

**THEORY AND PRACTICE OF
SUBTITLING:
THE CASE OF
CYRANO DE BERGERAC**

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**Theory and practice of subtitling:
the case of
*Cyrano de Bergerac***

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Poetry is what is lost in translation.

ROBERT FROST

The original is unfaithful to the translation.

JORGE LUIS BORGES

J'ai essayé plus d'une fois, comme tous mes amis, de m'enfermer dans un système pour y prêcher à mon aise. Mais un système est une espèce de damnation qui nous pousse à une abjuration perpétuelle; il en faut toujours inventer un autre, et cette fatigue est un cruel châtement. Et toujours mon système était beau, vaste spacieux, commode, propre et lisse surtout; du moins il me paraissait tel. Et toujours un produit spontané, inattendu, de la vitalité universelle venait donner un démenti à ma science enfantine et vieillote, fille déplorable de l'utopie. J'avais beau déplacer ou étendre le critérium, il était toujours en retard sur l'homme universel, et courait sans cesse après le beau multiforme et versicolore, qui se meut dans les spirales infinies de la vie. Condamné sans cesse à l'humiliation d'une conversion nouvelle, j'ai pris un grand parti. Pour échapper à l'horreur de ces apostasies philosophiques, je me suis orgueilleusement résigné à la modestie: je me suis contenté de sentir ; je suis revenu chercher un asile dans l'impeccable naïveté.

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

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WANT-GASTHAAN DE WERELD LEVENDE PRESENTENT

GERARD DEPARDIEU

CYRANO

DE BERGERAC
UN FILM DE JEAN-PAUL RAPPENEAU



JACK-JUS WEBER

ANNE BROCHET - VINCENT PEREZ - ROLAND BERTIN

SCÉNARIO JEAN-LUC LARROCHE - D'ADRIENNE GARNIER

D'UN FILM DE JEAN-PAUL RAPPENEAU

MONTAGE: CLAUDE LAFITTE

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CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION: RATIONALE AND OUTLINE

This chapter sets out to contextualise the problem under investigation, and to extract a problem statement which will be elaborated into specific aims. Having established these, an apposite method as well as a chapter outline completes the introductory section.

1.1 *Contextualisation and problem statement*

In any multilingual context issues centring on translation in its various forms will inevitably attain great importance. South Africa is no exception to this rule and translation in this country is slowly but steadily growing as the awareness of the language rights of citizens - as enshrined in the 1994 Constitution (RSA:1994) - increases. However, the growth of the language industry is hampered by, *inter alia*, the cost of translations. These two opposing forces, constitutional rights and financial constraints, have led to an increased interest in subtitling, which is a relatively inexpensive method of enabling access by different language groups to the same information and entertainment (Kruger, 2000:1). Therefore, in a situation like this, it is inevitable for a serious language practitioner to take cognisance of this type of development.

However, the present study is also the result of an intense personal interest in the world of the subtitled film, which goes back some fifteen years. It coincides with the time at which I started studying French as third language at university. French films with subtitles proved to be an excellent marriage of my love for films, especially European films, and my desire for maximum exposure to facilitate the learning of a third language. As a film fanatic, I was not deterred by the fact that much of what was being said on-screen, passed me by, although I did intuitively sense that enjoyment of the film is inversely proportionate to the significance of the language barrier. As my knowledge of the French language increased, I was gradually sensitised to the tension resulting from the difference between the subtitles super-imposed on the film and the original dialogue on the film soundtrack.

One of the subtitled films that intrigued me most specifically, was Jean-Paul Rappeneau's 1990 version of *Cyrano de Bergerac*. It emerged that, in spite of the fact that the subtitles of this film are extremely well done in terms of their translational qualities, they remain somewhat indigestible and lack the *panache* of the original French. Further investigation into the provenance of the subtitles led to the discovery that they were based on the 1971 (highly literate and

acclaimed) translation of the play by Anthony Burgess. This would not appear to be enough, however, to make a good set of subtitles, and confirmed my suspicion that a good literary translation does not necessarily make for good subtitles. It also prompted me to start pondering the **philosophy behind and the criteria for good subtitling**.

In 1998 I came across an article by Karamitroglou (1998) in which he identified certain "standards" for subtitling. The standards were in fact a list of **descriptive factors** of how subtitling in European countries can be standardised: a list of conventions that are, in most cases, already applied in subtitling practice. This article provided further impetus for the study. However, the article is highly prescriptive as far as the formalistic subtitling output is concerned, but it does not address the **creation** of the subtitle as such, and therefore offers no theoretical basis for subtitling. The lack in subtitling theory was felt world-wide, and at the Second International Conference on Translation for the Media in Berlin in October 1998, a Draft Code of Best Practice for Subtitling was proposed and accepted in order to address this need. This code will be discussed in more detail in the subsequent chapter, but at this stage it is important to mention that it also concentrated on the formal aspects of subtitling.

Further research introduced me to Luyken (1991:41) who states that "(s)ubtitling is a dynamic craft. It can never achieve conveyor-belt uniformity because the subtitler is always faced with a multiplicity of choices". As most of what has recently been written on subtitling is of a descriptive nature, I began to sense that it is a basic philosophy from which these choices will be made that was lacking. Luyken (1991:156) describes the art of subtitling as follows: "... subtitling is communicative translation par excellence. As such it is much less concerned with the words of the speaker than with the [?] of what the speaker wanted to say". He further argues that subtitling is the translational anti-pole of semantic translation, and that subtitling is "language transfer" as opposed to translation proper (1991:153-5). In this instance, it is important to keep in mind notions such as Newmark's semantic and communicative translation (1992) because Luyken's airy dismissal of translation seems fraught with problems, as it separates the creation of subtitles from the act of translating too completely.

It is useful in this context to look at the notion of text reliability as defined by Robinson (1997:10-1). Robinson identifies eight categories of text reliability for translations and which, although they cannot be placed on a continuum, represent varying degrees of closeness/distance to the source text and which would seem to be useful in the context of subtitling as a **type** of translation:

- Literalism, where the translation painstakingly follows the syntactic structure of the source text;
- Foreignism, where the translation reads fairly fluently but has an alien feel, betraying its origin;
- Fluency, where the translation is so accessible and readable that it does not betray its "foreign" origins;
- Summary, where the translation captures the main points or "gist" of the original;
- Commentary, where the translation unpacks or unfolds the hidden complexities of the original, exploring issues that are merely suggested or hinted at in the original;
- Summary-commentary, where the translator makes choices about ellipsis or expansion;
- Adaptation, where the translator recasts the original so as to have the desired impact on an audience that is substantially different from the original one;
- Encryption, where the translation recasts the original so as to hide the meaning or message from one group while still making it accessible to another group, which possesses the key (1997:10-1).

In the light of the aforementioned classification, I am inclined to suggest that the ideal for subtitling output is very close to Fluency, although, for practical reasons, it may lean slightly towards Summary. In Newmark's terms, the type of translation in subtitling would be classified as more communicative than semantic (1981:38-9). One of the more recent approaches to translation theory that proved to be eminently suited for the study of subtitling is semiotics, the study of systems of signification. This approach is ideal for interdisciplinary studies as the focus is on the deployment of the meaning-potential of a sign and is therefore not only limited to the study of linguistic matters, but also able to incorporate non-linguistic visual and aural elements, elements that cannot be ignored in the study of subtitles.

The aforementioned theories all apply to translation proper, and have to be adapted if they are to be applied to subtitling. Although Newmark (1981:19) calls translation theory a "misnomer" because it is not a theory, but "the body of knowledge that we have about the process of translating", translation theory has made a great deal of progress during the latter half of the previous century, and most of the "theories" can be substantiated by empirical research and field experience. Compared to these theories, it becomes clear that what is often presented as "subtitling theory" are primarily descriptions of the formal output of the process, while they neglect

the process behind the creation of a subtitle, confirming my suspicion that **the lack of an adequate theory for subtitling has led to a situation where practice tends to be contingent**.

One could therefore summarise the above by stating that while there are various publications which provide hard practical guidelines for subtitling, such as the best place on the screen to position the title, the most suitable fonts to use, and so forth, no guiding theory has developed to account at a more abstract level for the process of subtitling. It is this aspect that forms the basis for this study.

1.2 *Research questions*

In order to investigate the above, I have defined the following as important questions:

- 1.2.1 Does the lack of a feasible theory of subtitling have a detrimental effect on the quality of subtitling in general?
- 1.2.2 In the absence of sufficient theory, would a semiotic approach to translation and film resolve the problem?
- 1.2.3 Based on the usefulness of a semiotic approach, can a theory for subtitling be deduced from it?
- 1.2.4 To what extent will this theory hold up in practice by providing guidelines for subtitling practice?

1.3 *Aims of the study*

Derived from the above, the aims of this study are:

- 1.3.1 To demonstrate that the lack of a specific theory for subtitling underlies the problem.
- 1.3.2 To study the semiotics of translation and film as underlying components for a theory of subtitling.
- 1.3.3 To formulate a working theory for subtitling.

- 1.3.4 To demonstrate the relevance and usefulness of the theory by deducing guidelines from it to use in the evaluation of selected scenes from the subtitled version of *Cyrano de Bergerac*.

1.4 Thesis statement

The lack of an adequate specific theory for subtitling underlies most problems experienced with subtitling, and the formulation of a more substantial theory could be used as basis for guidelines to facilitate and improve subtitling practice.

1.5 Method

The following methods will be used in the study:

- An extensive literature study of translation theory, film theory, semiotics and literature on subtitling will be presented.
- This literature study will also include an analysis of the film *Cyrano de Bergerac* and Burgess's published translation and adaptation of the French play. These analyses will be used to determine to what extent a semiotic approach to translation and film theory can be applied to the practice of subtitling to serve as theoretical basis.
- This synthesis will be expanded to propose a workable theory for the philosophy of subtitling, and
- This theory will be used to deduce guidelines that will be tested on the film *Cyrano de Bergerac* to determine whether these guidelines can be used in practice to produce better quality subtitles.

1.6 Proposed chapter outline

Chapter 1: Introduction: Rationale and outline

Chapter 2: Background to the theory and practice of subtitling

- Chapter 3: Semiotics in translation
- Chapter 4: Semiotics in film
- Chapter 5: A proposed theory for subtitling
- Chapter 6: Application of the proposed theory for subtitling to the film *Cyrano de Bergerac*.
- Chapter 7: Conclusion and recommendations

CHAPTER 2 : BACKGROUND TO THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF SUBTITLING

2.1 *Current situation*

Before one can attempt to establish a theory for subtitling, it is important to be conversant with what has already been done in this field.

In contrast to what has been done in the field of **translation** theory, only a very limited number of texts can be classified as subtitling theory. In fact, what might be considered to be subtitling theory is mainly a corpus of descriptive or prescriptive studies of the formalistic output of subtitling, that in no way addresses the complexity of the subtitling process, which not only involves the passing from language A to language B (translation proper), but also the passing from one type of communication (spoken dialogue) to another (text in the form of super-imposed subtitles).

Before elaborating on the implications of this aspect for the theory of subtitling, it is important to consider some practical guidelines for subtitling in order to determine whether these are indeed manifestations of any particular theoretical positions. For this purpose, the study will now turn to Karamitroglou's proposed subtitling standards (1998) before considering the code of subtitling practice approved by the 1998 International Conference on Translation for the Media.¹

2.2 *A Proposed Set of Subtitling Standards in Europe by Dr Fotios Karamitroglou*

The most comprehensive descriptive and prescriptive study of subtitling (output) was that of Dr Fotios Karamitroglou, published in the *Translation Journal* (1998). Dr Karamitroglou proposes a set of guidelines for the production and layout of television subtitles in Europe by addressing the following aspects:

¹ Although there are other works on subtitling available (e.g. Luyken's *Overcoming language barriers in television: dubbing and subtitling for the European audience* to which reference has already been made, *Les transferts linguistiques dans les médias audiovisuels* by Prof Yves Gambier and Josephine Dries's *Dubbing and subtitling: guidelines for production and distribution*, these two texts seemed to be the most concise, yet representative, documents on what is currently regarded as subtitling theory.

- Spatial parameter / layout;
- Temporal parameter / duration;
- Punctuation and letter case; and
- Target text editing.

Although this article provides guidelines for television subtitles, it is also very relevant to the subtitling of films. It is true that the main emphasis in subtitling is currently on television, due to the proliferation of television channels, especially in Europe, and the fact that subtitling is substantially cheaper than dubbing. The following is a brief summary of Karamitroglou's article which, although it claims to propose guidelines, is actually a summary of the most acceptable subtitling **conventions** that are currently applied in practice.

2.2.1 Spatial parameter / layout

- Position on the screen: Subtitles should be positioned at the lower part of the screen with the bottom line at least $\frac{1}{12}$ of the total screen height above the bottom of the screen. They should also be positioned $\frac{1}{12}$ of the total screen width to the left and right of the subtitle line.
- Number of lines: A maximum of two lines of subtitles should be presented at a time, i.e. covering no more than $\frac{2}{12}$ of the screen image. A single-line subtitle should occupy the bottom second line to minimise interference with the background image action.
- Text positioning: The subtitled text should be centralised on its allocated line(s). An exception is the case of dialogue turns initiated by dashes and presented simultaneously on a two-line subtitle, which should be aligned to the left side of the screen.
- Number of characters per line: Around 35 characters are allowed per subtitled line in order to be able to accommodate a satisfactory portion of the (translated) spoken text and to minimise the need for original text reduction and omissions.

- Typeface and distribution: Typefaces with no serifs, e.g. Helvetica and Arial, are preferable. Proportional distribution makes it possible to fit the desired number of 35 characters per subtitle line.
- Font colour and background: Type characters should be coloured pale white and should be presented against a grey, see-through “ghost box”.

These aspects are undoubtedly important, as they ensure that the viewer is in a position to appreciate the film by not obscuring too much of the on-screen action, but also recommend ways of making the subtitles as readable as possible through the use of specific fonts and a limited number of characters per line. If these aspects are not adhered to, the quality of the subtitle will be immaterial, as the viewer will not be in a position to access and use it to complete the process of intellection involved in the viewing of a film.

2.2.2 Temporal parameter / duration

Apart from the spatial parameter, the temporal parameter (or the time that the subtitle remains on-screen) is also very important. Much research has been done in this respect by psychologists specialising in the field of reading, and the following aspects should be taken into account:

- Duration of a full two-line subtitle (maximum duration): The reading speed of the “average” viewers (aged 14-65, from an upper-middle socio-educational class) for a text of average complexity (a combination of formal and informal language) has been measured as 150-180 words per minute, i.e. between 2 ½-3 words per second. This means that a full two-line subtitle containing 14-16 words should remain on the screen for at least 6 seconds to secure ample reading time (not more than 6 seconds because this would cause automatic re-reading of the subtitle, especially by fast readers).
- Duration of a full single-line subtitle (maximum duration): About 3½ seconds are required for the reading of a full single-line subtitle. This is slightly more than half the time required for a full single-line subtitle of 7-8 words. This happens because the visual bulk of the two-line subtitle signals an acceleration of the reading speed. The subtitle should not be retained for more than 3½ seconds because this would cause automatic re-reading of the subtitle. The

duration could be calculated and reduced to the maximum of the reading time (3 subtitled words per second or $\frac{1}{3}$ of a second per subtitled word), if the text is lexically and syntactically easy to process and if the fast pace of the film action dictates it.

- Duration of a single-word subtitle (minimum duration): The minimum duration of a single-word subtitle is at least $1\frac{1}{2}$ seconds, however simple the word is. Anything shorter would render the subtitle a mere flash on the screen.
- Leading-in time: Subtitles should be inserted $\frac{1}{4}$ of a second after the initiation of an utterance, as the brain needs this time to process the advent of spoken linguistic material and guide the eye towards the bottom of the screen.
- Lagging-out time: Subtitles should not be left on the image for more than two seconds after the end of the utterance. This would compromise the reliability of subtitles in the eye of the viewers as they might start reflecting that what they have read might not actually have corresponded to what had been said, at the time it had been said.
- Between two consecutive subtitles: About $\frac{1}{4}$ of a second needs to be inserted between two consecutive subtitles. This time break signals to the brain the disappearance of one subtitle as a piece of linguistic information, and the appearance of another.
- "Overlay," "add-ons" and "cumulative text": All these terms are synonymous for the technique of presenting a "dynamic text," i.e. a dialogue or a briefly paused monologue, with its first part appearing first on the top line of the subtitle and the second part appearing consecutively on the bottom line while the first line still remains on screen.
- Camera takes/cuts: Subtitles should respect camera takes/cuts that signify a thematic change in the film and, for this reason, they should disappear before the cuts.

The present-day subtitler has the advantage of detailed empirical research into the reading habits, not only of different age groups, but also of different social groups. As a result of this, the subtitler can plan his/her work more scientifically to enable maximum absorption of information by

the viewer by avoiding the pitfalls of maintaining a title on-screen for too long (thereby inevitably omitting substantial parts of the dialogue and causing re-reading by fast readers) and not displaying a title for long enough (usually an attempt to cram in too much subtitling text which confuses the viewer as insufficient time is allowed for processing).

2.2.3 Punctuation and letter case

Punctuation is an important aspect of subtitling, as non-standard usage is likely to confuse the viewer, who is already constrained as far as the time allowed for reading each subtitle is concerned. As a rule of thumb, punctuation should be limited to a minimum, although the grammatical and spelling rules of a language should never be violated in the process. It is also important for the subtitler to realise that specific punctuation marks have – through convention – already acquired specific meanings in the context of subtitling. The following is an overview of the most important aspects pertaining to punctuation marks and letter case:

- “Sequence dots” (or “ending triple dots”) {...}: Placed right after the last character of a subtitle (no space character inserted), when the subtitled sentence is not finished on one subtitle and has to continue over the consecutive subtitle.
- “Linking dots” (or “starting triple dots”) {...}: Placed right before the first character of a subtitle (no space character inserted, the first character non-capitalised), when this subtitle carries the follow-up text of the previous uncompleted sentence.
- Full stops {.}: Used right after the last character of a subtitle (no space character inserted) to indicate the end of the subtitled sentence.
- Dashes and hyphens {-}: Used before the first character of each of the lines of a two-line subtitle (with a space character inserted each time) to indicate a dialogue, presented either in a single flash as “static double text,” or with the second speaker’s exchange as an “overlay” to the first subtitle line, i.e. as “dynamic double text.” When dashes are used to link words as hyphens, no space characters should be inserted between the linked words.

- Question marks {?} and exclamation marks {!}: Question marks and exclamation marks should be used to indicate a question or emphasis respectively.
- Parentheses {()} and brackets {[]}: Parentheses and brackets should be used to embrace comments which are explanatory to the preceding phrase.
- Single quotation marks {' '}: Single quotation marks should be used to embrace alleged information.
- Double quotation marks {" "}: Double quotation marks should be used to embrace quoted information.
- Commas {,}, colons {:} and semicolons {;}: Commas, colons and semicolons should be used to suggest a short pause in the reading pace. No subtitle flash should end in a comma, a colon or a semicolon because the inevitable pause in the reading pace—as a result of the time break between the two subtitles and the necessary time for the brain to process the new subtitle—would be disproportionately long in relation to the expected short pause.
- Italics: Italics should be used to indicate an off-screen source of the spoken text, (for example, when there is a voice of someone contemplating something, speaking over the phone from the other end, or narrating something). They should also be used when retaining foreign-language words in their original foreign-language version (for example “He’s got a certain *je ne sais quoi*.”).
- Quotation marks {""} embracing text in italics: Quotation marks embracing text in italics should be used to indicate a public broadcast, such as through a TV, a radio, or a loudspeaker, as well as when transferring song lyrics.
- Upper- and lower-case letters: Upper- and lower-case letters should be used just like in printed materials, as if the subtitle was to appear on paper. Upper-case letters should be used when transferring a display or a caption (i.e. a written sign that appears on the screen).

- **Boldface and underline:** These conventions are not permitted in subtitling.

Although punctuation and letter case belong to the realm of formal (visible) output in subtitling, these aspects remain very important. Subtitlers would do well to take note of the above recommendations, which are, in many cases, already firmly established in subtitling process as conventions.

2.2.4 Target text editing

This is one aspect with which every translator is familiar. However, because of the specific nature of subtitling, there are a few points that do not necessarily apply to translation proper (for example segmentation), and which deserve special attention from the subtitler in the editing of the target text:

- **From a single-line to a two-line subtitle:** It is better to segment a long single-line subtitle into a two-line subtitle, distributing the words over the two lines. (The eye and the brain of viewers render a two-line subtitle as more bulky and accelerate the reading process.)
- **Segmentation at the highest nodes:** Subtitled text should be segmented at the highest syntactic nodes possible. In cases where the sentence cannot fit into a single-line subtitle and has to continue over a second line or even over a new subtitle flash, the segmentation on each of the lines should be arranged to coincide with the highest syntactic node possible. The higher the node, the greater the grouping of the semantic load and the more complete the piece of information presented to the brain. When reading a segmented sentence, the brain is forced to pause its linguistic processing for a while, until the eyes trace the next piece of linguistic information. In cases where segmentation is inevitable, therefore, one should try to force this pause on the brain at a point where the semantic load has already managed to convey a satisfactorily complete piece of information.
- **Segmentation and line length:** The upper line and the lower line of a two-line subtitle should be proportionally as equal in length as possible, since the viewer's eye is more accustomed to reading text in a rectangular rather than a triangular format. Taking into account the previous entry on "segmentation at the highest nodes," this means that the segmentation of

subtitled text should be a compromise between syntax and geometry. However, if one had to sacrifice the one for the sake of the other, one should rather sacrifice geometry.

- Spoken utterances and subtitled sentences: Each spoken utterance should best correspond to a subtitled sentence as viewers expect a correct and faithful representation of the original text. One of the basic means to check this is by noting if the number of spoken utterances coincides with the number of subtitled sentences.
- More than one sentence on the same subtitle: No more than two sentences are allowed on the same subtitle.
- Omitting linguistic items of the original: The subtitler should not attempt to transfer everything, even when this is spatio-temporally feasible. The subtitler should rather attempt to achieve a balance between retaining a maximum of the original text (essential for the comprehension of the linguistic part of the target film), and allowing ample time for the eye to process the rest of the non-linguistic aural and visual elements (essential for appreciation of the target film as a whole). Categories of linguistic items that could be omitted are: padding expressions (such as "you know," "well," "as I say" etc), tautological cumulative adjectives/adverbs (for example "great big," "super extra," "teeny weeny" etc), responsive expressions (words such as "yes," "no," "ok," "please," "thanks," "thank you," "sorry").
- Retaining linguistic items of the original: Linguistic items of the original that can easily be recognised and comprehended by the viewers should not only be retained if they appear in a context of unrecognisable items which blurs the meaning of the total utterance, but they should also be translated word-for-word. This is frequently the case with proper nouns (such as geographical names like "Los Angeles," "Africa" etc.) or items that the target language has directly borrowed from or lent to the source language or happened to have in common after they both borrowed it from a third language (such as the items "mathematics," "mathématique" and "mathimatika" shared by English, French and Greek respectively). Viewers expect the exact, literal, translationally equivalent items to appear in the subtitles, because the constantly operating checking mechanism in the brain of the viewers raises

suspensions that the translation of the original text is not "properly" or "correctly" rendered in the subtitles, every time word-for-word translations for such items are not spotted.²

- Altering syntactic structures: Simpler syntactic structures tend to be both shorter and easier to understand and should be preferred, provided that a fine balance is achieved between:
 - a) semantic aspects (maintaining the semantic load of the original),
 - b) pragmatic aspects (maintaining the function of the original), and
 - c) stylistics (maintaining the stylistics features of the original).

Categories of complex syntactic structures could be replaced by simplified ones as follows:

- active for passive constructions,
 - positive for negative expressions,
 - temporal prepositional phrases for temporal subordinate clauses,
 - modified nouns for the referring relative clauses,
 - gapping for double verb insertion,
 - straightforward question sentences for indicative pragmatic requests,
 - straightforward imperative sentences for indicative pragmatic requests, and
 - coherent phrase grouping for syntactical scrambling.
-
- Acronyms, apostrophes, numerals and symbols: Acronyms, apostrophes and symbols can save precious character space by abbreviating meaning signs. However, they should be used only if they are immediately recognisable and comprehensible, following the conventions of printed materials.
 - Rendering dialects: If a dialect of the target language (regional or social) is chosen to be used on the subtitled text, it should not be rendered as a phonetic or syntactic transcription of the spoken form. Only dialects that have already appeared in a written form in printed materials may be used in subtitles.
 - Taboo words: Taboo words should not be censored unless their frequent repetition dictates *their reduction* for reasons of text economy.
 - Culture-specific linguistic elements: There is no standard guideline for the transfer of culture-specific linguistic elements. There are five possible alternatives for such a transfer:

² The concepts **translational equivalence** and **equivalent effect** will be discussed in Chapter 3 and 5 at the hand of existing definitions in translation studies for these concepts. See also Lederer (1994:50-66).

- a) cultural transfer,
- b) transposition,
- c) transposition with explanation,
- d) neutralisation (plain explanation), and
- e) omission.

The choice of which alternative to apply depends on the culture-specific linguistic element itself, as well as on the broader contextual, linguistic or non-linguistic aural and visual situation in which it is embedded.³

The above elements are very useful pointers for the subtitler. In the context of the article as a whole, this is the “most theoretical” part, since it attempts to address the constraints facing the subtitler when passing from one communication system (spoken language) to written language (subtitles). If one were to compare this to a similar article on the translation of a book, one could say that the author has now moved away from aspects which are normally more closely associated with publishing (layout, etc.) to what underlies the process of translation. Although it still does not provide a theory for the creation of subtitles, it does constitute a deeper level of describing subtitles.

In spite of the fact that the emphasis in this article is on the formal matters pertaining to subtitling, the subtitler would be wise to use the above as a check-list for the final evaluation of his/her subtitles. It is important to always bear in mind that even an excellent translation of the dialogue will be worth very little if it does not comply with the formal constraints imposed on subtitles by the reality of aspects such as viewer competency, legibility, and conventions associated with punctuation.

Compared to translation theory in general, the above article falls short in a number of ways to provide a working theory for subtitling, the first being the over-emphasis on external aspects of subtitling output, as if this would ensure the production of a good subtitle, and secondly, the failure to address the process through which translational equivalence between source and target text is reached.⁴

³ This problem is universal to all forms of translation. See also Newmark (1988:94-103) for approaches to cultural specific elements in translation theory.

⁴ See Chapters 3 and 5 for more information on current approaches in translation theory to the question of equivalence, as well as a proposed theory for attaining this in the creation of a subtitle.

However, in spite of the fact that the article does not penetrate deeply enough into the question of subtitling so as to be able to propose a theory for the creation of subtitles, it would be foolish not to take cognisance of these aspects. Many of these aspects also occur in the Code of Best Practice for Subtitling which will be discussed below.

2.3 *Code of Best Practice for Subtitling*

This code was approved by the Second International Conference on Translation for the Media held in Berlin in 1998. According to one of the authors, Jan Ivarsson, the main aim of the code is to ensure the quality of subtitling (especially on television) as channels proliferate and cost-cutting is becoming the norm (Ivarsson&Carroll, 1998:20).

The following is a brief summary of the code:

- Subtitlers must work with a copy of the production and, if possible, the dialogue list.
- Spotting (indicating where subtitles should be inserted) should be done by the subtitler, as well as the translation and writing of the subtitles in the foreign language.
- The quality of translation must be high and should take into account all idiomatic and cultural nuances.
- Uncomplicated semantic units should be used.
- The distribution of subtitle text should be done according to sense blocks and/or grammatical units.
- Each subtitle should be semantically self-contained to the furthest extent possible.
- The appropriate language register (corresponding to the spoken word) should be used.

- Language should be grammatically correct to serve as a model for literacy.
- Significant written information (signs, notices, etc.) should also be translated as far as possible.
- Information that may be described as "superfluous" (such as the calling of a name) should also be transcribed for the benefit of the hearing-impaired.
- Where relevant, songs should be subtitled.
- Obvious repetition (like names) need not always be subtitled .
- Speech rhythm, cuts and sound bridges should be taken into account with in- and out-times of subtitles.
- Subtitles should underline surprise and suspense and not undermine it.
- Duration of subtitles must reflect the reading speed of the average viewer.
- Subtitles may not appear for less than one second or more than seven seconds (with the exception of songs).
- No subtitle may consist of more than two lines.
- When lines are not of the same length, every attempt should be made to make the top line the shorter one so that there is as little interference as possible with the image.
- Subtitle and film content should correlate closely.

- Subtitle presence and film dialogue should correlate closely.
- The subtitler's work should be edited by a reviser / editor.
- The (main) subtitler should be acknowledged in the titles.
- The year of subtitle production and copyright should be displayed at the end of the film.

TECHNICAL ASPECTS

- Subtitles should be legible and clear in a font that is easy to read.
- The position of subtitles should be consistent.
- Character clarity in video productions can be enhanced by a drop shadow or semi-transparent box.
- Precise alignment of laser beam focus and accurate power adjustment can enhance sharp contours.
- The base line in laser subtitling must be set accurately for the projection of the film.
- The number of characters must be compatible with the subtitling system.
- TV / Video should be adapted for film application and vice versa.

The Code of Best Practice for Subtitling coincides with Karamitroglou's article on a number of points, namely semantic strategies (simplification and segmentation), duration and length of subtitles, correlation between subtitles and film content, position of subtitles, fonts to be used, and so forth. The code, with its prescriptions for practice to ensure good quality subtitles, also addresses aspects such as working with a copy of the film and external editing of subtitles. However, as in the case of the previous article, the code does not address the question of translational equivalence or equivalent effect or other criteria for evaluating the quality of a subtitle.

2.4 *Lack of a clearly-defined theory of subtitling*

From the aforementioned, it is clear that the formal practical aspects of subtitling output (or what could be called the micro level) are addressed substantially by the literature currently available, and these aspects form part of the tools of the subtitler's trade. However, this represents a top-down (deductive) approach, where conventions are super-imposed on subtitles that are arrived at in ways that are not necessarily compatible with contemporary translation theory, but still giving them a semblance of "good subtitles". To my mind, it would be more beneficial to approach the problem from the macro level: the transfer of one language in a specific communication system to another language in a different communication system. Once this aspect, which forms the essence of subtitling, has been addressed, it will not be too difficult to move on to refinement of presentation (or the formal aspects/micro level). Bluntly put, a language practitioner who knows the technical and formal aspects of the trade but is unable to successfully pass from dialogue to subtitle, can only be used in the subtitling process as an assistant to a subtitler, who, on the other hand, although lacking in technical knowledge knows how to pass from one language in a specific communication system to another language in a different communication system. Subtitling is indeed a craft: it requires talent, and technique can never be substituted for this. The proposed bottom-up approach will culminate in guidelines that can be used for effective subtitling, thereby constituting an inductive approach.

Although guidelines and conventions are useful, they do not address the primary question of how a subtitle is created. This, or rather, how a subtitle should be created, is the main research question of this thesis, and will be answered by investigating what has already been done in translation theory, and especially in semiotic approaches⁵ to translation in order to extrapolate

⁵

Semiotics, as the study of systems of signification is an extremely useful tool in the study of subtitling which is done at the interface of two such systems, namely film and language. A traditional linguistic approach to

from there. This constitutes an attempt to open "the black box" of this type of translation by defining the basic components and phases of the subtitling process. It will also facilitate the formulation of a working theory to underpin subtitling, which could then in turn be used to address practical issues. In the final instance, this theory and these guidelines will be put to the test by being applied to the case of *Cyrano de Bergerac*.

subtitling as merely a type of translation, and which does not take cognisance of the fact it is practised within the genre of the film, will not yield a complete theory.

CHAPTER 3 : SEMIOTICS IN TRANSLATION

3.1 *Definition of Semiotics*

"Semiotics is generally understood to cover the study of all systems of signification and of the various processes of communication" (Eco & Nergaard, 1998:218). All communication systems are signification systems, be they verbal, visual, aural or a combination of these.⁶ Translation, as a means of effecting, facilitating and enhancing communication, can thus also be studied as part of semiotics.⁷ According to Umberto Eco and Siri Nergaard (1998:218) "(t)ranslation studies is increasingly adopting an interdisciplinary approach to the study of translation and intertextual and intercultural transposition and some now acknowledge that 'although translation has a central core of linguistic activity, it belongs most properly to *semiotics*'".

3.2 *Structural and Interpretative Semiotics*

It is important to understand that semiotics is not a coherent discipline, but rather a collection of approaches to the study of signification systems. The two best-known branches are Structural Semiotics (with Ferdinand de Saussure as its main exponent) and Interpretative Semiotics (as formulated by the American philosopher, Charles Peirce). Of these two approaches, Interpretative Semiotics is best suited to the study of translation, as will be discussed in more detail further on. One of the most notable present-day authorities on semiotics, and who also bases much of his theory on work done by Peirce, is the Italian theorist and author Umberto Eco. In the last instance, this chapter will refer to an in-depth and most insightful study by Dinda L. Gorfée (1994) which looks at *Semiotics and the problem of translation (with special reference to the Semiotics of Charles S. Peirce)*.

⁶ See also Du Plooy (1992) and Combrink (1999).

⁷ Terms, especially those linked to the field of semiotics, that are crucial for this study will be printed in italics the first time they appear in the text and a definition will be provided in the Glossary.

3.3 Definition of translation

For the purpose of elaborating a theory for subtitling by means of a semiotic study, it is important to define "translation" briefly. The simplest yet most comprehensive definition of translation I could find, is "[t]ranslation does not involve comparing a language (or any other semiotic system) with another language or semiotic system; it involves passing from text 'a', elaborated according to semiotic system 'A', into text 'b', elaborated according to semiotic system 'B'" (Eco & Nergaard, 1998:221). This definition is ideally suited to the specific type of translation called *subtitling*, which truly represents passing not only from one language to another, but also from one semiotic system (spoken language) to another (written language).

3.4 Interpretative Semiotics and translation

Having concisely defined "translation", one can now take a closer look at the theory of interpretative semiotics, as developed by Peirce, as this is the approach that will be used to investigate the translation process. As already noted, Peirce considers each sign to be in a threefold relationship between the object, sign and interpretant (how the sign is perceived in a given context). According to Goriée (1994:169), this distinction could help us to address the following issues:

- equivalence between source and target text,
- the translation process and its phases, and
- the role of the translator in the translation process.

The above-mentioned points are a summary of the most important questions that have confronted translators through the ages. The first question addresses those qualities that should be present in a text in order for it to be regarded as a translation: what makes a translation, and what distinguishes it from a new text, or an adaptation or a summary? The second question is how this translation is created: how does one pass from the source text to the target text? The third question pertains to the role of the translator in the process: is it creative or merely instrumental? These aspects are central to the present study, and will be discussed in more detail

The basic premise of semiotics is that signification systems consist of *codes* that are in turn made up of *signs*. Signs have specific meanings because of the place they occupy in these codes and systems.⁸ Structural semiotics holds that "each language is regarded as a *system of relations* (more precisely, a set of interrelated systems), the elements of which – sounds, words, etc. – have no validity independently of the relations of equivalence and contrast which hold between them" (Lyons as quoted by Eco & Nergaard, 1998:210).

Although this approach has made a valuable contribution to the semiotic study of language, it disregards the context of production, reception and interpretation, which are all crucial elements for translation.⁹ These elements are, however, taken into account in Interpretative Semiotics. The father of this branch of semiotics, Charles S. Peirce describes *semiosis* as

an action, an influence, which is, or involves a co-operation of three subjects, such as a sign, its *object* and its *interpretant* [my italics], this three-relative influence not being in any way resolvable into actions between pairs'. An **interpretant** is any sign which 'translates' the first one: through a definition, a synonym, an example, a sign from another semiotic system and so on, *ad infinitum*. Every interpretation is an inference (Eco & Nergaard, 1998:219).

Whereas structural semiotics posits that language consists of codes, as can be catalogued in a dictionary, interpretative semiotics challenges this notion by bringing context into play, and postulating that the unlimited semiotic possibilities in language are closer to that of an encyclopaedia. A good example of the manifold possible meanings of a word is the word *cool*, which can be used in the conventional sense as an adjective (*a cool day*) or as a present-day expression to indicate that an object is fashionable (*a cool T-shirt*). The second use of *cool* also gives an indication of the context (what register is used, what time utterance is made).

Therefore, language with its multiplicity of meanings,

is best seen as a type of competence which provides instructions on how to interpret (and even translate) a given term according to the sense it acquires in a particular context and/or situation of production and reception, according to intertextual situations, and so on. The encyclopaedic (interpretative) view then consolidates *semantic and pragmatic* approaches to meaning to reassess the concept of EQUIVALENCE which has always received a great deal of attention in translation studies (Eco & Nergaard, 1998:219).

⁸ See also Robin (1999).

⁹ See also Kussmaul (1995:55).

in the next three points. In doing so, the most frequently asked questions in translatology which also form the basis for translation theory, will be addressed.¹⁰

3.4.1 Equivalence

According to Newmark (1991:3) it is "a common academic dead-end pursuit" to define equivalence. However, it is also not possible to discuss translation without employing a word which refers to the degree of "sameness" between source and target text. In the absence of this quality, translation would not exist, but a new document would be created every time a document is "converted" from source language to target language. Bassnett describes this equivalence as that which (1991:27), "results from the relation between signs and what they stand for, and the relationship between signs, what they stand for and those who use them". Therefore, as a working definition for the purpose of this study, equivalence will refer to the sameness of effect of signs in the source and target texts on the groups for which they are intended.

Thus, on a first level, this would mean that the contents of the two documents will be the same. In other words, in the translation of a tender document, the terms and conditions of the source document will be closely rendered in the target document to enable the user of the target document to submit a valid tender. This is what Newmark (1981, 1988, 1991) refers to as **semantic** translation, where the translation closely follows the source text. Referential texts (where the facts are all-important, as in the case of a tender document) are most likely to be translated in this way. Translators who favour this approach of closely following the semantic structure of the source text, are called *sourciers* (Newmark, 1991:4).

On a second level, equivalence could refer to the degree of sameness in the translation of a murder mystery from language A to language B, where the plot of the original text is closely followed, although some of the names of characters have been changed to names that are more significant to readers of the target text. Newmark (1981, 1988, 1991) calls this **communicative** translation. The emphasis is no longer on following the semantic structure of the source text, but rather on reaching the target readership as effectively as possible.¹¹ This type of translation would be used for texts where the emphasis is on the reader's perception of the work, such as popular fiction. Translators who use this approach are called *ciblistes* (from the French *cible*, which means target).

¹⁰ For the purpose of this dissertation, *translatology* will refer to the complete body of knowledge regarding the process of translating, while *translation theories* will refer to theories to explain the process of translating.
¹¹ See also Massoud (1988).

On a third level, equivalence could refer to the specific quality of sameness between source and target text, where a murder mystery which was written in French, and in which the letter "e" does not appear once, as in George Perec's *La disparition*, is translated into English or German, following the same plot, but also adhering to the formal constraint by omitting all e's (Hofstadter, 1998:107,110). Texts translated in this way (with the emphasis on formal constraints, or at least in which much attention is accorded to these aspects), are normally works that are considered to be of literary importance.

Therefore, equivalence implies much more than sameness of contents: it also implies sameness in effect, sameness in form, and in some instances, sameness in constraints.

Although admitting that it might be a gross oversimplification of the facts, Goriée (1994:170) describes the traditional view as one where the "original text and translated text are ideally placed in a one-to-one correspondence, meaning by this that they are to be considered as codifications of one piece of information, as logically and/or situationally interchangeable". However, he also points out that it is a dangerous misconception, as this would mean that back-translation of a "good" target text would result in the creation of text that is identical to the original source text.¹² Goriée (1994:173) bases his rejection of this idea on Peirce's use of the term "equivalence" for whom

equivalence was synonymous not with one-to-one correspondence, as in Firstness (iconicity) and, in a different modality, in Secondness, but with the one-to-many correspondence that obtains whenever a sign "gives birth" to an interpretant (or rather a series of interpretants). Two signs which are this dynamically equivalent can be logically derived from one another.

The implication of this for translation is that there is more than one possible translation of a text. The text as sign can be interpreted in more than one way, although one should be able to clearly see the link between object, sign and interpretant. This link can be tested by back-translating the target text. Although it is unlikely that it will be identical to the original source text, the back-translated text should bear some strong resemblances to it.

According to Peirce, there are three types of equivalence, namely qualitative, referential and signification (Goriée, 1994:174-82):

¹²

Back-translation is a test that is often applied to determine the degree of equivalence between source and target text. See Newmark (1991).

- By *qualitative equivalence* is meant parity of external characteristics of the sign, such as the rhyme structure of a sonnet which will be the same in a translation of the sonnet.
- *Referential equivalence* refers to the immediate object and the dynamical object¹³ of a sign. The immediate object is the idea "called up directly by a particular sign-use" (Gorlée, 1994:176). The dynamical object can only be understood by trying "to understand what is implied by the immediate object [...]. The dynamical object corresponds to the hypothetical sum of all instances of the sign-bound immediate object" (Gorlée, 1994:177). One of the most important factors to remember when dealing with equivalence in translation, is that the dynamical object of the primary sign and the translated interpretant-sign must always be the same, if the meaning of the two texts is to be considered the same. However, this does not necessarily mean that they have same immediate object. An example would be idiomatic expressions in different languages where cultural factors are often strongly prevalent on a first level, such as the French idiom "avoir des fourmis dans la main" which means that the speaker's hand is asleep, and not that s/he has ants in his/her hand. Gorlée describes this specific aspect of equivalence as follows:

even if the primary sign and the translated interpretant-sign have different immediate objects, their dynamical objects will always need to be identically the same, at least ideally. Even their sameness is, however, relative, since it is to some degree always the result of an interpretation, of an inferential procedure [but] the relation between the two must be mediated by a semiosis which makes it possible for one to be a logical consequence of the other (Gorlée, 1994:178).

Peirce also identifies two other aspects that need to be taken into account when considering equivalence in translation, namely connotation and denotation:

[D]enotation ... of a term relates to the world. It indicates the (real) individuals or objects to which the term applies and which occasion its use. [C]onnotation ... refers to a term's meaning-content, the attributes or qualities that can be predicated to it (Gorlée, 1994:179).

- *Significational equivalence* refers to the relation between the interpretant and the object, where "[t]he interpretant is supposed to indicate the same things or facts as the primary sign, and to signify these things, and assert these facts, in like manner" (Gorlée, 1994:181).

¹³

I use the term "dynamical object" for the purposes of standardisation as it was used by Peirce and Gorlée.

According to Eco (1976:68) Peirce sees the interpretant as "that which the sign produces in the quasi-mind which is the interpreter".

Eco (1976:70) enumerates the different forms of interpretants as follows:

- a) It can be the equivalent (or apparently equivalent) sign-vehicle in another semiotic system. For example I can make the drawing of dog correspond to the word /dog/.
- b) It can be the index which is directed to a single object, perhaps implying an element of universal qualification (<<all objects like this>>).
- c) It can be a scientific (or naive) definition in terms of the same semiotic system, for example /salt/ signifies <<sodium chloride>>.
- d) It can be an emotive association which acquires the value of an established connotation: /dog/ signifies <<fidelity>> (and vice versa).
- e) It can simply be the translation of the term into another language, or its substitute by a synonym.

It is obvious that for the purpose of this study, the emphasis will be on the last category of interpretants. It is important to realise that this is not the only type of interpretant that exists, but it is the one most likely to be helpful in the current study.

This concludes the discussion of equivalence in translation. The idea of translational equivalence, as well as its associated problems, is clearly defined by Goriée (1994:181) when he states that "(e)quivalence, in the strictest sense, between sign and interpretant is logically impossible: it would stifle the growth of knowledge, which growth is exactly the point of sign production and sign use". According to Goriée, Peirce maintained that the whole human inverse is "perfused with signs, if it is not composed exclusively of signs", since human beings communicate through signs, and these signs are constantly interpreted to generate new signs that are in turn interpreted. This process is never-ending and new significations (and thereby new truth-values) are constantly generated, examined, accepted or rejected. It is therefore impossible to assume that this process would at some point come to a standstill, especially since culture and society (context) is constantly changing. In fact, if the process were to come to a definite standstill, it would imply that society is no longer evolving. However, although this constant evolution means that a final interpretant (and therefore a final translation) can never be achieved, it remains the aim of the translator to

achieve total knowledge of the meaning of a sign. To achieve this, one needs to persevere in making ever-new interpretations/translations of the sign, in order to gain access, via the sign and its immediate object, to the sign's *prima causa*, the dynamical object. In the final analysis, translation, linguistic and otherwise, is about our own life-world, real and imagined and the myriad ways in which we make sense of it by creating signification equivalents of it and its parts (Gorlée, 1994:181).

3.4.2 The translation process (as pertinent to the study)

According to Peirce (as quoted in Gorlée, 1994:186)

(t)ranslation, at least in its lingual varieties, deals with signs interpretable by logical interpretants; it is a pragmatic process of making sense of intellectual concepts, or signs of Thirdness.

The first of these successive logical interpretants, is the fleeting, tentative idea. In terms of a translation, it can be seen an "impromptu translation" which is the result of the flow of ideas immediately generated by a text-sign in the trained translator's mind, but which is "nevertheless a new sign susceptible of serving as a point of departure in the next semiosis" (Gorlée, 1994:187).

The second logical interpretant is described by Peirce as "the dash of cold doubt that awakens the sane judgment of the muser" (Gorlée, 1994:187). During this phase, the translator evaluates the choices made in the first phase.

The working hypotheses are at this stage put to the test and verified by solid judgment. In the translation situation, the more or less lucky guesses are now put on the dissecting table and analyzed with a clear head. The result is "a" translation which provides "a" solution to the problem. It offers at best a successful solution, one which works in the intended communicational situation and which makes sense (that is, is significant) in the target culture. But it may at worst be received in it with mixed feelings, shock or rejection (Gorlée, 1994:187).

The third logical interpretant is the

near-perfect solution with which semiosis to all intents and purposes may come to a (possibly temporary) logical standstill. Such an ideal translation will have found its natural

habitat in the recipient situation, thereby losing its acute "percussivity". The new configuration having thus become unproblematic and more or less harmonious, the mind ceases to be in the "state [of] activity ... mingled with curiosity" by which it is stimulated to put out further interpretant-signs.

This ideal *status quo* should, nevertheless, never become a taking refuge in some artificial fixity. The third logical interpretant does express a firm belief, but it is still a thought-sign; and its primary goal is therefor to remain alive and communicative throughout time. To ignore its need to grow would be an antiquarianism. The judge of any interpretant's finality must always be the social community, or *communis opinio*, the norms of which are naturally changeable. Although the semiosis at this point may have lost its edge, yet the translation process has reached a still non-ultimate moment. Its apparent finality is no more than a resting point.

For this reason it is possible, and even essential, to take the semiotic process one crucial step further, and to consider that the semiotic fire is susceptible of rekindling at any future moment, however distant or utopian. The sign would then be called upon to fulfil the explosive task of generating one single unending habit with which the semiosis would definitively come to its end. The ultimate logical interpretant would embody the final truth-norm and would therefore no longer be placed in the triadic relation which characterises the Peircean sign. A translation which would pretend to give final answers is, however, an alarming oxymoron, a sure sign that culture itself has, for instance by some irreversible catastrophic final event, come to an end (Goriée, 1994:187-8).

The above rather lengthy quotation was deemed necessary for its compact and eminently meaningful argument pertaining to the current argument. In describing the translation process, one forcibly has to answer the question: what is the ideal outcome of the process? The answer is, of course, the ideal translation. But what constitutes the ideal translation? From a semiotic point of view and in Peircean terms, it is the point at which semiotic activity has come to a standstill.¹⁴ In other words, the stage where the ideal interpretant has been found. The ideal interpretant is the interpretant which fully deploys the meaning-potential of the original sign, which is absolutely equivalent to it, thereby erasing any tension that might have existed between sign and interpretant and which would have given rise to renewed semiotic activity. In practice this is unattainable, but it nevertheless remains the ideal that is pursued.

However, had it been possible, hypothetically, to attain the ideal interpretant (translation) in a specific context, the interpretant would still only have been valid within the specific context in which it was created. This is because all signs are interpreted within a specific context, and therefore the interpretant is only valid within that context.

¹⁴

See also Chapter 5.

Therefore, the aim of the translation process is to produce the perfect interpretant with which all semiotic activities will come to a standstill. However, in view of the fact that this is unattainable, the translation process is a pendular movement between sign and interpretant in order to find an interpretant that is as close as possible to the sign. Although this final interpretant may eventually be very close to the sign, the semiotic process never comes to a complete standstill, because complete equivalence can never be attained.

In terms of the subtitling process, this triadic relationship between object sign and interpretant can be described as the film being the object, and the dialogue and other linguistic elements being the sign that will give birth to an interpretant in the mind of the subtitler. However, the subtitling process does not end here: the subtitler creates a new sign (the subtitle) which is in turn interpreted by the viewer to become a new interpretant. The result of this process is a continuous creation of new signs and interpretants. Although the process seems to come to a standstill with the interpretant formed by the end-user (the viewer), this is only temporary.

This description of the translation process contrasts starkly with the frequently proffered "black box" theory, in which it is accepted that the core of the translation process is largely intuitive and defies all description.¹⁵ Toury (as quoted in Gorlée, 1994:182) describes it as "an open system whose internal structure can be guessed at, or tentatively reconstructed, only on the basis of the relationships between the entities established as its input and output". This definition is unsatisfactory because it relinquishes any attempt to define the activity that occurs between exposure to a source text and creation of a target text. In view of the fact that translation is a global activity, practised by hundreds of thousands of language practitioners throughout the world, it is logical to assume that the activity must have a shared central core of activity. It is undoubtedly not an easy task to define this activity, but it can also not be ignored. Traditional translation theory does not allow for an explanation of this activity, but semiotics does by describing it in terms of a pendular movement between sign and interpretant with its final (albeit unattainable) ideal as perfect semiotic balance.

Ironically enough, the way in which Peirce subdivides the process leaves more room for intuition than the division proposed by Toury (quoted in Gorlée, 1994:184), who describes the process as follows:

¹⁵

See also Ponteiro (1997:65): "Die-hard practitioners are no longer quite so adamant that intuition suffices without trying to explain the underlying processes."

- an indispensable *decomposition* of the initial entity up to a certain varying level, and assigning its constituents at this level the status of "features";
- a selection of features to be retained, that is, the assignment of *relevance* to some part of the initial entity's features, from one point of view or another;
- the *transfer* of the selected, relevant features over (one or more than one) more or less defined semiotic border;
- the *(re)composition* of a resultant entity around the transferred features, while assigning them to the same or another extent of relevancy.

The most marked difference between these two approaches is perhaps the quest for the *ideal sign-norm* by Peirce, in contrast to a *sign which adheres to the most important characteristics* of the original, as proposed by Toury. Gorlée (1994:185) summarises it as follows:

It would seem to me that no parts of a text-sign may be concealed by camouflage without practising some form of erosion, whereby the semiotic substance is thinned in the successive semiosis it undergoes, instead of becoming progressively richer in content, as Peirce would have it. The notion of relevancy brandished by Toury is really a dangerous and indiscriminate weapon. Due to the fact that it may have either an ideological or an intuitive bias, or both, Toury's scenario here seems to be more tailored to suit rhetorical needs than to lead to the *summum bonum*, the truth the way Peirce saw it.

This difference in approach (translation as the ideal interpretant with all the qualities of the original sign versus translation as possessing the most important qualities of the source text) is crucial for the purpose of this study. The nature of subtitling is such that a large volume of spoken text has to be rendered as written text within limited space while simultaneously adhering to other constraints. Bogard (1979:1) summarises this notion as follows:

The art of subtitling is an art of compromise for both creators of titles and their viewers. The subtitlist, working under constraints of time and space, must keep his or her creative impulses firmly reined in while choosing the most concise rendering of the idea expressed in the original dialogue.

The need for finding a concise written equivalent for spoken dialogue, may lead the subtitler to think that it is admissible, indeed preferred, to render only part of the spoken dialogue in the subtitles. This seems to be reinforced by Toury's view: the subtitler decides which parts of the dialogue are important (makes a selection) and then translates this to be used as subtitles. This will inevitably lead to an impoverishment of the film and does not constitute a responsible approach to subtitling as a special type of translation. The more acceptable option would be to view spoken dialogue as part of the film sign and to aim at rendering the full meaning of the sign

in producing a subtitle as interpretant. However, practical constraints such as reading speed and screen size cannot be ignored, and will inevitably influence the subtitling output. Although the contents of the dialogue may not be eroded, the subtitler knows that the physical space on screen available for reproduction of what is being said on the soundtrack, is limited. Therefore, the subtitler will require very particular skills to be able to render the meaning-potential of the source text, without impoverishing it in any way, in a very concise target text.

Peirce's definition of the process of translation is therefore more acceptable and responsible than that of Toury, especially since it does not rely on the subjective determining of relevant features. However, it is the opinion of the researcher that it does not make adequate provision for the difference between languages which further complicates the quest for absolute equivalence between source and target text. This aspect is aptly described in the words of Margaret Sayers Peden (as quoted in Wechsler, 1998:10-1):

I like to think of the original work as an ice cube. During the process of translation the cube is melted. While in its liquid state, every molecule changes place; none remains in its original relationship to the others. Then begins the process of forming the work in a second language. Molecules escape, new molecules are poured in to fill the spaces, but the lines of moulding and mending are virtually invisible. The work exists in the second language as a new ice cube – different, but to all appearance the same.

This description is appropriate because it offers a compromise between Peirce's view and the real situation - reality. It views the successful translation as being the same (having the same meaning-potential) as the source text. In other words, it is not a lesser version of the source text and none of the "less important features" have been eroded. However, it is also different from the source text because molecules have escaped and molecules have been added (inevitable when passing from one language to another). Therefore, the translation process is not a case of the translator reducing the source text (original ice cube) by chiselling away at it, nor is it left untouched for fear of losing any of the original meaning of the sign, but it is melted and changed into a new ice cube (target text) that is to all appearance the same as the target text.

3.4.3 Role of the translator

Peirce places the emphasis on the dynamical object of signs, their continuous evolution being an integral part of their characteristics. Therefore,

(a)pplied to the translation situation this means that the translator is merely instrumental in making sign-action possible; he or she is used (that is, acted upon, influenced) by the sign. [...] it would be a misconstrual of the facts to hold, as is generally done, that the sign is translated by the translator, because it really translates itself. The translator does not address the text-sign; the text-sign addresses the translator.

[...]

Translators shall accept the compliant role and be considered as bare and anonymous minds (Gorlée, 1994:192, 5).

This is in stark contrast with what Alistair Reid (the translator of Pablo Neruda's poems) recounts of a meeting with the poet:

Once, in Paris, while I was explaining some liberty I had taken, [Neruda] stopped me and put his hand on my shoulder [and said] 'Alistair, don't just translate my poems. I want you to improve them' (as quoted by Wechsler, 1998:101).

Where, on the one hand, the translator is seen as merely instrumental, on the other hand s/he is seen as creative. This is an old debate and most translators lean one way or the other. One of the more recent and moderate views of the role of the translator, is that the translator is a performer without a stage (Wechsler, 1998). The translator is meant to be invisible, although s/he is very much present and active.

And while the translator is shouldering this responsibility and forcing literary works into forms they were never intended to take, no one can see his difficult performance. Except where he slips up. In fact, he is praised primarily for not being seen. Even when we listen to an album, we can imagine the musician blowing or bowing, but nothing comes to mind when we think of a translator translating, nothing more than we imagine an author doing. Which isn't much (Wechsler, 1998:8).

3.5 *A model of translation based on Interpretative Semiotics*

Approaching translation from the point of view of Interpretative Semiotics, would imply that

- 3.5.1 A sign (utterance) refers to an object (reality). An interpretant is the idea about the object which is evoked by the sign. In the translation process, the interpretant is the translation and the sign is the source text.

3.5.2 Ideally, there should be as little difference as possible between the object, sign and interpretant.

3.5.3 This is called equivalence .

3.5.4 The translation process can be broken down into three stages, resulting in the successive first, second and third interpretants.

3.5.5 The translator does not act on the sign, the sign acts on the translator.

This approach desensitises many issues related to translating, notably the polemic question of the “fidelity” or “infidelity” of a translation. As Gorlée (1994:195) puts it:

(t)hese ideas are no longer in order in a theory of translation which aims not at the reproduction of meaning (without, however, losing its normative and purposive character) but at *the embodiment and deployment of a sign's meaning-potential* [my italics].

On the downside, a semiotic approach may not take full cognisance of the complexity of translation. It is a useful model, the most useful that has yet been applied to the study of translation, but it still needs to be qualified.

En résumé

This chapter investigated the suitability of Interpretative Semiotics, based on the work of Charles S. Peirce, as a model for establishing a theory of translation, which could eventually be applied to subtitling. The main questions that have confronted translation theorists through the ages (What is equivalence? What happens in the translation process? What is the role of the translator?) were addressed from the perspective of Interpretative Semiotics, referring to other compatible theories where the basic model was insufficient.

The next chapter, will briefly investigate semiotics in film. As noted at the beginning of Chapter 2, semiotics is eminently suited to the study of all systems of signification (including film). Chapter 4 will re-affirm this notion, thereby laying the foundation for a semiotic approach to subtitling, with its two main components: translation and film.

CHAPTER 4 : SEMIOTICS AND FILM

4.1 *Film and language*

Film is different from sign systems such as language, in the sense that it is not necessary to acquire any particular skill to appreciate and enjoy it on the most basic level. According to Monaco (1981:121) infants understand television images months before they develop any competency with regard to spoken language.

However, there are certain definite parallels between film and language. Monaco (1981:121) summarises it as follows:

People who are highly experienced in film, highly literate visually (or should we say "cinemate"?) see more and hear more than people who seldom go to the movies. An education in the quasi-language of film opens up greater potential meaning for the observer, so it is useful to use the metaphor of language to describe the phenomenon of film.

He also refers to the work of scientists such as the anthropologist William Hudson. In the 1920s, Hudson conducted experiments to determine whether African children who had had little contact with Western culture perceived depth in two-dimensional images in the same way as Westerners. He found that they did not perceive these images in the same way as children from the West and concluded that humans are taught certain conventions which enable them to interpret images.¹⁶ Therefore, the specific culture in which a child grows up plays a fundamental role in the interpreting of visual images (Monaco, 1981:123). The Ambiguous Trident (Figure 4.1) is an example of the powerful influence of the conventions of three-dimensionality in Western culture:

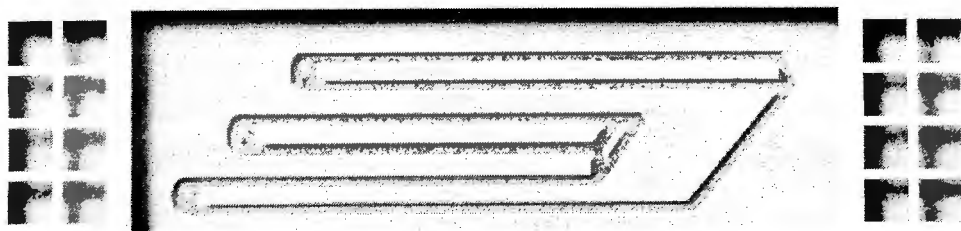


Figure 4.1 Ambiguous Trident

¹⁶ See also Deregowski (1972) and Currie (1995).

instead of seeing the object as two-dimensional (flat), our minds transform it into a three-dimensional object. This is largely due to the 45° oblique lines, which in Western culture are interpreted as indication of depth, and therefore three-dimensionality. However, the obvious impossibility of this object existing three-dimensionally creates a certain amount of tension because it is obvious that the object cannot exist in reality. This tension makes the design all the more intriguing. On the other hand, this figure poses no problem for someone who does not try to interpret it three-dimensionally, and therefore, it will create no tension or excitement in such a person. It is thus crucial to understand that this figure will be either highly intriguing or of no interest to a viewer, depending on the context in which it is seen.

Monaco (1981:123) comes to the conclusion that "there is a strong element of our ability to observe images, whether still or moving, that depends on learning". In this respect, film resembles language and Monaco feels that there are sufficient points of intersection between film and language to draw a meaningful comparison. This coincides with Braudy's (1973:213) opinion that "the visual elements in a film are intertwined like the grammar that tells us how words are related in language". Although this analogy is useful, the question arises why Braudy decided to include visual elements and exclude sound, as these are the two major components of a film.

Monaco distinguishes between the use of these two aspects in film: he summarises the difference as "ears hear whatever is available for them to hear; eyes choose what to see". This is largely due to the phenomenon of foveated vision: the concentration of receptor organs in the "fovea" of the retina, which means that one has to stare directly at an object in order to see it properly. As a result, in order for the eye to properly see an object, it must move constantly to take in the whole of the image. These movements are called *saccades* and take approximately $\frac{1}{20}$ seconds each, "just about the interval of persistence of vision, the phenomenon that makes film possible" (Monaco, 1981:125). From this he concludes that the human eye "reads" an image in the way it reads a page, the only difference being that "we know how to read a page—in English, from the left to right and top to bottom—but we are seldom conscious of how precisely we read an image".

Therefore, the analogy of film as a language of sorts is useful, on condition that the differences are not ignored: shots are composed according to (or breaking) certain conventions, much like the relationship between creative writing and grammar, **but** the eye still has a choice of what it would like to focus on. Furthermore, sound is an extra dimension that has to be incorporated in the comprehension of the film, and thirdly, whereas people are instructed on how to read a book, very few people are taught how to read the film image.

Monaco defines three categories of reading based on the degree to which individuals read images more or less well:

- Physiologically: the best readers would have the most efficient and extensive saccadic patterns;
- Ethnographically: the most literate readers would draw on a greater experience and knowledge of various cultural visual conventions; and
- Psychologically: the readers who gained the most from the material would be the ones who were best able to assimilate the various sets of meanings they perceived and then integrate the experience (Monaco, 1981:125).

From this one is able to conclude that individuals read images in varying ways and that not everyone draws the same amount of information from a particular image. The more sophisticated or trained reader will have a higher level of enjoyment and understanding of the image than the reader who lacks these traits. However, although this premise is generally accepted in the study of literature, there is still a tendency to confound *seeing* a film and *reading* a film, indeed, to assume that “anyone can read a film”. As Monaco (1981:126) puts it, “[a]nyone can see a film [...] even cats. But some people have learned to comprehend visual images—physiologically, ethnographically, and psychologically—with far more sophistication than have others. [...] The observer is not simply a consumer, but an active—or potentially active—participant in the process.”

4.2 Film and Interpretative Semiotics

Because of the similarities between film and language, methods used to study language can be applied with much success to the study of film. One of the methods that has been used to study language during the past century, is semiotics. Since semiotics is the study of systems of signs and since any system of communication (such as a language) is a system of signs, film, as a system of communication, can be studied using this framework.¹⁷

Chandler (1994) states that “[m]edia such as television and film are regarded by some semioticians as being like ‘languages’”. According to Monaco (1981:127) “[c]inema, therefore, may be a language of a sort, but it is clearly not a language system”. He also quotes the great

French semiologist, Christian Metz, as saying: "It is not because the cinema is language that it can tell such fine stories, but rather it has become language because it has told such fine stories" (Monaco, 1981:127). Similarly, Eco (1976) says that the subject of study of semiotics is "anything that can be used to lie".

Therefore, one can use as point of departure the assumption that film is a system of signs and because of the analogy between film and language, film will be studied from a semiotic point of view. Having already established that semiotics can be used to study written texts and translation, this will provide common ground for the analysis of film and language, and therefore subtitling. It is, however, important to note that there are some very important terms in the study of semiotics.

In film, the *signifier* and the *signified* are almost indistinguishable: the visual and aural indicators are the signifier, and what they refer to—what they represent—constitute the signified. Monaco uses the example of a book to illustrate this: the image of a book is conceptually much closer to a book than the word "book": "A picture bears some direct relationship with what it signifies, a word seldom does" (1981:128).

The fact that signifier and signified are very closely linked in film, means that they can be easily confounded, sometimes even with the object. The following example may help to clarify these terms: in a film, there is a scene of a snow storm. The snow storm is the image or the object. However, in order to represent it on-screen, the director makes use of various visual and aural components, for example, s/he may decide to use a white, powdery substance which looks like snow in the place of real snow. In this sense, the powdery substance is the signifier, but it must be suitably close to the signified - real snow - to pass the viewer test. Similarly, the director may also decide to use giant fans to blow the powdery substance and to add a synthetically produced soundtrack of howling winds to reinforce the idea of a snow storm. Once again, the signifiers in these signs should be close to the signified, or viewers will not understand the object (image). The director will attempt to achieve a maximum degree of verisimilitude in constructing the sign, because this is dictated by the conventions of the semiotic system within which s/he is working. Although it is acceptable in animation films to represent a snow storm using white dots that were generated with the help of a computer, this is not at present acceptable in main-stream films, as there will be too much distance between the signifier and the signified. Such a combination is likely to shock and confuse the viewer, who is not used to, and very reluctant to accept, a mixture of semiotic codes.

¹⁷

See also Mast and Cohen (1985), Mast, Cohen and Brady (1992) and Burnett (1991).

It is this compact (short-circuit, as Monaco puts it) nature of the film sign, the closeness between signifier and signified, which makes the language of film difficult to discuss.

We can't modify the signs of cinema the way we can modify the words of language systems. In cinema, an image of a rose is an image of a rose is an image of a rose is an image of a rose—nothing more, nothing less. In English, a rose can be a rose, simply, but it can also be modified or confused with similar words: rose, rosy, rosier, rosiest, rise risen, rows (ruse), arose, roselike, and so forth. The power of language systems is that there is a very great difference between the signifier and the signified; the power of film is that there is not.

[...] Film does not suggest, in this context: it states. And therein lies its power and the danger it poses to the observer: the reason why it is useful, even vital, to learn to read images well so that the observer can seize some of the power of the medium. The better one reads an image, the more one understands it, the more power one has over it. The reader of a page invents the image, the reader of a film does not, yet both readers must work to interpret the signs they perceive in order to complete the process of intellection. The more work they do, the better the balance between observer and creator in the process; the better the balance, the more vital and resonant the work of art (Monaco, 1981:128).

Monaco makes two extremely important points in this passage: in the first place, he explains that film states and does not suggest (compared to literature). The effect of this is that the role of the viewer is circumscribed, while that of the reader is open. In other words, an image of the sea cannot be confused with an image of a mother. In film, what you see is what you get. However, in language, it is possible to confuse “la mer” with “la mère”, as in the old joke of two friends walking along the beach, watching the sunbathers:

Friend A: “Est-ce que vous aimez la mer?”

Friend B: “J'aime bien la mère, mais je préfère la fille.”

This type of double meaning is simply not possible in the visual aspect of film. However, and this is the second important point that Monaco makes in the above passage: this does not mean that film is accessible to everybody. The viewer of a film must “interpret the [film] signs”¹⁸ in order to complete the intellection process. The better equipped the viewer is to interpret these signs, the more successful this process will be. As an example of this, Braudy (1971:218-223) explains exactly how Hitchcock uses camera angles and colour to win the viewer over to sympathise with

¹⁸

Although I would have preferred to use the term *filmic signs*, I will use film signs for the purpose of this dissertation to be consistent with the term used by Monaco.

the "baddie" in *Psycho*. Without an understanding of how this is done, the viewer is a victim of the film. With an awareness of the filmic means used to bring about this manipulation, the viewer is confronted with the complexity of human nature, of life, the unclear boundaries between good and evil and the darker side of his/her own personality. The viewer who lacks the ability to read film signs in this way, will gain about as much satisfaction as a cat watching a video of a goldfish. The viewer *with* an ability to read these signs, is the cat who reaches into the fishbowl to get the goldfish.

Another valuable contribution by Monaco is the way in which he qualifies the frequently heard comparison between language and film, according to which the shot is the word, the scene is the sentence and the sequence is the paragraph. Monaco states that the only validity of this comparison is that it arranges these sets of divisions in ascending order of complexity. However, the complexity of the film medium does not lend itself to such an easy comparison, as the frame, which could be considered as the basic unit of the film, already includes "a potentially infinite amount of visual information, as does the soundtrack which accompanies it" (Monaco, 1981:129). Therefore the frame is only on a technical level the smallest basic unit of a film.

Monaco (1981:130) summarizes the dilemma as follows:

Therefore film presents us with a language (of sorts) that:

- consists of short-circuit signs in which the signifier nearly equals the signified; and
- depends on a continuous, nondiscrete system in which we cannot identify a basic unit and which therefore we cannot describe quantitatively.

The result is, as Christian Metz says, that: "An easy art, the cinema is in constant danger of falling victim to this easiness." Film is too intelligible, which is what makes it difficult to analyse. "A film is difficult to explain because it is easy to understand."

How then does one go about to study film within the framework of semiotics?

The first important point is to realize that film **does** communicate meaning. It is a system of signs used to convey specific information to the viewer. It does so by showing and by *not showing*. The first means (by showing) works on two levels, namely the **connotative** and **denotative**. The denotative meaning is what is physically represented on the screen and through the soundtrack, the connotative meaning is everything associated with this.

According to Monaco (1981:131-2) the connotative meaning of film can be explained as that which the viewer associates with what is represented in a specific frame. However, in composing this frame, the filmmaker makes certain choices: s/he decides what to put in the frame, how to shoot it, what type of lighting to use, etc. At the same time, the filmmaker also decides what to exclude from this frame, and this is also significant. These choices (what to shoot and how to shoot it) are called paradigmatic choices, and it influences the viewer's connotation with specific elements of the film. Furthermore, these shots are also arranged and presented in a specific manner in the film: the sequence and context in which they follow on each other is also determined by choices and create a particular effect (just like the paradigmatic choices). These choices are called syntagmatic choices.

In other words, the film states by showing. What is being shown has a connotative meaning and a denotative meaning. Therefore, a shot of a red mushroom with white dots will have the connotative meaning of specific type of colourful fungus that grows in humid places. However its denotative meaning will range from "habitation of small creatures called gnomes" to "potentially toxic". The angle at which the shot is filmed will determine which of the denotative meanings are likely to be favoured. An overhead shot will make the mushroom appear small, while a low angle shot will make it appear over-powering. The meaning will further be determined by the paradigmatic choices made by the filmmaker, his/her reason for choosing this particular species of mushroom (instead of a porcini mushroom), and the syntagmatic choices: is the close-up of the mushroom followed by a shot of a tiny creature with pointed cap and shoes throwing open the front door of his mushroom, or by a shot an evil-looking creature clad in black who picks the mushroom and places it in a basket which already contains cobwebs, frogs and a rabbit's ears?

To summarise, in Interpretative Semiotics film is seen as a system of signs that convey meaning. These signs are visual and aural. The viewer interprets these signs on a connotative (what is shown) and denotative (what is associated with the image) level. The filmmaker conveys a particular meaning by making paradigmatic (deciding what to show and what not) and syntagmatic (when to show what) choices.

4.3 *Reading the film in terms of object, sign and interpretant*

Monaco (1981:144) describes the way in which the image is read, as follows:

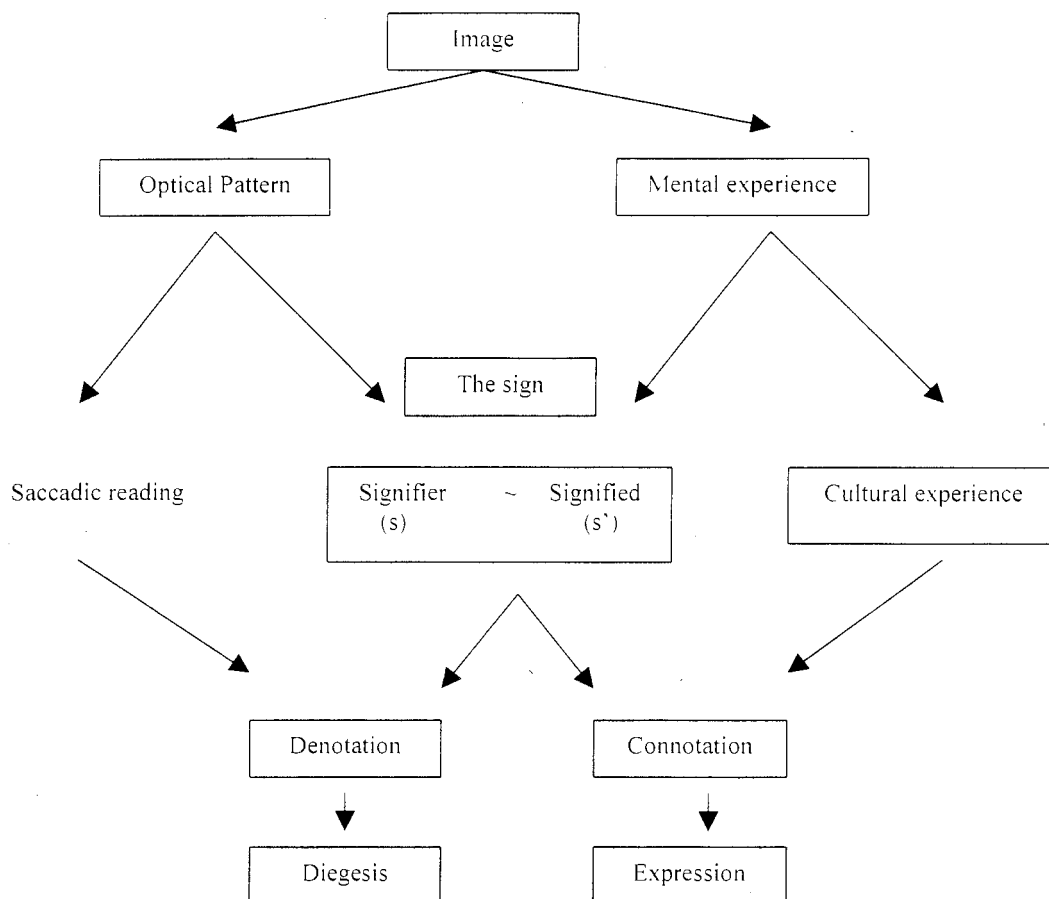


Figure 4.2 Optical and mental reading

The image is read on both an optical and a mental level. Reference has already been made to the saccadic patterns that are the physical optical manifestation of reading. On the other hand, cultural determinants are responsible for the mental reading.¹⁹ The processes of intellection on mental and optical levels combine to form the sign, where signifier (s) is so closely related to the signified (s') that they are virtually identical (to refer back to Monaco's example of the rose: the word *rose* (signifier) has very little to do with the idea of a rose (signified), but the image of a rose (signifier) is almost identical to the idea of rose). The nature of the signifier is more optical than mental; the reverse is true of the signified. The various levels of reading—saccadic, semiological, and cultural—then combine with each other in different ways to create meaning which is either essentially denotative or essentially connotative.

¹⁹

Cf. the Ambiguous Trident on page 29.

In traditional Interpretative Semiotic terms, the image²⁰ is the object. The object is represented by visual and aural components that form the sign (which in turn consists of a signifier and signified with connotative and denotative aspects). How the sign is understood (how the viewer perceives it) is then the interpretant.

According to Monaco, the image is understood according to the two main axes, namely the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes. Paradigmatic means that the filmmaker makes specific choices when s/he compiles and films a shot. The viewer must be aware, albeit unconsciously, of the possibility of the material being presented in a different way (by changing the physical arrangement, using different camera angles, etc.). Syntagmatic means that the shot is presented to the viewer in a specific sequence, following a specific shot and preceding a specific shot. In order to fully understand the sign, both these aspects should be taken into consideration. Without an understanding of the choices that were made, the viewer is only able to interpret the film on a first level, to perform a mimetic²¹ reading and will not be able to grasp the meaning of the film as object on the level of the interpretant. The semiotic process will therefore come to a standstill at the point where the viewer has identified the signified.

4.4 Film codes

The filmmaker composes the film signs in order to reflect the object as accurately as possible. This is achieved through the use of the specific codes for the specific semiotic system that is referred to as film. These codes are the framework within which the filmmaker responds to the three basic questions confronting him/her:

- What to shoot?
- How should it be shot?
- How should it be presented? (Monaco, 1981:148)

²⁰ In view of the fact that *image* normally refers exclusively to visual elements, it is important to specify that in the semiotic approach to film, *image* is used to refer to what is presented on-screen, and this is made up of both visual and aural aspects.

²¹ Mimetic reading: interpreting the film on the level of reality without any allowance for occurrences outside what has been portrayed.

The first two questions fall in the domain of *mise en scène*²² (traditionally referred to as "directing"), the last under the domain of *montage* (traditionally referred to as "editing"). Some of the most important aspects for the understanding of the codes of *mise en scène*, are: aspect ratio, open and closed form, geographic and depth planes, proximity and proportion, colour, line, form, weight and direction, texture, lighting, relation of camera to subject (Monaco, 1981:159).

- 4.4.1 Aspect ratio has to do with composition. This aspect has been influenced considerably by the change in width ratios, and filmmakers have had to adapt to changing screen formats. Important here is to realise that the composition of a shot is influenced by whether a film is shot with an Academy aperture with a ration of 1.33, or whether it is shot in Cinemascope or Panavision with a ration of 2.33:

Whereas the classic two-shot of the 1.33 screen tended to focus attention on speaker and listener, the very wide amorphic ratios cannot avoid photographing either the space between them or beside them and therefore calling attention to the space surrounding them. This is neither "better" nor "worse" ideally; it simply changes the code of the two-shot (Monaco, 1981:149).

- 4.4.2 Open and closed form has to do with movement in the frame. In an open frame, the subject is allowed (even encouraged) to leave and re-enter the frame, whereas in a closed form the camera follows the subject diligently (Monaco, 1981:151).
- 4.4.3 Geographic and depth planes. Although the filmmaker does not necessarily intend to reproduce a three-dimensional reality on screen, s/he has to take the various planes into account, as in all pictorial arts. There are three sets of compositional codes for planes: the first is the plane of the image, because the image is still essentially two-dimensional, the second is the geography of the space filmed (parallel with the ground and the horizon), and the third is the plane of depth perception (perpendicular to both the frame plane and the geographical plane) (Monaco, 1981:152). Although the frames interlock, the frame of the image is paramount, since that is what will eventually be presented on-screen.
- 4.4.4 Proximity and proportion. Can an actor be upstaged by an empty medicine bottle? Yes, if the medicine bottle is in the foreground with the actor in the background, as in Orson

²²

For the purpose of this dissertation, *mise en scène* will be spelt without hyphens, following the spelling used

Welles' *Citizen Kane* (1941). If the order of the scene is inverted, the medicine bottle will disappear in the background and the significance of this item will be lost to the viewer (Monaco, 1981:154).

- 4.4.5 Form, line, colour: these elements are paramount, as in all other pictorial arts. According to Monaco (1981:157) they all "carry their own intrinsic interests, significant weights that counteract, reinforce, counterpoint, or balance each other in complex systems, each read against our latent expectations of the frame and with the senses of compositions in depth and planar design combined". Monaco cites the well-known example of the cowboy with the white hat, where the white hat indicates his strength of character and honesty.
- 4.4.6 Texture. An interesting code here is that graininess has been associated with enlargement, and with documentary. This code can therefore be used by the filmmaker to enhance the "truthfulness" of an image (Monaco, 1981:158). Another texture code that is frequently used, is the sand-blasted glass in the door of the stereotypical private detective.
- 4.4.7 Lighting is perhaps the most important tool the filmmaker can use to modify the meanings of form, line and colour and their intrinsic interests (Monaco, 1981:159). The development of fast filmstocks permitted a new latitude in the code of lighting, "and today most cinematographers work for verisimilitude, rather than classic Hollywood balance" (Monaco, 1981:159). Monaco summarises the effect of the various lighting techniques as follows: full-frontal lighting gives a washed-out appearance, overhead lighting dominates, lighting from below gives a lugubrious appearance; highlighting calls attention to details (e.g. hair and eyes), backlighting can dominate or highlight the subject, and sidelighting can be used for a chiaroscuro effect (Monaco, 1981:159).

The aforementioned aspects all have bearing on the single frame. The diachronic shot, however, is also influenced by other aspects, notably:

- 4.4.8 Relation: camera vs. subject. Of importance here is whether the camera is stable or whether it follows the subject. In the case of a stable camera, the distance between subject and camera can be decreased by zooming in, or increased, by zooming out. The

effect of a film mainly shot in close-ups, "deprives us of setting and is therefore disorienting, claustrophobic" (Monaco, 1981:162). Another aspect which influences the relation between camera and subject, is focus. The choice between deep or shallow focus will determine what elements in the frame are paramount, and a soft or sharp focus will enable the filmmaker to create a certain atmosphere (soft focus is normally associated with a romantic mood, sharp focus with verisimilitude (Monaco, 1981:162)). The last aspect that influences the relation between subject and camera, is the angle of the camera. Monaco (1981:164) identifies three possible angles: the pan axis (vertical, either square or oblique), the tilt axis (horizontal: overhead, high-angle, eye-level, low-angle) and the roll (for example to indicate the rolling of the sea).

Aspects pertaining to the codes of *mise en scène*, are: cutting, accelerated *montage* and punctuation in cinema. These aspects are important, as they will determine the meaning created by the fusion and selection of the already-existing material.

- 4.4.9 Cutting determines the length of any individual shot, "both as it relates to shots that precede and follow it and as it concerns the action of the shot. *Découpage classique* demands that a shot be cut so that the editing doesn't interfere with the central action of the shot. If we plot the action of each shot so that we get a rising then a falling curve, Hollywood grammar demands a cut shortly after the climax of the curve" (Monaco, 1981:184). However, variations on this can be very functional, for example a shot which lingers on after the climax had been reached.
- 4.4.10 Accelerated *montage* highlights the rhythmic value of editing by heightening interest in a scene through progressively shorter alternations between two subjects (as in car chase scenes) (Monaco, 1981:184). According to Christian Metz, this is a uniquely cinematic code (Monaco, 1981:185). The flashback and flash forward also fall in this category as they influence the rhythm of the film.
- 4.4.11 Punctuation in cinema: Monaco (1981:191-2) describes the unmarked cut as the simplest type of punctuation. Other forms include the fade and dissolve (what Monaco calls the "comma"), which is commonly used "to segue or lead into a flashback, [but] also in continuity *montage* with the jump cut, while at the same time it can represent the passage of long periods of time, especially when it is sequential. It is the one mark of punctuation in cinema that mixes images at the same time as it conjoins them.

Therefore, the semiotic system of the film has at its disposal its own code (or set of signs) that can be used to create meaning. This code is by no means closed, and the innovative filmmaker (like any other artist) will find ways to expand the code. There are basically two sub-categories of codes: the first has to do with the composition of the shot (*mise en scène*), and the second with the way the shot is presented (*montage*). Knowledge of these codes will enhance the understanding of the viewer of the film sign. If the sign is understood on a connotative and denotative level (in Peircean terms: if the full meaning-potential of the sign is exploited, or as fully as possible), the interpretant (the viewer's understanding) will be very close to the object (the film reality). Stanley Kubrick's last film, *Eyes wide shut* (1999), is an excellent example of the necessity for an understanding of film codes, as well as the importance of not separating visual and aural signs: whenever there is a cut to a new scene, the soundtrack is a fraction of a second ahead of the visuals. This is immediately rectified as soon as the first frame of the new scene appears. This innovative technique will most likely irritate the uninitiated who will regard it as poor editing, but to the viewer with a knowledge of film codes, it reinforces the concept of two characters who are not synchronised, not in tune with each other, and who may be drifting apart - an ingenious way to reinforce the central theme throughout the film.

4.5 Conclusion

By studying film from the point of view of interpretative semiotics, it is possible to state that

- 4.5.1 A sign (visual and aural components) refers to an object (image). The idea that the sign engenders in the viewer, is the interpretant.
- 4.5.2 The sign consists of a signifier and a signified. In film the signifier and signified virtually look and sound the same.
- 4.5.3 The meaning of the film sign also can be divided into denotative and connotative aspects, although there is no clear distinction between these.
- 4.5.4 The paradigmatic and syntagmatic representation of the sign influences its meaning.

4.5.5 Just as one learns to read any written text, one has to learn to read the *film as text* in order to complete the process of intellection as far as possible.

En résumé

It is vital for the subtitler to be able to read a film correctly (i.e. to know how to interpret the signs), as this will greatly influence his/her understanding of the film. In the first instance, this will enhance his/her own understanding of the film, therefore making it possible to create a better quality subtitle. However, it will also enhance his/her understanding of other viewers' comprehension of the film, thereby enabling him/her to determine what information should be conveyed by the subtitle for understanding of the film by a foreign language viewer.

It is important to remember that "[s]ubtitles are not a replacement of anything, but an addition to a film – they form an overlay" (Hofstadter, 1997:159). As an addition to the film, subtitles can easily become a barrier between the viewer and the film, keeping the viewer so busy (either by providing too much information, thereby causing overload, or too little to be intelligible, thereby causing the viewer to speculate on what is going on) that s/he is unable to read the non-linguistic signs of the film. However, if the subtitler knows within what system the subtitles will have to function, and if the subtitler understands this system, s/he will be much better equipped to produce successful subtitles.

Chapter 5 will combine the semiotics of film and the semiotics of translation into a working theory for the subtitler. The aim of this theory is to enable the production of a subtitle that represents (as far as possible) the full meaning-deployment of the film sign for the viewer who does not understand the source language of the film.

CHAPTER 5 : A PROPOSED THEORY F OR SUBTITLING

5.1 *Semiotic comparison between translation and film*

It has already been established that both language and film can be considered as semiotic systems. Subtitling is done at the interface of these two systems and a comparison between them will reveal similarities and differences that might impact on the subtitling process.

Returning to our definition of *translation* (of which subtitling is a special type) in Chapter 3:

[t]ranslation does not involve comparing a language (or any other semiotic system) with another language or semiotic system; it involves passing from text 'a', elaborated according to semiotic system 'A', into text 'b', elaborated according to semiotic system 'B' (Eco & Nergaard, 1998:221),

it is obvious that semiotics is eminently suited to the study of subtitling, especially where dealing with passing from one semiotic system to another.

In Chapter 3 translation was examined with reference to the model of Interpretative Semiotics, as elaborated by Charles Peirce. Three basic elements were identified, namely the object, sign, and interpretant in translation. In Chapter 4, the "language" of film was investigated, and the object, sign and interpretant in this particular semiotic system were identified.

This information can be summarised as follows:

<i>Semiotic element:</i>	Translation:	Film:
<i>Object</i>	Textual reality	Textual reality
<i>Sign</i>	Source text	Visual and aural signs
<i>Interpretant</i>	Target text	Viewer interpretation

This breakdown requires closer examination:

The object in translation constitutes the textual reality. The object of a semiotic study of literature is not the words on the page, but the text. The words are merely signifiers, with a signified meaning, but what they refer to is the text or the object. It is the full content, and only that, of what is represented by the sign as it exists in this particular semiotic system. This particular semiotic system is language, more particularly the specific language in which it has been elaborated.

In film, the object is also a textual reality.²³ It is the full content of the image (including aural aspects). The film reality is more than the sum total of the aural and visual signs. It is the deepest and fullest level on which the film exists within the semiotic system of the film. It is the reality to which the signs refer, and these signs are eventually interpreted to yield an interpretant (meaning).

The sign in translation is the source text. It is language (spoken or written), and it is elaborated within the general framework of language (made up of words, sentences, etc.), but also within the more restricted code of the specific language in which it is written. It makes use of certain devices (rhyme, imagery, typography, and so forth) to convey the fullest possible meaning of the object.

In film, the sign is both visual and aural. It is what the filmmaker uses in order to convey the fullest possible meaning of the film reality to the viewer and is constructed according to specific film codes (and sometimes by breaking these codes). The sign includes, *inter alia*, the composition of a shot (what is physically present/absent), sound effects, dialogue, camera work, etc.

The interpretant in translation is the target text, although this in turn becomes a new sign with a new interpretant, as soon as the translation is read and interpreted by someone. In film, the interpretant is the meaning the film assumes in the mind of the viewer: the mental image of the film reality as represented by the film signs.

For the purpose of this study, it is important to understand that the translation process can be presented as follows:

²³

See Chandler (1994): "Semioticians commonly refer to films, television and radio programmes, advertising posters and so on as 'texts'. [...] Media such as television and film are regarded by some semioticians as being like 'languages'."

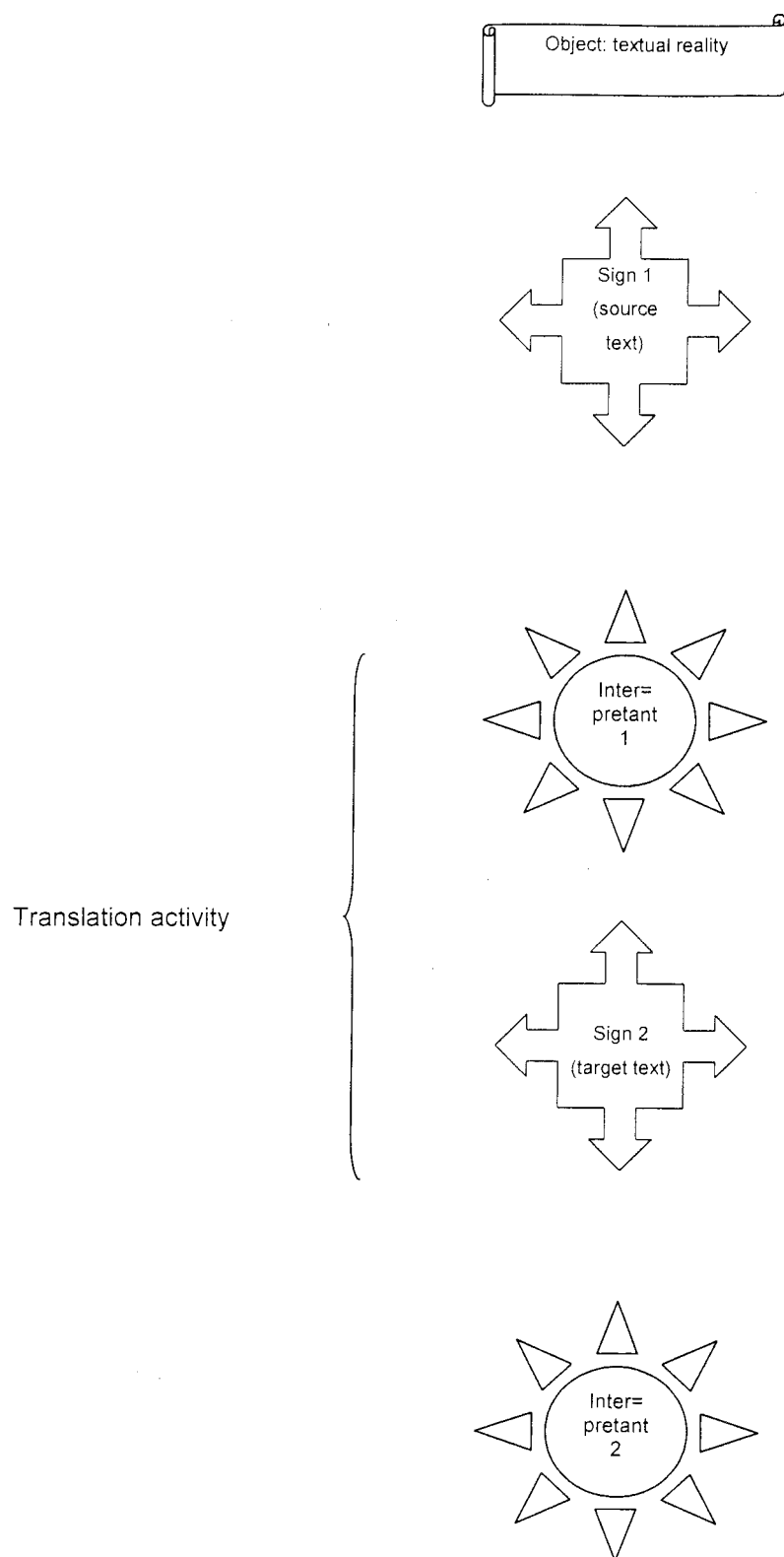


Figure 5.1 Interpretative semiotic view of translation process

As mentioned earlier, the object in translation is the textual reality. This object is referred to by the linguistic sign (the source text). The source text is read and interpreted. This idea about the object which is evoked by the sign, is the interpretant. In the case of translation, this is the meaning the translator attributes to the text in the source language. For the purpose of this study, this comprehension will be called the first interpretant or Interpretant 1. This, however, is not yet the end of the translation process; in fact, it is only the beginning. In order to complete the translation process, the sign has to pass from one language to another, and possibly even from one semiotic system to another (as in the case of subtitling where spoken language is changed to written language). Therefore, a new sign is born (to use a Peircean expression) from the interpretant, and this sign is the target text, or Sign 2. The purpose of Sign 2, however, is to describe or refer to the original object for the benefit of a foreign language speaker. Just as Sign 1 should be the fullest possible representation of the object in order for Interpretant 1 to be as close to the object as possible, so Sign 2 should be the fullest possible representation of Sign 1 (and thus the object), albeit in a different language (or semiotic system). This will ensure that the full (meaning and formalistic) potential of Sign 1 unfurls in Interpretant 2, because it was successfully conveyed by Sign 2. In mathematical terms, this equivalence²⁴ can be represented as follows: Object = Sign 1 = Interpretant 1 = Sign 2. In the case of Object > Sign 2 or Object < Sign 2, equivalence is lacking. In this instance, the process has to be retraced, i.e. the translator should return to Interpretant 1 to determine whether the meaning of Sign 1 does indeed represent the Object. An incomplete or incorrect understanding of Sign 1 could be at the root of the problem. However, should this not be the case, the translator should continue to elaborate options (investigate other translation solutions) until equivalence (Object = Sign 2) or the closest possible solution, has been found.

5.2 *Aim of subtitling theory*

The aim with the process of providing a theory for subtitling is to propose a possible way that could lead to the production/creation of a subtitle (Sign 2) that is as close as possible to the source text (Sign 1) and therefore, to the dynamical object of this sign.

The absence of a coherent theory guiding subtitling²⁵ is painfully evident in the varying quality of subtitles produced. According to Hofstadter (1997:159) it is more the exception than the rule to

²⁴ See chapter 3 for a detailed discussion on equivalence.

²⁵ See Chapter 2.

find subtitles that are well done. The difference in quality is not so much in the formal aspects, as in the measure to which they contribute or fail to contribute significantly to the completion of the intellection process in the mind of the foreign-language viewer. It has already been noted that what is presented as subtitling theory, is more often than not a list of guidelines and conventions regarding external subtitling output.²⁶ On the surface, these theories share many characteristics (number of characters per line recommended, number of lines allowed, display time, etc.), but these are all **external** factors and are primarily based on research in fields such as psychology, sociology and anthropology. It goes without saying that these characteristics are important, but they can be superimposed on any subtitle to make it fit formal constraints, although there may be no question of *equivalent effect* between the subtitle and source text.²⁷ In other words, forcing a certain number of words into the strictures of these constraints may ensure that the subtitle is legible and easy to follow, but it offers no guidance to the subtitler to allow for the creation of a subtitle that also adheres to **translational** requirements.

As has already been noted, the main criterion for a good translation is that it shares identity with the source text (equivalence).²⁸ However, in the instance of subtitling as a special form of translation, a particular type of equivalence is required: it is not the one-to-one equivalence of the semantic translation,²⁹ because this is logically impossible due to physical and physiological constraints. The type of equivalence required in subtitling, is *equivalent effect*. This means that equivalence will not primarily be judged on formal aspects (number of words, semantic relations, etc.), but rather on the question of whether the subtitle, within the formal constraints within which it functions, has the same effect on the viewer as the spoken word on the soundtrack.³⁰ (In order to demonstrate to what extent subtitling differs from translation proper, reference has already been made in Chapter 3 to the back-translation test and the fact that the back-translation of the subtitle will not yield the exact dialogue on the soundtrack. However, the back-translation of the subtitle should still have the same effect as the spoken word.)

This is then the main area that will be addressed by the proposed theory for subtitling: how to obtain equivalent effect between subtitle and dialogue. This is also the one area of subtitling that

²⁶ See Chapter 2.

²⁷ *Equivalent effect* is the term used by Newmark (1988) to describe the phenomenon where the translation has the same impact as the source text. See also Jin (1997:270):

[A] translator devoted to his art will always manage to find various possible renderings which would produce effects more or less similar to those of the original. A happy solution will be reached when he has given full play to his creative power while utilizing all the resources at his command and come to a version which he judges to be the closest approximation to the original.

²⁸ See Chapter 3.

²⁹ See Newmark (1981).

³⁰ See Dorothy Kenny (1998:77-80) for a very enlightening article on the various notions regarding equivalence in current translation theory.

has not yet been addressed in existing theories, undoubtedly because it is that part of the process which is the most difficult to measure, break down into steps and explain. **The theory for subtitling proposed in this dissertation will endeavour to describe a production process that will ensure maximum identification (equivalent effect) between Sign 1 and Sign 2.** This means that the contents and form of Interpretant 2 are, as far as possible, similar to those of Interpretant 1. The problem will be approached from the point of view of interpretative semiotics, which has already been applied individually to both translation and film.³¹ Of course, in the quest for equivalent effect, one should bear in mind what both Peirce and Eco refer to as *unlimited semiosis*, or the possible continuation and evolutionary aspect of the process, i.e. the fact that the ideal translation and absolute equivalence are unattainable. The proposed theory for subtitling will pay special attention to the role of the subtitler and the process of creation of a subtitle. The theory will further be extrapolated to provide guidelines for the subtitler, and will also address areas such as the testing and formal appearance of the subtitle.

5.3 *Proposed theory for subtitling*

5.3.1 *Role of the subtitler*

The particular translation activity called subtitling takes place in a very specific area. It occurs within the larger framework of the film, forms part of the semiotic system of the film and must therefore be compatible and adhere to film codes. However, it is also a translation activity which takes place outside the film, and in this sense it will be governed by linguistic codes.

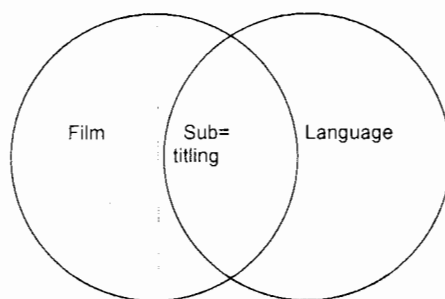


Figure 5.2 Subtitling

³¹ See Chapters 3 and 4.

Although the activity of subtitling requires of the subtitler a thorough understanding of film signs, the information gathered in this way remains part of the semiotic system of the film and is not in any way incorporated into, or commented upon, by the linguistic translation. The subtitler is not a film critic. The duty of the subtitler is to convey foreign-language material in the film to the viewer in such a way that the target language (TL) viewer will (ideally) have the opportunity to experience the full complexity of the film signs that a source language (SL) speaker would have experienced. The subtitler does not interpret film signs for the viewer – s/he facilitates the passing of signs from one language to another.³²

In order to achieve equivalence between the Sign 1 and Sign 2, the subtitler attempts to re-create the full meaning-potential of Sign 1 to Sign 2. The subtitler refrains from interpreting any film sign that is not strictly linguistic – the viewer does not require any assistance with this. These signs are not linguistically bound and therefore not influenced by the fact that the viewer is a foreign language speaker. These systems are interpreted (read) according to different rules, and it is assumed that the viewer knows these rules.

5.3.2 The subtitling process

5.3.2.1 The film as artefact

The beginning of the subtitling process is the film. The film is an artefact. It is a complete, well-rounded creation. The film is a work of art, created by the filmmaker and embodying its object through signs arranged according to the rules or the codes applicable to film.

The signs are visual and aural. The filmmaker tells a story by using visual and aural signs. These signs include linguistic elements. Aural linguistic signs may include dialogue (spoken language), while aural non-linguistic signs may refer to something like the sound of, for example, a wolf howling. Although most visual elements are non-linguistic, they may include visual elements such as lettering on a signpost.

³²

The only exception to this rule is subtitling for the deaf and hearing-impaired where sound effects (such as a gunshot) are also subtitled to make this part of the sign accessible to the viewer.

Gottlieb (1998:245) refers to these four different types of signs as **channels**, and defines them as follows:

- the verbal auditory channel, including dialogue, background voices and sometimes lyrics,
- the non-verbal auditory channel, including music, natural sound and sound effects
- the verbal visual channel, including superimposed titles and written signs on the screen
- and the non-verbal visual channel: picture composition and flow.

This breakdown is very useful to explain the various components of a film or television programme that need to be considered by the subtitler. In semiotic terms, one can say that these channels are used to convey signs to the interpreter (subtitler or viewer).

The film is self-contained. It is destined for viewers with an SL capability (hypothetical capability as proficiency varies depending on factors such as education, social position, age, etc.). An average viewer of the group for which it is destined should be able to complete the intellection process by **forming an interpretant, based on** the visual and aural **sign**, including linguistic signs, **which shares identity with (is equivalent to) the object**. In order for the interpretant to be equivalent to the object, it needs to unleash the full meaning-potential of the sign. The moment the viewer enters the equation, s/he becomes the co-creator. The process of creation culminates in the participation of the viewer, which allows the sign to mature and bear fruit, thereby reaching its full potential and maximum reference to the object and completing the process of intellection.

5.3.2.2 The foreign-language (FL) film

The above is a description of a situation when a (first-language) speaker of language A views a film in which all linguistic elements are also drawn from language A, and s/he is therefore able to interpret all or most of these signs.

However, the situation changes significantly in the case of a (first-language) speaker of language B watching a film in language A. If the language B speaker does not understand language A, the linguistic signs will not be accessible to him/her. This means that the full meaning of the film sign will not reach him/her and the object of the film will remain partially obscured. If the speaker has a

limited knowledge of language B (for example, as a second or third language), s/he will only have partial access to the linguistic signs. S/he will understand more than someone who has no knowledge of the language, but this is still not enough to allow the film sign (which includes the linguistic component) to come to full fruition.

5.3.2.3 Subtitling

This void can be bridged by subtitling if the subtitle succeeds in unlocking the linguistic potential of the linguistic signs in the foreign language so that they become accessible to FL speakers. The nature of the subtitle is not explanatory. If one compares the impact of the original linguistic item to an explosion, the subtitle with equivalent effect will not be a **description** of the explosion but an **explosion** itself. And the second explosion (subtitle) will have the same impact, i.e. equivalent effect, as that of the first explosion.

One also has to bear in mind that language can be used for many purposes. Just as an explosion can be used to destroy, to open up, to warn, etc., language can be used to divert, describe, obscure or lie (it has already been mentioned that this is one of Eco's favourite definitions of a sign – anything that can be used to lie). The subtitle with equivalent effect will therefore not only trigger the right *size* of explosion in the mind of the viewer, but also the right **type** of explosion for the particular purpose. Gottlieb (1998:247) describes subtitling as an act where "...the speech act is always in focus; intentions and effects are more important than isolated lexical elements". This is congruent with Luyken's (1991:156) remark that subtitling "...is much less concerned with the words of the speaker than with the [?] of what the speaker wanted to say". In other words, in subtitling, the subtitler will not attempt to reach equivalent effect by closely following the semantic structure of the dialogue, but rather by attempting to render the equivalent effect of that dialogue within the constraints that govern subtitles.

5.3.2.4 First introduction of subtitler to the film

The first introduction of the subtitler to the film is in his/her capacity as a first-language speaker. S/he experiences the film in its full potential. Visual and aural signs are interpreted bearing in mind the codes according to which they were elaborated. Because of the subtitler's high degree of proficiency in the source language of the film, s/he has full, or as close to this as is humanly

possible, access to the meaning of linguistic items. The subtitler is also in a position to understand the specific film codes that are used, because s/he is "cinemate" (as Monaco calls the viewer who is literate in "reading" films). The first introduction to the film is an attentive viewing to experience the film as a whole and to its fullest possible capacity. It has nothing to do with dissecting, but can be compared to the mimetic reading of a work of literature: it entails experiencing the text as it is presented, in the order that it is presented.

5.3.2.5 Translation/subtitling: Contractual semiosis and the Peircean stages of the interpretant

This first viewing is followed by a more serious examination of the film.³³ This can be compared to the second reading of a literary text, where a conscious attempt is made to understand the relationship between the various signs in order to increase understanding and appreciation of the text (i.e. to complete the process of intellection). The aim of this re-reading or re-viewing is to enable the subtitler to interpret Sign 1 (the film text) optimally, in order to be able to create a subtitle (Sign 2) that has **equivalent effect**. This term has already been described as the result of shared identity (equivalence) between Sign 1 (source text) and Sign 2 (target text). In using these terms, the problem remains that **shared identity** and **equivalence** are not qualities that can be easily measured or quantified. Determining the equivalence or equivalent effect between source and target text remains a subjective matter, for it entails more than the conveying of information, and can be sub-divided into at least three types of equivalence, namely qualitative, referential and signification. Of these three, referential equivalence is probably the most easily measurable, by answering the question: do these two texts refer to the same dynamical object? However, both qualitative and signification forms of equivalence are largely subjective, because they involve subjective aspects such as style, pre-knowledge, and so forth.

Gorlée (1994:197-223) proposes to solve this dilemma by using the Peircean idea of contractual semiosis. Although the idea of a contract cannot be fully transposed onto translation, there are some useful analogies that may help the subtitler to attain a greater degree of equivalence and therefore produce a subtitle with greater equivalence of effect (the aim of this theory).

³³

Refer to the first point of the Code of Best Subtitling Practice. It is exactly because the subtitler will have to view and review the text as many times as is necessary to unlock the meaning-potential of the film signs that this is recommended.

In a contractual relationship, there are two parties involved, namely a promisor and a promisee. The contract is a document which describes a previously agreed-upon arrangement between promisor and promisee. Fulfilment means that the conditions of the contract are executed. Bearing in mind that the basic nature of the contract is *quid pro quo* (this for that), it is always a two-way action that is taking place.

In semiotic terms, the object can be described as that which is referred to by the contract (the intention of the contract), the contract is the sign and the result of the contract is the interpretant. When all three are on par, there is a perfect triadic semiotic relationship. In natural language, the object will be the reality, the sign will be the language used (utterance, sentence) and the interpretant will be the idea that results from the sign. However, in natural language, there is also the question of the *utterer* and the *receiver*,³⁴ the utterer being the originator of the sign and the receiver being the recipient thereof. If the receiver interprets the sign emitted by the utterer in such a way that the message of the sender is understood perfectly (i.e. the interpretant is close to the object), the contractual obligations of the speech act have been fulfilled. However, if the interpretant is far removed from the object, the process is repeated until this distance has disappeared, which would signify full deployment of the meaning-potential of the sign and fulfilment of the contractual potential of the speech act.³⁵

Peirce did not place much emphasis on the utterer and the receiver, although he did make some allowance for these in calling them "quasi-minds". This concession is the result of the logical deduction that an utterance (sign) must originate somewhere, and, in order for it to deploy its meaning-potential (to become an interpretant) it must be received by something.

When one applies this to translation, the process can be described as follows: the utterer (author of source text) produces Sign 1 (source text) which has an object (text reality) and which is eventually interpreted (Interpretant 1) by the translator in order to be able create Sign 2 (target text) which is then in turn interpreted (Interpretant 2) by the reader/viewer (as represented in Figure 5.1).

³⁴ Terms used by Peirce.

³⁵ For the purpose of this study, the subject is literary texts and the point of departure is the premise that the full meaning-potential of the sign is equivalent to the object. It is assumed that the sign used to refer to the object is valid and that there is no discrepancy between the two. Therefore, the current study will not investigate any of the phenomena that occur in natural speech where the meaning-potential of the sign is *different* from the intended meaning by the utterer.

This whole process seems rather simple, except that the passing from Interpretant 1 to Sign 2 (target text) is not as simple as this. This can be explained by reverting to the comparison between translation and the contract. In order for the contractual potential/obligation of Sign 1 to be fulfilled, the idea formed by the final reader/viewer (Interpretant 2) needs to be a full deployment of the meaning-potential of Sign 1 (i.e. Interpretant 2 = Sign 2 = Interpretant 1 = Sign 1 = Object). In other words, when the reader reads Sign 2 (target text), the idea that takes shape in his/her mind (Interpretant 2), must be equivalent to the object or textual reality. If this has occurred, the contractual obligations of the semiotic act have been fulfilled and equivalent effect has been achieved.

This is easier said than done, because the viewer does not receive the sign directly as it was produced by the author of the original sign. S/he receives it as a sign in a different semiotic system, the conversion of which was facilitated by the translator. The translator is not the author of the sign, s/he is the medium through which it passes in order to reach the (FL) viewer. In Peircean terms, the translator is addressed by the sign, instead of the translator addressing the sign. Again one needs to stress that the aim of the translator is to render in his/her translation (Sign 2) the full meaning-potential of Sign 1 although transferring it from one semiotic system to another, without adding to or subtracting from the said meaning-potential.

The process of achieving maximum equivalent effect between Sign 1 and Sign 2 can be described as follows: firstly, the translator has a first introduction to the text. However, this is a horizontal reading/viewing and does not allow for the exploration of inter-sign relationships. After this first introduction, the subtitler returns to the text for a more in-depth study and to explore the full meaning-potential of signs. With each successive reading/viewing, some interpretants will change. This is what Peirce refers to as "the three interpretants",³⁶ the first interpretant being the tentative or impromptu translation, the second interpretant where first interpretants are subjected to testing to ascertain whether they indeed represent a full deployment of the meaning-potential of the sign, and the third interpretant which is the "...near-perfect solution with which semiosis to all intents and purposes comes to a (possible temporary) logical standstill" (Gorlée, 1994:187).

However, in reality there may be more or less than three interpretants. Sometimes the immediate response of the translator to the source text (his first translation) proves to be equivalent in effect, and sometimes there will be many more interpretants (possible translations that are dissected and tested and discarded) before the (near-)perfect translation is found. The three interpretants of

³⁶

See Chapter 3.

Peirce actually refer to phases in the process of translation: conception and testing of possibilities, discarding of those that are unsuccessful and retaining of the most successful possibilities. These are the steps required to ensure that there will eventually be equivalence in effect between Sign 1 and Sign 2.

In order to incorporate this into the diagrammatic representation of the translation process, it is adapted as follows:

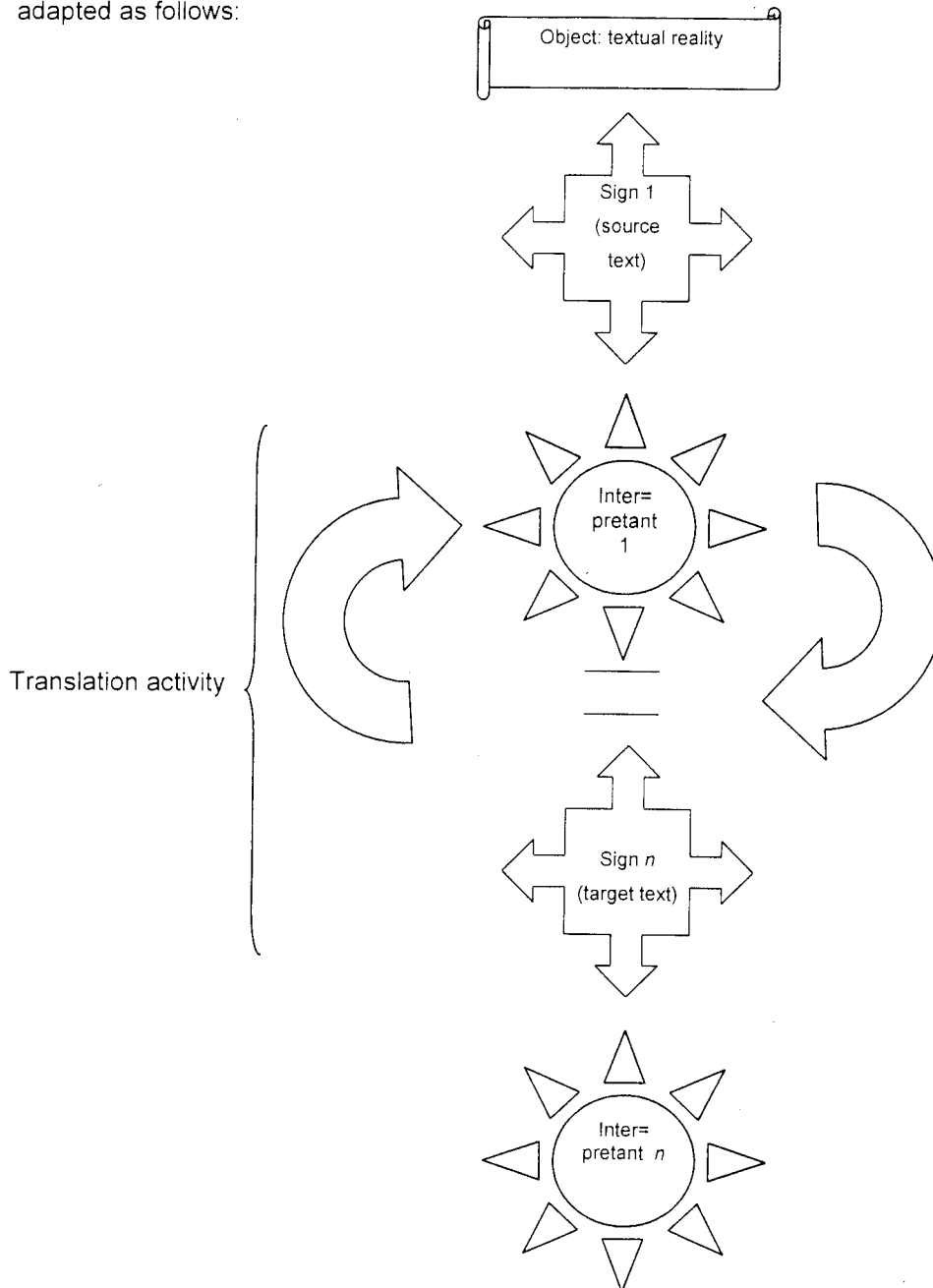


Figure 5.3 Interpretative semiotic view of contractual semiosis in the translation process

The revised diagrammatic representation of the translation process takes into account that there should be contractual equivalence between source text and target text, and that this might not be achieved with the first translation attempt.

As indicated in Figure 5.1, one begins with the object which is the textual reality. This textual reality is referred to by Sign 1 (the source text), which sign comes to full fruition in Interpretant 1, when the interpretant is similar to the object. In this particular instance, it will mean that the translator has interpreted the source text correctly and has accessed the full meaning-potential. Interpretant 1 then gives birth to Sign 2 (the target text) which is interpreted in turn. The translation process is indicated by the arrow on the right. However, in order to ensure that the final Interpretant n is a qualified interpretant of Sign 1 and therefore similar to the object, Sign n should be tested against Interpretant 1, which stands for the optimal realisation of the full meaning-potential of Sign 1 (source text). This process of testing (dissecting) is symbolised by the arrow on the left. If the meaning-potentials of the two signs are not contractually equivalent, the process recommences and a new sign is generated by the translator until s/he is satisfied that Sign n is of equivalent effect (embodies the full meaning-potential of the original sign).

The testing of signs generated by the translator (Peirce's second interpretant) requires closer examination. According to Peirce, this is where the more or less lucky initial guesses of the translator are tested to ascertain whether they represent the full meaning-potential of the original sign. The comparison of the contract again comes in handy, because it provides a framework within which to explain the equivalence of effect required between Sign n and Sign 1. It is also useful to employ Peirce's term of the "quasi-mind", because this particular type of contractual semiosis takes place in the mind of one person (the translator), whereas a normal contract is concluded between different persons or bodies. Therefore, in a normal communicative situation, the contractual potential is fulfilled when the receiver unlocks the full meaning-potential of the sign produced by the utterer and which refers to a specific object. This obviously does not describe the translation process, because it would mean that the process ends with full deployment of the meaning-potential of the sign in the mind of the translator.

However, Goriée explains that this theory can in fact be used to describe the translation process adequately, if one incorporates the notion of the "quasi-mind". In doing so, one is able to say that the sign is received by the "quasi-mind" of the interpreter (becomes an interpretant). This interpretant becomes a sign which is then in turn re-interpreted by the translator (using his/her

other "quasi-mind", as it were) in order to pursue the semiotic process until Interpretant *n* has been reached. Goriée (1994:220-1) states that

[I]ike the contractual relation, the semiotic structure of translational phenomena is rooted in a form of social organisation, namely in dialogue. To be sure, translation implies a rather rudimentary dialogue, namely the inner dialogue of self with self, the ongoing dialogic interaction, within the translator, between the interpreter (receiver, sign-user) and the utterer (emitter, signmaker). Peirce said that "all deliberate meditation, or thinking proper, takes the form of a dialogue. The person divides himself into two parties which endeavour to persuade each other" [...]

... [I]n translation the utterer [...] and the interpreter [...] must not only be considered marginal to the action of the sign; more characteristically, in translation they are both conflated into one, the translator's mind, who fulfils both actions alternately.

The theory of continuously testing interpretants against signs seems to be the most logical explanation of how equivalence of effect is obtained in translation. Instead of attempting to quantify the degree of equivalence between source and target text, it looks at the process of translation and the route which should be taken to ensure maximum equivalence of effect or, in Toury's terms: an acceptable rather than merely adequate level of equivalence.

If this theory is true for translation, it should also hold for subtitling which is a special type of translation. Once again, the model of contractual semiosis in the translation process can be used to describe this.

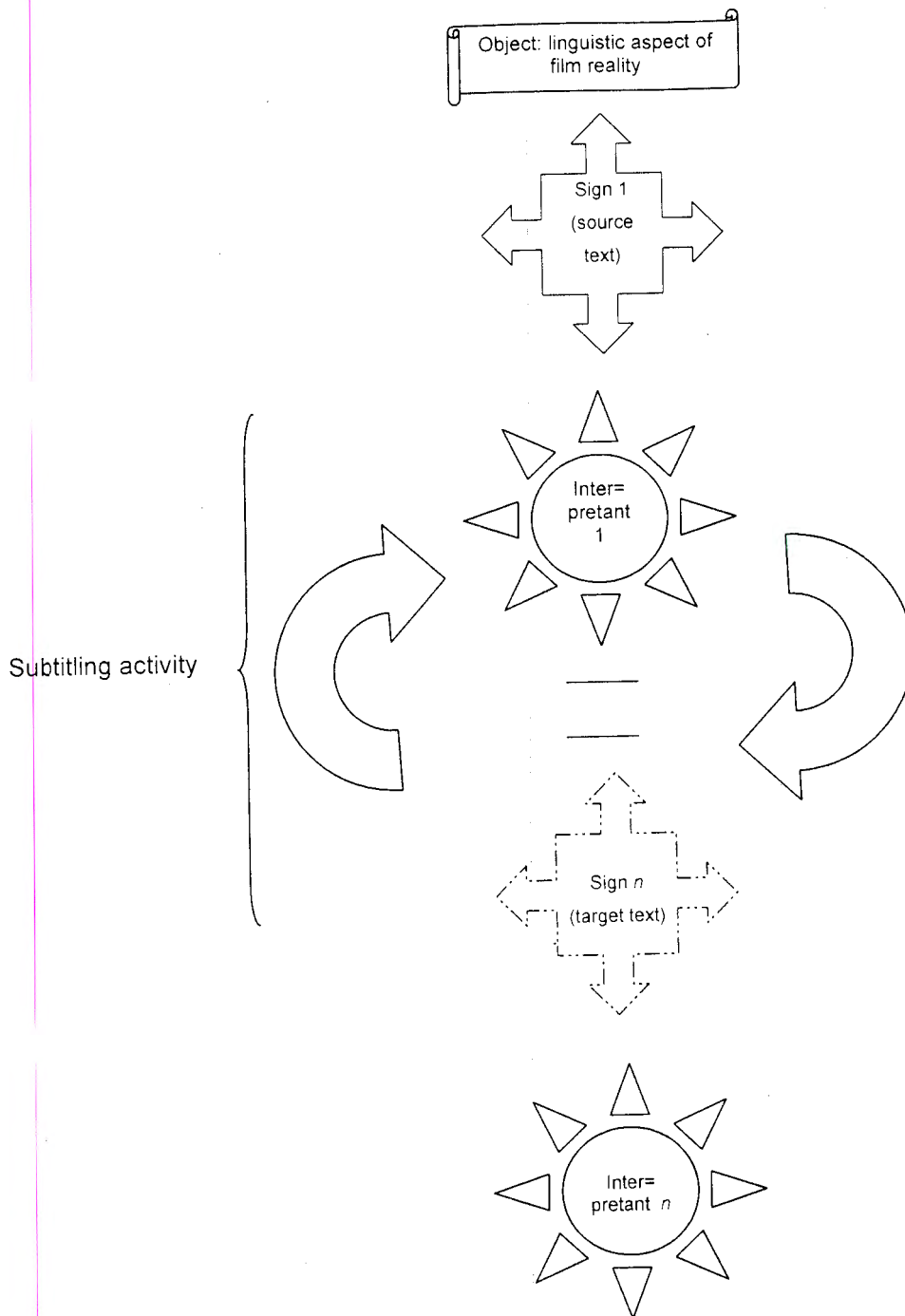


Figure 5.4 Interpretative semiotic view of contractual semiosis in subtitling process

In the subtitling process, the object is some or other linguistic aspect of the film reality, in most instances, the dialogue. The subtitler is introduced to the dialogue when s/he watches the film,

but also by means of a final script which is handed to the subtitler. Gottlieb (1998:245) states that "[c]inema subtitlers normally work from paper to paper, translating dialogue from a post-production script, the end product being a list of subtitles". Whereas this description gives some insight into the procedure followed by subtitlers, it neglects the very important aspect of subtitling as **translation within the context of film**. Translation proper is done from one written text to another; subtitling, however, entails passing from one semiotic system (spoken language) to another (written language), all within the semiotic framework of the film. Therefore it is imperative that the subtitler is introduced to the linguistic item within the context of the film and that the production script is merely used as reference (cf. the first point of the subtitling code, Chapter 1).

It is impossible for the subtitler to grasp the full meaning-potential of the sign if this is not within the context of the paradigmatic and syntagmatic choices that were made in the film. One of the basic precepts of semiotics is that no sign can be interpreted out of context, and that the sign will have a different meaning in a different context. The film is a system of signs, and signs acquire a particular meaning within this system: the subtitler who attempts to work from a paper script as basic text is not only presumptuous, but attempts the impossible. In the absence of the film as text, the subtitler will have to infer what the optimal meaning-potential of a sign is. Given the importance of matters such as camera angle, colour, line, etc. the dialogue list is the tip of the iceberg of semiotic interaction in the film.

Therefore, although the object of subtitling is focused on the linguistic elements of the film text, this object cannot be seized or grasped in isolation from other film signs. The subtitler is the receiver of these signs – all the film signs elaborated according to film codes.³⁷ S/he does not immediately obliterate all other signs and pounce on linguistic aspects because this is what brings home the bacon. The subtitler attentively explores all film signs and interprets the whole. In order to be able to interpret the whole, s/he is in the first instance a normal viewer who reads the film and will receive maximum benefit if as many signs as possible are allowed to reach their full meaning-potential in the interpretant. Given the complexity of film signs, it is unlikely that this will be attained during the course of a first viewing, and the ideal is therefore to watch the film as many times as required for the interpretant to come as close as possible to the object. This will obviously be dictated by the degree of complexity of the specific film.

The most important signs and codes used in film were discussed in detail in Chapter 4. It is imperative for the subtitler to be *au fait* with these. In fact, the subtitler distinguishes him-/herself

³⁷

The term **film codes** (instead of **filmic codes**) will be used to be consistent with the use of **film signs**.

from the ordinary translator by being highly cinematic. S/he will in particular pay attention to the following aspects of the specific semiotic system known as film:

- the short-circuit nature of signs in films, i.e. the fact that signifier and signified closely resemble one another as opposed to natural language
- the lack of a basic unit (like the word in language) which makes it impossible to describe this system quantitatively
- the connotative and denotative aspects of signs
- paradigmatic and syntagmatic choices (*mise en scène* and *montage*)
- cultural influences
- various film codes according to which signs have been arranged, including the following:
 - (i) aspect ratio
 - (ii) open and closed form
 - (iii) geographic and depth planes
 - (iv) proximity and proportion
 - (v) form, line, colour
 - (vi) texture
 - (vii) lighting
 - (viii) relation of camera to subject
 - (ix) length of shot
 - (x) *montage* rhythm, etc.

Once the subtitler has interpreted the totality of the film signs in (or as closely possible to) the way in which the "ideal viewer" would have done, s/he can get to work on the specific linguistic aspects of the film, all the while working with these signs within the context of the film.

Following the rhythm of the film, the subtitler identifies speech units and spots (where subtitles are to be inserted) in the film. The subtitler should have a thorough knowledge of how many characters, lines, etc. can be used per subtitle, as well as the level of lexical complexity that can be managed by the average reader in his/her target group. Much research has already been

done in this respect,³⁸ although it will certainly vary from one group to another. At this stage, the average used in the Western world is 35 characters per line. The number of characters per line not only influences the actual translation (because this number serves as one of the constraints within which the subtitle is to be produced), but also the spotting which eventually determines how the information contained in Sign 1 (spoken and written language) of the film will be rendered as Sign *n* (subtitles). Of course, **information** in no way implies that this is the sole type of equivalent effect required between dialogue and subtitle – I have already referred to others types of equivalence (qualitative and signification) that also need to be taken into consideration.

Once the subtitler has identified the respective speech units, and with the help of the script, s/he then sets out to translate the speech units to create the subtitles. The creation of subtitles is, however, a very special type of translation, as it entails creating a linguistic equivalent for a **spoken** utterance in language A into a **written** form in language B, where physical screen space and reading speed dictates that in order to convey the same information, the written form has to be more concentrated than the spoken form. Therefore, some form of external reduction is required, without losing equivalence of effect that would lead to a watered-down version of the original. This reduction that is required is central to the art of subtitling. There is no recipe or formula that can be applied, and the main criterion for a successful subtitle remains that it must have equivalence of effect with the source text, i.e. the reduction required cannot be used as mitigating circumstance to justify an ineffective subtitle (although many attempts have been made to do so).

The translation process in subtitling is thus peculiar in the sense that the target text needs to be more concentrated than the source text, but also because it involves passing from one semiotic system (spoken language as represented in film dialogue) to written language, representing spoken language, but nevertheless bound by the conventions of written language.

For this reason, it is to be expected that in subtitling there will be more activity in the area between Interpretant 1 and Subtitle *n*, than might normally be expected in translation. The formal constraints are narrower, there is a reduction in form, yet the quest for optimal equivalence of effect on the qualitative, referential and signification levels remains unaltered.

³⁸

See Karamitoglou (1998) for more information.

As in the case of translation proper, the subtitler often has an initial solution to the problem, an initial subtitle. This subtitle (sign) is measured against Interpretant 1 to ascertain whether it represents full deployment of the meaning-potential of the Sign 1 (the source text). Should the sign pass the test, it exits the translation cycle and becomes Subtitle *n*, which in turn gives birth to Interpretant *n* which is equivalent to the meaning-potential of Sign 1. Should this not be the case, the subtitle (Sign *n*-x) is referred back to the original Interpretant 1, and more contractual semiosis takes place to fully deploy the meaning-potential of Sign 1, until Sign *n* eventually represents equivalence on all levels with Sign 1. This would then represent the subtitle with an effect that is 100% equivalent to that of Sign 1, at which point semiosis would come to a standstill, but, as already pointed out, this remains an ideal and is in practice never fully attainable. The subtitler has as his/her ultimate goal to achieve full equivalence of effect between Sign 1 and Sign *n*, although s/he is conscious of the fact that this is an unending process and that reality forces one to put an end to this process at a point where there is as little distance as is humanly possible between these two signs. This would also represent the point where Interpretant *n* is closest to the object. Absolute equivalence is hard to imagine in a system where one not only passes from one language to another, but also from one semiotic system to another, and the **subtitle with equivalent effect** will be the one where there is least distance between Interpretant *n* and the object.

In subtitling, the difference between the target and source text will mainly be quantitative. Spoken language is received by the (first-language) receiver at a much more rapid pace than written language (measured in terms of words). This implies that the subtitler has fewer words to effect the same impact in Sign *n* than would have been the result of Sign 1 on a first-language speaker. This constraint limits the options available to the subtitler, which is why subtitling requires someone with exceptional knowledge of the target language to be able to find a semiotic equivalent for Sign 1, in spite of the external constraints and the reduction required. To revert to the metaphor of the explosion: the subtitler wants to cause an explosion with Sign *n* which is similar to the explosion caused by Sign 1. The function/aim of the two explosions is the same and one requires the same size of explosion. However, the subtitler will be forced to use a different (stronger) type of explosive in Sign *n* than was used in Sign 1, because external physical constraints force him to do so.

This metaphor is especially valid bearing in mind that the translation process (and therefore the subtitling process) in the current study is not seen as a case of erosion until (in one's opinion) only the most significant characteristics remain, which are then transferred to the translation. Rather, Sign *n* (target text) is regarded as the full deployment of the total meaning-potential of

Sign 1 (source text), albeit in a different semiotic system which is elaborated according to different codes than the original.

This acceptance of the unattainability of absolute one-to-one equivalence between Sign 1 and Sign *n* may seem pessimistic, but it is also optimistic, because it is a direct consequence of the continuous evolution of mankind and the signs and systems used by mankind. Just as one can never assume that a new world record for the mile represents the fastest time that will ever be recorded by a human being for that distance, it is impossible to say that Sign *n* is the ultimate translation of Sign 1. However, within a given context, it is possible to determine which translation represents greater equivalence of effect, and this is eventually the option that will be retained. In ten years' time, one of the other options may be more applicable. Even high status translations like those of the Bible are subject to this and eventually become dated and inaccessible to the average reader. Ultimately, one is only able to produce a subtitle with equivalent effect for the context and time in which the film is interpreted at the time of subtitling. Anything else would be mere speculation.

En résumé

By way of summarising, the proposed theory for subtitling posits the following: the aim of the subtitling process is to create a subtitle that is **equivalent in effect** to linguistic items that are inaccessible to viewers because of their lack of knowledge of the source language. Subtitling is done at the interface of film and translation, and is therefore **subject to the semiotic codes of both film and language**. The linguistic aspects of subtitling cannot be treated in isolation from the film aspects. Therefore, the subtitler shall at all times refer to the film text during the subtitling process, and will only use the dialogue list/script for the purpose of reference. It has to be stressed again that subtitling involves not only the **passing from one language to another** but also the **passing from one semiotic system to another** (oral to written).

In order to obtain equivalent effect between subtitle and source text, the target text (subtitle) is constantly measured against the source text to determine whether it does, in fact, deploy the full meaning-potential of the former. If this is the case, the subtitle is retained; if not, it is discarded and the subtitler returns to the source text to explore it further, and to test his/her interpretant (which gives rise to the new sign) to it. **This process is repeated until, ideally, the target text**

(subtitle) has the equivalent effect of the source text. However, in the creation of the *subtitle*, the subtitler shall bear in mind that subtitles have to function within certain **constraints**. The most notable constraint is that a certain reduction of the source text is required due to the discrepancy between the volume and speed in hearing and reading text.

Therefore, the subtitler shall ensure that the subtitle is concise, but without in any way detracting from the effect of the subtitle. The subtitler shall further ensure that the subtitle adheres to the formal constraints imposed by physical and physiological requirements, such as reading speed, preferred fonts, and so forth. These aspects shall be borne in mind during the creation of the subtitle, as it is of no use to produce a subtitle that is equivalent in effect to the source text, but which cannot be used on-screen. This will ensure that the final product, the "near perfect" subtitle is not only equivalent in effect to the source text, but also accessible to the viewer. In this instance, the value of the subtitle has been proven: it functions as a part of the film sign to make linguistic aspects accessible to the FL viewer, thereby facilitating the intellection process of the film as a whole.

5.4 Guidelines for subtitling

Based on the above theory, certain guidelines will now be deduced allowing the subtitler to consistently produce better subtitles. These guidelines differ from the *Code for Good Subtitling Practice* and *A Proposed Set of Subtitling Standards in Europe* because they are founded on the semiotic approach to film and translation, and do not merely concentrate on technical or formal aspects (the praxis).

- 5.4.1 *View the film at least once on a mimetic level.* The subtitler has to start at the beginning. Before s/he can participate in the signmaking and evaluate equivalence in sign-making, s/he first has to experience the film on the same level as it is experienced by the average first-language viewer.
- 5.4.2 *(Re)view the film until the meaning-potential of all film signs, both linguistic and non-linguistic have been optimally (or as close as possible to this) exploited.* Given the complexity of film signs, the full meaning-potential is seldom revealed upon a first viewing. The subtitler should watch the film until s/he feels that s/he has extensively explored the possible connotative and denotative meanings of all signs extensively. The

subtitler should be certain that s/he understands specific paradigmatic choices in the composition of shots (*mise en scène*), as well as syntagmatic choices in the presentation sequence (*montage*).

- 5.4.3 *Identify speech units by watching the film, and refer to the production script if necessary.* While viewing the film, the subtitler should identify and record speech units. S/he should pay attention to the rhythm and pace of the film and refer to the production script as a control for identified speech units. The subtitler should not rely on the production script as source text for subtitling. This is a watered-down version of the spoken language used in the film and cannot represent the full meaning-potential of linguistic signs as presented on screen.
- 5.4.4 *Spot the film.* By spotting the film, the subtitler identifies the time constraints within which s/he will have to function in the production of a translational equivalent in subtitle form. The subtitler should not attempt to first create subtitles and then force them into straightjackets determined by external constraints, such as available time. Subtitles will appear stilted and this *a posteriori* eroding of subtitles to fit formal constraints is directly opposed to the semiotic proposed where a sign is treated as a *whole*.
- 5.4.5 *Create subtitles for the speech units.* The subtitler should bear in mind that the external constraints imposed on subtitling render it impossible to produce a one-to-one translation in the traditional sense of the word. However, equivalent effect on all three levels (qualitative, referential and signification) is still the objective. As a result, the subtitle is expected to have the same impact and effect as the spoken utterance, and is also subject to the same formal constraints as the spoken utterance (although this cannot be matched as far as quantity is concerned). However, this **does** mean that a subtitle should render the emphatic quality of the source text.
- 5.4.6 *Test subtitles by evaluating equivalence of effect on qualitative, referential and signification levels.* Along with the previous point, this forms the hub of the translational activity in subtitling. The subtitler interprets the linguistic signs, creates a new sign, tests this new sign by comparing it to the original interpretant, and creates a new sign if there is too much discrepancy between Sign 1 and Sign 2. Subtitles are tested for equivalent effect to Sign 1 on qualitative, referential and signification levels.

- 5.4.7 *Ensure that the subtitles adhere to formal and technical requirements.* Having perfected the subtitle, the subtitler is now in a position to pay attention to details such as segmentation of the speech unit (subtitle), font, display time, and so forth.
- 5.4.8 *Know that this is the best solution at the time but that the nature of semiosis determines that there is no ultimate solution.* Bear in mind that the quest for the ultimate subtitle is unending, that the semiosis has only achieved a temporary equilibrium and that the process can recommence at any moment.

5.5 Conclusion

The theory for subtitling proposed in this chapter is based on a semiotic point of view. The subtitle with equivalent effect is equivalent in effect to the source text on a qualitative, referential and signification level. The fact that the subtitler has “fewer words” available to convey the same meaning as the source text, does not mean that certain aspects of the meaning-potential of the original sign (Sign 1) may now be eroded to accommodate this. The full meaning-potential of Sign 1 (source text) should be rendered in Sign 2 (target text). Only through a process of unlimited (continued) semiosis can this be attained (and even so, never fully, although it remains the aim).

Subtitlers will do well to increase their knowledge of subtitling theory, as this will undoubtedly improve their understanding of the process and its requirements, as well as the quality of output. It is clear from the guidelines that the formal qualities of subtitling cannot be ignored, but they are not the core of the subtitling activity and should not be awarded more importance than is their due. The main thrust of the subtitling activity is to create a Sign n which is equivalent in effect to Sign 1, albeit in a different semiotic system.

CHAPTER 6 : APPLICATION OF PROPOSED THEORY FOR SUBTITLING TO THE FILM *CYRANO DE BERGERAC*

This chapter will examine the validity of the proposed theory for subtitling by applying it to three segments from the film *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Three of the best-known and important scenes in the film will be examined in detail, in order to determine to what extent they adhere to the criteria for a **subtitle with equivalent effect**, in other words, whether there is equivalence of effect between Sign 1 (source text) and Sign 2 (target text).

In order to determine the degree of equivalence between Sign 1 and Sign 2, the first step will be to discuss the specific film signs that are used in each scene. Within the context of film signs, specific linguistic signs (dialogue) will be identified. Burgess's subtitles will be tested for equivalent effect in the context of the film text, as elaborated in the previous chapter. The dialogue, subtitles and comments will be reproduced in table form. The first column contains the name of the speaker. The second column contains the French speech units, as enunciated by the actor. The third column contains the English subtitles as they appear in the film. Each instance where the font changes from normal to italic, and vice versa, indicates a new subtitle. This is important, because it gives an indication of semantic division over more than one subtitle, which is an important factor in viewer comprehension (according to Karamitroglou (1995:3), a sentence should not be spread over more than two subtitles). The fourth column contains comments on the existing subtitles, as well as possible suggestions for improvement.

In order to be able to evaluate the translation quality (equivalence of effect) of the subtitles, it is important to provide some background information on the history of the play, *Cyrano de Bergerac*. It is "a heroic comedy in verse in five acts", as described by Rostand, and was an immediate success when first performed in 1897. To this day, it is still one of the best-loved French plays of all times (evident in the number of web-sites dedicated to it). The play is set in 1640 and tells the story of a man with an extremely big nose (Cyrano de Bergerac) who is in love with his beautiful cousin, Roxane. However, because of his appearance, Cyrano lacks the courage to confess his love to his cousin, although he is a brave, intelligent, witty and sensitive person. As the French say: "Il a de l'esprit." (Literally: he has spirit or wit). Roxane, in the meantime, falls in love with the handsome Christian, and he with her. But Christian, in contrast to Cyrano, is rather dull-witted and tongue-tied in the company of women and Cyrano, realising that he himself will never be able to confess his love to Roxane, decides to help Christian to win her heart. Cyrano writes letters to Roxane on Christian's behalf, coaches him on what to say and pours everything he would have wanted to say to Roxane himself into these letters and

speeches. With the assistance of Cyrano, Christian succeeds in winning Roxane's heart. When Christian is killed in battle, Roxane retreats to a convent where she is once a week visited by Cyrano, his love for her still burning. It is only minutes before his death that she realises that he was the author of the letters and that it was **him** she had loved, and not Christian with his handsome face.

The beauty and the popularity of the play have much to do with the language used. Although written at the turn of the nineteenth century, the French is as accessible to a contemporary viewer as it was to audiences then. Language is also one of the main themes of the play, or rather, the ability to use language elegantly. It is important for the plot, because it is the one characteristic that Christian requires to win Roxane's heart, and which Cyrano possesses. Therefore, language is not only the sign of this play, but also the object. Once this is realised, it is evident that the translation will have to take this aspect into account and that special care will have to be taken in translating the text.

In order to assist translators in deciding how closely the translation should follow the semantic structure of the source text (i.e. should it be literal, semantic, communicative, free), Newmark divides text functions into three categories, namely expressive, informative and vocative (1988:40-2). **Expressive texts** refer, among others, to serious imaginative literature and the core of the mind of the writer or speaker. **Informative texts** refer to facts regarding a situation outside language, i.e. any text that is used to convey theories, ideas or facts regarding a specific situation. **Vocative texts** concentrate on the reader and attempts to bring about a certain effect in his/her mind, and examples of this include popular fiction and publicity. According to Newmark, translation of these text functions can be placed on a continuum of closeness to the semantic structure of the source text, with expressive texts closely following the semantic structure of the source text to faithfully render the expression of the author,³⁹ and vocative texts on the other extreme, i.e. more concerned with causing a particular effect in the reader than with following the semantic structure of the original.

See Wechsler (1998) for an explanation on how strongly certain authors feel about the fact that the translation should render the semantic structure of the source text. He quotes Kundera as saying:

I had the increasingly strong impression that what I read was not my text: often the words were remote from what I had written; the syntax differed too; there was inaccuracy in all the reflective passages; irony had been transformed into satire; unusual turns of phrase had been obliterated; the distinctive voices of the characters-narrators had been altered to the extent of altering their personalities...I was all the more unhappy because I did not believe that it was a matter of incompetence on the translator's part, or of carelessness or ill will: no; in good conscience he produced the kind of translation that one might call *translation-adaptation* [adaptation to the taste of the time and of the country for which it is intended, to the taste, in the final analysis, of the translator]. Is this the current, normal practice? It's possible. But unacceptable. Unacceptable to me.

Cyrano de Bergerac is not easily classifiable in terms of these functions: on the one hand it has established itself as a very popular and accessible play, and can be considered as vocative, but on the other hand, it can also be considered as serious imaginative literature. In fact, both the balcony and the death scenes are extremely lyrical. Therefore, following Newmark's recommendation on how closely the semantic structure of the source text should be followed in the translation, it seems that a mixture of techniques will be required here. On the one hand, the author's voice should still be heard, while on the other hand, the translation should aim to produce an equivalent effect in FL viewers. Burgess makes no bones about the fact that he has taken some serious liberties in translating the play: the subscript on the cover already indicates that it is "translated and **adapted** for the modern stage by Anthony Burgess" [my emphasis]. The translation of the play has been described as a "crowd-pleaser" and "eminently actable",⁴⁰ but it still remains to be seen how suitable this translation is for use as the basis for subtitles.

In the application of the proposed theory for subtitling, the emphasis will be on determining the equivalent effect of the subtitle on the viewer, as opposed to the effect of the dialogue on a first-language viewer. Attention will also be given to formal, external aspects of subtitles and how this affects their readability. It is therefore not the aim of the critical evaluation that follows to determine whether Burgess's translation and adaptation of the play is successful, but merely to determine whether the subtitles, in the context of the other film signs, produce an effect equivalent to that of the original dialogue.

6.1 Act 1, scene IV: The duel 00:20:50

This scene portrays a sword fight between Cyrano and the Viscount. The pace is fast, and there is a sense of urgency and danger. The camera closely follows the protagonist and antagonist as the duel progresses. Close-ups are used to reduce the distance between the viewer and the characters, thereby implicating the viewer in the fight and increasing the sense of urgency. Various other types of shots are used to portray different aspects, e.g. Cyrano's mastery of the situation which is reflected in the shot where he is filmed across the Viscount's shoulder. In the foreground, the Viscount is frantically attempting to avoid contact with his opponent's foil, whereas Cyrano can be seen over his shoulder, fighting in an almost leisurely way while at the same time composing a ballad. Thus, the composition of this shot manages to convey the contrast between controlled action by Cyrano as opposed to frantic reaction on the side of the Viscount. The duel is filmed using a combination of open and closed frames: the camera

⁴⁰ See back cover of Burgess's translation.

sometimes allows the subjects to move out of and then re-enter the frame to increase the sense of action. There are also cuts to faces of bystanders (Roxane's, for instance) to increase tension: not only is a fierce duel being fought, but there is also a damsel involved. This is further enhanced by close-ups of the duellists' faces, especially the two-shot where Cyrano lightly touches the Viscount on the nose with his finger, as one would do with a child, patronisingly. This scene is set in a small square in Paris. Space is limited and camera angles are frequently alternated to give an overall picture of the duel (in an open area, the camera can move back to provide an overview of the action, in a limited space, the camera has to move around to cover the action). Space is further limited by the onlookers, and the two duellists locked in the small area, heighten the feeling of claustrophobia and the sense of urgency.

Colours are muted, except for Cyrano's trademark red cape, which he removes before the start of the duel. Underneath, he is dressed in the sober blue-grey uniform of his regiment, with no trimmings. The Viscount, on the other hand, is dressed in a light yellow outfit decorated with lace and ribbons. This is perfect for accentuating his youth, inexperience, and foppishness. These colours are significant as they can be connotatively linked to the theme of this scene, namely the battle between virtue and folly, honesty and dishonesty.

The scene takes place at night, and the lighting reflects this accurately. Once again, this increases the sense of danger as this is one of the strongest connotations of night and dark. The powerful music in the background also increases the tension and a battle-like atmosphere.

Speaker	French dialogue	Original subtitle	Comments
Cyrano	Moi, c'est moralement que j'ai mes élégances	My elegance is interior	This subtitle falls short, because, as noted, the duel is essentially a battle between virtue and folly. Therefore, the <i>moral</i> aspect has to be retained to deploy the full meaning-potential of the sign. This can be done by changing it to: <i>My elegance is moral</i>

	Je ne sortirais pas avec négligence	<i>I do not go out feeling inferior from an insult...</i> ...which on the exterior, leaves its mark of warning... ... <i>in libel and scruples</i> <i>in mourning. I step out...</i>	Not only is this sentence too long and complicated (spread over three subtitles which makes it too long for the viewer to retain), but it is also a mis-translation. <i>Sortir</i> in this sense is used transitively, in other words: I will not carelessly utter a dirty insult, with a feeble conscience that still has sleep in the corner of its eye, [my] honour in tatters, no scruples. I suggest this be replaced by: <i>It's not my style</i> <i>To carelessly insult,</i> <i>With a conscience half-asleep,</i> <i>My honour in tatters,</i> <i>No scruples at all</i> <i>But I step out...</i>
	Un affront pas très bien lavé		
	La conscience jaune encore de sommeil dans le coin de son oeil		
	Des scrupules en deuil		

	Mais je marche sans rien sur moi qui ne refuse	...smelling of scrubbed liberty and polished independence. Come see!	The first line is powerful, because it contains the phrase <i>scrubbed liberty</i> which has strong connotations in English. Although this is not a literal translation, it is a subtitle with equivalent effect, because it conveys the idea of virtue. However, it is a pity that <i>panache</i> in the second line is lost, especially since it is such an important leitmotiv in the film.⁴¹ Also, as this word is well-known in English, viewers might question the credibility of the subtitles if it does not feature there. It is suggested that the second line be changed to: Independence and panache. Come see! (Not only is this closer to the original text, but also to the original meter.)
	Empanaché d'indépendance et de franchise		

⁴¹

Burgess discusses the importance of the word *panache* to some length in the preface of his translation.

De Guiche	Il suffit	<i>Let him be!</i>	Mis-translation. This should simply be: That's enough!
Cyrano	Je n'ai pas de gants?	About gloves, you have me there.	An excellent translation of the original sign. The image of the glove "left" in a viscount's face is accessible to Anglophone viewers and in keeping with period in which the film is set.
	La belle affaire!	I had one left over from a pair.	
	Il m'en restait un seul		
	D'une très vieille paire!		
	Lequel m'était d'ailleurs encore fort importun:	<i>Its fellow I can't trace.</i>	
	Je l'ai laissé dans la figure de quelqu'un.	<i>I left it in some viscount's face.</i>	
Viscount	Maraud, faquin, butor de pied plat ridicule!	Cad, villain, clod... <i>...flatfooted fool!</i>	I see no reason not to use the dictionary equivalents (Oxford-Hachette French Dictionary) of the first two insults, and would therefore change it to: Rascal, scoundrel, clod... The second line clearly conveys the image in the original text and is accessible to Anglophones.
Cyrano	Ah?... Et moi, Cyrano-Savinien-Hercule de Bergerac	And I'm Cyrano-Savinien-Hercule de Bergerac	Subtitle with equivalent effect. Although <i>Pleased to meet you!</i> might have been a trifle more witty while conveying the same

			meaning, viewers will feel cheated if they recognise words in the dialogue (e.g. Cyrano's name) that do not appear in the sub-title. Because the duel is about honour, it is very functional to include his full name to add <i>gravitas</i> .
Viscount	Bouffon!	<i>Buffoon!</i>	This word is not very well-known in modern English. It can be replaced by another alternative from the dictionary (Oxford Hachette French Dictionary), namely Clown! Not only is this more accessible, but insulting someone by calling him/her a clown, is derisive and disdainful.
Cyrano	Ay!		This could have been translated with <i>Ouch!</i> The French exclamation for pain is not known in English, and Cyrano's mockery loses its 'edge' if this is not exploited.
De Guiche	Qu'est-ce encore qu'il dit?	What is it now?	Subtitle with equivalent effect, although not a literal translation

Cyrano	Il faut la remuer	<i>I must...</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
	Car elle s'engourdit...	...relieve these cramps.	
	Ce que c'est que de la laisser inoccupée!	It's lack of exercise.	
	Ay!		For the same reason as above, it is recommended to insert a subtitle for this, namely: <i>Ouch!</i>
Bystander	Qu'avez-vous?	<i>Are you all right?</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Cyrano	J'ai des fourmis dans mon épée!	My sword has gone to sleep.	The literal translation for this is "to have pins and needles", which is definitely more powerful than "gone to sleep". Therefore, it is recommended to change the subtitle to: <i>I've got pins and needles in my sword.</i> Although Burgess's subtitle is simpler, I feel that it misses an important part of the meaning-potential and does not create equivalent effect.
Viscount	Soit!	<i>So be it!</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Cyrano	Elle aime ce bruit presque	With what joy...	Subtitle with equivalent effect.

	passionnement	... <i>she wakens to that sound.</i>	
Viscount	Poète!	Poet, eh?	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Cyrano	Oui, monsieur, poète!	Yes, a poet.	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
	Et tellement, qu'en ferraillant je vais	<i>Even when rattling ironmongery...</i>	Words like “ironmongery” and “extempore” may cause difficulties, even to sophisticated viewers, especially since there is a lot of movement in this scene and reading time is limited. Alternatively one could use: <i>Even when rattling my sword</i> I'll compose a ballad word for word! Strictly speaking, the “word for word” is not part of the meaning of the original text, but in the light of the fact that rhyme is an important aspect of the expressive nature of this specific text, some poetic [translational?] license is allowed.
	Hop! à l'improvisade	I'll compose a ballade extempore.	
	Vous composer une ballade		
Viscount	Une ballade?	<i>A ballade?</i>	The viewer will recognise these words, therefore they should be included in the subtitles: A ballad?

Cyrano	Et vous toucher, monsieur, au dernier vers	I'll hit you on the final line.	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Viscount	Non!		Does not require subtitling as it is self-explanatory.
Cyrano	Non?		
	"Ballade du duel qu'en l'hôtel Bourguignon	" <i>Ballade of a Fencing Bout...</i> "	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
	Monsieur Bergerac eut avec un bélître!"	"... Between de Bergerac and a Foppish Lout."	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Viscount	Qu'est-ce que c'est ça, s'il vous plaît?	<i>What is that doggerel?</i>	Burgess deviates from the original text for the sake of rhyme, but in my opinion, this complicates the subtitles unnecessarily (especially since <i>doggerel</i> , meaning a worthless poem, is not very well-known), and it will be better to stick to a literal translation, i.e.: What is that, if you please?
Cyrano	C'est le titre	It's the title.	It's the title.
Crowd	Silence! Taisez-vous! S'il vous plaît – pas de bruit!	<i>Quiet!</i> <i>Silence!</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Cyrano	Attendez ! ... je choisis mes rimes...	Wait. Let me choose my rhymes.	Subtitle with equivalent effect.

Là, j'y suis	<i>Good. Ready.</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Je jette	I bare my head	Although Burgess uses a fair amount of poetic license in the translation of these lines, it is still a subtitle with equivalent effect because of the referential significance (process of undressing), signification, and qualitative significance (rhyme).
Avec grace	From crown to nape...	
Mon feutre		
Je fais lentement	<i>...and slowly...</i>	
L'abandon	...reveal the fighting trim	
Du grand manteau	beneath my cape.	
Qui me calfeutre		
Et je tire mon espadon	<i>Then finally I strip my steel.</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Élégant comme Céladon	A thoroughbred... <i>...from head to heel.</i>	Céladon is the name of a character in L'Astrée. However, this allusion (as are the allusions in the next two lines) is completely inaccessible to the average Anglophone, and Burgess makes a wise choice to move away from a strictly literal translation. However, it would be best to stick to the original text as far as possible, in which case, the first line can be translated as <i>Elegant...</i>

Agile comme Scaramouche

Disdainful of the rein or bit.

Scaramouche was a boastful person. A fuller deployment of the sign-potential, would be something like:

Not boastful in the least bit.

(This ensures that the rhyme pattern stays intact, which is very important in view of the last line:

I hit!)

Je vous préviens, cher Mirmidon	<i>I pull a lyric wheel,</i>	Mirmidon was a member of a legendary Thessalian people who accompanied their king Achilles in the Trojan War: a loyal follower. A literal translation will therefore read something like: <i>I'm warning you, slavish follower</i> [of de Guiche] Burgess's translation is not only quite far removed from the original meaning of the text, but it is also indigestible and inaccessible to the average Anglophone who does not necessarily have a thorough knowledge of mythology. If the viewer does not understand the allusion, the meaning-potential of the sign cannot be unlocked. It would therefore be more appropriate to circumscribe the idea, as above.
Qu'à la fin de l'envoi	<i>But at the poem's end...</i>	<i>Qu'à</i> should read <i>that</i> and not <i>but</i>, therefore: That at the poem's end...
Je touche!	<i>...I hit!</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.

Vous auriez bien dû rester neutre	<i>Come be burst...</i> ...you purple grape	Here, Burgess deviates significantly from the original text. He introduces the image of a grape that is peeled to translate Cyrano's banter. His choice is presumably dictated by the need for rhyming end-words, but in this case, it is more important to stick to the original meaning of the text and neglect the rhyme, than the other way round, especially since the pace is fast, there is a lot of movement on-screen and the viewer will have less attention available to appreciate formal aspects such as rhyme. An alternative could be: You should have stayed neutral
--	--	--

Où vais-je vous larder, dindon?

Come and lose your peel.

The source text here is rich in connotative meaning. "larder" means to roast, but also to stab repeatedly. "dindon" means turkey, but is also used to refer to a fool or a stupid person. Therefore, there are several possible translations, among others:

Where shall I roast you, turkey? or

Where shall I hit you, fool?

This is a typical example of the translator's predicament, as the translation, or subtitle in this case, should be of a similar degree of complexity as the source text, but not too complex so as to become inaccessible to the viewer.

A compromise could be found in the form of:

How shall I carve you, turkey?

Dans le flanc, sous votre maheure?	Show, you ribboned ape... ...<i>the fat your folderols conceal.</i>	The metaphor of the turkey can then be further extrapolated in this line: First the thigh and then the wing (which would also re-establish the rhyme pattern).
Au coeur, sous votre bleu cordon?		Building on the metaphor of the turkey being carved, the following is a possibility: First the heart, then the lung? Although the second part is not exactly the same as what is said in the source text, it does convey the same meaning (indicating an area that could possibly be hit) and it fits in with the rhyme scheme.
Le coquilles tintent	A pretty peal.	Having discarded the grape-image, a more accessible alternative can be used here, e.g.: <i>I hear the bells ring.</i>
Ding-don'		<i>Ding-dong.</i>
Ma pointe voltige: une mouche!	<i>Is that a fly?</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.

Décidément... c'est au bedon	Your blood will congeal.	Once again, when faced with the choice between rhyme and equivalent effect, it is in subtitling preferable to opt for a clearer subtitle, than to make it altogether inaccessible by trying to cast it into the form of a rhyming couplet. Burgess deviates from the original meaning of <i>bedon</i>, namely tummy, for his rhyme scheme, but in this instance it is advisable to recreate a subtitle which has the same vocative effect as the source text, e.g.: Then it's settled...in the tummy!
Qu'à la fin de l'envoi	<i>For, when the poem ends, I hit.</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Je touche!		
Il me manque une rime en eutre...	I need a rhyme to hold the shape	Subtitle with equivalent effect. This line is an excellent example of the importance of language not only as sign, but also as object in this play. This tongue-in-the-cheek remark actually says: "Wait a minute, slow down the action, I haven't yet got my words right."

Vous rompez, plus blanc qu'amidon?	<i>I'm going to wind the reel.</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
C'est pour me fournir le mot pleutre!	<i>My rod is ready to rape.</i>	
Tac! Je pare la pointe	The sharp tooth awaits its meal.	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Don't vous espériez me faire don		
J'ouvre la ligne	<i>Not yet.</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Je la bouche	I stop a bit...	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Tiens ta broche, Laridon!	<i>...awaiting the deal.</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
A la fin de l'envoi	<i>The poem ends and I hit.</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Je touche!		
Envoi	Envoy	Not all viewers are students of literature, therefore a better-known word will be more effective, e.g.: Dedication.
Prince	<i>Prince, pray to God and kneel.</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Demande à Dieu pardon!		

Je quarte du pied		This is a fencing term which refers to foot movements. It is an informative statement and could have been subtitled with an equivalent like: I step aside/back, etc.
J'escarmouche	Will you quit?	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Je coupe	<i>I cut, parry...</i>	Excellent subtitle, with the somewhat old-fashioned "parry", although this is still accessible to modern viewers and an essential term when talking about fencing.
Je feinte		
Hé! Là, donc	...off you reel!	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
A la fin de l'envoi	<i>The poem ended...</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Je touche!	...and I hit	

In summary, the above segment contains many subtitles with equivalent effect, including some excellent and ingenious translations. Burgess does not hesitate to deviate from the source text if a literal translation will reduce the dramatic effect of the subtitle. However, in certain cases, such as when he replaces the metaphor of the turkey being carved with that of the grape being peeled, his version has decidedly less thrust than the original and can therefore not be considered to have equivalent effect. Although Burgess does not attempt to imitate the rhyme structure of the source text, he does attempt to reconstruct some form of rhyme structure in his translation. In the preface to his translation (1990:viii) he describes it as follows: "There are in my version sprung-rhythmed heroic couplets, rhymed and unrhymed Alexandrines, blank verse breaking into occasional rhyme, verse with a free rhyming pattern (which really means lack of pattern), and – mainly in the last scene – something that can be called *vers libre*." However, in almost all the instances where his subtitles were problematic, it was because of the necessity to comply with the reconstructed rhyme structure. Although rhyme is certainly important in a play that is written in verse (after all, that is why it is called "written in verse"), the question remains whether it is really important in subtitles. Rhyme is an aural phenomenon and subtitles are not intended to be read out loud. Furthermore, the viewer of an FL film still has access to the soundtrack, in other words, the musicality of the dialogue can be appreciated on an auditory level – it is not something which disappears because subtitles have been added. Phenomena such as rhyme and half-rhyme, although not consciously noticed by the FL viewer, will contribute to the phonaesthetic experience of the dialogue. Of course, if it is sometimes possible to reconstruct rhyme in subtitles without unduly complicating them but, given the constraints within which the subtitle already has to function and the fact that the viewer already has access to the phonaesthetic quality of linguistic elements, albeit without understanding them, serious consideration should be given to the extent that deviation from the source text is sanctioned for the sake of creating rhyming subtitles.

6.2 Act 3, scene VII Balcony scene 1 [1:22:05]

In this scene, the pace is a lot slower than in the duel scene, and this helps to create the romantic atmosphere. Roxane is standing on the balcony, with Cyrano hidden in the dark. He is wooing her, pretending to be Christian. Roxane is shot from below, and this helps to portray the reverence Cyrano feels for her. He, on the other, is filmed from above, and this signifies his predicament: desperately in love with Roxane but unable to approach her, because of his physical appearance. The frames are closed, lingering on the subjects. There is little movement and the emphasis is on the words the lovers exchange. Close-ups are used to portray the effect of their words on one another.

Roxane is dressed in her white nightgown. Once again, this signifies the celestial reverence that Cyrano has for her. Although it is night, she is clearly visible, while Cyrano is hidden in the dark. This signifies the fraud that is being committed (Cyrano pretending to be the handsome Christian, Christian pretending to be the wordsmith Cyrano). Soft music is playing and one can hear the roll of thunder in the background, but it becomes gradually louder as Cyrano wins her over and their mutual excitement mounts.

Speaker	French dialogue	Original subtitle	Comments
Cyrano	Dans l'ombre	They grope in the darkness...	Subtitle with equivalent effect. This is an excellent example of what Karamitroglou calls "coherent phrase grouping for syntactical scrambling". Once again, the reference to Cyrano's words is a meta-textual pointer to the text (see also following lines).
	À tâtons	...looking for...	
	Ils cherchent votre oreille	...your ear.	
Roxane	Les miens n'éprouvent pas difficulté parreille	<i>My words have not that problem.</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Cyrano	Ils trouvent tout de suite?	It's normal they should	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
	Oh! Cela va de soi	find their way.	
	Puisque c'est dans mon coeur	<i>For it's upon my heart</i>	
	Eux, que je les reçois	<i>they prey.</i>	
	Or, moi, j'ai le coeur grand	My heart is large,	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
	Vous, l'oreille petite	Whereas your ear is small.	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
	D'ailleurs vos mots à vous, descendent	<i>Besides, your words slip down</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
	Ils vont vite	<i>Speedily along the wall.</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.

	Les miens montent, Madame	Mine are heavy like fruit on a bough.	This subtitle is difficult to read and does not deploy the full meaning-potential of the original text which signifies the effort of required by Cyranos' words to reach Roxane where she is standing in the skies. Instead, it introduces a new image which confuses and does not con. It is possible to replace this by a more literal translation, namely: <i>Mine are heavy, they need more time.</i>
	Il leur faut plus de temps!		
Roxane	Mais ils montent bien mieux depuis quelques instants	<i>They're arriving faster now.</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Cyrano	De cette gymnastique, ils ont pris l'habitude!	They're now used to the exercise.	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Roxane	Je vous parle, en effet, d'une vraie altitude!	<i>I'm standing here in the skies!</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.

Cyrano	Certes	One harsh word from so high could make my heart die.	The image used is that of something (a word) being dropped from a great height which crushes the object it lands on (heart). In other words, it would do more justice to the source text to change it to: One harsh word from so high would crush my heart. It is more important to stay faithful to the original metaphor than to re-create rhyme.
	Et vous me tueriez		
	Si de cette hauteur vous me laissez tomber un mot dur sur le coeur!		
Roxane	Je descends	<i>I'll come down.</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Cyrano	Non!	<i>No!</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Roxane	Grimpez jusqu'ici, alors, vite!	Climb up here!	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Cyrano	Non	<i>No!</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Roxane	Comment...non?	<i>Why...no?</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Cyrano	Laissez un peu que l'on profite...	Let us stay near...	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
	De cette occasion qui s'offre... de pouvoir se parler doucement, sans se voir	<i>...but talk without seeing each other...</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.

Roxane	Sans se voir?	Without seeing?	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Cyrano	Mais oui, c'est adorable	<i>It's quite wonderful...</i>	The translation of the second line loses a very important comic effect. A literal translation of the source text would read: <i>It's wonderful...</i> We hardly see each other. The absurdity and unlikelihood of an utterance like this occurring between two lovers, create a powerful comic effect which is completely lost in Burgess's translation. This translation of the rest of Cyrano's words, is excellent. Burgess manages to translate the original image, with the reference to light and darkness in such a way that it deploys both the connotative and denotative meaning-potential of the sign, while also maintaining the rhyme structure without unnecessary complicating the subtitle.
	On se devine à peine	...in darkness.	
	Vous voyez la noirceur d'un long manteau qui traîne	<i>You see a cloak of blackness.</i>	
	J'aperçois la blancheur d'une robe d'été	I see a dress of summer white.	
	Moi je ne suis qu'une ombre	<i>I'm but a shadow.</i>	
	Et vous qu'une clarté!	<i>You are a light.</i>	

	Et je crois vous parler pour la première fois!	I'm using my true voice.	Here, Burgess's translation deviates from the original text, and I do not think that there is any benefit to be gained from this, apart from making the transition to the next subtitle easier. In fact, a literal translation will be more powerful: It's like talking to you for the first time!
Roxane	C'est vrai que vous avez une toute autre voix	<i>Indeed, it is altered.</i>	This is an important line, because Roxane identifies the deception that is taking place, although she does not yet realise it. It is therefore important to be quite explicit about the fact that she realises that it is not Christian's voice that is addressing her. The following is a possibility: Your voice sounds quite different.
Cyrano	Oui, tout autre	In this dark night...	Subtitle with equivalent effect. Burgess sticks close to the original text and the full meaning-potential of the sign is deployed.
	Car dans la nuit qui me protège	<i>...which protects me,</i>	
	J'ose être enfin moi-même	<i>I can be myself.</i>	

	Et j'ose...	And I dare...	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
	Où en étais-je?	<i>Where was I?</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
	Je ne sais... tout ceci	I don't know... all this...	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
	Pardonnez mon émoi	<i>Forgive my emotion.</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
	C'est si délicieux...	It's this sweet, new sensation.	Burgess contracts two lines into one subtitle. However, because the pace in this scene is slow, it is possible to fit in two individual subtitles. This is not only possible, but desirable, as the viewer realises that Cyrano is wooing Roxane with words, and therefore [the viewer] will want to have access to as many of Cyrano's lines as possible (especially since language in this play is not only sign, but also object). A short subtitle when Cyrano is obviously saying more than that, will leave the viewer feeling cheated and dissatisfied. It is suggested that this be replaced with: <i>It's this sweet, gentle feeling</i> <i>To me a new sensation.</i>
	C'est si nouveau pour moi!		
Roxane	Si nouveau?	<i>New, you say?</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.

Cyrano	Si nouveau	Yes, new. I can be honest.	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
	Mais oui... d'être sincere		
	La peur d'être raillé, toujours au coeur me serre...	<i>Fear of mockery</i> <i>Gripped my breast.</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Roxane	Raillé de quoi?	Mockery?	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Cyrano	Mais de ... d'un élan!...	<i>For my feelings!</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.

Oui, mon coeur, toujours, de mon esprit s'habille, par pudeur	My heart, in modesty, Cloaks itself in art!	Burgess translates "esprit" with "art". However, this is too vague, especially in the light of the extreme importance of this word in the film. It is the one thing that Christian lacks and without which Roxane will not have him, in spite of his beauty. When Christian dies, she realises that she only loved him for his "esprit", that she would have loved him, even if he were ugly. A more suitable alternative would be <i>wit</i> , especially in the light of the definition in the Oxford dictionary, which describes wit as "the power of giving sudden intellectual pleasure", which is exactly what Roxane wants. Therefore: <i>Cloaks itself in wit.</i>
Ah, l'esprit! Je le hais dans l'amour!	Ah, "art". <i>How I hate that in love!</i>	For the same reason as above: <i>Ah, "wit".</i>

	C'est un crime lorsqu'on aime de trop prolonger cette escrime!	It's a crime, in love, to play this pantomime.	Burgess substitutes the fencing image with that of the pantomime. I think this is valid, as both are indicative of an activity in which the speaker does not want to expose him- or herself to the other party. In doing this, Burgess manages to maintain the rhyme scheme.
	Le moment vient d'ailleurs inévitablement	<i>There always has to come a moment...</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
	Et je plains ceux pour qui ne vient pas ce moment!	And I pity those who know it not.	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
	Où nous sentons qu'en nous un amour noble existe	<i>...when we a noble love attain...</i>	Excellent subtitle, simple yet conveying the full meaning potential of the original.
	Que chaque joli mot que nous disons rend triste!	<i>...but each pretty word causes pain.</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Roxane	Eh bien! Si ce moment est venu pour nous deux	<i>So what word will you find for us When that moment comes?</i>	Closer to the source text would be: <i>So what words would you find</i> <i>When that moment has come for us?</i>
	Quels mots me direz-vous?		

Cyrano	Tous ceux	All those, all those...	A literal translation of these lines would be: "I will shower you with all those [words], all those, all those that come to me, without trying to make neat arrangements". Cyrano compares his words to flowers, they will be like gifts, and he will not waste time to arrange them neatly, but rather just shower his loved one with them. Burgess's translation does not convey any of this. In fact, it is blatantly inadequate, compared to the meaning-potential of the original sign. Therefore, I suggest: <i>All those that come to me</i> <i>I'll shower you with them like flowers.</i>
	Tous ceux		
	Tous ceux		
	Qui me viendront, je vais vous les jeter, en touffe	...which come. <i>Everything, I throw away.</i>	
	Sans les mettre en bouquet		
	Je vous aime, j'étouffe	I'm stifling!	It is important to give a full translation of this line, because the viewer is likely to recognise the first phrase, and will feel cheated if it does not appear in the subtitle. Therefore: <i>I love you! I'm suffocating!</i>

Je t'aime, je suis fou, je n'en peux plus, c'est trop	<i>I love you, this is no game!</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Ton nom est dans mon coeur comme un sanglot	My heart cries your name!	Closer to the source text, and especially the lyrical aspect of the source text, would be: Your name lives in my heart like a sob!
De toi, je me souviens de tout, j'ai tout aimé	<i>I've loved you every passing day.</i>	This subtitle deviates significantly from the original, but is accessible and conveys the full meaning-potential, which makes it a subtitle with equivalent effect.
Je sais que l'an dernier, un jour le douze mai Pour sortir le matin tu changeas de coiffure!	Last year, on the twelfth of May You changed the style of your hair.	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Un soleil m'éblouit C'était une chevelure	<i>I was dazzled...</i> ...by its bright flare.	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Comprends-tu à présent?	<i>Do you understand?</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.

Enfin, te rends-tu compte?	Do you realize?	Closer to the source text would be: Do you finally understand? In my opinion, it is important to include <i>finally</i> , because it indicates Cyrano's exasperation. As this is a word that is frequently used, its addition does not place too much strain on the subtitle.
Sens-tu mon âme, un peu dans cette ombre qui monte?	<i>Do you feel my soul rise to the skies?</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Oh! Mais vraiment	Everything tonight is so wonderful, so sweet.	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Ce soir c'est trop beau		
C'est trop doux!		
Je vous dis cela, vous m'écoutez, moi	<i>I speak, you listen.</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Vous, c'est trop!	Me, at your feet!	This subtitle deviates substantially from the original, but is significationally equivalent (meaning: I'm not worthy of this). It also squares nicely with the spatial reality. Excellent subtitle.
Dans mon espoir même le moins modeste	<i>Even in my sweetest dreams,</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Je n'ai jamais espéré tant!	<i>I never planned on this.</i>	

	Il ne me reste qu'à mourir maintenant!	Now I must die.	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
	C'est à cause de ces mots que je dis qu'elle tremble entre les bleus rameaux!	<i>My poem makes her tremble in the boughs.</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
	Je sens le tremblement adoré de sa main descendre tout le long des branches du jasmin!	I feel the shaking of your hand come down along... <i>...this jasmin strand.</i>	Excellent translation. Equivalence on qualitative, referential and signification levels, except for the fact that Burgess deviates from the original text by switching to the second person singular. I see no need for this, and suggest that the original form be retained, i.e.: I feel the shaking of her hand
Roxane	Oui, je tremble et je pleure	I tremble and I weep.	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
	Et je t'aime	<i>I love you.</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
	Et je suis tienne!		Once again, the viewer will feel left out if this is not translated. It is also short enough to be included without being cumbersome. Therefore: I'm yours!

	Et tu m'as enivrée!	You have bewitched me.	This subtitle is substantially different from the original, where the image is to be drunk with love. However, Burgess's translation does offer significationalequivalence, while being more accessible to the Anglophone viewer than the original image, which would have read something like: You have made me drunk with your love.
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In the above scene, Burgess sticks fairly close to the source text. Although he does adapt *some* of the figures of speech, it is not as significant as that of turkey/grape metaphor in the first scene that was analysed. Burgess's subtitles in this second scene have a very high dramatic value and most of them are equivalent in effect to the source text. He also manages to create a number of excellent rhyming subtitles, without being overly complicated and thereby confusing the FL viewer. The pace in this scene is much slower than in the first one, and this undoubtedly also facilitates the creation of subtitles. In a few instances, there was even sufficient time to embellish Burgess's original subtitle, thereby producing a more lyrical translation.

6.3 Act 5, scene 6 Cyrano's Death 2:30:30

In this final scene where Cyrano dies, a variety of camera shots are used. There are close-ups to create more intimacy between the viewer and the actors, especially where the script is emotionally charged, but there is also zooming in and out. At the beginning of the scene, Cyrano says that his life has been to prompt others and be forgotten (once again a meta-textual reference to the play). Significantly, Roxane is sitting beside him with her arm around his shoulders when he says this, but only *her* face is visible. The back of Cyrano's head is to the camera as he talks. This is a brilliant composition, because it underscores what Cyrano is saying. The face is normally associated with identity, and the fact that his is not visible, underlines how much he lacked recognition. The camera encircles them in a very intimate movement, until it finally shows the two characters facing each other and when Roxane admits that she loves Cyrano the camera stops to emphasise the moment, as well as his answer (Cyrano tells her that it is too late). The camera then moves into an overhead angle, making the characters appear almost insignificant and underlining their inability to change their situation. The camera remains in this position as Cyrano talks wistfully about his death. However, when he enters his final "battle" with his old enemies, the camera returns to eye-level, very similar to what was used in the duel scene. It is a final brave fight, and although Cyrano knows that he will not win, he still fights with all his heart.

The setting is much more open than in the previous scenes. In the background is a view of the garden surrounding the monastery where Roxane now lives. The trees are symbolic of the mythological forest that has to be crossed on passing into "the other world" (death). Cyrano, in his dying moments, sometimes disappears from view behind the trees, signifying his nearing death. The subdued light (it is dusk) is also significant of his nearing end, as are the colours that are used: all characters are dressed in black, Cyrano's trademark red cape is absent and the only

bright colour is the blood on his forehead. The soft music in the background becomes louder as the tension mounts and Cyrano fights his ultimate battle, but stops abruptly as he dies and the camera zooms out from an overhead angle to leave Cyrano, with Roxane draped over him, almost completely obscured by the leaves. This is a very functional shot, as it reminds of the view one has of a burial: a dead person in a grave who gradually disappears from view as the hole is being covered.

Speaker	French dialogue	Original subtitle	Comments
Cyrano	Oui,		
	Ma vie ce fut d'être celui qui souffle	My life's work has been to prompt others...	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
	Et qu'on oublie!	...and be forgotten.	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
	Vous souvient-il du soir	Remember that night when	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
	Où Christian vous parla sous le balcon?	Christian came to your balcony?	
	Eh bien!		The pace is slow enough to allow for translation of this – it also draws attention to the next subtitle which is <i>extremely</i> important. Well...
	Toute ma vie est là:	<i>That moment sums up my life.</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
	Pendant que je restais en bas, dans l'ombre noir	While I was below in the dark shadows...	Excellent translation. Burgess not only manages to achieve qualitative equivalence (rhyme) but also signification equivalence, although he introduces the image of a "rose" which does not exist in the original text.
	D'autres montaient cueillir	...others climbed up	
	Le baiser de la gloire!	to kiss the sweet rose.	

	C'est justice!	It's only fair!	This is a mis-translation. Cyrano does not mean that it is fair, he is being ironic by saying: <i>That's justice for you!</i> I think this translation reflects more of the ambiguity of the French text.
	Et j'approuve au seuil de mon tombeau	<i>I say, as death has me</i>	Excellent translation of the source text. Burgess substitutes the original image of being "on the doorstep of the grave" by "in death's hooks". In doing so, he is able to maintain the rhyme scheme, while deploying the full meaning-potential of the sign.
	Molière a du génie	... Molière has genius...	
	Et Christian était beau!	...and Christian had good looks!	
Roxane	Ma soeur! Ma soeur! Venez!	Sister! Sister! Help!	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Cyrano	Non! Non! N'appellez personne:	<i>No! Don't call anyone!</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
	Qu'elles aillent prier puisque leur cloche sonne!	Let them pray. The bell is ringing.	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Roxane	J'ai fait votre malheur! Moi! Moi!	<i>I've made you so unhappy.</i> I have! I have!	This subtitle is not strong enough. <i>Malheur</i> has a wide range of meanings, from unhappiness to tragedy. In this sense, it is obvious that she has made him more than unhappy, and this should

			be reflected in the subtitle. A possible solution could be: I have caused you so much pain!
Cyrano	Vous? ...	<i>You? Of course you haven't.</i>	I see no reason to deviate from the original text, namely: You? On the contrary.
	Au contraire!		
	J'ignorais la douceur féminine	I knew not womanly sweetness.	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
	Ma mère ne m'a pas trouvé beau	<i>My mother found me ugly.</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
	Je n'ai pas eu de soeur	I had no sisters.	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
	Plus tard, j'ai redouté l'amante	<i>Later, I feared the mistress with mockery in her eye.</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
	À loeil moquer		
	Je vous dois d'avoir eu, tout au moins	But thanks to you, I have had...	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
	Une amie	<i>...a female friend.</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
	Grâce à vous une robe a passé dans ma vie.	Thanks to you, a dress crossed my life's path.	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Roxane	Je vous aime! Vivez!	<i>I love you!</i> Live!	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Cyrano	Il est trop tard, cousine!	<i>It's too late, cousin.</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
	Je vais monter la haut	I must go up...	Subtitle with equivalent effect.

Dans la lune opaline	<i>...to the opaline moon.</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect (although the word <i>opaline</i> is not much used).
Plus d'une âme que j'aime y doit être exilée	Many of those I love are in exile up there.	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Et je retrouverai Socrate et Galilée!	<i>I'll see Socrates... ...and Galileo.</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Philosophe, physicien,	<i>Philosopher and scientist...</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Rimeur, bratteur, musicien,	<i>...poet, musician and duellist...</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Et voyageur aérien	<i>...and traveller in space.</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Grand riposteur du tac au tac	Witty conversationalist...	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Amant aussi	<i>...and lover, too,</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Pas pour son bien!	<i>Too unlucky in love...</i>	Read in conjunction with the previous line and following the source text, this subtitle should be: Though not for his own good! Burgess's subtitle lacks the irony of the source text which is created by juxtaposing the two lines.

Ci-git Hercule-Savinien	Here lies Hercule-Savinien...	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
De Cyrano de Bergerac	... <i>de Cyrano de Bergerac</i> ...	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Qui fut tout et qui ne fut rien	...who was all... ...and who was <i>nothing</i> .	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Mais je m'en vais	I'm leaving now.	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Pardon	Sorry...	This subtitle appears to be somewhat blunt. Although "fillers" are not normally used in subtitles, the lyrical quality of this monologue demands something more. Therefore: So sorry...
Je ne peux faire attendre:	I can wait no more.	Mis-translation: Cyrano is referring to the moon which has come to fetch him, therefore: <i>I can't keep him waiting.</i>
Vous le voyez	See?	Subtitle with equivalent effect.

Le rayon de lune vient me prendre	The moon beam is here at my door.	The literal translation of this line is: <i>The moon beam has come to fetch me.</i> I see no reason to deviate from this and suggest that it be retained.
Ne me soutenez pas! Non!	<i>No one must help me!</i>	The literal translation is: Don't hold me up! There is no reason to deviate from this, especially since it refers both to Cyrano being physically supported by his friends, and their trying to hold him back (prevent him from dying), which is the wider secondary meaning of his words.
Rien	Only...	Subtitle with equivalent effect.

	Rien, que les arbres!	<i>Only the trees!</i>	This subtitle could be more explicit than that suggested by Burgess. Cyrano is about to start having delusions and seeing his old enemies among the trees. In order to emphasise his delusion, the subtitle has to be fairly explicit in indicating that there is nothing else, except for the trees, therefore: <i>Nothing but the trees.</i>
	Qu'elle vient	He's coming.	To the Anglophone viewer, it is not clear here that the "he" refers to the moon, therefore it is best to be more explicit: <i>Let the moon come.</i>
	Je me sens déjà botté de marbre	<i>I feel myself shod in marble.</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect. Excellent translation that captures the lyrical quality of the original.
	Ganté de plomb!	Gloved in lead.	Subtitle with equivalent effect. Another excellent lyrical subtitle which is concise and accessible to the viewer.
	Oh!		No need to subtitle.

Mais puisqu'elle est en chemin	<i>As he's on his way,</i>	As in the previous reference to the moon, the Anglophone viewer has no indication that this refers back to the moon, therefore: <i>As the moon is on its way,</i> <i>I shall go to meet him...</i>
J'irai à sa rencontre	<i>I shall go to meet him...</i>	
Et l'épée à la main!	... sword in hand!	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Que dites-vous?	<i>What?</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
C'est inutile?	It's useless? I know.	I would break this up into two separate subtitles, to fit in with the speech units in the film. Cyrano is talking slowly, therefore it is timewise possible to do so. It's useless? <i>I know.</i>
Je le sais!		
Mais on se bat pas dans l'espoir du succès!	<i>A man doesn't fight to win.</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Non!		
C'est bien plus beau lorsque c'est inutile!	It's better when the fight is in vain.	Subtitle with equivalent effect.

Qu'est-ce que c'est tous ceux-la?	<i>Who are they all?</i>	Cyrano is already addressing his old enemies, therefore I would change this to the second person plural, namely: Who are you all?
Vous êtes mille?	There's a horde of them.	Ditto. <i>There's a horde of you.</i>
Ah! Je vous reconnais	<i>Ah, I know you.</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Tous mes vieux ennemis	<i>All my old enemies!</i>	
Le mensonge!	Falsehood.	This is not close enough to the original text. It should simply read: Lies!
Les lâchetés!	<i>Cowardice.</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Les compromis!	Compromise.	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Je sais bien qu'à la fin	<i>I know you'll get the upper hand.</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Vous me mettrez à bas, n'importe	Never mind.	

Je me bats!		<i>I'll fight on, and on, and on!</i>	This is enunciated slowly and clearly as three separate remarks. I think it is important to stay as close as possible to the original text and to have three separate subtitles, namely: <i>I will fight!</i> <i>I will fight!</i> <i>I will fight!</i>
Je me bats!			
Je me bats!			
Oui			
Vous m'arrachez tout		You take everything...	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Le laurier et la rose!		<i>...the laurel and the rose, too!</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect. The <i>too</i> reinforces the lyrical aspect of the words.
Arrachez!		Go on, take them!	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Il y a malgré vous		<i>But, in spite of you,</i> <i>one thing goes with me now...</i>	Burgess's subtitle deviates from the source text, and thereby loses some of its thrust. It should simply read: But in spite of you, I take something with me...
Quelque chose			
Que j'emporte			

	Et ce soir	And tonight,	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
	Quand j'entrerai chez Dieu	when I at last, God behold...	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
	Mon salut balaiera largement le seuil bleu	... <i>my salute will sweep</i> <i>his blue threshold...</i>	<i>Salut</i> has diverse meanings such as greetings, salute, salvation and homage. "Salute", although an archaic form, conveys most of these meanings. The modern reader may not know all these possible connotations, but the translation is exact. It is also in keeping with the <u>language used during the period</u> in which the film is set.
	Quelque chose	...with something spotless,	Burgess deviates from the original text, for the sake of rhyme. However, the metaphor he uses to substitute that of the source is clear and accessible to the Anglophone viewer and is equivalent on both qualitative and signification levels.
	Que sans un pli	a diamond in the ash...	
	Sans une tache		
	J'emporte malgré vous	... <i>which I take</i> <i>in spite of you...</i>	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
	Et c'est ...	...and that's...	Subtitle with equivalent effect.
Roxane	C'est?		

Cyrano	Mon panache.	... <i>my panache</i> .	The reason why it was important to maintain <i>panache</i> in earlier scenes, is this line. It is the climax to which the play is building up, and the word is known well enough in English to be used without any problem. However, the fact that it was used earlier on in subtitles, means that viewers have also been prepared for this. ⁴²
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⁴² Of this Burgess (1990:xiii) says in the preface to his translation and adaptation of the play: "After much deliberation, I have allowed Cyrano to make his last English word the same as his last French one, but I have tried to prepare the audience for its totality of meaning by using it in various contexts throughout the play."

Burgess, a great wordsmith, truly manages to capture the lyrical quality of the dialogue with the subtitles of this last scene. For the most part he follows the source text closely, and this results in some beautiful images in the target language ("shod in marble", "gloved in lead"). This is an excellent example of how translation can enrich a target language: these metaphors may never have been born in the English language if it were not for the translation of the French play.

A few instances were singled out where Burgess could have followed the source text more closely. Some of them may be matters of personal taste, but others definitely need to be adjusted for greater equivalent effect with the source text.

In conclusion, the creation of subtitles for a film such as *Cyrano de Bergerac* is no mean feat. The film itself is a masterpiece of film signs interwoven to form a dense network of meaning. The play, on which it is closely based, is a text that is both expressive and vocative in quality. As a result of this, one would expect of the translation (the subtitles) to both convey the lyrical quality of the source text, *and* to have the same popular appeal as the original play still has today. In addition to this, these subtitles also have to fit into the context of the film sign, and adhere to external criteria for subtitles.

The proposed theory for subtitling has thus been substantially helpful in identifying problem areas by setting a standard for the evaluation of equivalent effect through determining whether the target text deploys the full meaning-potential of the source text. Where this is the case, the subtitle is accepted; if not, the subtitler returns to Sign 1 (source text) to ensure that his/her interpretant does indeed include the full (or as much as possible) of the meaning-potential of the sign, and then produces new signs (new subtitles) until the subtitle retained (Sign *n*) is equivalent in effect to Sign 1.

CHAPTER 7 : CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study set out to investigate the thesis statement that the lack of an adequate specific theory for subtitling underlies most problems experienced with subtitling, and that the formulation of a more substantial theory could be used as basis for guidelines to facilitate and improve subtitling practice.

The four aims set out in Chapter 1 were accomplished by compiling a summary of existing literature on subtitling theory, with special reference to Karamitroglou's article A Proposed Set of Subtitling Standards in Europe and the Code of Best Practice for Subtitling by Ivarsson and Carroll. This literature survey revealed that existing studies are mostly **descriptive** inasmuch as they describe conventions already applied to subtitling. They are also **prescriptive** as far as the formal subtitling output is concerned. However, they are not sufficiently **descriptive** in that they fail to describe existing subtitles in order to identify inadequacies. The main focus of these studies is legibility and readability of the subtitle and specific attention is given to duration, layout, semantic segmentation as well as simplification and cultural factors.

It was determined that these studies offer no guidance to subtitlers on the **creation** of subtitles, i.e. on the opening of the frequently proffered "black box" theory of translation to propose a theory for guiding subtitlers in the creation of subtitles that would adhere to accepted translational standards. Neither do they deal sufficiently with problems existing in the field.

The study then proceeded to use current translation theory, especially the semiotic approach to translation, as a basis for the investigation of subtitling. The semiotic approach was selected as most suitable because of its ability to accommodate various systems of signification. This is essential for a study of subtitling, since it enables the passing not only from one language to another (translation), but also the passing from one semiotic system (spoken language) to

another (written language). Furthermore, it facilitates the manifestation of other semiotic systems of signification (namely visual and aural systems as they appear in film) that has a pronounced impact on the semiotic system of written language (as it appears in the subtitled final product). Semiotics is therefore eminently suited for an activity which is performed at the interface between a number of systems of signification that constitute the macro-text of film.

Departing from the perspective of Interpretative Semiotics as formulated by Charles Peirce, it was postulated that in translation the text is the object, the source text is the sign and the translation (target text) is the interpretant. It was also noted that the target text as interpretant becomes a sign to the viewer, and that this sign is in turn interpreted by the viewer, thereby giving birth to another interpretant.

In translation the translator attempts to establish equivalence between the source text and target text and this reflects the ongoing process of semiosis to achieve equivalence between sign and interpretant. Equivalence was defined as the sameness of effect of signs in the source and target texts on the groups for which they are intended.

The equivalent semiotic elements for film are the film as text, the visual and aural elements as sign and viewer comprehension as the interpretant. It was postulated that knowledge of the "language" of film is crucial for subtitling, as this constitutes the semiotic system within which the subtitler practises his/her craft. This is important to enable the subtitler to find the right balance between conveying either too much or too little information to the viewer. Too much information will lead to linguistic overload where the viewer becomes pre-occupied with linguistic elements, or linguistic elements in an inaccessible format, which will allow insufficient time for the processing of non-linguistic film signs, whereas too little information will distract the viewer because it will necessitate speculation to fill in the gaps.

The proposed theory for subtitling assimilated existing translation theory (in particular the semiotic approach) with the semiotic approach to film theory. The gist of this proposed theory is that the subtitler needs to be well versed in the reading of a film, as well as translation theory. The only theoretical approach in which this process (belonging to both the realms of translation and film) can be assimilated, is semiotics, because of its ability to marry various disciplines.

In terms of a semiotic approach to both translation and film, the subtitling process has been described as:

- The film text as the object;
- Aural and visual elements as the sign that refers to the object;
- The idea that the subtitler forms about the object as the interpretant;
- The interpretant formed by the subtitler gives birth to a new sign, the subtitle; and
- The sign is in turn re-interpreted by the viewer and gives birth to a new interpretant in his/her mind.

In order for the subtitling process to be successful, the interpretant of the subtitle needs to be on par with the original sign (linguistic elements in the film). In order to achieve this, a pendular movement occurs between the interpretant in the mind of the translator and the source text until equivalence (as near as is humanly possible and of necessity a functional equivalence aimed at equivalence of effect) has been reached.

This has led to the proposed theory where the **subtitle with equivalent effect** is seen as the full deployment of the meaning-potential of the source text (linguistic elements in the film). Based on this theory, certain guidelines for subtitling were formulated to promote the creation of subtitles with equivalent effect. These guidelines are:

- *View the film at least once on a mimetic level.*

- *(Re)view the film until the meaning-potential of all film signs, both linguistic and non-linguistic have been optimally (or as close as possible to this) exploited.*
- *Identify speech units by watching the film, and refer to the production script if necessary.*
- *Spot the film.*
- *Create subtitles for the speech units.*
- *Test subtitles by evaluating equivalence of effect on qualitative, referential and signification levels.*
- *Ensure that the subtitles adhere to formal and technical requirements.*
- *Know that this is the best solution at the time but that the nature of semiosis determines that there is no ultimate solution.*

The proposed theory was then applied to three scenes from the film *Cyrano de Bergerac*. The existing subtitles were evaluated in terms of equivalent effect. Where they fell short, the semiotic approach to translation was used to formulate suggestions that are equivalent in effect to the source text rather than the existing subtitles. It was noted that the quest for rhyming subtitles often forced the subtitler to deviate from the figurative images used in the source text, resulting in figurative images that are far less powerful. It was postulated that rhyme, as an aural phenomenon, is not essential to subtitles not intended to be read out loud. In view of the fact that the viewer has access to the soundtrack of the film, and therefore to the musicality of the dialogue, it is more important to have subtitles with equivalent effect on the signification level, than on the qualitative level. In the final instance, the subtitling of this film requires a variety of approaches, since the film text is both expressive (as serious literature) and vocative (as a crowd-pleaser) in nature.

The application of the proposed theory for subtitling and accompanying guidelines proved useful in the evaluation of existing subtitles in *Cyrano de Bergerac*, but also in the creation of alternatives where existing subtitles were lacking in terms of equivalent effect with the source text. Having thus established the validity of the proposed theory, it is felt that it will make a

valuable contribution to the theory of subtitling in general and facilitate the creation of subtitles with equivalent effect.

A further avenue for research could be a descriptive study of subtitles in a variety of film and television genres in order to test the above theory. Another avenue would be to investigate the *particular* impact of the manipulation of semiotic systems of signification on the viewer in order to test the validity of equivalence of effect in this form of translation.

GLOSSARY

<i>semiotics</i>	The study of systems of signification.
<i>object</i>	The "reality" referred to by a sign.
<i>signs</i>	Used to refer to a reality (object), for example the word "dog" which refers to a canine.
<i>interpretant</i>	The idea formed in the mind of the receiver about the object.
<i>signifier</i>	The component of the sign which refers to reality, such as the word /dog/.
<i>signified</i>	What the signifier refers to, such as the specific type of animal referred to by the word /dog/.
<i>semiosis</i>	The process through which an object is understood as being referred to by a sign.
<i>codes</i>	Sets of signs within which signs acquire specific meaning

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