamic texts in which different semiotic systems come into play. Intersemiotic translation is a dynamic process, since languages are open systems that allow translatability given that they keep their boundaries (Dusi 2015: 183). Eco (2001) refers to the field of intersemiotic translation as *adaptation*. It is rather a form of transformation, since it makes more explicit the unsaid. The non-verbal signs come into play and act as explicitation points to express visually what is also portrayed verbally in the subtitles. Torop (2002: 598) makes a similar remark when he mentions that ‘intersemiotic translation makes implicit aspects of interlinguistic translation explicit’. Commenting on the distinction between interlingual and intersemiotic translation, Zabalbeascoa (1997) observes that:

Instead of interlingual–intersemiotic distinction it seems more accurate to regard texts as having varying proportions of linguistic and verbal elements and nonlinguistic or nonverbal signs. In this light, all translations are the result of semiotic processes, where nonlinguistic (and/or nonverbal/suprasegmental, etc.) signs are more important in some translations than in others. (Zabalbeascoa 1997: 341)

Zabalbeascoa therefore asserts that the three-part division proposed by Jakobson may not have clear-cut borders distinguishing the three categories and that it would be more fruitful to examine the different types of translation ‘as a matter of degree, where many different factors come into play’ (ibid.: 327). The distinction between the various types of translation will be made on the basis that ‘certain factors are more important or more restrictive in one type and not so much in another’ (ibid.) This approach allows the translator to have more flexibility in deciding what to include and what to exclude from his/her translation. Furthermore, the model of priorities and restrictions of various types of translation permits the translator to work in a holistic way and account for the difficulties that he/she might encounter. Zabalbeascoa gives the example of translating television comedy and proposes a set of priorities and restrictions imposed both by the medium and by the specific type of translation. This list of priorities and restrictions guides the translator in his work, and can account for ‘[n]ew forms of text production (e.g. cinema, television, hypertexts and multimedia), new discoveries and models describing and explaining language variation and semiotic factors, and even changes in social attitudes and practices’ (ibid.).

Films are considered aesthetic texts, in which meaning is created through the use of semiotic and verbal signs. According to Lotman (1994 [1981]), it can be said that one of the functions of the aesthetic text is to produce new meanings. Lotman posits that every text creates its own semiotic space, but in order to function it needs to interact with other texts. For him, even the audience is a text. Following this, Dusi (2015: 185) states that ‘a film should always be considered an aesthetic text, in which both the plane of expression and the plane of content are necessary for the overall construction of meaning’.

Bearing in mind the above viewpoints, films can be regarded as semiotic texts in which several semiotic systems co-operate and serve to create a coherent whole. Subtitles are an addition to a finished film. As such, in order 'to function effectively, they must interact with and rely on all the film's different channels' (Diaz Cintas and Remael 2007: 45). Delabastita (1989: 199) distinguishes four categories or communication channels that form the filmic sign:

1. Visual presentation – verbal signs.
2. Visual presentation – non-verbal signs.
3. Acoustic presentation – verbal signs.
4. Acoustic presentation – non-verbal signs.

The first category includes credit titles, letters, newspapers and other documents that may appear on screen; the second category focuses on the film's photography; the third category involves songs and dialogue exchanges; and the final one refers to instrumental music and other background noises. The subtitler, in order to fully render the complexity of the film to a foreign audience, should not only rely on verbal information but also on visual information. Visual signs serve to carry cultural information, and help to effectively render the message that is transferred by the verbal sign. Cultures have different visual as well as oral and linguistic traditions. According to the authors, problems arise 'when a linguistic sign, a phrase, refers metaphorically to an iconographic sign or image that the source and target culture do not share' (ibid.: 46). As Dusi states:

The audiovisual image may be deliberately open to interpretations and free to *not-show* and *not-say*: for example, it may employ contrasts in sound, unfocused, point-of-view images, partial shots of actors, with points of view limited to specific details, all of which can create potential elements of indeterminacy that enable the target text to translate the *ambiguities* and the semantic openendedness of the source text. (Dusi 2015: 195-196)

Subtitling can thus be considered 'a process of visual supplementation' (O'Connell 1998: 66). This statement underlines the supplementary nature of subtitles which together with the visual and auditory message form a whole. According to Kovacic (1998: 75), the function of subtitles is 'to facilitate reception and comprehension of a film or television programme produced in a foreign language'. In the case of films, the film itself is a text. However, this text is not limited to verbal signs or to the audio elements of the film; it is considered as an integral whole in which the various points (verbal, non-verbal, visual and acoustic) are complementary. Kendon (1981) concludes that it is very difficult for the writer to convey the wealth of human communication, especially nonverbal communication (cited in Pettit 2004: 35).

Translating culture-specific items in films

The concepts of language and culture are inseparable. According to Aixelá (1996: 53), '[e]ach linguistic or national-linguistic community has at its disposal a series of habits, value judgments, classification systems etc. which sometimes are clearly different and sometimes overlap. This way, cultures create a variability factor the translator will have to take into account. One of the most challenging areas in translation is the rendering of culture-specific items. The specificity of a culture is rendered in texts in the form of references to subjects carrying this cultural distinction (Grammenidis 2009: 107). Several researchers have dealt with this area and use a variety of terms to describe it. Newmark (1988) uses the term *cultural words*, Vermeer (1983) and Nord (1997) refer to *culturemes*, Gambier (2004) uses the term *culture specific references*, Aixelá (1996) and Davies (2003) employ the term *culture-specific items*. Reiss (in Floros 2005) and Leppihalme (2007) use the term *realia*, Pedersen employs the terms *extralinguistic culture-bound references* (ECRs) (2005) and *extralinguistic cultural*

references (2007, 2011) to mention but a few. It is evident that not only the terminology but also the definitions of these terms differ.

Aixelá (1996: 57) notes that many studies have examined CSIs but avoid offering a definition, thus 'attributing the meaning of the notion to a sort of collective intuition'. This poses a two-fold problem, according to the author. Firstly, these terms are arbitrary and secondly they are considered static, 'parallel with the idea that there are permanent CSIs, no matter which pair of cultures is involved and no matter what the textual function (in one text or the other) of the item under study is' (ibid.). For these reasons Aixelá attempts to offer a definition of CSIs as follows:

Those textually actualized items whose function and connotations in a source text involve a translation problem in their transference to a target text, whenever this problem is a product of the nonexistence of the referred item or of its different intertextual status in the cultural system of the readers of the target text. (Aixelá 1996: 58)

From the above definition it is evident that CSIs pose problems in translation either because these items do not exist in the target culture or because they have a *different intertextual status* in the target text. The author offers a third parameter that should be taken into consideration while examining CSIs. This parameter is the *course of time*. As time passes, it is possible for objects, habits or values that in the past were restricted to one community to be shared by other communities (ibid.). Larson referring to the translation of CSIs mentions that:

When the cultures are similar, there is less difficulty in translating. This is because both languages will probably have terms that are more or less equivalent for the various aspects of the culture. When the cultures are very different, it is often difficult to find equivalent lexical items. (Larson 1984: 95-6)

The author posits that every culture has a different focus; some societies are more technical and others are less so (ibid.: 95). The vocabulary used in these societies is more or less technical accordingly. The problem arises when there is a difference in mentality, in culture or in the structure of a society, and this difference is not shared by the target culture. In cases where there is a CSI that is not shared by the target language community, it is difficult to render this diversity. One of the best-known investigations of problems caused by the translation of allusions are the studies by Leppihalme (1994, 1997, 2000), in which she analyzes allusions that can cause 'culture bumps', namely problems in rendering cultural references from one language to another. Baker (1992) refers to the translation of CSIs as one of the most common areas of translation problems. This leads to a 'translation crisis point' (Pedersen 2005: 1). According to the author '[t]he translation crisis point caused by a cultural reference reveals the workings of many norms, such as domestication vs. foreignization, degree of functionalism, awareness of skopos etc' (ibid.). Pedersen proposes the following definition of extralinguistic culture-bound references (ECRs):

Extralinguistic Culture-Bound Reference (ECR) is defined as reference that is attempted by means of any culture-bound linguistic expression, which refers to an extralinguistic entity or process, and which is assumed to have a discourse referent that is identifiable to a relevant audience as this referent is within the encyclopedic knowledge of this audience. (Pedersen 2005: 2)

ECRs are thus 'expressions pertaining to cultural items, which are not part of a language system' (ibid.). The model employed uses a simple demarcation line, namely the use of standard reference works, and does not include 'intralinguistic culture-bound references, such as idioms, proverbs, slang

and dialects' (ibid.). Since the language used in films abounds in intralinguistic culture-bound references such as slang, idioms and even dialects, the definition of CSIs and the model proposed by Aixelá (1996) is more appropriate for the needs of the present study.

The prevailing trends regarding the rendering of CSIs are domestication and foreignisation (cf. Lawrence Venuti 1995). Holmes observes that contrary to the trends of translating culture items in the previous centuries, among contemporary translations there is 'a tendency towards exoticizing and historicizing in the socio-cultural situation' (cited in Aixelá 1996: 56). However, there are some cultural elements that cannot be easily perceived by a foreign-speaking audience.

A translator, in his/ her effort to maintain the cultural diversity of the original film, is faced with several challenges. One challenge is the transfer of proper names to the target text. The translator has the option of preserving the proper name or omitting it. In subtitling, nonverbal messages play an important role in the process of communication. Very often when the verbal message cannot be easily rendered, the visual message is able to make up for it. Bearing in mind the spatiotemporal constraints of film subtitling that were analyzed in the previous section, the transfer of CSIs becomes even more difficult. To make matters worse, the translator is not able to resort to translator's notes or explanatory footnotes to explain CSIs, as in the case of literary texts. Explanations of CSIs in subtitling usually take the form of an intertextual gloss, whereby an explanation is provided with an addition of a word in the subtitles, as a non-distinct part of the text, thus without disrupting the coherence of the text. There are some rare instances in which information is provided as an extratextual gloss, usually in parenthesis or in brackets.

Methodology

Corpus

The study is a comparative analysis of the translation strategies used to translate CSIs. The corpus is comprised of a parallel Greek-English corpus of 103 minutes of film, consisting of the Greek audio script of Tassos Boulmetis' film *Πολίτικη Κουζίνα/A Touch of Spice* (2003) and its English subtitles.

The film is a story about a young boy who, through his grandfather's lessons, acquires some excellent cooking skills along with important lessons about life. The film tries to remind us all that both life and food need a touch of spice, in order to become more interesting and more fulfilling. The director, who is also the scriptwriter, drawing from his own experiences, carefully constructs a nostalgic film which is permeated by several CSIs. The CSIs fall under the categories of personal and geographic names, material culture (food, clothes, objects, measurements, etc.), customs, institutions and historical references. In the following section, I will present the theoretical framework that was used as a basis for the analysis of the film.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework which was adopted for the analysis of the data was Aixelá's proposed translation strategies for the transfer of CSIs (1996) and the parameter of Polysemiotics (Pedersen 2011). Aixelá notes that this frame allows us to decipher 'the general tendency of a translation as regards the double tension [...] (being a representation of a source text and being a valid text in itself)' (ibid.: 60). Aixelá thus devised a scale of possible degrees of manipulation of CSIs, which, based on the degree of manipulation that was observed in the target language translation, can fall under two main groups. The main strategies can be 'the conservation or substitution of the original reference(s) by other(s) closer to the receiving pole' (ibid.: 61).

Conservation	Substitution
<i>Repetition</i> : retention of the original reference	<i>Synonymy</i> : the translator uses 'a synonym or a parallel reference' to substitute the CSI in the target text (p. 63).
<i>Orthographic adaptation</i> : transcription or transliteration	<i>Limited universalization</i> : the translators 'seek another reference, also belonging to the source language culture but closer to their readers' (p. 63).
<i>Linguistic (non-cultural) translation</i> : '[T]he translator chooses in many cases a denotatively very close reference to the original, but increases its comprehensibility by offering a target language version which can still be recognized as belonging to the cultural system of the source text' (p. 61-62).	<i>Absolute universalization</i> : the translator eliminates the foreign connotation of the CSI and chooses a neutral one.
<i>Extratextual gloss</i> : an explanation of the CSI is offered in a footnote, endnote, glossary or in brackets.	<i>Naturalization</i> : '[t]he translator decides to bring the CSI into the intertextual corpus felt as specific by the target language culture' (p. 63).
<i>Intratextual gloss</i> : the translator includes the gloss as a non-distinct part of the text.	<i>Deletion</i> : omission of the CSI in the target text
	<i>Autonomous creation</i> : the translator decides to include 'some nonexistent cultural reference in the target text' (p. 64).

Table 1. Translation Procedures for the Transfer of Culture-Specific Items (Aixelá 1996: 61-65).

Procedure

As mentioned before, the study is a comparative analysis of the source and target text. A descriptive and non-judgmental procedure was followed. The process of analyzing the frames was as follows: firstly, the film was viewed. Then both the original soundtrack and the English subtitles were transcribed. At a third stage, the subtitles were analyzed, so as to determine which translation procedure was used for the transfer of CSIs. At a final stage, the verbal signs of the film were examined in comparison with the visual signs so as to decipher if there is a clash between the visual and verbal sign and if the visual signs help the viewer understand the CSIs. As Cómite Narváez and Valverde Zambrana, referring to the work of Yuste Frias, note:

[i]n any specialised translation of texts including images, translators never isolate verbal content from other semiotic codes, from a language into another, but they translate between languages weaving single words in an 'intersemiotic and multimedial relationship' within one or more codes. Thus, a translator should not forget that an informative and persuasive effect is also based on visuals. (Cómite Narváez and Valverde Zambrana 2014: 82)

I will agree with the aforementioned viewpoint and in this study I will distance myself from the position that audiovisual translation, and more specifically subtitling, is a 'constrained translation'. The visual signs in a film never work in isolation. Thus, the translator should not isolate verbal content but treat it in comparison with other semiotic codes that coexist in the film.

Interlingual and intersemiotic translation of CSIs in the film

In this section I will focus on the translation of CSIs in the target text, and will approach the issue both at the interlingual and the intersemiotic translation level. Some examples of CSIs will be treated according to the category of culture to which they belong.

Personal and geographic names

In the film that was analyzed, one of the most common categories of CSIs was the translation of personal names and geographic names. This category often poses problems in translation, since the foreign audience is rarely acquainted with these CSIs.

In the film there are many references to *Constantinos Palaiologos*, the last emperor of Byzantium. The references to this personal name acquire a comic character in the film, since the father of the protagonist (Pantelis) makes ironic comments to his wife, suggesting that she lacks important historical knowledge. The reference to the emperor is reminiscent of an era associated with glory for the Greek people. At the level of interlingual translation, the procedure of transcription is used. This procedure is quite common for the transfer of personal names. Pralas (2012: 13) makes a similar remark by concluding that '[i]n the translation of personal names the most frequently used procedure is transcription'. From the verbal message that precedes this dialogue, the viewer understands that they are speaking about an important historic figure. Nonetheless, he/she is not able to grasp the meaning of the specific reference and more importantly the connotation associated with this name. At the intersemiotic translation level, especially from the examination of body language, the viewer understands that Pantelis is disturbed by the fact that his wife mentions the name of the emperor, and the ironic tone of his voice brings to the fore his negative comments about his wife's lack of historical knowledge. One could acknowledge that this particular scene partially helps the viewer understand the connotation associated with the emperor's name. In this scene the level of polysemiotic interplay is quite intense. The dialogue exchange is intense, with gestures, intense body language. Thus the message is conveyed by the non-verbal visual channel (the picture, gestures and body language) and the verbal audio channel (the dialogue). Since there is a high level of polysemiotic interplay, the translator has opted to transcribe the reference to the last emperor of Byzantium.

[1] (ST: source text)

- Ο Παλαιολόγος.
- Και σένα τον Παλαιολόγο ποιος σε τον έμαθε;
- Το γράφουν όλα τα βιβλία.

(TT: target text)

- Paleologos.
- What do you know about Paleologos?
- All the books talk about him!

(BT: back translation)

- Paleologos.
- Who has taught you about Paleologos?
- All the books write about him.

In example 2 there is a similar reference to a former Emperor of Byzantium. The reference to this proper name has a dual function in the film: first, to awaken an association to the glorious era and secondly and most significantly to create a humorous effect, with the repetition of a similar exchange as the one explained in example 1. The exchange is between Pantelis and his wife (Soulтана). From

a verbal analysis of the dialogue, it is evident that every time Sultana makes a reference to a former king of Byzantium, Pantelis is frustrated and comments ironically on his wife's lack of historical knowledge. From an interlingual translation perspective, the selected translation procedure for the transfer of the CSI is that of transcription and of intratextual gloss. The translator transcribes the proper name and adds a gloss, namely the word *King* as a non-distinct part of the target text. In this way, he facilitates the understanding of the proper name. From an intersemiotic analysis of the scene, it is evident that the tone of voice and Pantelis' gestures help the viewer understand that they are having another argument about historic figures. From the verbal message the viewer can grasp the meaning of the exchange and the reason they are having an argument. He can also connect this scene to the previous scene analyzed in example 1 and therefore, the ironic comment and the humorous tone of the scene become evident. As far as Polysemiotics is concerned, we note that the level of polysemiotic interplay is not very high in this scene. The message is almost solely conveyed by the verbal audio channel (the dialogue). The translator has opted to add a gloss to the personal name (*King Voulgaroktonos*) explaining that he was an Emperor, possibly because from the non-verbal visual channel this information cannot be deduced and also he might have judged that this type of information might not be known to the majority of the TT audience.

- [2] ST:- Ο Βουλγαροκτόνος; Και συ το Βασίλειο τον Βουλγαροκτόνο, που τον ξέρεις;
 - Το γράφουν όλα τα βιβλία. Ο Βουλγαροκτόνος έτρωγε μόνο παλαμίδα.
 TT: Who was it that taught you
 about King Voulgaroktonos?
 All the books write about him
 and he ate yellow tail tuna.
 BT: Voulgaroktonos? And you, how do you know Vasileio Voulgaroktono?
 All the books talk about him. Voulgaroktonos only ate yellow tail tuna.

As far as geographical names (suburbs, regions, street names etc.) are concerned they are usually transcribed. Thus, *Τσιχανγκίρ* (a place in Turkey) is transferred as *Tsihangir*, *Πόλη* (a shorter form for *Κωνσταντινούπολη*) is transferred with the word *Constantinople*, *Φάληρο* (an area in Athens) is transcribed as *Faliro*. Similarly, street names that do not play an important role in the plot of the film are transcribed. Thus, the address *Οδός Θησέως* is adapted by transliteration to *Thisseas Street*, and *Οδός Αλκυόνης* is similarly adapted and becomes *Halcyone Street*. These references do not carry any significant meaning and do not create a humorous effect in the film. The translator has chosen the procedure of orthographic adaptation to help the viewer understand their meaning. From the verbal message, the viewer understands that they are geographical references. However, since there is no shared cultural knowledge, he/she might not understand the majority of the references.

The usual strategy for the transfer of CSIs referring to personal names or geographical names is conservation. However, there are some cases in which the translator chooses the strategy of substitution. Thus, a reference to *Μπαλουκλί* (an asylum in Istanbul) is universalized as *asylum*. The translator eliminates the foreign connotation of the CSI and chooses a neutral one. The procedure of absolute universalization is also used in other instances, where the translator judges that it is important for the understanding of the plot of the film to grasp the exact meaning of the reference. Hence, *Πατήσια* (a neighborhood in Athens) is absolutely universalized as *our neighborhood*. The choice of the substitution strategy and more specifically of the procedure of absolute universalization eliminates the foreignness of the film but in the instances that were examined it facilitates the understanding of the reference and hence the viewer can follow the plot of the film.

Along the same line of promoting the understanding of the culture-specific reference is a reference to *Καλαμάτα* (a region in Greece), which is translated using an extratextual gloss as *She's from*

Kalamata... (in Greece). In this example the translator opted for the translation strategy of conservation of the foreign cultural reference. The selected procedures were that of transcription of the geographic reference combined with an extratextual gloss in parenthesis. It is worth noting that the use of extratextual gloss is not a common procedure in subtitling, due to the spatiotemporal constraints involved in this particular AVT mode. Nonetheless, it is often chosen as a way to provide extra information on the CSI without eliminating the foreign character of the reference. In these two examples there is a low level of polysemiotic interplay. This means that there is little interaction between the semiotic channels. The message is solely transferred through the verbal audio channel. Thus we observe that the parameter of Polysemiotics is low and this factor influences the translator's decision to universalize a geographical reference (*Πατήσια* becomes *our neighborhood*) or to include an extratextual gloss explaining the exact location of the geographical reference *She's from Kalamata... (in Greece)*

References to geographical names can rarely be deduced through examination of the iconic visual signs of the film (based on the categorization of nonverbal semiotic systems made by Groupe μ. 1992), since they are included in the dialogue and usually no reference is provided by the image or the gestures to help the viewer understand their meaning or more specifically, the connotations associated with them. Therefore, the translator provides an explanation of the CSI whenever it is deemed necessary in the form of an extratextual or intratextual gloss, or sometimes prefers to eliminate the reference to the Greek culture and provide a neutral word to explain the reference.

Material culture

The film *A Touch of Spice* is permeated by CSIs that belong to material culture: food, clothes, objects, measurements, etc. which are specific to the source culture. The target viewer might be acquainted with some of them, but most of them pose problems when the translator decides to transfer them into the target language. In the following example, the translator has opted for the translation procedure of absolute universalization. We observe that the foreign connotation of the CSI (*ρακί: raki*, a strong alcoholic drink) has been eliminated and a neutral word (*drink*) was chosen. The translator has possibly judged that the average TT audience would not be acquainted with this CSI so he/she has opted for a neutral one.

- [3] ST: έτσι να πιούμε ένα ρακί για το καλωσόρισες.
 TT: so we can have a drink
 to welcome him.
 BT: so we drink a raki to welcome him.

In another sequence in the film, there is a scene in which Fanis' grandfathers' friends wait for the arrival of grandpa. They decide to have a toast to grandpa by drinking *raki*. The reference to *raki* is also absolutely universalized and becomes the neutral word *toast*. In this scene the polysemiotic interplay is not very high, since the message is conveyed by both the non-verbal visual channel (the picture, gestures and body language) and the verbal audio channel (the dialogue). From the analysis of the iconic visual signs of the scene, the viewer can deduce that they are having a toast and that they are drinking *raki*. So, in this case, the nonverbal signs aid the viewer in understanding the CSI.

- [4] ST: Να πιούμε πρώτα ένα ρακί στην υγεία του παππού;
 TT: Should we have
 a toast to grandpa?
 BT: Should we first drink a raki as a toast to grandpa?

In example 5, we have another case in which the verbal sign refers to a CSI associated with food (*μεζέδες* plural for *μεζές: meze*, a selection of small dishes served to accompany alcoholic drinks. These

dishes are used as appetizers mainly before serving the main dish in Turkey, Iran, the Balkans and the Near East). From an interlingual translation perspective, the translator has used a substitution strategy (absolute universalization). The culture-specific reference *μεζέδες* has been substituted by a neutral reference to food *appetizers*. The iconic visual sign in this scene does not help the viewer to understand the meaning of the word and the connotation of hospitality associated with it. However, it should be noted that this reference reoccurs in other sequences later on in the film, and there the iconic visual signs aid the viewer in visualizing the CSI and understanding the connotation.

[5] ST: Θα πούμε και σε μερικούς φίλους που έχει να τους δει από τότες. Εσύ θα ετοιμάσεις μερικούς μεζέδες...

TT: We'll call his old friends and you can cook some appetizers...

BT: We'll call his friends that he hasn't seen since then. You can prepare some *meze*...

Customs, institutions and historical references

Another category of CSIs that poses problems in translation are references to customs, institutions and historical events. Customs that belong to a particular culture bear specific connotations. Thus, in Greece, before a marriage it is usual to wish to a couple *Η ώρα η καλή*. It is a particular wish that means to have a nice and prosperous life together, and it bears positive connotations of prosperity. In example 6 we observe that this utterance was deleted in the target text. From the intersemiotic analysis, it is evident that Fanis' grandfather is smiling and makes comments about the wedding. The viewer cannot understand the particular reference to this custom. However, from the gestures, the smiling faces, and the body language, he/ she can deduce that there is a wish being made and positive connotations associated with it. The polysemiotic interplay in this scene is low, since the message is conveyed by the verbal audio channel and partially also by the non-verbal visual channel (the smiling face and the body language). The translator has opted to delete the utterance, probably because he/she has judged that it is not central to the plot of the film.

[6] ST: Άντε η ώρα η καλή.

TT: [no translation]

Another CSI that refers to an institution is example 7. In this example *η Μεγάλη του Γένους* is a shorter form for *η Μεγάλη του Γένους Σχολή* (Phanar Greek Orthodox College, in Greek known as the Great School of the Nation). This institution was established in 1454 and was a school from which important Greek ministers and politicians graduated. It should be highlighted that this school is considered the most prestigious Greek Orthodox School in Istanbul. In this scene, Pantelis mentions to his wife Sultana that he has graduated from Phanar Greek Orthodox College, thus connoting that he is a prominent figure with significant historical knowledge. From an interlingual perspective, it is observed that the translator has opted for the strategy of substitution and more specifically, the procedure of deletion. It should be stressed that the reference to this institution cannot be deduced from nonverbal signs in the scene. Therefore, the connotation associated with this specific reference is lost. In this example the polysemiotic interplay is rather low. The message comes almost solely through the dialogue (the verbal audio channel). The translator has opted to delete this CSI, probably because he has judged that not all TT viewers would be acquainted with it and secondly because it is not central to the development of the plot. In this particular example, the spatiotemporal constraints of subtitling might have also influenced the translator's decision to delete the CSI.

[7] ST: Εγώ τελείωσα τη Μεγάλη του Γένους. Ποτέ δεν μας είπαν ότι ο αυτοκράτορας έτρωγε κρέας με κανέλλα!

TT: I never heard that Paleologos
ate meatballs with cinnamon!

BT: I graduated from the Great School of the Nation. They never told us that the emperor
ate meat with cinnamon!

In the last example there is a reference to a historical event, namely the day (April 21, 1967) that the Greek military junta came to power and imposed a dictatorship which lasted until 1974. The reference to this historical event is rendered into English by using a parallel reference (instead of translating the utterance *αξιωματικοί* with a similar word such as officers, colonels etc. the translator uses the reference *military junta*) and the intratextual gloss (*Greek*). In the film, the director seeks to stress this tragic event by using a scene of military officers wearing uniforms and army tanks. The use of this iconic sign connotes a rigid era and also translates connotatively the verbal sign of a previous scene in the film, in which Fanis narrates that he was afraid of people wearing uniforms. In this scene of the film there is a high degree of interaction between the channels. The message comes through the verbal audio channel (a narrator speaking), the non-verbal visual channel (the iconic signs, namely the military officers and the army tanks), the non-verbal audio channel (the Greek national anthem is the background music) and finally the verbal visual channel (there is a caption with the date April 21, 1967, the date the Greek military junta came to power, in yellow capital letters). The translator has opted to add an intratextual gloss to the subtitles, possibly because this cultural reference would not be understood by the TT audience without an explanation. Finally, this cultural reference is central to the development of the plot, thus an intratextual gloss was deemed necessary to aid comprehension.

[8] ST: Έτσι οι αξιωματικοί εκείνο το πρωί, έπεισαν τον πατέρα μου πως για να ξεχάσω τη Σαϊμέ...

TT: The day the Greek Military Junta came to power.

My father was convinced that

in order to forget Saime...

BT: Thus the officers that morning, convinced my father that in order to forget Saime...

Conclusion

From the study and the results it is evident that the transfer of CSIs in subtitling entails significant difficulties. The translator is faced with the dilemma whether to maintain the diversity of the source text or make the target text more accessible to the target language culture. When faced with the translation of CSIs, the situation is further exacerbated. It is observed that cultural heterogeneity cannot be easily rendered in films, except in cases where the similarities between languages makes it possible. This difficulty is mainly due to the specificities of every language and culture and not to the spatiotemporal constraints of subtitling. More specifically, for references to customs or institutions where representations are not sharable, deletion is often the selected translation procedure. CSIs referring to personal or geographic names are usually transcribed and, whenever they bear connotations that affect the plot of the film, an intratextual or extratextual gloss is added. Most CSIs referring to food, drinks or measurements are rendered into English by using the procedure of absolute universalization. These items are usually intersemiotically translated in the film with the use of nonverbal signs (mainly iconic visual signs). Finally, we observe that the parameter of Polysemiotics partially influences the choice of translation strategies. In some cases when there is a high level of interaction between the polysemiotic channels, and the CSI is judged as central to the plot of the film and it is deemed that the TT audience will not be acquainted with it, there is an explanation in the form of an intratextual or extratextual gloss added to the subtitles.

NOTES

¹ The six-second rule was invented by d'Ydewalle et al. (1987). The researchers conducted a series of experiments concerning the time needed for the human mind to process a double-line subtitle. This time was estimated as six seconds for a double-liner and three seconds for a single line subtitle. Gambier (2003) expresses his disagreement with this rule, noting that every viewer has his/ her own reading pace. He thus stresses the need to cater for the real needs not only of an average viewer but of specific groups.

² Diaz Cintas (2005) mentions that in certain countries such as Turkey we might even encounter a subtitle of three lines. Furthermore, in countries where there are two official languages, such as Finland (Finnish/Swedish) and Belgium (French/Flemish), we might have four lines of subtitles: a double-liner for Swedish/ French and a double-liner for Finnish/ Flemish.

³ See Remael 1998 and Franco 2000.

REFERENCES

- Aixelá, Javier Franco 1996. Culture-Specific Items in Translation. In: Roman Alvarez and Carmen-Africa Vidal (eds.), *Translation, Power, Subversion*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters LTD, 52-78.
- Baker, Mona 1992. *In other words. A coursebook on translation*. London: Routledge.
- Cómitre Narváez, Isabel and José María Valverde Zambrana 2014. How to translate culture-bound references: a case study of Turespaña's tourist promotion campaign. *Jostrans-The Journal of Specialised Translation* 21: 71-111.
- Davies, Eirlys 2003. A Goblin or a Dirty Nose? The Treatment of Culture-Specific References in Translations of the Harry Potter Books. *The Translator: Studies in Intercultural Communication* 9 (1): 65-100.
- Delabastita, Dirk 1989. Translation and mass-communication: film and TV translation as evidence of cultural dynamics. *Babel* 35 (4): 193-218.
- Díaz Cintas, Jorge 2003. *Teoría y práctica de la subtitulación: inglés-español*. Barcelona: Ariel.
- Díaz Cintas, Jorge 2005. Back to the Future in Subtitling. *MuTra 2005 – Challenges of Multidimensional Translation: Conference Proceedings*. Available from: http://www.euroconferences.info/proceedings/2005_DiazCintas_Jorge.pdf [Accessed June 19, 2015]
- Díaz Cintas, Jorge and Aline Remael 2007. *Audiovisual Translation: Subtitling*. Manchester and Kinderhook: St. Jerome Publishing.
- d'Ydewalle, Géry, Johan Van Rensbergen and Joris Pollet 1987. Reading a message when the same message is available auditorily in another language: the case of subtitling. In: J. Kevin O' Regan and A. Levy-Schoen (eds.), *Eye Movements: From Physiology to Cognition*. Amsterdam and New York: Elsevier Science Publishers, 313-321.
- Dusi, Nicola 2015. Intersemiotic translation: Theories, problems, analysis. *Semiotica* 206: 181–205.
- Eco, Umberto 2001. *Experiences in Translation*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Floros, Georgios 2005. Critical Reading: the case of culture in translation studies. *FORUM* 3 (2): 59-84.
- Franco, Eliana 2000. *Revoicing the Alien in Documentaries. Cultural Agency, Norms and the Translation of Audiovisual Reality*. PhD thesis, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven.
- Gambier, Yves 2003. Introduction. Screen Transadaptation: Perception and Reception. *The Translator Studies in Intercultural Communication* 9 (2): 171-189.
- Gambier, Yves 2004. La traduction audiovisuelle: un genre en expansion. *Meta: Journal des traducteurs* 49 (1): 1-11.

- Gottlieb, Henrik 1994. People Translating People. *Teaching Translation and Interpreting. Insights, aims and visions 2*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 261-274.
- Gottlieb, Henrik 1997. *Subtitles, Translation and Idioms*. Copenhagen: Centre for Translation Studies, University of Copenhagen.
- Grammenidis, Simos 2009. *Μεταφράζοντας τον Κόσμο του Άλλου, Θεωρητικοί προβληματισμοί – Λειτουργικές προοπτικές [Translating the World of the Other, Theoretical reflections–Functional Perspectives]*. Athens: Diavlos.
- Groupe μ. 1992. *Traité du signe visuel. Pour une rhétorique de l'image*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.
- Jakobson, Roman 1959. On linguistic aspects of translation. In: Reuben A. Brower (ed.), *On translation*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 232-239.
- Kendon, Adam 1981. Introduction: Current Issues in the Study of Nonverbal Communication. In: Thomas A. Sebeok (ed.), *Nonverbal Communication, Interaction and Gesture: Selections from Semiotica*, The Hague: Mouton, 1-53.
- Koller, Werner 1995. The concept of equivalence and the object of translation studies. *Target* 7 (2): 191–222.
- Kovacic, Irena 1998. Six Subtitlers – Six Subtitling Texts. In: Lynne Bowker, Michael Cronin, Dorothy Kenny and Jennifer Pearson (eds.), *Unity in Diversity? Current Trends in Translation Studies*. Manchester: St. Jerome, 75-82.
- Larson, Mildred 1984. *Meaning-Based Translation: A Guide to Cross-Language Equivalence*. Lanham and New York: University Press of America, Inc.
- Leppihalme, Ritva 1994. *Culture Bumps: On the Translation of Allusions*. Helsinki: University of Helsinki.
- Leppihalme, Ritva 1997. *Culture Bumps*. Clevedon etc: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Leppihalme, Ritva 2000. Caution: Cultural Bumps. On Cultural Literacy as a Goal in Translator Training. In: Dimitrova and Englund (eds.), *Översättning och Tolkning: Rapport från ASLA:s höstsymposium, Stockholm, 5-6 november 1998*. Uppsala: Universitetstryckeriet, 219-228.
- Leppihalme, Ritva 2007. Culture and translation. In: Marcel Thelen and Barbara Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk (eds.), *Translation and Meaning, Part 7. Proceedings of the Maastricht Session of the 4th International Maastricht – Łódź Duo Colloquium on 'Translation and Meaning', held in Maastricht 18-21 May 2005*. Maastricht: Zuyd University, Maastricht School of International Communication, Department of Translation and Interpreting, 381-390.
- Lotman, Juri 1994 [1981]. The text within the text. *PMLA* 109 (3): 377–384.
- Marleau, Lucien 1982. Les sous-titres...un mal nécessaire. *Meta* 27 (3): 271-285.
- Mayoral, Roberto, Dorothy Kelly and Natividad Gallardo 1988. Concept of Constrained Translation. Non-linguistic Perspectives of Translation. *Meta* 33 (3): 356-367.
- Newmark, Peter 1988. *A textbook of translation*. New York: Phoenix ELT.
- Nord, Christiane 1997. *Translating as a Purposeful Activity*. Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing.
- O'Connell, Eithne 1998. Choices and Constraints in Film Translation. In: Lynne Bowker, Michael Cronin, Dorothy Kenny and Jennifer Pearson (eds.), *Unity in Diversity? Current Trends in Translation Studies*. Manchester: St. Jerome, 65-71.
- Pedersen, Jan 2005. How is culture rendered in subtitles? *MuTra 2005 – Challenges of Multidimensional Translation: Conference Proceedings*. Available from: www.euroconferences.info/proceedings/2005_Proceedings/2005_Pedersen_Jan.pdf [accessed January 30, 2016].
- Pedersen, Jan 2007. *Scandinavian Subtitles. A Comparative Study of Subtitling Norms in Sweden and Denmark with a Focus on Extralinguistic Cultural References*. PhD thesis. Stockholm: Stockholm University.
- Pedersen, Jan 2011. *Subtitling Norms for Television*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

- Pettit, Zoë 2004. The Audio-Visual Text: Subtitling and Dubbing Different Genres. *Meta: journal des traducteurs* 49 (1): 25-38.
- Pralas, Jelena 2012. Translating French culture-specific items in Julian Barnes's Flaubert's Parrot. *Linguistics and Literature* 10 (1): 11-18.
- Remael, Aline 1998. The poetics of screenwriting manuals: a reflection of some of mainstream cinema's manifest and hidden tangles with the written word. In: Paul Joret and Aline Remael (eds.), *Language and Beyond. Actuality and Virtuality in the Relations Between Word, Image and Sound*. Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 203-218.
- Sonesson, Göran 2014. Translation and other acts of meaning: In between cognitive semiotics and semiotics of culture. *Cognitive Semiotics* 7 (2): 249-280.
- Titford, Christopher 1982. Sub-titling-Constrained translation. *Lebende Sprachen* 3: 113-116.
- Torop, Peeter 2002. Translation as translating as culture. *Sign Systems Studies* 30 (2): 593-605.
- Venuti, Lawrence 1995. *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Vermeer, Hans 1983. Translation theory and linguistics. In: Roinila Pauli, Ritva Orfanos and Sonja Tirkkonen-Condit (eds.), *Näkökohtia kääntämisen tutkimuksesta*. University of Joensuu, 1-10.
- Zabalbeascoa, Patrick 1997. Dubbing and the nonverbal dimension of translation. In Fernando Poyatos (ed.), *Nonverbal Communication and Translation*. John Benjamins Publishing Company: Amsterdam/Philadelphia, 327-342.

FILMOGRAPHY

Πολίτικη Κουζίνα/ *A Touch of Spice*. 2003. Tassos Boulmetis, Greece.

Loukia Kostopoulou holds a PhD in Audiovisual Translation from the Department of Translation and Interpreting, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. She has worked as a translator and has taught Audiovisual Translation, namely interlingual subtitling, at the Department of French Language and Literature, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.

Email: loukia_kostopoulou@hotmail.com