Maren Elise Sæther

Bachelor's thesis

What kinds of losses have occured in the subtitle translation of the movie *The King`s Speech*, and what are the likely effects on the target audience?
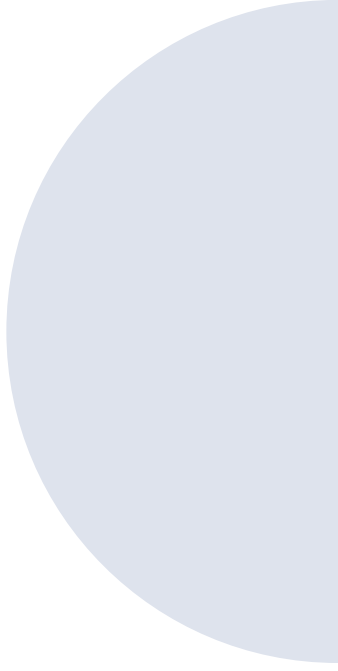
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1.0 Introduction

"King`s speech" is a British historical drama directed by Tom Hooper, which debuted in 2010. Colin Firth is playing the role as the future King George VI of Great Britain, or Bertie, who struggles with stammering. Bertie is not initially the heir to the throne, but subsequently overtakes this position as his elder brother, David, subtracts himself from being a king as he has other callings in life that overtakes his attention. Bertie`s speech issues becomes predominantly problematic as a member of the royal family, and he therefore sees the speech and language therapist Lionel Logue. Hence, the story and theme of the film are also centered around language and speech, as well as British history (Hooper, 2011). To establish comprehension of the film for a Norwegian audience, the also British dialogue in the movie has been translated into Norwegian subtitles. This founds challenges and conversations in relation to the equivalence and the relation between the orally presented source text and the written target text. On this account, the aim of this thesis is to investigate the different kinds of losses that occurs in the subtitling of the film`s discourse, and how the translation and these losses affect the meaning and social substance in the audiovisual work. The formulation of the research question will consequently be: What kinds of losses have occurred in the subtitle translation of the movie *The King's Speech*, and what are the likely effects on the target audience?

First, relevant theory pertaining to the field will be presented. Moreover, the method used in this thesis is included, following the data and the analysis of this. Thereafter, a discussion regarding the findings of the analysis will precede, followed by a conclusion and references.

Prefabricated orality

One can claim that the process of creating fictional dialogues that are believable and natural sounding is one of the most central challenges when it comes to audiovisual translation (Baños-Piñero & Chaume, 2009). The main issue lies in selecting the specific features of this mode of dialogue that can be generally accepted and identified as such by the audience, that gives the effect of spontaneity of the utterings. Prefabricated orality is a term used to define audiovisual texts based on a script to be interpreted as if it had not been written, by employing various linguistic resources to promote a true-to-life discourse (Baños-Piñero & Chaume, 2009).

2.0 Theory

2.1 Audiovisual translation

Audiovisual translation is the term for the branch of translation studies that is centered on the transferal of multimodal and multimedial texts into a different language and/or culture (Gonzales, 2009). The audiovisual texts are multimodal as they merge different meaning-making modes, including for instance language, image, color, music, and perspective. These modes are delivered to the viewer through the synchronized deployment of a variety of media, centering the screen as a coordinating role in the presentation process. In this way, the audiovisual text is also multimedial. (Gonzales, 2009). Chaume (2004, page 1) states that "the main function of audiovisual translation is to produce a similar effect on the target culture audience as the source text produced on the source culture audience".

2.2. Oral to written as a constraint in subtitling

Audiovisual translation includes the transfer from an orally spoken to a written medium and is hence defined as an intermodal form of audiovisual translating. Interlingual subtitles gives the audience a written version of the orally held source text in another language (Gonzales, 2009). Limitations due to subtitling may occur; studies have claimed that subtitles can provide only 67% of the spoken dialogue into written text. Thus, professional subtitlers are constrained to prioritize the overall communicative intention of the utterance over the semantics of the individual lexical constituents. Some of the most common subtitling strategies implemented are therefore deleting, condensing and adapting the source speech (Gonzales, 2009). These aspects are confirmed by Hatim & Mason (1999); the mode transfer from speech to writing often result in misrepresentation of non-standard dialects, emphatic devices such as intonation, code-switching and style-shifting, and turn-taking. Furthermore, this constraint may also explain losses in translation such as loss of swearing. This is because the written text in comparison to the oral, will have to be tidier and more formal, with fewer pragmatic markers, and that in this sense, swearing belongs to the spoken language (Greenall, 2011).

2.3. Time and space as a constraint in subtitling

Subtitling is a form of translating that involves the issue of producing fragments of written texts to be overlaid on visual footage (Gonzales, 2009). The fragments of written speech provided as subtitles must be delivered alongside with the source language for the purpose of translation. This offers challenges to the process of subtitling, because one generally speaks more rapidly than one can read. Due to this, subtitling often involves technical constraints of lack of screen space and shortage of time, depending on the duration of the corresponding speech unit. Mason (2001) studies the topic of loss in subtitling, and views subtitling as a selective reduction, where preference for maintaining certain communicative aspects over others. The constraint of time and space will inevitably increase the possibility of loss in the audiovisual translation.

2.4 Politeness

Hatim and Mason (1999) claims that politeness is a feature that frequently is underrepresented in translation. Politeness in their study is defined as: "all aspects of language usage which serve to establish, maintain, or modify interpersonal relationships between text producer and text receiver" (Hatim & Mason, 1999). Moreover, the discourse element of politeness includes different linguistic features, such as lexical choice, sentence form, intonation, uncompleted utterance, and ambiguity of reference.

2.5 Humor

Chiaro (2010) states that it is challenging to translate and convey verbal humor. The term "Jab lines" defines humorous elements that are fully integrated within a serious text or discourse without disrupting the narrative flow (Chiaro, 2010, page 14). These are clever "good lines" that are delivered in perfect timing, that needs to be recognized by the translator. Chiaro (2004, page 1) points out that the translator of verbally expressed humor should attempt to recreate the source text humor, which involves matching the linguistic ambiguity in the source language similarly to the target language.

2.6 Non-translation of swear-words

Greenall (2011) explores the topic omission of swearwords in translation as a "trend" in professional translating. Swearing is a discourse phenomenon that can be important in terms of providing information about the components in literature and audiovisual works, such as characters and setting, in addition to the specific fragment of discourse. In this way, use of swearing in dialogue delivers valuable information concerning issues of persona and behavior such as class membership and social belonging, motives, emotions, and goals. This is defined as social implicature. The aspect of neutral style language may act as a possible reasoning for the exclusion of swear words; the strategy of removing taboo words may precede as an unwritten rule to ovoid vulgar language (Greenall, 2011).

2.7 Effects of loss

The linguistic features within discourse constitute interpersonal dynamics, the progress of the conflictual verbal relationship, and indication of the management of the situation, that the subtitles struggle to retain (Hatim & Mason, 1999). Meaning is often retrieved from the implications of the utterings, more than the utterings by themselves; the subtitles provide the audience with a different picture of the overall situation. Moreover, in the study by Hatim and Mason (1999), the politeness features of the works, such as tentativeness, ambiguity, and vagueness, vanished in the subtitles, explained by the subtitler opting for the briefest possible option that is compatible with establishing coherence. Thereupon, implementing the full intention or meaning in subtitles is imperiled, and receivers of the target language often struggle to retrieve impersonal meaning in its entirety, and even derive deluded impressions of characters and the communicational situation.

Similarly, Dimitrova (2004) states that the function of dialect and other non-standard linguistic features in fictional prose is often considered to be characterization of the fictional characters in the work; it identifies the character on social or regional grounds, or it separates or contrasts the character. It can also mark localization, the contrast of space and time, being central in relation to themes in the work. Furthermore, this suggests that loss of these features may in this sense affect the portrait of the characters and themes of the work. This is confirmed by Hamaida (2007) as she states that the meaning of a sentence in standard English may lead to an easier comprehension by an audience unfamiliar with a certain dialect, nonetheless it could be argued

that there is a significant loss of emotional warmth, characterization, and individuality in a standardized version of a discourse.

2.8 Standardization

Mason (2001) presents different aspects of loss in subtitles, where the issue of linguistic standardization stands relevant. Standardization in subtitling includes exclusion of dialectal language, resulting in the loss of social differentiation of the language. Vulgar and taboo terms and expressions are eliminated, as well as "correction" of popular elements. These sacrifices lead to a more neutral style. However, even more propulsive attempts of translation with the aim of representing the social connotations and non-standard usage from the source text, may be problematized. The seemingly impossible challenge consists of finding representative and corresponding matches of the discourse effects, which often is both socially, culturally, and geographically tied. Gonzales (2009) claims that this process of change and reduction can influence the receiver's impression on the work; for instance, it can misrepresent the characters´ identity or friendliness. Developing subtitling may lead to domestication of the source dialogue and the effacement of the translator (Gonzales, 2009).

3.0 Method

The comparative method will be pivotal in this thesis. One scene of the film in focus will be transcribed, including the orally given source text, the written and translated target text, as well as the direct translation of this. This transcription will be parted into sections, to orderly give references to the specific segment within the conversation. The different discourse elements found within the scenes included will be analyzed and categorized according to the central topics of the thesis, which will be further discussed considering the theory presented above.

3.1 Comparative model

The analysis and discussion will be based on comparing the segments transcribed, which Williams and Chesterman (2002) describe as comparative models of translation. Emphasis lies on the contrastive approaches by presenting the translation adjacent to the source text, and the aim is to establish the elements of the translation that best represent the source language. The

model of comparing translations with non-translated texts aims to discover the nature of the relation, with focus on linguistic features. Central themes in comparative translation methods are for instance differences in characteristics, length, or style, and the significance of these differences. The aim is to discover the correlations between the two sides of the relation, as the degree of correspondence may affect how the work communicates with the audience.

4.0 Data

(1)   Bertie:

ST: David, I`ve been trying to see you.

TT: David, jeg har prøvd å få tak i deg. [David, I have tried to get a hold of you]

David:

ST: I`ve been terribly busy.

TT: Jeg har vært opptatt. [I have been busy]

Bertie:

ST: Doing what?

TT: Med hva da? [With what?]

(2)   David:

ST: Kinging

TT: Å være konge. [Being a king]

Bertie:

ST: Really. Kinging is a precarious business these days.

TT: Å være konge er ... risikabelt for tiden. [Being a king is... risky these days]

ST: Where's the Russian tsar, where's Cousin Wilhelm?

TT: Hvor er tsaren og fetter Willhelm? [Where is the tsar and Cousin Wilhelm?]

David:

ST: You`re being dreary.

TT: Ikke vær så kjedelig. [Don`t be so boring]

Bertie:

ST: Is Kinging laying off 80 staff and buying more pearls for Wallis while people are marching across Europe

TT: Du sparker 80 og kjøper flere perler til Wallis mens de røde masjerer I Europa! [You fire 80 and buy more pearls to Wallis while the red are marching in Europe!]

(3)   David:

ST: Stop worrying, Heil Hitler will sort them out. Wherse the bloody 23?

TT: Slapp av, herr Hitler tar seg av dem. Hvor er den 23-årgangen? [Relax, Mr. Hitler will take care of them. Where is the 23-vintage?]

(4)   Bertie:

ST: And you put that woman in our mother's suite.

TT: Og du har gitt henne mors suite! [And you have given her mother`s suite!]

(5)   David:

ST: Mother isn't still in the bed, is she?

TT: Mor ligger da ikke der lenger? [Mother does not lie there anymore?]

5.0 Analysis

5.1 The scene

The scene analyzed contains the discourse between the main character Bertie and his brother David, where they are arguing about the royal duties that David now are supposed to uphold, as the new king of Great Britain. In this analysis, aspects of the discourse that has been changed in translation, and therefore can be perceived as relevant in relation to loss in the translation, will be pointed out.

5.1.1 Swearing

In discourse section (3), one can see that the discourse element of swearing is omitted in the translated source text. In the increasingly heated discussion with his brother, David uses [bloody], a swear word commonly used in Great Britain of blasphemous origins, as he is progressively irritated. The subtitles do not include this linguistic feature, which leads to the question of what this implicates in terms of loss. The use of swearing in this case is a component which enhances the motif or the expression of the uttering, which in this case is that David is increasingly exasperated or provoked, as a result of the complaints from his younger brother. The lack of inclusion of the swearing in the subtitles may numb this effect, flatting out the emotional dimension of the discourse. It may also be relevant to claim that this is exemplifying for dialogue throughout the movie, as the use of swearing in the film tends to be omitted in the subtitles.

5.1.2 non-standard language

Section (2) of the conversation illustrates the loss of oral, non-standard language; more specifically is the transformation from [kinging] in the source language to [å være konge] in the target language, specifically interesting. The fact that David, as the king of Great Britain and hence of a highly noble and decorous position, uses this unformal language, acts as embodying for the character in question, the relationship between the characters leading the dialogue, as well as the dialogue itself. The translation includes a shift from a perceived ungrammaticalness that can be categorized as non-standard, transpired by the verbalization of the noun *king*, towards a standardized version in the subtitle. The implementation of this non-standard language produces a more unserious tone, representing David as dismissive and nonchalant in relation to his role as the head of the country, as well as portraying both the nature of the discourse and the relationship between David and Bertie as informal, however also influenced by tension and dispute. The loss of this aspect may decrease this effect, diminishing the nuances of the conversation and within the characters.

5.1.3 Politeness

Politeness, as a type of characterization of the language, is conveyed in the source text, and may be exemplified using section (1) of the scene. Most characters in the film, including those

holding the conversation in the scene epitomized, converse in British language, which is well known to have markers of politeness. Specifically, the implementation of the word [terribly], modifying the word busy, can be perceived as use of typical British politeness, that lightly indicates a sort of formal, rigid and conventional type of speech. The translation does not include this marker of politeness, which results in a loss of these characteristics. In section (3), one can also point out that the change in sentence structure of the uttering [You`re being dreary], into [Ikke være så kjedelig], is a form of change in politeness. The source text version can possibly be perceived as more direct and accusatory than the target text version. These markers of politeness that occurs in the oral source text tends to be reduced in extent or even omitted in the written target text, which further provides a loss of depiction of the uttering.

5.1.4 Humor

In section (5) of the scene, a humorous element is introduced in the dialogue. Concerning the translation of this element, one can suggest that the point of this uttering is adequately carried out, as a quite witty and unmannerly "comeback" that is has a similar effect both in the source and target language. The main message in this specific discourse situation seems to be that Bertie`s brother finds it unproblematic that his new girlfriend sleeps in his mother`s old room, as a response to Bertie`s highly negative reaction to this. Still, it may also be pointed out that there are differences between the variations. The subtitle translation may be argued to be less "smart" in comparison to its original, perceived as a cleverer and more witty sort of joke.

5.1.5 Semantic connotation

Another dimension worth including is the loss of semantic connotation that transpires due to the translation. Section (4) shows an utterance of anger, where the source text includes [that woman], whereas the translation uses [henne], directly translated into [her]. The target text uttering indicates a repulsion or distance towards the subject in matter, Wallis, while the target text loses this meaning by using a more neutral term. Furthermore, in section (2), the word [kinging] is repeated in the source text, however not in the target text. This leads to an inequality, as the repetition of the word may signalize importance of it, as it emphasizes the effect mentioned above, that David is unserious in his job as a king.

5.2 Standardization and neutralization

These occurrences of the translation, which is in this text classified as non-standard word use, humor, politeness, and swearing, can possibly be put in the category of standardization. Moreover, the outcome of the audiovisual translation seems to be a type of neutralization of the utterings, where the nuances of the language and ambiguities are flattened out. Additionally, it may also be mentioned that the causality in respects to the standardization may be discussed with reference to cause and effect; whether the standardization acts as the effect that is comprised as a result of the change in translation, or vice versa, where the standardization is the cause, and the change in translation the result.

5.0 Discussion

Summing this up, one can suggest that there have occurred losses of different origins in concurrence with subtitling of the *Film the King`s Speech*. The comparative analysis revealed loss of the linguistic features that in this thesis is categorized as non-standard word-use, politeness, swearing, wit, and semantic connotation. These aspects may be received as valuable stylistic and literary elements of the interaction, due to their function of characterizing and embodying the elements of the film (Dimitrova, 2004). The loss of swearing in the dialogue, epitomized in section (3), may implicate a diminution of the character David`s increasing exasperation in the situation, which also characterizes the nature of the fragment of discourse. Accordingly, the loss of swearing affects the social implicature (Greenall, 2011). The loss of semantic connotation and non-standard language in the translation also may seem to further the effect on social implicature mentioned here, as these aspects of language are contributing in providing information of the social context of the discourse for the audience (Gonzales, 2009).

Furthermore, the loss in relation to politeness may also be mentioned as an aspect of considerable change in the translation. It may be claimed that the source text provides a contrast in politeness, as David firstly utilizes a more polite language in section (1), and subsequently reduces the features of affableness of his utterings, exemplified in section (3). This illustrates the turn that the conversation takes, which is that David increasingly dislikes Bertie`s accusations or intensions of the discussion. The loss of politeness in this way creates a

malfunction of modifying the interpersonal relationship between the communicators, in agreement to the theory of Hatim & Mason (1999). Concerning loss of humor, the aspect of jab lines is relevant in accordance with section (5) of the discourse. This section includes a witty and smart "comeback" in the source text which is difficult to match in the target text. This is due to the features of linguistic ambiguity (Chiaro, 2010), which in this context revolves around the quite sharp and cunning tone in the uttering.

The loss of semantic connotation and non-standard-language also affects the film. These prospects promote a reduction in the semantic depth, as the intentions of the utterings are not conveyed in the translation. This relates to the challenge of translating and transmitting not merely what the utterings directly signifies, but also the dimensions of the intention of them, in consanguinity with Hatim and Mason (1999). All these losses arguably contribute to an increasing standardization and neutralization of the language, which as Mason (2001) states results in a loss of social differentiation. This may be perceived as a "correction" of the language or of vulgar expressions (Mason, 2001), and likewise as a norm for translators (Greenall, 2011). Loss of politeness may also be a strategy of adapting to the source text culture, as a domestication of the text (Gonzales, 2009). Nonetheless, these strategies implicate a standardization that can disrupt the picture of the overall situation provided for the audience (Dimitrova, 2004).

The effects of these losses may hence be elucidated. The aspect of standardization of the discourse has been mentioned as the main trait common for the types of losses found. However, which effects does the neutralizing have in relation to the target audience? Eliminating the nuances of the discourse may denote the consequence of lost information offered to the audience, as dimensions of meaning are not conveyed. Lost nuances in language in this way signifies lost nuances of meaning. Meaning in this sense includes elements such as characterization and emotions (Hamida, 2007), which standardization of non-standard language may disrupt (Dimitrova, 2004). In the conversation of the scene, the losses of the features occurred in the translation, affected the portrayal of the progress of the conflictual verbal relationship, as Hatim & Mason (1999) mentions. The source text illuminates an increasing resentment and frustration on the behalf of both characters, both indicating a problematic interpersonal relationship between them, and in regard to the emotions and thoughts concerning their standing; it can be stated that the scene indicates, by word choice and style of expressions, that David is careless or perhaps ambivalent regarding the role as a king. The different types of losses in the translation results in difficulties in receiving this

impression of the discussion, as it provides a dissimilar effect in the target and source language audience, which impedes the main function of audiovisual translation (Chaume, 2004).

It may be relevant to enlighten the justifications behind these translations, concerning the constraints of both time and space, as well as to oral to written. In relation to the omission of swear words for instance, the constraint of time and space is more relevant than of oral to written constrains. Similar to sundry words, the specific swear word [bloody] does not have a matching literal translation in the source language, as the Norwegian literal translation [blodig] signifies something that is drained in blood or has blood onto it, and hence does not share the same meaning as the perhaps orally interrelated swear word [bloody]. As this may seem to problematize the translation, the discourse item could certainly have been transferred into the Norwegian translation by using a similar Norwegian word, for instance [forbanna] or [jævla], hence eliminating or reducing the oral to written constraint. Considering the limitations of time and space, it is possible to argue that due to the conversation density being quite high, consequently reasons the omission of the word, in coherence with Gonzales (2009) theory that claims that the lack of screen space results in a selective reduction, maintaining certain communicative aspects over others.

The constraint of oral to written may also be relevant. For instance, regarding the translation of non-standard language illuminated in discourse section 2, the constraint of oral to written may be significant. It can be postulated that the target text translation is a result of transmitting the uttering into written text, as [å være konge] may be more understandable, grammatical and commonly used in written text than a direct translation of the source text word [kinging]. Thence, the intent of the translator may have been to prioritize the general communicative intention (Gonzalez, 2009). Nevertheless, one can allege that the dimensions of this intention may not have been included as a result of this, as the inconspicuous and unserious style of the uttering is perhaps symbolic for the meaning of the uttering in itself, as a contributing factor. Another example is concerning the loss of politeness, exemplified by the omission of the word [terribly] in the subtitles. This may be due to lack of space and time, since the oral discourse precedes more rapidly than one can read the written version of it. This thereof results in the strategy of deleting, which causes a misrepresentation of the stylistic devices (Gonzalez, 2009).

Lastly, it can be mentioned that knowledge of the source text language may affect the magnitude of changes made in translation. By predicting that the multitude of the Norwegian speaking audience could comprehend segments of the source text language English, the information provided in the discourse may be grasped to a greater extent. The aspect of prefabricated orality can also be considered; the orality of the conversation may seem to have been reduced in the target text, however the source text discourse is carefully and intentionally constructed as such, and is neither a result of spontaneous speech (Baños-Piñero & Chaume, 2009).

6.0 Conclusion

To conclude, the analysis of the scene shows loss of swear-words, non-standard language, politeness, humor, and semantic connotations. These losses may have occurred due to the constraint of audiovisual translation, such as the constraints of time and space, and oral to written, or due to norms within subtitling. The types of losses result in a standardizing and neutralization of the translated target text, which leads to a disruption of nuances that provides information about the characters and the communicative situation. Consequently, the audience may not receive the full intention and implications of the uttering, and thereby merely the superficial meaning. In relation to further research, it could be interesting to analyze additional scenes or segments of the film, to investigate the consistency of the style of translation throughout the film.

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