

MEDIATED TRANSLATION OF FILMS: A CROSS-LINGUISTIC AND CROSS-CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF “GONE IN 60 SECONDS”

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Abstract: The present study focuses on the notion of equivalence in film translation through comparative analysis that enables to get new insights into its lexical, grammatical and stylistic peculiarities. Translating films involves careful consideration of various elements, adding complexity to the process of translation for this particular medium. Different approaches employed by translators in rendering the text significantly impact the attainment of equivalence in the realm of film translation. This objective is fulfilled by exploring key methods of film translation, notably dubbing and subtitling, along with their widespread use and the evolution of their history. One of the most complicated tasks in film translation is to accurately transfer the linguistic features and cultural values into the target language. The data analysis of the research aims to reveal the role of intermediary language in film translation. The text analysis utilized in this study relies on qualitative analysis. By comparing the source text with the target one, an attempt has been made to highlight their similarities and differences and whether the source text has undergone any major transformations in the course of mediated translation. Thus, some linguistic and cultural issues dealing with mediated translation have been examined and a number of conclusions have been drawn.

Keywords: film translation; audiovisual translation; intermediary language; mediated translation

1. Introduction

This study aims to discuss the transformations of some subtitling issues that the translator faces and to examine the function of intermediary language in the translation process of subtitles for the movie “Gone in 60 Seconds” from English as a source

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language into Armenian as a target language. The Armenian subtitles are translated from the Russian dubbed version, which in its turn is translated from English, being the original language of the film. The Russian version has considerably influenced the final results acting as an intermediary language in forming the message from the source language into the target language based on cultural and linguistic differences of the original language as well as the intermediary and final languages. The present case study dwells upon the translation strategies used in film translation.

The problem arises from the scarcity of research on mediated translation which affects the final translated product. Mediated translation has not been analyzed as a subject of study before in the field of translation studies, especially in situations where the source text is inaccessible or when the translator possesses proficiency solely in the target language (the intermediary language), lacking proficiency in the source language. Moreover, it can be inferred that translating through an intermediary language might result in undesirable outcomes, such as distorting the message in terms of semantics, grammar, and style. This is mainly due to the fact that the translation is conducted from the mediated language rather than directly from the original text. Consequently, the present study is grounded in the aforementioned reasons.

Therefore, it is imperative to assess the potential difficulties and issues that translators could encounter in analogous situations. “Whether adopting a domesticating or foreignizing strategy, any type of audiovisual translation ultimately contributes uniquely to the shaping of both national identities and stereotypes. The portrayal of cultural values through screen translation has been minimally explored in literature, making it a significant and pressing research area within translation studies” (Baker & Hochel 1997: 76).

2. The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to bring attention to certain challenges arising from the translation process involving an intermediary language. The study aims at revealing how translating from an intermediary language affects the content and the form of the original text syntactically, semantically and stylistically as well as what the final product loses and/or gains as a result of such shifts.

3. Methods

To deliver a fairly unbiased analysis, we conducted comparative research and delved into a specific case study based on the original English, intermediary Russian and Armenian as a target language of translation of the film “Gone in 60 Seconds.” A total of 100 translation examples were collected for the study. The corresponding examples are classified according to the following techniques: (1) direct observation; (2) comparative analysis carried out according to strategies proposed by Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007), and Santamaria Guinot (2001), which help find out various transformations and challenges of mediated translation.

4. Film Translation Problems

Film translation can be a challenging as well as a rewarding job, as, despite the typical challenges, there are several other components that make this process even tougher.

The following offers a summary of certain principles relevant to the translation of movies:

1. Informal discussions may contain industry-specific terminology or colloquial expressions.
2. Subtitles are constrained by limitations related to both time and space. It is important to ensure that the text fits within the confines of the screen space, taking into consideration readability for the audience. Synchronization of the text with both visual imagery and auditory elements is crucial for a cohesive multimedia experience.
3. In the process of dubbing, it is essential that the length of the translated text closely aligns with the duration of the original material.
4. Prior to commencing the translation process, it is imperative to reach a mutual understanding regarding various technical specifications. This encompasses specifying the desired text format preferred by the client, identifying the original file format, and defining the format of the eventual translated output, among other relevant details.
5. In certain scenarios, the process of translation may be undertaken being devoid of the availability of foreign language subtitle files, essentially necessitating the direct translation from a tape or analogous medium. This could pose a considerable challenge, particularly in case of poor sound quality. Broadly speaking, translators generally exhibit a preference for engaging with manuscripts or foreign language files, a practice that serves to diminish the probability of encountering errors.
6. In some cases, a translator might need to translate subtitles without having the opportunity to watch the movie. This situation can lead to potential errors; as visual context significantly aids comprehension.

Although easy film translating may seem due to the use of everyday language, the translator has to make complex decisions in order to meet the fixed character limitation. The task of the translator may sometimes become even harder when they have to replace depictive expressions with shorter, ordinary or just laconic ones.

5. Theoretical Background of Mediated Translation

According to Amal Al-Shunnaq (2014), “in the context of mediated translation, the term denotes a case where the translation does not take place directly from the original source language. Instead, it involves translating from an intermediary language that was previously translated from the target language.” This process incorporates at least three languages: the source language, the intermediary language, and the target language, although there could be more. For instance, an English text may undergo translation into French, then into Russian, and finally into Armenian. Therefore, the

complexity of the translation process from an intermediary language is influenced by the number of languages involved.

In this respect Nida (1964: 17) states that “in the process of translation, the unique characteristics of a text, particularly in the case of poetry or drama, are often diminished in a direct translation.” This effect becomes more pronounced when translating from an intermediary language. It can be contended that the extent of losses increases with the number of languages involved in the translation process. Thus, if there are losses in each iteration of translation, the overall losses compound with each additional attempt.

As suggested by Adusmilli (2007: 24) “translation may necessitate translators with proficiency in multiple languages, extending beyond mere bilingualism. This is justified by the growing demand for translating texts into various languages and back again. Consequently, there is a need to enhance the reciprocal nature of translation.”

Li et al. (2017) note that “the influence of translation from an intermediate language extends to both culture and literature.” To support this idea, a significant portion of international literature has undergone translation into various languages using an intermediary language. This practice facilitates global access to the rich international literary heritage. Consequently, to foster interliterary dialogue, the emphasis is on understanding the work itself rather than a literal word-for-word translation. Translators strive to grasp the essence of the piece and convey it effectively in the target language. In this context, the nature of literary dialogue remains consistent, regardless of whether the works are translated through an intermediary language.

6. Differences between Dubbing and Subtitling

Film translation employs two methods, dubbing and subtitling, to aid viewers in comprehending foreign films, while also contributing to the broader development of the domestic film industry. The choice between these techniques, as Gottlieb (2001) asserts, is influenced by the country and language of origin and the target country and language. Subtitles, displayed at the bottom of the screen, present translated captions in real-time, appearing and disappearing in sync with the dialogue. With a character limit ranging from 35 to 42 per line, the speed of human reading determines the content. Subtitles convert the audio into text, allowing viewers to read and understand the film simultaneously. For example, if a scene features a ringing cell phone, the subtitles might indicate ‘(mobile phone rings).’ Intralinguistic captions serve to facilitate accessibility for the hearing impaired by ensuring that the content within media is comprehensible to individuals with auditory challenges.

The objective of dubbing is to present the translated dialogue in a manner that gives the impression it is spoken by the actors in the target language. This is achieved through “the substitution of the original speech with a voice track that strives to closely match the timing, phrasing, and lip movements of the original dialogue” (Luyken et al. 1991: 31).

In contrast to the relatively static and literary nature of novel and poetry translation, subtitle translation assumes a more colloquial character as it involves the interpretation

of original dialogues among characters. Consequently, it necessitates the incorporation of typical features of spoken English, refraining from obscure expressions or intricate sentence structures. The language employed in subtitle translation should be straightforward and simple to ensure comprehensive understanding and audience engagement. Unlike readers of printed literary works who may have the luxury of revisiting the text, those viewing subtitles are afforded only a brief interval, necessitating a balance between immediacy and conciseness in subtitle translation to accommodate the limited time available for information processing.

7. Strategies of Film Translation

Translators address translation challenges by employing specific strategies, which can be defined as “approaches through which translators aim to adhere to established norms” (Chesterman 1997: 88). In the realm of subtitling, various strategies are available to handle the transition from the source text to the target text. The analysis of examples has been guided by the categorizations of subtitling strategies put forth by Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007) as well as Santamaria Guinot (2001). Accordingly, the following 11 strategies will serve as the basis for the comparative analysis of the present work providing a concise explanation of each procedure:

1) Loan (LN) occurs when an identical word or phrase from the source language is also utilized in the target language. This situation commonly arises with proper names, such as brand names, as illustrated in the following example:

SL: Tumbler messed up. Said the *Porsche* would be at the corner of Wiltern and Wetherly.

IL: Тумблер облажался. Он сказал, что *Порше* на углу Уилтерн и Ветерли.

TL: Տումբլերը սխալվել է, ասել էր «Պորշեն» Վիլթերնի և Վեթերլի խաչմերուկում է:

2) Calque (CAL) involves a verbatim translation of a word or expression. As an illustration, a character might exclaim:

'Let's get the hell outta here,' which is dubbed into Russian as *'Давай убираться к черту отсюда!!'* a rather typical solution for the Russian audience, while the subtitled Armenian version *'Արագացրո՛ւ, փախչել է պէտք'* is rather condensed and reformulated.

3) Explication (EXP) involves making the subtitled text more accessible to the target audience by employing a hyponym (a word with a more specific meaning) or utilizing a hypernym (a word with a broader meaning) to enhance the clarity of the reference. In one of the examples analyzed, the original text *'... the car is you. You are the car'* is translated into the intermediary language using the broader term. *'...Вы единое целое'* which is translated into Armenian as *'...դուք մի ամբողջություն եք'* (Eng. *single whole*) to make the reference clearer and more precise.

SL: But remember - the car is you. You are the car.

IL: Помните: машина - это вы. Вы единое целое.

TL: Հիշեք՝ մեքենան դուք եք, դուք մի ամբողջություն եք:

4) Substitution (SUBS) serves as a form of explicitation and represents a common approach in subtitling. This strategy becomes particularly relevant in situations where the limited space available in subtitles prevents the inclusion of a lengthy term, despite its existence in the target language. An illustration of substitution is evident in the Armenian dialogue, where the word ‘*talented*’ is rendered as the Russian word ‘*талантливая*’ to address spatial constraints. However, as the Armenian language, unlike Russian, is gender neutral, the translator has substituted the adjective ‘*талантливая*’ with the noun ‘*աղջիկ*’ (Eng. girl) inasmuch as the Armenian noun is shorter than the word ‘*талантливая*’ and reflects the gender of the character.

SL: Oh, my God. Sweetie, you're so talented.

IL: О, Боже, дорогая, ты такая талантливая.

TL: Ի՞նչ: Տեսեք ինչ աղջիկ է:

5) Transposition, in cultural context, occurs when an element from one culture is replaced with a counterpart from another culture. For instance, the colloquial phrase ‘*You’re bullshittin’ me, right?*’ is transformed into the neutral Russian expression ‘*Ты что, шутишь?*’ which is directly transposed into Armenian as ‘*Կատաղու՞մ ես.*’ The following is another example of transposition:

SL: Aw, come on.

IL: Блин, не надо!

TL: Գրողը տանի, պետք չէ՛:

The exclamation ‘*Aw!*’ used to express disapproval or sympathy is transposed into Russian as ‘*блин*’ which compared to the English ‘*Aw!*’ sounds more demeaning while not very rude. In the same way, the Armenian expression ‘*Գրողը տանի*’ substitutes the Russian version.

Similarly, in the following example we may observe a complete cultural substitution, i.e. “The Dukes of Hazzard” which, being an American action comedy TV series, is substituted with the Russian ‘*Через витрину? Мы не каскадеры,*’ (Eng. *Through the shop-window? We’re not stuntmen.*) as the target audience may not be familiar with this popular TV series in the US. Due to the same reason, the Armenian translation is done from the intermediary language as ‘*...ցուցափեղկի միջոցով: Ի՞նչ ես անում, մենք կասկադյորներ չենք*’ correspondingly.

SL: Come on! This ain't The Dukes of Hazzard.

IL: Что ты делаешь? Через витрину? Мы не каскадеры.

TL: Ի՞նչ ես անում, հիմա՞ր ես, ցուցափեղկի միջոցով: Ի՞նչ ես անում, մենք կասկադյորներ չենք: Դե՛:

6) Lexical recreation (LR) is a linguistic phenomenon characterized by the inventive formation of new terms and is deemed acceptable in the target language, especially when a character coins a word in the source language. In a dialogue, one character employs the phrase ‘*you know Ferraris,*’ signifying someone's professional expertise in their field. This has been translated into Russian idiomatic expression as ‘*вы с Феррари на ты,*’ while the Armenian rendition is subtitled as ‘*Ֆերարրիաւնի,*’ a term entirely coined in the TL.

SL: I know you know Ferraris.

IL: Я знаю, вы с Феррари на ты.

TL: Գիտեմ, ֆերարրիաւնի ես:

7) Compensation (COM) is a frequently used technique in subtitling, where any loss in translation at a particular moment in the audiovisual program is offset by improving specific elements in the translation at another juncture in the target text. Examples of this strategy have not been analyzed in the scope of the current research.

8) Omission (OMS) of specific parts of the message is inevitable due to the technical constraints set by the medium. Subtitlers need to discern the crucial information essential to the plot, ensuring its retention in the target language, thus we may observe a tendency to omit some proper names in the dialogues substituting them with the corresponding context-based words. For instance, the name ‘*Jerry Springer*’ is omitted from the Russian and the Armenian translations being substituted for the nouns ‘*свидание*’ and ‘*Ժամադրութիւն*’ correspondingly, which mean ‘*dating*’ in English. Thereby, in the given example, word substitution has been made based on the contextual background information.

SL: Something wrong, Tumbler? - Yeah, I'm missing Jerry Springer.

IL: Что-то не так, Тумблер? Я опоздаю на свидание.

TL: Ինչ-որ բան այն չէ՞, Տումբլը՛ր: Ժամադրութիւն եմ ուշանում:

9) In the context of explicitation, the addition (ADD) technique is employed when a cultural reference is present, potentially unclear to the intended audience, and requires an explanation for better comprehension. This strategy is not frequently utilized in subtitling due to the associated increase in length. An illustration of addition can be observed in the translation of the given English sentence: ‘*It seems a little late for soccer practice*’ rendered in the IL and TL as ‘*Детишек в такое время с футбола не развозят*’ and ‘*Այս ժամին երեխաներին ֆուտբոլից տուն չեն տանում*’ correspondingly. As can be observed, the nouns ‘*детушек*’ and ‘*երեխաներին*’ (Eng. children) have been added to provide more contextual information stating the reason why the character is being late.

SL: It seems a little late for soccer practice.

IL: Детишек в такое время с футбола не развозят.

TL: Այս ժամին երեխաներին ֆուտբոլից տուն չեն տանում:

10) Condensation (CON) refers to the partial reduction of textual content, whereas Reformulation (REF), as per Talaván (2011), is employed to convey information in an alternative manner. The approach that a subtitler adopts in condensing and rephrasing statements is contingent upon the anticipated reading speed of the audience. The effectiveness of integrating these two strategies is exemplified in the subsequent example:

SL: Kip! *Man*, that's not a tool. That's a *damn* brick. Kip, *man*, we gonna use a brick, *man*.

IL: Кип, это инструмент? Это же кирпич! Кип, *чувак*, ты что, хочешь воспользоваться этим кирпичом?

TL: Չի՛ւզ, դա գործի՛ք ք է, աղյուս է, աղյուսն ինչի՞ դ է պէտք:

As can be observed, the words *man* and *damn* are omitted in the Russian version, while condensation has taken place in the Armenian version as, besides omission of some elements, the core of the message has been successfully conveyed through the use of reformulation.

The previously outlined strategies have been utilized to elucidate the methodology employed by the Armenian subtitler in dealing with the challenges encountered during the transfer of source language dialogue to the target language. These challenges encompass issues related to grammatical structures, the use of slang, omitted elements in sentences, and similar constraints. Furthermore, limitations referring to spatial, lexical and syntactic aspects, including the use of loans, may become a real challenge for the subtitler. The subtitler often has to combine and integrate several strategies simultaneously in an effort to choose the most relevant translation for the exchange of the dialogue.

8. Data Collection

The movie was downloaded from an open online source and was carefully viewed and analyzed throughout the research. The intermediary translation and the subtitles were carefully studied. About 100 examples from the movie were found and thoroughly analyzed. Russian and Armenian equivalents were compared to the SL version revealing the translation strategies and categorizing the examples according to them. The overall results of the data analysis could be best illustrated in Table 1

Table 1. Observed frequencies of translation strategies

Strategies	Observed frequencies /TL	Observed frequencies /IL
Loan	9	9
Calque	5	20
Explicitation	6	2
Substitution	10	10
Transposition	32	26
Lexical Recreation	4	6

Compensation	0	0
Omission	12	8
Addition	5	10
Condensation/Reformulation	17	9

9. Conclusion

Based on the current research, we can conclude that colloquialism, popularity, instantaneity and brevity are the four features of subtitle translation, warranting meticulous consideration. Subtitles should not be too long due to time and space restrictions. The imposition of temporal and spatial constraints necessitates the restraint of subtitle length, prompting translators to align the length of the source text with its translated version. Therefore, it is necessary to delete redundant information in order to make the translation more concise and readable.

Within the various linguistic limitations identified in the translation process, the following are the outcomes derived from a qualitative analysis of the case study of "Gone in 60 Seconds." Accordingly, it has been revealed that the prevailing strategies employed in the TL subtitle translation of the given film are reduction through condensation/reformulation (17%), transposition/cultural substitution (32%) and omission (12%), whilst calque (5%), addition (5%) and lexical recreation (4%) hold the lowest rates. Notably, instances of compensation are absent in the investigated research. In comparison, most frequently used techniques in the IL dubbed Russian version are calque (20%) and transposition (26%), while condensation (9%) and explicitation (2%) are the least frequently used ones in comparison to the subtitled version. Similarly, no examples of compensation have been observed in the IL either.

Data analysis underscores a tendency towards the deletion of linguistic elements, driven by the consideration that linguistic structures in English are more concise than their Armenian variants. This stems from linguistic disparities, with Armenian structures being inherently longer than those in English and Russian, necessitating text reduction in the target text to prevent subtitle overloading with too many characters. Similarly, the original text consistently surpasses the translated version in length. Among the myriad challenges encountered in film translation, a notable issue is the requirement to employ translation from intermediary languages. In instances where no linguistic or cultural "equivalence" exists in the target language and culture, translators may opt to omit colloquialisms and re-create lines, striking a balance between the dual principles of fidelity to the source text and naturalness in the target text.

Furthermore, strategies of loan, lexical recreation and omission loss are usually implemented while translating proper names, nicknames, geographical names, and so on. The translator applies the method of transposition in the translation of culture-specific words and phrases.

Translation is a multifaceted phenomenon and some aspects of it can be subject to the research of diverse sciences. The choice of film translation mode significantly contributes to the reception of a source language film in a target culture. Accordingly, dubbing neutralizes foreign elements of the source text and thus privileges the target

culture. In contrast, subtitling accentuates the foreign nature of a film, embodying a source-culture-bound translation.

Ultimately, the success of a well-translated film hinges on the translator's ability to evoke analogous feelings in both foreign and local viewers, constituting a formidable challenge and a measure of the translator's proficiency.

Abbreviations Used

Loan (LN), calque (CAL), explicitation (EXP), substitution (SUBS), transposition (TRAN), lexical recreation (LR), compensation (COM), omission (OMS), addition (ADD), condensation (CON), reformulation (REF), source language (SL), intermediary language (IL), target language (TL)

Filmography

Gone in 60 Seconds, directed by Dominic Sena. 2000. United States: Touchstone Pictures, Jerry Bruckheimer Films.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

Ethical Standards

The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.