



La sobretitulación es una forma de transferencia interlingüística que tiene lugar en escena cuando una producción teatral se desplaza. Consiste, además, en una modalidad híbrida de traducción entre la traducción propiamente dicha y la interpretación. Por ello constituye un campo de investigación novedoso y de gran interés en el ámbito de los Estudios de Traducción. En la actualidad el público ya está acostumbrado a la recepción de imágenes fragmentadas en escena. Esta forma híbrida de traducción se inserta en un teatro intermedial. Este trabajo trata sobre la sobretitulación en el mencionado contexto híbrido. La hibricidad es una característica específica de la sobretitulación que se puede presentar de muchas formas y con la que se tiene que trabajar en escena. El artículo muestra que la transferencia interlingüística lejos de ser simple, presenta complejidad, encuentra muchos escollos como es el caso de las dicotomías. Pero si el escollo se acepta como un reto, este formará parte de la puesta en escena y además puede suponer una forma de enriquecerla.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Sobretitulación, modalidad híbrida de traducción, teatro intermedial, transferencia interlingüística en escena, diversificación del público.

Surtitling: Surtitles an other hybrid on a hybrid stage

Surtitling is one form within the interlingual transfer, that takes place on stage when a theatre production travels. It is also a kind of hybrid form of translation between interpretation and translation. Therefore it is a very interesting and new field of research within translation studies. Today public is used to a reception of fragmented images on stage. The hybrid form of translation is introduced into an intermedial theatre. This article deals with the surtitling in this hybrid context. Hybridity is a specific of surtitling, and one can experience it, in many ways and we have to deal with it on stage. The article shows that the interlingual transfer is not simple, it is complex, comes across many obstacles like dichotomies and so on. But if the obstacles are accepted as a challenge, it could be a part of the performance and can be an enrichment.

KEYWORDS: Surtitling, translation hybrid, intermedial theatre, interlingual transfer on stage, diversification of the public.

YVONNE GRIESEL

Humboldt University, Berlin



INTRODUCTION

120

Surtitling is a hybrid form of translation which is introduced when foreign language companies go to stage. Surtitling on theatre stage exists since the 1980s and was first used in Scandinavia. It is a form of live subtitling. Surtitles are prepared on the basis of a prototype in form of a DVD by a drama translator who manually inserts them simultaneously on the eve of the spectacle. So we can call it a form of translation hybrid between interpretation and translation.

Surtitling is becoming more and more popular and during the last 10 years it has been started to be an every day phenomena in various domains, for example in opera. Concerning research it is quite a new field. One of the first works in the field of translation studies being Griesel (2000). In theatre studies work on this theme has only started recently (Zatlin, 2005). So I first start with a theoretical orientation. I explain the hybrid meaning compared to the other existing hybrids on, and round stage. Then there will be a closer look at theatre surtitling in comparison to the other means of interlingual transfer on stage, which means simultaneous interpretation, summarising translation and alternative forms.

In conclusion the question will be discussed if hybridity is a specific form of surtitling and translation on stage. And if so, does the translation hybrid on stage put the tin lid on it or represents an organic element that can slip in a creative way itself into the work of art. Or if it is only an other element in a hybrid world which the public is used to and can easily deal with.

THEORY

When a theatre production travels with all their actors around the world an interlingual transfer on stage takes place. This is done on international festivals, in major theatres, in operas almost every day. But up to now only very few researches have been done in this field. We have a basic study by Griesel (2000) about the four forms of transfer on stage. In 2007 the same author carried out an empirical research on the limits and possibilities of surtitles based on a corpus of French performances subtitled into German. The same author published several articles (2007b, 2008) on surtitling, but always within the complex of interlingual transfer in theatre and clearly closed surtitling off from drama translation, opera surtitling and subtitling in films (Griesel, 2000: 15ff.). Kapusta (2006) did a research about the aesthetic aspect of surtitles on stage, also mainly based on a corpus of French performances with German surtitles. This work is only published on the internet. Kaindl (1997) has published an article about surtitling in opera and theatre, but his main topic was opera translation (Kaindl, 1995). Zatlin (2005) mainly works on drama translation, but also started with surtitling. Mateo also (2007) published an article about surtitling in theatre, her topic is opera surtitling too.

Opera surtitling is not the same as theatre surtitling, it has its own specifics, a repertoire that is quite different, another theatrical sign system, where music plays a vital role (Griesel, 2007a: ff.). Text is often redundant and works with repetition. The operas and the texts are well known therefore the cultural memory of the public can be used in a very extended way. Due to this it is easier and more efficient to use surtitles in opera. In the famous opera houses all over the world we are used to surtitles in our



days. This fact is also mirrored by the research. Mackerras already started in 1991 to establish guidelines for writing surtitles for opera, and the theoretical reflections are reinforced by Palmer, the main surtitler in the Royal Opera House London, and Desblache (2007). There are many works in Finland just to mention some of them Vallissari (1996), Virkkunen with her thesis (2004).

It is also important not to confuse the drama translation with theatre translation on stage. The first one is a translation done to be spoken and the second one is a translation of a literary text into another language that we can hear on stage. And we have to create a pragmatic, additive, literary and short translation that fits into the limits of time and space that the surtitling offers to the translated text.

HYBRIDS ON STAGE

There are so many hybrids on stage. Theatre in our days lives between screen and stage, images and humans. The theatrical sign system (Fischer-Lichte, 1998: 27) has changed considerably since the 1980s because of digitalization. Intermedial theatre has become normal in western Europe, we are used to a reception of fragmented images on stage. The 1990s were affected by intermediality (Rajewsky, 2002). We just have to think about the productions of Robert Wilson and Robert Lepage. Theatre studies have also been dealing with intermediality for the last 20 years (Balme, 1999; Fischer-Lichte 2001; Pfahl, 2005 etc.). The latest example in Germany is Castorf's production *Endstation Sehnsucht* which was first staged in 2000. We are used to a mixture of screen and stage, actors on stage and on screens, also as text fragments written and spoken on stage, above and below stage.

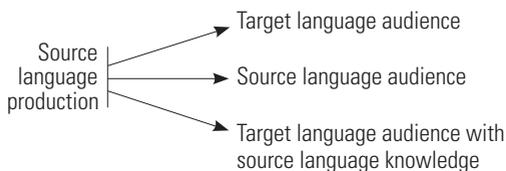
Intercultural theatre is replacing international theatre, so we have to deal with hybrids between cultures, such as the translation as a hybrid seen by Bhabha (2000) or Bachmann-Medick (1996), they consider the interlingual transfer in itself as a form of hybrid. They see the hybrids as a result of the clash of cultures and considered the cultures not to be homogeneous any more but a hybrid. National identities are replaced by the understanding that every cultural meeting is already translation and culture in itself is translation.

This aspect is also very important for the intercultural transfer on stage. Most of the time, international theatre is considered as intercultural theatre which plays with the elements of the source language for the public and already takes into account the interlingual transfer that must take place (Griesel, 2007a: 44 ff.).

In addition to this, surtitles appeared on stage. And insert other elements to the theatrical sign system, a written element in another language. This very dichotomy between written and spoken language plays a major role for the reception. The difference between the intermedial elements, already existing on stage is, that the foreign language surtitles are not a suggestion, but they have to be taken into account for understanding. Of course there always is the argument voiced that a reception of the language on stage is also possible if one doesn't understand the language and takes the foreign language as a tonal sequence and is carried away by the images. But if we want to create a performance in the target language being similar to the one in the source language, then we have to translate the source language in a certain way, because language is one theatrical sign in the theatrical sign-system, that forms the performance (see Fischer-Lichte, 1994; Griesel, 2007a).



Of course surtitles can be a suggestion for the part of the public, that understands the foreign language on stage, but for those who don't understand, it is not a suggestion, but necessity. When foreign language plays are performed, we always have to take into account the diversification of the public (see Griesel, 2007a: 19 ff.). One part of the public are native speakers, one are target language speakers and one part are target language speakers with knowledge of the source language.



So within interlingual transfer, whether it is simultaneous interpreting, surtitling, translation or other methods, one has to accept all the different needs and cannot ignore one part of the public. For example you cannot transmit the translation via loudspeakers, because then it is impossible for the source language audience to understand the source language on stage. And one reason for them to come is to see and hear (!) a performance in their first language. Under these circumstances this would not be an adequate translation and one can easily imagine other situations. When it comes to simultaneous interpreting, we have to take care that the whispering from the earphones is not too loud to disturb the public not using earphones or the actors on stage. If surtitles are too dominant, too clear, or hiding actors it has the same effect. And so on, only to show that the translation on stage is a delicate task and that one has to deal with many dichotomies and a difficult public. Most of them are of high

education, very exigent everything concerning language and translation, they are aware of all mistakes in interpreting, surtitles, summarising translations etc. And in addition to this they are divided into the three afore mentioned groups. The challenge for a surtitler, an interpreter and a translator on stage is to work carefully, consciously and nearly unnoticed.

It is a very complex interlingual transfer between different cultures, different theatre cultures, between interpretation and translation, between intercultural and international theatre, between oral and written words, between a divided audience, and intermedial and multi-medial theatre. These facts make the transfer amazing, but at the same time difficult.

SURTITLING AS A TRANSLATION HYBRID

Surtitling is a creative and literary translation but at the same time a pragmatic form of translation. It is not drama translation because of its additive character, it is seen and heard at the same time as the actors are on stage. So we have to deal with source and target language at the same time and one has to take care that the work of art is not destroyed by the translation.

In Germany surtitling is the form of translation that is used most due to the technical development that took place in the last 20 years. In our days it is quite easy and cheap to project surtitles on stage as means of translation. And the public is used to an inter medial approach on stage. It was also the time when surtitling was introduced on stage. It started in the 1980^{ies} in Finland with theatre surtitling, then *Focon Machine*, a first type of surtitling machine which is used up to now. But very often the surtitles are projected on stage in a very simple way by *power point*.



Concerning their form surtitles are similar to the subtitles in film. The translation is done in a synoptic way, and the short sub or surtitles, 70 signs each, are projected on stage. They are prefabricated by the translator and then projected live on stage. The difference between film and theatre is, that the source text is not a film copy that doesn't change and it is, in that sense, similar to a written text. But a theatre performance is constantly changing and every evening there is some improvisation, little changes, something unexpected. The translator gets a videotape of the performance, that means a prototype of each performance on stage and prepares the translation on the basis of this text. In the real translation situation when the performance is shown on stage, the source text can change. There might be improvisations and the translator has to react spontaneously as in an interpreting situation. The surtitler is sitting behind the technicians behind the public and working in real time like an interpreter but with prefabricated translation segments based on a prototype source text.

So first of all we have to deal with a translation hybrid meaning a mixture between interpretation and translation. Usually, *translation* is split up into *translating* and *interpreting*. There are numerous definitions for both methods of translation, going beyond the typically assumed distinction between oral and written transmission. The distinction, that translation can be repeatedly corrected in comparison to the interpretation where the source text is presented only once and can only be checked to a limited extend and can hardly be corrected is for me the most important (Kade in Snell-Hornby, 2006: 28).

Research in the field of TT, i.e. an oral and written transmission of a foreign language performance has shown that categories like

interpreting and translating are not sufficient to describe every process of translation. For example, I had to split up translation as an umbrella term still further in order to describe theatre surtitling. Thus I coined *translation hybrid* as a term. A *translation hybrid* is a form of translation, that may be fully described neither by interpreting nor by translating. It is a mixture of both: interpreting and translating.

I would like to position the *translation hybrid* referring to TT, as I have explored at length this mode of transmission of foreign language performances within the framework of my doctoral dissertation. Apart from simultaneous interpreting, summarising translation and alternative modes, the *translation hybrid* seems to be the mode of translation employed most frequently in the field of TT. The term «translation in the theatre» was defined, classified and coined by me (Griesel, 2000; 2007a). It contains all modes of translation mentioned so far and should be understood as a complex structure of translation. Theatre surtitling is a means of transmitting a foreign language production on stage into another language. Written translations of surtitles are prepared and projected onto the stage with the help of special software combined with a video projector. The projection is carried out manually and simultaneously with the actual performance on stage. A particular difficulty in this mode of translation in case of improvisations is, for example, that the pre-existing translation of the target language material does no longer coincide with the source text. The translator's possibilities of correcting and reacting to alterations are very limited.

The surtitles being prepared in advance are used in the interpreting process and the quality of the overall translation process depends



on these prepared written surtitles. However, even translations of a high quality may not guarantee a successful process of translation. Contextual factors like temporal restrictions, a high tempo of speech, technical malfunctions or individual mistakes that have an influence on any interpreting process (Pöchhacker, 2000) may prevail over the overall process of translation and hinder or even prevent its success. Therefore, a very good translation may not always render an adequate process of transmission. Apart from the above mentioned factors that play a vital role in every interpreting process, theatre surtitling has to deal with wrongly positioned surtitles that cannot be seen from all places, with poor lighting or with surtitles that are projected too fast, etc. Unfortunately, obstacles of this kind seem to be the rule in theatre surtitling.

This *translation hybrid* on stage outlined above is not an exceptional phenomenon and instead rather one hybrid form of translation among others. Other kinds of translation hybrids in film, TV and culture are for example opera surtitling, live subtitling, semi-live subtitling, correctable interpretation (Moreau, 2008; Griesel, 2008) etc. The development of new media again and again triggers and demands new forms of translation. *Translation hybrids* are among those forms. Because of the continuing, ongoing development of new technical possibilities, it is quite impossible to list every type of *translation hybrid*.

All these hybrid forms of translation mentioned above consist of phases of interpreting and translating. The sequence of phases is irregular. Generally speaking, a translation hybrid may consist of two or more phases of translation. If, for example, this product of interpreting serves as a source for surtitles, a conflict will arise. Surtitles are written

language; they should be easily perceivable and should therefore have simple sentence structures and a clear structure. As a rule, they are shortened by one third and should be without faults. These are some of the important facts. This example shows quite clearly, that there are two products of translation, which were produced for different purposes. If they were simply taken as translation and interpretation without integrating them into the overall translation hybrid, an adequate translation could not take place. In opera for example a libretto is written for singing and its translation takes the singableness of the text into account, certain notes must coincide with certain vowels and this principle must be observed in the target language as well. As a result, significant differences in terms of content have to be put up with. If one puts this translation into surtitles, and this happens, these surtitles will meet the requirements of singableness, although they will never be sung, but they should guarantee a fast reception, consisting of simple sentence structures and form complete unities instead, to name but a few aspects (Mackerras, 1991). The discrepancy between both products of translation becomes obvious, if they are looked at in an isolated way. Any interlingual transfer can be examined by separating its elements, thus identifying the weak points of many processes of translation.

This is exactly the reason, why a translation hybrid should be considered to be an independent form of translation. If a process of translation is simply understood as a combination of two or more forms of translation, an adequate or functional translation will be impossible.

When it comes to structure, theatre surtitling is among the above described transla-

tion hybrids. They illustrate the necessity for translators to act as experts. In addition to that, it has become clear that a division into interpretation and translation studies and research cannot fulfil current demands. Therefore, an open approach is needed in translation studies, which is capable of integrating new phenomena into the field of translation. Translation hybrids are an example of the relevancy of translator's expert knowledge for society. This is the only means to contribute to an understanding in a cultural sphere of growing diversity and increasing internationalism.

CONCLUSION

Hybridity is a specific of surtitling, and one can experience it, in many ways. It is a hybrid product with which we have to deal on stage. And it is always visible, in a certain way, or we can hear the translation, we can read or we can see it.

Normally it is mentioned as disturbing, but in reality it is only one hybrid factor on stage that is becoming more and more hybrid in so many ways. We have to take this as a chance; we can deal with it and imagine creative solution for the translation. Up to now it is seen as a necessary evil, but that is not necessary, we can change this image and create new forms of translation. We only have to be a little bit courageous to do so.

In 2002 Ariane Mnouchkine showed us with her performance *Le dernier Caravansérail* on the famous Theatre Festival «Ruhfestspiele» on a German stage how to carry this out. In this performance the surtitles really slipped in pauses and lacks on stage, they used every space for translation; they slipped in small places above and below the stage, onto stage element and requisites. The surtitles were always close

to the actor, the translator used writing types in different ways. A letter was written down on the wall handwritten and gave a perfect image of a German letter.

To realize such a translation, the surtitler has to work together with the director. The director must realize that it is necessary to work together with the surtitler to get to best translation of his performance. Of course for this they need more time and it makes a lot of work. But the public, the actors and at least the director will be very grateful.

A bad translation can destroy the performance completely, such as in the Turkish performance *Geyikler Lanetler* in the German theatre festival «Theater der Welt», where the surtitles were irregularly projected, not comprehensively and then they stopped completely and the German audience left the theatre, but the Turkish public not only stayed, but told afterwards that it was an important and wonderful performance and it was a chance, that they had the opportunity to see a work of Mustafa Avkiran, one of the most important directors of Turkey. For the director and the actors it was not comprehensive, what had happened, why the audience left the theatre and he was very furious after the performance.

This example shows in an obvious way what happens if you don't accept interlingual transfer as a complex and professional transfer. Translators and Interpreters have to be accepted as partners and together with the production they can find solutions for each performance. Ariane Mnouchkine worked together with translators on a surtitling system. The press didn't mention the excellent work of the surtitles, the destiny of translation in every sphere. But the press mentioned the bad surtitles of *Geyikler Lanetler* and that is the rule: Surtitles are visible if they are not there or if they are





bad. The Turkish surtitled had one night before the première only to translate, the surtitles of *Le dernier Caravansérail* were created together in an artistic process and that is the way it has to be done.

Many companies remarked that the interlingual transfer on stage is important and the off theatres realised it very quickly, and it is not astonishing, that they react in an unconventional way and tried out different things, such as paper rolls on stage, reading out a poem, etc.

«Akhe» is one of the most famous groups in Russia they do travel around the world very often with their production. I did the interlingual transfer for their performance *Globo* in Germany. I translated and prepared the surtitles for them and we integrated them on stage in different ways. Furthermore, a Russian poem was shown on stage by the actor on cards, I translated it, and spoke via loudspeakers the German poem mutually with the Russian actor. It was a creative way of interlingual transfer, we had only two days to prepare it, but it was a success. So it is not only a question of time and money, but first of all a question of acceptance and creativity.

If the interlingual transfer is accepted as a transfer that consists of simultaneous interpreting, summarising translation, alternative forms and at least subtitling, but not only subtitling, we can get very good and creative results. And it is necessary to accept the translators and interpreters as language experts for the stage, if this is their specialization.

The article has shown, that the interlingual transfer is not simple, it is complex, comes across many obstacles like dichotomies and so on. But if we accept the obstacle as a challenge, it could be a part of the performance and can be considered an enrichment and no more a necessary evil. And we can bring the performance

safe and sound «to the other borders where other winds are blowing» as the famous German philologist Jakob Grimm said in 1847:

Übersetzen ist übersetzen, traducere navem. wer nun, zur seefahrt aufgelegt, ein schiff bemannen und mit vollem segel an das gestade jenseits führen kann, musz dennoch landen, wo andrer boden ist und andre luft streicht.

RECIBIDO DICIEMBRE 2008

ACEPTADO FEBRERO 2009

REFERENCES

- Aaltonen, S. (2000). *Time-Sharing on stage. Drama Translation in Theatre and Society*, Topics in Translation, 17, Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Bachmann-Medick, D. (1996). *Kultur als Text*, Frankfurt: Fischer.
- Balme, Ch. (1999). «Intermediality: Rethinking the Relationship between Theatre and Media». www.thewis.de <Consulted: December 2008>.
- Bhabha, H. (2000). *Verortung der Kultur*, Tübingen: Narr.
- Desblache, L. (2007). «Music to my ears, but words to my eyes?: Text, opera and their audiences». *Linguistica Antverpiensa*, New Series, 6 (A tool for social integration? Audiovisual translation from different angles), pp. 155-170.
- Fischer-Lichte, E. (1994). *Semiotik des Theaters. Das System der theatralischen Zeichen*, volume 1, Tübingen: Gunter Narr.
- Fischer-Lichte E., Horn, Ch., Umatham, S. Warstatt, M. (eds.) (2001). *Wahrnehmung und Medialität*, Theatralität Bd. 3, Tübingen: Francke.
- Griesel, Y. (2000). *Translation im Theater*, Frankfurt: Peter Lang.
- (2007a). *Die Inszenierung als Translat*, Berlin: Frank und Timme.
- (2007b). «Are surtitles an adequate means of interlingual transfer at the theatre?». <www.euroconferences.info> [Consulted: December 2008].
- (2008). «Translationshybride zwischen Theorie und Praxis», in H. Kalverkämper and L. Schippel (eds.) *Translation zwischen Text und Welt, TransÜD*, 11. Berlin: Frank und Timme.

- Kaindl, K. (1997). «Die Übersetzung als Inszenierung». *Target*, 9/2, Amsterdam: John Benjamins, pp. 271-287.
- (1995). *Die Oper als Textgestalt. Perspektiven einer interdisziplinären Übersetzungswissenschaft*, Tübingen: Stauffenburg.
- Kapusta, D. (2006). *Übertitel als ästhetisches eigenständiges Element*. Zürich (Non-published diploma theses).
- Mateo, M. (2007). «Surtitling nowadays: new uses, attitudes and developments». *Linguistica Antverpiensia*, New Series, 6 (A tool for social integration? Audiovisual translation from different angles), pp. 135-154.
- Mackerras, J. (1991). *A Guide to writing Surtitles*, London: Royal Opera House Covent Garden.
- Moreau, H. (2008). «Übersetzer und Dolmetscher für die Medien», *MDÜ. Mitteilungen für Dolmetscher und Übersetzer*, 3.
- Pfahl, J. (2005). *Québec inszenieren. Identität, Alterität und Multikulturalität als Paradigmen im Theater von Robert Lepage*, Marburg: Tectum.
- Pöchhacker, F. (2000). *Dolmetschen*, Tübingen: Stauffenburg.
- Rajewski, I. (2002). *Intermedialität*, Tübingen: Francke.
- Remael, A. and Neves, J. (eds.) (2007). «A tool for social integration? Audiovisual translation from different angles». *Linguistica Antverpiensia*, New Series, 6, pp. 7-22.
- Snell-Hornby, M. (2006). *The Turns of Translation Studies. New paradigms or shifting viewpoints?*, Benjamins Translation Library, 66, Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Vallissari, L. (1996). «Subtiteling and Surtiteling opera», in *XIV World Congress of the Fédération Internationale des Traducteurs (FIT)*, Proceedings, Volume 2, Melbourne: AUSIT.
- Virkkunen, R. (2004). «The source text of Opera Surtitles». *META*, 49/1, pp. 89-97.
- Zatlin, Ph. (2005). *Theatrical Translation and Film Adaptation. A Practitioner's View*, Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

