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Translate the Pun, Sacrifice the Fun:

A Comparative Case Study of the Dutch Subtitled Wordplay in an Episode of *The Persuaders!*

Shachida Ushurova

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Begeleider: Dhr. Joost Bolle

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Abstract

This thesis analyses an evolution in the way wordplay is translated in subtitles, when no specific target language equivalent is at hand. Relevant literature points towards the use of generally standardized language in present-day subtitling, with greater attention for grammatically correct and formal expressions rather than naturally sounding collocations. A case study of one episode of the British television series *The Persuaders!* investigated the difference between the translations of wordplay in 1972 and 2006. The composed corpus clearly shows a preference for formal language use in the 2006 subtitles. Moreover, the generally longer sentences and the choice of lexical items suggest greater importance of disambiguated information transfer in modern subtitles. Possible interpretations of the results could be the ever-increasing use of subtitling as an audiovisual translation technique, which forces subtitlers to be fast rather than creative. A bigger and more diverse target audience, which explains the disambiguated language. Alternatively, the higher public knowledge of English and the suggested ESIST-subtitling norms could also influence the translation in subtitles. A specific and clear conclusion, however, is difficult to give, as there is still a great lack of consensus when it comes to subtitling. Especially in the case of specific colloquial expressions, such as wordplay. Further research is, therefore, suggested.

1. Introduction

Subtitling remains up to this day one of the hardest forms of translation. This has mainly to do with limitations in space and time (Araújo, 2004, p. 163). There are, for instance, very strict rules considering the length of subtitles. As a result, subtitlers are forced to handle translation difficulties very quickly (Araújo, 2004, p. 161), but also effectively. However, this is not as easy as it may sound. Consider, for example, culturally-specific expressions (Araújo, 2004, p. 161). In this case, subtitlers simply do not always have enough time to render the exact meaning of the source language expression in the best possible way. Araújo (2004, p. 162) supports this idea, claiming that film dialogues are "a simulation of oral conversation" and, therefore, often consist of expressions which are very typical of certain communities. Consequently, translating them may cause difficulties to screen translators in general, as she also includes dubbing translators.

Space and time constraints, however, are not the only problems subtitlers have to face. There is also the question of comprehensible translation. Again, especially in the case of culturally-specific or colloquial expressions. Keeping in mind that the function of subtitles is to make the target audience understand the meaning of the source language discourse, subtitlers have to make sure they use clear and understandable language. As Chang (2012, p. 75) suggests, it is not enough "merely to translate so that the average receptor is likely to understand the message rather we aim to make certain that such a person is unlikely to misunderstand it." This, mainly, forms an issue when the source language expression does not have an exact target language equivalent (Dollerup, 1974, p. 202). Making the meaning of such an expression clear, namely, requires extra effort from the subtitler. This could explain why a general tendency in subtitling, according to Smith (1998), is the elimination and reformulation of colloquial expressions and dialects into standard language. Because these expressions are not only difficult to render, irregularities in their translation may cause comprehension impairment (Smith in Asimakoulas, 2004, p. 839).

Another important aspect of subtitling is that it is "a cross-medium activity (spoken to written)" (Bogucki, 2004, p. 72). Distributors and subtitling companies, therefore, often expect subtitlers to follow the rules of the written language (Araújo, 2004, pp. 168-169). This means greater attention for grammatically correct and formal expressions. Furthermore, Gottlieb (2004) claims straightaway that subtitling is mainly governed by the norms of the written language (Gottlieb in Orero, 2004, p. 87). Karamitroglou (1998, p. 2), for example, also talks about "subtitled text", suggesting that the production and layout of television subtitles should maximize the legibility and readability of the inserted subtitles.

Thus, taking into account the limitations in space and time, the necessity of easy understandable subtitles, and the obvious importance of grammatically correct and formal language, the fact that a common set of rules is still missing is somewhat surprising. Mainly because Cintas (2005, pp. 4-5), for example, is certain that quality standards in subtitling have decreased significantly. A few reasons for this, according to him, are little training for newcomers and the absence of proper in-house guidelines. Cintas (2005, p. 5) also believes that the decline in subtitling quality can be explained by the lack of a consensus concerning quality in interlingual subtitling. Moreover, he is convinced that the Code of Good Subtitling Practice, introduced by Ivarsson and Carroll (1998) based on the proposals from the European Association for Studies in Screen Translation (ESIST), has failed to bring any significant change in the situation.

Keeping all the mentioned aspects in mind, it is interesting to know what their impact is on the subtitling practice of such specific expressions as wordplay. The main object of this thesis is to see whether there is an evolution in the way subtitlers translate wordplay, when no specific target language equivalents are available. This will be analysed with a case study of an episode of the British television series *The Persuaders!* More specifically, a comparison will be made between the translations of wordplay in the subtitles from 1972 and from 2006.

It is worth mentioning, however, that linguistic research into the specific functioning of wordplay has, so far, been inconclusive. Therefore, the translation of wordplay in this thesis will mainly be treated as the translation of colloquial expressions.

Before the discussion of the case study, some theoretical background information will be provided. Seeing as this thesis is virtually concerned with subtitling and wordplay, it is useful to understand the basic concepts of these two disciplines. In addition, a brief overview of subtitling tendencies and the translation of wordplay will be given.

Finally, the results of the case study will be discussed by means of several sub-questions. These questions were derived from the main research question, which will be answered in the conclusion.

2. Theoretical background

In order to fully understand the topic of this thesis, the following sections will provide basic information about subtitling, subtitling tendencies, wordplay, and the translation of wordplay, respectively.

2.1 Subtitling

Gottlieb (2004) defines subtitling as "the rendering in a different language of verbal messages in filmic media, in the shape of one or more lines of written text, presented on the screen in synch with the original verbal message" (cited in Orero, 2004, p. 86). It is not a new discipline, as the first subtitles, or *intertitles*, were already introduced during the silent film era at the beginning of the 20th century (Ivarsson, 2004). However, those mainly involved explaining parts of the film. The subtitling technique as we now know it, that is the translation of film dialogue, started taking shape with the invention of sound film in 1927 (Ivarsson, 2004).

Baker (1998) presents film as "a semiotic composition of four channels" (cited in Bogucki, 2004, p. 82). Bogucki represents those four channels in a simplified model as dialogue, sound, subtitles and image. Incidentally, image plays a fairly important part when it comes to subtitling. For example, Bogucki (2004, p. 75) claims that linguistically relevant elements in the visual context also determine the content of subtitles. This makes sense, seeing as image and subtitles are visible to the target audience simultaneously. The absence of an image in other types of translation, for instance, makes free translation easier, without causing incoherence (Chaume, 2004, p. 19).

Furthermore, subtitling is the generally preferred translation technique "in the smaller language areas, such as the Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries" (Ivarsson, 2004), as it is much cheaper than other techniques, such as dubbing or voiceover.

In terms of language use, subtitling consists of small and uncomplicated sentences (Bogucki, 2004, p. 73). This, however, does not mean that film dialogue in itself is simple. On the contrary, as Chaume (2004, p. 12) calls it a complex language with its own rules and conventions. The main complications being posed by colloquial language, which subtitlers must permanently keep in mind, for they are dealing with everyday dialogue (Chang, 2012, p. 72).

Next to language use, subtitlers have to deal with two important technical limitations. Firstly, there are limitations in space. Subtitles can maximally occupy two lines at the lower part of the screen. Yet, they should transfer all the necessary information, with minimal text reduction (Chang, 2012, p. 74). Furthermore, each of the two subtitle lines should allow around 35 characters. An increase in the number of characters reduces the legibility of the subtitles (Karamitroglou, 1998, p. 3). Secondly, there are time limitations. First and foremost, the presence of subtitles should be consistent with the visual image. On top of that, they should stay visible long enough for the average viewers to read them, but not too long, as they would become irritating (Chang, 2012, p. 74). Study of the reading speed of the average viewers (aged

14-65, from an upper-middle socio-educational class) has shown that a full two-line subtitle (14-16 words) should remain on the screen for about six seconds. It should, however, be no longer than that, for this would cause automatic rereading of the subtitle (Karamitroglou, 1998, p. 2).

In other words, target viewers clearly play an essential part in the subtitling process. According to Bogucki (2004, p. 76) they may even influence the choice of vocabulary and syntax. He says, for example, that people with higher education have better reading skills and broader general knowledge, which would allow for subtitles to be more condensed both in content and quantity. Moreover, Bogucki (2004, p. 78) is convinced that "restrictions of concision and omission are standard operating practice in subtitling." However, it cannot be simply assumed that the viewers consist of higher educated people. Mainly, because the use of subtitling as an audiovisual translation technique has increased significantly in recent years. This means that it now reaches a much broader target audience, which may very well consist of lower educated people. Standard practice in subtitling should, therefore, be making the average viewer understand the message. Araújo (2004, p. 164), furthermore, claims that the final result of translation is affected by such elements as context, target audience and target culture.

2.2 Subtitling tendencies

It has already been mentioned that subtitling practice, basically, lacks any kind of a common and strict set of rules. Above that, the majority of research into subtitling practices in Europe seems to be descriptive rather than prescriptive (Karamitroglou, 1998, p. 1). Yet, Karamitroglou is convinced that there are a few undeniable parameters that should be taken into account. Firstly, the countries of the European Union require the adoption of common practices so they can operate as a unified body. Secondly, new technological developments in mass media and communication exceed the physical borders of the participating EU-countries, leading to the creation of a pan-European market audience. Furthermore, Cintas (2004) claims that a consensus among all parties involved is particularly essential because of the time and space constraints in the presentation of subtitles, as it is otherwise almost impossible to reach a stable and homogeneous discourse. That is why, for example, the ESIST aims to create a code of good practice in subtitling. According to Cintas, however, this is again only a prescriptive list of rules (Cintas in Orero, 2004, pp. 29-30).

This being said, it has, nonetheless, been suggested here that subtitlers generally tend to create grammatically correct and formal expressions. This way they hope to render comprehensible subtitles, which often sound unnatural. For instance, Araújo (2004, p. 166) illustrates this with the translation of clichés by Brazilian subtitlers. An analysis of their translations revealed four strategies which demonstrate that "the absence of naturalness is the norm." Two of those

strategies are quite interesting for this thesis. Namely, "the creation of grammatically correct expressions, which do not sound nativelike" and "the use of formal language in subtitling, which does not suit the oral aspect of a film dialogue."

Furthermore, Bamba (1996) states that expressions which may sound strange to the target audience often appear in the subtitled translation. Considering that clichés, for example, belong to colloquial language, translating these expressions demands a lot of adaptation from the translator who "thinks it safer to remain closer to the source language." Consequently, this results in expressions which are very similar to the original ones (Bamba in Araújo, 2004, p. 167). Another reason for such faithfulness to the source language may be because, contrary to other types of translation, subtitling does not allow for free condensation or deletion. Completeness and logic, namely, are strongly demanded (Chang, 2012, p. 74).

Basically, it appears that subtitlers prefer to mimic the source language rather than allow for even the slightest translation mistakes. This is, especially, noticeable when it comes to the English language. For instance, due to globalization and the overall popularity of English-speaking films, many people have become familiar with the language. Chang (2012, pp. 71-72) even suggests that some viewers can easily be experts in the English culture. Thus, translation mistakes become highly undesirable. Moreover, Ebeling (2012, p. 104) states that since both the source and the target expressions are available to the public simultaneously, people with knowledge of both languages can easily judge the success of the translated subtitles.

2.3 Wordplay

Some authors use the term wordplay for different kinds of play on language, such as parody, anagram, spoonerism and transformed allusion (Low, 2011, p. 62). However, according to Schröter (2005, p. 84) wordplay forms no more than a prominent subcategory of *language-play*, which he labels as a general term. Crystal (1998) gives the following definition of language-play:

> We play with language when we manipulate it as a source of enjoyment, either for ourselves or for the benefit of others. I mean 'manipulate' literally: we take some linguistic feature – such as a word, a phrase, a sentence, a part of a word, a group of sounds, a series of letters – and make it do things it does not normally do. We are, in effect, bending and breaking the rules of the language. And if someone were to ask why we do it, the answer is simply: for fun.
>
> (cited in Schröter, 2005, p. 77)

Furthermore, wordplay is often used interchangeably with the term pun. Delabastita (1993), for example, literally says: "I will consider *pun* synonymous with 'instance of wordplay'" (cited in

Schröter, 2005, p. 85). Yet, not all authors agree on the equality of the two terms. Nonetheless, for the sake of clarity, both will be used interchangeably throughout this thesis as well.

The basic principle of wordplay is ambiguity (Attardo, 1993, p. 542), which arises when expressions have different meanings. However, Attardo (1994) and Ritchie (2004) later stated that ambiguity in itself does not suffice as a condition for punning. Attardo (1994), for instance, proposes two other elements to transform ambiguity into a pun. Firstly, the meanings of the two punning expressions should be opposed. Secondly, the puns should be "authored", meaning someone has to point out the ambiguity (cited in Partington, 2009, p. 1795).

There are two separate linguistic mechanisms for the production of wordplay. Yet, both of them depend on the acceptance of the idiom as the basic principle in interpretation of normal communication. The two mechanisms are "relexicalisation" and "reconstruction". In the relexicalisation pun the recipient is presented with a (semi)-fixed expression. Something in the discourse, however, makes him break up the parts of the expression and reinterpret the utterance. In the reconstruction pun the recipient is presented with an expression which is a reworking of another preconstructed expression. In this case, the challenge is to recognize the allusion (Partington, 2009, p. 1803).

So far, linguistics has mainly provided lists of different kinds of puns, without really explaining how they function in daily discourse (Partington, 2009, p. 1795). Therefore, it is reasonable to imagine that translating puns may lead to language-specific problems (Low, 2011, p. 62). On top of that, wordplay generally uses creative and unusual language (Partington, 2009, p. 1795), which in itself is difficult to transfer.

2.4 Translation of wordplay

Despite the uncertainty about the specific functioning of wordplay, it can be suggested that its purpose is to be playful and possibly humorous. Without further argument, it will be assumed here that punning expressions are meant to be funny. Therefore, in this case, humour will play a significant part in the translation of wordplay.

Taking into account everything that has already been mentioned about wordplay, it is fairly reasonable to say that discussing the translation of such expressions is relatively complicated. It is, however, possible that target language and audience exercise most of the influence. This influence can, for instance, be found in three of the seven translation strategies for puns, proposed by Delabastita (1993). These are: the translation of the source language pun by a target language pun; the rendering of the pun with another rhetorical device; the insertion of a

compensatory pun where there was none in the source language (Delabastita in Asimakoulas, 2004, p. 827).

Furthermore, Low (2011, p. 62) claims that when it comes to humorous sentences containing wordplay, puns should ideally be replicated or compensated in the target language. Unless information transfer is more important than witticism, in which case priority should go to the information. In other words, it is better to explain an utterance instead of forcing a literal translation of the humorous meaning. Giora (2003), moreover, shows with examples from psycholinguistic studies that listeners prefer idiomatic interpretations of phrases to literal ones. Hence, "idiomaticity" is more noticeable than literalness (Giora in Partington, 2009, p. 1799). In this respect, Hymes (1971) also claims that it is part of a native speaker's communicative competence to know what is the usual combinatorial behaviour of linguistic items (Hymes in Partington, 2009, p. 1797).

Additionally, Qvale (1995) states that translators should decide from the beginning whether wordplay or ambiguity really is what it looks like, and whether it is intentional or not (Qvale in Schröter, 2005, p. 79). In the case of intentional ambiguity, the translator then needs to decide whether it is significant enough to be transferred to the target text (Schröter, 2005, p. 82). Considering humorous utterances, for instance, Chiaro (1992) claims that comic situations which are too culture-specific will not be considered amusing outside the culture of origin (Chiaro in Schröter, 2005, p. 62). Thus, with these kinds of expressions it is better to transfer only the essential information.

3. Case study

Theoretical background appears to point towards the explicit use of grammatically correct and formal language in the translation of present-day subtitles. Even in the case of such specific expressions as wordplay. The following case study will put this theory to the test. In order to do so, a comparative corpus was composed in which two different Dutch translations of several original English expressions containing wordplay were analysed. The source expressions come from an episode of the British television series *The Persuaders!* A comparison was made each time between a subtitle from 1972 and from 2006.

3.1 Research questions

The main goal of this thesis is to show how wordplay is translated in present-day subtitling. More specifically, the research will focus on the way subtitlers translate puns which do not have specific target language equivalents. For this purpose, the following research question was formulated:

Is there an evolution in the way subtitlers translate wordplay when no specific target language equivalent is available?

This research question was further divided into the following sub-questions, which will be used in the discussion of the results:

1. *Is there an evolution in subtitling?*
2. *How big is the impact of the suggested subtitling standards?*
3. *Is potential humour taken into account when translating wordplay?*
4. *What enjoys greater attention: natural interpretation or information transfer?*
5. *What is the importance of the target language/audience?*
6. *What is the importance of the source language?*

3.2 Method

The research method used in this thesis is a case study of the ninth episode of the British television series *The Persuaders!* The episode, *The Old, the New, and the Deadly*, aired in 1971 and was directed by Leslie Norman.

The entire episode was viewed twice, with Dutch subtitles from 1972 and from 2006, respectively. After selecting seven original expressions containing wordplay, a comparative corpus was composed. The two translations of each expression are analysed in the Analysis (3.3) section. The relevant findings are summarized and presented under Data Processing (3.4).

3.3 Analysis

The following section provides a comparative analysis of the two Dutch subtitles of each of the seven original English expressions.

Consider, for starters, expression (1), which shows a great example of an informal and a formal translation, respectively. The subtitles also contain a different use of past tenses:

	Original expression	**1972 subtitle**	**2006 subtitle**
1	It was too much heel clicking that lost us the war.	Met hakken-klakken verloren we de oorlog!	Door al dat geklik met de hielen hebben we de oorlog juist verloren.

For instance, *too much heel clicking* is translated as *hakken-klakken* in the first subtitle, which is fairly informal comparing to *al dat geklik met de hielen* in the second translation. Moreover, the second subtitle is longer, clearly trying to transfer as much information as possible. Note, for

example, that not only the *heel clicking* is translated, but also the *too much* (*al dat*) of it. As for the grammatical aspect, there is a difference between *verloren …* (lost = simple past) and *hebben … verloren* (have lost = perfect tense). In the Dutch language the perfect tense is used to express facts, emphasizing the result. The simple past, however, is used to describe certain past events, without any link to the present. Keeping this in mind, the losing of the war, in this case, is best translated with a perfect tense found in the second subtitle.

Expression (2) is interesting because of an obviously censored omission in the first subtitle, showing again that the second translation faithfully renders maximum information:

Original expression		**1972 subtitle**	**2006 subtitle**
2	Don't worry. It's not an invitation, just an abbreviation. Sinclair.	Roep dat zo niet… Sin betekent Sinclair!	Ze zegt niet dat ze zin heeft. Gewoon 'n afkorting van Sinclair.

When Prue runs towards Brett screaming *Sin*, he explains to the waiter that *it's not an invitation* (referring ambiguously to *sin*), but simply *an abbreviation* of his name. The sexual reference in the original expression seems to be ignored in the first subtitle, which gives the translation *Roep dat zo niet* (lit. *Don't scream it like that*). The second subtitle, however, does transfer this information with the colloquial expression *Ze zegt niet dat ze zin heeft*. Hence, the subtitler appears to have found an appropriate translation in this case. Furthermore, *an abbreviation* is translated literally as *'n afkorting* in the second subtitle, while the first one preferred the more interpretative translation with the verb *betekenen* (lit. *to mean*).

In expression (3) a small piece of the original expression is not translated in the first subtitle. Both subtitles also show, again, a different use of register and the grammatical use of past tenses:

Original expression		**1972 subtitle**	**2006 subtitle**
3	I simply explained to the police how I happened to be dancing in the street with a dead man.	Ik heb de politie uitgelegd waarom ik met een dooie danste…	Ik legde de politie gewoon uit waarom ik op straat danste met 'n dode man.

The second part of the original expression, *how I happened to be dancing in the street with a dead man*, is translated in the first subtitle as *waarom ik met een dooie danste*, which merely means *how I happened to be dancing with a dead man*. Thus, *in the street* is not translated at all. In the second subtitle, however, the translation is *waarom ik <u>op straat</u> danste met 'n dode man*. The translation of *in the street* is underlined. Moreover, *a dead man* is translated as *een dooie* in the first subtitle, as opposed to *'n dode man* in the second one. The first translation is undeniably informal. Finally, the grammar use. Comparing *heb … uitgelegd* (= have explained) from the first subtitle to *legde … uit* (= explained) from the second one, the translation with a simple past appears to be more suitable. Seeing as, explaining something to the police is more a description rather than a fact.

The two translations of expression (4) can be compared to the ones of expression (3), which once again proves that the choices were not made randomly:

Original expression		**1972 subtitle**	**2006 subtitle**
4	I am an old hand.	Ik ben een ouwe rat.	Ik ben een oude rat in het vak.

The two different translations of *an old hand* are *een ouwe rat* and *een oude rat in het vak*. Firstly, *ouwe* is a much more informal and quite an archaic translation of *old*, in comparison to *oude*. Moreover, the second translation is expanded to *een oude rat <u>in het vak</u>*, which emphasizes that Denton is talking about his profession.

In expression (5), the second translation sounds more neutral than the first one, which tries to transfer the playful tone of the original message:

Original expression		**1972 subtitle**	**2006 subtitle**
5	You're playing absolute havoc with my love life.	Je stuurt mijn amoureuze leven in de war.	Je ruïneert mijn liefdesleven.

Especially interesting in this expression is the translation of *love life*, which is *amoureuze leven* in the first subtitle and *liefdesleven* in the second one. The latter is a more common expression. Furthermore, *playing havoc with* is translated in the first subtitle as *in de war sturen*. This is a colloquial expression, meaning messing something up. Thus, in this case too there seems to be a

good target language equivalent for the original expression. Yet, in the second translation the subtitler prefers to use the somewhat neutral verb *ruïneren*.

Expression (6) contains a clear ambiguous reference, which is not transferred in the first subtitle, but rather translated literally:

	Original expression	**1972 subtitle**	**2006 subtitle**
6	Which only goes to prove how dangerous it could be to go around picking up strange birds.	Dus kun je andermans vogels beter met rust laten.	Zo zie je maar hoe riskant het is om overal kippetjes op te scharrelen.

In the scene Danny is looking at a picture in the newspaper, when he realizes his problems started after he accidentally picked up the statue of a bird. Brett then makes a joke about *picking up strange birds*. This is ambiguous, as *birds* is also British slang for young women and Danny is a notorious womanizer. Yet, in the first subtitle *strange birds* is translated as *andermans vogels* (lit. *someone else's birds*), without additional reference. The second subtitle does take the ambiguity into account, for *kippetjes* refers informally to young women as well. Moreover, the entire sentence structure of the second translation remains closer to the original message. Consider the translation *Zo zie je maar* of *Which only goes to prove*. It is obviously more literal than *Dus* (lit. *So*). Furthermore, *opscharrelen* is a closer translation to *picking up* than *met rust laten* (lit. *to leave alone*).

Finally, expression (7). Again, in this case the second subtitle remains closer to the original expression, mainly regarding the sentence structure:

	Original expression	**1972 subtitle**	**2006 subtitle**
7	I'm going to usher you through the doors of eternity, or I shall help you shuffle off this mortal coil.	Nu zal ik u behulpzaam zijn bij het vaarwel zeggen aan de aardse beslommeringen…	Ik werk jullie door de deur naar de eeuwigheid, of ik help jullie het tijdelijke met het eeuwige verwisselen.

The original expression consists of two coordinating sentences. The second subtitle copies this structure, while the first one contains a subordinating sentence, viz. *bij het vaarwel zeggen aan de aardse beslommeringen*. Moreover, the first subtitle appears only to translate the second part

of the original expression, i.e. *I shall help you shuffle off this mortal coil*. The second subtitle, however, not only copies the sentence structure of the original message, but also renders a fairly literal translation. For example, *door de deur naar de eeuwigheid* becomes *through the doors of eternity*.

3.4 Data processing

Some general findings from the previous section will now be summarized and linked to the theoretical background. All percentages were calculated manually.

Expressions (1), (3), (4) and (5) all contain examples of informal language in the subtitles from 1972, i.e. *hakken-klakken*, *dooie*, *ouwe* and *amoureuze leven*. All these expressions are changed into more formal alternatives in the 2006 subtitles, i.e. *geklik met de hielen*, *dode man*, *oude* and *liefdesleven*. This means that 4 expressions out of 7 (or 57% of the corpus) point towards an increased use of formal language in present-day subtitling.

Moreover, the subtitles from 2006 remain undeniably more faithful to the source language. This can be seen in expressions (2), (3), (4), (6) and (7), where certain utterances were often translated literally. In other words, 71.43% of the corpus shows clear importance of maximum information transfer.

Furthermore, expressions (1) and (3) (or 28.57% of the corpus) obviously show more attention to correct grammar use in the subtitles from 2006. At first sight, the figure may seem insignificant. However, in the corpus of a larger scale this would pose a problem. Moreover, grammar mistakes should, ideally, be avoided in translation altogether.

Finally, the subtitles from 2006 express a noticeable preference for neutral and common language use, as opposed to the ones from 1972. This is also emphasized by a different use of punctuation. For instance, in 1972 exclamation marks and ellipses appear to have been used more often than today. However, punctuation use is less important for the research at hand and will not be discussed any longer.

4. Results

The analysis of the corpus has led to several interesting observations concerning language use in present-day subtitling. These will be discussed in further detail in the following sections, by means of earlier defined research sub-questions. The main question will be handled in the conclusion. Furthermore, the results will be supported by additional theory.

4.1 Is there an evolution in subtitling?

Several examples from the case study clearly show changes in subtitling practice. Sánchez (2004), for instance, claims that subtitles generally tend to be more literal (Sánchez in Orero, 2004, p. 13). Expression (7) from the corpus illustrates this. The subtitle from 2006 is definitely more literal than the one from 1972, which renders rather an interpretative translation.

One possible explanation for the evolution towards literal translation could be the development in translation memory tools. Namely, it allows you to reuse previously translated sentences. However, their impact on audiovisual translation is still to be researched (Cintas, 2005, p. 2). Furthermore, Karamitroglou (1998, p. 8) suggests that linguistic items of the original expression, which can easily be recognized and comprehended by the target audience, should in some cases be translated word-for-word. He supports his idea by investigations in the psychology of viewing. These indicate that when viewers recognize certain linguistic items, they expect to see literal, translationally equivalent items in the subtitles as well. Apparently, there is an inherently operating checking mechanism in our brain, which makes us think that the subtitle of the original message is not correct when literal translation is missing. This would explain the explicit translation of *the street* in the second subtitle of expression (3). The Dutch word *straat* resembles *street*. Thus, viewers could expect to see this item in the subtitle.

Moreover, viewers anticipate a faithful representation of the original expression. They will, therefore, check whether the number of the spoken utterances corresponds to the number of the subtitled sentences (Karamitroglou, 1998, p. 7). This idea can, for instance, be applied on expression (6). Knowing that the original utterance consists of 17 characters, the second 14 character subtitle is better than the first one, which only contains 9 characters. In addition, Kovačič (1994) states that even if viewers are spared the effort of processing the missing part of the original message, they may find it harder to process the remaining part (Kovačič in Schröter, 2005, pp. 38-39). In other words, authors largely appear to be in favour of complete and even literal translation in subtitling.

4.2 How big is the impact of the suggested subtitling standards?

As mentioned above, all existing subtitling rules are merely suggestions, not strict guidelines. Nonetheless, large satellite broadcasting companies of Europe are convinced that a unifying code of subtitling practices is necessary. This code would make it possible to reach various audiences through a unique set of subtitling standards (Karamitroglou, 1998, p. 1).

The Code of Good Subtitling Practice is an example of the suggested subtitling norms. This is a 26-point list, created by Jan Ivarsson and Mary Carroll. A few of these points were applied to several expressions from the corpus. The concerning rules are:

- Translation quality must be high with due consideration of all idiomatic and cultural nuances.
- The language should be grammatically correct since subtitlers serve as a model for literacy.
- There must be a close correlation between film dialogue and subtitle content; source language and target language should be synchronized as far as possible.

(Ivarsson & Carroll, 1998)

The first rule can be used for expression (6). Contrary to the first subtitle, the second one shows higher translation quality, respecting the ambiguity in the original expression. The second rule applies to expressions (1) and (3). The subtitles from 2006 express correct grammar use. Finally, the third rule can be found in expression (2), where the sexual reference from the original utterance is preserved in the second subtitle. Thus, it could be assumed that modern translators keep the proposed subtitling standards in mind.

4.3 Is potential humour taken into account when translating wordplay?

According to Morgan (2001) "humour is the first thing to go in translation" (cited in Schröter, 2005, p. 37). If considering how much attention has been paid, so far, to grammatically correct and formal language, it seems that little space is left for creativity. However, creativity is exactly what the translation of humour requires. In expression (5), for instance, it can be suggested that Brett's utterance was meant to be funny. Yet, the second subtitle renders a fairly neutral translation.

Still, not all authors agree with this development. Keep in mind that if wordplay was intended to be funny, it is a case of verbally expressed humour (Attardo, 2008, p. 1207). Low (2011, p. 59) then claims that almost all humour of this kind can be translated, if the right strategies are used. One of his own proposed strategies is to "ignore the pun, rendering only one meaning of the ambiguous phrase (…)" (Low, 2011, p. 67). This action could successfully be applied to expression (6). By *picking up strange birds* Brett refers to the statue of the bird, as well as to young women. The translation *kippetjes* (lit. *little chickens*) refers only to young women, eliminating the reference to the bird. Low's strategy appears to work in this case, as the second subtitle is, at the very least, funnier than the first one. In short, whenever possible, translators seem to take humour into account. This could, however, also be explained by translators' faithfulness to the source language.

4.4 What enjoys greater attention: natural interpretation or information transfer?

There is always a slight possibility of the target audience understanding parts of the source language. In this sense, it is advisable to pay greater attention to information transfer. Gottlieb (1994; 1997), for example, suggests that subtitling is seen as "overt translation", which means that anyone with some knowledge of the source language can easily criticize it. Moreover, he is convinced that in most cases there is at least a large minority of the viewers who understands what is said on the screen (Gottlieb in Chang, 2012, p. 72). Knowing this, the second and less creative translation of expression (5) appears to be safer. It is, for instance, possible that after hearing the expression *love life*, viewers may prefer to see the translation *liefdesleven* instead of *amoureuze leven*.

Moreover, Cintas (2005, p. 15) claims that the actual cultural referent receives more importance than a correct translation, as viewers are genuinely interested in the foreign culture and language. In expression (7), for example, *the doors of eternity* is a biblical reference, which is translated almost literally in the second subtitle as *de deur naar de eeuwigheid*. In the first subtitle, however, it is left out altogether. In other words, complete information transfer appears to predominate nowadays.

4.5 What is the importance of the target language/audience?

It has already been established that in the translation of wordplay target language and audience play an essential part. Thus, it makes sense that they have great influence on subtitling as well. Espindola & Vasconcellos (2006, pp. 46-47), for example, claim that "the subtitler adjusts the implicit otherness of the source text to fulfil the intended target audience's expectations," which eventually results in the creation of a "domesticating procedure". This is, however, especially the case with unfamiliar source languages. Remael (2004), therefore, suggests that across wider culture gaps only the essence of the original expression is subtitled (Remael in Orero, 2004, p. 119). Yet, in the case of specific expressions, it could be argued that this theory also applies to such languages as English. For instance, the second subtitle of expression (5) clearly renders only the essence of the original message.

Generally speaking, best subtitles are not only easy to process, but they also transfer maximum information. If there is too little information, viewers may not fully understand the meaning of the message. Too much information, however, requires a lot of time to process and in subtitling this is undesirable (Bogucki, 2004, p. 81). In this respect, the subtitles from 2006 are generally better than the ones from 1972, as they transfer all the information of the original expressions

and are also easier to process. Thus, target audience has a significant impact on modern subtitlers.

4.6 What is the importance of the source language?

As already mentioned, certain source languages can have quite an effect on subtitling. Koolstra et al. say, for example, that when the source language is completely foreign to viewers, their comprehension of the original expressions is fully dependent on the subtitles. The majority of foreign programs in Europe, however, come from English-speaking countries or from neighbouring countries where a related language is spoken. In these cases, the target audience may understand some expressions of the source language (Koolstra, Peeters, & Spinhof, 2002, p. 329). This could explain the explicit translations of *the street* and *the doors* in expressions (3) and (6), respectively, in the subtitles from 2006.

Moreover, according to Gottlieb (2004) subtitlers in Germanic speech communities sometimes prefer to use English-sounding constructions instead of domestic syntax (Gottlieb in Orero, 2004, pp. 88-89). An example of this can be found in the second subtitle of expression (7), which has the identical sentence structure as the original expression. Even though the first subtitle renders the original message just as good. However, the source language of the corpus being English, the often literal translations are understandable. Gottlieb, for instance, cites Baloti (2000) and Press (2003) when he says some viewers are convinced that good translation is formally equivalent. This attitude sometimes forces subtitlers to copy the English dialogue instead of translating it (Gottlieb in Orero, 2004, p. 90).

5. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to see whether there is an evolution in the way subtitlers translate wordplay, when specific target language equivalents are not immediately available. However, seeing as linguistics have yet to give a fully coherent explanation of wordplay (Partington, 2009, p. 1797), it is difficult to focus on the specific translation of these kinds of expressions. For this reason, wordplay has mainly been treated in this thesis as part of culturally-specific expressions. Still, a slight distinction has to be kept in mind between wordplay and other kinds of specific expressions, such as clichés, dialects etc. Namely, the punning examples from the corpus were meant to have a humorous undertone. Partington (2009, p. 1798), for instance, suggests that next to ambiguity humour is also strongly associated with wordplay. Yet, keeping in mind that humour too is a fairly vague concept, as it does not naturally belong to any one academic discipline (Schröter, 2005, p. 71).

Another reason why puns are considered as culturally-specific expressions here, is because the results suggest that present-day subtitlers treat them as such. For example, the case study did not show any sign of techniques used specifically for the translation of wordplay. This makes sense, as there is no standard guideline for the transfer of culturally-specific expressions in general (Karamitroglou, 1998, p. 10). Such authors as Chang (2012, p. 75), however, suggest that subtitles should sound as natural as possible, enabling the target audience to fully understand and appreciate the film. "Naturalness" means that the translated dialogues should pay attention to the audience's speaking habits. Chang, therefore, recommends the use of high frequency words or phrases, and short sentences. Furthermore, Cintas (2001) is cited in Remael (2004), saying that the subtitler must first of all eliminate all irrelevant information from the original expression and then reformulate what he considers to be most important for the understanding of the message (Remael in Orero, 2004, p. 104).

Broadly speaking, the results of the case study support the suggested idea that present-day subtitlers generally focus on the use of grammatically correct and formal language in translation. Regardless the use of culturally-specific expressions, or in this case wordplay. Based on the corpus, the movement towards standardized language use in subtitling is more notable today than, for instance, 40 years ago. In other words, there is a visible evolution in subtitling practice. As for the specific case of wordplay, there have been no striking or conclusive findings. The overall assumption seems to be that due to limitations in space and time, and the general predominance of maximum information transfer, these kinds of expressions are simply not taken into account. Again, keeping in mind that the specific functioning of wordplay has yet to be defined.

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Appendix I

Code of Good Subtitling Practice

Subtitle spotting and translation:

- Subtitlers must always work with a copy of the production and, if possible, a dialogue list and glossary of atypical words and special references.
- It is the subtitler's job to spot the production and translate and write the subtitles in the (foreign) language required.
- Translation quality must be high with due consideration of all idiomatic and cultural nuances.
- Simple syntactic units should be used.
- When it is necessary to condense dialogue, the text must be coherent.
- Subtitle text must be distributed from line to line and page to page in sense blocks and/or grammatical units.
- Ideally, each subtitle should be syntactically self-contained.
- The language register must be appropriate and correspond to locution.
- The language should be grammatically correct since subtitles serve as a model for literacy.
- All important written information in the images (signs, notices, etc.) should be translated and incorporated wherever possible.
- Given the fact that many TV viewers are hearing-impaired, "superfluous" information, such as names, off-screen interjections, etc., should also be subtitled.
- Songs must be subtitled where relevant.
- Obvious repetition of names and common comprehensible phrases need not always be subtitled.
- The in and out times of subtitles must follow the speech rhythm of the dialogue, taking cuts and sound bridges into consideration.

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- Language distribution within and over subtitles must consider cuts and sound bridges; the subtitles must underline surprise or suspense and in no way undermine it.

- The duration of all subtitles within a production must adhere to a regular viewer reading rhythm.

- Spotting must reflect the rhythm of the film.

- No subtitle should appear for less than one second or, with the exception of songs, stay on the screen for longer than seven seconds.

- A minimum of four frames should be left between subtitles to allow the viewer´s eye to register the appearance of a new subtitle.

- The number of lines in any subtitle must be limited to two.

- Wherever two lines of unequal length are used, the upper line should preferably be shorter to keep as much of the image as free as possible and in left-justified subtitles in order to reduce unnecessary eye movement.

- There must be a close correlation between film dialogue and subtitle content; source language and target language should be synchronized as far as possible.

- There must be a close correlation between film dialogue and the presence of subtitles.

- Each production should be edited by a reviser/editor.

- The (main) subtitler should be acknowledged at the end of the film or, if the credits are at the beginning, then close to the credit for the script writer.

- The year of subtitle production and the copyright for the version should be displayed at the end of the film.

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