

ADDING TEXT TO IMAGE: CHALLENGES OF SUBTITLING NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Muhammad Y Gamal^a

Abstract Egyptian films began to appear on DVDs in 2002 subtitled into English and French. The new technology brought opportunities for marketing one of the major industries in the country: cinema. However, close examination of the subtitling of films on DVD reveal that the practice is not without some serious problems. The practice of treating Egyptian films as linear texts and without proper training in film semiotics; the subtitling fails to enhance what otherwise would be a marketable product. Subtitlers, eager to complete their “translation” on time fail to see and account for non-verbal communication in film and thus contribute inadvertently to damaging the very product they were contracted to promote. The paper looks at the current practice of Arabic DVD subtitling into English. It will focus on the English subtitling of one of Omar Sharif’s most enduring films *A Man in our House*.

Keywords Egyptian cinema, subtitling Arabic films, Omar Sharif, classic films, non-verbal channels, murals, sotto voce, graffiti, ethnic names, cultural signs, DVD subtitling

^a The University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia.

E-mail: muh_gamal@yahoo.com

Introduction

Egypt had a taste of the first audiovisual revolution back in the thirties of the twentieth century. Two major technological advances shook, changed and shaped the way people, not only in Egypt but in the entire Arab world, came to speak, think and interact with each other. The first was in 1932 when *Children of the Rich*, the first Arabic language talkie was produced. By the mid twenties, private radio stations, in different languages, were not uncommon in Cairo and Alexandria. On 31st May 1934, "This is Cairo" was to announce the birth of Egyptian radio to the Egyptians and millions of other Arabic-speaking listeners. The significance of the revolution lies in its result: the proliferation of the Egyptian dialect and with it, Egyptian culture. Today, Egyptian cinema has become the powerhouse of cinema in the Arab world and with it Egyptian dialect has become the *lingua franca* of the region. Over the years, Lebanese, Iraqis, Syrians, Sudanese, Tunisians, Algerians and Moroccans learned and mastered the Egyptian accent and performed, either as singers or actors, in Egyptian film. The rise of the Egyptian dialect however, has not been matched by an interest in its examination by academics or translators. Gamal (2007b) points out that dialect remains mostly the domain of foreigners interested in learning the local variety of the Arab country they wish to live or work in.

The advent of television in the Arab world was not systematic thereby reaching different places at different times: Baghdad (1956), Cairo and Damascus (1960), Beirut (1961), Riyadh (1965), Amman (1968) and Qatar (1971), etc. The Arab television industry was to follow a pattern established by the cinema industry some thirty years earlier, namely foreign programs will only be subtitled and not dubbed. This was a crucial decision that would have far reaching consequences on the new digital audiovisual revolution in the twenty-first century. Initially, the nascent Egyptian film industry, keenly aware of the competition coming from Hollywood, opted not to dub American films for fear of killing off the local industry. The choice to subtitle was made early, and all foreign films shown in Egypt were subtitled into Arabic.

Ever since the early American talkies, starting with *The Lights of New York*, the first all-dialogue motion picture in 1928, Egyptians and later Arabic-speakers in various parts of the Arab world came to appreciate films subtitled into Arabic. When television was established in most Arab capital cities in the sixties, the tradition of subtitling foreign drama and films continued. The decades between 1930 and 2000 were characterized by two main features: first that most of the subtitling work was controlled by way of a monopoly by a single company in Cairo^b, and second that the majority of the subtitling was carried out into Arabic.

This professional context was equally reflected in academia: audiovisual translation was neither taught nor considered a specialization of translation studies. Despite the numerous post-graduate studies examining “errors in film translation” the situation remained unchanged until the digital revolution forced a complete change in the audiovisual situation throughout the entire Arab world. Satellite televisions mushroomed and with them the need to subtitle more programs into Arabic. Satellite channels also meant that more and more Arabic language programs needed to be subtitled into English, French and other languages. This appears on state-owned channels which are viewed as the official channel representing and introducing local television to the world^c. The digital revolution also brought about a new development: the digital versatile disk (DVD). For the first time in history, Egyptian films were not only accessible, portable and affordable but also available with subtitles!

Egyptian Cinema on DVDs

Egyptian films began to appear in DVD format in 2002. The Founoon distribution company was the first organization to introduce Egyptian films on DVD. The total number of films produced by Egyptian cinema

^b Anis Ebaid Studios is the oldest Egyptian audiovisual company that specialized in and produced subtitling and dubbing in Egypt and many other Arab countries.

^c The number of satellite channels in the Arab world has reached 500 and most are privately owned. Only satellite channels that bear the country's name such as the

varies according to different sources, but ranges between 3500-5000 films produced between the years 1927-2000. Today almost 500 titles are available on DVD and are subtitled into English and French. Although the industry is less than six years old, the practice of DVD subtitling is worth examining as the need to subtitle more Arabic-language programs into English is gaining greater importance. Another reason is that 'quality' in subtitling Egyptian films has not been examined; perhaps because actors, directors and distributors are rarely interested in what happens to their films abroad (Ivarsson: 1992) or due to the fact that audiovisual translation is not formally taught at academic institutions. As the Arab world is witnessing a revolution in media production as exemplified by the proliferation of satellite channels, establishment of media production cities and the launching of film festivals, the demand for professional audiovisual services is sorely felt.

Traditionally, the quality of subtitling foreign programs into Arabic as seen at theaters and on the television screen has been negative. This is partly because of the lack of understanding of what film translation entails. Very few studies on viewer feedback have been conducted. Gamal (2008) points out that the language of subtitling in Arabic has developed its own semantic features and syntactic patterns over the past eighty years. This is partly because of the monopoly of one company over the entire subtitling business for more than 60 years. Despite the fact that Arab viewers have been watching programs subtitled into Arabic for more than seventy years, little examination has been conducted into the process of subtitling foreign programs into Arabic.

Egyptian films have been subtitled into English, French and Spanish and broadcast on Nile TV - Egypt's international channel since its launch in the late nineties. Other programs have been televised with prerecorded or simultaneous subtitling. However, the new direction of subtitling (Arabic-English) is fairly new and has received no attention. The recent production of Egyptian films on DVD is one of the major manifestations

Egyptian or Nile TV in Egypt are considered the official channels and they subtitle some of their programs into English, French and some Spanish.

of subtitling into the other direction. Although the working conditions differ from those at the long established television stations or even the newly established satellite channels, DVD subtitling is almost entirely conducted in a freelance context. The focus of this paper is the quality of the Arabic-English subtitling of Egyptian films on DVDs.

Omar Sharif

Very few viewers in the West would know that the young Egyptian actor who played Prince Ali in *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) and the Russian surgeon in *Doctor Zhivago* (1965) was already an established actor in his home country. When Omar Sharif came to Hollywood he had been on the Egyptian cinematic scene for almost ten years and had 21 films to his name. Five of his films have been included in the list of the best 100 films produced by Egyptian cinema (Toufic: 1995). One of these films - *A man in our house* - is widely considered Sharif's *piece de resistance* in Egyptian and Arab cinema. After forty seven years, the film is still shown on television several times a year. Sharif is also remembered by his other masterpiece *River of Love* (1960). The DVD series titled "Egyptian Cinema Classics" include *Sleepless* (1957), *A Date with the Unknown* (1958), *A Struggle on the Nile* (1959) and *A Rumor of Love* (1960). These remain the only Omar Sharif films converted to DVD since the release of subtitled films on DVD. This series of five subtitled films present a unique opportunity to examine the subtitling practice of a significant actor. (Gamal: 2006)

The examination of the subtitling of Omar Sharif's films into English is of a particular relevance^d. Apart from dealing with the subtitling of a classic or a famous film, the subtitling of an internationally-famed actor who is well-known for his exotic accent, multilingual skills and the special ability in playing the foreign character, poses some challenges: how would Omar Sharif, while acting in his native tongue, appear to

^d The writer specializes in the examination of Omar Sharif Egyptian films subtitled into English. This includes all 21 films Sharif appeared in prior to his international stardom and the five films and one TV drama he appeared in till 2007. The veteran actor, 76, will appear in two more Egyptian films in 2008.

Western viewers watching their star acting in a “foreign” language film? Does the subtitling help or hinder the enjoyment of the film? Very little research has been conducted on this issue. While feedback studies could be conducted within the comfort of a translation class in Australia or through an Omar Sharif fan club anywhere in the world, the focus here is actually on the subtitler: how to deal with classic films or with famous actors/directors?

Another pertinent issue is the amount of film analysis that subtitlers do or are allowed to do prior to the subtitling of a film of “particular interest”. Some of Sharif’s significant films show a greater degree of non-verbal communication that the current practice of DVD subtitling tends to overlook in its commercially orientated focus of getting translations produced quickly and cheaply.

The Practice of Egyptian DVD subtitling:

Although the production of Egyptian films on DVD was heralded as a great opportunity to market the local industry abroad, the quality of subtitling is less than satisfactory. A study^e of a large number of subtitled films that appeared on DVD between 2002-2007 found that the practice of DVD subtitling was flawed. This conclusion is reached after the subtitling of almost fifty films were examined with extensive examination of the translation errors and subtitling issues that have a direct bearing on subtitling quality. The results of the five-year study^f also found that the practice of Egyptian DVD subtitling suffers four major issues which impact on the overall quality of DVD subtitling. These are:

1- Number of subtitled languages

^e The study includes the building of a corpus of audiovisual material that includes representative films and clips illustrating challenges and difficulties for trainee subtitlers. The corpus includes 500 films with more than 100 scenes representing linguistic, pragmatic and semiotic challenges. The material is being used to develop a full training course on subtitling Arabic-language film.

^f The five year study focused on the examination of subtitled films as they appeared on DVD. There are several distributing companies that produce these DVDs. Distinct subtitling styles have been identified.

- 2- Film analysis
- 3- Modus operandi
- 4- Editing policy

Before dealing with the issue of adding text to image and the challenges of non-verbal communication, I will explain the significance of the four factors listed above.

First, traditionally, Egyptian films on DVDs are subtitled into two languages only: English and French. This is despite the number of academic institutions that teach Spanish, Italian, German, Russian, Korean, Japanese and Chinese languages. While the decision not to subtitle into other languages is surely a commercial one, the inference points to the secondary status of audiovisual translation at Egyptian (and Arab) academic institutions. AVT scholars point out that screen translation is a promising field and indeed the number of screens beaming at least bilingual information is increasing everywhere (Gambier: 2003) (Gamal: 2007a). DVD technology allows for subtitles to be stored in at least 32 languages on the same disc – a capacity which is under utilized in this case.

Second: Audiovisual translation remains one of the specializations that translators first discover, move into after graduation and finally learn the ropes whilst on the job. AVT is not examined at Arab academia and its research is not even examined at translation conferences. Thus, cinema studies and particularly film analysis is an individual skill that is left to the subtitler to acquire. Commercial practice and competition have created a work situation where the subtitler does not even meet or see the editor or the client, let alone the film itself. The ability to view the film and to conduct film analysis is akin to working on any translation project in the traditional sense. Film analysis alerts the subtitler to the blind spots where a scene has a lot more than what is said. The issue becomes a major problem, particularly when the film is of significant form, of the classics, belongs to the list of the best 100 films or simply is *the opus* of a great film director.

Third, the *modus operandi* of DVD subtitling^g appears to be the same “economical” policy employed in many parts of the world: translate the dialogue list! While this method has been criticized (Dias-Cintas: 2004) and many a scholar points out its risks, the commercial world of DVD subtitling does not seem to recognize any factors except the lure of the dollar. The problem with Egyptian cinema is that non-verbal communication plays a significant part in the screenplay and which tends to be the first component that is sacrificed by subtitling from the dialogue list. Further, given the cultural distance between Arabic and English, many of the linguistic features suffer a degree of distortion when the verbal channel is the only one the subtitler relies upon to convey the film’s meaning.

Finally, the examination of film subtitling reveals that there is no editing policy in place. This is confirmed through an extensive examination of more than fifty Egyptian films on DVDs produced commercially in the first five years of the DVD industry in Egypt.

Error analysis, classification of categories of subtitling errors and the development of a typological study of challenges, all point to the absence of an editing policy. Error analysis even points to two different translation styles suggesting that at least two different subtitlers worked on the same film. The linguistic and cultural differences between Arabic and English require that a well-developed editing policy should be in place to ensure that viewers do not resort to the image in order to understand the subtitles (Hajmohammadi: 2004)

Verbal and Non-verbal Channels in Film

Film is essentially a visual experience; and since the advent of talkies the dialogue has been regarded as an added feature to the cinematic effect. However, people do not go to the movies for the sole purpose of watching others talk, but rather to enjoy a composite cinematic language

^g DVD subtitling appears to be a practice shrouded in secrecy. All attempts to contact distribution companies seeking information on subtitling have been ignored. The same applied to terrestrial channels and other privately-owned satellite channels.

that includes verbal and non verbal communication. Gottlieb explains that “in films and television programmers, the translator has four simultaneous channels to consider:

- (a) the verbal auditory channel, including dialogue, background voices, and sometimes lyrics
- (b) the non-verbal auditory channel, including music, natural sound and sound effects
- (c) the verbal visual channel, including superimposed titles and written signs on the screen
- (d) and the non-verbal visual channel: picture composition and flow” (1998:245)

In other words, meaning can be presented in audio and visual forms and these can take the shape of four channels that make up the medium with which the translator works. It must be remembered though that of the four channels that make up the cinematic medium, the only one available to the translator to manipulate is the verbal channel (Chaume: 1997). The verbal auditory channel shows how simplistic the assumption is that a film can be subtitled from the dialogue list alone. The verbal auditory channel is not the only channel that can carry meaning. Indeed, meaning takes different shapes and forms and the cinematic language is full of semiotic signs and gestures that, as Phillips points out, invites viewers to “make expectations and to interpret them as film proceeds”. (2002: 440)

Unlike American cinema, Egyptian films tend to be less-paced, scene-centered and consequently dialogue-dependent. Whilst Phillips (2002) states that the dialogue occupies less than half of the film in Western production, by contrast, Muharram (2002) points out that the dialogue is a prominent aspect in Egyptian films and occupies about 70% of the film. Indeed, the Syrian director Nejdett Anzour criticizes Egyptian cinema for its heavy reliance on dialogue and calls them “radio films” not cinema (2006). There are of course, other reasons for this high verbal content within Egyptian films: the colloquial dialect of Egypt is also appreciated for its own sake, both locally and regionally. Yet, what adds

to the burden of the subtitler is not only the heavy content but also the register. Spoken Egyptian Arabic differs from formal Arabic which is used in the domains of academia, literature, religion and the media. By contrast, the spoken language is the variety of Arabic that is understood and appreciated by the man in the street and carries with it the spirit of the country and its culture. The major subtitling challenge is to capture the “force of meaning” that is expressed by the colloquial dialect, something translators are not trained in. Translating from Arabic at training institutions has always been from and into the formal variety of Arabic. Doss (2007) also identifies that Arabic dialects have never been studied in Arab universities, except occasionally in the context of folklore. Halls (2007) on the other hand, stresses the absence of translations of the vernacular tends to result in an incomplete and largely misleading picture of Arab culture.

Therefore it is not surprising that Egyptian films on DVD show “syntactic fatigue” in the subtitles. The term syntactic fatigue refers to syntax that is neither cohesive on its own nor coherent as far as the medium of subtitles allow. The subtitles fail to communicate the overall ‘cinematic meaning’ produced by the four channels due to wrong translation strategies that pays too much attention to the dialogue. This narrow focus, more often than not, entails literal translation as the subtitler attempts to parody the special skill exhibited in the dialogue. In most cases, the two lines of subtitles fail to preserve the linguistic features of the vernacular and therefore lack the coherence and cohesiveness they should demonstrate in the first place.

El Batal (2000), observes that the digital revolution of the mid nineties created a demand for subtitled Arabic television drama and Arabic feature films. However, he observes that the two lines of the subtitles bear little resemblance to what the intended meaning is. In his analysis, El Batal argues that the subtitlers fail to accurately and pragmatically render the idiomatic Arabic vernacular into English due to lack of understanding of the idiomatic structures in spoken Arabic. This is a common problem in the subtitling of Egyptian films on DVD where

the translation reflects the subtitler's close attention to the semantics and syntax of the dialogue which result in sentences that are ambiguous, idiomatic structures that are too literal and collocations that defy English logic. Problems with the visual channel are augmented when the subtitler fails to identify and account for communication designed to be transmitted non-verbally.

Non-verbal Communication in Egyptian Film

In addition to the prominent role played by the dialogue in film, Egyptian cinema employs non-verbal communication in more than one form. Over and above body language, Egyptian cinema employs filmic techniques that are laden with signs and implicit meanings that may carry messages beyond or instead of words. In this section I will examine six of the most common techniques of non-verbal communication in Egyptian film: the graphic introduction, murals, cultural signs, graffiti, sotto voce and ethnic names^h.

The examples examined here are all taken from *A Man in our House* (1961) widely regarded as one of Omar Sharif's best film in Egyptian cinema. Qassem in his *Guide to Egyptian Films Produced in the Twentieth Century* provides the following summary:

"Ibrahim Hamdy, a political activist, assassinates the prime minister who has been collaborating with the colonial powers. He manages to escape from his captors and resorts to the apartment of his university friend Mohie who has no political interests. Mohie's family was reluctant to take him in but agrees in the end. Abdel-Hameed, a cousin of Mohie and formerly engaged to Mohie's sister Samia, knows of the family's secret and uses the situation to pressure the family into reconsidering his marriage to Samia who actually dislikes him. Nawal, the younger sister agrees to be the link between Ibrahim Hamdy and his colleagues who were working on helping

^h Egyptian films are used in training community interpreters in Australia. Quite often, the multi-dialect Arabic class would employ the Egyptian dialect, a lingua franca, among migrant Arab communities and also would benefit from comparing body language and other examples of non-verbal communication. (See Gamal: 2007a)

him to leave the country. Abdel-Hameed tries to report the family to secret police but Samia stops him at the last moment. However, the Chief of the Secret Police smells a rat and tortures Mohie and his cousin Abdel-Hameed in a bid to find out the whereabouts of Ibrahim Hamdy. Ibrahim decides against leaving the country and returns to continue his struggle against the British and dies in one of the operations". (Qassem: 2002:351) [My translation]

1- Graphic introduction:

The use of graphic drawings in the opening shot serves as a means of setting the scene for the historical context of the film. Here cultural and historical meaning is rather implicit. In *A Man in our House*, the film is introduced via a series of graphic plates showing scenes of historical significance dating back to the British occupation of Egypt (1881), the British massacre of Egyptian farmers at the village of Denshawai (1906) and the Egyptian Revolution of 1919. To native viewers, the drawings on the eight plates represent basic history information and the film gets its historical framework from such background. However, the situation becomes more complex as the pictures are accompanied by a narration in the higher register of Arabic that tells of the Egyptian struggle for independence. Yet there is another dimension that adds to the complexity of the scene as voices (emanating from people in the graphic plates) are heard calling for "Independence" and "Long live Egypt". These shouts were actually drowned by the voice of the narrator and were not subtitled. Here, it must be remembered that native viewers can process such complex audio-visual information simultaneously. For target viewers, the information would have to be broken down channel by channel and they would be processed individually or serially. De Linde and Kay observe that for target viewers "linguistic and visual information are not processed simultaneously but serially and this leads to disruption" (1999:52) A close examination of the translation shows that the eight graphic plates were given two lines of subtitles each to coincide with the speed of the narration. The subtitles were confined to the narration with

no reference to or explanation of the historical information implicitly included in the plates. The loss of the historical information denies target viewers of the opportunity to better understand the plot.

One of the plates show General Orabi who tried to resist the British campaign to occupy Egypt in 1881. Orabi is remembered by his famous words to the Khedvi of Egypt: “We are no slaves for we were born free”. In another plate, there is a man wearing a turban who is no other but Abdullah An-Nadeem, the orator of the Orabi Revolution who stirred the masses to join the Orabi Revolution and to resist the British. Abdulla An-Nadeem was a cleric from Alexandria.

All this information was neither recognized nor compensated for during the initial subtitling of the first minute of the film.

In the plates referring to the Egyptian Revolution of 1919 against the British who had promised Egypt independence after the First World War, the information becomes more relevant. The pictures show Egyptian women marching in demonstration carrying banners that say “Long Live Egypt”. A closer look at the picture would show women wearing Islamic dress marching next to Christian nuns. Further, there is a little girl carrying a flag showing the Cross and the Crescent. The flag is a political icon that sums up the British attempt at sowing the seeds of sedition among the Egyptians in a bid to foil the national resolve and demand for independence. The eight graphic plates are only seen fleetingly and the historical details are too subtle for the target viewer. None of this non-verbal content was offered in the subtitling as the attention was only given to the audio channel dominated by the narrator’s voice. Although Diaz Cintas and Remael correctly argue that “traditional subtitling rules state that film dialogue should get priority over other information” (2007: 231) in a complex opening scene such as this more direction by the subtitler should be exercised.

2- Murals:

Another aspect of non-verbal communication in Egyptian film is the use of murals or wall hangings. Murals come in different forms and shapes:

photographs, posters, pictures or more commonly calligraphic paintings. Quite often Egyptian homes have a calligraphic painting that contains a verse from the Koran or the Bible, a religious teaching, a stanza from a famous poem, or a famous quotation of wisdom or philosophy. Apart from its intrinsic calligraphic style, the mural painting has a meaning that is special to the person who occupies the room. In Egyptian cinema, quite often the use of such a mural is connected with the scene, and thereby the camera moves in or away from the wall giving more, albeit fleeting, access to the mural which alludes to or refers to some event or concept within the film. This is perhaps one of the most sophisticated techniques of employing non-verbal communication in Egyptian film and one of the least understood by subtitlers of Egyptian films.

After the secret police have detained Mohie and they give no details about his release, there is a scene where the distraught family is being comforted by friends. The scene takes place in family's reception room, a room reserved for guests. It has better furniture, décor and a painting on the wall. The mother is crying uncontrollably for fear that her son may have been killed. The father tries to show composure by saying that their son is alive and well and the investigation will take only a few days. His words are deep and meaningful reflecting his religious beliefs. As the camera moves away from the family, it brings into focus a mural painting. Native viewers can readily recognize the mural. It is a verse from the Koran "Say nothing shall ever happen to us except what Allah has ordained for us. He is our Guardian. And in Allah let the believers put their trust" (7:51) This composite semiotic feature is often employed in Egyptian cinema and the semiotic (mural) and extra linguistic (Koranic verse) have a pragmatic effect that enhances the cinematic meaning in a way that is more than the total sum of the verbal and visual channels of the film.

3- Cultural signs:

In *A Man in our House*, the events of the film take place during the Muslim month of Ramadan. It is one of two films that best treat the

month of Ramadan in Arab cinema. The other is *The Mother of the Bride* (1964) which was nominated for the 1965 Oscars for the best foreign film award. Again, native viewers would decode the cultural signs implicit in the religious rituals and cultural festivities of the month with ease, but target viewers would not. Though subtitling is usually regarded as translation in a confined space (Schwartz: 2002) and that a degree of loss is inevitable, some information deemed indispensable to the development of the plot, need to be accounted for.

In the film, Ibrahim Hamdy (Omar Sharif) is hospitalized after being roughed up by the police. One of his comrades disguises himself as a nurse and manages to smuggle in a gun and money. He asks Ibrahim about his plan to escape to which Ibrahim replies:

“Having studied their routine here, I think, I will have a much better chance in Ramadan”. In the following scene, a canon is seen striking and in the background the lights of a minaret are turned on. To Egyptian viewers these are two iconic representations of Ramadan. The canon strikes at sunset and the lights on the minarets are lit signaling the end of fasting and time to break the fast. It is dinner time where almost every thing stops. This is the moment Ibrahim Hamdy makes his move. In the following scene, he escapes from his captors and manages to practically walk away. As he gets out of the hospital he catches a taxi and the streets, as did the hospital, look deserted. A failure to account for the significance of his reply “I will have a better chance in Ramadan” and the accompanying semiotic signs signaling the advent of Ramadan, diminishes the dramatic moment by making his escape look like an easy walk out.

Throughout the film, cultural and religious gestures and the constant reference to time are easily and simultaneously decoded by native viewers. The drummer scene, where a drummer wakes people for the dawn prayer and the morning pre-fasting meal, is also reduced to the lexical meaning without an attempt to ‘interpret’ its significance to the target viewer. Poyatos highlights the task of the film translator: “It is

obvious that sometimes the sensitive interpreter needs to skillfully switch codes instead of just translating words” (1997:253).

4- Graffiti:

One of the most under-researched topics in Arabic subtitling is the translation of graffiti in Egyptian cinema. Such graffiti is mostly in Arabic but may appear in different languages as well, and may be in classical or colloquial Arabic and may cover a wide variety of topics from politics to religion to soccer. Graffiti, not unlike idioms, are difficult to transfer to the target language given the constraints of the medium. In a fleeting scene or when the verbal channel assumes more importance, graffiti tends to be ignored.

In *A Man in our House*, there is an entire scene where the secret police are seen whitewashing a graffito on the wall that reads “Down with colonialism”. The DVD subtitling does not offer any translation despite the fact that there is no dialogue occurring. The film is of a political nature and the theme is that of resistance to the British occupation of Egypt. The preceding and following scenes relate to the protagonist being tailed by the political police and undercover detectives.

This is perhaps one of the clearest examples that show the frailty of relying on the dialogue list to subtitle a film. Since the graffiti scene involved no dialogue, it did not show on the dialogue list which is primarily concerned with *spotting* and what is actually being said. The subtitler did not “translate” the graffito because they did not see the writing on the wall. Translators, using the dialogue list, can not recognize non-verbal communication without watching the film. This is one reason why the current practice of DVD subtitling is essentially flawed. It denies the subtitler the opportunity to watch the film and does not have an editing procedure in place. Failing to account for the graffito, which is clearly visible, detracts from the viewing experience. While some writings on the wall may be left out or alluded to, in this scene the target language viewers’ attention was inescapably drawn to the graffito since the undercover police were actually covering it up.

A Man in our House is a political film and the political message both on the wall and in protestors' placards (in the opening shot) are too significant to overlook. The non-verbal communication is part and parcel of the cinematic language that adds to the nuance of the entire work. Though visible but not spoken, the graffiti ought to be accounted for. The experience of Federico Fellini in 1988, as reported in the New York Times is a case in point. Unhappy with the subtitling of his *Intervista*, Fellini actually sued the French company that subtitled his film. He cited that the poor subtitling had "distorted and diminished his work".

5- Sotto Voce:

One of the most common non-verbal communication examples in film is sotto voce - where a speaker talks to themselves, whispers something or moves their lips to say something but without actually uttering it. Native viewers can read lips but not target viewers. When sotto voce is employed purposefully and is clearly seen by the (target) viewer, it deserves to be explicated. Poyatos explains that audiovisual reality is made up of verbal language, paralanguage and kinesics "that is what we say, how we say it and how we move what we say" (1997:249).

In *A Man in our House*, Samia loathes her cousin and suitor and rejects all his overtures. At a particular scene, she turns her face away from his and faces the camera and appears to be saying "Jerk!". Again, although she does not utter anything she is seen to be whispering something that native viewers are able to pick and understand.

Earlier in the same film, she feels sorry for their servant who was sent home for fear of divulging the secret of the freedom fighter they were harboring in their apartment. The servant is seen leaving and crying for the loss of work. Samia is then clearly seen whispering something to herself. Native viewers are able to decode the kinetic gesture and to understand that she is saying "Poor thing".

The subtitler did not offer any translation on either of these two occasions. The non-verbal communication is too obvious to viewers and a translation would have been helpful particularly when it was not forced,

given little time or detracted from other significant information. The fact is the subtitler did not see any of them.

6- Use of ethnic names:

Later in the film, one of the freedom fighters is introduced as Nached Saleeb. The name is subtitled *literally*. To Egyptian viewers the name has extra meaning: it is a Christian name. This is a very significant gesture in this political film. It signifies the unity of the Egyptian society in face of the occupying British who through the 'divide and rule' policy, attempt to weaken their resolve for demanding independence in the wake of the First World War. The gesture alludes to and builds on the graphic introduction of the film where the little girl was carrying the Cross and Crescent flag. In other words, the choice of the ethnic name has a dramatic value in the film over and above its lexical choice and it was a value that was not conveyed in the subtitling of the film. In Egyptian Arabic, some names can be clearly identified as Islamic/Christian, local/foreign, Egyptian/Arab, city/country, rich/poor, etc. Egyptian cinema employs this technique quite often and the choice of certain names usually enhances character portrayal.

Later in the film, when the freedom fighters decide on smuggling Ibrahim Hamdy (Omar Sharif) to France, the action moves to Alexandria. Here Ibrahim is introduced to "Abdullah An-Nadeem, a freedom fighter from Alexandria". This exact sentence amplifies what appeared in the graphic plates in the first minute of the film with the man in the Turban. Native viewers know that "Abdullah An-Nadeem is a freedom fighter from Alexandria" but the significance of the name is totally lost on the target viewer. To reinforce the significance of the historical reference, Abdullah An-Nadeem speaks in the dialect of Alexandria which native viewers, again, can easily detect but target viewers can not.

Discussion:

These six examples highlight the important concept that film subtitling is a complex translation process that requires film analysis. The ability to

conduct such analysis presupposes an understanding and appreciation of the filmic material due to its multi-semiotic natureⁱ. For subtitles to be credible, the two lines must be not only accurate but also representative of the information imparted both explicitly and implicitly from the visuals. While a detailed dialogue list, the one Diaz-Cintas (2001) wishes for (but concedes are not always available), is a great source of help, the fact is no matter how “good” a dialogue list may be nothing would replace or surpass the actual viewing of a film for better subtitling results.

Thus, the information included in the graphic introduction should be verbalized and yet this poses a serious challenge due to the on-going narration. Adding a third line (at the top of the screen) would be distracting and would clutter the screen. Besides, the amount of historical information necessary could not be condensed into a single line. This example shows the complexity of subtitling ‘classic’ films or those films that require a certain background, thereby demanding experience for their subtitling. In cases of information overload, as seen in the opening shot of the film, a more creative solution should be contemplated by the subtitler. This could be done by manipulating the narration itself. Thus by freeing themselves from its limitation, the subtitler could rewrite the narration combining both visual and verbal information. Subtitles do not have to be a complete and full rendition of the original, but rather have to be credible and helpful to the target viewer, particularly when the source and target language are not cognate as in the case of Arabic and English.

Likewise, the murals and their powerful effect in Egyptian film require sensitivity to the visual and its multi-layered meaning. In the case of the extra-linguistic meaning imparted by the mural as the camera moves away from the distraught family, the subtitler having identified the non-verbal message could rebuild its meaning in the discourse of the

ⁱ To date, there is no formal training in audiovisual translation in Egypt. Only a non-credit course is offered by the American University in Cairo. Most of the work is carried out by translators-cum-subtitlers.

father. After all, there is another mural in the father's bedroom "A book is the best friend" which helps reinforce the stoic and reflective nature of the character seen reading in more than one occasion throughout the film. By working on the father's discourse, such non-verbal information could be saved and embodied in his words. To achieve this, the subtitler needs to be aware of what constitutes non-verbal communication in film and requires training in film analysis - something which the current little training that is available does not account for.

Though the graffiti scene in this film is a 'silent' one, it speaks volumes. Firstly within the film, it highlights the plot development as the surveillance scene unfolds. Secondly, it serves as a conclusive example that working from a dialogue list is an impoverished practice that adversely impacts the integrity of the subtitling. Morgan succinctly concludes that "Good subtitles cannot save a bad film, but bad subtitles can spoil a good one" (2001:164). Viewing (significant) films prior to their subtitling is the *sine qua non* for professional subtitling results. This scene serves as an excellent example to illustrate to trainee subtitlers the importance of non-verbal communication in film and the significance of demanding a copy of the film, with or without a "good" dialogue list.

The employment of sotto voce in film is a technique used to needle viewers and engage their senses. The difficulty is that lip reading is language-specific and can not be expected of target viewers. The subtitler needs to identify the sotto voce incident (firstly by observing it) and then account for its non-verbal meaning, physically. In this incident the scene where the sotto voce example occurred was not burdened by other verbal input and the meaning could have been easily verbalized. Again, such issues demand subtitlers view the film and determine the relevance of the information and weigh its pragmatic effect on the overall subtitling. In the end, subtitles need to be a help not a hindrance to the target viewer.

Apart from Hollywood, most if not all national cinemas address their audience in their films. Thus a director employs techniques that appeal to the local audience in the first instance and within the local audience there

are semiotic signs that target certain groups within that audience. When cultural and ethnic names are employed denotative and connotative inferences are made and this in itself is part of the cinematic experience. Native viewers can appreciate this. In most Egyptian films, play on words and names are a common fare and their translation would pose a challenge. However, in historical or political films or those classified as significant films, the translation of proper names should be approached with care. Strategies for dealing with extra-linguistic challenges posed by references to ethnic or religious groups, here exemplified by proper names, “will inevitably require intervention by the subtitler” (Hatim: 1997). Here the subtitler will have to establish a link between the moment the name was mentioned and the early semiotic reference to Egyptian Christians in the opening shot. Subtitlers need to be creative in their compensation techniques particularly when the information has been implicitly suggested^j.

Certain films, whether classics or those of significant form deserve more attention to their composition. Buckland explains that the term “significant form” is what distinguishes good art from bad art. “When we say that a film has ‘significant form’, what we mean is that the whole is more than the sum of its total parts. The film’s parts add up to create a new entity that does not exist in each part”. (2003: 2) *A Man in our House* is a film of this category and its subtitling requires attention to its details not merely its dialogue. Mera (1999) argues that when working on the films of famous directors, special attention must be given to their work. The abundance of cultural signs in the film adds to the challenges facing the subtitler. The identification and accounting of these signs require the subtitler to be both resourceful and creative in their manipulation through the rewriting process, thus making the subtitler a master of the two-liner. That is, the multi-semiotic information is processed by the subtitler and digested into two verbally cohesive yet visually coherent lines.

^j The use of subtitling software has made training a lot more interactive and affordable. Software that helps trainees to rip and burn scenes and to create subtitled segments has become an essential part of the writer’s training program not only in AVT but also in mainstream translation programs.

The Final Analysis:

The six examples cited in this paper clearly identify the significant role played by non-verbal communication in film. Therefore the practice of DVD subtitling will have to alter its *modus operandi* and move away from the reliance on the dialogue list. However, the ability to identify and deal with non-verbal communication may not be accessible to all subtitlers due to the lack of academic training or little professional experience or indeed both. Strategies for dealing with graphic introductions, murals, graffiti, *sotto voce*, ethnic names and cultural signs require knowledge of what constitutes non-verbal communication in film *a priori*. The strategies which may include compensation, explicating or indeed verbalizing also require a degree of intervention by the subtitler. To expect subtitlers, in the current professional context, to be able to see the whole picture and appreciate that the paramount skill in subtitling lies on their ability to add text to the image in a way that will enhance the audiovisual text and augment the viewing experience by the target audience is essentially a tall order. This presupposes training in film analysis and training in the identification of these hurdles. Such training provides the theoretical framework for subtitlers to develop their repertoire of skills and techniques and as Chaume (2002:3) explains, leads to “the discovery of translation strategies and rhetorical mechanisms unique to the construction of audiovisual texts is only possible from an analysis of audiovisual texts that looks at their peculiarity; *meaning constructed from the conjunction of images and words.*” (Italics in the original)

As these examples come from only one film and one of the classic films for that matter, there is an urgent need for a focus on training in film semiotics and film analysis^k.

^k Over the past few years several Egyptian films were nationally nominated to compete internationally at film festivals and even the Oscars Foreign Film Award. However, very little interest was shown in subtitling and how target audiences view subtitled films. Despite participation at film festivals in Berlin, Venice, Moscow and other places the subtitling is confined only to two languages.

Developing appropriate subtitling strategies must come from within the individual culture and its language. It can not and should not come from abroad by simply translating subtitling manuals (Gambier: 1994). Ivarsson (1998: 2) mentions that when his manual was first published in Swedish several countries requested it to be translated into English and points that the Australian Special Broadcasting Service (SBS Television) in Sydney was the first one that called for its translation and adoption (personal communication). Different cultures see reality differently and many a scholar has highlighted the significance of ‘measuring the cultural distance’ Nedergaard-Larsen (1993), ‘shared cultural knowledge’ Chaume (1997) and as Rickles concedes “Even with cultures that one has studied and with which one has concerned oneself intensively there are always surprises” (2004:434). The treatment of non-verbal communication in Egyptian film requires research based on typological studies which identify challenges and suggest appropriate strategies. Taxonomies help both students and subtitlers to locate and collect examples for their research and translation. Despite the current lack of training opportunities in audiovisual translation in Egypt the number of DVDs commercially available provides a sufficient corpus for further research. A typological study may consist of three general categories: verbal, pragmatic and semiotic.

The verbal category includes challenges resulting from dealing with the source language with particular reference to interpreting the denotative and connotative meaning intrinsic in its diglossic features, the subtitler’s decision to adopt literal or liberal translation and strategies employed in dealing with profanities, play on words and idiomatic structures. The category could be enlarged and enhanced through practice and experience to include dialects, terminology, and Arabic-language specific jokes and the use of foreign language in Arabic films.

The pragmatic category examines errors resulting from the failure to observe the communicative effect in translating religious as well as cultural-specific features existent in the verbal channel. This category

requires more in-depth examination of the nature of the audiovisual text where meaning is derived from extra-linguistic features in the dialogue. The category may also include editorial techniques particularly where the meaning is supported by the image which may entail pruning of the subtitles.

The semiotic category includes the interpretation of sign in film as it appears in translating information from non-verbal clues, ethnic names, incidents of *sotto voce*, explicating graphic signs in film, dealing with non-verbal messages resulting from cultural values and characterization. It should also identify and examine the semiotic context of the entire film as the context of the month of Ramadan has shown.

The examination of Egyptian films subtitled on DVD is a very new field that provides fertile ground for training in the translation of multimedia texts. The constant examination of the categories and testing of their strategies would develop better manuals for trainees and practitioners alike.

This year, the DVD industry celebrates its first decade (six years in Egypt) and there is a growing need for audiovisual translation not only in film, but also in other applications such as corporate DVDs, promotional DVDs of all domains and most importantly technical and educational DVDs. As digital technology is rapidly influencing the way society views and uses information, the domain of audiovisual translation will assume greater relevance. In the Arab world, with its young population, there is an increasing trend to espouse digital technology in electronic government, distant education and infotainment. Further, the proliferation of media production cities in several Arab countries, the increasing number of film festivals in the Gulf countries and the entering of Saudi Arabia into media and film production, will all shape and change the audiovisual scene in the region over the next few years. All these changes require an immediate shift towards audiovisual translation which until now has been outside the domain of academia. Chaume (2002:2) correctly points out that “audiovisual translation should take its place in today’s syllabus, not just because it responds to one of the

translation activities with the most rapidly growing volume of work, one ever more present in our daily lives, but also because of its didactic potential, as an example of an exercise in translation”.

Biographical Note:

Muhammad Y Gamal is an applied linguist with professional and teaching experience in Arabic translation and interpreting. His research interests are in audiovisual translation (AVT) and its applications in the Arab world. Muhammad published a series of papers examining the audiovisual scene in the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia and produces an annual report on the audiovisual scene in the Arab world. In his doctoral research he examined the subtitling of Omar Sharif Egyptian films into English. Muhammad lives and works in Sydney, Australia. His email: muh_gamal@yahoo.com.

Notes

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