

Deconstruction Subtitled – Subtitling Deconstructed

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Abstract:

Derrida revealed the fallacy that it is possible to distinguish between reality, thinking and language; a fallacy constructed by Plato and transmitted through Western philosophy. Furthermore, this belief has been the foundation stone of translation studies, creating a concept of translation as a mechanism by means of which the essence of a message is transmitted from one language to another, and whose ultimate guarantor is always the author of the original text. Derrida makes use of writing to dismantle this fallacy and to show language as a complex system of signs that do not have one fixed, unchangeable meaning, insofar as they cannot actualize the referent, but rather imply a multiplicity of interpretations. In a multimodal context in which the original and the translation are simultaneous and complementary, subtitling brings us closer to the Derridian notion of writing as the place wherein language shows us precisely what it is.

Key words: subtitling, deconstruction, writing, multimodality, Derrida.

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The attempt to achieve perfect subtitling has some affinity to the search for the Holy Grail.

–Baker et al. (1984)

1. Introduction

The increasing presence of Derrida's philosophy of deconstruction in translation studies is the necessary answer to those scientific pretensions that do not fully tackle the phenomenon of translation in all its complexity. Derrida put forward that the simplistic concept of language as a reflection of reality posited throughout the history of Western thinking had represented a hindrance to its correct understanding. With a view to dismantling this simplistic concept of language, Derrida finds proof in writing that the linguistic sign is not directly connected to its referent, but rather is presented as a series of symbols drawn on paper which in themselves express nothing. It is the reader who activates certain specific meanings, but these are activated from somewhere where there is only paper and ink, from a purely physical medium, from which the essence of the text cannot be necessarily deduced (an essence which, in the opinion of this writer, is inexistent). Therefore, from the perspective of deconstruction, language is viewed as an instrument that allows us to communicate via a system of signs which are inter-related but do not transmit the reality, they are simply a reflection of what our thinking believes it sees and understands.

Subtitling is writing; it is presented on the screen as a text superimposed on to some images and sounds, whose function is to make it possible for us to understand a

message that has been created using a multiplicity of codes. Hence, the subtitle does not substitute the original text, but instead accompanies and complements it. Thus, the difficult relationship between the original and the translation is one of the matters raised by subtitling. Unlike other modes of translation, the aim of subtitling is not to substitute the original for a translation, nor to pass off the translation as original. In order for subtitling to be legible, it must synthesize the oral text from the audiovisual medium. Moreover, to ensure that it can be understood, the subtitling must be accompanied by the paralinguistic and visual information which makes up the audiovisual product. In this way, the characteristics of subtitling undermine some notions that have traditionally been at the centre of translation studies, such as faithfulness to the original or the enshrinement of the writer. Faced both with an original whose meaning has been blurred by the multiplicity of codes and also with some unavoidable requirements of the synthesizing process, the translator of subtitles must make use of other parameters on which to base his/her work. Accordingly, Arrojo (2013, 275) reminds us that deconstruction has represented a great source of inspiration in the movement of translation studies away from the idea of 'equivalence' and nearer to the notion of 'difference'.

2. Writing in Derrida

In his dismantling of Western philosophy, based on Platonic idealism, Derrida took writing as both an example and metaphor in order to highlight that any identification between reality, thinking and speech is a mere illusion. Concordant with this illusion, if thinking is a direct reflection of reality and speech a direct reflection of thinking, speech

should be a direct reflection of reality. In this way, Western philosophy long trusted in the possibility of the absolute transparency of the transcendental signified (see Peretti 1989, 31). This is why speech has traditionally been considered as the place where language is shown in all its essence; writing, on the other hand, has been considered as a secondary representation of speech, insofar as it is apparently much more conventional in nature due to the obvious distance that exists with regard to the idea. Derrida calls this primacy of speech 'logocentrism', which is characterized by a rejection of the signifier which contrasts with the privilege granted to the signified.

However, in Derrida's view (1997), every linguistic sign has an arbitrary and institutionalizing nature, both in spoken and written discourse; in this regard, the nature of speech is as conventional and removed from reality, the reality to which it supposedly refers, as writing. Yet the nature of writing, which clearly shows the difference between signifier and signified, allows Derrida to emphasize the fact that not only does the sign always appear in the absence of that which it is supposed to represent, but that the sign is always a sign of another sign, and not so much of a fixed, permanent meaning. Thus, all of the signs are referents of other signs which make up the linguistic code to which they belong, without it ever being possible for us to find the 'originary trace' (Derrida 1997, 61); whenever we use a word or an expression, we activate echoes of its different meanings and the uses to which it has been put, we actualize them and, we simultaneously create a new echo that is integrated into the resonance of the word or expression. In this way, Derrida attempts to put an end to the myth of the fullness of meaning, as 'the unique feature of the Derridian trace is precisely the *impossibility of finding originals in their immediate presence*' (Peretti 1989, 72).

Derrida is adamant when he states that there is no originary trace to confer a definitive meaning on the signs; on the contrary, we can only speak about an origin which is 'structured and a differentiator of differences' (Derrida 1982a, 12) which Derrida calls '*différance*'. With this neologism, Derrida's intention is to point up the unbreachable distance between the signifier and the signified, a distance both temporal ('deferred') and spatial ('different'). Derrida uses *différance* to explain that the word, the element *present* in language (the signifier), establishes a provisional link to what is *absent* (the signified), which is to say, to everything it *defers* or *differs* from (cf. Derrida 1982a). For this reason we are told that what characterizes the sign is simply an absence of presence. As Norris states (2002, 45): 'Derrida's logic is simple but devastating. Language can fulfil the condition of self-present meaning only if it offers a total and immediate access to the thoughts that occasioned its utterance. But this is an impossible requirement.' We could say that, according to deconstruction, the origin of the words in itself is polysemic, the sign is already diverse at its very origin. Thus, the linguistic signs may be interpreted in a multiplicity of ways, at both their points of origin (past) and destination (future).

Thanks to the idea that language is disseminated in an endless chain of signifiers, Derrida succeeds in dismantling the fallacy transmitted by Western philosophy of the three-way identification between reality, thinking and language. This is to say that, it is not possible for the author of a text to be fully cognizant of reality, conceptualize it and capture it; nor is it possible for the reader of that text to decipher it in another different context, and discover the truthful interpretation of what the alleged author intended. In other words, the signified concept is never present, neither in the origin of the text nor

in its reproduction (see Jordà 2016, 290). Ultimately, what we do when we speak or write is reproduce traces which are lacking inherent meaning, but which simply evoke meaning 'effects' through the play of differences established to a certain degree by tradition and institutionalization. Therefore, the difference between signifier and signified is made possible not because there is a relationship between representation and the object/idea that is represented, but rather, as Davis points out (2001, 23): 'because language accrues, through fairly regulated repetition of signifiers in a general code, certain instituted meaning effects.'

For Derrida, the differential oppositions of signs with an arbitrary and institutionalizing nature make up the foundations on which the language system is constructed. Therefore, despite the fact that the Saussurean conception of the language as a closed system of references has come under criticism since deconstruction, there is no denying that language needs to be equipped with a certain degree of structure and must be able to transmit meaningfully. On the contrary, the system is a necessary evil which allows us to talk, although we must appreciate it in all its complexity. What Derrida wishes to underline is the fragility of the conceptual oppositions (such as those of presence/absence, intelligible/sensible, inside/outside, signified/signifier, speech/writing), which he considers to be a burden inherited from metaphysics (see Peretti 1989, 59). Derrida's aim is to advocate his concept of the system as a movement of differences rather than a system of pure oppositions. Thus, he is not then telling us that nothing makes sense, since, if it were, there would be no comment to make, but rather that the meaning cannot be fixed as it is in constant flux.

The classical concept of the 'original text' as a source of meaning is no longer consistent as soon as we understand language as an open system in which it is impossible to establish either a specific origin of the meanings in the past or a definitive interpretation of the same meanings in the future. From the viewpoint deconstruction, the relationship between the original and the translation has been seen as a maelstrom of relationships in perpetual flux. The original therefore loses its dominance over the translation and merely becomes its predecessor; the original forfeits its authority over the translation insofar as both texts are products of an endless game of cross references. If every text, expression and word is intertextual, as it always refers to other texts, expressions and words, it is impossible to draw the boundaries of the alleged *original*. As Davis indicates (2001, 16): 'The source text for a translation is already a site of multiple meanings and intertextual crossings.' Derrida (1985b) goes even further when he posits that the pre-existence of the original should not be taken for granted, as it is the translation that brings it up to date. In this sense, Derrida ascribes greater value to the translation, not as a reproduction, nor as a copy, but rather as a medium which makes it possible for the original to survive.

Derrida's commitment to dismantling structuralism, to show the openness and indefiniteness of language, partly comes from his concern for what is divergent, what struggles against structure, what is scorned. From his point of view, language is not a system of pure oppositions, but is formed by asystematic elements that are, under no circumstances, secondary or peripheral, but rather which define the language and make it possible. In Derrida's view, what does not fit, what remains outside the perfectly defined opposition is precisely what makes language possible. Whereas structuralism aims to ignore anything that spoils the purity of the perfect oppositions, deconstruction

insists on the need to abandon terms such as 'loss' or 'inadequacy' (see Carreres 2005). Let us say then that something is white because it is the opposite of black, even though there is an endless range of intermediate shades of grey, although the white we are defining is also grey. This, however, allows us to express ourselves rather than saying nothing, although what we do say is not accurate, although our grey, which we are calling white, is more black than white in a different context.

As we have already pointed out, for Derrida writing represents the model of what language is, free from the deceptions that we are used to finding in speech (thanks to the tradition of Platonic idealism). In his view, writing succeeds in dispelling the illusion of an identification between reality, thinking and language, thus, highlighting the distance between the sign and what it represents; not only that, it also raises the impossibility of establishing that the meaning has one ultimate, unchangeable origin. The very essence of language prevents the connection with pure meaning, with the original trace; that essence is none other than the *différance*, the condition that makes it possible for us to say things in the absence of the referent. This explains why the linguistic signs are condemned to remain within the uncertain nature of their meanings, with no specific origin, with no definitive interpretation, with no direct connection to their referent. The meaning of the linguistic sign is in perpetual flux, although it is determined by its relationship with other signs (more than by its connection to its referent). There is no linguistic form that better conveys this *différance* than writing because the written text itself is no more than a set of signs; it possesses no inherent meaning. The meaning comes into being, is activated, when the reader confers a new interpretation to the text. An interpretation of endless multiplicity which leads us away from the concept of the original text as the source of a fixed, unchanging meaning.

3. Subtitling as Multimodal Translation

Subtitling is a modality of audiovisual translation with some specific features that are worthwhile analysing for the purposes of showing it to be, in some respects, an example of what Derrida understood by 'writing.' Basically, subtitling differs from the rest of the audiovisual modalities in that it is written in nature (as opposed to dubbing or voice-over, which superimposes one spoken message on top of another). One obvious consequence of the process of converting a spoken text into a written one is that of having to synthesize the translation. Gottlieb (2005, 20) speaks of the need for the 'sacrifice of close to 50% of the dialogue' so that the written text may easily be read by the viewer at the same rhythm as the text is being spoken on the screen. As far as style is concerned, referring to this essential process of synthesis, Ivarson (1992, 91) stated that 'it is impossible to give any rules on exactly how the selection of relevant information should be made (omission, paraphrases, free translation, ellipsis, merging, simplification of sentences, simplification of vocabulary...).'

Nevertheless, the implications of the complex translation mode of subtitling is the transformation of spoken text to written (according to Hurtado's classification of the modalities of translation 2007) and the implications of such a complex form of translation go far beyond the mere stylistic form. As Catford (1965, 53) pointed out: 'Translation between media is impossible (i. e. cannot "translate" from the *spoken* to the *written* form of a text or vice-versa).' Yet, in spite of that, we subtitle, in one more demonstration of our determination to make translation the place where the translator

broadens the horizons of reality, making the impossible possible. However, it is clear that, when translating subtitles, decisions are taken based on the features distinguishing spoken from written communication: implicit language, different aesthetic norms, spontaneous speech, interruptions, *grammatically unacceptable* constructions, ambiguities and nonsense, overlapping speech, dialectal or sociolectal features, idiolectal features, among others.

In addition to all of these considerations on spoken and written language, it is obvious that subtitling does not take place in a medium that is merely linguistic but rather polysemiotic. Sanz (2011) lists the different codes of meaning that accompany the verbal message in an audiovisual product: paralanguage, kinesics, proxemics and cultural signs. The first one, paralanguage, refers to the non-verbal qualities of the voice (intonation, rhythm, tone); the second one, kinesics, to body movements and gestures that accompany words; the third one, proxemics, to interpersonal space that people establish when interacting with others and the fourth one, cultural signs, to colours, places, music, physical appearance, and so on. Going somewhat further, we can speak of the photographic code, of the planning and syntax specific to the audiovisual products, that is to say ‘the “way” visual elements are shown, and not only what is seen’ (Taylor 2016, 229). Broadly speaking, the term ‘non-verbal information’ can be used to denominate the paralinguistic information that is transmitted acoustically and the visual information supplied by the images. We should additionally remember that although the translator has to bear in mind all of the information, both verbal and non-verbal, of the audiovisual text, he/she can only construct the translation by using linguistic elements which are subject to a series of technical and stylistic criteria that shackle his/her work even more.

Chaume (2004, 226), however, points out that ‘the limited attention paid to non-verbal information might be due to the fact that it is generally believed that iconic language is universal and consequently, semiotically understandable for nearly all cultures.’

Likewise, Gambier (2006, 7) acknowledges that most of the research into subtitling and audiovisual translation in general focuses on the linguistic aspects, while ‘the multisemiotic blends of many different signs are not ignored but they are usually neglected or not integrated into a framework.’ Nevertheless, most of the authors demand greater attention should be paid to ‘intersemiotic cohesion’ which, in the case of subtitling, is defined by Diaz-Cintas and Remael (2007, 171) as: ‘the way it connects language directly to the soundtrack and to images on screen, making use of the information they supply to create a coherent linguistic-visual whole.’

The research work carried out into audiovisual translation has adopted the concept of ‘multimodality’ in order to refer to the phenomenon of the multiplicity of codes present in audiovisual products (see Gambier 2006). From this perspective, it is only possible to understand a film as being an ensemble in which one message is produced through diverse, complementary codes. In the words of Taylor (2016, 224): ‘it is the integration of all the semiotic modes in a multimodal text that creates meaning and, although that meaning is translated into words, it is the task of the audiovisual translator to find the wording in his/her language that best expresses the integration of semiotic forces.’

Given the complementary, inclusive character of the semiotic modes present, it becomes necessary to speak of coherence and cohesion as being required not only at the heart of each and every one of the codes, but rather as being multimodal in nature. As Gambier (2013, 8) says: ‘once the functions of the verbal aspect in the audiovisual flow [...] and

the interplay between what is said and what is shown have been understood, only then can the translator decide what strategies to employ.'

When the translator is aware of the relevance of multimodality in audiovisual texts, that complexity cannot be ignored and he/she must take into consideration operations such as: the shift from the paralinguistic, the image and sound effects to verbal language (Perego 2009, 59). Therefore, when deciding on how the subtitle should be worded, the subtitler has to heed the different channels through which meanings are transmitted by means of diverse, non-verbal codes (both phonic and visual). In some cases, the non-verbal information will suffice to transmit the message, making the subtitle unnecessary and allowing it to be deleted; this will lessen the cognitive burden of the viewer (Taylor 2016, 228). This is why Gottlieb (2005, 21) states that, despite the essential synthesis of the subtitled text, 'much current reduction in subtitling is neutralized, so viewers miss less of the content of the film than a merely linguistic analysis might indicate.' In other cases, the non-verbal information may reflect cultural inequivalences that somehow must be explained in the subtitle so that the information in question is not lost (Perego 2009, 59-60). In any event, it is clear that a subtitle loses all meaning if separated from the audiovisual product of which it is part; this confirms its dependence on the rest of the non-verbal elements that make up the audiovisual product. Along these lines, Gambier (2006, 3) reminds us that the concept of 'sense' should be revised 'since this is produced neither in a linear sequence nor with a single system of signs.'

4. Subtitling as Writing

The multimodal complexity that characterises subtitling has led various authors to query the suitability of using the classical concept of ‘translation’ when referring to it.

Gambier (2006, 3), for example, states that ‘screen texts [...] do not fit readily into the traditional dichotomy between source text and target text’ and, for this reason, he puts forward other terms for audiovisual translation, such as: ‘adaptation’, ‘manipulation’, ‘censorship’, ‘transfer’ or ‘remake’. Delabastita (1989, 213) also proposed the use of the terms ‘adaptation’ or ‘transfer.’ As argued by this author: ‘It is obvious at first sight that the empirical relationships between source films and target films can hardly be exhaustively described in terms of a maximally faithful linguistic recoding process,’ among other things because many verbal elements of the source film are not translated at all. Nevertheless, what should undoubtedly be questioned is the suitability of using the classical concept of translation to describe not only audiovisual translation, but also any other translation modality. Derrida (1982b, 20) already queried this when he spoke of translation as ‘a regulated transformation of one language by another, of one text by another.’ However, it is no coincidence that the difficulty associated with the classical concept of ‘translation’ raises its head at the precise moment that the theory behind audiovisual translation is under discussion.

Fundamentally, the problem centres around two points: on the one hand, the concept of translation as an operation wherein a merely linguistic meaning is transferred and, on the other hand, the relationship between the original text and its translation, where the original is enshrined, the author exalted and the translator is reduced to simply deciphering the author’s intentions. As far as the second point is concerned, it should be stressed that translation studies have traditionally conceived ‘loyalty’ to the original as the basic criterion when determining the suitability of any translation. From the point of

view of the philosophy of deconstruction, however, if the meaning is never the same (not even within the same language), inasmuch as each and every time a text is read it is interpreted anew, we can no longer retain the idea of the original text as being a hermetic container in which the author's intentions are preserved unchanged. Once the unstable nature of the original text is assumed, a text which does not allow itself to be translated unless it is interfered with to some degree (meddling in it, shaping it, tampering with it), the sought after loyalty becomes diluted in a welter of confusion in which what should be reflected in the translation is totally distorted. Thus, as a means of overcoming the complex traditionally assumed by translators of being subordinate to the original, Tack (2000), Arrojo (1998), Venuti (1995) or Godard (1990), among others, propound freeing the unreal expectations of transparency or neutrality with regard to the languages and cultures involved in the translation process.

Turning back to the matter of translation being an operation wherein a merely linguistic meaning is transferred, it is clear that this notion is an invalid one in the case of subtitling if we consider all of the aforementioned references to its multimodal nature. From the viewpoint of deconstruction, however, this inconvenience does not come about simply as a consequence of the existence of multiple codes, but rather it is produced at the very heart of each and every one of them (including, and most fundamentally, in the linguistic code). As Ketkar (2012) explains: 'Translation is founded on a myth that one can separate word/s from their "meaning" or can substitute other word/s from the same or some other language, and yet keep the "meaning" intact.' From the perspective of deconstruction, the meaning is not independent from the signifier that can be extracted from the original text and transplanted to another text in another language. The meanings belong to the signs, to the texts, to the contexts and to

the languages and they are non-transferable because, otherwise, it would imply transferring the whole body and not simply the organ we wish to transplant. In the case of subtitling, the fact that the translator has to synthesize a spoken message that is inseparable from a multimodal context underlines the fact that the result will never be identical to the original; this is simply because translating is not the same as putting forward a mathematical equation in which equality between two expressions on either side of the sign '=' can be achieved by applying certain formulas.

The mere appearance of the subtitle in the form of a text written on the screen already represents a discrepancy between the original and the translation. As Gottlieb (2005, 20) points up, subtitling is an '*overt*' type of translation. On the one hand, we have a multimodal text made up of linguistic and paralinguistic elements both spoken and written, acoustic elements and moving visual elements, all of which belong to their corresponding codes of meaning. When we subtitle, however, this appears as an added element, not as a substitute for any of the aforementioned items, but as a 'supplement'. As an element added to the original, the subtitle is usually taken to be a lesser evil, something that is bothersome but vital if the audiovisual product is to reach a certain public. We can, however, also understand it as being a supplement, which has immediate positive connotations. The supplement is something which is added because it is needed, but, at the same time, it is something worthwhile, something that enriches and, even, replaces the original (see Koskinen 2000, 36). In the words of Derrida (1985a, 188), the supplement implies that the translation 'will truly be a moment in the growth of the original.' And there is no place where the supplement shows itself in such clarity as in writing. Thus, the mere presence of the subtitle on the screen highlights the fact that there is something more to it; and that is precisely what allows us to understand

the original. Therefore, the subtitle does not come after the original, but rather it is what actualizes it, what allows it to survive, to be reborn or resurrected in another cultural context.

Subtitling also represents an anomaly to the classical concept of translation in that both the original and the translation appear to the viewer at the same time and, what is more, they do this so explicitly that it is impossible to ignore. If the message is to be understood, the viewer must pay attention to the multiplicity of codes being offered to him/her, where the subtitle is but one more of this amalgam of signs. We are not going to be able to understand what is being told to us if we only focus on the image, the sound, or the subtitle. In this way, the subtitle also demonstrates to us that the language is not the only container of meaning; it highlights the fact that the language is truly the lesser evil that allows us to communicate, but which forms part of a broader whole to which language cannot accede. In this regard, deconstruction reminds us of the principle of the economy of language thanks to which we are able to speak but unable to transmit the referent, since this will always be absent. 'The impossibility of translation is based on the principle of economy,' says Dizdar (2011, 33). That is to say that language is a system with no direct link to reality, only the semblance of one (just as the subtitle appears on the screen alongside the image and sound); however, thanks to its capacity for simplification (in the same way as the subtitle synthesizes the original spoken message), we can transmit a message whose meaning is never identical nor faithful, nor constant nor unvarying.

All of this has to be seen in a positive light, once we have grown disenchanted with the fallacy of Western metaphysics which tried to make us believe that what we were

saying was reality itself. As Dizdar (2011, 33) reminds us: 'each time we pretend to refer to a signified it is actually already a signifier because we cannot step out of language.' This is why we must relinquish the concept of 'loss' associated with translation (and also with language itself insofar as it is incapable of transmitting *reality*). The impossibility of transmitting certain messages, certain subtleties or word plays, should not lead us to think that translation is a waste; the very language is a waste in itself if what we want is to look at it from that angle. In this respect, if subtitling is taken as an example, we have posited that it is not a waste but rather a supplement. The subtitle appears on screen and contributes something more, underlining the fact that something is added not lost. The subtitle actualizes the message, it reactivates it, allowing us to understand it provided we do not lose sight of its connection with everything that surrounds it (image and sound).

Similarly, the fact that the translation and the original are both present at the same time within the subtitle reminds us that the translation does not substitute the original; nor can we construe it as being the same, because it is obviously not (the subtitle is a synthesis and not a transcription). As we have already commented on, Catford (1965, 65) states that there is a degree of *impossibility* when it comes to translating a spoken text to another, written one because we are dealing with differing codes that follow different rules and have features that are neither comparable nor transposable. From this point of view, the meaning of the spoken message, which does not consist simply of words but also of other non-verbal qualities of the voice (intonation, rhythm, tone), cannot be transposed as-is to the subtitle's box. It could be argued that all of these non-verbal qualities are retained in the audiovisual products when their projection is accompanied by subtitles, and that they complement or support them to some extent,

although this does not imply that the result will be the same. However, Chaume (2004, 226) has already warned us that the non-verbal language is not universal. The magic of the *equivalence* of the simple translation modes (spoken-spoken, written-written), fades away when a subtitle is superimposed on its corresponding spoken statement. This very same equivalence, which has prevailed over translation studies for centuries, is ‘based on an essentialist stance which postulates a neutral transfer of meaning between language and cultures’ (Arrojo 1995, 53).

To all this must be added one final question regarding the difficulty of applying the classical concept of ‘original text’ to subtitling. An audiovisual product is the quintessential product whose authorship is difficult to determine. Scriptwriters, directors, producers, actors and actresses, etcetera, all of them contribute to the final result but authorship cannot be clearly attributed to just one of them (even though it is true that the director is the one who approaches the piece from a broader global perspective). Nevertheless, when we treat a film as the original text of a translation (subtitling), we could be assailed by doubts as to the *intentionality* of the author that makes it difficult to determine who is behind that expression we are trying to translate if we approach the translation from the classical parameters of *loyalty* to the author. Here is where the translator’s sense of responsibility emerges (see Dizdar 2001, 34); the translator cannot turn to the author and, furthermore, has to take his/her own decisions about what is relevant or not within the fusion of signs of differing codes that make up the audiovisual product.

5. Conclusions

Arrojo (1998, 25) comments that: ‘deconstruction implicitly and explicitly questions all the traditional notions usually associated with translation as an idealized form of meaning transferral from one language to another.’ Therefore, once we assume that the meaning is not transferable (at least if it is understood as fixed and independent from both the signifier and the language to which it refers), there is no other way to understand translation than as a provisional interpretation which, in turn, will influence future interpretations of the text. It is not that there is no meaning at all, rather a multiplicity of meanings that precede and succeed the text. Subtitling underscores this fact by showing us a text that requires a context if it is to be interpreted. As Gottlieb (2005, 21) reminds us: ‘The audience will have to turn to the original acoustic and visual clues in trying to grasp the meaning behind the words of the subtitles.’ In this way, the magic of the immediacy of language is lost through the use of subtitles, as they show themselves to be visually intrusive supplements, which are worthless in themselves but rather need to be interwoven into the web of visual and acoustic signs that accompany them.

The excitement about being able to reproduce a text in another language as a replica of the original vanishes when the writing removes the blindfold from our eyes to show us that language is simply a system of signs that refer one to another and which, to a certain extent, have meaning thanks to the impossibility of alluding to reality, thanks to that *différance* which reminds us that we always speak in the absence of the referent (it is impossible to talk any other way). As Lindegaard (1996, 161) puts it: ‘language does not mirror an ordered and consistent reality [...] translation reminds us of the world’s ambiguity.’ For that very reason, from the perspective of deconstruction the classical

criterion of faithfulness being at the heart of a translation is discarded and terms such as 'flexibility' or 'compromise' (Bennington and McLeod (1987, xiv) have been championed. In this regard, the translator of subtitles is used to this *modus operandi*, since he/she needs to synthesize and fit the translation into the space available; he/she has to negotiate with the language until an expression is procured that underlines the provisional nature of the message. Thus, subtitling once again shows itself to be an example of the paradigm shift that is required in the field of translation studies.

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