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# **I SEE WHAT YOU ARE SAYING**

*-the perception and processing of subtitled films-*

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2008

## Abstract

The present thesis aims at analysing interlingual subtitling within the framework of Audiovisual Translation, a relatively new field of study on the boundary of several disciplines. The advantages and repercussions of subtitling are studied from a cognitive-semiotic approach, focusing on the viewers of the film. Interlingual subtitling is often regarded as a necessary bad thing by the public. To see whether this opinion has any foundation in the characteristics of subtitles linguistic, semiotic, cognitive and psychological issues are considered that can influence the processing of subtitled films. The empirical research conducted with the participation of 81 high-school students indicated that the presence of subtitles does have an effect on the way different semiotic resources of the film are processed. It disrupts image reading and enhances the recall of verbal elements in the film. However, the loss of visual information is insignificant. Results have also shown that the processing of the information is not worse when more codes are perceived simultaneously. This implies that the negative opinion about interlingual subtitling is based on the greater cognitive effort required by the viewers as well as on psychological and attitudinal variables.

# Contents

Foreword .....	5
<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2. Historical Overview of Film Translation.....</b>	<b>11</b>
2.1. The first films.....	11
2.2. Intertitles .....	12
2.3. “The patter” .....	12
2.4. Subtitles .....	13
2.5. Multilingual productions.....	13
2.6. Dubbing .....	13
2.7. Multilingual distributions .....	14
<b>3. Audiovisual Translation – a new field of study.....</b>	<b>16</b>
3.1. What is Audiovisual Translation?.....	16
3.2. Terminology questions .....	17
3.3. A typology .....	18
3.4. Scientific perspectives .....	20
<b>4. Subtitling – Why is it a necessary bad thing? .....</b>	<b>22</b>
4.1. The advantages of subtitling.....	22
4.1.1. Economic and cultural importance .....	22
4.1.2. Accessibility.....	22
4.1.3. Language learning.....	23
4.2. The repercussions of subtitling on film viewing .....	24
4.2.1. Issues arising from linguistic aspects .....	24
4.2.1.1. The presence of the original text .....	25
4.2.1.2. The oral and the written – different registers.....	26

4.2.1.3. Inevitable adaptation .....	27
4.2.2. Issues arising from semiotic aspects .....	27
4.2.2.1. Film as a multimodal entity .....	29
4.2.2.2. Introducing another modality: subtitles .....	30
4.2.2.3. Proposed semiotic model for the processing of subtitled films .....	32
4.2.3. Issues arising from cognitive and psychological aspects.....	35
4.2.3.1. The viewer's attitude .....	36
4.2.3.2. Causes of tension or anxiety .....	36
4.2.3.3. Causes of tiredness.....	36
<b>5. An empirical study on the processing of subtitled films.....</b>	<b>39</b>
5.1. Introduction to the research .....	39
5.2. Method .....	40
5.3. Participants.....	40
5.4. Materials .....	41
5.5. Procedure .....	42
5.6. Results.....	43
<b>6. Conclusion .....</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Works Cited.....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Filmography .....</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>Appendixes .....</b>	<b>53</b>

## Foreword

At first sight, the analysis of subtitling does not seem to be a topic closely related to the classical training of a philologist. I have chosen this research topic because of my personal experience in the field. My motivation comes from the belief that as digital technology advances in the film industry, the need for research in audiovisual translation emerges in Hungary, too.

I started to be interested in audiovisual translation, more precisely in subtitling, when I studied in Belgium at the École d'Interprètes Internationaux de l'Université de Mons-Hainaut, where I completed two semesters of Prof. H. Safar's Introduction to Subtitling course in 2005-2006. During this course I had the privilege of learning a lot about the practical and theoretical aspects of subtitling that enabled me to produce my own DVD by the end of the school year containing a French cartoon subtitled in Hungarian.

I chose the cartoon "Titeuf" that is well known in France and in Belgium and has not yet been translated into Hungarian. I subtitled two episodes which are about eight-minutes each. The subtitling process involved several steps. Firstly, I had to obtain the authorization of the producers, France Animation and Moonscoop in Paris. Secondly, I typed up all the dialogues of the two episodes in French on a computer – not having had access to the original scripts – and translated them. After the translation of the scripts I was facing the most difficult part of the work: adaptation. I had to find the right Hungarian expressions that convey the same meaning as the original soundtrack but are condensed enough to fit into two lines of subtitles and short enough to be read in a few seconds. When I finalised the duration and the form of the subtitles, I used a program called Studio 9 to

incrust the subtitles into the film. Finally, I created the credit titles with the help of the same program.

By completing each step of the subtitling process on my own, I became fascinated by Audiovisual Translation as a discipline and wanted to find out more about the different semiotic systems that are involved in the meaning making process while watching a subtitled film. In the case of subtitled films the image, the sound and the text have a very special and complex relationship. My goal is to investigate their interaction during the perception and understanding of a subtitled film. Since this multimodal aspect of subtitling cannot be analysed directly without involving the viewers in the research, my thesis will rely on results from several scientific domains: linguistic studies, cognitive sciences, film studies, translation studies, psychology. I hope that the findings of this research will provide some information in order to help me create more comfortable and viewer-friendly subtitles in the future.

## 1. Introduction

Audiovisual media gains more and more importance in every domain of today's society, be it in the form of personal or mass communication. We are constantly surrounded by screens that serve different purposes. They have become indispensable in everyday personal communication where emails, blogs, chat and short text messages have replaced handwritten or printed letters. Thanks to the large number of possibilities that the multimedia has brought about, it is now possible to hear, see and write to one another at the same time. It is no surprise that this revolutionisation of communication invaded all public places. In the underground or in the streets, publicities on large screens inform us and compete for our attention. At schools computer screens are also used for educational purposes. Many programs provide audiovisual material that can help practice grammar or pronunciation while learning a foreign language. At home television and the Internet are infinite sources of audiovisual material to give information or to divert. Last but not least, screens are the essential medium for computer games and films that have become the most popular forms of entertainment.

When we take a closer look at these forms of communication, we notice that they all share one advantage: they combine visual and oral information and present them simultaneously. Hence they have a more powerful and overwhelming effect on the viewer. Due to this technical achievement the way in which we transfer information has been radically transformed.

The change in the way we communicate brought about the necessity for new modes of translation. It is thanks to Audiovisual Translation (AVT) - or "Screen Translation" - that linguistic barriers are overcome and different kinds of audiovisual material can be



accessible in any part of the world in the viewers' language. Audiovisual translation, as its name suggests, contains three types of information: textual, because it is a translation, as well as oral and visual, given the nature of the media in which the text is presented. For example, in the case of a subtitled film, the subtitles are the textual elements, the translation into the viewers' language. In addition to this, the film communicates in two more ways that are processed by the viewers: through the visual (camera shots, actors' mimicry etc.) and through the auditory elements (dialogues, music, noises). This multitude of information is conveyed by different semiotic codes. The scope of this thesis is to examine one type of screen translation, namely interlingual subtitling,<sup>1</sup> and see how this mode of language transfer is perceived and processed by the viewers.

According to Perron (1997:101-106) during film watching the viewers use two kinds of information processing. The "Bottom-Up" mechanism is described by a movement from the part towards the whole, from the particular towards the general. The viewers try to make meaning and draw conclusions out of the perceptive data that comes into the working memory through the different senses. The "Top-Down" processing is directed by concepts stored in the long term memory. Previous knowledge, experience and schematas are activated to construct meaning. Perron suggests that both of these perception types are at work while watching a film. What is more, they are in constant interaction with each other. (Perron, 1997:105) But what happens when the unity of picture and sound in the film is interrupted by the introduction of subtitles?

Before the hypotheses are formulated, it is necessary to mention that textual psycholinguistics – a discipline that deals with the comprehension of "classical" texts (Coirier et al. 1996:6) – forms the basis for the observations made in the field about the

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<sup>1</sup> Intralingual subtitling, that is the subtitles made for the deaf or hard of hearing, is not part of the research given the limited time and space available for this project.



comprehension of audiovisual texts. It is due to the low number of experiments carried out by AVT researchers on the reception and understanding of subtitles. One movement in cognitive sciences suggests that reading comprehension involves several stages - recognition of letters and words, analysis of syntax and semantic components, generation of inferences - that are hierarchically ordered. While other researchers believe that comprehension is more a result of an interaction that operates simultaneously rather than sequentially. (Chun & Plass, 1997:61-62) It is not easy to bring up evidence for any of these comprehension theories due to the inaccessibility and the complexity of mental activities.

In my thesis I focus on the perception and understanding of subtitled films with a cognitive-semiotic approach. My first hypothesis is that watching subtitled films is a cognitively more demanding task than watching the original or the dubbed version because the presence of subtitles changes the overall perception process of the film. I assume that one reason for this is that subtitles require sequential processing – since the viewers are provided with a maximum of two-line long texts at a time (Schnotz, 1993 as cited in Chun & Plass, 1997:61; de Linde & Kay, 1999:32) – while the processing of the image and the sound happens globally and simultaneously. (Gentner, 1983; Clark & Paivio, 1991 as cited in Chun & Plass, 1997:61; de Linde & Kay, 1999:32) I believe that another reason is that subtitles are read automatically and involuntarily even in cases when they are not necessary for the viewers. (D'Ydewalle et al. as cited in Lavaur & Nava, 2008:4) Hence the viewers' eyes jump to the bottom of the screen every time a new subtitle appears taking away time from the processing of the image. In other words, I presume that the presence of subtitles changes the way in which the different semiotic resources of the film are processed. My second hypothesis is that the depth of the processing is influenced by the nature of the cognitive task. When only two semiotic codes interact with each other, the

information is processed more effectively than when three codes are combined. My assumption is that the number of codes simultaneously perceived is in inverse proportion to the effectiveness of the information processing.

To test these hypotheses I have carried out a research among a group of high-school students in Pécs. Four groups watched the same sequence of a film but in different versions:

- Group 1: film sequence in French without subtitles
- Group 2: film sequence in French with Hungarian subtitles
- Group 3: film sequence dubbed in Hungarian without subtitles
- Group 4: film sequence dubbed in Hungarian with Hungarian subtitles

After having seen the fifteen-minute long sequence the students were asked to fill in a questionnaire that aimed at three types of information: visual, verbal and implicit out of which the students generated inferences. It was hoped that the effects of the interaction of different semiotic codes on the understanding of subtitled films would be transparent in the answers.

In the following chapters I would first like to give a brief outline of different types of film translation in the past and then describe Audiovisual Translation as a relatively new field of research that studies different ways of audiovisual language transfer from a multidisciplinary point of view. From the fourth chapter the thesis focuses only on subtitling. It presents several linguistic, semiotic, cognitive and psychological issues related to subtitling that make the viewing of a subtitled film a more demanding, sometimes undesirable task. Finally, in chapter five, an empiric study conducted with the help of 81 participants about the perception and understanding of subtitled films is presented with the findings.

## 2. Historical Overview of Film Translation

Interlingual subtitling is by definition a type of translation. As we have seen before it has the specificity of combining visual, auditory and textual information simultaneously, but its main function is to transform the content of the dialogues that are uttered in the source language into a short, written translation in the target language. Interlingual subtitling is used to facilitate the understanding of a foreign film for those viewers who do not speak the language of the original version. Practically speaking it means that one or two short lines of text are pasted onto the lower part of the screen to give a condensed but precise translation of the dialogues of the film. Subtitles can also contain other information conveyed by the sound track (songs, voice-off) as well as the discursive elements of the image (letters, advertisements, grafitis, newspaper articles etc.) (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2007:8) However, subtitling was not the only method used in film translation. In the following I will give a short summary of how film translation practices changed over time since the beginning of the film industry to the age of today's high technology that offers better and better solutions.

### 2.1. The first films

The beginnings of film history go back to France where Auguste and Louis Lumière invented the cinematograph, a machine that is a camera and a projector in one. The first public projections took place on the 28th of December 1895 in Paris. Among the projected short films the famous *L'Arroseur arrosé*, *Le repas de bébé* and *La sortie de l'usine Lumière à Lyon*<sup>2</sup> could be found. (Dirks, 1996) Thanks to the huge success of these shows, thousands started to be fascinated with this new art. At this stage, the image was the only

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<sup>2</sup> *The Sprinkler Sprinkled, Baby's Meal, Workers Leaving the Lumiere Factory*

means of conveying information. These films were silent, so linguistic or translation problems had not yet arisen.

## **2.2. Intertitles**

Shortly after the invention of films a way of sharing verbal information with the viewers was found. Intertitles were short, filmed texts that were inserted between sequences of the silent film. Usually they were written in white on a black background and they had the function of explaining and completing the image as well as presenting the content of the dialogues. (Safar & Hamaoui, 2004:8) This technique was invented by J. Stuart Blackton, an American cartoonist. The first intertitles appeared in the film *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1903. At this time, film translation could easily be solved by the simple translation and refilming of the intertitles which then were placed back onto the tape. (Ivarsson, 2004)

## **2.3. The "patter"**

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a new profession came into being in France and in Canada: 'le boniment'<sup>3</sup>. The patter was a speech given by a man whose task was to stand beside the screen during the projection and explain as well as comment on the silent film. He could freely add his own impressions and feelings concerning the action. Besides, he was responsible for the translation and adaptation of the film. He translated the intertitles into the viewers' language and provided them with the necessary explications according to the cultural context of the film. (Gaudreault & Lacasse, 1996) Soon the world-wide commercialisation of motion pictures called for a new type of film translation that made it possible to watch a foreign language film and have access to its translation simultaneously.

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<sup>3</sup> English translations of the French word "boniment" vary in the dictionaries. I use this term based on the French-English Oxford SuperLex Dictionary, 1996 and the Collins English French Electronic Dictionary, 2005.

## **2.4. Subtitles**

The first subtitles already appeared during the silent film period. In 1909 M. N. Topp invented a technique that made it possible to add subtitles to a film with the help of a second projector. (Ivarsson, 2004) The subtitles only appeared as translations of the intertitles at the bottom of the screen during the film. When sound films were invented the use of intertitles stopped and film translation became very complicated. The hearing of the dialogues gave special cultural and linguistic characteristics to each film and it seemed to divide the world of cinema into as many productions as countries. (Manageria, 2001) However, soon a new idea emerged to place subtitles on the moving pictures and synchronise them with the dialogues in order to provide a simultaneous translation for the viewers of another country. The first film that was subtitled in Europe was the *The Jazz Singer* presented in Paris in 1929. (Ivarsson, 2004) In the following years the development of technology offered several subtitling methods: optic, thermic, chemical, laser or electronic. (Ivarsson, 2004)

## **2.5. Multilingual productions**

In the 1920s big film making companies in the US had the idea of shooting several versions of the same screenplay in different languages in order to have polyglot movies. It was a very expensive solution to film translation. The actors came from the countries where the films were to be commercialised and spoke in their native languages. This method was not very successful and soon was replaced by the technique of dubbing. (Sponholz, 2003:11)

## **2.6. Dubbing**

The invention of dubbing provided a possibility to overcome the linguistic difficulties of the international film market. It was Edwin Hopkins who first had the idea of recording the



dialogues of the film in different languages and synchronise them with the acting and the movement of the camera. (Abidli as cited in Safar & Hamaoui, 2004:314) The first attempts to juxtapose the original tape and a soundtrack in another language were made in the United States. The competition between France and the USA in developing film industry was soon over. In a few years time the famous companies of Hollywood produced more films dubbed in French than the French themselves in their own country. To put an end to the American monopoly and to assure high-quality dubbing, the French government passed a legislation according to which only those foreign films could be projected that had been dubbed in France with the help of French actors and personnel. (Abidli as cited in Safar & Hamaoui, 2004:314) Dubbing has been a very expensive and long film translation process. Due to the growing demand on the market for a quick international circulation of films, new technological inventions were very welcome both by the industry and the translators.

## **2.7. Multilingual distributions**

The era of digital technology and multimedia has opened up many new perspectives for film translators. Digital methods assure better quality in the treatment of sound, picture and text during the process of film making. What is more, the continuously increasing quantity of information that one can store on a CD or on a DVD made it possible to watch a movie in several versions, in several languages on one single DVD. Viewers can even combine the dubbed and subtitled versions according to their likes and dislikes. One DVD can contain subtitles in up to 32 languages or even different subtitles in the same language for different public. For example, subtitles for the deaf and hard-of-hearing, subtitles for children, subtitles for the young and fast readers etc. (Gambier, 2004:6)

The technical developments in the field of mass communication, for example the expansion of digital television, make the market of audiovisual translation grow even more. A growing number of people in Europe in the near future will have access to digital television and hence will have the choice of watching a film in a version that they prefer.

Audiovisual translation as a type of linguistic transfer is in the centre of today's scientific, economic and political discussions. At an international conference on Audiovisual Communication and Language Transfer the Council of Europe and the International Federation of Translators called for systematic research to be conducted on the "various modes of transfer, and the language effects induced by each of these modes" (report of the conference written by Gambier, 1995 as cited in Safar & Hamaoui, 2004:248) In reply to the fast changes in the market of audiovisual materials and the encouragement of scientific research on audiovisual language transfer, many conferences have been organised and hundreds of articles have been published since the 1990s. The following chapter will provide an overview of this new field of study, Audiovisual Translation (AVT), with its own research questions, typology and scientific perspectives.



### 3. Audiovisual Translation – a new field of study

#### 3.1. What is Audiovisual Translation?

Audiovisual Translation is a new genre in translation. The challenges that it has to overcome are very different from literary or technical translation. Because of the limited space and time available for the translation to be presented the text has to be compressed as much as possible without losing important information. Often the translation does not only involve transferring the message from one language and culture to another, but it also means changing from oral presentation to written form, like in the case of subtitling. According to Gambier these types of translations could legitimately be called *tradaptations* because they imply adaptation of the source text by providing a translation that has to be reformulated and condensed. In the case of audiovisual translations the polysemiotic nature of the environment, the different genres of audio-visual materials as well as the expectations of different audiences have to be taken into consideration during the translation process. (Gambier, 2004:5)

Audiovisual Translation is also a recent field of study that grew out of Linguistics, Translation Studies and Film Studies. It started to receive special attention within the circle of translation specialists and linguists in 1995, the centenary of the cinema. AVT research usually has three main foci:

- 1.) to describe the relationship between image, sound and speech in audiovisual texts
- 2.) to analyse the relationship between source language and target language in audiovisual language transfers
- 3.) to analyse the code switching from oral to written forms of communication in AV materials. (Gambier, 2004:1)

AVT has only a few scholars compared to other well-established and respected disciplines, however there is a growing interest in this field among young researchers. (Díaz Cintas, 2004:54) The articles and books published so far in this field are quite repetitious and mainly focus on technical questions or translation issues. This is why leading scholars of AVT now call for new paths of research. (Díaz Cintas, 2004:53-54)

### **3.2. Terminology questions**

AVT is still a young discipline that struggles with unsettled terminology. Yves Gambier – one of the leading figures of research in this field – starts his introduction to the special issue of *The Translator* journal on Screen Translation in 2003 by collecting at least four expressions used interchangeably to name the field of research that studies the translation of audiovisual materials. According to Gambier, the first papers used the term “Film Translation” which was soon challenged because of neglecting the different ways of translating for television or video. “Language Transfer” was also commonly used in the beginning, however it seemed to focus too much on the linguistic aspect of the translation process leaving out the importance of picture and sound in the media. Later the usage of “Audiovisual Translation” took over that had the advantage of emphasising the multisemiotic nature of AV texts. “Screen Translation” has also become a commonly accepted term in the field, which enlarges the notion of audiovisual translation to any kind of text transmitted by a screen (TV, cinema or computer). More recently the expression “Multimedia Translation” started to appear in articles. This term has the broadest meaning of all since it expands from film translation, through translating for the theatre to the localisation of websites and computer games. (Gambier, 2003:170) I choose to use the term Audiovisual Translation (AVT) in this thesis, because I find this expression the most relevant to my research topic.

### 3.3. A typology

For the following typology I am indebted to Yves Gambier's article published in the Meta magazine in 2004. Gambier provides the fullest and most organised list of different types of Audiovisual Translation presently practiced. In relation to AVT, often only dubbing and subtitling are remembered. However, it is important to note that Audiovisual Translation is a very diverse and large field including the study of many different types of translation. Gambier enumerates 12 types of AVT<sup>4</sup>:

1. *Script translation* is usually done for obtaining special funds or for making coproductions. It is an unedited text, however still crucial from a film making point of view.
2. *Interlingual subtitling* or *open captioning* means providing a simultaneous and synchronised written translation in the target language of an AV material. The subtitles are usually placed on the bottom of the screen in a maximum of two lines. Other types of interlingual subtitling can be further distinguished according to the number of languages involved or to the genre of the source material. For instance, bilingual subtitling in Belgium or Switzerland, subtitling of TV programmes, subtitling for the cinema, subtitling for DVD or video.
3. *Intralingual subtitling* or *closed captioning* is used to make AV programmes accessible for the deaf and hard-of-hearing. In this type of translation the source and the target language is the same, but there is a code switching from oral to written form.
4. *Real-time subtitling* is used for providing immediate, live translation of an interview or some kind of speech on TV. It is most common in talk-shows or broadcast court cases.

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<sup>4</sup> The examples referring to Hungary are my own and cannot be found in the article mentioned above.

5. *Dubbing* means that the translation in the target language is synchronised to the lip movement of the speaker as well as to the time of their speech. In this case the original soundtrack of the film or TV programme is substituted by the new soundtrack with the voices in the target language. This translation type requires a lot of adaptation and time. It is still the most common AVT practice in Hungary, although it is being more and more challenged by subtitling in the cinemas.
6. *Simultaneous interpretation* means that an immediate live translation is provided by a professional translator while the speaker is talking. For example, the interviews with the winners of the Formula 1 races are often broadcast with this type of AVT in Hungary.
7. *Voice-over* is an AVT type where the oral translation in the target language is superimposed on the original soundtrack and synchronised with it. It is most common in documentaries.
8. *Free commentary* is a way of adapting an AV programme to a new audience in the target language. It involves a lot of explicitation and adaptation - for example, in the case of children's programmes - while keeping the synchrony with the moving images.
9. *Subtitling* is a translation type used in theatres or operas. It is often presented as one continuously running line above the stage projected in live, given the fact that two performances of the same play are not always identical.
10. *Sight translation* is a rarely used AVT type. It is common practice though at international film festivals. The translation is provided by a translator who reads the dialogues out loud in the target language based on a scenario or already existing subtitles in another language.

11. *Audio-description* is a special translation for the blind and visually impaired. It involves making a new soundtrack with the description of important visual details of the scenes, the actions, the actors' mimicry etc. It can also be intra- or interlingual.
12. *Multilingual production* can mean two types of translation/adaptation: double versions or remakes. In double versions each actor plays in his or her mother tongue and later on the film is synchronised in only one language. Remakes involve more adaptation since their aim is to recontextualise the film according to the target culture where the film will be distributed. It is often practiced by European and Asian film companies in order to get more attention and success on the American market. (Gambier, 2003:172-177; 2004:2-4)

### **3.4. Scientific perspectives**

In recent publications scholars interested in Audiovisual Translation research – Gambier, Gottlieb, Díaz Cintas, de Linde & Kay among others – started to encourage a change of focus in the field. So far the articles and books dealing with AVT were primarily concerned with describing and solving technical difficulties and working out good strategies to overcome the challenges of subtitling and dubbing within the framework of Translation Studies. The new scientific perspectives for AVT could include:

- empiric studies dealing with all twelve types of Audiovisual Translation
- studies relying on terminolgy, findings and data coming from several disciplines, mainly from Film Studies, Cultural Studies, Cognitive Studies, Semiotics, Psychology and Linguistics
- research on multimodality in AVT, especially in relation to subtitling
- the revision of terminolgy in Translation Studies (eg.: the notion of 'translation', 'text', 'equivalence' etc.)

- reception studies to improve the quality in AVT focusing on socio-cultural, attitudinal, perceptual and cognitive issues
- comparative and contrastive studies (eg.: diachronic or synchronic with different programmes, media, genres and audiences)
- studies exploring the role of subtitling in foreign language learning

(Díaz Cintas, 2004:62-66; Gambier, 2003:182-187; Gambier, 2006:2-7)

This thesis wishes to follow the above mentioned guidelines and tries to fit into the recently proposed scientific perspectives despite the disadvantage of having few sources. In what follows interlingual subtitling will be analysed considering some linguistic, semiotic, cognitive as well as psychological aspects related to the viewing of a subtitled film. Finally, an empiriccal study on the reception and processing of subtitled films will be presented.



## 4. Subtitling – Why is it a necessary bad thing?<sup>5</sup>

### 4.1. The advantages of subtitling

Subtitles are often considered to be a necessary bad thing that viewers have to put up with if they want to have access to a foreign language film. This negative attitude can be explained by translation difficulties arising from the nature of the medium, by the complex relation of several semiotic codes that interact during the meaning making process, as well as, by a greater cognitive effort that is needed from the part of the viewer while watching a subtitled film. But before these aspects are analysed in detail, it is important to emphasize the advantages of subtitling that make it still a very important and popular way of language transfer.

#### 4.1.1. Economic and cultural importance

One of the main arguments on the audiovisual market for using subtitles is that it is a relatively cheap and fast translation process since it does not require the involvement of many people. (Díaz Cintas, 2004:50) Besides its economic importance, subtitling plays an important role from a social and cultural point of view. (Ramière, 2006:152) It overcomes linguistic barriers while conserving the original sound track, hence conveying the source culture in an authentic way. (Jordão Coelh)

#### 4.1.2. Accessibility

An outstanding merit of subtitling is that it provides access to audiences who otherwise could not fully understand or enjoy a certain audiovisual material. (Gambier as cited in Neves, 2005:16) Egoyan & Balfour put it as the following in their book titled *Subtitles. On the Foreignness of Film*: “Subtitles offer a way into worlds outside of ourselves.” (Egoyan

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<sup>5</sup> The expression is borrowed from Lucien Marleau whose French article is titled “Les sous-titres... un mal nécessaire.”



& Balfour as cited in Neves, 2005:16) Subtitles are not only useful for those who do not understand the language of the film or TV programme, but also for those viewers who cannot perceive any sound. The aim of intralingual subtitling is to provide a written form of the dialogue as well as other significant sounds or noises on the soundtrack. (de Linde & Kay, 1999:2) According to the estimates of the European Commission in 1995 there were 1,100,000 deaf people and about 80 million hard-of-hearing in Europe. (de Linde & Kay, 1999:10) In Hungary, according to a statistics from 2006, there are nine thousand deaf citizens and about 45 thousand people are hard-of-hearing. (Tóvizi & Szőke, 2007) This data shows the importance of subtitling in providing access to vital information as well as entertainment to a large community of people.

#### **4.1.3. Language learning**

Recent research has shown that both intra- and interlingual subtitling have a good effect on language learning. According to Martine Danan, watching subtitled audiovisual material increases language comprehension and results in deeper processing. (Danan, 2004:67) Intralingual subtitling was shown to help in vocabulary building, in recalling the exact expression used in certain situation of the AV material as well as in word recognition. In other words, it helped viewers improve their language processing skills because they had to take a more active part in the viewing of the film by reading and processing the subtitles together with the image and the sound. (Danan, 2004:69-71) However, intralingual subtitling is not always beneficial to language learners if the level of the AV material is not chosen appropriately. Students can easily feel lost if there is no comprehensible input. Danan applies Krashen's Comprehensible Input theory to subtitling and argues that for beginners interlingual subtitling can be more of a help in their learning process. (Danan, 2004:71) It was also proven to improve learners' word recognition and recall. The image, the sound in one language and the text in another reinforces referential connections, thus,

helps building vocabulary. Having access to the text in their mother tongue, the students' anxiety level is lowered which results in more effective learning. (Danan, 2004:72-74)

Jorge Díaz Cintas & Remael point out another important area of language learning that is also improved by subtitling. Interlingual subtitling helps the learners to become familiar not only with a foreign language, but also with its culture including the peculiar behaviour of its speakers.

“We familiarize ourselves with the foreign language through the soundtrack (vocabulary, intonation, pronunciation), and the images bring us into contact with the mannerisms and behaviours of other cultures (gesticulation, way of dressing, interpersonal relationships, geographical spaces). It is precisely this unique possibility of having direct access to the original and being able to compare it with its translation that ...[is]... one of the most positive additional bonuses of subtitling.”

(Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2007:15)

## **4.2. The repercussions of subtitling on film viewing**

In the literature available about subtitling many difficulties or challenges related to this type of audiovisual translation are listed or analysed. Most of these are written from the translators'/subtitlers' point of view reflecting on the process of translation and adaptation itself. This thesis, however, takes a different perspective and aims at presenting the inconveniences of subtitling on film viewing with a focus on the viewer.

### **4.2.1. Issues arising from linguistic aspects**

Since subtitling is a translation by definition, the viewer has to face some linguistic challenges or even suffer from certain losses as a result of the translation process. This chapter will not deal with general translation issues that can occur in any text, but focus only on questions unique to subtitling. These are a result of the medium and its technical limitations: the audiovisual environment, the constraint of time and the constraint of space. The technical restraints do not only limit the translator but also the viewer. Teresa Tomasziewicz defines subtitling as a translation with a change of form from oral to

written, which is then adapted according to the technical constraints of AV materials. (Tomaszkiewicz, 1993:37) The effects of this obligatory adaptation and of the code switching from oral to written form of communication are numerable on the viewer.

#### *4.2.1.1. The presence of the original text*

One of the peculiarities of subtitling is that it is a kind of translation where the original is also accessible to the reader. This means that those viewers who understand the original dialogue a little bit will almost automatically compare the subtitles with what they have heard. This continuous checking on the translator takes away time and energy from the viewer to process the film as a whole. In case of a poor translation it can also raise doubts in the viewers depriving them of the full enjoyment of the film. (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2007:55-56)

Another aspect of the simultaneous presence of subtitles and the original soundtrack is the effect of foreignisation as opposed to domestication. Foreignisation is an approach to translation where the foreignness of the original text and culture is emphasized. The translation does not try to embed the source text into the target culture. On the other hand, domestication is an approach in which the translation favours the target audience's culture and tries to make the target text appear the least foreign possible. (Szarkowska, 2005) Subtitling falls into the category of foreignisation. It emphasises cultural difference between the film and its viewers. (Ramière, 2006:153) The Self-Other dichotomy from Cultural Studies can be applied here in two ways: either the target culture is seen as Self in which the viewers of the subtitled film can enjoy or judge the Otherness of the movie, or the source culture is perceived as the Self and the viewers of the film in another language are considered part of the Other. In this case the presence of the subtitles is a constant reminder for the viewers of their status of "outsiders". (Ramière, 2006:153)

#### *4.2.1.2. The oral and the written – different registers*

The fact that the translation is provided for the viewer in another modality than the source text, namely in writing instead of speaking, can leave the viewer with certain linguistic losses or misunderstandings. Hajmohammadi argues that subtitles only give the translation of the dialogues without their “extra-linguistic features” (age, social status etc.), “paralinguistic features” (facial expressions, movements etc.), “pitch patterns and emotional tones.” (Hajmohammadi, 2004) Another major disadvantage of subtitling is that it is unable to transfer the difference between different dialects used in the film. Different accents are often related to humorous situations that the viewer cannot always grasp with the help of the subtitles. It can be rather frustrating for the viewer especially if it is obvious from the film that a joke was missed. Given the written nature of subtitles the source text can never produce the same effects on the viewer as an oral translation. Of course, it has to be mentioned that the image and the flow of actions carry a lot of information in themselves which allow the viewer to guess and fill in the gaps in the subtitles. But this requires extra cognitive effort from the viewer’s part in order to process and understand the subtitled film.

Rendering speech in writing has another consequence: the written medium necessitates a different register. This is especially important in the case of colloquial language use and swearing. Each culture and each epoch is different and has its own rules about what can be presented in written form. In subtitling there is a general tendency to favour the expectations of written language over linguistic equivalence. (Tomaszkiewicz, 1993:24) To defend this trend Chen argues that swearwords should be toned down in order to protect younger viewers and not to shock the target audience. (Chen, 2004:121) However, the

excessive use of this strategy can mislead the viewers and give a false picture of the characters and their socio-cultural background in the film.

#### *4.2.1.3. Inevitable adaptation*

Adaptation of the text is unavoidable in subtitling because the reading speed of the viewer can never be as fast as the comprehension of oral input. The temporal and spatial constraints on subtitles result in a compression of the translation to 50% or 70% of the original. (Tomaszkiewicz, 1993:24; Şerban, 2004) In order to reach this condensation the translator is forced to omit certain words or expressions and to reformulate or summarise what was said in the dialogue. A simplification in the syntactic structure of the sentences is also recommended. (Şerban, 2004) The effect of the adaptation can be that the viewer misses out on certain linguistic information, although no empirical studies were conducted to measure how much is actually lost in this way of translation.

Fragmentation of the dialogues is also inevitable due to the limited space available for the subtitles on the bottom of the screen as well as to the different speech rhythm of each character in the film. The viewers can only have access to one subtitle at a time; hence they are forced to make meaning of the dialogues in a fragmented way, which can lead to less “processing ease.” (Şerban, 2004) This is especially true if the subtitles are not cut in a way that each segment is a complete whole and direct the reader towards the right conclusion. (Marleau, 1982:280)

#### **4.2.2. Issues arising from semiotic aspects**

Semiotics is a discipline that studies the use and interpretation of signs. It also aims at describing what meaning is and where it comes from. Signs are substitutes, tools that enable human beings to deal with things that they do not have direct access to. (Klinkenberg,

1996:29,34) In a more concrete way Klinkenberg explains that signs are stimulations – sounds, pictures etc. – that in themselves do not have any meaning. It is in the central nervous system that meaning is attributed to these signs. This process necessitates the presence of a set of rules, called a code, through which the different signs can be interpreted and understood. (Klinkenberg, 1996:47,49) Most of the information that one processes is transferred by the visual and the acoustic channel. Through these channels a multitude of different codes can be conveyed.

Film makes use of several visual and acoustic codes that function as semiotic resources for the viewer in order to construct meaning. These codes operate simultaneously and are often in interaction with each other. The separate analysis of these codes is a methodological choice and can often lead to simplification. (Klinkenberg, 1996:233) However, this investigation is particularly interesting in the case of subtitling where three different types of codes interact at the same time. Gambier believes that such a method can be very fruitful since it can reveal a lot about “the perception and processing of various AVT modalities.” (Gambier, 2006:7)

In what follows, adopting the approach of Cognitive Film Semiotics – that emphasises the modelling of mental activities that are involved in the process of film understanding, rather than the description of filmic texts – (Buckland, 2000:2-3,19), I would like to analyse the underlying structure of subtitled films, the combination of different semiotic codes, taking into consideration the viewer’s cognitive mechanisms that also play an important part in the meaning making process.



#### 4.2.2.1. *Film as a multimodal entity*

Most scholars in AVT research agree that filmic meaning is a result of the combination of different signifying codes that appear in the film. (Gambier, Chaume, de Linde & Kay, Díaz Cintas & Remael, Gottlieb, Taylor) These underlying semiotic codes are usually non-perceptible to the viewers, but they are responsible for providing the structure of the film and for assuring its clarity. (Buckland, 2000:10) Frederic Chaume defines film as a composition of a “series of codified signs” that are organised according to “syntactic rules.” The meaning of each element and the way they are combined results in “a semantic structure.” It is this semantic structure that the viewer then deconstructs to understand the meaning conveyed by the film. (Chaume, 2004:16)

While AVT scholars agree about the interplay of different semiotic codes in filmic meaning construction, they do not list these codes in the same way. Chaume’s distinction is far the most detailed one. He describes ten different codes that can be present in a filmic text:

- Linguistic code (verbal message)
- Paralinguistic code (usually only present in the script)
- Musical code and special effects code (songs, music, noises)
- Sound arrangement code (people talking on-screen, off-screen)
- Iconographic codes (icons, indices, symbols)
- Photographic codes (perspectives, lighting, colours...)
- Planning code (types of shots)
- Mobility code (distance from camera and between characters)
- Graphic codes (text on screen: intertitles, street names...)
- Syntactic codes (editing)

(Chaume, 2004:17-21)

Delabastita takes a different perspective and distinguishes four categories of filmic semiotic resources according to the type of sign and channel they are transferred by: 1) visual presentation – verbal signs (written documents on screen); 2) visual presentation –



non-verbal signs (photography); 3) acoustic presentation – verbal signs (dialogues, songs); 4) acoustic presentation – non-verbal signs (music, noises). (Delabastita as cited in Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2007:46) When talking about film as a multisemiotic entity, Christopher Taylor distinguishes “the code of spatial composition”, the “code of temporal composition”, verbal components and sound elements. (Taylor, 2003:194) As opposed to these lists, others only mention camera manipulation, editing, gestures and looks of actors, setting, costumes and props as important signifying codes in filmic meaning. (de Linde & Kay 1999:32-33; Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2007:49) It is important to underline that regardless of what classification is made between the signifying codes, the meaning of each code and their interaction brings about “cohesion and coherence between [...] the visual and the verbal” (Chaume, 2004:23) and it gives an extra, enriched meaning to the whole filmic text. This is what gives the specificity of all audiovisual materials. (Chaume, 2004:23) The understanding of filmic meaning from all of these semiotic resources does not require any special cognitive effort from the viewer’s part as long as the codes can be processed simultaneously. The codes can easily be processed simultaneously when the information is transmitted through different channels, as it is in the case of sounds and images. (de Linde & Kay, 1999:32) The processing becomes more problematic when another modality is introduced in the case of subtitled films.

#### *4.2.2.2. Introducing another modality: subtitles*

As soon as subtitles appear on the screen the usual balance between the semiotic codes in the film is altered. The viewer has to process visual, non-verbal information, acoustic information and visual, verbal information at the same time. In a way it is inappropriate to call this the introduction of a new modality, since films do use visual verbal signs on the screen, but their appearance is rather rare. In a subtitled film, however, there is a shift from acoustic to visual communication that overloads the visual channel. In other words,

subtitling distorts the “semiotic division of labour in the viewer.” (Gottlieb, 2005:14)

Henrik Gottlieb set up a table in which he ranks the major semiotic codes in different film versions according to their impact on the viewers.

	<b>Original production</b>	<b>Subtitled version</b>
<b>Image</b>	1	1
<b>Writing</b>	4	2
<b>Sound effects</b>	3	4
<b>Speech</b>	2	3

*Impact ranking of semiotic codes according to Gottlieb (2005:13)*

This table clearly shows the shift in the importance of writing from last to second place in the meaning making process of subtitled films. In the case of subtitling the two most important semiotic resources, image and writing, are both conveyed by the visual channel which results in a demanding attention-share between the two. Gottlieb provides further estimates in another table about the relative impact of these semiotic codes in the processing of a subtitled film.

	<b>Original production</b>	<b>Subtitled version</b>
<b>Image</b>	55%	40%
<b>Writing</b>	2%	32%
<b>Sound effects</b>	18%	18%
<b>Speech</b>	25%	10%

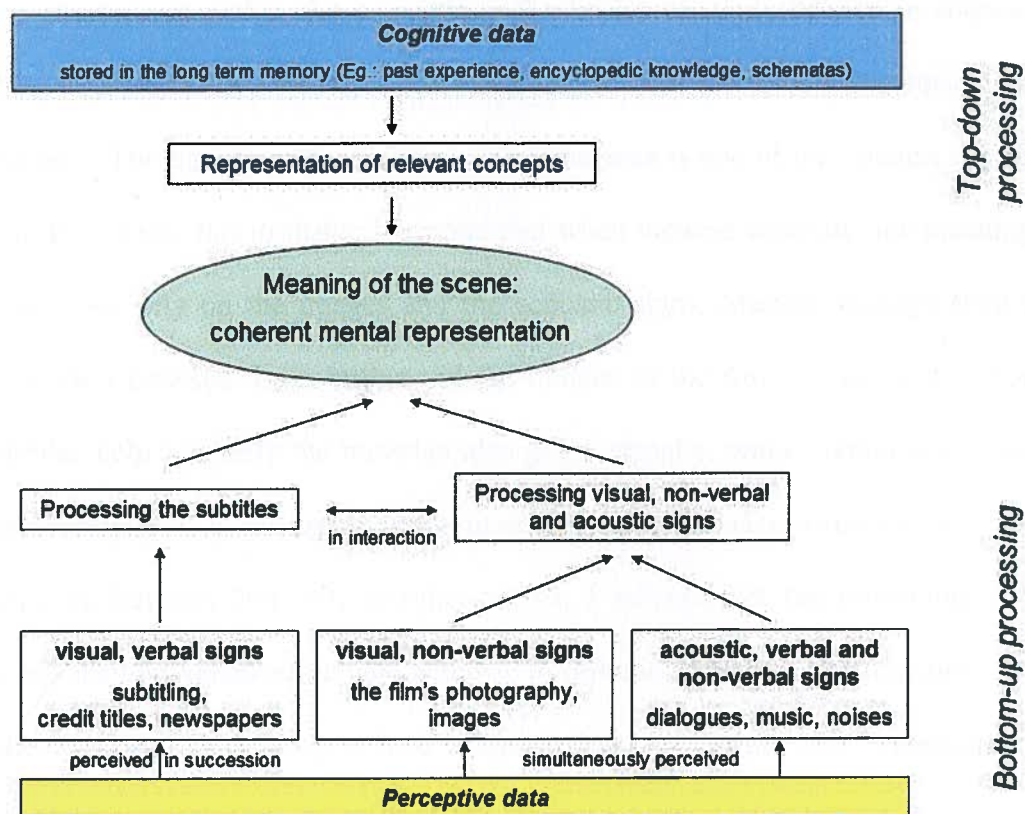
*Relative impact of semiotic codes according to Gottlieb (2005:14)*

The result of the inevitable attention-share is manifested in the reduction of the “semantic load” (Gottlieb, 2005:14) carried by the images of the film. De Linde & Kay describes this situation as two mediums competing for the same visual channel which implies that they cannot be processed simultaneously, but only in succession. Hence, image and text do not complement each other anymore but fight for the viewer’s attention. (de Linde & Kay, 1999:32)

Normally, the visual channel can carry a lot more information than the acoustic during the same interval of time, because it can make advantage of simultaneous processing. On the other hand, the processing of the information carried by the acoustic channel is based on linearity, processing in succession, and global comprehension in established thanks to the working memory. (Klinkenberg, 1996:219-220) As it was mentioned earlier subtitles replace spoken language in written form and hence they also share the characteristics of spoken language: they need to be processed in succession. Even though they are conveyed by the visual channel, they cannot be processed at the same time as the images. The presence of subtitles changes the structure of the filmic text and stirs up the balance between oral and visual channels. (de Linde & Kay, 1999:34) This means that the reception of a subtitled film is very different from that of an original or dubbed film where sound and image can be processed simultaneously. The harmonisation of simultaneous and successive processing that is required for the understanding of subtitled films demands more effort from the viewers.

#### *4.2.2.3. Proposed semiotic model for the processing of subtitled films*

As it was mentioned above films are very complex multimodal texts in which different sign systems interact with each other in the production of meaning. Subtitles must fit into this semiotic web and rely on as well as interact with other codes in the film. (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2007:45) Based on the works of Perron (1997; 2002), Díaz Cintas & Remael (2007) and Taylor (2003) as well as the typology of different semiotic codes provided by Delabastita (as cited in Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2007:46), I would like to propose a semiotic model for the processing and understanding of subtitled films that includes the combination of different codes as well as top-down and bottom-up information processing mechanisms.



*Proposed semiotic model for the processing of subtitled films*

This model aims at describing how the meaning of a filmic unit, a scene, is constructed by the viewer. There are two main information processing types that are both active during film watching: top-down processing and bottom-up processing. (Perron, 2002:136)

Bottom-up processing is executed from the perceptive data and it always works in a way that the meaning of each element is added together to reach the meaning of the whole. Using this kind of processing the viewer tries to draw conclusions out of the things seen and heard in the film. Top-down processing is directed by the cognitive data of the viewer. Past experience, encyclopedic knowledge, schemata stored in the form of concepts in the long term memory are activated, through which the viewer can check if the perceived data corresponds or can be linked to any former concepts or mental representations that could help in the construction of meaning. (Perron, 2002:136-137)

As it was pointed out earlier the perception of subtitles can only happen in succession while the perception of visual, non-verbal signs and acoustic elements happen simultaneously. The harmonisation of these two processes is one of the greatest cognitive efforts that the viewer has to make. I assume that when viewers construct the meaning of the subtitles they rely on the images and the acoustic signs. Marleau distinguished two types of relation between the subtitles and the images of the film. "Anchoring" appears when subtitles help to clarify the message also given visually, while "redundancy" arises when the subtitles and the images communicate the same message. (Marleau as cited in Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2007:50) In other words, I assume that the processing of the subtitles and the non-verbal visual and acoustic information happens in interaction. In the meanwhile top-down processing is also active and helps viewers draw conclusions or anticipate certain actions by relying on relevant parts of their schemata, past experiences, cultural or encyclopedic knowledge etc. These mechanisms together lead to a coherent mental representation: the meaning of the scene.

It is important to mention that memory plays a crucial role in film watching. (Ghislotti, 2005:2) As it can be seen in the model both the long term memory and the short term memory are at work while film viewing. The short term memory is responsible for establishing global comprehension out of the perceptive data, while the long term memory provides the basis for the top-down processes. Ghislotti quotes David Bordwell in his essay to affirm that memory during film watching is not "a simple reproduction of prior perception, but [...] an act of construction, guided by schemata." (Bordwell as cited in Ghislotti, 2005:2) Although memory is significantly involved in the processing and understanding of films, there are no studies dealing with the direct relation between film viewing and memory functions. (Ghislotti, 2005:3)



I have to admit that, even though I propose a model that integrates the processing of various semiotic codes as well as the different cognitive mechanisms in an innovative way, the shortcomings of this model are several. First of all, it can give the impression that the meanings of different semiotic resources are added together as a formula to get the meaning of the whole scene. Taylor quotes Paul Thibault who precises that the combination of the different semiotic codes is “wave-like” and similar to “chains of interacting cohesive elements” rather than a mathematical addition. (Taylor, 2003:194) Secondly, the model is unable to represent that these cognitive mechanisms are constantly active in film viewing and their interaction is repetitious. This model only shows the processing of one scene and does not suggest that the meaning of different scenes also interact with each other and help viewers generate inferences or explain causes of the actions in the film. To express this constant and dynamic back-and-forth movement in the perception and understanding of subtitled films a cyclical model would have been more adequate. (Perron, 1997:116) Thirdly, the model does not represent the fact that according to the type of film or scene watched by the viewer one type of processing can dominate over the other. (Perron, 1997:113-114)

#### **4.2.3. Issues arising from cognitive and psychological aspects**

Viewers often have a very negative attitude towards subtitling. According to de Linde & Kay, the way viewers process subtitles is dependent on the characteristics of the film and the subtitles themselves. (de Linde & Kay, 1999:75) However, they are not the only factors that come into play during the viewing of a foreign language film. This sub-chapter is devoted to give a list of other psychological or cognitive issues that can be linked to the characteristics of subtitles, and can also explain why some viewers find watching subtitled films an annoying or tiring activity.

#### *4.2.3.1. The viewer's attitude*

First of all, the attitude of the viewer towards subtitled films can have an impact on the way he or she will feel during the film. Going to the cinema to watch a film is a conscious decision of the viewer, most often the film is also the result of a conscious choice which means that the spectator arrives into the projection hall with certain expectations about the film, the genre, the story and the way it will be presented. Watching a subtitled film for those who are not used to such kind of translation can bring up feelings of anxiety or tiredness. Some spectators who are used to watching subtitled films might wonder what the factors that can cause tension or fatigue in the viewer are.

#### *4.2.3.2. Causes of tension or anxiety*

One reason for feeling tensed – beside the above mentioned repercussions of subtitling – is that the film has its own pace and continuous flow, so do the subtitles, and the spectators have no control over it. (Hajmohammadi, 2004) When long subtitles appear on the screen, the viewers feel obliged to rush through the reading with the fear that if they are too slow, the subtitle will disappear and they will miss some important information. This constant time pressure can cause tension and lead to worse processing of the subtitles. But not only does it affect the processing of the subtitles, it also disturbs image reading, taking time away from the processing of the visual information. (Hajmohammadi, 2004) After a movie that has a high rate of subtitle changes some viewers can feel frustrated because “they have read rather than watched the film.” (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2007:95)

#### *4.2.3.3. Causes of tiredness*

Besides the constant fast reading that the viewers have to do throughout the whole film, the harmonisation of a number of cognitive activities (image reading, subtitle reading, processing and meaning making out of several semiotic codes etc.) takes a lot of energy



and effort. It was proven that subtitles are read automatically. (D'Ydewalle, Van Rensbergen et Pollet, 1987 as cited in Lavaur & Nava, 2008:4) This means that even if the viewers try to ignore them the subtitles will be processed. Marleau criticises this aspect of subtitling very harshly by saying that a viewer has to suffer from about 900 visual shocks during an average-length film. (Marleau, 1982:6-7) By visual shocks he understands the sudden appearance and disappearance of the subtitles that attract the eye and the attention of the viewer to themselves. It was also proven that the automatic reading of subtitles causes eye-fatigue. (Liu, 1992 as cited in Chen, 2004:117) What makes the task even more demanding is that unconscious re-reading of the subtitles can also occur when they stay on the screen for too long or if a shot change happens while a subtitle is on the screen. (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2007:89,91; de Linde & Kay, 1999:67,72)

The viewers' attention is also a key factor in film watching. Hutchinson claims that during film viewing there is an ongoing battle in the viewer against distraction. The viewers' control of attention can be "stimulus-driven" which is an automatic reaction from their part to any kind of stimuli or it can be "goal-driven" which manifests in a conscious, deliberate focusing. (Hutchinson, 2003:1-3) Both types are present in the case of subtitled films. The spectators' goal-driven attention is turned to the important signifying codes of the film in order to proceed in the understanding of the film, while their "stimulus-driven" attention control turns their eyes to the subtitles. The shifting, or in other words, the competition between these attention controls is often quoted as the dual demand on the viewer. (Hajmohammadi, 2004) Attention is divided between the reading of the subtitles and the scanning of the image which also results in lesser processing ease and hence causes tension and tiredness.

Up to this point the thesis concentrated on the presentation of theoretical arguments related to the issues arising from linguistic, semiotic, cognitive and psychological aspects of subtitling that make the viewing of a subtitled film more demanding for the viewer. In order to measure to what extent these factors influence the processing of a subtitled film an empirical research has been conducted.

## 5. An empirical study on the processing of subtitled films

### 5.1. Introduction to the research

Most of the literature review presented earlier was based on theoretical issues published in articles dealing with Audiovisual Translation and often lacked empirical evidence. That is why AVT scholars encourage the collection of empirical data in the field. My research was also motivated by this challenge; however, the proposed empirical study is rather limited given the fact that the instruments and the environment for cognitive psychological experiments were not available.

The empirical study described here is a modified version of the experiments carried out by Lavour & Nava in 2008 in France about the “Interferences in the processing of films due to intralingual subtitling”<sup>6</sup> and by Grognon, Lavour & Blanc in 2008 on “The effect of subtitles on film understanding.” My empiric study consisted of comparing the reception of four different versions of the same film sequence.

- Original version (French), no subtitles
- Original version with Hungarian subtitles
- Hungarian dubbed version
- Hungarian dubbed version with Hungarian subtitles

The aim of the research was to test two hypotheses about the perception and processing of subtitled films.

Hypothesis 1: The presence of the subtitles changes the way in which different semiotic resources of the film are processed.

Hypothesis 2: The depth of the processing is influenced by the nature of the cognitive task. The information is processed more effectively in the case of the

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<sup>6</sup> Interférences liées au sous-titrage intralangue sur le traitement des images d’une séquence filmée

dubbed version than in the case of the subtitled version. The number of codes simultaneously received is in inverse proportion to the effectiveness of the information processing.

## **5.2. Method**

I chose to apply a mixed research method that contains both quantitative and qualitative methods. The questionnaire designed for the participants after the viewing of the sequence aimed at three different areas: memory for visual elements, memory for verbal elements and inferences generated after the viewing. I assumed that the scores for visual elements would be higher for those groups who watched a version without subtitles and the recall for verbal elements would be higher for those who watched the subtitled versions, especially high in the case of the Hungarian dubbed version with Hungarian subtitles. I also hypothesised that the overall scores for those who watched the dubbed versions would be higher than for those who watched the subtitled version. I thought that relying on multiple choice tests or closed questions only would not have revealed enough detail about the processing of the film sequence, so I decided to use open-ended questions, too. In the questionnaire I also asked for some personal data about the participants in order to get to know more about their film watching habits and their knowledge of the original language of the film.

## **5.3. Participants**

There were 81 high-school students who participated at the research. The participants came from two schools: PTE Babits Mihály Gyakorló Gimnázium és Szakközépiskola, Pécs (n=42) and Kodály Zoltán Gimnázium és Szakközépiskola, Pécs (n=39). They were all students from classes between 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade and the average age of the participants was 16,2 years. They did not volunteer to participate in the research but they were ready to

help as they were asked to watch the film sequence and fill in the questionnaire within the framework of a regular 45-minute long class. I chose this age group because I assumed that they regularly watch films and enjoy them. I picked these classes because I could make sure that the majority of the participants do not speak French, the language of the original version. I wanted to prevent a situation where the spectators reflect on the subtitles and their good knowledge of French might cause interference. Out of 81 students only 8 learnt French, but they assessed themselves as beginners.

#### **5.4. Materials**

I chose to show the first fifteen minutes of a French film *Le Jaguar* (1996, Francis Veber). I opted for a comedy instead of an art film to be shown to the young participants because I was convinced that an everyday movie would appeal to a more general and wider public. The first fifteen minutes of the film constitute a sequence of the story that can be understood on its own without further explanations. After the viewing of the sequence in different versions I distributed the same questionnaire<sup>7</sup> to every participant.

Firstly, the questionnaire asked for the name, the age of the participant, whether they study/ied French and if yes what level they would be at. I found this important, because in case of a good French knowledge, the subtitles can have a different effect on the processing of the film. Then the participants were asked if they had seen this film before. I had no control over this factor and it turned out that unfortunately 16 students out of 81 had seen the film before. Finally a fifth question was asked about the participants' film watching habits. This question aimed at finding out the preferences of this age group about watching subtitled or dubbed films if they have a choice. 71 students marked that they usually opt for the dubbed version.

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<sup>7</sup> Appendix 1

The core part of the questionnaire contained 30 questions in three sections. The first section was a multiple-choice test to check the memory for visual elements. The participants had to choose the right answer out of four possibilities. There was always just one right solution. The questions were put together in a way that some referred to moments when there were subtitles on the screen and others referred to moments when there were no subtitles displayed. I also tried to vary the type of visual information the questions focused on (objects, colours, people and movements in the background as well as in the foreground). The second section tested the participants' memory for verbal elements in the film sequence. Here open ended questions were used, but the answers could start either with the phrase "I remember that..." or "I don't remember but I suppose...". Offering this choice I wanted to make sure that I can collect enough data from the participants even if they are not sure if they remember well. The questions could be answered in one short sentence. The last section of the questionnaire also contained open ended questions to find out about the inferences and conclusions the participants made about what happened and why in the film and what might happen later with the main characters. Participants were encouraged to write down all their thoughts freely and rely on their fantasy. This way I wanted to see what type of inferences they make and how previous experience and schemata play a role in the understanding of the film. At the very end I thanked the participants in a few lines and offered them the possibility to write down their email address if they interested in the results and the interpretation of the research.

### **5.5. Procedure**

Before the research was conducted among the participants, the questionnaire was tested by four young adults. Each of them watched a different version of the film sequence and filled in the questionnaire. With their help I could make the questions more precise by accepting their suggestions for better sentence formulations. The research was conducted between the



27<sup>th</sup> of May 2008 and the 11<sup>th</sup> of June 2008 in Pécs in the two high-schools mentioned earlier. The projection of the film sequence and the filling in of the questionnaire fit into a regular 45-minute long class. There were altogether eight projections of the film sequence, four in each high-school, ensuring that each version was viewed by participants from both schools.<sup>8</sup>

First, the topic of the research was explained to the group of participants without anticipating any possible outcomes. Then they were informed that they would be asked to fill in a questionnaire at the end. The students were asked to watch the film sequence normally, without concentrating on any particular aspects. The projection of the sequence was done with the help of a DVD player, a projector and some speakers. The version in which the sequence was viewed was chosen randomly for each group. Right after the viewing of the film the questionnaire was distributed and the participants had about 25 minutes to fill it in.

## **5.6. Results<sup>9</sup>**

The results have shown that the majority of the participants favour dubbed versions over subtitled ones if they have the choice. Out of 81 participants only 8 would choose the subtitled version. This can imply that the majority of the students were not used to watching subtitled films.

When the results are analysed according to the three types of information that were tested by the questionnaire the following tendencies can be observed.

- 1) Viewers of the Hungarian dubbed version got the highest scores for remembering visual elements. This can be explained by the fact that subtitles

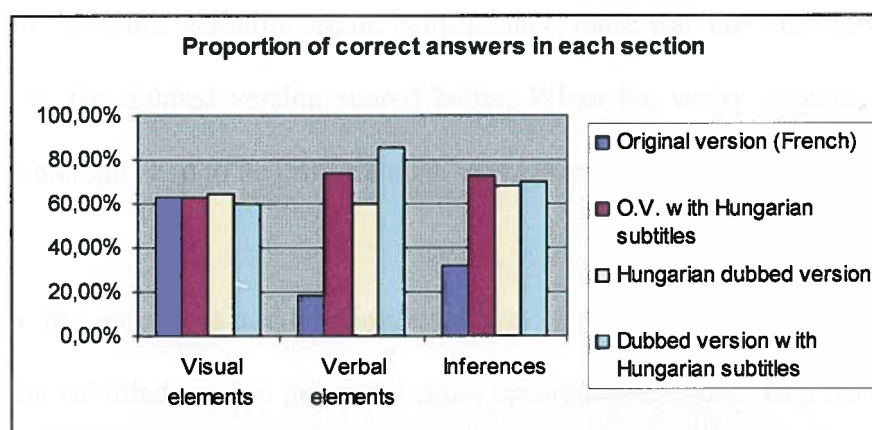
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<sup>8</sup> The exact numbers are provided in Appendix 2.

<sup>9</sup> Diagrams and data are enclosed in Appendix 3.

cover part of the image and also disrupt its processing. The result can also mean that the simultaneous processing of the image and the sound required less effort and the viewers had more time to scan the picture.

- 2) For the recall of verbal elements viewers of the dubbed version with Hungarian subtitles got the highest scores. This can be due to the fact that the same information was given to the viewers through two different channels, which can result in better retention. The visual form of the dialogues could also enhance the recall.
- 3) Interestingly, the results for accurate inferences were the highest in the group that watched the original version subtitled in Hungarian. It can be explained by a greater processing effort that pushed the viewers to generate more inferences.



A close analysis of the results showed that the presence of subtitles disturbs the processing of the image; however, the small difference in scores indicated that it does not have significant consequences. When the results were compared for each question, it was found that viewers of the subtitled version tend to miss things that appear in the background, that usually do not have great importance in the meaning of film. In moments when there were no subtitles on screen the score for visual elements were almost the same for the viewers of the subtitled version as for those of the dubbed version. There was one case where the presence of subtitles had clearly a negative impact on the recall of visual information. Viewers of the dubbed version with Hungarian subtitles had the lowest scores in this

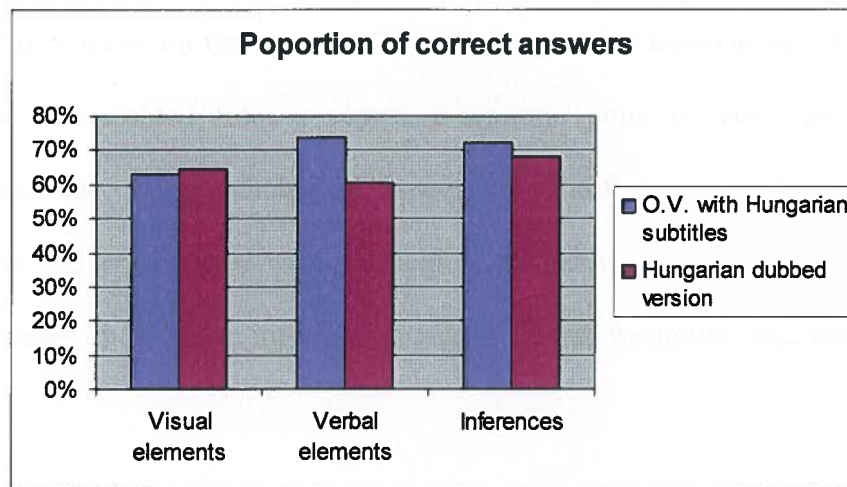
section. It seems that interference occurred when the same information was conveyed through visual and acoustic codes which induced worse image processing. It could also be a result of a continuous checking of the subtitles from the viewers' part to see whether they were exactly the same as the dialogues.

The analysis of the answers given for questions dealing with verbal elements of the film sequence showed that those viewers who watched the subtitled versions remembered the contents of the dialogues better. Interestingly, students who watched the dubbed version with Hungarian subtitles could often cite the subtitles word by word. This precise verbatim recall could be the result of the characteristics of the version, namely that the information was presented to the viewers in visual as well as in acoustic forms. The visual image of the subtitles could enhance verbatim recall. Surprisingly, there was one case however, where the viewers of the dubbed version scored better. When the verbal content of a several-subtitle long dialogue had to be reformulated, viewers of the dubbed version excelled.

In relation to the inferences and conclusions drawn by the viewers it can be observed that viewers of the subtitled version generated more accurate inferences. This could be a proof of greater cognitive efforts that the viewers had to make. It could also be a result of the deeper processing that occurred since – according to the results of the questionnaire – both the visual and the verbal elements were processed in a balanced way.

When the scores for the dubbed and subtitled versions are compared it can be seen that viewers of the subtitled version got better scores in two sections out of three. This result shows that in terms of the depth of processing subtitling does not have much disadvantage compared with dubbing. There is no remarkable loss from which the viewers have to

suffer. It shows that the negative attitude towards subtitling is based on affective and psychological variables.



Before the research was conducted I hypothesised that the presence of subtitles changes the way different semiotic resources of the film are processed. After the interpretation of the results I found this assumption justified. Subtitles do have an effect on the way in which the film's visual and verbal elements are processed. They seem to have a slightly negative effect on image reading and they enhance the recall of the content of the dialogues. My second hypothesis stated that the number of codes simultaneously perceived is in inverse proportion to the effectiveness of the information processing. After having studied the results of the research I had to reject this assumption. It seems that in the case of subtitling the interaction of visual non-verbal, visual verbal as well as acoustic verbal and non-verbal codes result in deeper, more effective processing of the information.

## 6. Conclusion

Within the framework of Audiovisual Translation the thesis aimed at analysing interlingual subtitling with a focus on the viewers. The advantages and repercussions of this type of subtitling were presented from a cognitive-semiotic point of view. Issues based on linguistic, semiotic, and psychological aspects of subtitling as an often used language transfer were further analysed with the help of available literature in the field of AVT studies. However, most of the information published was theoretical and lacked empirical data.

The research conducted on the processing of subtitled films wanted to test the generally negative attitude towards interlingual subtitling. The two hypotheses formulated before the empirical study stated that the presence of subtitles changes the perception of different semiotic codes and that watching subtitled films is cognitively very demanding because of the simultaneous reception and processing of several, diverse semiotic resources. It was also assumed that the number of codes perceived at the same time is in inverse proportion to the effectiveness of the information processing. However, the results of the research indicated that although the presence of subtitles does have an effect on the processing of different codes, this impact is insignificant. Subtitles disrupt the processing of the image but this loss of information is very small in the case of interlingual subtitling. Subtitles on the other hand enhance the memory for verbal elements of the film. When interlingual subtitling was compared to dubbing it was found that viewers of the subtitled version scored better in two areas, namely in the memory for verbal elements and in the generation of correct inferences. This result showed that the second hypothesis had to be rejected because viewers of the subtitled version processed the content of the film just as well as those who watched the dubbed version. The lower score for visual elements was not justificative.



After the research it can be concluded that the negative opinion of the public about interlingual subtitling compared to dubbing is not based on the loss of important information, but rather on the greater cognitive effort required by the viewer to process a subtitled film as well as on psychological and attitudinal variables.

This research could not measure the cognitive, psychological and attitudinal aspects of the reception of subtitled films for lack of the required equipment and environment. It would be, however, very interesting to conduct further research in the future on the processing of subtitled films to see how psychological and attitudinal factors play a role in the reception and processing of these films.



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## Filmography

*Le Jaguar* (1996), Francis Veber, France

## Appendixes

## Appendix One: The Questionnaire

### KÉRDŐÍV

1. Név: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Láttad-e már ezt a filmet korábban?

2. Életkor: \_\_\_\_\_

Igen. Nem.

3. Tanulsz / tanultál franciául? Igen. Nem.

5. Ha van választásod, általában milyen verzióban nézel meg egy filmet?

Ha igen, milyen szinten állsz?

kezdő alapkilon középilon felsőilon

feliratos szinkronizált

I. Kérlek, válaszd ki a helyes megoldást és jelöld egyértelműen aláhúzással.

**1. Volt-e valami furcsa a limuzinon, amikor megérkezett a hotel elé?**

- a.) Teljesen normálisan nézett ki.
- b.) Meg volt húzva az oldala.
- c.) Egy madártoll volt odacsukva a hátsó ajtóhoz.
- d.) Elöl négy lámpája volt.

**2. Mit viselt az indián a lábán?**

- a.) Papucsot.
- b.) Sarut.
- c.) Cipőt.
- d.) Semmit.

**3. Hol akadt meg a lift?**

- a.) Az első emeleten.
- b.) A második emeleten.
- c.) Az első és a második emelet között.
- d.) A második és a harmadik emelet között.

**4. Hányszor telefonált a liftes a recepcióra?**

- a.) Egyszer.
- b.) Kétszer.
- c.) Háromszor.
- d.) Több mint háromszor.

**5. Melyik emeleten szállt ki az indián, hogy kövesse François-t?**

- a.) Az elsőn.
- b.) A másodikon.
- c.) A harmadikon.
- d.) A negyediken.

**6. Ki szállt ki végül a liftből a harmadik emeleten?**

- a.) François.
- b.) François és az indián.
- c.) François, az indián és egyik kísérője.
- d.) François, az indián, két kísérője és a liftes.

**7. Hová akasztották az indián függőágyát?**

- a.) A plafonra.
- b.) A függőnyt rögzítő zsinór kampójára.
- c.) Az ágy szélére.
- d.) A falra.

**8. Milyen színű volt az indián takarója?**

- a.) Világos barna.
- b.) Fekete.
- c.) Sárga.
- d.) Fehér.



**9. Milyen színű volt az ágy kárpitja a nő szobájában?**

- a.) Kék.
- b.) Bordó.
- c.) Fehér.
- d.) Zöld.

**10. Hogy nézett ki a nyaklánc, amit az indián először adott François-nak?**

- a.) Kis apró barna gyöngyökből állt.
- b.) Barna tollak és színes gyöngyökből állt.
- c.) Különböző színű tollak és fehér fogak voltak rajta.
- d.) Nagyobb fekete gyöngyök és fehér fogak voltak rajta.

**11. Mit viselt Campana, amikor hajnalban le kellett jönnie a recepcióra az indiánért?**

- a.) Pizzamát.
- b.) Kabátot és fehér inget.
- c.) Kék pólót.
- d.) Kabátot és szürke pólót.

---

II. Kérlek, válaszolj az alábbi kérdésekre a táblázat szerint, folytatva a megkezdett mondatokat.

**1. Melyik emeleten volt az indián szobája?**

Úgy emlékszem, hogy...

Nem emlékszem, de feltételezem, hogy...

**2. Miért örült Mr. Stevens (az indián programszervező kísérője) különösen, amikor elindult a lift?**

Úgy emlékszem, hogy...

Nem emlékszem, de feltételezem, hogy...

**3. Miért fogta meg az indián François orrát?**

Úgy emlékszem, hogy...

Nem emlékszem, de feltételezem, hogy...

**4. Miért lehet büszke magára François?**

Úgy emlékszem, hogy...

Nem emlékszem, de feltételezem, hogy...

**5. Mi a foglalkozása az indiánnak?**

Úgy emlékszem, hogy...

Nem emlékszem, de feltételezem, hogy...

**6. Hogy hívják az indiánt?**

Úgy emlékszem, hogy...

Nem emlékszem, de feltételezem, hogy...

**7. Mit álmódott előző nap az indián?**

Úgy emlékszem, hogy...

Nem emlékszem, de feltételezem, hogy...

**8. Mennyi pénzre van François-nak szüksége?**

Úgy emlékszem, hogy...

Nem emlékszem, de feltételezem, hogy...

**9. Miért kellett François-nak kölcsönkérnie egy kis pénzt?**

Úgy emlékszem, hogy...

Nem emlékszem, de feltételezem, hogy...

**10. Mit tanácsolt a nő François-nak, honnan szerezzen pénzt?**

Úgy emlékszem, hogy...

Nem emlékszem, de feltételezem, hogy...

**11. Miért nem kapta vissza François a kabátját?**

Úgy emlékszem, hogy...

Nem emlékszem, de feltételezem, hogy...

**12. Mit mondott Campana az indiánnak a kocsikulcsról?**

Úgy emlékszem, hogy...

Nem emlékszem, de feltételezem, hogy...

---

III. Kérlek, válaszolj az alábbi kérdésekre röviden. Nyugodtan írd le feltételezéseidet, hivatkozhatasz szabadon a fantáziádra.

**1. Vajon miért várta az indiánt annyi fotós?**

**2. Hisz Mr. Stevens az indián álmában?**

**3. Ki a kiválasztott?**

**4. Mi volt François igazi indoka arra, hogy meglátogatta a nőt?**

**5. Mire gondolhatott François, amikor ránézett a nő gyűrűjére, ami az éjjeliszekrényen volt?**

**6. Miért döntött úgy François, hogy nem kér pénzt a kabátért?**

**7. Mi fog történni François-val később a filmben? Hogyan képzeled el a film folytatását?**

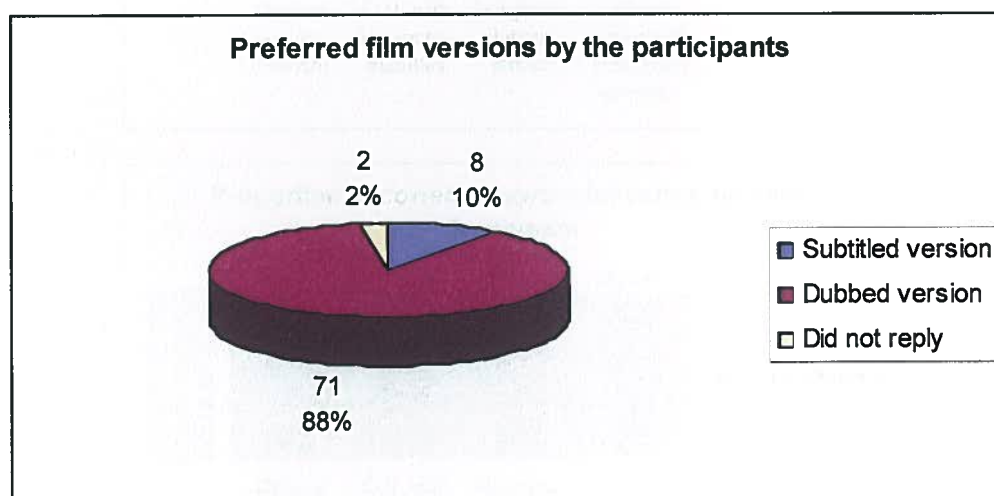
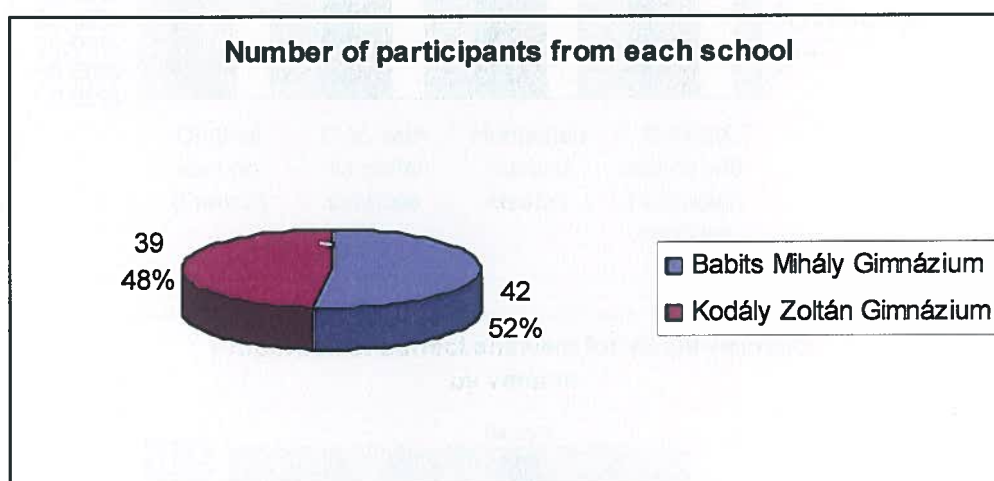
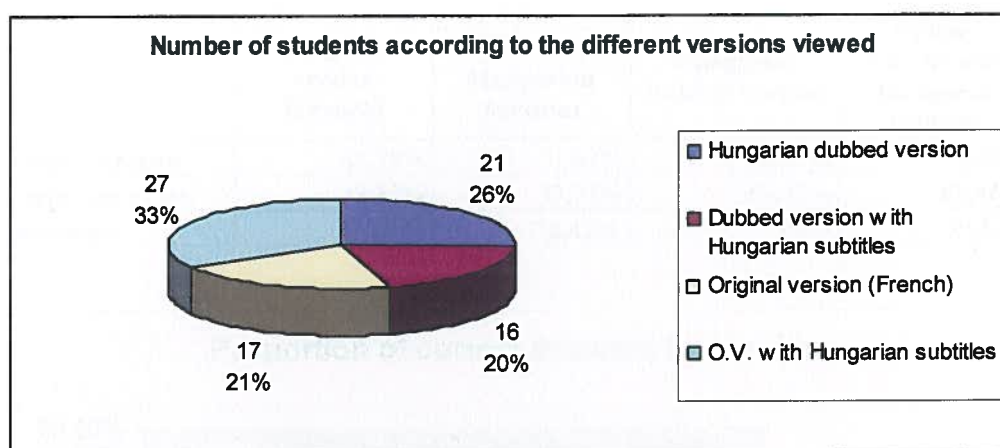
Köszönöm szépen, hogy időt és energiát szenteltél a kérdőív kitöltésére! Ezzel nagyban segítetted a szakdolgozatomhoz tartozó kutatás sikerességét. Ha érdekel, hogy milyen eredmények születtek, és milyen következtetéseket lehet levonni ezekből az adatokból, add meg az emailcímedet és elküldöm majd egy csatolt fájlban.



: \_\_\_\_\_

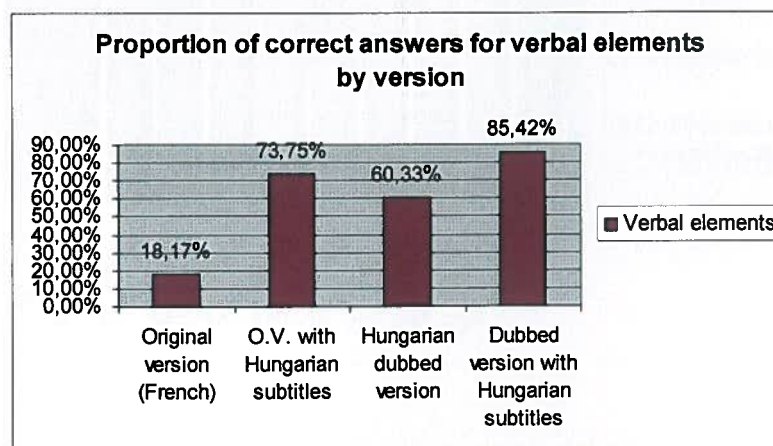
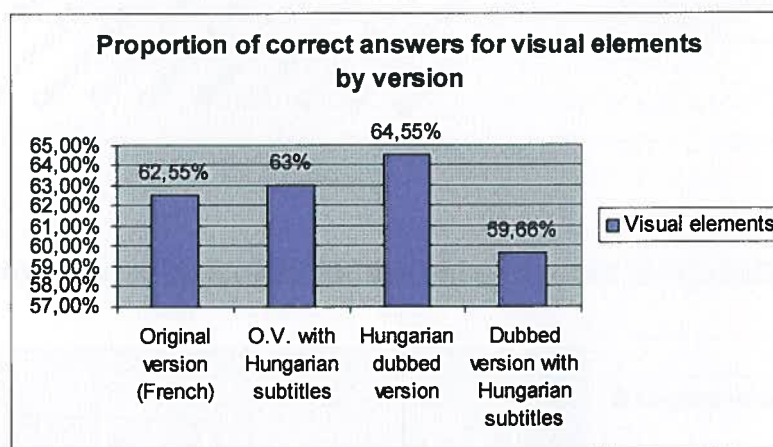
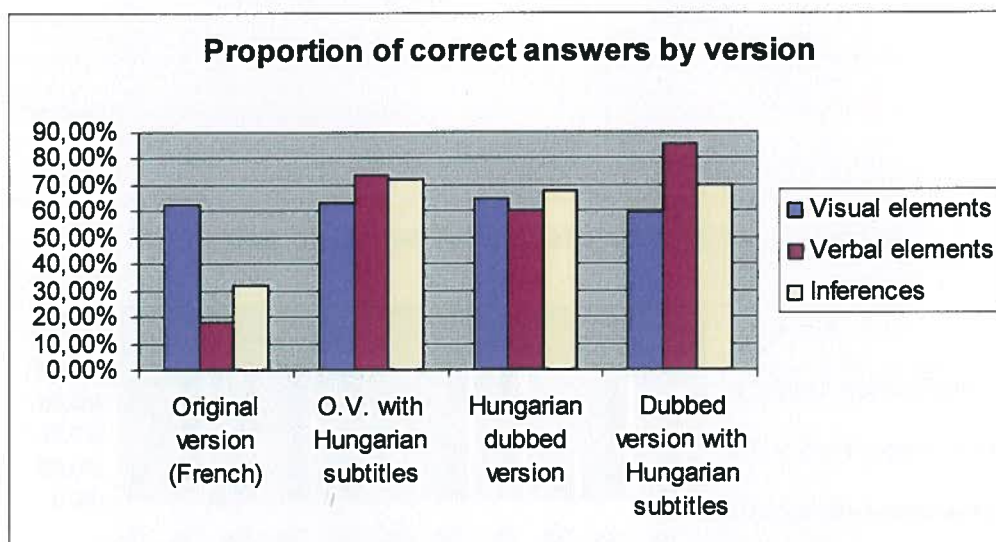
Köszönettel,  
*Kurdi Eszter*

## Appendix Two: Data of the participants

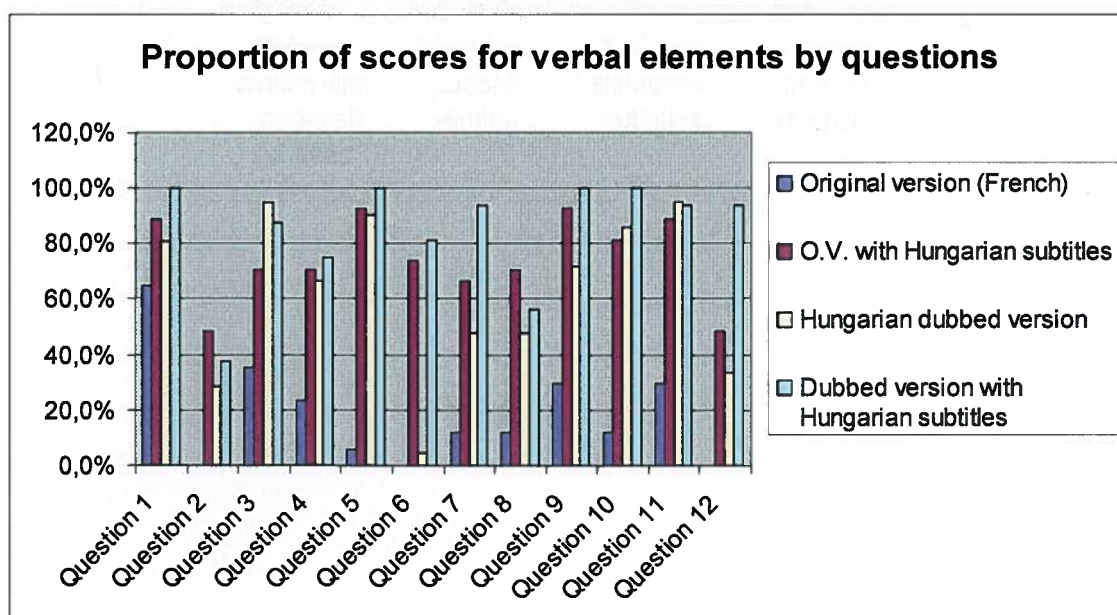
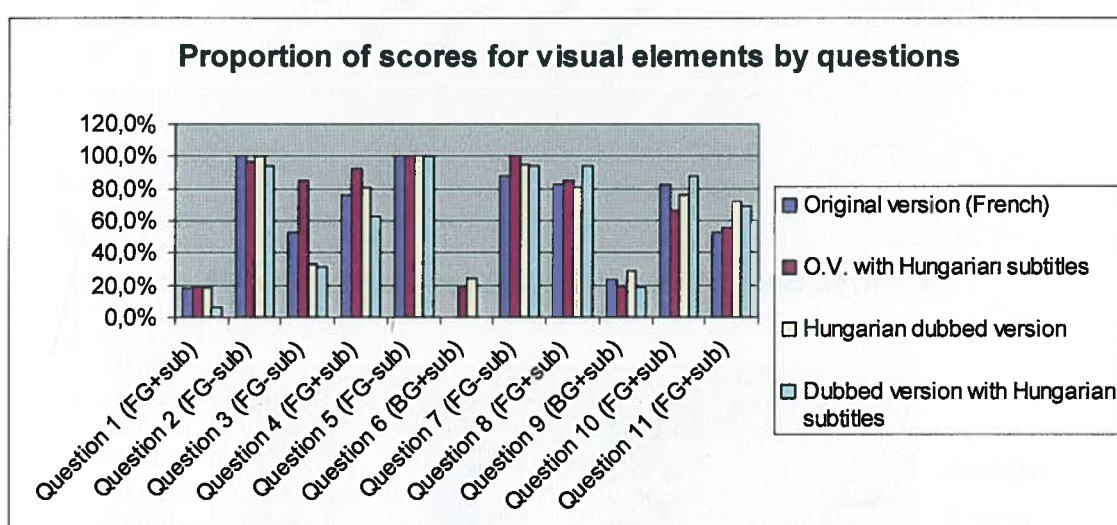
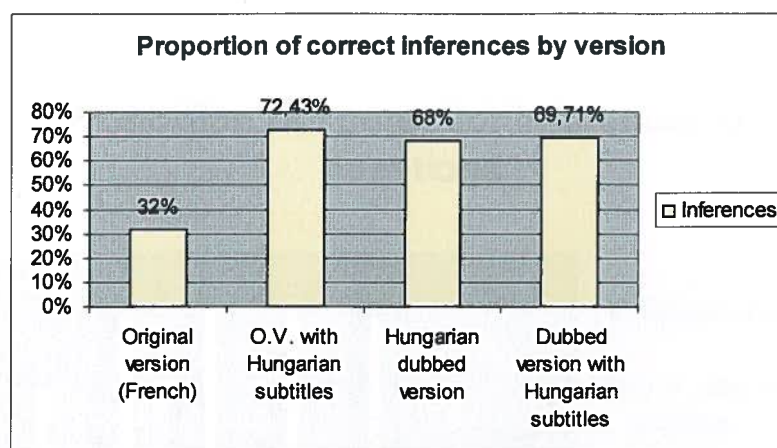


### Appendix Three: Results of the research in numbers and diagrams

	Original version (French)	O.V. with Hungarian subtitles	Hungarian dubbed version	Dubbed version with Hungarian subtitles
Visual elements	62,55%	63%	64,55%	59,66%
Verbal elements	18,17%	73,75%	60,33%	85,42%
Inferences	32%	72,43%	68%	69,71%

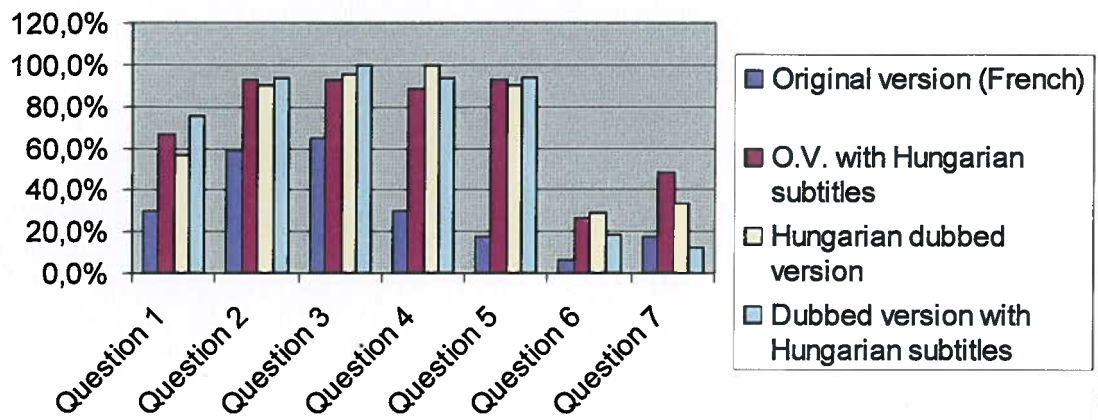








### Proportion of scores for inferences by questions



### Proportion of overall scores in the two schools

