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PLAN

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TEXTE

1 When I watched Netflix's 1899, I was at once hooked to its mysteries and dumbfounded by some interactions and oddities I could not make sense of. Only when I watched the making-of did I realise my mistake: I had watched the series in the French dubbed version. It may have been a very different experience if I had watched it in its original language(s). A new perspective through the lens of audiovisual translation studies allowed me to rethink the impact that translation choices can have on the reception of films and series. One of 1899's distinctive features is that many characters come from different parts of the globe, accounting for a nearly constant multilingualism which is completely omitted in the dubbed version. In this regard, my paper relies on two articles dealing with the audiovisual translation of multilingual movies, which will be presented in the first part. Secondly, I will focus on the multilingual series 1899 and the implications of the dubbing choices for the French version.

Multilingualism in Cinema and Audiovisual Translation

2 In her article "Multilingualism and Cinema," Cultural Studies scholar Simber Atay defines multilingualism and a multilingual movie and provides its defining features or characteristics. To attest that "multilingualism represents cultural diversity on individual and social level" (ATAY, 2019, 143), Atay bases her demonstration on various historical, mythological, biblical or political instances of multilingualism. She then briefly explains the "linguistic organisation in cinema" (ATAY, 2019, 149) that is dubbing. It is normal for the accustomed viewer to see every character of every movie speak his/her own language. Yet dubbing is a change imposed on the artistic project of the filmmaker, and some elements can be lost, or even filtered out. In the case of multilingual movies, the "cultural originality" that is multilingualism is "necessary to preserve" (ATAY, 2019, 150). It makes the movie more realistic. She establishes multilingual movies as a genre in itself, with its main characteristics being the presence of three or more languages, an emphasis on multilingualism, the exploitation of "linguistic deterritorialisation" and the fact that "[m]multilingualism becomes a convenient doctrine to discuss human condition within its aesthetic, political, historical, mnemonic, geographical and cultural multi-coordinates" (ATAY, 2019, 152). Moreover, she attests that multilingualism is a new cinematographic trend and a source of inspiration for filmmakers. Indeed she proves her point with eight well-known multilingual films, including Quentin Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds*, in which she identifies multilingualism as a "metaphor of Nazism's repressive power" (ATAY, 2019, 157).

3 Cinema Studies scholar Nolwenn Mingant includes a case study for her approach to multilingual movies in her article "Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds*: a blueprint for dubbing translators?" This way, she seeks to "interrogate [the] complexity and determine [the] role" of the dubbing process of multilingual movies (MINGANT, 2010, 712). Dubbing the dialogue of a film can be seen as an act of domestication as opposed to subtitling (DANAN, 1991, 613, cited in MINGANT, 2010, 713). However, incorporating other languages than English comes as a new trend that matches the "new desire to give a larger and more au-

thentic representation of the non-American world" in Hollywood movies (MINGANT, 2010, 713). Mingant discusses the necessary "linguistic suspension of disbelief" (MINGANT, 2010, 713) as in classic cinema, in which nearly all characters speak the same language, no matter where they come from. It followed conventions of the time and assumedly increased spectatorial comfort. Tarantino himself argues that some of these conventions are old-fashioned and that it is important to be more realistic. Yet some local dubbing conventions need to be respected. She also looks into the use of subtitles–in the original version–for when actors are not speaking English: the "foreign line [thus] becomes meaningful" (MINGANT, 2010, 717). Noticeably, Tarantino chooses at some point not to subtitle a few lines, creating suspense in the narrative by hiding crucial information. Mingant then discusses the importance for the dubbing voices to have the right texture to match with the character so as to maintain credibility, as well as the difficulties involved in translating regional accents and the cultural implications they convey. Finally, she looks into language as a vehicle of narration, in the sense that it is able to quickly situate a scene given the language spoken, providing comic relief or creating suspense (as in the example of not subtitling a given line). In the film under study, language makes the difference between life and death and is intertwined with the themes of deception and power. Some losses are, however, to be deplored in dubbed versions, as in the loss of some "narrative and thematic uses of language" (MINGANT, 2010, 726), of authenticity, cumulated with a "cultural displacement" (MINGANT, 2010, 729) being linked to the intra-diegetic allusions to various uses of the English language.

4 Both authors, just like Translation Studies scholar Jorge Díaz Cintas, acknowledge in their own way the interdisciplinarity of audiovisual translation in the case of multilingual movies. They have a very different approach but do not contradict each other. Atay first looks at the overall significance and implications of multilingualism to then seek to establish multilingual movies as a genre, defining its characteristics and exploiting many concepts from different disciplines. Although Mingant bases her argumentation on concrete examples from *Inglourious Basterds*, she contributes to defining the parameters of multilingual movies. She also analyses and comments on the choices of translation made (here, for the French audience). In this way, she

pinpoints the different practices of dubbing and subtitling with their pros and cons. She offers a guideline as well as raises awareness about the need of new practices of audiovisual translation in the context of the multiplication of multilingual movies.

5 Both look at culture and its implications but tackle the question from a different angle. Atay explains how multilingualism is anchored in culture, thus looking more into themes, the overall significance and implications of multilingualism. As for Mingant, she complements the approach by studying the fact that some elements are to be transformed, shifted or displaced to match the target culture or the change of language. There are some inevitable losses, regarding cultural references that do no longer exist in the Target Culture and Target Language, references in the Source Language that cannot be maintained in the Target Language, having "to deal with other elements which couldn't remain in the French version" (MINGANT, 2010, 716) and some dialogues that may not exist as such if all the characters are then dubbed into the same language like when they discuss the languages they exchange in.

6 Another element being looked at is the effect of domestication that dubbing has for the foreign viewer. Mingant declares: "[d]ubbing strives at making a film accessible to an audience, not simply by translating the dialogue and subtitles, but by localising or naturalising the film, by changing the reference frame" (MINGANT, 2010, 730). Indeed it changes the cultural aspect, but also, it gives the (in this example French) viewer the impression–in the dubbed version–that characters are French, or if not, it is assumed they would live their lives speaking perfectly fluent or even native-quality French in foreign lands and between them. In this way, Mingant names a double suspension of disbelief,[1] explaining that viewers pass "over the discrepancy between nationality and language" (MINGANT, 2010, 717). Thus in a dubbing-culture country, people would expect movies coming out of industries like Hollywood to be in their own language and would accept this situation as normal, no matter the nationality and language originally spoken by characters. It seems then widely accepted that the Hollywood language is that of the dubbed one. That language is called "the base language of narration" by Bleichenbacher (cited in ATAY, 2019, 150).

7 They finally agree that "subtitle is the best method to keep artistic originality of movies," acknowledging that "dubbing is against the nature of multilingual film" (ATAY, 2019, 142), completed by the words of Tarantino himself saying that it would not make sense to dub *Inglourious Basterds* (Tarantino, cited in MINGANT, 2010, 713). Atay completes this by saying that it is "important for polyglot films [to be subtitled] because it is necessary to preserve also the cultural originality of multilingualism" and to "keep artistic originality of movies" (ATAY, 2019, 150).

The Case of the *1899* Series

8 The Netflix series under study, *1899*, tells the story of many passengers aboard a ship for a transatlantic journey that same year. It belongs to the multilingual genre (ATAY, 2019, 151-152) because there are passengers from different countries, namely England, France, Spain and Portugal, Poland, Denmark and Hong Kong and the crew manning the ship is German. Actors are from various countries too, according to their role.[2] There are many instances where each character speaks his/her own language and there are various encounters between speakers of different languages. Some characters are bilingual and speak English as an additional language to their mother tongue being thus the link between different social and linguistic groups, such as the Captain of the ship, Eyk (whose mother tongue is German), Angel (Spanish), or Ling Yi's mother and the madame, Virginia (both speak Cantonese and English). All the other characters only speak their own language or sometimes scarce words in English. Incidentally, in the making-of, the creators Jantje Friese and Baran bo Odar admit that they were very interested in this multilingualism: some encounters happen without words, or with words that do not make sense for the addressee across the room. Since most of the intended message is conveyed by body language rather than words, the directors intended for body language to take on more depth (as attested by the actors in the making-of, 11:10 & 13:06). One can note that on the finale of the season, multilingualism and lack of understanding between the characters emphasize the looming chaos and doom of the situation, reminiscent of the tower of Babel case (ATAY, 2019, 141, 143-4) or as if it were a less explosive–but not less spectacular–*Inglourious Basterds* ending, in which "the fast pace switch from

one language to another accompanie[s] the editing choices leading to the chaotic final" (MINGANT, 2010, 729). This case study is fourfold. Firstly, I will delve into the choices made for the translation of 1899 and the effects they have for the French public. Secondly, I will consider the ethics of audiovisual translation and to what extent changes can be deemed acceptable. Thirdly, I will ponder whether different options could have been elected, and if they would have had different effects, not omitting to look into a major theme of 1899: the difficulty of comprehension between people who don't speak the same language, and how it may have been rendered.

9 To begin with, in the French version of 1899, all voices are dubbed in French, regardless of which language was originally spoken. There are no clear mentions of the different origins of the characters, apart from some distinguishable outfits such as the geisha costume of Ling Yi, yet both her and her mother speak perfect French in the dubbed version. Evoked by both Mingant and Atay, the reasons that motivate such choices could be the cultural habits and conventions of the French public of receiving foreign movies (nearly entirely) dubbed, and a will to maximise comfort and ease when watching, especially for an audience accustomed to reading subtitles only occasionally (MINGANT, 2010, 713-715 and ATAY, 2019, 150).

Awkward Conversations

10 However, such choices do not come without consequence, especially on the diegesis. Some incoherences can be found as to why the characters are not answering to one another and simply stare. It makes for inexplicably long silences. Let us take for example the meeting between Polish-speaking Olek and Cantonese-speaking Ying Li.[3] Olek speaks and offers help. Ying Li does not move, does not answer, and only stares at him. He is kind, adjusts to the situation and gives his name by showing his chest. She gives hers and ends up letting him help. In the dubbed version, they should have understood each other on the first attempt. The fact that he repeats his name and that she does not answer back to him is very strange to the viewer who finds her response not adequate. It breaks the diegetic "suspension of disbelief" (MINGANT, 2010, 713-4) for the viewer because the situation can be interpreted as unrealistic. This difference of reception corres-

ponds to what Mingant says when she explains that "audiences have outgrown this linguistic convention" (MINGANT, 2010, 714) that characters automatically speak the viewer's (or target) language.

(Mis)Leading to Different Characterisation

11 Besides, the absence or change of answers between characters who assumedly speak the same (dubbed) language can lead to a change of characterisation, as for the successive encounters of Ángel and Krester. It can be assumed that the former is rather rude, while the latter, who does not say a word, appears to be extremely shy. Some dialogues are completely changed contrarily to that between Olek and Ying Li. Indeed some others have been rewritten to supposedly ensure coherence. A case in point is when a little girl comes up to Maura who is a doctor and just saved her pregnant sister, saying she wants to be a doctor when she grows up.[4] She speaks Danish to Maura, who, in the original version answers "I am so sorry, I don't understand what you're saying" and in French, it becomes "*J'espère sincèrement que ton souhait se réalisera*" ("I truly hope your wish comes true"). This intervention can be interpreted as condescending in the dubbed version given the social class the Danish girl belongs to (poor and rural). Maura, with her frown, seems to find it very difficult for her to reach such a level of education, if any education at all. It makes for a different characterisation of Maura, who appears more confident and condescending once dubbed, instead of selfless and vulnerable in the original version. Some similar changes to dialogues were highlighted in Mingant's study (MINGANT, 2010, 724-725), yet in the French dubbed version of *Inglourious Basterds*, they had chosen to keep some languages without dubbing (which were almost always subtitled).

Not Multilingual Any Longer

12 Such a choice of dubbing every language in one and the same could be said to lessen the effects of multilingualism, pluri-culturality and exchange, as well as this idea of communication and meaning that goes way beyond words, as intended by the series directors. Tarantino (MINGANT, 2010, 714) defends multilingualism explaining that

dubbing a multilingual film generates a great loss in erasing the reflection on language and the "cultural richness" (ATAY, 2019, 156). And if in its original version the series can be as defined as a multilingual production (ATAY, 2019, 151-152), the dubbed version cannot be categorised as such, and loses its meta-linguistic dimension.

Difficulties: Ethics and Acceptability of Change

Constraints of Audiovisual Translations

13 Nonetheless one can wonder to what extent changes can be deemed acceptable and if there are–or should be–ethics of audiovisual translation. To start with, audiovisual translation, and more particularly dubbing, has to obey many constraints. Some do not exist in other kinds of translation at all, such as the necessity for matching the duration of speech for lip syncing. As explained by Díaz Cintas:

> "[Dubbing] involves replacing the original soundtrack containing the actors' dialogue with a target language recording that reproduces the original message, ensuring that the target language sounds and the actors' lip movements are synchronised, in such a way that target viewers are led to believe that the actors on screen are actually speaking their language ?"
> (DÍAZ CINTAS, 2009, 4-5)

14 A solution to circumvent this necessity would be to have characters speak when they are not visible in the frame, as in an over-the-shoulder shot. It allows for more liberty as to the speech duration, for perhaps a text that is closer to what was originally said. It is likely not feasible often, as it also depends on the montage and more parameters. Besides, the dubbing has to sound convincing, as if it were the actor's real voice (MINGANT, 2010, 719-722). Dubbing can be seen as an artistic endeavour necessitating "dramatic skills" (ATAY, 2019, 150) and thus the recruiting of competent voice actors. [5]

Translating / Modifying / Adapting

15 Moreover, audiovisual translation, just as in any kind of translation, also has to be considered as a modification of a first utterance, a possible "deforming tendency" (Antoine Berman in Venuti 244). One can wonder whether there is a "localising effect," a domestication in such translation, or cultural displacements (MINGANT, 2010, 713, 729). Nonetheless, audiovisual translation could as well be seen as a form of adaptation and thus linked to Linda Hutcheon's *Theory of Adaptation*: the Source Text would then be the hypotext (original) and the Target Text would be the hypertext (adaptation). In this regard, the dubbed series–the hypertext–is rather "a new version of the film" (MINGANT, 2010, 730). It is then not about the faithfulness to the hypotext: it should rather be about the adaptation as a finished product of its own, a cultural artefact. It would remove the question of ethics and good practices all together.

Other Possibilities ?

Not Dubbing

16 It then seems that by choosing to dub all languages into a sole one and having all characters speak in French, it does not really respect, support nor promote the audiovisual production as a multilingual one. But then, what other possibilities were there for the French dubbing team? And what consequences would those choices have? Firstly, not dubbing the series at all would respect the intent of the creators and the multilingual intention and culture(s). However, it could go against the conventional habits of a given audience (Mingant 713-5) and hence be received with reticence.

Dubbing Only One Language

17 Another option could have been to elect a language of reference and only dub that one, and to subtitle the others, just like in *Inglourious Basterds*. There would still be a "double suspension of disbelief," on the diegetic level and on the linguistic level (MINGANT, 2010, 730, 717). With one language dubbed in 1899, two groups of people would then speak French: the French characters but also the

ones of the elected language. It could possibly bring unwanted confusion concerning the diegesis, since the two groups (French-speaking and French-dubbed), could be assimilated as one and the same. But then more issues arise: it would "localiz[e] or naturaliz[e] the film, by changing the reference frame" (MINGANT, 2010, 730) and thus erase the nationality and cultural particularities of the characters whose language was not originally French. Although the elected language would likely be the one having the most screen time, the choice could be deemed arbitrary. It could be subject to interpretations and unwanted intention as for example a postcolonial interpretation if English is elected, perceived as a sign of dominance and/or inferiority of the non-selected language (implied in ATAY, 2019, 150).

To Offer the Viewer the Choice

18 Furthermore, since it is distributed on a streaming platform, several versions are readily available, only a few clicks away: the dubbed one (by default) and the one with original languages and voices, with their subtitles. A disclaimer could have been added prior to the first viewing, advising the audience to watch in the original version with subtitles for a better rendering, maybe explaining the stakes. It would have offered an enlightened choice to the viewer and more flexibility as to his/her eagerness to watch original versions or generate a double suspension of disbelief, this time in full awareness.

Rendering the Difficulty of Comprehension Differently

19 But if we seek to respect the general French public preference for predominantly dubbed films and series, maybe other ways can be found to render the difficulty of comprehension, on top of the possibility of the disclaimer just mentioned. For instance, in imitating Tarantino's movie (MINGANT, 2010, 718), information could be withheld for the viewer, the same way a given character does not understand the person in front of him. So in the case of a multilingual movie and conversations like the many instances in 1899, one character could be dubbed/subtitled and not the other. It thus imitates "a true-to-life communication situation" and can be considered "situational realism" for the viewer who has to embrace the subtitled

character's point-of-view and lack of understanding (MINGANT, 2010, 718). However, once again, choosing who or which language is subtitled–and who is not–is arbitrary and could lead to interpretations on the viewer's part (including questions as to why having dubbed such language and not the other one or why should the audience understand or perceive one language and not the other one?).

20 If all languages were to be dubbed, during the conversation between Olek and Ying Li for instance, the audience for the French dubbed version watches a scene that lacks coherence. To remediate such misunderstandings from the audience, the dubbed version could usefully encode subtitles as to indicate the language in which the characters originally speak: an additional information indicating the language, whether it be a mention in between brackets or asterisks (perhaps meme-like: *talks in Cantonese* / *in Polish*). Atay, citing De Bonis, suggests "using different colour subtitles for each of secondary languages present in the film" (DE BONIS, 2015, 58, cited in ATAY, 2019, 150).

Conclusion

21 I studied Netflix's 1899 series and its translation for the French public, in which case all languages of this very multilingual production have been dubbed into French. I found that it made for many changes, in the diegesis as in the reception. I have found that many different options could have been elected and that it would have suited the series to highlight particularly how difficult it is to communicate for some characters. The debate raises practical questions as well as ethical questions about the limit to the changes one can make when translating audiovisual material. It could be interesting to see if different choices of translation have been made for the same series for different Target Language. Another axis of study could be to reflect whether the success of the series varied in different countries (or areas with different language) and link it with the dubbing culture and conventions or the targeted audience and compare the choices made.

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NOTES

1 The first suspension of disbelief is fictional: accepting that elements of the narrative though impossible in reality, exist in this fiction. It enables readers or viewers to enjoy the fiction (the second one is linguistic).

2 In the making-of, Lucy Bevan, the casting director, explicitly specifies the decision to have an international cast [6:56].

3 1899, episode 3, 22:05-23:24; 33:00-33:43.

4 1899, episode 1, 18:39-19:13.

5 More information about the job of voice actors is available in this article: Menon, Noella. "The Difference Between Voice Over, Voice Acting & Dubbing." *Wonders of the Voice Website*. 2021. https://wondersofthevoice.com/the-difference-between-voice-over-voice-acting-dubbing/ (accessed March 10, 2023).

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