

THE USE AND ABUSE OF SUBTITLES
Amresh Sinha

"Nobody likes to 'read' a movie," claims film scholar Louis Giannetti, "The subtitles are distracting and can absorb much of a viewer's energy" (233-4). Cynthia Joyce echoes the above sentiment: "As anyone with even a mild appreciation for foreign films understands, watching a subtitled film often leaves you with a vague sense that you got only the *Cliffs Notes* version—the crudest signposts are provided for you, but the all-important details never make it into print." Abé Markus Nornes's frustration with bad subtitling makes him so furious that he wants to "kill" the translator. He begins his essay by stating that "all of us have, at one time or another, left a movie theatre wanting to kill the translator. Our motive: the movie's murder by 'incompetent' subtitles." And the paragraph ends with further indictment: "It is likely that no one has ever come away from a foreign film admiring the translation. If the subtitles attract comment, it is only a desire for reciprocal violence, a revenge for the text in the face of its corruption. For as we shall see, all subtitles are corrupt" (Nornes 17).

Reading subtitles can easily polarize the population into those for and against them. People often complain that reading subtitles distracts the viewer from looking/gazing at the image, that it takes away the pleasure of visual consumption and replaces it with the tedious task of reading. More than anything else, a class resentment or bias has set in between the ideologues of popular culture and the liberal, elitist culture. In American popular culture, subtitles have a dubious status, if not an outright *un-American* character. The spectators of foreign films are more tolerant towards the doctrine of multiculturalism than the America-first white majority. Those who think all foreign items are necessarily hostile and harmful to the American way of life inherently view the spectators of foreign films with suspicion. The consumption of popular culture creates a new division between national, local, and global cultures. The subtitles must show the

inclination of being completely absorbed in the dominant mode of the visual. Difference must be translated fully into the national language. Subtitles are superimposed, but it is truly an *invisible* superimposition, unlike the traditional superimposition of either sound or image, which have a relative privilege over subtitles. This superimposition exists most prominently on the screen for a certain duration, but its presence is immediately assimilated and inducted into the visual and acoustic matrix.

For us, subtitling does not simply signify replacing the audio with an “invisible” text. It is a phenomenon that is both internal and external, on the borderline between image and voice—an addition, *the third dimension*, to the film itself. The subtitles come from outside to make sense of the inside, but their own genealogy, in relation to the audio-visual mode, is, if anything, spurious. Their status is not simply that of the “offscreen voice” that renders the space outside contiguous to the onscreen space. They remain pariahs, outsiders, in exile from the imperial territoriality of the visual regime. Nothing originally belongs to the cinema, ontologically speaking. We all know that the image on the screen is a gift from another medium, photography. The voice belongs to the actors, who came from the theatre. The music belongs to opera, vaudeville, and melodrama, and the voice-over was traditionally confined to the commentary that normally accompanied the magic lantern or slide show. The writing appeared on the screen in the form of intertitles, inserted between visuals but never superimposed on the visual like the subtitles. Thus, the intertitles, like the visuals, have an intrinsic space in the visual choreography.

Perhaps one of the greatest threats of subtitles lies in the act of reading the text, which bestows a function to the mind that tears it away “from the bodily presence of the film” (Thompson). There are people who staunchly believe that subtitles act as a barrier, as

an infringement upon a cardinal rule, between their access to pleasure that extends itself to them and the work of the mind and intelligence required to synthesize the three different kinds of signifiers: visual, audio, and textual. Reading subtitles in a long film could produce both "resentment" and "fatigue" in audience members, because they are "continually faced with difficult choices along the spectrum between translation exactitude and translation impression" (Thompson). The longer the texts, the greater the risks of "fatigue" with the exactitude required for proper translation, which could even lead to "active resentment." Thompson argues that limiting the number of words for translation impression could reduce the audience withdrawal and hostility. But he takes a middle-ground, advocating a balance between translation exactitude and impression. Once we adopt the position that the "subtitles are an intrusion into the visual space of a film," it becomes, more or less, an effort to place the subtitles in the visual field in the least obstructive or obtrusive manner. Habitually, the spatial placing of the subtitles at the lowest spectrum of the screen betrays its almost contemptuously lower status, its inferior origin in the hierarchy of image and sound. Its origin remains an evil necessity, a product conceived as an after-thought rather than a natural component of the film. The "verbosity" of subtitles could even lead to a complete betrayal of the visual dynamics, for they have the potential to "drown" the images in the literal inscriptions of words and sentences that can dominate the intellectual sensibility to the extent that the image might pass without even being seen. Instead of watching images, the audience starts literally to see only the texts. The texts get superimposed over the image, and the reading of the subtitles also takes over the act of seeing. The images on the screen withdraw with the ascendance of the texts. We not only read the subtitles, but the only things to be seen are the texts themselves. There are two possibilities: you

either “stop reading the subtitles altogether, or, conversely, see little of the film except the texts” (Thompson). Another problem that the filmmaker encounters is the synchronization of subtitles with the dialogue. It is here that we face the difficulties of finding an equivalent translation, and of matching the words with the temporality of utterance and the temporality of reading.

But these issues are not resolved satisfactorily in dubbing either. In fact, dubbing creates a whole different set of problems. “Sound and image are difficult to match in dubbed versions, especially in the closer ranges where the movements of the actors’ lips aren’t synchronized with the sounds” (Giannetti 233). Is it possible to render properly via translation in subtitles the digitally synthesized voice of Darth Vader? And what does one do with actors like Robert de Niro, or Marlon Brando, or Meryl Streep, “who are chameleons with their voices?” (Gorbman xi). “The goal of dubbing is to outfit a body with an ‘appropriate’ voice,” says Michel Chion (132). Certain actors’ voices are rather constant and distinctive. Only a few actors are used in dubbing for the voices of Tom Cruise, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sylvester Stallone and other popular actors, so foreign audiences who frequent their movies hear the same voice from one movie to another. They are dubbed with voices that become attached to them. The voice becomes closely identified with a particular foreign actor’s voice, which lends credibility, ad hoc authenticity, so to speak. The voice takes on the substitutive authenticity of the original voice. It is a replacement, but a replacement that has almost acquired a second nature, an authentic copy.

Historically speaking, it was after the screening of *The Jazz Singer* (1927) that the human voice became central to the cinema. But that didn’t mean that characters in silent cinema were mute. Actually they were pretty “chatty”—you *do* see them utter whole

sentences through their lip movements, you just don't hear the voices (Chion 8). The characters indeed talk, but they speak in "a vacuum." No one could hear them, but the characters in the film certainly heard each other, because their gestures clearly established that conversations were conducted in a normal fashion. But how did the spectators know what the characters were saying? These speeches were communicated to the audience normally in a thoroughly "abridged manner" through intertitles. The early cinemas had commentators, like the Japanese *benshi*, who freely translated the intertitles to the mostly illiterate spectators. This problem was further compounded when the same audience had to cope with subtitles in foreign films, at which time the commentators became indispensable.

The conventions and practices of subtitling that were set during the age of Hollywood studio system have not changed much since their invention. Meg James explains the technological impasse of subtitling and dubbing processes: "All the major studios continue to rely on a decades-old system of inserting subtitles on film prints that dates back to the 1930s. That's because studios have not invested in technologies to convert English language films for foreign audiences. They prefer to wait until the arrival of digital movie projection, which will eliminate the delays caused by the cumbersome process of etching words on individual frames of film." Unfortunately, thus far, the subtitling apparatus has not lost its antiquated form, nor has the subtitler been able to lift his or her "ancillary" or "servile" status from obscurity.

Luis Manuel Rodríguez, a dentist-turned-translator of hundreds of Hollywood films—including *Star Wars*, *Crooklyn*, and *Primary Colors*—into Spanish, blames bad translations on the fact that translators are last in the assembly-line process of film production. "With American movies, translators don't even get a film credit," he complains in his

interview with Cynthia Joyce. "I would imagine a person who is willing to put their name on a film would be much more conscientious about their work. By the time the film gets translated in post-production, the director has already moved on to another project," he says. Joyce also discloses that "not only is it unusual for Rodríguez to get any guidance from the director, it's even rare for him to receive a copy of the film to work from. Instead, he gets a 'spotting list' that tells him how much time, or how many frames, he has for each title—and a week to write about 1,200 to 1,500 snippets of dialogue. If he's lucky he'll watch the movie once before getting started and once after the titles have been printed; but all too often, he must make do without such luxuries. With *Primary Colors*, Rodríguez was under such intense deadline pressure that he had to begin translating without seeing the movie at all." This account of the extremely inauspicious conditions under which a translator operates helps to explain why subtitles are often so badly tarnished.

The spacing of subtitles in the visual field also poses obvious constraints: the subtitles must accommodate the action or be limited to the scene. They cannot spill over to the other image without causing confusion and corruption, and thus the requirement to condense utterances to fit the space available on the screen. The subtitles are also faced with temporal constraints, that is, the time that is allowed for the subtitles to appear on the screen. The problems are complicated when we take into account that the written texts have higher "lexical density" than the spoken words. It arises from the distinction between speech and writing and the requirement to condense utterances to fit the space available on the screen. Zoé de Linde and Neil Kay provide us with a very interesting example of close captioning from the *Oprah Winfrey Show*, demonstrating the problematics of transferring language from one mode to another

and illustrating "how the meaning of an utterance is subtly altered by the removal of a few cohesive elements":

Dialogue: It's what I call the vicious cycle syndrome. You start with drug A and then they put you on drug B, and drug C, and pretty soon you are taking a handful of pills, all because of the first drug.

Subtitle: It's a vicious cycle. You start with drug A, then drug B, then soon you are taking a handful of drugs.

Linde and Kay argue that the subtitles take away the agency of "*they put you on,*" and instead put the onus on the patient, who seems to have become a victim of drug addiction on her own volition. And also, by reducing the lexical variety of the synonym "pills" for "drugs," along with the removal of the final clause beginning "*all because,*" the subtitles corrupt the "causal sequence" in the original utterance implying the "self-perpetuating nature of medical drugs" (Linde and Kay 50). The corruption of meaning, with its ideological strains, in this intralingual transfer is by no means simply a technical necessity—far from it. In a slightly different context, Trinh T. Minh-ha applies the concept of "suture" to unveil the complicity of subtitles with the ideological apparatus of the cinematic reproduction. She states:

The duration of the subtitles, for example, is very ideological. I think that if, in most translated films, the subtitles usually stay on as long as they technically can—often much longer than the time needed even for a slow reader—it's because translation is conceived here as part of the operation of *suture* that defines the classical cinematic apparatus and the technological effort it deploys to naturalize a dominant, hierarchically unified worldview. The success of the mainstream film relies precisely on how well it can hide [its articulated artifices] in what it wishes to show. Therefore, the attempt is always to

protect the unity of the subject; here to collapse, in subtitling, the activities of reading, hearing, and seeing into one single activity, as if they were all the same. What you read is what you hear, and what you hear is more often than not, what you see. (emphasis added; Nornes 18)

Trinh's position is the classical stance of a poststructuralist critic for whom the hegemonic structure of the Hollywood narrative represents a critical genealogy of technological domination. This is a tenable position as long as it is also evident that the subtitled film conforms to the conventions of the continuity system: the overall system of "suture" by which Hollywood movies foster the unity of the subject, while, at the same time, the very device that makes that unity or identity possible in the interest of the logic of causality makes the apparatus invisible. Nornes goes even further, not being satisfied with the indictment of the structural conformity of the cinematic apparatus; he, instead, blames the subtitlers for "hiding" and "suppressing" the ideological content of the subtitles. "Facing the violent reduction demanded by the apparatus," argues Nornes, "subtitlers have developed a method of translation that conspires to hide its work—along with its ideological assumptions—from its own reader-spectators. In this sense we may think of them as *corrupt*. They accept a vision of translation that violently appropriates the source text, and in the process of converting speech into writing within the time and space limits of the subtitle they conform the original to the rules, regulations, idioms, and frame of reference of the target language and its culture. It is a practice of translation that smoothes over its textual violence and domesticates all otherness while it pretends to bring the audience to an experience of the foreign" (18).

The tendency toward invisibility or self-effacement in translation scholarship is a main concern for Lawrence Venuti. By invisibility, Venuti means the self-effacing tendency of

the translator who values the sanctity of the original text, that is, the author's voice and the style within the cultural context of its production, over his or her own voice and style. Hence, a successful translation is a translation that does not appear to be a translation at all, for it has managed to transparently incorporate the essence, the universal sense of meaning, of the source language into the target language. Venuti draws attention to the fact that by making the original subservient to the exigency of one's own language, the translator performs an act of domestication, making the experience of the foreign into what is one's own.

The question of fidelity is another seminal issue in translation theory. Its importance cannot be minimized or reduced on any account. Nornes insists that subtitlers—and his criticism, although specifically related to the (corrupt) practice of subtitling in Japanese films, has general overtones as well—have a hard time not violating the sanctity of the original work. There are many reasons why such practices of inflicting violence on the original have continued unabated even today. The strategy deployed by the subtitler depends on whether one defines the task of the translator to communicate to the reader, or to develop a more a critical relationship with the reader and the original text. Take an example of how the “Ketchup” joke told by Mia, Marsellus Wallace's wife, to Vincent Vega in *Pulp Fiction* is subtitled in French:

Three tomatoes are walking down the street.

Papa, mama, and baby tomato.

Baby tomato starts lagging.

Papa tomato gets really angry...

goes back and squishes him.

Says “Ketchup.”

Now the interlingual subtitles in French:

La famille citron se ballade.

Papa, maman et bébé citron.

Bébé citron est à la traine.

Papa citron se met en boule...

Le rejoint et l'écrabouille

En disant "presse-toi citron pressé."

This sort of translation poses a few problems, which we need to think about. Is it possible to reproduce the "homophonic pun" on "catchup/Ketchup" in French in a different linguistic system? And in this particular case, Linde and Kay observe, it appears to cause "a content shift," precisely because it is made quite explicit that the two scenes are not homophonic (47). Many of the issues dealing with both the intralingual and the interlingual subtitling of dialogue are predicated upon equivalent text and, therefore, they open themselves to linguistic analysis.

Taking the example from *Pulp Fiction* of interlingual translation from English into French, we find that instead of applying the principle of equivalent translation, which retains the communicative function of the source text, what we have here is an example of "heterovalent translation (content-reworking), where the text takes on a different function in the target language" (Fawcett 122). Most interlingual translations in films are not translations but adaptations. Luis Manuel Rodríguez recalls his experience of translating a double-entendre political joke in *Primary Colors*, "There's one part where John Travolta's character, Governor Stanton, is accused of having an affair with a Paula Jones-type, a hairdresser, and all the TV comedians are making fun of it: 'It all started one day when the governor walked into the hair salon and asked for some

longer bangs.' If I translated directly, it just wouldn't have made sense" (Joyce). Exasperated, he made up a totally different joke, this one having to do with the governor having a different kind of "head" trimmed.

This type of translation privileges the mode of intercultural translation over the functional equivalence. But could we assert with the same fervour that this particular kind of translation (communicative rather than semantic), although clearly and without any doubt an act of domestication, a case of familiarization of the foreign in one's own idiom, is, by definition, an act of cultural imperialism? Does this kind of translation betray the original, because the attempt is to communicate the sense of the joke in French, which, at the same time, effectively distorts the original's semanticity? On the other hand, in a different cultural context, if the joke were originally in Swahili or Hindi and was translated into the language of an imperial culture—which maintains and preserves its cultural discourse along with its aggressive defense of economic, political, social, and religious identity—the issue would be treated under the rubric of politics of translation carried out by a colonial power to domesticate the foreignizing elements. But since both English and French are colonial languages, does that mean that the asymmetrical relations of power between the colonial and the colonized is not applicable in this particular case? Or, should we interpret this situation in terms of the cultural imperialism of Hollywood, which is being essentially neutralized by another imperial power that claims the validity of its own cultural expression above all the rest?

Now let us turn our attention to some of the problems "for translators who do not seek the goal of cultural domination" (Fawcett 117). How to give voice in translation to language varieties, such as slang, puns, jokes, sociolects (as opposed to dialects, which are spoken by a distinct group living in a particular region), etc., which are not

part of the prevalent “correct speech”? It is often not that easy to find equivalents to slang forms in the target language. As a matter of fact, according to Peter Fawcett, “slang seems to be quite regularly expunged from the translation of film” (120). He draws our attention further to the extensive use of back-slang, *verlan* (words written and pronounced “backward”—*femme* becomes *meuf*, head, *deache*, face becomes *essaff*—initially introduced by Arab teenagers in Paris) in the film *La Haine* (1995), which were not subtitled, because of the lack of proper equivalents in English.

Some of the issues of appropriating the foreignness of a film in one’s own idiom results in, what Fawcett calls, an “unwarranted cultural transfer.” He provides another example from the dubbed version of *Second Chance*, where a French teacher is translated as saying, “Hey, wow, man! You’re all meatheads in this class,” which most likely is not the way a French teacher would speak to his or her class. The same scene is translated in German as *Eine brillante Klasse habe ich da*, which fails to evoke the sardonic expression of the German language in the facial expression (Fawcett 120). Mishandling sociolects and dialects in translation can lead to laughable situations. I recall watching the 1980s Hong Kong “sword” and “ghost story” films. Not only did they feature incredible gravity-defying stunts and special-effects, but they also included the most outrageous English translations, which bent and broke every possible syntactic and grammatical rule of the English language, to comical effect. “But,” warns Fawcett, “the results of inept handling of sociolect and dialect can be far worse than laughable: they can lead to offensive stereotyping and to whole groups of people being gratuitously insulted” (120–1). A particularly gratuitous example of stereotyping an entire nation’s speech pattern is Peter Sellers’s portrayal of an Indian actor in Blake Edwards’s *The Party* (1968). The British Raj films and Steven Spielberg’s *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984) are also

examples of films in which the native tongue is always drowned in the babble of noises in the background. Indian voices are stereotypically rendered with a thick accent (most notorious of all is the accent of the character Apu in *The Simpsons*), suppressing the vast linguistic diversity of the highly balkanized subcontinent, which has little if any common identity and many divergent subcultures.

Let us take an example, from Mira Nair's award-winning film *Monsoon Wedding* (2001), which testifies to the complicated linguistic and social hierarchy of Indian life, as well as its bilingual or multilingual capacity to interact simultaneously with various dialects, national and colonial languages. There is a scene in the film in which a young boy makes fun of his older relative who has just missed the chance to sleep with a young woman. The boy uses a Hindi slang, "KLPD," an English acronym, to tease his relative. The English subtitles translate the acronym fairly accurately as "betrayal of the erect dick" but suppress the full connotations of the "abusive" appropriation of the English letter, "K," "L," "P," "D" to form a Hindi word. The letter "K" stands for Khade, which could be translated as "standing" or "erect;" "L" for "Ling," derived from Sanskrit Lingum," meaning phallus or penis; "P" is the preposition "of" or "on," and "D" for dhoka, meaning "betrayal." Hardly anyone in the West got it. People laughed at the content, but the form of the word, although in English, escaped the viewer's attention, and there was nothing in the subtitles to indicate the trace of the acronym. The subtitles of the film also benevolently neglect to translate in full the following vulgarity from Hindi to English: "There is not enough shit in your asshole."

In "The Politics of Translation" Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak intones that the task of the translator is to "facilitate" love between the original and its shadow (181). This love must come from the translator's desire to acknowledge the realm of memory, of love, and

the trace of the other. For Spivak, "translation is the most intimate act of reading" (180). To translate is to "surrender" to its charm—"More erotic than ethical," she claims (183). In her political analysis of a Third World feminist translator, both reading and surrendering take on new meanings. "The translator earns permission to transgress from the trace of the other, before memory, to the closest places of self" (180). In other words, transgression in translation is invoked at a time when the memory of the other takes precedence over the forgetting of the self. Translating is an act of loving, of transgression, of fraying, based upon the surrendering (here we can conjure Trinh's "suturing" as fundamentally complicit in ideological exercise) and not renunciation of the self, that is, in love for the other. The hierarchical difference between the original and the copy is substituted by the agency of love and surrender. An intimacy without fidelity and full of "transgressions," as opposed to the responsibility of conveying or communicating the meaning and the sense adequately, is the fraying, the breaching, the pathway, to the "rhetoricity" or the "stylistics" of the language, which, in other words, is to expose its limits. The rhetorical aspect of the text reveals itself in "the silence of the absolute fraying" of the language that text demands to be intimately acquainted with in order for the limits of language to be disclosed. To translate is to surrender oneself to the text. Moreover, speaking of the "site" of translation from a postcolonial perspective, the question of fidelity (as opposed to love) between the source and the translated text takes on multiple resonances. First of all, it ought to be recalled that the relationship between the original and the translation is not only based on linguistic or literary theory, but also on the repressive asymmetrical relations between the "subjection" of the colonized language to the colonial discursive practices, a project of historicity that continues to emerge in the heterogeneous discourses of postcoloniality. Spivak considers

the difference between "migrant" and "postcolonial" as an example of "catachresis," and how that difference cannot be fully appropriated by a term like "hybridity"—an important concept in postcolonial theory, referring to the integration (or, mingling) of cultural signs and practices from the colonizing and the colonized cultures (243). Taxonomically speaking, the difference between migrancy and postcoloniality refers to a difference in kind, which is to say that the latest restructuring of global politics in the name of New World Order has created a migrant reality that may not coincide with the systemic difference of postcoloniality. *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (1987) is a film that points to the discontinuity between the urban migrant (the son) and the postcolonial subject (the father). It is also a film that does not marginalize the issue of lesbian politics (as does *My Beautiful Launderette* [1985], where the gay theme acquires, according to Spivak, an almost incidental value).

We critique *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* as a film that touches upon the issue of lesbianism in a manner that is no longer governed by the specific difference between migrant and postcolonial, insofar as the focus of lesbianism, its interraciality, is also a site that marks the failure and command of language use. In a poignant scene, the postcolonial subject and the migrant lesbian come face to face with each other's alterity.

Rafi (Sammy's father), incensed after finding the lesbian couple in his son's bed, lapses into his mother tongue, Urdu, as he hurls abuses at them.

Rafi: *Lahol vilakubat, yeh kya kar rahe ho yahan tum log? Haramjadian, randion, pata nahin kxanha se ayie ho...nikal jao yanha say.*

Subtitles: God save my eyes from the sight I am seeing. You perverted, half-sexed, God accursed lesbian.

My translation: God forbid! What are you two doing? Bastards, whores, no idea where you have come from...get out of here.

The translation of "bastards" (in feminized form) and "whores" into "perverted, half-sexed, God accursed lesbian" is only an example of supplementary excesses of translation from one language into another that lacks the equivalent word. It is this "Other" model, the figure of lesbian, feminine subalternity, that renders Rafi speechless: for there is no such word as lesbian in Urdu lexicon. For the migrant lesbian, on the other hand, hurling abuses in Punjabi/Urdu gives her the control of an entire "spectrum of language use" (Spivak 249). What she says to Rafi in retaliation is, however, almost incomprehensible due to the cacophonous environment of the scene, and all we can hear are a few excerpts like, "Who the hell do you think you are? Fucking (substituted for the Hindi *Sala*, which literally means 'brother-in-law,' an endearing term of common abuse) bastard!" But the subtitles perform quite an imaginative free translation of the range of her abuse:

Subtitles: Fuck off old bastard. I'll tin-opener [sic] your foreskin.... I'll shove live rats up your canal.... Pig-shit bastard! I'll crush his balls! Let me get that withered sperm factory.

In short, the recourse to *Ur*(du) language becomes the site for both the breakdown and the flexibility of a language command through which we witness the limit of postcolonial understanding of sex and gender, forcing its subject to a state of speechlessness that can only be articulated by a return to the mother tongue.

The strength of subtitles lies in *abuses*, in the *Klang*—the ringing at the origin of language that Hegel discerns in the statue of Colossi of Memnon (*Klangstatue*)—of foreignness.¹ The idea of "abusive" translation originates in Derrida's famous remark in "The Retrait of

1. The "colossal sounding statue" (*Klangstatue*) of the Memnons in ancient Thebes, emitted a sound when struck by sunlight at sunrise. The Colossi of Memnon actually portray Amenhotep III. Due to an earthquake in 27 BC, these statues became known for a bell-like tone that usually occurred in the morning due to rising temperatures and humidity. The Roman emperor Septimius Severus, seeking to repair the statues, inadvertently silenced them forever.

Metaphor"—"a 'good' translation must always commit abuses" (*Une 'bonne' traduction doit toujours abuser*), and its subtle complexities are the subtext of his "White Mythology." The notion of abuse in translation is, arguably, best articulated by Philip E. Lewis. By translating the title of his essay *Vers la traduction abusive* as "The Measure of Translation Effects," Lewis claims that his translation itself becomes an effect or meditation on translation. Since a faithful translation of *Vers la traduction abusive* is quite possible in English as "Towards an Abusive Translation," why does he translate the title as "The Measure of Translation Effects" then? According to Lewis, "the English word 'abusive' (meaning wrongful, injurious, insulting, and so forth) does not immediately pick up another connotation of the French cognate: false, deceptive, misleading, and so forth." But the reason is not limited to that, as Lewis goes on to elaborate the choice of his title in English. He claims that the slant of his translation, which, of course, also reveals his strategy towards an abusive turn for translation to which he would subject his own essay, is a measure "to achieve more than a stilted transfer of meaning, to make it 'work' in English, to endow it with texture of a piece written in English for an English-speaking audience" (33).

If we are willing to force a compromise as far as the subtitling processes go, then it might be a good idea to adopt some of Lewis's insights. Lewis advocates the interpretive model, which is not simply an imposition of one interpretation; instead it offers a model beyond the "contradictory exigency" of the classical paradigm of the translator's task, and asks for "a double interpretation requiring . . . a double writing." The double interpretation remains "faithful both to the language/message of the original and to the message-orienting cast of its own language" (37). Lewis's model of the translator remains faithful both to the original and translation, and it seems to recall Rosenzweig's

190 SUBTITLES

— (1982)

White Mythology
Margins of Philosophy
Alan Bass, trans.
Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Peter Fawcett (1997)
*Translation and Language:
Linguistic Theories Explained*
Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing

Louis Giannetti (1999)
Understanding Movies
New Jersey: Prentice Hall

Claudia Gorbman (1995)
Editor's Note
The Voice in the Cinema
New York: Columbia University Press

Meg James (2001)
Language Barrier Slows Movie Releases
L.A. Times August 25

Cynthia Joyce (1998)
Why Do Movie Subtitles Stink?
<http://www.salon.com/media/1998/03/23media.html>

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The Measure of Translation Effect
Difference in Translation
Joseph F. Graham, ed.
Ithaca: Cornell University Press

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Film Quarterly 52.3

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1993)
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Outside in the Teaching Machine
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Sammy and Rosie Get Laid
Outside in the Teaching Machine
New York: Routledge

Peter Thompson (2000)
Notes on Subtitles and Superimpositions
http://www.chicagomediaworks.com/2instructworks/3instruct_writings/wrsubtit.doc

Lawrence Venuti (1995)
The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation
London: Routledge

characterization of translator, who must face the predicament “to serve two masters”: The foreign work and the foreign language and one’s own public and one’s own language (Berman 35).

So what is at stake in abusive translation? “How far can the abuse be carried?” At stake is the practice of translation that resists “the movement of domestication or recuperation by which rhetoric—and analogously, philosophy—bring the abusive forces of catachresis back under the control of a reigning interpretation, of meanings supposed to be already present in the storehouse of language” (Lewis 58). The task of the translator is to render the traditional concept of translation, in which the meaning of the foreign words and sentences are made comprehensible within the reader’s linguistic *milieu*, incomprehensible in such a way that the familiar sight of the reader’s own language turns radically different in its foreignness. The foreignness is not made ours, on the contrary, in subtitles, what is ours, our own language, is made foreign.

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