9
ISSUES IN AUDIOVISUAL TRANSLATION
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9.0 INTRODUCTION

Audiovisual translation is one of several overlapping umbrella terms that include ‘media translation’, ‘multimedia translation’, ‘multimodal translation’ and ‘screen translation’. These different terms all set out to cover the interlingual transfer of verbal language when it is transmitted and accessed both visually and acoustically, usually, but not necessarily, through some kind of electronic device. Theatrical plays and opera, for example, are clearly audiovisual yet, until recently, audiences required no technological devices to access their translations; actors and singers simply acted and sang the translated versions. Nowadays, however, opera is frequently performed in the original language with surtitles in the target language projected on to the stage. Furthermore, electronic librettos placed on the back of each seat containing translations are now becoming widely available. However, to date most research in audiovisual translation has been dedicated to the field of screen translation, which, while being both audiovisual and multimedial in nature, is specifically understood to refer to the translation of films and other products for cinema, TV, video and DVD.

After the introduction of the first talking pictures in the 1920s a solution needed to be found to allow films to circulate despite language barriers. How to translate film dialogues and make movie-going accessible to speakers of all languages was to become a major concern for both North American and European film directors. Today, of course, screens are no longer restricted to cinema theatres alone. Television screens, computer screens and a series of devices such as DVD players, video game consoles, GPS navigation devices and mobile phones are also able to send out audiovisual products to be translated into scores of languages. Hence, strictly speaking, screen translation includes translations for any electronic appliance with a screen; however, for the purposes of this chapter, the term will be used mainly to refer to translations for the most popular products, namely for cinema, TV, video and DVD, and videogames.

The two most widespread modalities adopted for translating products for the screen are dubbing and subtitling. Dubbing is a process which uses the acoustic channel for translational purposes, while subtitling is visual and involves a written translation that is superimposed on to the
DELIA CHIARO

Screen. Another, less common, acoustic form of screen translation is voice-over.

Translating for the screen is quite different from translating print. Books, newspapers and other written products are simply meant to be read. Although they may contain illustrations (pictures, photographs, graphs, diagrams, etc.), these generally serve to complement and/or enhance the verbal content. Comic books are an interesting exception as they are made up of images and words that are closely interconnected so as to create a narrative whole. While not being audio visual in nature, they are both read and ‘watched’ simultaneously as the dialogues contained in the speech balloons connected to each speaker attempt to emulate spoken language. This ‘oral’ element is especially evident in the conventions attached to conveying emotions, e.g. the use of words such as ‘swoon’, ‘gasp’, ‘sigh’, etc. as well as those pertaining to an array of physical sensations such as ‘aaagh!’, ‘ouch’, ‘zap’ and ‘pow’. Furthermore, the visuals in comics consist of series of sequential captions that are reminiscent of stills of a film on celluloid. In a sense, readers of comics are privy to a narrative event that gives the impression of unfolding in motion. As a genre, comics could be placed on the interface between print texts and audiovisual products, as the reader is able to imagine sounds and noises, and although images are static, because they appear within a sequential framework of continuous and interconnected images and captions, the overall perception can be likened to that of watching a film (Zanettin 2008). Unsurprisingly, from the mid-twentieth century, traditional Japanese comics, known as manga, developed into a flourishing animated cartoon industry, animé (e.g. Sailor Moon, Pokemon etc.).

Conversely, products for the screen (i.e. films, TV series and serials, sitcoms, documentaries, etc.) are completely audiovisual in nature. This means that they function simultaneously on two different levels. Screen products (from this point onwards SP) are polysemiotic; in other words, they are made up of numerous codes that interact to produce a single effect (see Figure 9.1).

We talk of ‘watching’ films and of television; thus, primarily, these products are made to be seen. Accordingly, at one level, SP will be made up of a complex visual code comprising elements that range from actors’ movements, facial expressions and gesture to scenery, costume and use of lighting and colour. However, this visual code will also include verbal information in written form that will comprise features such as signposts and street signs and also items such as banners, newspapers, letters, notes, etc. This arrangement of visuals is united to an acoustic code that consists not only of the words in the dialogues but also of a series of non-verbal sounds such as background noise, sound effects and music. Thus, SP are both seen and heard by audiences. Screen translation is concerned mainly with conveying the verbal audio codes of an audiovisual product into other languages.
To my knowledge, there is no complete overview of screen translation in terms of its exact spread and impact on a global level. However, traditionally western Europe has been roughly divided into two major screen translation blocks: the UK, Benelux, Scandinavian countries, Greece and Portugal, which are mainly ‘subtitling nations’, and central and southern European countries stretching from Germany down to Spain (so-called ‘FIGS’, France, Italy, Germany and Spain, but also Austria), which are mainly ‘dubbing nations’. Both translational methods present advantages and disadvantages, not only of a practical nature but especially of a sociolinguistic and political kind. In other words, countries which originally favoured dubbing tended to do so for protectionist reasons and it is not surprising that the 1930s saw the birth of dubbing in Italy and Germany both to inhibit English and to exalt national languages, as well as to censor content. Conversely, a preference towards subtitling in Scandinavia, for example, does not simply reflect a more open attitude towards other languages but an inexpensive form of screen translation for a relatively restricted number of spectators. However, although traditional dubbing strongholds stand firm, there too subtitling markets are in rapid expansion: DVD technology, satellite and cable TV channels and digital television have produced the need for vast numbers of screen translations. Furthermore, world markets demand that products are screened soon after being premiered in the USA (products that are mainly of US origin and thus translated from English into other languages; see Dries 1996; Eurobarometer2). In fact, subtitling is commonplace across the whole of Europe, chiefly because of its cost-effectiveness (Chiaro 2005). Although, outside Europe, dubbing enjoys a strong standing in mainland China, Japan, Latin America and Québec, just as subtitling does in Israel, Hong Kong and Thailand, the screen translation map is less clear-cut than it seems. For example, subtitling is indeed usually
preferred in countries with small populations, but political entities such as Wales, the Basque country and Catalonia opt for dubbing as a way of promoting and/or standardizing a minority language (O’Connell 1996; Izard 2000). Furthermore, even in subtitling countries, children’s films and programmes are almost always dubbed, while the possibility for cinema and TV users to choose between one modality or another is becoming ever more common through interactive pay TV stations. Cinema theatres screening in the original language with subtitles are becoming commonplace in traditionally dubbing countries, while countries such as Denmark and Greece now also dub to audiences other than children (Gottlieb 2001a; Díaz Cintas 1999). Finally, the general tendency in English-speaking countries is to subtitle the few foreign language feature films that actually enter these markets, for highly educated, ‘élite’ art-house cinemas audiences, while TV products in languages other than English are virtually non-existent (Kilborn 1989). In 2006, foreign language films represented 3.5 per cent of the total UK gross box office revenue, of which 1.8 per cent were in Hindi and presumably played almost exclusively to an Asian audience. In the same year, 2 per cent of all films broadcast across terrestrial TV channels were in a foreign language.3

This chapter will present and discuss the different ways in which SP are translated from one language to another. SP include full-length feature films for cinema, TV, video and DVD and the entire spectrum of TV products (i.e. series, serials, sitcoms, documentaries, news programmes, advertisements, etc.), many of which are also available in home video and DVD formats.4 Following this brief overview of how screen translation fits in within the wider field of multimedia translation, the two major modalities adopted for translating SP, namely dubbing and subtitling, will be described and discussed in detail, especially in terms of the advantages and disadvantages of each specific mode. The modalities of voice-over and TV interpreting will also be presented and discussed. Finally, a detailed discussion of the specific translational constraints of screen translation will close the chapter.

9.1 DUBBING

Dubbing is a process which entails ‘the replacement of the original speech by a voice track which attempts to follow as closely as possible the timing, phrasing and lip-movements of the original dialogue’ (Luyken et al. 1991: 31). The goal of dubbing is to make the target dialogues look as if they are being uttered by the original actors so that viewers’ enjoyment of foreign products will be enhanced.

9.1.1 THE DUBBING PROCESS

There are traditionally four basic steps involved in the process of dubbing a film from start to finish. First, the script is translated; second, it is adapted to
sound both natural in the target language and to fit in with the lip movements of the actors on screen; third, the new, translated script is recorded by actors; and finally it is mixed into the original recording. The first translation is usually word for word. Some companies employ translators simply to provide a literal translation of the script, after which it is the adaptor or ‘dubbing translator’ who subsequently adjusts the rough translation to make it sound like natural target-language dialogue. By tradition, the dubbing translator need not be proficient in the source language, but creative and talented enough in the target language to create fresh dialogue that is convincing. As well as rendering talk natural, care is taken to ensure that the dialogue fits into visual features on screen such as lip movement, facial expressions and so on. Furthermore, the new dialogue also needs to take the emotive content of each utterance into account. However, with the awareness that a thorough understanding of the source text is a crucial asset for a translator, it is becoming ever more common for the two processes (the translation itself and the adaptation) to merge and be carried out by a single translator who is proficient in both languages (Chaume 2006).

While the script is being translated and adapted, the dubbing director, a project manager who supervises the entire dubbing process, including economic aspects such as negotiating time scales and costs with the commissioner, will choose the dubbing actors (known as ‘voice talents’ in the USA) that best suit the parts. The director may choose an actor according to his or her voice quality, which may closely match that of the original actor. However, in the case of well-known actors, it is common in Europe for one person to dub the same actor for his or her entire career. For example, Woody Allen has at least three European counterparts who have dubbed him in all his films: Wolfgang Draeger in Germany (Pisek 1994), Oreste Lionello in Italy and Joan Pera in Spain. While the dubbing director carries out these administrative tasks, his or her ‘dubbing assistant’ will divide up the film track (traditionally in videotape form) into ‘takes’ or loops (anelli, literally ‘rings’, thus reminiscent of celluloid) and mark them with a time code at the beginning and end of each. These short tracks of film are organized according to the combination of characters appearing in each one in order to arrange recording shifts in the studio for the different actors involved. Recordings are carried out with the actors watching the film and listening to the dialogues contained in each original take through headphones while they rehearse the translation that they read from the script. As soon as the actors’ utterances are in sync with the original, recording begins. The new voices are processed by a synthesizer so that they are coordinated as precisely as possible with the original lip and facial movement (Paolinelli and Di Fortunato 2005). Significantly, actors are free to adapt the new screenplay when they begin recording. In fact, they will often have the freedom to manipulate utterances as they think fit according to artistic or other criteria. Furthermore, the dubbing director may intervene in the translation of the
dialogues wherever he or she wishes. In practice, a single person often carries out more than one of the four steps in the process. For example, the same person may double up as both dubbing director and dubbing translator or an actor may also double up as dubbing director (Chiaro 2005).

Finally, once recording has been completed, the dubbed tracks are mixed with the international track and musical score so as to create a balanced effect.

So far we have considered an ‘artisan’ approach that has been common across Europe since the outset of dubbing. Nowadays, however, digital technology is beginning to replace this more traditional approach, mainly for reasons of cost-effectiveness. One of the advantages of digital technology is that it allows actors more freedom during the recording process. Push-button technology eliminates the bother of having to continually wind reels of tape back and forth. Moreover, the dubbing assistant no longer needs to slice up a reel into takes because there is no need to arrange actors into numerous and complex shifts. Thanks to electronic formats, each dubbing actor can simply record their part on their own. The complicated and time-consuming traditional artisan approach forced actors to physically work together in all the scenes in which the original actors appeared together; hi-tech allows each actor to perform his or her part in the film, not necessarily in the presence of other actors. Separate pieces of footage will thus be edited into a whole by means of software and/or computer appliances.

As well as simplifying technical and organizational aspects of the dubbing process, new technology is also able to modify lip sync and voice quality. Software is now available that can automatically modify footage so that an actor mouths words that he or she did not actually speak in the original; in other words, the original sequence can be modified to sync the actors’ lip motions to the new soundtrack. Other programmes allow a dubbed voice to be readily assimilated to that of the original actor, irrespective of the source language, by recording first a sample of the original voice and then the dubbed dialogues. The software matches the first recording with the second, giving the impression that the original actor is speaking the target language with its characteristic quality and intonation patterns.

Finally, it is worth briefly mentioning the idiosyncrasy of dubbing in Poland and Russia. Here, SP are generally dubbed by a single male voice known as the Lektor, who interprets all parts, regardless of whether they are male or female, with a style of intonation which is, to say the least, monotonous to foreign ears. Furthermore, no attention whatsoever is paid to lip sync, while the underlying dialogue in the original language is fairly perceptible. Arguably, this style of dubbing is closer to voice-over (section 9.3.1) simply because of the slight audibility of the underlying code. Although this style of screen translation may seem odd to audiences elsewhere, it nevertheless appears to be appreciated in Poland and Russia.
9.1.2 ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF DUBBING

Bollettieri Bosinelli argues that those in favour of dubbing have traditionally stressed the association of dubbing with ‘doubling’ and hence the ‘opportunity of making films available to larger audiences (‘increase the sales’) while privileging the semantic trait of ‘exact likeness’. Those against dubbing stress the negative meaning of ‘double’ such as ‘ambiguous, fake, deceitful, false, other than original, phoney, artificial’ (1994: 8).

It would not be unfair to say that dubbing has a worse reputation in subtitling countries than subtitling has in dubbing countries. Furthermore, there appears to be a certain element of supremacy attached to subtitles that escapes dubbing, possibly because of its link with art-house movies and artistically renowned directors. Unlike subtitling, dubbing is often condemned for spoiling the original soundtrack and denying audiences the opportunity of hearing the voices of the original actors. Yet, in a sense, dubbing is the screen translation modality which is able to fulfil the greatest filmic uniformity with the original simply by virtue of the fact that there is no need to reduce or condense the source dialogues as in subtitling (section 9.2.1). In other words, there is less textual reduction. With dubbing, audiences can actually watch the film in its entirety as they are not distracted by also having to concentrate on reading the dialogues. In fact, dubbing is a language service that is consumed automatically and in a sense goes by unnoticed by audiences that are used to this modality. However, subtitles too are consumed without audiences being unduly aware of or disturbed by them. In fact, audiences get used to what they see and hear and by and large they accept it simply because ‘viewers are creatures of habit’ (Ivarsson 1992: 66). Significantly, even the issue of imperfect lip sync, which is frequently raised as one of dubbing’s negative points, appears to pass unnoticed by audiences in dubbing countries, presumably because perfect or near-perfect sync is only vital in close-up shots (Herbst 1994).

Nevertheless, dubbing is far more complex, time-consuming and, consequently, more costly than subtitling, simply because of the number of operators involved in dubbing a film from start to finish: dubbing director, translator, dubbing translator, actors, sound engineers, etc. Digital technology can reduce both time and cost factors (see section 9.1.1), but whether it achieves the same quality as that of ‘artisan’ style dubbing still remains to be seen.

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the dubbing countries have begun to be swamped by cost-effective subtitled products, especially the newly invented DVD. This is because the market is in need of very fast (and cheap) translations to deal with the continuous large numbers of new productions for both cinema and TV, as well as an autonomous DVD market. Apart from the real risk of reducing work in the dubbing industry (a significant European market sector which employs thousands of people), there is a real danger
of stamping out a singular European craft. Ironically, while the USA filmic and television markets are extremely protectionist, with foreign products exclusively subtitled, it is Hollywood that oversees the dubbing (rather than subtitling) process of their goods in several developing countries. At present, Hollywood supervises dubbing in 33 territories, including Afghanistan and Iraq, to which the USA has sold its ‘dubbing expertise’ (Chiaro forthcoming a).

9.2 SUBTITLING

Subtitling can be defined as ‘the rendering in a different language of verbal messages in filmic media, in the shape of one or more lines of written text presented on the screen in sync with the original written message’ (Gottlieb 2001b: 87, emphasis added).

9.2.1 THE SUBTITLING PROCESS

Subtitling consists of incorporating on the screen a written text which is a condensed version in the target text of what can be heard on screen. Depending on the mode of projection, subtitles can either be printed on the film itself (‘open’ subtitles), selected by the viewer from a DVD or teletext menu (‘closed subtitles’) or projected on to the screen, although the latter mode is largely restricted to film festivals where subtitles are displayed in real time.

The written, subtitled text has to be shorter than the audio, simply because the viewer needs the necessary time to read the captions while at the same time remaining unaware that he or she is actually reading. According to Antonini (2005: 213), the words contained in the original dialogues tend to be reduced by between 40 and 75 per cent in order to give viewers the chance of reading the subtitles while watching the film at the same time. Especially, where an SP is thick with dialogue, the subtitling translator is forced to reduce and condense the original so that viewers have the chance to read, watch and, hopefully, enjoy the film.

Antonini (213–14) identifies three principal operations that the translator must carry out in order to obtain effective subtitles: elimination, rendering and simplification. Elimination consists of cutting out elements that do not modify the meaning of the original dialogue but only the form (e.g. hesitations, false starts, redundancies, etc.) as well as removing any information that can be understood from the visuals (e.g. a nod or shake of the head). Rendering refers to dealing with (in most cases eliminating) features such as slang, dialect and taboo language, while condensation indicates the simplification and fragmentation of the original syntax so as to promote comfortable reading.

Just like dubbing, the subtitling process may also involve several operators. The first stage in subtitling is known as spotting or cueing and involves marking the transcript or the dialogue list according to where subtitles should start.
ISSUES IN AUDIOVISUAL TRANSLATION

and stop. Traditionally, this stage in the process is carried out by a technician, who calculates the length of the subtitles according to the cueing times of each frame. With the aid of the dialogue list annotated for cueing, the translator will then take over and carry out the actual translation. In addition, it is not unusual for a third operator to be employed to perfect the final subtitles, checking language but also technical aspects, such as ensuring that subtitles are in sync with changes of frame. However, as with the dubbing process, thanks to technology it has become quite normal nowadays for a single operator to carry out all three steps of the entire procedure (see the report of a workshop by Díaz Cintas). Nevertheless, while subtitling translators working with SP for the cinema tend to create a new transcript from the original transcript in writing alone (i.e. their end product will be in written form), those working for DVD and TV are likely to work from computer-based workstations that allow them to receive all the necessary information, including the time-coded transcription or dialogue list, from which they devise, cue, check and even edit the subtitles. In other words, they will work directly on to electronic files and produce a complete product.

Traditionally, subtitles consist of one or two lines of 30 to 40 characters (including spaces) that are displayed at the bottom of the picture, either centred or left-aligned (Gottlieb 2001b). However, films for the big screen tend to have longer lines with more characters compared to TV screens because of movie audiences’ greater concentration and DVDs also have longer lines, presumably because viewers can rewind and re-read anything they may not have read (Díaz Cintas and Ramael 2007: 24). According to Díaz Cintas, such restrictions are bound to disappear in the future as many subtitling programmes work with pixels that are able to manage space according to the shape and size of letters.9

Naturally, subtitles in languages which read from right to left (e.g. Hebrew, Arabic) are, of course, right-aligned, and scripts can also be placed vertically, as for Japanese. Normally, the letters are white, spaced proportionally with a grey-coloured shadow or background box that darkens if the underlying picture becomes darker. Furthermore, nowadays it is also fairly common to find subtitles both at the top of the screen and the bottom, (e.g. MTV television) as well as moving or ‘crawling’ subtitles in the lower screen (seen by the writer in Taiwan). The exposure time for each subtitle should be long enough to permit comfortable reading; three to five seconds for one line and four to six for two lines (Linde and Kay 1999: 7). Subtitles cannot remain on screen too long because the original dialogue continues and this would lead to further reduction in the following ‘sub’. Studies also show that, if they are left on the screen too long, viewers tend to re-read them, which does not appear to lead to better comprehension (Linde and Kay 1999). However, at present subtitles adhere to what Gottlieb has defined as the ‘one-size-fits-all’ rule of thumb (1994: 118), based on the assumption that slower readers who are not familiar with the source language set the pace. This has led to the
established length/timing conventions. Yet different languages use varying amounts of verbal content to express the same meaning. For example, the average German word is longer than the average English word and the syntax of Italian is notoriously complex and hypotactic compared to English, but subtitling conventions are the same for all.

As indicated above, subtitles can also be either open, meaning that they cannot be turned off and controlled by the viewer (i.e. at cinemas), or closed, which means that they are optional and accessed by the user (i.e. subtitles for hard of hearing, subtitles on pay TV channels and DVDs).

9.2.2 ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF SUBTITLING

Generally speaking, subtitling seems to enjoy a more positive reputation than dubbing (see section 9.1.2.). In fact, the type of film that is subtitled in both English-speaking countries and within the dubbing block will tend to be associated with a more élite and possibly highbrow audience. In addition, the fact that dubbing in countries such as Italy was originally introduced, amongst other things, to meet the needs of the high incidence of illiteracy within the population, associates the mode even further with less intellectual audiences. Moreover, it is not only scholars from subtitling countries who have supported this modality. An abundance of case studies comparing source and target versions of SP have been produced by scholars working within FIGS countries; underscore the weakness of the dubs. In contrast, it would appear that research on subtitling has focused on wider issues such as source language interference in naturally occurring language (Gottlieb 1999, 2001a) and reading speeds (Linde and Kay 1999) as well as more general theoretical aspects (Titford 1982; Delabastita 1989).

The fact that the source language is not distorted in any way is surely the most significant benefit of subtitles. Furthermore, an important advantage is that the original dialogue is always present and potentially accessible. Thus, audiences who are familiar with the original language of the film can also follow the acoustics. A popular argument in favour of subtitling is that it promotes the learning of foreign languages, but whether this is really true has never been established empirically. Certainly, a significant advantage is the prospect of its use as a language-teaching tool in the classroom. However, the fact that the original dialogues can be heard is double-edged as this severely limits translators’ choices, especially when translating from English. Censorship is a clear example of this and is exemplified in the manipulation of films in Francoist Spain (Vandaele 2002: 267) and of series such as The Simpsons and South Park produced for the Arab world (see ‘Taboo’ in section 9.4.2.2). Yet, as Weissbrod highlights, on Israeli TV the subs in both Hebrew and Arabic retain references to sex and the sacrilegious expressions of the original (2007: 30). Internationally well-known taboo swear words in English films may be reduced in foreign subtitles but they will still be clearly
audible and therefore recognized by audiences. And, through comparisons of subtitles and dubs of the same products, it would appear that subtitles reduce taboo language more than dubbing (Bucaria 2007), presumably because of the belief that these words in writing have a stronger effect than speech (Roffe 1995), but again, this is still to be proven empirically.

In addition, the effort of reading and listening at the same time may be disorienting for some viewers. However, this challenge should not be overstated, because (1) there is reason to believe that subtitling audiences pay less attention to the spoken dialogue than dubbing audiences; (2) subtitles are becoming more and more ‘readable’ and user-friendly. Apart from the greatly improved aesthetics of layout (i.e. ‘bleeding’), pale-coloured subtitles are a thing of the past and have been widely replaced by modern black boxes filled with bold characters. Texts are now segmented so that grammatical units are respected across and within a subtitle, with line-breaks occurring after a clause or a sentence (Wildblood 2002). Also, simple lexis is preferred to more complex words, punctuation is conventionalized, with a tendency to avoid hyphenation, and care is taken for the upper line in two-line subtitles to be shorter than the lower line so as to keep eye movement to a minimum (Ivarsson 1992).

Finally, the fact that subtitles are added to the original version, rather than substituting part of it (i.e. the verbal code), renders subtitling an uncharacteristic and possibly unique type of translation. Moreover, the translation of subtitles is ‘diagonal’ (Gottlieb 1994) in the sense that, unlike literary translation, for example, in which transfer is ‘written to written’, or interpreting, in which transfer is ‘spoken to spoken’, in subtitling spoken language is transformed into writing. Consequently, all the elements that are unacceptable in standard, or even informal written language (e.g. hesitations, false starts, taboo, language, etc.) are inevitably omitted in the streamlining that the modality necessitates. So, paradoxically, subtitles, a form of writing, are unable to conform to ‘real’ writing by virtue of the fact that they are reflecting speech. To sum up, the bonus of viewers able to hear the original voices and dialogue is traded off not only against the textual reduction of the subtitles but also against the missing elements of ‘real’ writing such as explicitness, elaborateness, formality, etc.

9.2.2.1 Fansubs

A fansub is a ‘fan-produced, translated, subtitled version of a Japanese anime programme’ (Díaz Cintas and Muñoz Sánchez 2006). The production of a fansub involves teamwork, in which different members are responsible for different steps in the procedure, from initially downloading the original video from the web to processes such as timing, editing and distribution. However, the translation element is often carried out separately from the other technical processes and mostly uses the English version (translated by a Japanese) as a
pivot language. Fansubs differ significantly from professional subtitling in that they are more daring and flout many conventions by introducing features such as the use of different colours for different actors, the glossing of unfamiliar features on different parts of the screen as well as giving operators more visibility by naming them in the credits, which, unlike most mainstream subs, are also translated (ibid.). Possibly because many fansubbers are information technology experts, many of the innovations adopted, such as use of coloured subs and special fonts, have been borrowed from video game localization that involves expertise in software engineering combined with translational skills (cf. section 9.3.2). Today, however, as well as cartoons, fansubbers create translations for a wide variety of television genres which, once subtitled, are subsequently made available over the internet.

9.3 Other Screen Translation Modalities

9.3.1 Voice-over

Voice-over can be defined as a technique in which a disembodied voice can be heard over the original soundtrack, which remains audible but indecipherable to audiences. To date, this modality of screen translation has been very much overlooked and under-researched by academics. The only study of which the author is aware is Grigaravičiūtė and Gottlieb (2001).

Voice-over consists of a narrator who begins speaking in the target language following the initial utterance in the original and subsequently remains slightly out of step with the underlying soundtrack for the entire recording. Despite the fact that audiences may be familiar with the source language, the underlying speech cannot be clearly perceived apart from the initial and final utterances of the original narrator and the insertion of the odd sound bite. A sound bite is a very short piece of footage of the original soundtrack which is not covered by the new target language audio. For example, a chunk of speech may be given prominence by being made perceptible through a short and temporary silencing of the voice-over. Normally, sound bites are discernible at the beginning and end of a voice-over.

This modality is generally linked to the sober narrative style adopted in traditional historical and wildlife documentaries as well as news broadcasts. However, it would be wrong to believe that voice-over is limited to these particular genres and to factual products alone. In Italy, for example, advertisements and shopping channels make frequent use of voice-over, albeit with an intonation which is less sober than that adopted for traditional documentaries. People acting as testimonials for products advertised are voiced over ‘theatrically’, as are celebrity chef programmes (e.g. Jamie at Home, Channel 4, 2007 broadcast on Gambero Rosso pay TV channel) and eyewitnesses in several historical documentaries (e.g. History Channel’s Decoding The Past, A&E Television Networks, 1995; Opus Dei Unveiled,
9.3.2 LOCALIZATION FOR VIDEO GAMES

Video games can be defined as ‘computer-based entertainment software, using any electronic platform …, involving one or multiple players in a physical or networked environment’ (Frasca 2001: 4).

A wide variety of video games can be accessed and played from computers, television sets, hand-held consoles, machines in dedicated arcades and mobile phones. These games can be fairly simple, involving a single player (e.g. solitaire) or else complex and interactive with more players (e.g. role-play games). Similarly to other SP, video games are audiovisual in nature, but they are created using cutting-edge technology, making great use of creativity that is continually evolving to produce newer, brighter and more lifelike visual and sound effects. Video games incorporate human voices, thus products tend to be both dubbed and subtitled. However, language translation and software engineering go hand in hand in the localization of these products for individual markets, and, unlike for other SP, translation is considered an integral part of the localization process of each product. In terms of revenue, the video game industry has clearly overtaken cinema and television (Bernal Merino 2006) and this may well be due to the quality control that companies exert on each product. In fact, the video game industry is a rare example of the way translation is not seen just as something to be carried out once production has been completed as a sort of unrelated and unimportant appendage. Game publishers are usually also responsible for localizing their products, a process in which both functional and linguistic testing are part of quality assurance (Chandler 2005). Furthermore, translators are involved in each stage of projects. Of course, the negative side is that translators work with ‘unstable work models’ that are continually changing (O’Hagan and Mangiron 2006).

O’Hagan and Mangiron highlight a number of similarities and diversities between video game localization and audiovisual translation. Firstly, while most SP are dubbed or subtitled from English into other languages, video games are mainly dubbed and subtitled into English from Japanese. The dubbing process for video games is similar to that of other SP; subtitling, however, differs. Most subtitled games make use of intralingual subtitles. Players are able to control them, by pausing for example, as when watching a DVD. Furthermore, in order to keep up with the rapid speed of a video game, subtitles appear at a faster speed than at the cinema or on TV.
Above all, however, the aim of video games is to provide entertainment and to be enjoyed. It is thus paramount that translators bear in mind the importance of the ‘look and feel’ of the original. Although this involves taking into account culture-specific features and especially humorous effects, it also means that the translator should be familiar with the game genre itself and the specific type of register it employs. In fact, translators are usually given total freedom to accommodate sub and dub so as to come up with a product that is as enjoyable as possible for each locale. Translators are given the freedom to make use as much as possible of local features, such as jokes and references to popular culture, so as to enhance the target product. This kind of translation is often termed ‘transcreation’ (cf. section 1.7 and Chapter 6).

9.3.3 Real-time subtitling and respeaking

Real-time subtitling is ‘real time transcription using speaker-dependant speech recognition of the voice of a trained narrating interpreter in order to provide near simultaneous subtitles with a minimum of errors’ (Lambourne 2006).

Originally developed to provide intralingual subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing, real-time subtitling is also widely used for interlingual subtitling in many countries worldwide (see Sheng-Jie Chen 2006 for an overview). Whether inter- or intra-lingual, real-time subtitles are produced with a speaker/interpreter who reads and reduces and, in the case of interlingual subtitles, translates speech flow in the original language while a stenographer creates the subtitles. Korte (2006) reports that Dutch television companies have been regularly adopting real-time subtitles, not only for international affairs, state weddings and funerals etc., but also for live programmes in a foreign language since the late 1990s.

However, more recently the practice of respeaking has been rapidly gaining ground. Thanks to speech recognition software able to transform oral speech into written subtitles with a certain degree of accuracy, the respeaker remains the only human operator in the entire process. Basically, the respeaker reduces the source message, software recognizes his or her voice and automatically translates this into written subtitles. At present, speech recognition software is able to transform oral speech into written subtitles with some accuracy, and there is reason to believe that future advances will eliminate existing technical shortcomings.

9.4 Translating audiovisual products: linguistic and cultural issues

Whether the chosen mode of translation is subtitling, dubbing or voice-over, the screen translator will face a series of common problems. As we have seen, unlike both written texts and purely oral discourse, filmic products contain
both oral and visual elements. However, what makes audiovisuals especially complex in translational terms is the fact that the acoustic and visual codes are so tightly combined as to create an inseparable whole. Therefore, although translation operates on the verbal level alone (i.e. the translator can only modify the words of an audiovisual product), it still remains inextricably linked to the visuals of the film itself, which remain intact. Moreover, if we consider the process of dubbing, translation will involve facing the basic difficulty of the synchronization of lip movement in the original language with lip movement in the target language (see 9.1.2). On the other hand, the process of subtitling requires dialogues to be condensed in order for them to fit into short captions which appear on the screen that can only be left on display for a limited time (see 9.2.2). These are difficulties that are specific to each modality. In addition to these, both dubbing translators and subtitling translators have to contend with three basic categories of translational hurdles:

1. highly culture-specific references (e.g. place names, references to sports and festivities, famous people, monetary systems, institutions, etc.);
2. language-specific features (terms of address, taboo language, etc.);
3. areas of overlap between language and culture (songs, rhymes, jokes, etc.).

Of course, the features specified above are problematic in written translation too and in interpreting, but in audiovisual products audiences will be able to match what they see on screen (the visuals) with what they hear in a dub or read in a subtitle. For example, in a novel, no matter how such features are conveyed for the target reader, the idea of the objects in question will remain in the reader’s mind and imagination; in contrast, with filmic products many references are in full view on the screen, leaving the translator with little room for manoeuvre. Additionally, in the case of subtitling, this leads to what Díaz Cintas (2003: 43) labels ‘vulnerable translation’ since the possibility of comparing soundtrack and subs renders the latter subject to criticism by audiences who may identify what they perceive to be discrepancies, omissions and unexpected equivalents (see also section 9.2.2 above).

9.4.1 Culture-specific references

Naturally, when watching many audiovisual products, viewers must suspend their disbelief. However, when watching in translation, disbelief must be suspended even further. If French viewers see a well-known American actor on screen climbing into a New York cab and hear him speaking to the driver in impeccable French, they will know that what they are hearing is an artefact. They will be well aware of the fact that the actor normally speaks English and that New York taxi drivers would normally expect to be addressed in English too. However, viewers’ acceptance is often stretched
to extreme limits, especially because of the presence of a series of highly culture-specific references (CSRs). CSRs are entities that are typical of one particular culture, and that culture alone, and they can be either exclusively or predominantly visual (an image of a local or national figure, a local dance, pet funerals, baby showers), exclusively verbal or else both visual and verbal in nature.

National institutions in film and TV genres are an example of CSRs: there are numerous North American screen products pertaining to ‘legal’ (e.g. *Ally McBeal*), ‘police’ (e.g. *CSI* and *Cold Case*) and ‘hospital’ (e.g. *ER* and *Grey’s Anatomy*) which are translated for audiences worldwide. These institutions rarely correspond to those in other countries but, while in English-speaking countries such as the UK the viewer simply ‘learns’ the additional procedures, practices and above all the specific language of different judiciary, police, health and school systems, elsewhere these are conveyed through diverse translational norms that accommodate these institutions to each target culture. Thus, in Italian dubs and the subtitles of legal filmic genres, for example, a figure such as a ‘district attorney’ regularly becomes a *procuratore distrettuale* – a nonce term in naturally occurring Italian; similarly, a schoolchild’s ‘F’ grade would be translated literally despite the absence of a corresponding marking system in Italy. In other words, audiences see a foreign reality (e.g. wigs and gowns of French and British judiciary, costume and behaviour of North American cheer leaders, etc.), yet hear some sort of compensatory source language to convey it. Antonini and Chiaro (2005: 39) have identified ten areas in which what they have labelled ‘lingua-cultural drops in translational voltage’ may occur:

1. **Institutions** (including judiciary, police, military)
   a. Legal formulae: e.g. ‘This court is now in session’, ‘All rise’, ‘Objection, your Honour’, ‘Objection overruled/sustained’, ‘You may be seated’;
   b. Courtroom forms of address: e.g. ‘Your Honour’, ‘My Lord’, ‘Members of the jury’;
   c. Legal topography: Supreme Court, Grand Jury, Court, etc.;
   d. Agents: lawyers, solicitors, attorneys, barristers, etc.; hospital hierarchies such as consultants, interns, paramedics; military hierarchies, etc.

2. **Educational** references to ‘high school’ culture, tests, grading systems, sororities, cheer leaders, etc.

3. **Place names**: The District of Columbia, The Country Club, 42nd Street, etc.

4. **Units of measurement**: Two ounces of meat, 150 pounds, twenty yards, etc.

5. **Monetary systems**: Dollars, soles, pounds, etc.

6. **National sports and pastimes**: American football, baseball, basketball teams: *The Nicks, Boston, Brooklyn Dodgers*, etc.
7. **Food and drink:** Mississippi Mud Pie, pancakes, BLT, etc.
8. **Holidays and festivities:** Halloween, St Patrick’s, July 4th, Thanksgiving, Bar Mitzvah, Chinese New Year, The Festival of Light, etc.
9. **Books, films and TV programmes:** ‘Did you watch the Brady Bunch?’; ‘Welcome to the road Dorothy’.
10. **Celebrities and personalities:** Ringo Starr; Toppy; The Cookie Monster, etc.

Adopting a wavering supply of electricity as a metaphor, ‘lingua-cultural drops in translational voltage’ (ibid.) refer to the inevitable perceived uneasiness and turbulence in the verbal code with respect to the visuals. The previous examples are mainly taken from US filmic products and, although translations are not provided, it is clear to see why they may create difficulty. Furthermore, the abundance of examples from US SP reflects their dominance in the Italian, and indeed all European, media (see European Audiovisual Observatory data\(^{12}\) as well as more internationally.

In order to handle such references, as in written translation, translators opt for either: a) ‘chunking up’ and making CSR in the target language more general than those in the source language through the adoption of hyperonymy; b) ‘chunking down’ by replacing them with more specific references in the target language; or c) ‘chunking sideways’ and replacing CSR with same level equivalents (Katan 1999/2004: 147).

9.4.1.1 **Chunking upwards and downwards**

Chunking a CSR upwards involves replacing it with a more general example of the same object in the target language, while chunking downwards involves substitution with an example of an extremely culture-specific and (therefore) extremely different item, in the target language. For example, in a breakfast scene from a well-known US sitcom \*The Nanny*, there is a reference to three foodstuffs that are typically North American, namely muffins, cereals and puddings. Both Italian and German translations (dubs) have been domesticated for respective audiences. However, the original US ‘muffins’ have been chunked down for Italian audiences to be replaced by *maritozzi*, a type of bun that is typically Roman, while in German they have been chunked up to become generic *Kuchen* – ‘cakes’. Again, the non-specific ‘cereal’ in the original becomes specific *Müsli* – ‘muesli’ in German. Significantly, in the Italian dub the cereal and puddings are respectively transformed into highly specific *savoiardi* and *pasticcini* (‘sponge fingers’ and ‘petits fours’) while in the German version the puddings specifically become *Pralinen* (‘chocolates’). Alert viewers in Italy and Germany may well be able to spot the differences as the original muffins, cereal and puddings are likely to be discernible on screen.
9.4.1.2 Chinking Sideways

Chinking sideways occurs when a CSR is replaced with a target feature which is neither more general nor more specific than the original, but of the same level. In a well-known sketch from an episode (Series 2, Episode 1) of *Little Britain*, featuring Lou and Andy subtitled in Italian, the off-screen narrator is heard to say that Lou has just been spending a ‘busy morning taking all the K’s out of Andy’s Alphabet Spaghetti’. Despite the fact that Alphabet Spaghetti are not available in Italy, the subtitles supply a word-for-word translation: *una mattinata passata a rimuovere tutte le ‘K’ dall’Alphabetti Spaghetti di Andy*. The translator has chunked sideways. Similarly, in another sketch in the same episode, the Prime Minister’s aide offers the shadow minister a ‘chocolate finger’. This time the biscuits can be clearly seen on screen, yet the subtitles refer to *Dito di cioccolato* (literally: a real [chocolate] finger of a hand) despite the fact that similar biscuits in Italy go by the name of *Togo*. Admittedly, translating with *Togo* would have left no room for the sexual innuendo which follows, but the visual/verbal mismatch remains.

9.4.2 Lingua-Specific Features

9.4.2.1 Linguistic Variation

Sociolinguistic markers such as accent, variety and slang (Pavesi 1996; Chiaro 1996, 2000a) tend to disappear in screen translations. In fact, the ‘homogenizing convention’ (Sternberg 1981) typical also of literary translation, in which all characters adopt a standard variety of the target language, tends to be the general norm. In the case of subtitles, the translator can attempt to connote those pertaining to the speech of certain characters so that the reader will understand that the vocalizations of a particular person are different from that of others, but transcribing the subtitles of an entire film in any variety other than the standard would be unprecedented.

In the Italian subtitles of *My Cousin Vinnie* (1992, Jonathan Lynn, USA) the odd (deliberate) grammatical mistake underscores teddy-boy Vinnie’s (Joe Pesci) poor command of standard American English as well as his Italo-American inarticulateness. For example, Vinnie’s inability to correctly pronounce the final fricative of the word ‘youths’ is reflected in the misspelt *ragazzi* instead of *ragazzi* but the inclusion of these mistakes in the subs is not consistent throughout the film. Similarly, in dubbing it is quite unusual to connote all characters in terms of their geographic, ethnic or social origin. In the dubbed version, Vinnie speaks with a Sicilian accent from start to finish. However, he is the only character whose language is marked in the translations (both sub and dub) despite the strong Alabama drawl of most of the other characters. Assis Rosa (2001: 217) provides examples of two film adaptations of Shaw’s *Pygmalion* subtitled for Portuguese TV channels. As is well-known, language is a central theme of the plot and Assis Rosa shows
how one version simply adopted the odd example of non-standard vocabulary while the other consistently inserted informal lexis, deviant spelling and other oral features.

However, comedies constitute an exception to the homogenizing convention. In fact, it is not at all unusual for comic or cartoon characters to be dubbed with stereotypical accents. In Dreamworks productions such as *Shark Tale* (2004, Bibo Bergeron and Vicky Jenson, USA), the mobster-shark Don Vito (Robert De Niro) and his henchman Sykes (Martin Scorsese) are dubbed with Sicilian accents, while Ernie and Bernie, two Jamaican jelly-fish thugs, are transformed into speakers of Italian teenspeak, voiced by two well-known comedians, thus paralleling, in part, the voices of Ziggy Marley and comedian Doug E. Doug in the original. So, laid-back, vaguely Roman-sounding teenage gobbledygook compensates for the Rasta speech of the jelly-fish and crosscuts dialect and sociolect. Again, in *Chicken Run* (2000, V.G., USA) the Scottish hen is dubbed with a marked German accent. The audience’s perception of the hen is no longer that of the strict Scottish spinster but of the stereotypical cruel German. Therefore, the Italian version gives the character a completely different connotation from the intended one, although the comic *skopos* remains.

Nevertheless, on rare occasions, ‘serious’ genres also choose to insert sociolinguistic markers in translation, as in the Italian dub of *The Da Vinci Code* (2006, Ron Howard, USA) that includes characters speaking Italian with French, Spanish and English accents, but this is an exception rather than the rule. Similarly, educational History Channel documentaries such as *The Plague* (2005) and *The Scourge of the Black Death* (2005) are voiced over by actors speaking English (or the language of each interlingual voice-over) with the imaginary accents of writers at the time.

**MULTILINGUAL FILMS**

Products containing characters speaking in a language other than the main film language present another translational quandary when the film is dubbed. In the case of multilingual films, the strategy in dubbing countries tends to be to adopt a mixture of dubbing and subtitling although, if one of the foreign languages in question happens to be the one into which the film is being translated, this will create additional difficulties. Thus, in the Italian version of *A Fish Called Wanda* (1988, Charles Crichton, UK) in which Wanda’s lovers must speak to her in any language other than English, Otto’s Italian is transformed into Spanish. Subtitling is, of course, the most obvious solution in such cases. However, in both Spain and Italy the DVD version of *Babel* (2006, Alejandro González Iñárritu, France, USA, Mexico), a film originally shot in five languages (English, Mexican Spanish, Arabic, Japanese and Japanese sign language), was released completely dubbed, whitewashing the overall effect and missing the point of the film,
which concerns the wider issue of the lack of dialogue in contemporary society.

9.4.2.2 Pragmatic Features

Forms of Address and Discourse Markers

Language-specific pragmatic features such as politeness and forms of address also create problems. Standard modern English has a single ‘you’ form, which requires differentiation in languages that have both informal and polite forms of address (e.g. French tu/vous) (Pavesi 1994), not to mention languages such as Japanese with a more complex system of honorifies. Thus, amongst the issues faced by screen translators is the means of conveying the explicit shift from formality to intimacy in the French on se tutoie? Or the use of the given names in an utterance such as ‘You can call me Jane’.

Similarly, translators also need to overcome the hurdle posed by discourse markers and fillers. With the severe restrictions required in subtitling, such markers are an obvious choice when it comes to choosing which parts of the dialogues to eliminate. However, dubs also tend to restrict such markers. Interjections such as ‘Oh!’ and ‘Ah!’; as well as hesitations like ‘um’, ‘er’‘mmm’ etc. in English tend to disappear in the Spanish subtitles of Four Weddings and a Funeral (1994, Richard Curtis, UK). For example, when the main character, played by Hugh Grant, stammers: ‘It’s that girl, um … Carrie. You remember the uh … The American’, in the Spanish version it becomes Es aquella chica. Carrie. ¿Te acuerdas? La americana. (‘It’s that girl. Do you remember? The American.’) Yet Hugh Grant’s character is also totally transformed in the Italian dubbed version where his hesitations and false starts are also severely reduced (Chiaro 2000b).

Taboo

Screen translators increasingly have to deal with what many consider to be offensive language. According to Roffe (1995: 221) ‘the audience will be more offended by written crudeness than by actual oral usage’. Whether this is true or not remains to be proved, but in matters of censorship, subtitles do appear to be weaker than the original. But again, so does dubbing (Bucaria 2007; Chiaro 2007). However, it is certainly much easier to disguise what may seem distasteful to regimes, commissioners and translators themselves through dubbing than subtitling (Vandaele 2002; Hargan 2006). On the other hand, the adaptation of The Simpsons for Arabic speaking audiences has been purged of references to alcohol and sex and the family’s lifestyle has been generally sobered up. This, however, appears to have angered those Arab Simpsons fans who want Omar to be as politically incorrect as his original US counterpart Homer. With the ease of accessibility of film and TV materials, as well as
ISSUES IN AUDIOVISUAL TRANSLATION

Information about them, audiences have become extremely knowledgeable and this may cause producers to think twice before censoring.14

9.4.2.3 VISUAL VERBAL VERSUS SPOKEN

Anything written on screen, especially elements which are read aloud by the actors, is problematic to convey in another language. In The Da Vinci Code, the main characters need to unravel a number of anagrams and cryptic rhymes which can be clearly seen, in English, on the screen. For example, viewers see the anagrams ‘O Draconian devil!’ and ‘So dark the con of Man’ and are aided in unravelling them (respectively Leonardo Da Vinci and Madonna of the Rocks) through the visualization of the code-breaking process by lighting up certain portions of the letters. Obviously this requires radical adaptations for both a convincing dub and subtitle. Denton (1994: 31) provides an example of a complex interaction of written and spoken signs from A Fish Called Wanda. Otto, Wanda’s lover, is in the bathroom making a series of loud invectives against the British: ‘[the British] … counting the seconds to the … weekend, so they can dress up as ballerinas and whip themselves into a frenzy at the …’. At this point Otto comes across a note from Archie (with whom Wanda is about to have an affair), which he opens. The letter contains an address that is shown on screen:

So see you at the flat at 4.
It’s 2B St. Trevor’s Wharf E.1.
All my love,
Archie

Otto reads the note aloud so that the entire dialogue becomes:

[the British] … counting the seconds to the … weekend, so they can dress up as ballerinas and whip themselves into a frenzy at the … [reads note that audience can see] … flat at four, 2B St … To be honest I … er … hate them.

It would not be possible to transpose the phonological connection between the flat number ‘2B’ and ‘to be’ so the Italian repair strategy becomes:

… contano i secondi che mancano all’arrivo del fine settimana per potersi vestire come delle ballerine e andarsi ad ubriacare … [reads] nell’appartamento Quattro al 2B … due bi … chieri e poi crollano.
[lit. they count the seconds till the weekend so they can dress up like ballerinas and get drunk … in apartment Four, 2B … two gl … glasses and they drop].

The translation of manga (Japanese comic books, see section 9.0) creates a related problem. In the original these comic books are written from top to
bottom and right to left, as this is the natural reading pattern of Japanese. Although some translations are kept in this original format, others are ‘flipped’ from left to right in translation so as not to confuse foreign readers. Naturally, this practice can lead to inconsistencies with the real world, such as all characters being left-handed. A culturally specific example is that people wearing kimonos in the original manga, where it would be shaped like a y, would be depicted wearing them the other way around in the flipped version. In Japan, the left side overlaps the right (from the viewer’s perspective) when the person is dead.

9.4.3 **Fuzzy areas**

Allusions, songs, rhymes, metaphors, idiomacity and verbally expressed humour are also extremely problematic. These features have been labelled as fuzzy because they cross strictly linguistic features with cultural references.

9.4.3.1 **Songs**

In musicals, as well as films, the words of the songs often contribute to the storyline. In the case of dubbing, the songs are often translated and sung in the target language, but they are just as often left in the original, subtitled or left untranslated. The latter is especially typical of Japanese cartoons in which audiences suddenly hear a song in Japanese when the rest of the audio is dubbed in another language.

9.4.3.2 **Verbally expressed humour**

Verbally expressed humour is notoriously difficult to translate when it is simply written or spoken, but on screen it can become especially complex when visuals and vocals coalesce. A clear example of this difficulty can be found in a scene in *The Big Chill* (1983, Lawrence Kasdan, USA) in which one of the main characters, Sam, on being asked by Meg to father her child, replies: ‘You’re giving me a massive headache!’, to which Meg replies: ‘You’re not gonna use that old excuse, are you? You’ve got genes!’ In response, Sam looks down at his trousers and touches the jeans he is wearing, a bemused expression on his face. The Italian version of Meg’s final utterance becomes *perché hai dei buoni geni* [lit. ‘because you have good genes’] but the word *geni* is monosemous and can only refer to chemically patterned information (‘genes’). Furthermore, it bears no phonological resemblance to the universal word for denim trousers, ‘jeans’. Thus, Italian audiences must have wondered why Berenger should touch and glare at his jeans as he does.

Subtitling does not escape the snares of verbally expressed humour either. The main character in *The Pianist* (2002, Roman Polanski, USA) is called Wladyslaw Szpilman. The language of the film is mainly English with some
German that is subtitled. In one of the final scenes of the film, Gestapo captain Wilm Hosenfeld finds Szpilman in hiding. The dialogues between the two men are in German and subtitled in English as follows:

**Captain:** What is your name? So I can listen for you.
**Szpilman:** My name is Szpilman.
**Captain:** Spielmann? That is a good name, for a pianist.

Unless readers know German they will be unable to understand that the surname ‘Szpilman’ sounds like ‘Spielmann’ which literally means ‘the man who plays’ or ‘the player’.

However, not all verbally expressed humour based on the visuals fares so badly. In the Marx Brothers’ film *Horse Feathers* (1932, Norman McLeod, USA), Groucho is signing a document and asks someone to give him a seal to make it official. At this, Harpo quite typically produces a live (animal) seal that is clearly visible on screen. In Italian, *sigillo* (‘seal/stamp’) is monosemous so the film’s dubbing-scriptwriters were faced with running the risk of puzzling spectators with a word-to-word translation. Long before the days of digitalization, the visual code could not be modified in any way but the dubbing director came up with *Focalizziamo* as a solution, meaning literally, ‘Let’s focus on it’ playing on the term *foca* meaning ‘seal’ and the verb *focalizzare* meaning ‘to focus on something’ (see Chiaro 2006). However, a very common strategy adopted to translate a particularly difficult instance of verbally expressed humour is simply to ignore it and subsequently omit it in translation (see Delabastita 1996; Chiaro 2008).

Naturally, problems referred to in this section, together with the strategies adopted to solve them, are not restricted to screen translation alone but can be applied to all types of translation. It is however, important to remember that what is particular about translating for the screen is the existence of a close interplay of visuals and acoustics combined with words. The screen translator can only operate on a linguistic level; he or she is limited to translating the verbal code, yet close attention must be paid to elements that are not strictly linguistic (i.e. gestures, visuals, music, etc.) when transferring the words from one language to another, simply because, by virtue of the fact that these words are ‘on screen’, they are neither self-sufficient nor independent.

### 9.5 Conclusions

The twenty-first century is witnessing the advent of new technological devices for people’s entertainment and interaction and the future is likely to bring new forms of translation which will be able to cope with the constraints of small, portable screens. These futuristic modalities are, at present, almost unimaginable. Another increasingly important consideration is inclusion (also known as ‘accessibility’), namely intralingual translations for the deaf and hard of
hearing and audiodescriptions for the blind and visually impaired, which
deserves a dedicated space (see the Key concepts entry for Inclusion). How-
ever, it is worth stressing that the world’s large ageing population will be ever
more in need of translation modalities to allow them easy access to SP given
the inevitable hearing and reading difficulties that increase with age. This
also highlights that screen translation is a service. It is only right that con-
sumers of this service receive high-quality products. The quantity of SP that
are produced and translated is incalculable and in today’s world the speed
at which they are translated is paramount to business. New technologies can
indeed speed up the processes of dubbing and subtitling, but it is the quality
of the translation itself which is crucial. All the subtitling and dubbing software
imaginable cannot replace a good translation. Therefore, training is an essen-
tial tool and academia has a duty to interact with screen translation industries
to sensitize both them and governmental agencies to the importance of this
overlooked and undervalued service.

NOTES
1 The nouns ‘dub’ and ‘sub’ are used respectively to refer to translated utterances in
dubbed and subtitled form, i.e. the final verbal product in the target language.
2 http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_en.htm
3 Source: UK Film Council Statistical Yearbook: http://www.rsu.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk
4 Whether dubbed or subtitled, the screen translation of a product first screened at
the cinema or on TV is likely to be translated again for VHS formats (where they
are still used) for home viewing, and once more for the DVD version. This can
obviously lead to three dissimilar translations.
5 Chaume (2007) reports on the slight operational differences in the dubbing process
in the different FIGS countries.
6 According to Chaume (2007) Video Rewrite appears to have been developed by
researchers at New York University. Amongst its more obvious applications is the
sync of the speech of computer-generated characters such as those in productions
like Shrek, Ratatouille, Bee Movie, etc.
7 Gambier (2008) discusses the implications of ReelVoice.
8 British Council workshop on subtitling at: http://www.literarytranslation.com/
workshops/almodovar/
9 Pixel is short for Picture Element. ‘Pixels are the smallest point of light or colour
that make up a digital image. The more pixels, the higher the image resolution
will be. In subtitling, it is being used to work out the maximum length of a subtitle
line, taking over the traditional number of characters per line and allowing greater
rationalization of the available space’ (Díaz Cintas and Ramael 2007: 250).
10 Ally McBeal (Fox, 1997–2002); CSI (CBS, 2000 to present); Cold Case (CBS, 2003
to present); ER (NBC, 1994 to present); Grey’s Anatomy (CBS, 2005 to present).
11 Most examples provided are taken from US filmic/TV products simply because
North America is the chief producer and exporter of these goods worldwide
The translator has chunked sideways despite the fact that just as easy an option was to chunk downwards by translating with *pastina alfabeto*, alphabet-shaped pasta eaten by toddlers, especially since the dish is not visible on screen. It is unlikely that Italian viewers will be familiar with the tinned product and will therefore probably miss the joke (Chiaro forthcoming b).