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The semiotic cohesion of audiovisual texts. Types of intersemiotic explicitations in the English subtitles of Japanese full-length films

ABSTRACT

The semiotic cohesion of audiovisual texts. Types of intersemiotic explicitations in the English subtitles of Japanese full-length films

This study intends to address the following questions from the perspective of audiovisual translation studies: how can extraverbal elements of multimodal texts be represented within subtitling? What strategies can be implemented to facilitate the interlinguistic mediation of feature films subtitled into English from non-European languages without significant phenomena of anchoring and redundancy?

Keywords: audiovisual translation, intersemiotic specification, semiotic cohesion, Japanese-Italian interlinguistic subtitling, source text and target text intercultural relation.

1. Semiotic cohesion in interlinguistic subtitles

The indissoluble relation between word and sound/image which, according to Marleau (1982), can be found in the *anchoring* (soundtrack backed up by the audiovisual message, *fonction d'ancrage*) and *redundancy* phenomena (soundtrack and audiovisual input conveying the same message, *fonction de redondance*) forces interlinguistic subtitlers to cope with the so-called *semiotic cohesion* of the translation (Díaz Cintas et al. 2007, Gottlieb 1992 and 1994, Perego 2005, Perego et al. 2012, Petillo 2008) resulting from the competition among verbal, para-verbal and kinesic elements in the text. Within the *translation studies*, many scholars have already pointed out the necessity to analyse the above-mentioned

multimodal issues, considering the increasing spread of interlinguistic audiovisual translations in our contemporary society. To this end, Taylor stresses that:

Multimodality and multimodal texts have been described in the literature as, respectively, the «use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event» [...] or «texts which combine and integrate the meaning-making resources of more than one semiotic modality – for example, language, gesture, movement, visual images, sound and so on – in order to produce a text-specific meaning» [...] in the modern world, archetypal multimodal texts such as films, television programmes and websites, have greatly broadened the scope of such studies. The concept of multimodality cuts across every discipline, and as every discipline can be subject to translation from one language to another, its importance in Translation Studies is now recognised. (ibidem 2016: 223).

In particular, coherence and cohesion are fundamental for the comprehension of multimodal texts (Burczynska 2012): according to Taylor (2016), films are deemed *coherent* if the semantic contents present at the oral and iconic level, (as well as oral dialogues), contribute to a clear understanding of the internal narration; conversely, *cohesion* requires a careful analysis of all the semiotic components without an exclusive focus on the connections of written dialogues. In fact, various elements are involved, such as gestures, body movements, and facial expressions, which often reflect the feelings of the narration. While on the one hand they are helped by the oral language in the *source* language, on the other hand they sometimes complete the final subtitles in the *target* language. In this context, the excitement and feelings aroused by the multimodal text must preserve their key role for the purposes of translation. As suggested by Gambier (2013), once the functions of the verbal framework present in the audiovisual flow and the connection between what is said and what is shown are grasped by the translator, then it is possible to identify the strategies to be implemented (ibidem 2013: 8). Actually, unlike the conventional references to cohesion (Halliday et al. 1976) which focus at a textual level on deictic forms such as anaphoric and cataphoric expressions, lexical strategies like repetition, the use of specific tenses, and conjunctions – within the audiovisual field, the semiotic cohesion must consider the acoustic-iconic channel from which information – not always verbally explicit – can be extrapolated: this happens when narration relies on kinesic and proxemic aspects, such as body movements, postures, eye contact and facial expressions¹ (Vitucci 2016a: 49) or, as will be discussed below, on iconic trans-, micro and/or monocultural references (Ranzato 2011: 47). To this end, Taniya Gupta stresses as follows:

1] Within the extra- and paraverbal context, Taylor (2016) mentions other kinds of iconic-acoustic signs to be considered in addition to the ones listed above, including: written language on the screen, images, pitch and volume of the spoken parts, music, lights, perspectives and direction techniques such as *flash back* and *fade-out*.

Translators, by the very nature of their work, deal principally with the verbal text, and do not work with either visual or acoustic cultural references, unless they are mentioned in the linguistic code. Nevertheless, these cultural references provide often a deeper understanding of the film plot, narrative and socio-cultural setting and they affect the strategies employed in the translation of the verbal text (ibidem 2015: 72).

Since audiovisual text is a polysemiotic 'fabric' consisting of different sign systems (Delabastita 1989, Chaume Varela 2004, Gambier 2003, Gottlieb 1992 and 1994), the combination of these signs will result in the final meaning of the translation. Actually, since language is one of the most easily manipulable sign systems in subtitled texts, interlinguistic metatexts arising from translation must include also non-verbal components in order to remain equivalent to the source text by negotiating its meaning and displaying, at the same time, its interpretative potentials (Eco 2003). Even though the translation of the above-mentioned elements does not grant the *authoriality* of the new metatext with respect to the subtitler, the latter has the delicate task of adding or eliminating some crucial meaning aspects based on the (preliminary) knowledge of the *source* culture by the *target* reference spectators. As stressed Taylor in this regard:

Text analysis should be a prelude to any serious translation task, and in the case of multimodal texts, such analysis should move away from exclusive reference to words, clauses and sentences and recognize other well-established meaning-make units, forming part of what is now referred to as film language and cinematic language [...] it is the integration of all 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 that integration of semiotic forces (ibidem 2016: 224).

This quotation shows that the subtitler must make decisions relating to the translation with the purpose of ensuring a correct and full interpretation of the semiotic event (*the whole semiotic event*, as defined by Taylor) in the titles expressed in the *target* language. Obviously, these decisions must combine the translator's knowledge of the *source* language-culture with the awareness of the limits of the *target* recipients of the text. From the point of view of translation, as already stressed in previous studies (Tortoriello 2011, Chaume Varela 2004), interlinguistic subtitles has often given up the restitution of extraverbal elements through omission² or, only at best, written explicitations³. In the first case, in

2| Elimination of the subtitle in favour of a mere iconic exposure.

3| Explicitation aiming at the written disambiguation of the meaning expressed at iconic level. Among the various taxonomies, it is worth consulting those suggested by Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007), Perego (2004), Aixelá (1996). Kinga Klauzy (1993a, 1993b, 1995, 1996, 2001) identifies four explicitation categories: 1. Mandatory explicitations due

particular, the literature (Díaz Cintas et al. 2007, Gottlieb 1992 and 1994, Marleau 1982, Perego 2009 and 2004, Kovačič 1994) has often highlighted the fact that the physiological losses in subtitles were mainly due to the underlying insoluble space-time constraints. Nevertheless, it is important to stress that the utmost concision of subtitles cannot be always regarded as a synonymous for a high-quality translation (Díaz Cintas 2014), especially when the iconic fabric of the text makes the cultural intermediation even more difficult (Katan 1999), thus forcing subtitlers to opt for countervailing strategies based on additions. In fact, as suggested by Tortoriello:

In audiovisual translation in general and subtitling in particular, given the time and space constraints, the existing literature has often concentrated on reduction strategies such as condensation or elimination. [...] however, [...] it is my belief that the subtitler does not, or should not, always aim at achieving the shortest translation, but, rather, the one that ensures cohesion between all codes at play, the verbal and the non-verbal (ibidem 2011: 63).

In this passage the author refers to the relation between the soundtrack (the dialogues of full-length films) and the iconic and paraverbal channel, however this assumption can be applied also to the questions raised by this paper: How are extra-verbal elements included in subtitles? But, above all, what translational strategies can be implemented to facilitate mediation when films from non-European areas must be subtitled in English without relevant anchoring and redundancy phenomena? In particular, as for the Japanese culture, whose language is understood only by a small percentage of the *target* audiences (Vitucci 2016a), the above-mentioned cohesion issues are specifically important when the aim of the intermediation corresponds to a high quality standard (a synonym for *responsibility*) which includes the use of subtitles as a truly intersemiotic translation mode (Díaz Cintas 2014).

2. Audiovisual texts and cultural gaps

As suggested by Gupta (2015), subtitlers must be able to ensure the intercultural transmission of the so-called *cultural bumps*, not only granting the fluidity of the written metatext, but also offering the spectators an enjoyable viewing/reading experience:

Taking them into consideration (⇒ cultural bumps) while translating would definitely add flavour to the text, and make the experience more enjoyable and comprehensible

to language asymmetry between pairs (as a result of grammatical and morpho-syntactic differences); 2. Optional explicitations due to differences in the use of the language; 3. Pragmatic or cultural explicitations required by cultural differences; 4. Translation explicitations relating to the intrinsic translation process.

for the audience; what we understand better, we enjoy all the more. But there may be certain instances, where these cultural bumps may become actual culture pitfalls, and actually hamper the receivers' comprehension of the target text (ibidem 2015: 84).

As highlighted by the assumptions above, audiovisual texts – like other textual types – seem to be rooted in their own culture of origin, which requires subtitlers to have the ability to manage symbols (Kramsch 1993, Katan 1999, Suzuki 1973 and 1990), thus ensuring their transfer to a metacontext where the recipients may not necessarily share the same codes and socio-cultural background (Ranzato 2011, Burczynska 2012.) Belonging to a certain culture which allows the reference audience to decode their polysemic aspects (Pym 2010), audiovisual texts show not only specific verbal features, but also relevant iconic components such as historical settings, geographic locations, objectemic, vestemic and kinesic codes as well as non-verbal communication signs and cinematographic conventions through which the concept of belonging can be connected to the network of relations that it establishes in its production context. It is no coincidence that subtitlers must identify these relations before facing the issues regarding the culture specificity of the text and its transfer to another socio-cultural context, building their translation on a detailed systemic analysis of the text (Cavagnoli 2012), on the needs of any intermediary (customers and distributors) as well as of the end-users (target audience). As pointed out by Ranzato:

The degree of the knowledge shared by author and the audience can be considered ideal in spite of some individual variations. This privileged relation between the author and the audience allows the latter to interpret some of all of the signs present in the context. Translators then have the task to loosen the so-called “bonds of belonging”, i.e. the belonging of a text to its culture of origin, and to find suitable solutions to root in the target culture. (ibidem 2011: 37).

Although films often provide *transcultural inputs*⁴, i.e. elements able to cross the boundaries of a specific geographic area to reach other socio-cultural spheres, thus losing their cultural specificity, Pedersen (2005, 2011) highlights how, in most cases, the translated audiovisual texts must cope with *mono- and micro-cultural*⁵ elements, which are neglected by the majority of the target spectators; sometimes these elements are so culture-specific that they are recognised by only a small percentage of the audience of the source culture. This applies, for example, to extraverbal iconic inputs, which often deal with the so-called “centrality of the reference” (Ranzato 2011), namely with those elements so strongly marked at the macrotextual level that cannot be omitted within the interlinguistic translation

4| In his studies Pedersen (2005) introduces the concept of intratextuality divided into “internal” and “external”.

5| Defined *translation crisis points* by Pedersen (2011).

mediation. Figure 1 shows an iconic example referred to in monocultural elements belonging to the Japanese folklore.



Figure 1: «Centrality of reference» due to Japanese folkloristic elements⁶.

The frame has been taken from a Japanese full-length film entitled *Ima ai ni yukimasu* and shows a child hanging a *teru teru bōzu* doll on the porch, which is a traditional Japanese item supposed to bring good weather. However, although it should be hung with its head upwards to interact with gods according to the tradition, it is said that this is strictly hanging to be able to intercede and bring good weather, a cultural explication (Perego 2004) in English through an *addition* to explain this folkloristic element is absolutely necessary, since the whole narration revolves around the role of the Japanese seasons, (in particular, the rainy season), and their impact of the relationships between the characters: in particular, the child hangs the doll with its head downwards to bring rain instead of good weather. The soundtrack does not report this cultural reference in the dialogues, therefore a central supertitle in English (*pop-up*) may help solve the iconic enigma thus providing the spectator with a cultural explanation. As evidenced by the example above, any expansion (Gottlieb 1992, 1994) may be fruitful when the translation aims at a 'high translatability' standard (Osimo 2010, 2011) intended for an easy access to the source text by the target spectators and their intercultural. As explained by Perego:

6| E.P.: Honma Hideyuki, Director: Doi Nobuhiro, 2004, Copyright © TOHO CO., LTD. All Rights Reserved.

Despite the need for brevity required by the subtitling process, there are in fact some cases when the subtitler has to expand the source text in order to better depict film reality and to be able to mediate non-converging world-views giving the audience enough encyclopaedic knowledge about the setting of the film to let them understand and appreciate what is really going on. (ibidem 2004: 147).

Precisely with the purpose of leading the audience through audiovisual texts, this study focuses not only on the cultural explicitation provided by the iconic presence of products, rites and customs typical of local cultures not mentioned in the soundtrack, but also on those cases when the soundtrack deliberately gives spectators the freedom to infer the meaning of expressions through the investigation of the iconic fabric of the full-length film. Further on we will analyse the possible cases of semiotic cohesion in English subtitles of some Japanese full-length films as well as the strategies to be implemented in the interlinguistic step.

3. The intersemiotic explicitation

Perego (2009) points out that the semantic load of the para- and extraverbal signs accompanying the soundtracks of full-length films often play a key role with respect to same verbal channel. In the above-mentioned cases, before starting the translation, subtitlers must analyse the following elements: the transfer of paraverbal elements to the subtitled translation, the diamesic shift from multimodal dimension to writing and the transfer of iconic-acoustic information to the subtitle (ibidem 2009: 59). Audiovisual translation studies often refer to the transfer of the above-mentioned multisemiotic system in the subtitles as “*intersemiotic explicitation*”.

Explicitation is a linguistic phenomenon whereby a source text’s covert, implicit, un-said and implied information is expressed overtly and verbally in the translated text, without altering the source message, but making it clearer and more informative, more complete and unambiguous, [...] enriching, developing and reconstructing it for the sake of the target viewer. (ibidem 2009: 59).

As for interlinguistic subtitles, the intersemiotic explicitation has three main aspects: *addition*, in case of language insertions inside the subtitles which are not present in the source text (Figure 1); *specification*, in the case of nominalizations justified by the iconic presence of objects on the screen which are not recalled in the soundtrack; and *reformulation* which manifests itself at textual level and aims at replacing a vague syntax with informative sentences⁷. All these strategies help

7| In a previous study dated 2004, Perego further divides the explicitation categories into: *additions*, *specifications*, *reformulations*, *distortions* (which Katan regards as a sort of zoom in his studies in 1999, able to draw the attention of the spectators to some narration aspects, leaving others in the background), *ellipses* (omissions of terms that can be implied), *equivalences* (strategy applied to currency conversion, units of measurement and other

relieve the cognitive burden on the users, who must cope with three simultaneous processes: vision/reading/listening. Some explicitation cases with Japanese as the source language will be presented below to discuss some translation issues.

3.1. Types of intersemiotic explicitations

As already stressed in a previous study (Vitucci 2017), in the subtitles from the Japanese language, it is often difficult to interpret the role of gestures which manifest themselves through different deictic and symbolic uses of the hands and body. It is useless to say that these elements impose interlinguistic a previous knowledge of a whole society on the subtitlers, which is crucial for the coding of the original proto-messages in the target language-culture (Balboni 1999, Balboni et al. 2015). It is no coincidence that the semiotic cohesion, which in the audiovisual field results from the interaction between dialogues and visual-acoustic inputs, is achieved through the decoding of a local kinesic specificity of which the actors are unaware. In this regard, Tassan (2005) points out that not only some representative signals (nodding and denial signs in various languages), but also the so-called symbolic signals can be located in well-defined cultural and social geographic areas, totally losing their meaning beyond them (ibidem 2005: 47). This statement confirms the studies conducted by Kress (2010), which highlight the connection between gestures and the historical and cultural background of each country, thus dispelling the myth of a universal communication shared by all the cultures. In Japan, for example, people often touch their nose with their index finger to point at themselves, position their fingers to form a ring with their capsized hand to indicate money, hit their belly with their fist to recall ritual suicide, or drag their thumb upwards along the cheek to refer to someone's belongings to the *yakuza* criminal association (Vitucci 2016a, 49). As for the practical production of subtitles, the management of the above-mentioned kinesic corpus (Veneziano 2013) often combines with “verbal ambiguities” that can be clarified only through written explanation strategies.

3.1.1. Explicitation induced by the decoding of symbolic gestures

To confirm the statements above, a short dialogue is provided below (Example 1) taken from the *Kagi dorobō no mesoddo* full-length film whose protagonist, Mr Kondo asks his interlocutor Mr. Sakurai whether the cause for his psychological problems and suicide attempt was his previous sentimental relationship.

Initially, the decoding of this concise and highly connoted dialogue is complex, since it assumes the intracultural knowledge of the meaning of the little finger raised in the Japanese communication on the part the subtitler, while, at intralinguistic

types of cultural-specific items), *cultural adaptations* (aiming at the creation of equivalent expressions in terms of connotations or at the rhetoric reorganisation of the syntax based on the uses in the target language).

Example 1.

Line	Speaking character	Captions	English subtitles
1	Kondo	じゃ、なんでだ?	Then? Why did you make it?
2	Sakurai	...もっと情けないだよ、俺は...	...when I think it over, I feel even more ashamed ...
3	Kondo	もしかして...これか? (symbolic gesture with raised little finger)	Maybe... for a woman?

level, the dialogue seems *ambiguous* because it is characterised by an evocative-ness (Vitucci 2016b) expressed by the pragmatic use of gestures and the resulting linguistic void (Vitucci 2016a). In order to be *equivalent*, the English metatext requires an intersemiotic explicitation through a *specification* able to disambiguate the iconic gesture (Katan 1999, Suzuki 1973) by means of its recomposition at diamesic level in the composition of the subtitles. As suggested by the subtitle reported in Example 1 – together with its editing visible in Figure 2 – the Japanese interrogative pronoun *kore* (Eng. ‘this’) combined with the interrogative suffix



Figure 2: Intersemiotic explicitation (Japanese-Italian) through *specification* due to the presence of an intracultural symbolic gesture⁸.

8 | E.P.: Fujimoto Makoto, Wadakura Kazutoshi, Ōnishi Yoji, Director: Uchida Kenji, 2012, Copyright©THE KLOCKWORX Co., Ltd. All Rights Reserved.

-ka (*koreka*) is accompanied by the deictic gesture of the little finger (signifier), corresponding to the English translation (*for*) *a woman?* aiming at explaining the meaning of this gesture (not shared at intercultural level) to the target spectators.

In this case, a mere literal translation of the soundtrack (*koreka*) would be unsuitable for the transmission of the cultural content of the gesture, moreover it would also prevent the subtitles from guiding the audience throughout the narration, ensuring the macro and microcontextual focalisation, providing mediation, information and reducing the cognitive effort (Perego 2004: 162, Kovačič 1994.)

3.1.2. Explicitation induced by the iconic decoding of source culture elements
A case similar to the above-mentioned one involves the iconic quotation of cultural elements (such as food, traditional items or commercial products very popular in the source culture) which, however, are not present in the soundtrack. As stressed by Katan in this regard:

Both the translator and the interpreter will also need solid background information about the cultures they are working with, particularly the geography and contemporary social and political history. These form the backbone of a culture's cognitive environment. This also means being aware of the popular culture (the culture's heroes, TV, films, personalities, etc.) (ibidem 1999: 13).

The knowledge of the elements above requires the translator to promote an intercultural insight through the specification of some aspects relating to the way of life of the source culture (Vitucci 2014a: 524). In particular, this enhancement may be crucial to avoid the so-called *cultural substitutions* (Vinay and Darbelnet 1995), which often impair the target spectators attempt to gain a better insight. In this case, the specification limits the cognitive effort thanks to the introduction of a new terminology, and also stimulate a «high translatability» (Osimo 2010, 2011) aiming not only to bring the users closer to source culture, but also at the achievement of what is technically referred to as the «ethical target of translation» (Cavagnoli 2012). In this regard, an interesting example is provided by Example 2, taken from the *Umimachi Diary* full-length film: in this scene Chika (the girl on the right in Figure 3) is talking to her younger sister Suzu. They are both

Example 2.

Line	Speaking character	Captions	English subtitles
1	Chika	お姉ちゃんたちの評判はいまいちなんだけどさ...	The dishes cooked by our sisters do not taste fine.
2	Chika	時々食べたくなるんだよね? (nominal ellipsis)	I sometimes feel like eating curry rice .

eating their lunch sitting on a *tatami* and leaning on the traditional small table in their old Japanese-style home.



Figure 3: Intersemiotic explicitation (Japanese-Italian) through *specification* due to the presence of an intracultural symbolic gesture⁹.

In line 2, Chika says that, although their older sisters are not particularly keen on preparing this dish, she sometimes feels like eating *curry rice*. However, it should be noted that although the dish is iconically mentioned on the screen, as a result of a nominal ellipsis, it is not indicated in the soundtrack¹⁰. Since, at an intercultural level, most of the target spectators are not familiar with Japanese dishes, at an interlinguistic level the most appropriate solution is the explicitation through specification, which was carried out in the English subtitles by adding “*curry rice*”: thus the intracultural iconic rebus has been solved and the semiotic event has been entirely conveyed (Taylor 2016, Pym 2010).

3.1.3. Explicitation induced by the decoding of deictic iconic gestures

As shown in the examples above, from a multimodal point of view, the constant interaction between the soundtrack and the iconic channel often leads to

9| E.P.: Matsuzaki Kaoru, Taguchi Hijiri, Director: Koreeda Hirokazu, 2015, Copyright © TOHO CO., LTD. All Rights Reserved.

10| At intralinguistic level, the ellipsis of the subject in the main and subordinate clause should be noted. It is a typical element of high-context languages such as Japanese (Hall 1976, Suzuki 1973).

semiotic hybridization phenomena whose identification and classification may be complex¹¹. In fact, subtitlers should pay the utmost attention to the audiovisual context with which they must interact in order to successfully intervene without imposing the cognitive burden of their mediation on the spectators. As already suggested, precisely because subtitles do not claim to be a complete translation in spite of the intrinsic compliance with their own qualitative standard (Díaz Cintas 2014, Pérez-González 2014), translators must adhere to the so-called principle of *relevance*, i.e. achievement of the least cognitive effort by the audience and the maximum efficiency of the subtitles with the purpose of ensuring an overall understanding of the script (Kovačič 1994)¹². Actually, as confirmed also by Chuang (2006), the multimedia nature of audio-visual texts allows translators to reject some parts of the soundtrack, especially when the messages are conveyed by the extraverbal context¹³. A glaring example is provided by Example 3 (with an iconic reference in Figure 4) which displays a scene taken from the *Shikeidai no erebētā* full-length film where an old Mafia boss (sitting on the left with a gun in

Example 3.

Line	Speaking character	Captions	English subtitles
1	Policeman	返せ!	Give it back to me!
2	Capomafia	銃をか...それとも...? (deictic gesture of the hand towards the woman)	...do you mean your gun ...or...? (verbal ellipsis)

- 11| To this end, Taylor (2016) points out that, to facilitate the comparison of the various semiotic fields of the audiovisual text, it is possible to rely on the so-called «multimodal transcription», which consists of a grid containing the frame of the scene to be subtitled and three boxes, the first for the iconic-kinetic analysis, the second for the soundtrack (dialogues) and the third for the interlinguistic subtitles (ibidem 2016: 229).
- 12| Paraphrasing Kovačič's thought (1994), we should ask ourselves whether we should opt for a short and less informative subtitle (quick reading, but with a remarkable cognitive and inferential effort), or for a longer subtitle rich in content (slower reading with a lower cognitive effort.) Regardless of the answer to this question, instead of quantifying the reduction of the soundtrack, it would be more appropriate to consider that these cuts should take into account the film genre, the context of the dialogue and the speed. These elements, if carefully analysed, may help the subtitler get rid of the original soundtrack and enjoy the freedom necessary to focus on the specific needs of the target audience.
- 13| Chuang (2006) stresses the importance of the contribution of the extra-verbal semiotic channels of audiovisual text to the subtitles. Subtitlers, in fact, can always combine them to create an equivalent metatext that can be understood by the target spectators. Thanks to this wealth of information, they can omit some passages of the soundtrack, although he must necessarily translate some extraverbal inputs, since iconic gestures, body movements or looks are somehow more important than the same soundtrack, which nowadays is no longer regarded as the core of subtitles.

his hand in Figure 4) asks the young policeman on the right if he wants the gun or the woman back (with her back turned, she is the young man's lover.)

In this dialogue, after an initial imperative locution spoken by the young man (*kaese!* → *give it back to me!*), the old man answers in an interrogative tone (*jū o ka, soreto...* → *do you mean your gun/or...?*) then stops talking and opts for an indicative gesture pointing the gun at the woman, thus suggesting an iconic continuation of the action (Tassan 2005). In this case, it is important to stress that, thanks to the iconic support both of the hand gesture of the old man and of the look at the woman, it is possible to decode the signifier of the deictic gesture (the woman), thus resulting in an ellipsis in the subtitle which falls within the above-mentioned principle of relevance and the lower cognitive effort (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Intersemiotic explicitation (Japanese-Italian) through *ellipsis* due to the presence of deictic gestures¹⁴.

3.1.4. Explicitation induced by the combination of deictic gestures and evocative use of the language

A similar case of specification, albeit more complex at intersemiotic level, is found in the *Hospitalité* full-length film. In the scene in question Mr. Kagawa (on the left, wearing a yellow shirt in Figure 5) asks Mr. Kobayashi (on the right

14| E.P.: Anzai Mikiko, Ogura Satoru, Director: Ogata Akira, 2010, Copyright © 1998–2017 Kadokawa Pictures. All rights reserved.

in the frame) whether the activity in his print shop has always been carried out by two persons.



Lavorate solo in due qui?

Figure 5: Intersemiotic explicitation through (Japanese-Italian) *addition* caused by the combination of the evocative use of language and deictic gestures¹⁵.

The diamesic passage shown in this short dialogue (Example 4) is quite complex, because it combines some of the most representative elements of the Japanese dialogue at a pragmatic level, such as: i) *circularity*, i.e. the ability to gradually build the meaning through subsequent and preliminary formulations of the concepts involved from time to time (Balboni 2007, Okamoto 2008); ii) *cooperativity*¹⁶, namely the ability to create a dialogue with the interlocutor (Bazzanella 1994, Markus and Kitayama 1991, Heritage 1998) by means of the mutual use of «emotional» feedback (Sawano 2008, Machida et al. 2004); and iii) *evocativeness*: the ability to recall concepts and images belonging to one's language-culture through an interaction sometimes with a simple syntaxis but with a major involvement of para and extraverbal aspects (Tassan 2005, Okamoto 2008, Vitucci 2014). A careful analysis of this scene shows that in line 1 Kagawa addresses Kobayashi with a question in a clearly evocative tone (*koko wa ofutari de...→ here the both of you...*) leading to a total ellipsis of the verb, which is 'reproduced' at an iconic level by two elements visible to the spectators: the deictic gesture of

15| (E.P.: Sugino Kiki, Fukada Kōji, Director: Fukada Kōji, 2011, Film Movement Copyright© All Rights Reserved).

16| Different from the concept of *cooperation* developed by Paul Grice.

Kagawa's hand that points at the worker in the middle of the scene, together with the iconic use of the setting, which clearly hints at a print shop (a work environment) owned by Kobayashi. This detail is extremely important in terms of translation strategy, since the subtitlers must use the iconic channel to verbally reconstruct what has been «suggested» but has remained «unsaid» in the soundtrack.

Example 4.

Line	Speaking character	Captions	English subtitles
1	Kagawa	ここはお二人で... (verbal ellipsis)	Are you two the only workers here?
2	Kobayashi	ええ。後、つまとね。	Yes. And there's my wife also.

Unlike Example 3, in this case, the only possible strategy is an explicitation through *addition*, because a verbal ellipsis in the target language (*are you two ... here...*) would be too reticent considering the major syntactic differences between Japanese and English: in fact, the possibility to omit the verb in the source language inevitably collides with the impossibility to outline a sentence without a predicate in the target language as well as with the necessity to add the noun «workers» to the English subtitle in order to complete the meaning of the translation. As assumed by Perego, additions can help the audience achieve a better contextualisation of the narration and reconstruct any pragmatic inconsistencies at intracultural level:

Additions are the most common devices offering the audience new or more explicit information on the film setting and on the way in which the original dialogue has to be interpreted and contextualised. [...] at times inserting them into the subtitles may be vital for a correct interpretation of the film plot because they actively contribute to informing, or even reminding, the viewer of the setting of the film itself (ibidem 2004: 148).

3.1.5. Explicitation induced by iconic non-verbalised rebuses

As already anticipated in the previous paragraphs, the extraverbal communication has a very important semiotic role within the audiovisual text, although the target spectators cannot often decode the source gestures, facial expressions and body movements outside their cultural sphere in the same way (Burczynska 2012: 33). Moreover, considering the director's humorous touch, the translation becomes even more complex, because the subtitlers must fill that communication gap through a clear comic «reproduction» strategy (Zabalbeascoa 1996, Chiaro 1992). But what if the humour relies on a combination of cultural references and iconic rebuses that are neither based on the soundtrack nor backed up by

phenomena such as *anchoring* (soundtrack completed by the audiovisual message) or *redundancy* (soundtrack and audio-visual input delivering the same message)? Although the extraverbal language can increase the comic effect or, in some cases, even replace the language itself (in terms of both source soundtrack and interlinguistic subtitle)¹⁷, the mere iconic anchoring not always grants the ‘automatic’ transfer of the comic effect.



Figure 6: missing intersemiotic explicitation caused by a non-verbalised iconic rebus¹⁸.

A clear example is the frame taken from the *Jāji no futari* full-length film displayed in Figure 6, where the three protagonists are having a picture taken together. At first sight, the position of the characters and the objects appearing on the screen (especially the rake held by the man wearing a green tracksuit on the left) seems to be casual, while, actually, in this frame the director intends to recall a pattern very popular to the Japanese audience, i.e. the one reported below in Figure 7:

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- 17| Zabalbeascoa (1996) points out that acoustic elements such as sounds, background noise and music can increase the comic effect, just like iconic inputs including images and writings on the screen, if this comic effect is included in the original prototext. Sometimes, the impact of these elements can be greater than that of the soundtrack, to the extent that the latter can be replaced: in these cases, the translators must focus on the above-mentioned elements in order to assess the feasibility of the translation and facilitate, where possible, the intercultural transmission of the comic effect.
- 18| E.P.: Udagawa Yasushi, Tanabe Keigo, Wakabayashi Yūsuke, Director: Nakamura Yoshiro, 2008, Copyright© Xanadeus Company Co., Ltd. All Rights Reserved.



Figure 7: icon of the Japanese mobile phone signal.

The non-verbalised iconic rebus clearly refers to a monocultural element (Ranzato 2011), represented by the icon of the mobile phone signal which can be found in most of the Japanese smartphones and is very popular in the source culture. At micro-narration level, however, within the above-mentioned full-length film, the reference to this icon is justified by the presence of many characters who, living in a remote town in the mountain, are desperately looking for the mobile phone signal in order to communicate with the rest of the world. Although, in this case, the narration does not rely on dialogues but rather, exclusively, and deliberately on the iconic channel, it is possible to explicitate the hidden meaning of the image by adding a pop-up in order to provide the target audience with important information on the narration. As suggested by Kress (2010), in these cases, most of the mono and microcultural elements belonging to the source culture are often misunderstood or ignored by the target spectators due to historical and social differences, as well as to the discrepancies among the iconic remarks of the cultures in question.

4. Conclusions

This paper has focused on the analysis of the polysemiotic fabric of Japanese audiovisual texts with English subtitles, showing how the combination of the various sign systems can contribute to the reconstruction of the final meaning in the target language by means of various translation techniques. In particular, the purpose was to highlight the impossibility of the English speaking public to decode the audiovisual texts in its polysemic integrity due to intercultural gaps, (also referred to as translation crisis points), which often require a targeted translation intervention able to recreate in the subtitle some of crystallised meanings at extraverbal level. Among the various taxonomies found in audiovisual translation studies, this essay paid special attention to the intersemiotic explication strategies as evidenced by the study of Perego (2004) and introduced some specific cases in relation to Japanese.

In particular, five cases of intersemiotic explication arising from different media issues have been presented to show how the intrinsic semiotic cohesion in audiovisual texts can influence and diversify the Japanese-English interlinguistic translation process:

- 1) In the first case, explication has been achieved by means of a specification induced by the decoding of symbolic gestures, thus highlighting the

difficulties that subtitlers must face whenever gestures recall precise intra-cultural signifiers without any specification in the soundtrack (for example, the raised little finger in the Japanese culture.) The mediation of the translation, in this case, is necessary to allow the end spectators to enjoy the original Japanese prototext in a *consistent* way;

- 2) The second case represents an explicitation through specification induced by the iconic decoding of typical products of the source culture (Aixelá 1996, Osimo 2011, Vitucci 2016a): in spite of its presence in the scene but without being mentioned in the dialogue, the cultural-specific element in question (Japanese curry rice) must be specified by the subtitler, so that the target audience can enjoy the narration without a major omission in the plot;
- 3) The third case consists of an explicitation through ellipsis induced by the decoding of deictic gestures (Tassan 2005), which iconically complete interrupted or sketched soundtracks: in this case, the omission helps the translator make the subtitled text more fluent and reduce the cognitive burden on the final viewers (Kovačič 1994), who are involved in a constant vision/reading/listening process (Perego et al. 2012);
- 4) In the fourth case, the explicitation is carried out through addition, induced by the combination of deictic gestures and evocative use of the language (Okamoto 2008, Sawano 2008, Machida et al. 2004). In this context, the spoken lines are so reticent, (verbal ellipsis in Japanese), that the final meaning has been “reconstructed” in the subtitle thanks only to the interpretation of the deictic gesture of the speaker’s hand;
- 5) Eventually, the fifth case shows an explicitation through addition induced by iconic rebuses with non-verbalised humorous purpose. The analysis of the frame presented has proved that images, just like dialogues, convey specific monocultural references (Kress 2010) which can be explicitated in the subtitles thanks to the bicultural skills of the translators (Katan 1999). In this case, the absence of a translational intervention would deprive the spectators of an important part of the meaning, resulting in confusion and a low translatability level.

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