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# How is Culture Rendered in Subtitles?

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## Abstract

This article investigates the translation problem, or crisis point, which may be caused by an Extralinguistic Culture-bound Reference (ECR), with particular focus on subtitling. A model is proposed, wherein all strategies available to the subtitler are listed. These are Retention, Specification, Direct Translation, Generalization, Substitution, Omission or the use of an Official Equivalent. The model also investigates the subtitling process, in that the parameters that influence the subtitler's choice of strategy are explored. These parameters are Transculturality, Extratextuality, Centrality of Reference, Intersemiotic Redundancy, Co-text, Media-specific Constraints and Paratextual Considerations. Finally, it is proposed that it is unlikely that a truly unsolvable culture-bound translation problem would exist.

## 1 Introduction

When analyzing translations for the purpose of uncovering the underlying norms in the tradition of Descriptive Translation Studies (Tourey 1995), it is advantageous to study certain features that can be seen as symptomatic of these norms. These features can be called translation crisis points, and examples of these are puns, poetry, quotations or allusions. What they have in common is that they present translation problems; they constitute turning points, at which the translators have to make active decisions, and these points are thus indicative of overall strategy and to what norms the translator professes. Translation crisis points in Source and Target Texts also constitute “coupled pairs” in Tourey's sense (1995: 38). At these points, norms that normally are hidden or unconscious are thrown into relief. Granted, it is important to be aware that the translation crisis points only indicate what norms have been operative and then to proceed by analysing longer stretches of texts, but it gives the analyst a starting point.

One of the most revealing translation crisis points is when some reference to the Source Culture is made, and there is no obvious official equivalent. The translation crisis point caused by a cultural reference reveals the workings of many norms, such as domestication vs. foreignization, degree of functionalism, awareness of skopos etc. This paper proposes to put forward a tentative model for analysing how cultural references are rendered in translation in general and subtitling in particular.

## 2 Extralinguistic culture-bound references

The proposed model is based on data from the investigation of one hundred Anglophone films and TV-programs and their Scandinavian subtitles in a project called *Scandinavian Subtitles* (cf. Pedersen 2003b). As this corpus is too extensive to be analyzed in its entirety, a feature causing translation crisis points was chosen to indicate what norms had been dominant in the production of the subtitles. I call this feature Extralinguistic Culture-bound reference (ECR), and it is defined as follows:

Extralinguistic Culture-bound Reference (ECR) is defined as reference that is attempted by means of any culture-bound<sup>1</sup> linguistic expression<sup>2</sup>, which refers to an extralinguistic entity<sup>3</sup> or process, and which is assumed<sup>4</sup> to have a discourse referent that is identifiable to a relevant<sup>5</sup> audience as this referent is within the encyclopedic knowledge of this audience.

In other words, ECRs are expressions pertaining to realia, to cultural items, which are not part of a language system. The language issue is of course a complex issue, as, depending on your standpoint, everything, some things, or nothing is purely intralinguistic. The present model aims for a middle-of-the-road point of view, in which some things are intralinguistic and some are not. The same is true for the issue of culture. Is language culture and vice versa? These are highly complex issues and they go beyond the scope of this paper, which is operationalized by a simple demarcation line by using standard reference works such as the Oxford English Dictionary ([www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com)).

This means that the study of intralinguistic culture-bound references, such as idioms, proverbs, slang and dialects are not included in this model, even though it is possible that the model could be modified for the study of those as well.

## 3 Previous studies

### 3.1 Culture

There have been a few studies of how cultural elements are translated, from general translation studies, such as Hatim (1997), to studies dealing with culture in audio-visual translation, such as Nedergaard Larsen (1993) and Orrevall (2004).

The best-known investigation of the translation of cultural elements to date is probably Leppihalme's studies of allusions and how they cause "culture bumps" (1994, 1997, 2000). The present model owes much to her work. It should be pointed out, though, that even though the object of study is similar and overlapping in many ways, it is not identical. Her allusions cover a wider area than the ECRs do, in that they cover intralinguistic cultural expressions as well, and also what she calls "key phrase allusions" (1994: 10) which are not part of the present model. ECRs are, on the other hand, a wider notion than her allusions, as they refer to

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<sup>1</sup> In a very wide sense of the word, including geographical names etc.

<sup>2</sup> Regardless of POS, syntactic function or size.

<sup>3</sup> Including fictional ones.

<sup>4</sup> As implied in the speech situation.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. a TV programme's primary target audience.

anything that is extralinguistic and culture-bound, and not just other texts, which would be the case of allusions. Intertextuality is thus not a prerequisite for inclusion in the category of ECRs.

### **3.2 Translation strategies**

The list of previous studies uncovering translation strategies is long indeed. One of the earliest attempts at classifying translation strategies known to this author is Vinay and Darbelnet (1958/2000), who displayed an impressive array of possible translation strategies, but who left out some strikingly common techniques, such as Generalization, a strategy which has been debated (and often denounced) ever since by scholars from Levý (1967/2000) to Venuti (1995). The taxonomy of translation strategies in the present model is perhaps inevitably somewhat similar to that of Leppihalme (1994: 94), and also to that of Nedergaard Larsen (1993: 219), but it makes finer distinctions.

## **4 Strategies for rendering ECRs**

Instead of ‘translate’, the verb ‘render’ will henceforth be used about the different strategies involved in transferring ECRs from a Source Text (ST) to a Target Text (TT), as not all of the strategies actually involve translation.

In this model, the strategies for rendering ECRs into a Target Language are arranged on what might be called a Venutian scale, ranging from the most foreignizing to the most domesticating strategies (cf. Venuti 1995). Having said that, however, the Venutian terms will be abandoned, as they are somewhat counterproductive when translating from English into smaller languages such as the Scandinavian ones. Instead, the more neutral labels ‘Source Language (SL) oriented’ and ‘Target Language (TL) oriented’ will be used. The taxonomy is based on descriptive observations of norms underlying subtitling, but it could easily be adapted to suit other forms of translation as well.

### **4.1 Official equivalent**

The strategy of using an Official Equivalent is different in kind from the other strategies, in that the process is bureaucratic rather than linguistic. Following the spirit of Hermans reasoning about “authentication” (2003: 39), for there to be an Official Equivalent, some sort of official decision by people in authority over an ECR is needed. A typical example of this would be the fact that ‘Donald Duck’ is called ‘Kalle Anka’ in Swedish, and there is no translation-related reason for rendering ‘Donald Duck’ in any other way. There may be other reasons, however, such as the time-and-space constraints of subtitling. Apart from “the executive decision”, an Official Equivalent may come into existence as a “standard translation [...] a preformed TL version” (Leppihalme 1994: 94). It could be said that this “preformed TL version” is evidence of the ECR having entered the TL. The pivotal point about Official Equivalents is that when one exists, it is highly unlikely that you would have a translation crisis point, as there is a pre-fabricated solution to the problem.

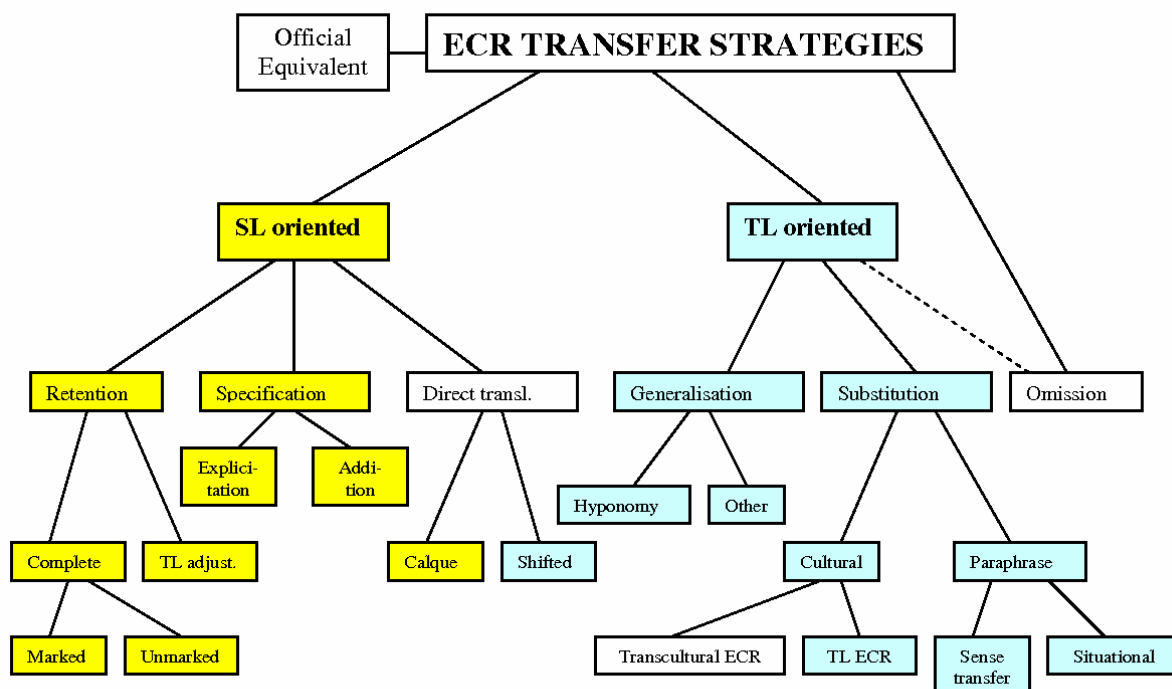


Fig. 1: Taxonomy of ECR transfer strategies

## 4.2 Retention

Retention is the most SL-oriented strategy, as it allows an element from the SL to enter the TT. Sometimes the retained ECR is marked off from the rest of the TT by quotes and occasionally by italics; the difference seems to be whether the ECR is a proper noun (unmarked or in quotes) or not, in which case the ECR may be marked by italics. There appears to be much inconsistency, though. The ECR can also be adjusted slightly to meet TL conventions, by adjusting the spelling or dropping an article. This is by far the most common strategy for rendering ECRs. It is however not the most felicitous way of solving an ECR crisis point that involves a Monocultural ECR (see section 5.1. below), as it offers no guidance whatever to the TT audience. In one sense, Retention would be the strategy that displays the most fidelity towards the ST, as the translator is true not only to the spirit, but indeed every letter of the ST.

## 4.3 Specification

Specification means leaving the ECR in its untranslated form, but adding information that is not present in the ST, making the TT ECR more specific than the ST ECR. This is done in one of two ways: either through Explicitation or Addition.

### 4.3.1 Explicitation

Explicitation is here used in a very restricted sense. Explicitation could be seen as any strategy involving expansion of the text, or spelling out anything that is implicit in the ST. In

the present model, however, Explicitation means that the added material is latent in the ST ECR, as part of the expression side (the name) of the ECR. Examples of this are the spelling out of an acronym or abbreviation (often combined with other strategies), the adding of someone's first name or the completion of an official name to disambiguate an ECR for the Target Culture (TC) audience, which may not be as familiar with the ECR as the original Source Culture (SC) audience is.

### 4.3.2 Addition

This means that the added material is latent in the ECR, as part of the sense or connotations of the ECR. By using this strategy, the translator intervenes to give guidance to the TC audience. This can be seen in the Swedish subtitles of example (1), where a character (David Brent) in *The Office* names someone who has had an influence on his life:

(1) Ian Botham

**Cricketspelaren Ian Botham**

(The Office9: 1.31)

Botham would be virtually unknown to most Swedes, so by adding 'cricketspelaren' ("the cricket player"), the Swedish subtitler has rendered this ECR in a way that has made it more accessible to the Swedish audience. The drawbacks of this strategy are that it is space consuming and could be regarded as patronizing.

## 4.4 Direct translation

This strategy could hardly be used on proper names, but it is not uncommon for rendering the names of companies, official institutions, technical gadgetry etc.

Unlike the strategies of Specification and Generalization, the semantic load of the ST ECR is unchanged: nothing is added, or subtracted. There is no effort made to transfer connotations or guide the TT audience in any way. In the present model, the strategy is divided into two subcategories, based on the outcome of the strategy: Calque and Shifted. A Calque would be the result of stringent literal translation and it may appear exotic to the TT audience. An example of this is the Danish subtitles of example (2):

(2) Captain (of police)

**politi-kaptajn**

(Midnight Run: 51.38)

A 'Captain of police' would more often than not be rendered by using some corresponding Danish title, such as 'kommissær'. The Calque in (2) would definitely seem odd to the TT audience. The only shifts that are made when a Calque is produced are obligatory ones, required by the differences between SL and TL (cf. Vinay & Darbelnet: 1958/2000: 88). It is more common, and less SL-oriented, for translators to perform some optional shifts on the ST ECR that makes the ECR more unobtrusive (Shifted Direct Translation). Thus, the strategy of Direct Translation straddles the fence between the SL and the TL-oriented strategies, between the exotic and the domestic.

## 4.5 Generalization

This strategy (which typically, albeit not necessarily<sup>6</sup>, involves translation) means replacing an ECR referring to something specific by something more general. Typically, this involves hyponymy, but in a wide sense, as the form of the TT ECR may retain uniqueness of referent, as in example (3), (where a particular brand of volleyball has been replaced by a Danish hyperonym meaning “the brand of the ball” (definite)) or not, as in example (4) (where the name of a particular café has been replaced by a Swedish hyperonym meaning “a café”(indefinite)).

(3) Voit

**boldmærket**

(Meet the Parents: 58.59)

(4) the Corinth coffee shop

**ett kafé**

(Meet Joe Black: 37.20)

There are similarities between the strategies of Generalization and of Addition, in that the information added in Addition often is a hyperonym. This can be seen in example (1) above, as ‘cricket player’ could be said to be a hyperonym of Ian Botham: there are many cricket players and one of their number is Ian Botham. Thus, Addition could be said to be the result of Generalization + Retention. The difference between the strategies is linguistic and based on the perspective of the ST ECR. In Generalization, there is an upward movement on a hyponymy scale, producing a TT item that is less specific than the ST ECR. When using Addition, the movement goes in the opposite direction, and the technique involves not as much hyponymy as meronymy<sup>7</sup>. The person known as ‘Ian Botham’ is many things besides being a cricket player. For instance, he is a charity worker, a rogue, an Officer of the British Empire, a husband and so on. Yet, the TT ECR disregards all other parts of Botham’s persona, focussing only on his being a cricket player. Thus, the TT ECR is more specific than the ST ECR.

## 4.6 Substitution

This strategy involves removing the ST ECR and replacing it with something else, either a different ECR or some sort of paraphrase, which does not necessarily involve an ECR.

### 4.6.1 Cultural substitution

The strategy of Cultural Substitution means that the ST ECR is removed, and replaced by a different ECR. In the least marked form a transcultural (cf. Leppihalme 1994: 96, and section 5.1 below) ECR is used to replace the ST ECR. In these cases, the ECR would be an ECR that could be expected to be known by the TT audience. This is illustrated in example (5), taken from *the Last Boy Scout*. The speaker’s car has just been blown up, and his wife asks him “Who the hell did this?” Thinking this a stupid question, as there is no way for him to know this, the speaker suggests the avuncular host of a children’s TV-program, namely:

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<sup>6</sup> Translation is not present in e.g. rendering ‘Central Park’ as **New York**, which is done by a Danish subtitled of *Jurassic Park* (45,19).

<sup>7</sup> I owe the meronymy observation to Christina Alm-Arvius.

(5) Mr Rogers

**Anders And**

(Last Boy Scout: 18.07)

Presumably because ‘Mr Rogers’ is virtually unknown in Scandinavia, the Danish subtitler has replaced him by the Danish Official Equivalent of ‘Donald Duck’, who shares with Mr Rogers the property of being highly unlikely to blow up people’s cars.<sup>8</sup> At this point, it should be mentioned that it is not at all uncommon for two strategies to combine in this (i.e. Cultural Substitution + Official Equivalent) and other ways (notably Explication + Direct Translation).

In a more marked form, the SL ECR is replaced by a TL ECR. This is the most domesticating of all strategies for rendering ECRs. This strategy is most often used for rendering ECRs referring to official institutions or titles. This practice has a long tradition in translation and is a fast and effective way of rendering this sort of ECR. This strategy can be illustrated by the Swedish translation of (6), where an American official institution has been replaced by a corresponding Swedish institution.

(6) the Prison Board

**kriminalvårdsstyrelsen**

(Tango & Cash: 30.53)

The TT audience seems to be used to this, and there is probably not even much awareness that the ST ECR has been replaced by a TT ECR. The evidence of this is that the Transcultural ECRs rendered in this way are lexicalized, and found in most bilingual dictionaries, which means that they could be considered Official Equivalents produced by Substitution. This does not mean that all cases of TL ECR Cultural Substitution are Official Equivalents, for two reasons. First, when the ST ECR is less well known to the TT audience (i.e. a Monocultural ECR, see section 5.1 below), there is much variability in what TT ECR is chosen, which would not be the case for an Official Equivalent. Second, the strategy is also used for made-up ECRs (i.e. Text Internal ECRs, see section 5.2. below).

When this category is used outside what could vaguely be called “the official domain” and is applied to proper names, the result could be considered an anomaly and this creates a certain credibility gap. The credibility gap is triggered by a character positioned in the SC treating a TC ECR as if it were a SC ECR. The strategy could therefore hardly be used in texts where information is the primary skopos (cf. Vermeer 1989/2000), but the strategy appears in texts that have other primary skopoi, particularly humor, as in example (7), where, in a humorous conversation based on a profusion of anagrams and abbreviations, an American agent claims to have gone to:

(7) NYU

**KUA**

(Spy Hard: 39.17)

The Danish subtitler has opted to substitute the (in America) well-known abbreviation of ‘New York University’, for the (in Denmark) well-known anagram of (a part of) ‘the University of Copenhagen’. Thus, the joke (based on a profusion of anagrams) is kept, at the

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<sup>8</sup> The cause of Donald Duck’s being unlikely to blow up cars differs from Mr Rogers as it is based on Donald Duck’s being a cartoon character, rather than because of his gentle manners.

cost of a slight credibility gap, as not many American agents receive their education at the Arts and Humanities department of the University of Copenhagen.<sup>9</sup>

## 4.6.2 Paraphrase

This strategy involves rephrasing the ECR, either through “reduction to sense” (Leppihalme 1994: 125), or by completely removing all trace of the ECR and instead using a paraphrase that fits the context.

### 4.6.2.1 Paraphrase with sense transfer

When using this strategy, the ST ECR is removed, but its sense or relevant connotations are kept by using a paraphrase. This strategy would mainly be used for solving ECR crisis points that are too complex for Generalization or Specification. An example of this is (8). In *the Fugitive*, there is a train crash and the investigating marshals are discussing what the driver of the engine may have done, and the Tommy Lee Jones character clips:

(8) I bet he did a Casey Jones.<sup>10</sup>

**Han lämnade säkert inte loket.**

(Back translation: I’m sure he didn’t leave the engine.)

(Fugitive: 20.25)

Judging that Casey Jones would be little known in Sweden, the Swedish subtitler has opted for scratching the ST ECR and substituting it by a Sense Transfer Paraphrase that retains the relevant information about this American folk hero.

The paraphrase in question may vary much in length and complexity as compared to the SL ECR. There may be an inverse relation between the length of the TT paraphrase and the degree of familiarity of the TT audience with the ECR (i.e. Transculturality, see section 5.1.). This can be illustrated by example (9), from *Midsomer Murders*, where some people are looking at pictures of:

(9) the VE Day celebrations

**Swedish subtitle: firandet av kapitulationen i andra världskriget**

(Back translation: the celebrations of the capitulation in the Second World War)

**Danish subtitle: 8. maj 1945**

(MM1: 8.54)

The crucial difference between the Swedish and the Danish audiences here is that the Danes, but not the Swedes, took part in the war, so the ECR pertaining to its ending would be more vivid in the minds of the Danish audience. The ECR in example (9), which is an ECR

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<sup>9</sup> Gottlieb (forthcoming) suggests three subcategories of this strategy, one being identical to the TL ECR above. He then suggests a subcategory for Transcultural ECRs from the SC, and Transcultural ECRs *shared* by the SC and TC. It could be argued that this difference is too fine to validate this division (his example for the latter subcategory is ‘McDonald’s’, which might also qualify for inclusion in his former subcategory). Also, a brief scan suggests that the strategy is used too rarely to validate any further subdivision. He himself does not make this subdivision for this very reason.

<sup>10</sup> Casey Jones was an American engine driver hero who is famous for remaining on his post when his train crashed, thus keeping the train on the tracks, and saving the lives of his passengers and dying a martyr. The story of CJ was disseminated by a folk song that bears his name.



crisis point for the Swedish TT audience, could be considered a Transcultural ECR for the Danish (but not the Swedish) TT audience. It is still a paraphrase, though, as the Danish Official Equivalent, 'Befrielsesdagen' ("Liberation Day"), is not used.

#### 4.6.2.2 Situational paraphrase

When using this strategy, every sense of the ST ECR is completely removed, and replaced by something that fits the situation, regardless of the sense of the SC ECR. This strategy could thus be considered a quasi-omission strategy. This method seems to be used a lot when it comes to rendering ECRs in puns.

### 4.7 Omission

As Toury has pointed out (1995: 82), Omission is a valid translation strategy, and in the present model it simply means replacing the ST ECR with nothing. There are circumstances that make Omission the only viable option (see section 5.), but it may also be opted for out of laziness. As Leppihalme puts it: "a translator may choose omission responsibly, after rejecting all alternative strategies, or irresponsibly, to save him/herself the trouble of looking up something s/he does not know" (1994: 93).

### 4.8 Discussion

As we have seen, there are many strategies for rendering ECRs into TT subtitles, not all of which involve translation and not all of which involve a TT ECR, which is generally not the case for Paraphrase and Generalization and obviously not Omission. The taxonomy in this section is based on the translation product, and illustrates how it is SL-or TL-oriented. It is also possible to view it from the perspective of the translation process. The relevant top categories (orientation) could then be replaced by the top categories of 'minimum change strategies' and 'interventional strategies' (cf Leppihalme 1994: 200). The grouping would still be very similar, as minimum change would imply that SC ECRs are retained, and intervention would in most cases lead to TL orientation. This is because it would be unlikely for a subtitler to intervene to make a TT more foreignized. Instead, intervention would be carried out to aid the TT audience, and thus to bring the text closer to the TC (cf. Schleiermacher 1813/1998: 118). Thus the minimum change strategies would be Retention, Official Equivalent and Direct Translation, and the interventional strategies would be Specification, Generalization and Substitution, with Omission sitting on the sideline as being neither. It is important to note that in real life subtitling, the strategies are often combined. It is for instance not uncommon that a ST ECR is explicitated before being directly translated. The strategies describe linguistically how ECRs are transferred from ST to TT. It does not necessarily mean that the subtitlers themselves are consciously aware of what choices they make, as part of the process may be internalized and subconscious. This is probably particularly true in the case where strategies combine; the subtitlers may not be aware that they have used more than one strategy. The same is true of what will be discussed in the next section, namely what parameters influence the decisions subtitlers make.

## 5 Influencing parameters

Some of the strategies outlined in the previous section may seem odd and it may seem as if the subtitlers are taking rather too many liberties with the ST. This is particularly true of the more TL-oriented strategies, like Cultural Substitution. However, there are many circumstances, under which it may be justified, or even necessary to use these strategies. This section contains an attempt to list all factors (or parameters) that influence the decision-making of subtitlers. Seven parameters have been generalized from the data available. It is important to note that even though they are listed separately, they are intertwined and interact to a very high degree, and may combine to aid or obstruct the subtitler in his or her work.

### 5.1 Transculturality

The most basic of all influencing parameters is that of Transculturality. The notion of Transculturality as explained by Welsch explores how cultures in the modern world “are extremely interconnected and entangled with each other” (1994: 198). This implies that many ECRs that once were familiar only to people in one culture, will now be accessible on a global scale, and are thus not very culture-bound. As applied to the present model, the degree of Transculturality of an ECR deals with how familiar it is to the ST and TT audiences. Leppihalme also deals with this parameter in her work on allusions. Her model contains a diagram of what is known in Anglophone society and what is known in Finland, and what is shared by the two cultures (1994: 96). The present model differs in that it also includes what is not generally known in either of the cultures involved. This results in three methodologically relevant levels of Transculturality, namely Transcultural ECRs, Monocultural ECRs and Microcultural ECRs.

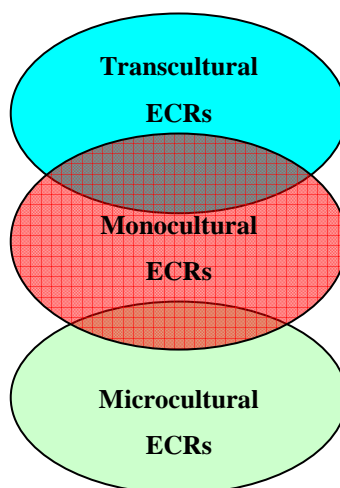


Fig. 2: Levels of Transculturality

#### 5.1.1 Transcultural ECR

A Transcultural ECR is an ECR which is not bound to the Source Culture, but which should be retrievable from common encyclopedic knowledge of the ST and the TT audiences, as it

could be assumed to be known in both the SC and the TC (e.g. ‘7-Eleven’ (*As Good As It Gets*: 32.03)) and/or belongs to a third culture (e.g. ‘Jacques Cousteau’ (*Anaconda*: 7.53)).

### 5.1.2 Monocultural ECR

A Monocultural ECR causes a translation crisis point, which arises when the referent of an ECR can be assumed to be less identifiable to the majority of the relevant TT audience than it is to the relevant ST audience, due to differences in encyclopedic knowledge.

### 5.1.3 Microcultural ECR

A Microcultural ECR is bound to the Source Culture, but it could *not* be assumed to be within the encyclopedic knowledge of neither the ST nor the TT audience, as it is too specialized or too local to be known even by the majority of the relevant ST audience (e.g. ‘19, Cranberry Street, Brooklyn’ (*Moonstruck*: 1.16.29)). In these cases, reference must instead be achieved through the context or the co-text. There would of course be a few potential members of the ST audience who would know the ECR (people living on Cranberry Street in Brooklyn, for instance), but that is not the point. The point is that the number of people who know the ECR is negligible compared to the total relevant ST audience. This difference can be ascertained by analyzing the way in which the ECR is treated in the ST.

The level of Transculturality of a specific ECR varies with some of the other influencing parameters, such as that of the assumed knowledge of the target audience, so that what is a Transcultural ECR in one text may be a Monocultural ECR in another text.

## 5.2 Extratextuality

This parameter has to do with whether an ECR exists outside the ST or not. If it does, it is Text External. If it does not, it is Text Internal. Thus, a Text External ECR is an ECR that exists in some culture, independent of the text at hand. Transcultural ECRs and Microcultural ECRs, as well as Monocultural ECR are always Text External. Conversely, an ECR is Text Internal if it is constructed for the text (or series of texts) at hand. A Text Internal ECR may be virtually indistinguishable from a Microcultural ECR (e.g. ‘Lancaster Square’ (*Truman Show*: 28.39)). This is unproblematic from a translation point of view, as both Microcultural ECRs and Text Internal ECRs must attempt to achieve reference intratextually. These two categories are purely referential and cannot have any sense or connotation beyond what can be established within the text (or series of texts) or through the intralingual sense of the words making up the ECR. This means that they are fairly unproblematic from a translation point of view, as the subtitler would have no impediment from the Text External world to limit his or her choice of translation strategy.

An originally Text Internal ECR may become a Transcultural ECR through the process of intertextuality, if it is very successful. An example of this would be ‘James Bond’ which is Text Internal when he introduces himself in *Goldfinger* (11.31), but Text External (and Transcultural) when a character compares himself to Bond in *Notting Hill* (1.45.41). This shows that Text External ECRs may very well be fictional, as long as they do not have existence in the text at hand.

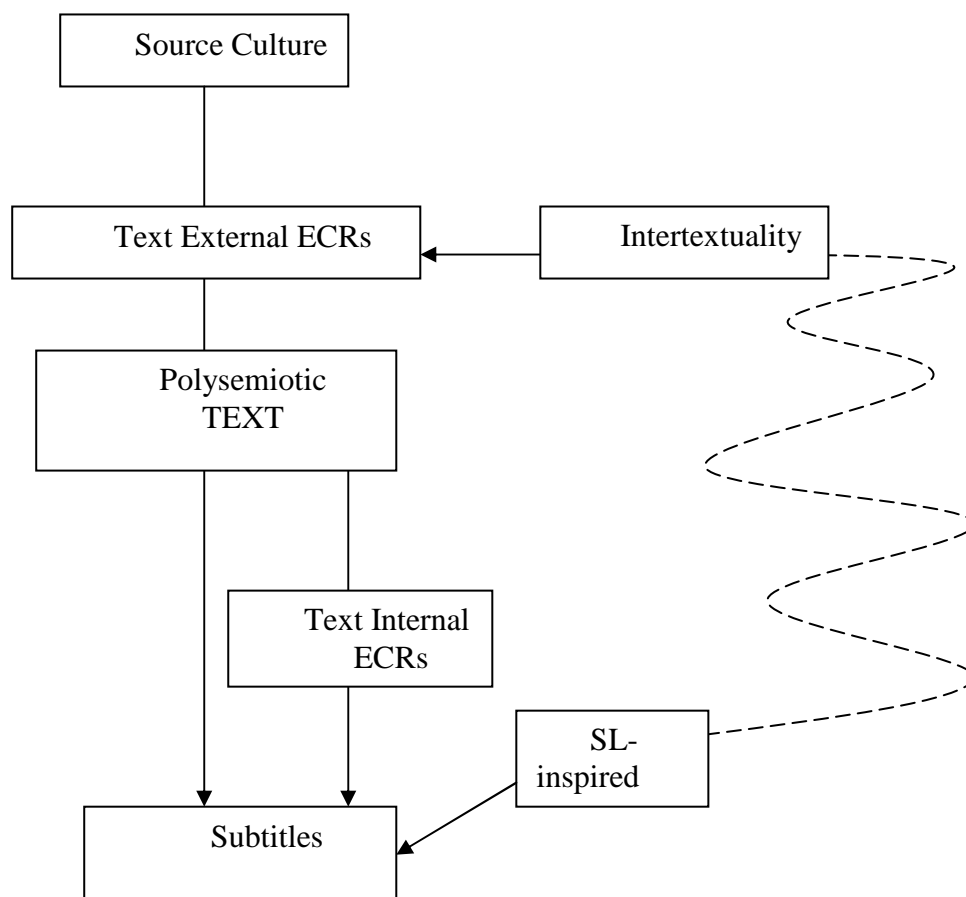


Fig. 3: Extratextuality flow chart

### 5.3 Centrality of reference

This is one of the most important influencing parameters, and it works on multiple levels. When establishing the centrality of an ECR in a text, one has to look at the ECR on at least two levels: the macro level and the micro level. If an ECR is central on the macro level, it may typically be the subject matter, or at least a very central theme of the film or TV-programme at hand. It would then be more or less impossible to render it by using any other strategy than Retention or Official Equivalent. To render the county in *Bridges of Madison County* as anything other than ‘Madison’ would be slightly absurd. If an ECR is just mentioned in passing a few times in the film, then the ECR would be peripheral on the macro level. The treatment of it would then depend on how central it is to local discourse on the micro level. If it is peripheral on the micro level as well, e.g. it could just be one in a long list of ECRs, then there is plenty of evidence of Omission being used, and responsibly at that. However, if the ECR e.g. carries local discourse forward, is referred to later on, or is the trigger of a joke, then it would be central on the micro level. There may then be a need for interventional strategies. In example (5) above, we saw an example of this. Even if the ECR (‘Mr Rogers’) is very peripheral on the macro level, appearing in the film just once, it is

central on the micro level. This is probably why the Danish subtitler chose to Substitute for it something that would be accessible to the TT audience.<sup>11</sup>

## 5.4 Intersemiotic redundancy

Subtitles differ from the common notion of TT, because they are part of a polysemiotic text. Subtitling is additive (Gottlieb 1997: 141), it adds information, unlike literary translation or dubbing (isosemiotic translation, Gottlieb 1997: 146), where the ST is replaced by the TT. Gottlieb (1997: 143) distinguishes between four semiotic channels in polysemiotic texts (e.g. films or tv-programmes): the non-verbal visual channel (i.e. the picture), the non-verbal audio channels (e.g. music and sound effects), the verbal audio channel (i.e. the dialogue) and the verbal visual channels (signs and captions). All these channels carry semiotic information, and there is often a degree of overlap, or Intersemiotic Redundancy between them. From a subtitling point of view, the greater the Intersemiotic Redundancy, the less the pressure for the subtitler to provide the TT audience with guidance. An example: if something is referred to in the dialogue and at the same time clearly visible in the picture, it may be enough to refer to it by using a pronoun in the subtitles (Generalization). It may simplify the referring process in other ways as well, as in example (10). In the film *As Good as it Gets*, the leading lady returns home to find a car carrying M.D. license plates parked outside her house. Thinking that something has happened to her asthmatic son, she becomes upset, and gasps:

(10) M.D.

**en läkarbil**

(Back translation: a doctor's car)

(As Good as it Gets: 1,04,07)

As the practice of marking physicians' cars in this way is unknown in Scandinavia, some sort of explanation would be necessary to explain why she becomes upset and how she knows that there is a doctor in her house. In this example, the verbal audio channel - her short utterance of "M.D." - is supported by a) the verbal visual channel: the license plate inscription "M.D.", and b) the non-verbal visual channel: a car is seen in the picture. This has two effects for the subtitles. First, the redundancy caused by the identical information between the two verbal channels means that the subtitler only has to subtitle the message once (normally pertinent signs in the picture are subtitled). Second, the presence of the car makes it possible for the subtitler to use the brief Paraphrase strategy in (10), instead of having to come up with some more cumbersome explanation for her behaviour, or alternatively leaving the TT audience in the dark as to the trigger for her behaviour.

## 5.5 Co-text

This parameter is fairly uncomplicated. Just as there may be overlapping information in the other semiotic channels in the polysemiotic text, there may be overlapping information elsewhere in the co-text (the dialog). If an ECR is disambiguated or explained at some point earlier or later in the co-text, the subtitler does not have to perform the task at every point.

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<sup>11</sup> The Swedish subtitlers of this film opted for Retention here, which is less felicitous, as that may lead the Swedish TT audience taking the utterance at face value, rather than as ironic, making them think that 'Mr Rogers' was the "bad guy" in the movie.

## 5.6 Media-specific constraints

The media-specific constraints of subtitling should be well known by now, and they will be outlined here only insofar as they interfere with the rendering of ECRs. For more details on these matters, the reader is referred to the works of Luyken (1991), Ivarsson & Carroll (1998), or Gottlieb (1997, 2000). Most fundamentally, there is the semiotic switch from the spoken to the written word, which means that the text gets somewhat formalized in the transfer from SL to TL. In many countries, however, subtitles are seen as a “hybrid” form, containing oral features in the written form. Nevertheless, this constraint often leads to Explicitation being used on ECRs in subtitles. Apart from the semiotic switch, there are “the famous and infamous time and space restrictions of subtitling” (Gottlieb 2004: 219), which often restrict the subtitlers’ options. Generally speaking, these options are limited by constraints such as the widely applied 12 cps rule, which means that there should be a display time of one second per 12 characters in the subtitles (equalling 36 characters for a full one-liner that would be displayed for three seconds). This means that in rapid conversation, the dialogue will be condensed. A previous study by the present author shows that the mean quantitative condensation rate is about a third in Scandinavia (Pedersen 2003a). The condensation tends to affect verbal material that is less central than ECRs however, but it means that Omission is sometimes the only viable strategy for rendering (or rather not rendering) ECRs in subtitling of rapid dialogue. On the other hand, the media-specific constraints can be low (in slow dialogue), and the subtitler may have ample time and space to use space-consuming strategies like Addition or Paraphrase.

## 5.7 Paratextual considerations

The parameters outlined this far have in common that they can be analysed from the texts alone or from the interplay between the texts and the world. This final parameter is not *in* the text, but rather *about* the text. The parameter is centered on the translation situation (cf. e.g. Chesterman 1998: 207) and the individual considerations combine to form overall translation goals or overarching translation strategies pertaining to the text as a whole. The facts that constitute the paratextual considerations would ideally be included in Nord’s “translation briefs”(1997: 59). Unfortunately, translation briefs are extremely rare in real life subtitling, and even rarer for an analyst of subtitling to get hold of. This means that the answers to the paratextual questions often have to be sought elsewhere: from subtitlers, guidelines, subtitling companies, broadcasters, the Internet and even TV-guides. Nevertheless, it is crucial to take the paratextual factors into consideration, because in very many cases, pivotal explanations of subtitling behavior lie here.

The paratextual considerations can be broken down into a few clusters of questions, and the following are but a few examples of the most central questions in each cluster; the list is not meant to be exclusive:

### 5.7.1 Skopos-related Questions

(cf. Vermeer: 1989/2000)

- i) What are the national norms of subtitling?
- ii) What are the company’s guidelines and other in-house rules for subtitling?
- iii) Have the clients left any instructions about what sort of strategies they want?
- iv) What norms does the subtitler prescribe to?

- a) Foreignizing?
- b) Domesticating?
- c) etc.
- v) What genre is the film?
  - a) Is it a documentary? Then information is the most important aspect, and minimum change strategies could be used.
  - b) Is it a comedy? Then humor is the most important aspect, and interventional strategies may have to be used to secure punch lines.
- vi) etc.

### **5.7.2 TT Audience-related Questions**

- i) What is the age group? Do they remember e.g. ‘The Battle of the Bulge’ (if that is the ECR at stake)?
- ii) Do they have specialist knowledge? Does the program appeal only to e.g. snowboarding buffs? Then they could be assumed to be familiar with many of the ECRs pertaining to that field, hence Retention.
- iii) etc.

### **5.7.3 Broadcasting-relates Questions**

- i) When will the film be aired?
  - a) On prime time? That signals high prestige and many viewers, and there is evidence of more effort going into prime time subtitling, with the result of more felicitous solutions.
- ii) Who is the broadcaster?
  - a) Is it a public service channel? They have certain obligations towards their viewers regarding reading speed etc.
- iii) etc.

### **5.7.4 Questions related to Pragmatic matters**

- i) What may the deadlines have been? Interventional strategies take time, and the subtitler may not have had that.
- ii) What financial remuneration may there have been? Since subtitlers get paid by their quantitative output, and interventional strategies take time, and as some subtitling firms do not pay very well, there is ample evidence of some subtitlers’ not always being able to set aside the time it takes to use interventional strategies.
- iii) etc.

## **6 Conclusions**

The model presented in this paper covers the seven strategies available to subtitlers for rendering ST ECRs in subtitles: Official Equivalent, Retention, Specification, Direct Translation, Generalization, Substitution and Omission. We have also seen the seven different parameters that influence the subtitlers’ decision-making: Transculturality, Extratextuality, Centrality of Reference, Intersemiotic Redundancy, Co-text, Media-specific Constraints and Paratextual Considerations. Using this model, an analyst should be able to describe how

ECRs have been rendered in a TT and also explain why they have been rendered in this way. Applied on a significantly large corpus, this model should go a long way towards uncovering the translation norms that are operative for that corpus. It has indeed served the present author well when applied on a corpus of one hundred films and TV-programs and their subtitles. Interestingly enough, it has also illustrated a tendency about the translatability of culture in subtitles. If all seven parameters work against a subtitle: i.e. if you have a Text External and Monocultural ECR, which is central to the film, the Intersemiotic Redundancy is low, the Co-Text offers no guidance, the media-specific Constraints are high and the Paratextual Considerations has shown you e.g. that you are dealing with a general audience without particular knowledge of the subject matter of the film at hand, then none of the seven strategies may offer a solution and you may have an untransferable ECR on your hands. However, after analyzing about one hundred thousand subtitles, the present author has still to come across such an ECR.

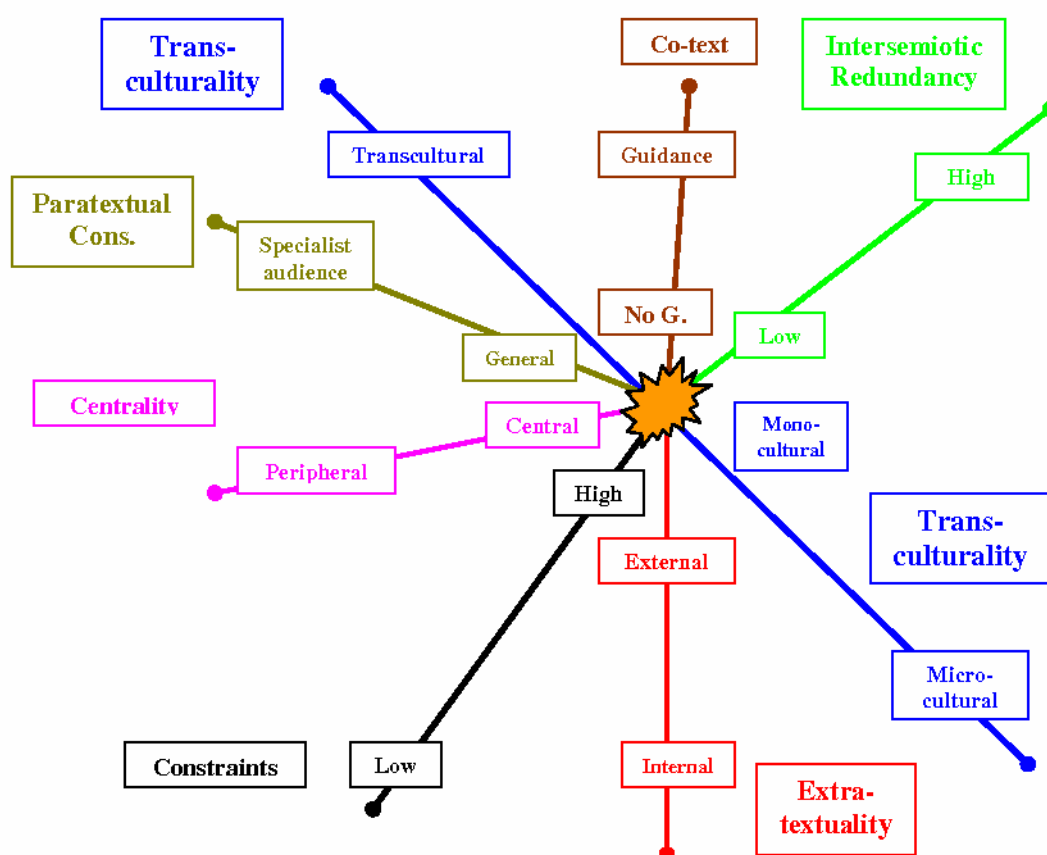


Fig. 4: The “untransferable” ECR



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## **8 Electronic resources**

Oxford English Dictionary Online: [www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com)