

The Subtitling Process

Part Two

The Subtitling Process

Due attention has to be paid to the actors' dialogue, but without forgetting other acoustic and visual elements that should also be translated: songs, inserts, newspaper headlines, or voices coming from a radio or a television set, for instance. Besides being aware of the constraints imposed by the medium, translators also have to be familiar with the value added by the images. In the Norwegian film *Elling*, a framed photograph of a woman on a kitchen wall is subtitled to give us her name, since it is a very important iconic referent to understand some of the ironic nuances in the conversation between the two male protagonists. She is Gro Harlem Brundtland, ex-Prime Minister of Norway, from the Labour Party.

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A widespread practice in our field is to use English as a pivot language to translate from lesser-known languages. A Japanese, Iranian or Hungarian film may well be translated into Italian, Spanish or Portuguese from an English translation of the film rather than the original soundtrack. But not only errors: ambiguities, nuances and interpretations will also be filtered through English. A practice perceived by many as problematic and worrying, since not only are most of the programmes already produced in English, but even films shot in other languages end up being translated from English.

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Depending on the way the subtitling company works, if the subtitler was not asked to produce the actual subtitles, then the translation may need to go through an **adaptation process**. Some firms ask their translators to submit a complete translation of the dialogues, without worrying about any medium constraints. A technician or adaptor is then in charge of adjusting the translations to an appropriate subtitling length, according to the time limitations that operate in particular cases and the reading speed applied to the programme.

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Revision and proofreading of the subtitles (in a printed version) is done to detect any possible mistakes and guarantee a final product of high quality. Ideally, a different person should be responsible for this task. Any mistranslations or typos must be corrected. Spelling mistakes seem to be more noticeable on a screen than on a page, and they must be avoided at all costs. Their presence in a subtitle may not only be irritating but may also distance the viewer from the whole process.

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As a matter of principle, translators should have a say in the proposed changes and be entitled to a copy of the final, revised subtitles to see the type of amendments and alterations that have been made to their translations. It helps not only to improve one's work but also to become familiar with the likes and dislikes of the clients.

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Before inserting the subtitles on the celluloid, a **simulation** of what the film is going to look like with the subtitles on it is carried out in the presence of the client. If needed, amendments or changes are incorporated at this stage.

Some of the big distribution companies have the figure of the **supervisor**, responsible for this, well enshrined in their working routines.

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It is important not to forget that both translators and subtitlers do nothing more than come up with a subtitling proposal for the client, who at any moment can change, delete, substitute... whatever s/he wants, in terms of text or spotting .

The traditional, academic perception of translation as an individual activity clashes here head-on with professional reality.

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When the simulation is to the taste of the client, the subtitling company can then proceed to the next stage, which consists in laser engraving the subtitles on the celluloid. Laser subtitling is widely used in the cinema and, although relatively more expensive, it has proved to be much more effective and reliable than the previous methods.

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Once the subtitles have been laser engraved on the film copy, or copies, and before dispatching it to the client, a final viewing takes place to make sure that both the engraving and the washing of the celluloid are satisfactory. The film is then sent to the client who will screen it in the cinema, broadcast it on television or sell it on DVD.

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