

# MULTILINGUALISM IN AUDIOVISUAL TEXTS FOR THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING PEOPLE

**Jurgita Kerevičienė, Miglė Urbonienė**

**Vilnius University  
Kaunas Faculty**

# Objective

To overview the current situation related to the adaptation of multilingual AV texts for the deaf and hard of hearing audience taking into account subtitling practices along with the norms, criteria and strategies of the multilingual subtitling activity in Lithuania and abroad.



# Object

Subtitles in the multilingual films  
adapted to the hearing impaired  
audience.

# Outline

- Audiovisual text;
- Multilingualism in audiovisual texts;
- Subtitling techniques for the deaf and hard of hearing;
- Potential subtitling variants for the AV multilingual texts adapted for the hearing impaired audience;

# Audiovisual text

- Audiovisuality may be regarded as a particular bipolar communicative socio-cultural process between spectators and producers.
- Audiovisual text which includes cinematic language is a complex phenomenon as it is “not only codified linguistically, but also through numerous codes that contribute to make up the final message: linguistic, paralinguistic, musical, special effects and sound arrangement codes, etc. ” (Varela, 2004, p. 42).
- Thus, audiovisual translation may be regarded as a translation of the synchronized correlation of verbal and non-verbal components of a cinematographic product.

# Channels of audiovisual translation

G. Gottlieb distinguishes four main channels of information which are taken into consideration while translating audiovisual texts:

- 1) **verbal audio channel**: dialogues, off-screen voices, songs;
- 2) **non-verbal audio channel**: music, sound effects, off-screen sounds;
- 3) **verbal and visual channel**: subtitles, signs, notes, inscriptions that appear on the screen;
- 4) **nonverbal visual channel**: picture on the screen (Gottlieb, 1998).



# Multilingualism in audiovisual texts (1)

- Nowadays language contacts has become commonplace and multilingualism seems to be a different way of communicating.
- Traditionally, multilingual films may be considered to be those in which at least two languages are spoken, by a single character or, more commonly, by several characters and which include intralingual variations such as dialects, sociolects, slang, pidgin and invented languages (Cintas, 2011; Delabastita, 2005)

# Functions of multilingualism in audiovisual texts

Multilingualism in audiovisual texts is used:

- as a rhetorical device;
- to describe both cultural understanding and misunderstanding;
- to indicate idiosyncrasy;
- to portray diverse social, cultural and personal aspects of the depicted characters;
- to create the sense of differentiation between something what is known and what is alien among the film characters;
- to add certain exotic aspects to the plot;
- to create the effect of humor.



# Translation challenges

- Translation of all the occurring different languages is associated with the value that multilingual aspects have in the film.
- **A quantitative element** is substantial: *how often and how much different languages are used in the film.*
- If languages recur regularly they should be translated in such a way that the target viewer is aware of the language difference;
- If the second or third language is spoken only occasionally, the decision can be taken according to the qualitative importance intended by that language plurality in the film. (Cintas, 2011)

# Translation modes of multilingual AV texts

- ***Dubbing***, as a certain replacement of “the original track of any audiovisual text’s source language dialogues with another track on which translated dialogues have been recorded in the target language” (Chaume, 2012).
- ***Voice-over*** as “simultaneous emission of the original soundtrack and the translation track” (Matamala, Orero, 2010);
- ***Subtitling*** as “a translation practice that consists of presenting a written text which recounts the original dialogue of the speakers, discursive elements that appear in the image, and the information that is contained on the soundtrack” (Cintas & Remael, 2007).

# **Subtitling as the most appropriate mode of film comprehension for the deaf and hard of hearing (SDH)**

There are particular technical constraints used for SDH:

- Spatial constraints;
- Temporal constraints;
- Presentational constraints.

# Spatial Constraints

- **Space:** max 2 lines, 35-45 characters per line (average reading speed of 12 cps, etc.)
- **Line breaks:** the oral content of the actors' dialogue into written speech should be converted by using subtitles of up to three, or occasionally four, lines.
- The text in subtitles typically changes **color** depending on the person who is talking or the emphasis given words within the same subtitle.
- Together with the dialogue, in subtitles there is incorporated all paralinguistic information.



# "Barber of Siberia" (1998)



Officer?

What?

# "Joyeux Noël" (2005)



[in the background the accordion is playing,  
whoops of joy are heard, applause]

# Temporal Constraints

- The length of subtitle is directly related to its on-air time.
- The text in the subtitles should be in balance with the appropriate reading time setting.
- On screen for a longer period of time (speeds lower than 140–180 wpm).

# Presentational Constraints

- Subtitles have to take approximately 20% of screen space.
- Subtitles traditionally are displayed at the bottom of the screen; although they can be exposed at the top of the screen if there is already text at the bottom.
- Off screen characters are marked in *italics*.
- **Sound effects** are very important and can be essential in helping to understand the plot. They are reproduced (symbols on the screen).



# Description of sound effects

- Typically, sounds and their effects can either be described by statements in the form of labels (with the use of adjectives and adverbs)
- Or they can be phonetically reproduced in the form of onomatopoeias.
- Usually, sound effects tend to be described by gerund (*barking*), nouns (*doorbell*), verbs (*laughs*), nouns and verbs (*they babble*).

# Typographical signs

- Typographical signs are used for SDH to convey various aspects perceptible through hearing (i.e. intonation, accents, pauses, interruptions, singing):

*# Wha-a-at? Wha-a-t?*

That's totally ridiculous.  
It was OBVIOUSLY your husband.

# "Joyeux Noël" (2005)



[In Latin]  
She is singing *Ave Maria*  
[Hail Mary]

## Other signs

- Exclamation and question marks are used to show surprise, question, sarcasm, irony, etc.
- Three suspension dots (...) indicate pauses or interruptions.
- Segmentation has to follow the general rules set for subtitles: *words should be connected by logic, semantic or grammatical principles (article+noun, pronoun+verb, conjunction+clause, preposition+relative phrase, etc.)*



# Multilingualism in subtitles for SDH

- In subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing viewers, language transfer encompasses two modes:
  - from speech to writing and
  - from the soundtrack and portrayed audial plot of the film to the written subtitles.
  - Translation of multilingual AV texts should be expressed in such a manner that it yields the intended interpretation without putting the audience to unnecessary processing effort (Gutt, 1991)

# Strategies of multilingualism in subtitles for SDH (1)

- ***Vehicular matching.*** The strategy of subtitling when the transcribed version of a foreign language spoken in the film is shown; e.g. *Guten Tag*;
- ***Translation together with explicit attribution.*** In this case, the dialogue of a foreign language is translated and a foreign language is indicated, e.g. *[IN GERMAN] Good morning*;

# Strategies of multilingualism in subtitles for SDH (2)

- ***Translation and colour-coding.*** In the subtitles translated message is performed and the text is colour-coded, e.g. *Good morning*;
- ***Explicit attribution.*** It is indicated that a foreign language is spoken, e.g. *[IN GERMAN]*;
- ***Linguistic homogenization.*** It is the case when the marking of a foreign language in the dialogue is avoided at all, e.g. *Good morning*.

# Explicit attribution (“Barber of Siberia” (1998) )



[He is speaking in French]



# Vehicular matching ("Two days in Paris"(2007))



Sauce? Blan wine... Blanc wine.  
No, wine white?

# Translation together with explicit attribution ("Two days in Paris" (2007))



[PRANCŪZIŠKAI] **Atsargiai, labai karšta.**

[FRENCH] Careful, it's steaming hot.

# Translation and colour-coding ("Two days in Paris" (2007))



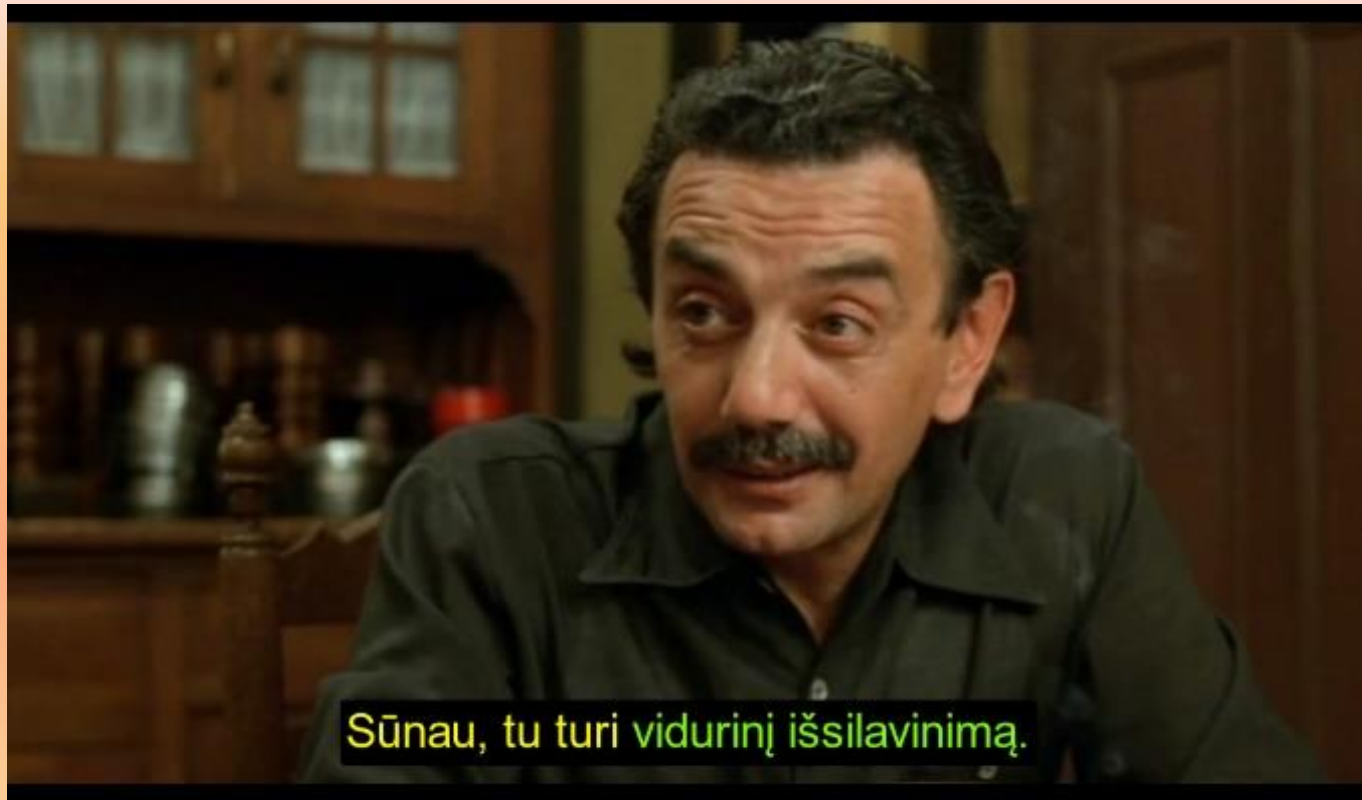
To the airport.  
[English] Where?

# Debatable Cases ("The Barber of Siberia" (1998))



[he is shouting] Take him out

# Debatable Cases ("Solino" (2002))



Son, you have got secondary education.

# Conclusions (1)

- Nowadays in Lithuania the hearing impaired people are still not able to participate fully in the economic, social, political and cultural life of the country.
- Subtitles would be recourse for hearing impaired people to achieve the information, follow the dialogue in films, be familiar with different cultural aspects and broaden their mind.
- Subtitling technique for the deaf and hard of hearing is a pioneering way to discover multilingual films.
- The strategies, proposed by Sharkowska et al. (2013), have been applied when preparing subtitles for SDH in Lithuanian.



## Conclusions (2)

- The study has shown that most subtitling strategies tend to discover the multicultural aspects explicitly to a certain extent;
- However, the strategy "Linguistic homogenization" is hardly applicable, since it wipes out all the traits of multilingualism in a film and robs the viewers of the central feature of a film.
- Typically two or more strategies are used when subtitling a particular piece, since different films call for different creative approaches.

## Conclusions (3)

- The most common ways to combine the strategies were to incorporate colour-coding and together with explicit attribution, or vehicular matching and translation with explicit attribution;
- It was noticed that colour-coding alone may be misleading and insufficient in some cases.
- In some cases vehicular matching is blended with explicit attribution.
- Therefore, as directors do not follow a precise system in their choices, a translator should also be able to respond to the director's wish and to modify strategies.

# Important facts

The number of people of the social group is constantly growing:

- in 2015 there were over 90 million adults affected by a hearing loss in Europe;
- In US the group takes 13% of all population;
- Today over 5% worldwide - 360 million people - has disabling hearing loss and 32 million of these are children;
- 1.1 billion young people (aged between 12-35 years) are at risk of hearing loss.
- Approximately one third of people over 65 years of age are affected by this disability.
- It means that between 1% and 5% of the population of any country are deaf or hearing-impaired.
- In Lithuania there are 6000 deaf and 4000 hearing-impaired people.



Thank you for your attention

Your questions are wellcome 😊