

# The impact of pivot translation on the quality of subtitling

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## Abstract

*When dealing with “exotic” languages (such as Dutch in Spain), it is a widespread practice in subtitling to use interlingual pivots, rather than translate the original dialogue list. Needless to say, that in such cases the idiomatic particularities of the source text and the cultural references will be filtered through the pivot, in most cases, through English. If the translator does not pay attention to the dialogues on the original soundtrack, he risks copying the errors that may have slipped into the pivot(s). Moreover, in countries where dubbing is the traditional mode of audiovisual translation (such as Spain), the subtitlers (or adaptors) sometimes use intralingual pivots when they work with the translation that was prepared for the dubbing and only make the necessary adjustments, in order to convert dubbing into subtitles. The aim of the following case study is to show the impact of the use of pivots on the quality of subtitling, drawing attention to the pitfalls of using intermediate texts, both intra and interlingual. The case study is based on the Spanish subtitling of *De zaak Alzheimer* (The Alzheimer Case / *La memoria del asesino*), the successful Belgian (Flemish) thriller directed by Van Looy (2003).*

**Keywords:** Audiovisual translation, subtitling, dubbing, interlingual pivot, intralingual pivot linguistic variation

## 1. Introduction

For more than twenty years now, the Faculty of Translation in Ghent has participated in the International Film Festival of the city in the form of student work placements. Every year the students involved provide translations (subtitling or voice over, depending on the facilities of the theatre) of around 20 films, most of them in so called ‘exotic’ languages (Czech, Turkish, Chinese, Japanese, Hungarian, Arabic, Ethiopian, Kurdish,...). In the majority of cases a copy is delivered with English subtitles and an English translation of the script, so that they translate the script without understanding what is really uttered on screen, though, if possible, a native speaker is contacted to review the result. On some occasions, the situation is even more complicated. When in 2009, the Hebrew spoken film *Zion and his Brother* by Merav (Israel / France 2008) entered the competition, the English subtitles on the copy were made invisible and translated into French and Dutch, offering a bilingual subtitling as is usual in some parts of Belgium. However, since one of the jury members, a Chinese person, was not familiar with French or Dutch, he needed a Chinese translation. So, a live subtitling, based on the Dutch subtitles on screen was provided in English, and simultaneously translated by an interpreter into Chinese. The question that immediately arises here is how the use of so many intermediary languages affects the quality of the verbal transmission. In this case it does not

appear to have had an adverse effect because the film won the SABAM (the Belgian Association of Authors, Composers and Publishers) Award for Best Screenplay.

The use of intermediary languages, both intralingual and interlingual pivots, is not at all unusual in translation, be it audiovisual translation or not. The Russians at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century became acquainted with Shakespeare, Milton, Richardson, Byron and others through the French translations. Goethe (1814) based his translation of Persian poetry (*West-östlicher Diwan* by the Persian poet Hafez, 1378) on a German metatext prepared by von Hammer (1812). In the same vein, the Spanish translation of the most translated book of Dutch literature, *Het Achterhuis* (*The Diary of a Young Girl*) of Anne Frank was first based on a German and later on a French translation, before it was translated directly from Dutch into Spanish (by Puls, 1993). Also in audiovisual translation the use of pivot languages, usually English, to translate from lesser-known languages is a widespread practice, (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2007: 32, 250), especially at international film festivals, although not exclusively, as will be illustrated in the following case study based on the Spanish DVD of Belgian (Flemish) film.

In relation to this study, thanks are due to the translator, Anna Bellosta, for her generous cooperation. She kindly explained what the commissioner asked her to do and described the material she received. She also provided me with her source text and translation. In this study I will describe the complicated working process she had to go through to convert the Flemish (meaning Belgian Dutch) source text into Spanish subtitles. The aim of this case study goes far beyond the description of the impact of pivot translation on the quality of subtitling in this particular film. By commenting on the pitfalls of using intermediate texts, both intra and interlingual, it is my aim to draw the attention to the weakest links of the use of pivots; this is a problem that seems almost inevitable in its occurrence, mainly because of commercial imperatives.

## 2. Corpus of the case study

This case study is based on a corpus containing the transcripts of the original Flemish (Belgian Dutch) dialogue list of the film *De zaak Alzheimer* and the Spanish dubbing and subtitling of *La memoria del asesino*. This psychological thriller was directed by Van Looy, who also wrote the script in collaboration with the scriptwriter Joos, and produced by Provoost and De Laere.

The film is an adaptation of a novel by Geeraerts (1985) that tells the story of a hitman, Angelo Ledda, who is losing his memory due to the early stages of Alzheimer's disease and therefore does not remember whether or not he has committed a number of murders. When he realizes that one of the targets is a twelve-year-old girl, Ledda, who himself was a victim of child abuse, turns against his client, who tries to eliminate him. Furious over the attempt on his life, he kills the middleman. When he discovers that the job is tied to a cadre of powerful figures in business and politics, he shoots his way through the chain of command that led to the murders. Realizing that he will not be able to finish the job because of his failing memory, he decides to help a pair of police detectives to solve the case of the murders of prominent citizens.

The film was produced in Flanders by MMG Film&Television Production in 2003 and distributed on DVD in Spain by Paramount Home Entertainment in 2006. On the box as in the extras no word is said about the translations. In a personal communication (October 15, 2005) Jaime Comas, of Flins&Pinículas explained that the subtitling was done by Laserfilm. A striking detail here is that on the Spanish DVD the viewers of the dubbing have a choice of

languages between Spanish ('español') and German ('alemán'), although the latter appears to be the original Flemish (Belgian Dutch) version.

### **3. Why use pivots?**

Normally translators use pivots when they feel that their knowledge of the source language and culture is insufficient. In subtitling, however, the frequent use of pivots has also to do with other factors such as the working process, the problem of the source text of an audiovisual document, and, last but not least of course with commercial imperatives, that is money and time pressures. Production and distribution companies much prefer to work with English master titles or even intralingual pivots because it allows them to reduce the costs, as it is much cheaper and quicker to have the job done by an adaptor than by a translator.

The subtitling process can be very complicated (Karamitroglou 2000; Chaume & Agost (eds) 2001; Duro 2001; Chaume 2004; Díaz Cintas & Remael 2007). From the moment a job is commissioned to the appearance of the subtitles on the screen, there are many steps to be taken and several persons involved: the commissioner, a translation agency, a translator, an adapter, a reviewer, a spotter, an editor, and so on. Every step in the process is important, because not only is the translation quality a matter of the competence of the individual translator, it is also the result of effective co-operation between those involved – ideally the process should be regarded as a joint effort. In reality, however, all these persons often work independently, without any contact between them and most of them literally invisible since their names seldom appear on the credits or on the DVD box. And although it is true that the individual translator bears a great responsibility for the quality of his work, it must also be said that the final responsibility for the quality of a translation lies with the company commissioning the translation.

When a commissioner contacts a translation agency he is supposed to deliver to the translator the source text and a copy of the video or DVD. As Toury (1995: 76) pointed out there are many candidates for a source text in the case of subtitling: "the original script before the spoken version, the final release of the script in the spoken version, a translation of the script in the TL or any other pivot language, or finally a combination of these alternatives". However, common sense tells us that, due to the simultaneous presence of the original dialogue, the one and only source text of a subtitling is the dialogue list of the original soundtrack. Despite all the efforts that have been made in the past to set up guidelines for the submission of the source text (Díaz Cintas in Gambier, 2001: 207), it is still not unusual for incomplete scripts to be delivered. Rather than working with annotated post production dialogue lists (as should be the case), audiovisual translators often have to work with preproduction scripts that are not a faithful reproduction of the actual on-screen dialogue.

This is especially so when dealing with exotic languages (such as Dutch in Spain or Spanish in Flanders). In this kind of situation, it is a widespread practice to use interlingual pivots, the so called master titles, that contain the compressed English translation, rather than to translate the original dialogue list. Needless to say, in that case the idiomatic particularities of the source text and the cultural references will be filtered through English. If the translator does not pay attention to the dialogues on the original soundtrack, because he did not receive the DVD, or because the soundtrack is very difficult to understand, he risks translating lines that are not actually uttered and heard on screen or he will tend to copy the errors that may have slipped into the English translation.

Moreover, in countries where dubbing is the traditional mode of audiovisual translation (such as Spain), the subtitlers, or in that case the adaptors, sometimes use intralingual pivots when they work with the translation that was prepared for the dubbing and

only make the necessary adjustments, mostly omissions in order to respect the space and time limits, to convert the dubbing into a subtitles. Recently some companies have taken to first commissioning a subtitling, a more cost effective approach, and then use the subtitles as an intralingual pivot to prepare the dubbing.

#### 4. Subtitling process of *La memoria del asesino*

In order to evaluate the quality of subtitling it is essential to know the circumstances in which the subtitles were made. According to the skopos theory (Vermeer: 1978, Nord: 1988) one should take into account all the steps of the working process, as well as all the (f)actors that lead to the final result. The Spanish author of the translation, Anna Bellosta, explained that due to time pressure and her particular situation (she was living in Germany at the time), she did not receive a copy of the film nor the original Flemish dialogue list. The commissioner only delivered her the English translation of the preproduction script. As a responsible translator with some experience in audiovisual translation corresponds, she rented the DVD herself.

Since dubbing is the traditional mode of audiovisual translation in Spain, she was asked to prepare a rough translation for the dubbing, not the subtitling. Later on, an adaptor would make the necessary adjustments. She had at her disposal the original Flemish soundtrack, the German subtitles on the DVD, and the English translation of the annotated preproduction script. Such an annotated script is normally made with the purpose of being distributed among producers who might be interested in financing the project and among actors, who might be interested in playing a role. To facilitate finding a distribution company abroad the annotated preproduction script is generally translated into English. Besides the dialogues, it usually contains extra information about the characters, the setting and the action, but it gives no explanation concerning cultural references and background, nor about linguistic variation. Above all, it does not correspond exactly to the original soundtrack, that is the lines that are delivered on screen (the dialogue list), the one and only real source text.

In this particular case, the translator, who had some experience with audiovisual translation, did more than just deliver a rough translation. According to the instructions (Castro Roig, in Duro & Agost: 2001: 275-276; Chaume 2004: 96-97) she added some metatextual information for the dubbing adaptor such as ON, OFF, GRITA (screams), LLORA (weeps), SILBA (whistles), TOSE (coughs), BESO (kiss). She also indicated when another language than the original (Belgian Dutch) was used. She copied most French spoken parts literally and provided a translation in Spanish between brackets, leaving the final choice of which to use to the adaptors. She even explained a pronunciation error indicated by quotation marks in the script, by adding "he makes a mistake pronouncing the plural of the word egg in French": *se equivoca al pronunciar y Vincke le corrige. Un oef (oeuf), des eu (oeufs).*[*Le corrige la pronunciación, huevo. Un huevo, los huevos*).

She also explained some specific cultural references: *Merksem, nombre de una población cercana a Amberes* (a little town near to Antwerp) or *Merodelaan 2 se refiere a la dirección: calle y número* (refers to a street and a number). And when Mrs. Seynaeve says *All Belgians are repressed* she explains that the lady *es holandesa e insulta a los belgas. Se conoce por el acento* (the lady is Dutch, which can only be detected by her accent).

So, generally speaking, the translator did a good job preparing the translation for the dubbing, but due to the fact that she did not dispose of the transcription of the original dialogue list, there are some pitfalls that she and the adaptors, both of the dubbed and the subtitled version, could not avoid.

## 5. Pitfalls

The analysis of the corpus reveals that the most challenging parts, and therefore the weakest links in the ‘rough’ translation, the dubbing and the subtitling, are result from the use of the source text that the translator received from the commissioner, that is: the English translation of the preproduction script. Comparing this script with what is really uttered on screen, there are several additions (5.1) and changes (5.2) introduced during the shooting of the film, that the translator did not repair or that she could not understand. In addition to these problems that are typical in audiovisual translation, there were also the general challenges encountered in all translation activities: the use of colloquial expressions and word plays (5.3), the translation of multilingualism (5.4) and the transference of cultural references (5.5). Sticking is also the linguistic interference from the interlingual pivots used in the process (5.6) and, last but not least, some misinterpretations and correction of errors committed in the pivots (5.7). Let us look at the examples and discuss the way the translator dealt with the problems that arose:

### 5.1. Additions introduced during the shooting of the film

A particular challenge was posed by those lines that were added during the shooting of the film, and therefore do not figure in the English translation of the preproduction Flemish script. In these cases the translator had to recuperate them by listening to the soundtrack. It must be said that the original soundtrack is very hard to understand for a non native, since the characters often use colloquial expressions and some of them even use the Antwerp dialect of the Belgian variant (Flemish) of Dutch. In most cases, the translator resolved the problem by rendering a plot-oriented translation that respects the semiotic cohesion, rather than a faithful one, as in the following scene: the father of the abused girl is threatened by the police and points his gun at the Detective Chief Inspector saying a line that was not translated in the English script. Obviously, the translator did not understand what was really uttered in the Flemish soundtrack and created a new line, based on what she knows from the context and what she sees on screen, respecting the semiotic cohesion (Chaume in Duro: 2001, 79). (the English back translation between brackets is mine):

SOUNDTRACK	Ge gaat eraan, makker <i>[You're dead, pal.]</i>
EN TR	[.]
SP TR	Apártate, cerdo. <i>[Get out of my way, pig.]</i>
SP DUB	Apártate, cerdo.
SP SUB	Apártate, cerdo.

Some of the additions introduced during the shooting of the film were obviously made to explain the plot and are particularly important for a clear understanding of the issues. For instance, looking for an excuse to explain why he cannot go with his wife to the opening of a gallery, Van Camp adds in the soundtrack that he is working on construction permits (*bouwvergunningen*), that, as we all know, might give rise to corruption, which is actually the case. This information is left out in the English translation and therefore also in the Spanish versions:

SOUNDTRACK	Bouwvergunningen. En ik heb nog een vergadering in Brussel. Maar, amuseert u.
EN TR	I still have to go to some meetings in Brussels. Do have fun.

SP TR	Todavía tengo que ir a una reunión a Bruselas. Pero, pásalo bien.
SP DUB	Tengo una reunión en Bruselas. Pero pásalo bien.
SP SUB	Tengo una reunión en Bruselas. Pásalo bien.

Or the information that the Detective Chief Inspector, Vincke, added when he asks his boss:

SOUNDTRACK	Of zullen we onze vrienden van de rijkswacht hun job laten doen? <i>[or shall we let our friends of the federal police do the job?]</i>
EN TR	[.]
SP TR	¿O quizás deberíamos dejar el caso a la policía?
SP DUB	¿O quizás deberíamos dejar el caso a la policía?
SP SUB	¿O deberíamos dejar el caso a la policía?

This information, and especially, the fact that he speaks ironically about the federal police force as ‘our friends’, is very important to the plot, since they introduce one of the main themes of the film, which is the competition between the local and the federal police forces. Leaving this information out because it does not figure in the English translation is unfortunate. .

## 5.2. Changes made during the shooting of the film

The cases where the lines were changed during the making of the film, also seem to be problematic and sometimes lead to an error in the interpretation. When the sergeant and the inspector enter a tunnel, the call the sergeant is making is interrupted:

SOUNDTRACK	Wie graaft er nu een tunnel waar wij moeten bellen? <i>[Who digs a tunnel where we want to make a call?]</i>
EN TR	Hello ? Hello ? Useless, cheap mobiles!
SP TR	¿Cómo se me ocurre entrar en un túnel mientras llamo? <i>[Why do I enter a tunnel when I want to make a call.]</i>
SP DUB	¿Cómo se me ocurre entrar en un túnel?
SP SUB	¿Cómo se me ocurre entrar en un túnel?

## 5.3. Colloquial expressions and word plays

In a few cases, the fact that a colloquial expression did not figure in the English translation leads to an error of interpretation. When the chief inspector says to the assassin “We have a problem”, Ledda responds with a colloquial expression “You’re telling me?”. Since this expression does not figure in the English translation, the translator had to listen to the soundtrack and obviously did not understand, since she translated it as “Says who?”.

SOUNDTRACK	We hebben een probleem, Ledda. -Tegen wie zegd’t. <i>[You’re telling me?]</i>
EN TR	We’ve got a problem, Ledda. -[.]
SP TR	Tenemos un problema, Ledda. -Sí, ¿quién lo dice ? <i>[Yes, who says?]</i>
SP DUB	Tenemos un problema, Ledda. - Sí, ¿quién lo dice ?
SP SUB	Tenemos un problema, Ledda. - ¿Y quién lo dice ?

Also in the case of a word play that was not translated into English, the translator misinterpreted the line:

SOUNDTRACK	Je weet het wel mooi in te kleden, hé ? [ <i>You were looking for an excuse to come to see me</i> ]
EN TR	[.]
SP TR	¿Aun no te has quitado la ropa? [ <i>Why are you still dressed</i> ]
SP DUB	¿Aun no te has quitado la ropa?
SP SUB	¿Aun no te has quitado la ropa?

In this scene, Mrs. Seynaeve, who stands next to the pool in her bathing suit, says to the fully dressed sergeant that he was looking for an excuse to come see her. She uses an expression in Dutch, which refers to clothing but really means: you were looking for an excuse to come and see me.

#### 5.4. Multilingualism

It is not at all unusual in a Belgian film that French should also be spoken (Vermeulen: 2011). The fact that French lines are not translated in the English script also lead to an error in the interpretation. In the following example, the translator misinterpreted the French expression *Au suivant*, translating it into “see or hear from you later”. The assassin is not saying goodbye, but referring to the following murder, “up to the next one”: a la próxima (víctima):

SOUNDTRACK	<i>Au suivant</i>
EN TR	<i>Au suivant.</i>
SP TR	Hasta pronto.
SP DUB	Hasta pronto.
SP SUB	Hasta pronto.

Or in the following example:

SOUNDTRACK	Tu ne vas pas m'emmerder encore avec tes histoires de retraite? [ <i>Don't start with the same old retirement story.</i> ]
EN TR	Tu ne vas pas m'emmerder encore avec tes histoires de retraite?
SP TR	¿No irás a martirizarme otra vez con el cuento ese del cansancio? [ <i>Don't say once again that you are tired.</i> ]
SP DUB	¿Vuelves a empezar con el cuento ese del cansancio?
SP SUB	Otra vez con el cuento del cansancio, ¿eh?

The assassin is not tired, he is old and sick and wants to retire.

#### 5.5. Cultural references

As for the translation of cultural references, they are often generalized or even deleted in the English translation and therefore also in the Spanish translation, dubbing and subtitling, as shown in the following examples:

SOUNDTRACK	Zeker niet bij een éclairke.
EN TR	That doesn't go with muffins.
SP TR	No sienta bien con los bollos.
SP DUB	No sienta bien con los bollos.
SP SUB	No sienta bien con los bollos.

SOUNDTRACK	Stimorol.
EN TR	Chewing gum. Stimorol.
SP TR	Chicle.
SP DUB	Chicle.
SP SUB	Chicle.

In the following example one of the characters makes an allusion to the culture-bound habit of offering grapes when visiting a friend in a hospital, reproaching his chief for being too kind towards the assassin. The line was translated almost literally in English, but the Spanish translator changed it into ‘give him my regards’, which was changed once again in the dubbing and the subtitling into ‘you can go without me’:

SOUNDTRACK	Neemt een bakske druiven mee.
EN TR	Take the guy some grapes.
SP TR	Dale recuerdos de mi parte.
SP DUB	Ve tú solo.
SP SUB	Ve tú solo.

## 5.6. Linguistic interferences from the pivots

The reason why the name of one of the characters has been adapted to German can only be explained by the use of the German subtitles:

SOUNDTRACK	Papa, ik ga snel naar Katrien, hè.
EN TR	Daddy, are you in here? I’m going to Katriens place.
SP TR	¿Papá? Voy un rato a casa de Kathrin.
SP DUB	¿Papá? Voy un rato a casa de Kathrin.
SP SUB	Papá, voy un rato a casa de Kathrin.

There are also some examples of linguistic interference from English into Spanish, that probably would not have occurred if the translator had translated the original Flemish script:

SOUNDTRACK	Een slechte gewoonte.
EN TR	Bad habit.
SP TR	Un mal hábito.
SP DUB	Un mal hábito.
SP SUB	Un mal hábito.

Whereas the Spanish idiomatic translation would be: *un vicio*.

Another example:

SOUNDTRACK	Ik ben ‘ns benieuwd.
EN TR	I’m curious.
SP TR	Estoy curioso.
SP DUB	Tengo curiosidad.
SP SUB	Tengo curiosidad.

In Spanish one would say: *a ver*.

In this last example, the first adaptor changed the Spanish translation in order to render a more idiomatic dialogue in the dubbing. This is also the case in the following example:

SOUNDTRACK	Ik zei altijd: die Angelo, die zou drie klassen hoger moeten zitten.
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EN TR	Angelo should be three forms higher, I used to say.
SP TR	Angelo tendría que haber ido tres cursos más arriba.
SP DUB	Angelo tendría que haber ido tres cursos por delante.
SP SUB	Angelo tendría que haber ido tres cursos por delante.

Most of the changes made by the first adaptor were aimed at creating a close correspondence between the text and visual features on screen such as lip movement and facial expressions, (*echt waar* < translation: *es cierto* < dubbing and subtitling: *es verdad*, respecting the bilabial lip movement of ‘*waar*’ in Dutch; *schatje* < translation: *querida* < dubbing and subtitling: *cariño*). He also reduced the text in order to respect the time limits, (*me doy cuenta* < *noto*; *la primera vez que entraste* < *el día que entraste*; *saldremos todos juntos fuera* < *saldremos todos juntos*; *no me gusta correr riesgos* < *no me gusta arriesgarme*; *podríamos haberle echado la mano encima mucho antes* < *podríamos haberle cogido hace tiempo*; *míralo por el lado positivo* < *sé positivo*; *no pasa la noche en casa* < *no duerme en casa*; *de vez en cuando* < *a veces*).

On one occasion the Spanish translation was adapted in the dubbing according to the non-verbal information that appears on the screen. When the pimp says “I knew it. Human nature”, he taps his nose. The Spanish translation “*Lo sabía. Esto, intuición*” is changed in the dubbing into “*Sí, puedo olerlo*”, based on the body language on screen. That is why the subtitle also translates “human nature” into “I can smell it” which at first sight is rather strange, although perfectly correct according to the context.

SOUNDTRACK	Hier ... mensenkennis.
EN TR	I knew it. Human nature. (taps his nose again)
SP TR	Lo sabía. Esto, intuición.
SP DUB	Sí, puedo olerlo. [Yes, I can smell it]
SP SUB	Sí, puedo olerlo.

The last step of the working process was the adaptation of the dubbing into subtitles. For that purpose the text was further reduced by deleting discourse markers, names, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, verbs, redundancies, swear words,.... As in the following examples:

SOUNDTRACK	De meeste buitenlanders die kennen in België eigenlijk alleen naar Brugge..
EN TR	[.]
SP TR	La mayoría de turistas no conocen otra cosa de Bélgica que no sea Brujas.
SP DUB	A la mayoría de los turistas que vienen a Bélgica sólo les interesa visitar Brujas.
SP SUB	A la mayoría de los turistas sólo les interesa visitar Brujas.
SOUNDTRACK	Dju, hij is gepakt!
EN TR	[.] He's been found.
SP TR	¡Mierda! Le han descubierto.
DUB	¡Mierda! Le han descubierto..
SUB	[.] Le han descubierto.

In only a few cases the subtitling is slightly different from the dubbed version, but always more idiomatic than the dubbing or the translation:

SOUNDTRACK	Okee. Maar doe me dan een plezier. Koop haar ‘ns een
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	beter parfum.
EN TR	Ok, but do me a favour, next time buy her a better perfume.
SP TR	Bien. Pero hazme un favor. Cómprale un perfume más bueno.
SP DUB	Bien. Pero hazme un favor. Cómprale un perfume más bueno.
SP SUB	Bien. Pero hazme un favor, cómprale un perfume mejor.
SOUNDTRACK	Voorrang van rechts, Freddy. Let een beetje op?
EN TR	[.] Watch out, Freddy!
SP TR	Tenía prioridad. Vigila un poco.
SP DUB	Tenía prioridad. Vigila un poco.
SP SUB	Tenía prioridad, presta atención.

## 5.7. Misinterpretations and correction of errors

It must be said that both adaptors also corrected some errors produced in the Spanish translation: when the police says to the driver that “It’s not getting any greener”, it is translated into “It’s never going to turn green”. The adaptor corrected the mistake saying “The traffic light has turned green”.

SOUNDTRACK	Groener ga da nie worden, makker. <i>[It's not getting any greener.]</i>
EN TR	[.]
SP TR	Ese semáforo nunca se pone verde. <i>[It's never going to turn green.]</i>
SP DUB	El semáforo se pone verde.
SP SUB	El semáforo se ha puesto verde. <i>[The traffic light has turned green.]</i>

In the following case however, the French lines were translated correctly in the translation, and left in French in the dubbing, but misinterpreted in the subtitling:

SOUNDTRACK	<i>Vous êtes bien monsieur...</i>
EN TR	<i>Vous êtes bien monsieur...</i> <i>[Are you mister...]</i>
SP TR	¿Usted debe ser el señor...?
SP DUB	<i>Vous êtes bien monsieur...</i>
SP SUB	Se encuentra bien, señor... <i>[Are you all right, sir?]</i>

## 6. Conclusion

As Toury observed in a footnote (1995: 76), researchers should not neglect the need to establish the source text properly as a precondition for the extraction of translational relationships between the source and the target text on the one hand and on the other the evaluation of the translation that follows. This case study clearly shows that it would be unfair to the translator simply to compare the Spanish subtitles with the original Flemish soundtrack. It is obvious that the subtitling is not based on the original soundtrack or its transcription in the original dialogue list. Since only 18.46% of the subtitles are slightly different from the dubbing (mostly omissions of names, repetitions, discourse markers, adjectives and adverbs), it can be deduced that the subtitles are a reduced version of the

dubbing that was used as an intralingual pivot. The dubbing is based on a rough translation into Spanish (a second intralingual pivot) of the English preproduction script (an interlingual pivot), compared to the original soundtrack (the real source text) and the German subtitles (a second interlingual pivot).

It is obvious from this case study that the use of so many pivots affects the quality of the subtitling and that traces of each of the pivots can be found in the final result. The weakest parts in the subtitling are the lines that were added during the shooting of the film and therefore do not figure in the source text that the translator received from the commissioner (the English translation of the preproduction script), as well as the lines that were changed during the shooting of the film. In all these cases the translator who was obviously unable to understand what was uttered in the original soundtrack, chose to render a plot-oriented translation that respects semiotic cohesion. The same translation strategy was used in the case of linguistic variation. The use of the Belgian variant of Dutch, the Antwerp dialect and police slang undoubtedly was very difficult for a non native translator to understand. Also the multilingual nature of the film, the use of the different official languages in Belgium, Flemish as well as French, obviously caused a problem. The lines that remained in French in the English preproduction script are not always translated correctly into Spanish. As for the cultural references, such as the allusions to food and drink and the different police forces, whose lack of cooperation is one of the main themes of the film, they were mostly filtered by generalization.

All of these pitfalls could easily have been avoided if the commissioner had delivered the original (post production) dialogue list as well as the English translation, with some metatextual information about socio-cultural connotations, puns, word play, the use of colloquial language, slang and dialects, the idiomatic expressions, the correct spelling of proper names, cultural references (food, drink, institutions, titles, and so on). The first rule of the Code of Good Subtitling Practice as proposed by Carroll and Ivarsson (1998) states that subtitlers should have a copy of the dialogue list and a glossary of unusual words, names and specific references. Ten years ago Díaz Cintas (in Gambier, 2001: 207) stated in his article *Striving for quality in Subtitling* that “A detailed dialogue list is imperative if we are to create a high quality target product, and it is the director’s duty, [...] to guarantee that the subtitler receives one of these lists as well as to control the end-product quality.” However, thirteen years later, experience has shown that this is more an ideal than a reality, at least in small countries with a minor film industries such as Belgium. Nevertheless, nowadays, with courses in audiovisual translation being fairly common in master degrees of translation, there are more and better trained translators specialized in subtitling. This means that the number of people involved in the subtitling process can easily be reduced, and so can the costs. Instead of working with several persons (translator, adaptor, reviewer, editor) it should be sufficient for the commissioner to deliver the film with the original dialogue list to a well trained subtitler. Not only is he able to assure the linguistic transfer, since he knows both languages and is familiar with both cultures (even for less widely spoken languages such as Dutch), but he also knows how to reduce the text in perfect interaction with the audiovisual information offered by the sound and the image, and can manage the required technical skills (spotting, editing). However, it might take some time before industry practice addresses this need, so, in the meantime, future subtitlers should be prepared to work with pivot translations and be aware of the pitfalls and possible solutions.

#### NOTE

1. The English back translation between brackets is mine

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