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SOME REMARKS ON A MULTIMODAL APPROACH TO SUBTITLES

1. Introduction

For decades, translation has not fully appreciated a multimodal nature of communication and has been dominated by a monomodal approach, largely interested in the verbal channel of communication. In audiovisual translation, some works have discussed the problem theoretically (e.g. papers by Gottlieb, see below; Gambier 2006, Delabastita 1989), in practice, however, even subtitling has seemed to be rather aligned to monomodality - a research paradigm granting centrality to language in communication at the expense of, and to the exclusion of extralinguistic channels of communication. This long-lasting line of reasoning has begun to reverse and is currently being phased out by multi-

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modality – a more recent enterprise (albeit noticed some time ago, it has not been in full sway so far) which offers a global, holistic and *plurisemiotic* perspective on communication, which, in simplest terms, allows for verbal along with nonverbal signals (Delabastita 1989; Gottlieb 1998; Taylor 2003, 2009; Ventola et al. 2004; Baldry and Thibault 2005; Gambier 2006; Chuang 2006, 2009; Pettit 2007; Perego 2009; Bączkowska and Kieś 2012). The present paper is an attempt to combine an originally semiotic theory applied to communication studies, i.e. multimodality (Kress 2010; Kress and van Leeuwen 1996; 2001; Baldry 2000), with one type of audiovisual translation, that of subtitling, with the aim of seeking justification for or finding arguments against the use of the technique widely employed in subtitling known as omission (Gottlieb 1992; Díaz Cintas and Remael 2007). In our analysis this technique is not only understood as a complete omission in the target text of a word or a sequence of words present in the source text, it is discussed in the context of other semiotic signals, in particular in relation to visual signals available on the screen. In other words, what we shall discuss is the problem of reiteration or omission of visual signals in the textual layer of subtitles or duplication or omission of original verbal signals in the subtitles relative to the availability of the visual signals.

2. Multimodality in audiovisual translation

Originally proposed for research focusing on social semiotics, Kress's theory of multimodal communication acknowledges and treats on an equal footing all types of semiotic signs (in his theory called semiotic modes or semiotic resources), which include visual, gestural, auditory and linguistic signals. Semiotic modes are said to be the *carriers of meaning*; they are the major elements of *information weight*, which has some *functional load* (Kress 2010: 60). They are co-present in meaning-making in the act of communication, as meaning resides in all modes, not just in language alone (Kress 2001: 111). They are thus read and interpreted conjointly in a meaning-making process.

Multimodality promotes a semiotic analysis, wherein the interplay and mutual dependencies among different semiotic modes are equally valid and pooled together to allow the emergence of a final coherent meaning. It is assumed that communication entails several channels entwined in the act of perception/conception working in parallel, and thus that interactants are attentive to linguistic as well as visual signals (e.g. gaze, spatial positioning, gesture, posture). It even goes as far as to postulate that one should not be talking about the traditional binary model of

analysis juxtaposing linguistic versus nonlinguistic signals, or linguistic versus extralinguistic ones (which highlight the central role of language), but rather about a *plurimodal* approach with linguistic signals as one of many elements, with the prevailing visual impact (visual versus extravisual signals). This approach is indicative of a shift in the centre of gravity originally placed on language to images (albeit language is still extremely important), and from a sign categorised as an autonomous entity to signs seen in the wider context of other signs (“co-orchestration in meaning emergence”). The approach that gives centrality to language as a unique mode of expression has thus been supplanted by a shift to visual signals.

In the act of film perception, a viewer is exposed to all modes of expression, and for this reason there is no need for all the modes to be considered in subtitle production. This means that a subtitler does not have to carry the whole burden and responsibility of rendering the source reality for the target audience, as if there were no visual-auditory data available, since watching a film is not the same as reading a book. While in the case of the latter, the reader must rely on words alone while re-creating the author’s intended elements of meanings (pictures, atmosphere, etc.), a moving image is impregnated with explicit meaning, it provides the viewer with ready ‘chunks of information’, a combination of words, sounds and pictures, and imposes the atmosphere by resorting directly to visual, auditory (background music, for example) and verbal (dialogue) elements of communication. By flashing the message directly on the screen pictorially and aurally, the viewer’s subjective contribution to the re-creation of the original director’s intention is severely limited; it is shaped by pictures and sound along with words. The only channel inaccessible for the viewer is the verbal one (the original soundtrack is in a foreign language); however, it is not autonomous and separated from the other signals but immersed in them. From this it transpires that the interpretation of all semiotic modes available in the original version falls on the shoulders of, first, the translator and next, the viewer. For multimodality, the role of message recipient is crucial and the active process of message re-creation, or representation by the addressee, is fundamental. Kress and van Leeuwen (2001: 20) define communication as “a process in which a semiotic product or event is both articulated or produced *and* interpreted or used”.

Supported to a great extent by visual-gestural-auditory signals, words are (should be?) rendered in a different way than they are in the case of literary work translation, where the presence of pictures is scarce and auditory signals are nonexistent. Consequently, a reader may only rely on words (and their imagination), which, however, are not fully ca-

pable of representing the realities meant by a book author. Since a film is treated as a polysemiotic product (Gottlieb 1998), i.e. one with many semiotic resources (which are not always equally distributed in a visual-auditory-linguistic configuration), a multimodal approach to subtitling should have a definite ameliorating effect on the quality of translation due to the availability of a rich resource of meaning potential encapsulated not just in words as carriers of senses, but also in extralinguistic modes; all signals have a power to depict with greater precision than otherwise fairly precarious guesses about what is being communicated through words. Given the extralinguistic approach to communication, a multimodal approach to language has the power to bridge or complement the verbal and nonverbal, and help overcome or compensate for cross-linguistic and cross-cultural incommensurability.

The topic of a multimodal approach to subtitles is gaining popularity and the theoretical assumptions originally fleshed out by Kress and his associates have already been successfully implemented by some scholars dealing with subtitles, who either make reference to Kress and his theory directly or draw upon research based on Kress without making direct reference to the source, yet offering instead a modified or adapted model. First and foremost, the model of analysis proposed by Taylor (2003) – a *multimodal transcription* of subtitles – which harks back to Thibault's (2000) and Baldry's (2000) studies on multimodal analysis originally used for advertisement and film analysis, deserves to be mentioned. A multimodal transcription is very detailed; it shows each frame separately in a table, where each screenshot is meticulously described in separate columns devoted to further data on visual signals and sounds, the position of the camera and the original soundtrack, together with the subtitles provided. The information is presented vertically, which allows one to notice with great precision where meaning emanates from the nonverbal signals, as well as how and at which moment it appears in the subtitle. Taylor's research instigated further attempts at the adaptation of the multimodal model of communication to film subtitling by demonstrating how the verbal and the visual may interact. For example, Perego (2009) examines the codification of visual and linguistic signals along the following lines: from paralinguage (comprising both nonverbal and vocal signals) to verbal language, from sounds to verbal language, and from images to verbal language. In her study, she does not follow the methodology of multimodal transcription, rather she focuses on how the nonverbal sources are transplanted on the translated text. Other studies following the multimodal approach to subtitles include, for example, Chuang (2006, 2009), Pettit (2007), Tortoriello (2011), and Bączkowska and Kieś (2012).

An important question that arises at this point is concerned with the *degree* of translators' reliance on extralinguistic signals during subtitle production. The prescribed reduction of the original text, typically by 30-40% (Pisarska and Tomasziewicz 1996: 207), or even 50% (Gottlieb 2001: 20)², is widely acknowledged and it stems from technical restrictions imposed on subtitle production. The question which remains unresolved then is not so much whether to use reduction strategies in subtitles, but what *criteria* to choose while deciding *what*, if anything, to omit in the target text. In such a short paper we are not able to answer these complex questions, rather we would like to present some glimpses of possible translations and potential problems arising from a translation founded on a multimodal approach to communication.

3. Omission and reinforcement

As stated in the introductory part of this paper, our aim is to observe how subtitlers deal with the translation of text combined with visual signals. The interplay between the verbal and the visual may be effectuated either by relying on visual signals to affirm the original verbal information, and in consequence omitting some words in the translated text (omission), or neglecting them, which entails repeating the original words in the target text regardless of the fact that they are illustrated by on-screen extralinguistic signals (reinforcement). Before we embark on the analysis, a few words are in order connected to the process of omission seen from the perspective of subtitling strategies and a polysemiotic (multimodal) text.

In simplest terms, reinforcement (to use our terminology) may be subsumed by what Marleau (1982) called 'redundancy'. According to Marleau, *fonction de redondance* occurs whenever the verbal text and the image communicate the same information. A special case is distinguished by Marleau, dubbed 'anchoring' (*fonction d'ancrage*), to describe a context wherein the word specifies the otherwise polysemous image.

We are more inclined to use the term reinforcement rather than redundancy due to the fact that while to be redundant is implicative of being unnecessary and pejorative, reinforcement triggers positive associations and entrenches the idea of a conscious and purposeful activity with

² Pedersen (2007) quotes research by Nordang (1989) who states that in Sweden in the eighties, the original text in subtitled films tended to be highly condensed, amounting to as much as 70% relative to the original soundtrack.

some specific objective in mind. This is exactly what we wish to stress: reinforcement is believed to play an important pragmatic role by contributing to achieving some special effects (irony, humour, etc., see Bączkowska and Kieś 2012) or to obtain markedness in an utterance.

In the wake of Marleau's functions of subtitles, subsequent years saw other typologies concerning the visual-verbal interplay. For example, Tomaszewicz (1993) has put forward the term 'replacement' (translation from French into English by Pettit 2009) while discussing the translation of cultural reference. In line with this strategy, whenever an on-screen visual signal is available, it may be transferred through deictics. Bogucki (2004) talks about the procedure of 'referencing' in connection with the substitution of nominals with pronouns (e.g. *King>He*) when the person being referred to is visible on the screen, and in addition to this he mentions 'name deletion' as a procedure employed to avoid repetition of proper names denoting people visible on the screen in a particular scene. Replacement and referencing are not genuine examples of omission, rather they are implicative of some degree of cross-modal reduction. By reduction we mean the need to suppress the verbal information present in the original text so that the target text is depleted. It is not a far cry from the notion of reduction to omission, and they are not always treated as two separate notions. In fact, most scholars in AVT refer to omission regardless whether they are talking about complete omission of a source fragment (deleting a sentence, utterance, larger fragment) or a partial omission (deleting single words or phrases and thus employing condensation or achieving decimation).

Justification of omission is sought by Taylor (2004) in a multimodal approach to subtitling when he says that

If the meaning, or a part of the meaning, of a section of multimodal film text is carried by semiotic modalities other than the verbal (visual clues, gesture, facial expression, dramatic music, surreal lighting effects, etc.), then a paring down of the verbal component can be justified, facilitating the various processes of condensation, decimation and deletion (...). (Taylor 2004: 161)

Omission thus seems to be a strategy *a fortiori* inscribed not only in subtitling (recall that there is original text reduction by over 30% due to time and space constraints inherent in films) but also in a multimodal approach to subtitles, as voiced by Taylor. Naturally enough, in addition to spatio-temporal constraints and visual-aural channel availability, other factors also contribute to text reduction, such as the viewer's general

knowledge about the world and about the structure of conversations (hence frequent deletion of greetings), phatic expressions, etc. (Pisarska and Tomaszewicz 1996: 206-207).

All these conditions considered, it seems recommendable to resort to omission whenever possible in film translation, yet a subtitler should not be completely led into temptation by these attractive, general, common sense rules, as there are contexts, as already mentioned, where reinforcement is a more welcome technique. In the suggested contexts, non-verbal signals, and in particular visual signals, are not given salience. Meaning construal does not seem to rely upon the simple binary distinction of omission whenever the visual signal which encodes a word is on-screen or the translation of a word is in a subtitle when it is not represented visually. The gist of the matter resides in what is given prominence and what is put to the fore in a scene by the director. Imagine a scene wherein a couple are at their wedding ceremony and the priest talks about a wedding ring being the token of their wedlock. In such circumstances, even if the wedding ring is visually accessible, which is highly probable, and the lexeme is uttered by an actor, it still seems expected to read about it in the subtitle. It is due to the prominence given to the ring which makes it likely to be reiterated and noticeable both visually and verbally (in subtitles).

Putting these special cases aside, name deletion and omission boil down to the process of deleting lexical items which appear to be superfluous in a given context. The decision whether to leave a word/phrase out due to its visual availability or whether to repeat a message encoded by a visual signal in the subtitled text seems to be a question of choosing between the canonical degrees of omission offered by Gottlieb (1992) in his well known strategies of ‘condensation’, ‘decimation’ or ‘deletion’. These three options operate on the verbal plane only and permit either partial omission of the original soundtrack targeted at (1) ‘catch-all’ phrases carrying little or no semantic content (e.g. *really*, *actually*) and thus being largely a question of stylistic value (condensation; claimed to be the prototypical subtitling strategy), or (2) targeted at important semantic content and, consequently having an unwarranted devastating effect on the target text due to partial omission (decimation). Alternatively, full omission is permitted, i.e. leaving out some utterance altogether, omitting verbal content that is “fast speech of less importance” (deletion) (Gottlieb 1992: 166). Interestingly, Gottlieb also allows ‘resignation’, which occurs in the case of “distorted content” with “untranslatable elements” (ibid.). This strategy is not illustrated by the samples presented in our analysis below. In line with Gottlieb’s taxonomy, omission may be of

varying degree and may be incarnated through condensation, decimation, deletion or resignation.

Omission has been meticulously investigated by Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007), who focus on condensation and complete omission at word, clause and sentence level, enlisting a number of their subtypes. In their interesting work they present contexts wherein verbal omission is warranted and even prescribed, and they stress contexts where it is recommended not only due to stylistic, semantic or syntactic preferences but also due to technical constraints typically imposed on subtitling (time of exposure to subtitles, moving images and screen size).

For Pedersen (2007: 165, 234), who studies what he calls 'extralinguistic cultural references' (ECRs) in subtitles, omission is a single term with no subcategories, i.e. it is a complete deletion. It exemplifies a strategy which is neither source- nor target-text oriented transfer, and it is often the only means in subtitling, which is notorious for rapid dialogues. Interestingly, it may be combined with other strategies; for example, in the Swedish translation of *Omaha and Utah beaches*, which was *Omaha och Utah*, both omission (of *beaches*) and retention (of the location being the beaches rather than the geographical locations from which the names derive) were used.

Taken together, omission may stem from several factors which condition this strategy. They may be marshalled on a cline with stylistic versus semantic values at its extremes (Gottlieb's condensation versus decimation; some techniques by Díaz Cintas and Remael), or they may focus on the degree of omission, with condensation being the least intrusive procedure of the subtitler, decimation standing midway, and resignation as well as Pedersen's omission being pitched at the other extreme of the cline.

Contrary to these strategies, omission and reinforcement proposed by us operate across modes (and are thus cross-modal) and are effectuated between words and non-words rather than between the source verbal text and the target verbal text. Thus, omission is *not* only about deleting superfluous lexical items. Our understanding of the terms is closer to seeing omission as deleting words relative to the moving image or sound (cross-modal; multi-modal; intersemiotic or diasemiotic; aforementioned strategies proposed by Tomaszkiwicz, Bogucki, Taylor), rather than as deleting some lexical items relative to the source text.

Despite the fundamental and highly influential subtitling strategies which draw chiefly on the verbal plane, Gottlieb frequently stresses the polisemiotic nature of subtitling. Screen translation is "more than just words" (2005); a film made on the basis of a novel may use one fourth of

the original words, other words and their semantic meanings being delegated to other semiotic modes:

What is expressed monosemiotically in a novel, solely through writing, occupies four channels in a film: dialogue, music & effects, picture, and – for a smaller part – writing (displays and captions, plus in a few original films, even subtitles). A screen adaptation of a 100,000 word novel may keep only 20,000 words for the dialogue, leaving the semantic load of the remaining 80,000 words to the non-verbal semiotic channels – or to deletion. (Gottlieb 2001: 3)

4. Analysis

Two scenes have been selected for the analysis from the feature film “What Women Want” (2000, directed by Nancy Meyers, starring Mel Gibson and Helen Hunt). The film subtitles have been chosen from a corpus of subtitles which is currently being created by a group of scholars associated with an international project on a multimodal approach to subtitles³. The corpus consists of a few of feature films (mainly comedies) with subtitles in several European languages (largely Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Polish, and Swedish). The scenes examined below incorporate some interplay occurring between the verbal and nonverbal resources, and for this reason we have decided to use them in the present analysis for illustrative purposes. To observe the interplay between the visual and verbal signals, the scenes will be examined along with their five renderings in Polish, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese and Swedish; for clarity reasons they will be entitled “Blue Eyes” and “Inspiration”. Also for clarity, the subtitles will be back-translated into English (marked in the tables as *BT*). The intention of this brief and preliminary study is to give some indication as to how omission and reinforcement may be effectuated given a multimodal context of a film across languages. The results of our study are by no means meant to be conclusive or prescriptive, rather some tentative observations in line with the previous theoretical discussion will be offered, and thus it remains both descriptive and

³ The Polish and Italian translations were conducted by Anna Bączkowska; the Italian translation involved consultation with Raffaella Panizzon (University of Padua, Italy). The Spanish subtitles have been discussed by Pamela Stoll Dougall, and the Swedish subtitles have been analysed by Marek Kieś. Isabel Fernandes da Silva (Autonomous University of Lisbon) was consulted for the Portuguese translations. The authors are grateful for all the comments expressed by our consultants. Some of these scholars are involved in an international project devoted to a multimodal approach to subtitles (www.multimodality-lab.net).



nonjudgmental, with some suggestions being made that have emerged out of this brief cross-linguistic contrastive study.

4.1. Blue Eyes

The scene takes place in a shopping centre, where the main hero (Nick) is situated in the middle of a mall, surrounded by women passing by who are talking and thinking (Nick can hear what women think) or buying cosmetics. An elegant middle-aged woman compliments Nick on his eyes by saying “Hi, blue eyes”. Metonymic relations present in the original version and its Polish translation “Cześć niebieskooki” (“Hi, blue-eyed (man)”) establish a similarity link between the hero’s blue eyes exposed on the screen and the whole person who possesses the attribute. The subtitler makes a direct reference to the accessible visual signals: the camera has approached the man and the director shows the hero down to his shoulders; thus the head and the eyes become the central points in the scene and catch the viewer’s attention. The text in Polish not only reflects the original soundtrack, but also duplicates visual signals, the notion of *blue eyes*⁴ thus being made available twice – through both the visual and verbal channels. The translated version gives additional stress to the attribute of *blue eyes* exposed by the director (see Table 1.).

⁴ Italics are used throughout the text to indicate concepts, while double inverted commas stand for words (as graphic symbols encoding concepts) and straight characters for entities.

Table 1. *Blue Eyes*

1	BLUE EYES	0:44:17
	WOMAN: Hi, blue eyes !	Swedish: WOMAN: He, snygging. <i>BT: Hi, hunk.</i>
	Polish: WOMAN: Cześć niebieskooki. <i>BT: Hi, blue-eyed (man).</i>	Italian: WOMAN: Che figo! <i>BT: What a handsome (man)!</i>
	Spanish: WOMAN: Hola, ojitos azules. <i>BT: Hi little blue eyes.</i>	Portuguese: WOMAN: Olá, Olho Azul. <i>BT: Hi, blue eye.</i>
	 Picture 1	 Picture 2

The Italian version drifts away from the original text as the idea of *eyes* is replaced by “figo”. Thus, *blue eyes*, triggering somewhat romantic associations, are taken over by a cruder “figo”, invoking more emotional associations, possibly even tinged with eroticism. This verbal expression coincides with the head movement of the speaker: the woman lowers her chin and looks up, smiling flirtatiously and keeping eye contact while walking. Emotions present in the scene are emphasised by the exclamation mark present in the Italian version (which is also present in the original subtitle that accompanies the film). In this same vein, the Swedish translator resorts to a different lexicalization of admiration expressed by the woman passing Nick and, instead of making reference to his eyes as standing for the whole person metonymically, a different word, a more neutral one, is used to refer to the whole person (“handsome man”/“hunk”). In Portuguese, the translation is close to the Polish version, with the difference that capital letters are used, giving the words the status of proper names. It can be expected that a man addressed in this way should definitely feel noticed, appreciated and flattered. On the other hand, the Spanish translator has additionally attached the diminutive morpheme “ito” to the noun “ojo”, to mean “little eye”, and thus capture and make linguistically explicit the affective meaning conveyed visually in the scene, the seductive glance the middle-aged woman casts at Nick.

All versions convey the notion of complimenting, although the English, Polish, Spanish and Portuguese texts focus on personal attributes of the addressee, while the Italian and Swedish subtitles resort to more common, impersonal, generic and less individualised features. This generalisation, or de-personification, willy-nilly attenuates the pragmatic force of the compliment in the Italian and Swedish renditions. While the Polish interpretation duplicates signals, the Swedish treats visual signals (exposed blue eyes) as a complementation of the verbal signals. The Spanish translator's strategy has been not only to duplicate the visual meaning in the text, as in the original script, but to supplement it by making linguistically manifest other non-verbal meanings from the context. From the point of view of multimodal translation, in this case the Spanish translator has relied less than his/her other colleagues on the multiple sources of communicative meaning available to the viewer of the film.

Given the purpose of this speech act, which is expressing a compliment, it seems that (1) the mentioning of "blue eyes" makes the compliment more sophisticated, original and honest, and thus the illocutionary force of the compliment seems to be strengthened by the speaker, and (2) the duplication of the same signal (visually and verbally expressed concept of *blue eyes*) is to the advantage of the situation. Regardless of the techniques of translation the subtitlers resort to in this scene, they all preserve the same type of compliment as in the original English version, (i.e. explicit compliment).



As for the key concept pursued in this paper, namely that of omission, it is present in the Swedish and Italian subtitles, wherein the notion of "blue eyes" is substituted with rough equivalents of "handsome". Thus, the visual signal exposed on the screen (blue eyes) completes the textual layer of the subtitle, which in fact adds extra information. In the Swedish and Italian versions, the viewer is provided with two messages regarding the man: he has blue eyes (visual signal) and he is handsome (verbal signal). The key information is thus reinforced. Now, in Polish, Spanish and Portuguese, the viewer learns verbally only that the man has blue eyes, but at the same time the viewer can see the man on the screen and so evaluation of the hero as a handsome man is not impossible; in fact it is highly probable. From this analysis it transpires that whichever translation one decides upon, the effect should be the same. However, firstly, in our opinion it is much easier to notice that the man is handsome than to notice his blue eyes, as the silhouette of his head and shoulders is simply bigger and more visible than his eyes. Secondly, as discussed above, noticing the colour of somebody's eyes seems to be a more personified and refined observation, and thus it functions as a more sophisticated and original compliment than a clichéd "handsome". Taken togeth-

er, omission is not a prescribed translation technique in this scene, which makes the Polish, Spanish and Portuguese versions most appealing. Reinforcing a pictorial message by verbal coding fulfils a complementary role which entails stronger illocutionary force.

4.2. Inspiration

In a local coffee shop, the main hero tries to encourage his friend (Lola) to go out with him in the evening. This conversation lasts long enough to allow a queue to be formed, with a young, inexperienced-looking man standing right behind Nick and overhearing (P1) his conversation. The young man is stunned with Nick's dating skills, and he expresses this verbally when Nick is just about to leave the shop (P2). The main hero looks down on the boy (not only idiomatically speaking), his behaviour (manner, posture and facial expression) being indicative of his higher status, older age, greater experience with women, stronger assertiveness and a more laid-back attitude to life. The director contrasts this with the naïve-looking boy, a neat but stiff garment style, unrefined haircut (girlish locks exposed) and manifested symptoms of insecurity. This asymmetry is emphasised by the form of address used in the English version: the boy uses a very polite word, "Sir", which encodes respect, and in this scene also encodes the notion of admiration. The Polish translator rightly resorts to "Proszę pana", and the Italian to "Signore". Strangely enough, the Swedish, Spanish and Portuguese translations are deprived of this element. While it can be agreed that visual-gestural signals compensate for this loss, the question as to whether it is better to refer the viewers to these extralinguistic signals to be coupled with the subtitle on their own, or to provide them with an explicit suggestion of how to interpret the scene by using an equivalent of the English "Sir", remains open and unresolved for the moment. We are more likely, however, to subscribe to the explicit multimodal translation, which stresses the imbalance in the distribution of power in this scene. It is important to realize that whichever option one adheres to, in our opinion we are still dealing with multimodal translation, either in terms of the complementary relationship of signals or as one amplifying pragmatic effects in a scene (see Table 2). We believe that a multimodal approach to subtitles does not necessarily entail omission, rather it is about a conscious and judicious process of choices made by a subtitler of what is non/salient in a particular scene, and thus what deserves concealment or reinforcement.

Table 2. *Inspiration*

2	INSPIRATION		00:07:22
	YOUNG MAN: Sir, that was inspiring. NICK: I know.	Swedish: YOUNG MAN: Det var inspirerande. NICK: Jag vet. BT: YOUNG MAN: <i>That was inspiring.</i> NICK: <i>I know.</i>	
	Polish: YOUNG MAN: Proszę pana. To było inspirujące. NICK: Wiem. BT: YOUNG MAN: <i>Sir. This was inspiring.</i> NICK: (I) <i>know.</i>	Italian: YOUNG MAN: Signore, senta, lei è un mito ! NICK: Lo so. BT: YOUNG MAN: <i>Sir, listen, you are a myth !</i> NICK: (I) <i>know it.</i>	
	Spanish: YOUNG MAN: Muy inspirador. NICK: Lo sé. BT: YOUNG MAN: <i>Very inspiring.</i> NICK: (I) <i>know it.</i>	Portuguese: YOUNG MAN: Isso foi inspirador. NICK: Pois foi. BT: YOUNG MAN: <i>That was inspiring.</i> NICK: <i>I agree.</i>	
 <p data-bbox="367 1025 467 1049">Picture 1</p>	 <p data-bbox="838 1025 938 1049">Picture 2</p>		

An implicit compliment uttered by the young man in this scene in the original soundtrack remains implicit in all renditions. In Italian, the translator is more straightforward, shifting the “I” perspective (“that was inspiring” for *me*) into the “You” perspective (“*you* are a myth”), yet at the same time making reference to another entity (“myth”), thus preserving some degree of implicitness. In Portuguese, the translator resorts to the original text in a similar way to the Swedish rendition. The Spanish version, “Muy inspirador” (“Very inspiring”), omits the rendering of “Sir” and tones down the compliment to a mere noun phrase. Such a weakened compliment may very well be the appropriate manner to carry out a compliment in such a specific situation if it were to occur in a (peninsular) Spanish context. The Spanish translator has avoided a literal transposition and brought into play peninsular Spanish conventions of language use, the knowledge of which s/he relies on the viewers to possess. Importantly, in the flanking scenes there is an attempt at compensating for this omission (the scene is very short and actually finishes with the words cited in Table 2). Although “Sir” was not rendered, the

text reinforces the notion of admiration sensed in the original soundtrack by resorting to the addition of “muy” (“very”). We can here see multimodal translation in operation. Similarly, in Swedish and Portuguese the equivalents of the English “Sir” would also be rather untypical and against the linguistic convention. This case stresses how important it is to consider omission not only in terms of translation strategies and multimodality, but also in terms of linguistic conventions and culture-specificity.

The realization of omission in the scene’s translations is connected to a form of address. The Swedish, Spanish and Portuguese versions lack “Sir”, which seems to weaken the pragmatic effect of the speech act. If it were not for linguistic conventions applicable to forms of address in peninsular Spanish, Swedish and Portuguese, in our opinion omission would not have been recommended here, as by duplicating visual effects (the nervousness and submissiveness of the young man and his admiration of the hero) with the translation of the word “Sir”, the young man’s attitude towards Nick is emphasised.

5. Concluding remarks

The process of writing subtitles is a challenge for a translator because it requires a great deal of brevity effectuated largely through varying reduction strategies due to technical restrictions (spatial and temporal) typical of screen translation. While a translator is obliged to omit large portions of the original text, the criteria governing whether and what to omit rather than reduce or leave in its original form still remain relatively nebulous. In addition to the technical restrictions and haziness of criteria for omission, recent growth in the popularity of the multimodal approach elaborated in the theoretical part of this paper, which focuses on the moving image and on the textual layer equally, generally speaking encourages reductions and omissions even more than was customary in the past. This is so because by relying heavily on the availability of a number of semiotic modes which are capable of compensating for missing textual messages (e.g. visual or auditory signals), the viewer is expected to process all semiotic modes in parallel. The question posed in the paper concerning whether and what to omit certainly cannot find full support by resorting solely to the analysis of the two selected scenes presented in this short paper for illustrative purposes, but some observations and tentative concluding remarks can be formed on the basis of our theoretical discussion, which, surprisingly, in some cases may speak against omission. This, however, should not lead us to think that the theory of

multimodality, as proposed by Kress (2010), is at loggerheads with a polisemiotic approach to subtitles, as proposed by Gottlieb (1998) and elaborated by, say, Taylor (2004); far from it. These two models of analysis may seamlessly coexist due to a considerable overlap on the theoretical level discernible in both solutions. In the translations analysed in this paper, most subtitles repeat verbally the visual signals a viewer is exposed to. In such contexts, reiteration of the visual signals in the verbal stratum is proposed as a recommended strategy, since it is believed to expose salient elements of the scenes, and stress special rhetoric effects and the pragmatic force of the speech acts under investigation. What counts in decision making concerning word omission or meaning reinforcement is scene construal and the most salient signal in the aggregate of all types of semiotic modes; one which plays the leading role in the orchestration of meaning. Our tentative observations certainly should not be understood as implicative of the use of solely reinforcement strategy (redundancy or duplication of same types of semiotic sources) in lieu of the otherwise warranted in subtitling omission strategy. It has been our intention to stress that although a multimodal approach to subtitles is rightly associated chiefly with text omission due to the availability of the visual signals, a reverse strategy conveying the same information twice (through the verbal and visual channel) might not be unprofitable as it can contribute towards achieving marked utterances.

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ABSTRACT

Key words: subtitles, multimodality, translation strategies

For decades, translation has been dominated by a monomodal approach to communication, largely interested in the verbal channel of communication. This long-lasting line of reasoning has begun to reverse and is currently being phased out by multimodality – a more recent enterprise, which offers a global, holistic and *plurisemiotic* perspective on communication, which, in simplest terms, allows for verbal along with nonverbal signals. The present paper is an attempt to combine an originally semiotic theory applied to communication studies, i.e. multimodality (Kress 2010), with one type of audiovisual translation, that of subtitling, with the aim of seeking justification for or finding arguments against the use of the technique widely employed in subtitling known as omission. In our analysis this technique is not only understood as a com-

plete omission in the target text of a word or a sequence of words present in the source text, it is discussed in the context of other semiotic signals, in particular in relation to visual signals available on the screen. The question posed in the paper concerning whether and what to omit in subtitles is illustrated by a sample analysis of selected scenes excerpted from a romantic comedy “What Women Want”. The analysis has shown that while a translator is obliged to omit large portions of the original text in subtitles, the criteria governing whether and what to omit rather than reduce or leave in its original form still remain unclear. Whilst recent growth in the popularity of the multimodal approach, which focuses on the moving image and on the textual layer equally, generally speaking encourages reductions and omissions even more than was customary in the past, in some cases omission is not recommended, in particular when special pragmatic effects play a crucial role in a scene.