Chapter VII

Affecting Factors of Subtitling
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7. Affecting Factors in Subtitling

Subtitles in films are used as cues for comprehending the delicate events portrayed in the story and to comprehend the culturally specific aspects of conversation displayed in the films. An ideal subtitling should be highly intelligible to the viewer and a faithful rendering of the dialogues of the movie. It may be brief enough so as to function as a perfect cue for the comprehension of dialogues.

But, these subtitles, when compared to the dialogues are brief enough and between the SL base dialogues and the substitute TL subtitle, some difference could be observed. The dialogues in general, display high degree of redundancy, and reflect some stylistic peculiarities. Display of registeral varieties may be elaborate in form. It may be full in retaining the content and may reflect the presence of sub text or text within a text. But, subtitles are less redundant, less stylised; they
avoid the use of registeral varieties and are straightforward in presenting the text in concise form. They are imperfect in content and have shortened structure (Santhosh Kumar: 1993). Keeping these differences or variations in the form and content of the dialogues and their corresponding subtitles, it is possible to identify some of the factors which govern the presence of such variations between the dialogues and subtitles. These factors may be taken as affecting factors constraining the production of subtitles which are in a way structurally and semantically incompatible with the corresponding dialogues.

7.1. Time

Time is a significant factor that affects the quality of translation in the subtitles for films in general. The running speed of films are though normal in all films, the scenic details in each film controls the length of verbal language used. So, there is no unified time scale used for the oral delivery of language in the data. This may be taken as a factor for introducing brevity in subtitles. The dialogues in the film are in oral form and the number of utterances produced in the oral dialogues in a unit time may be high. Producing or visually displaying all these oral utterance through subtitles in a unit time will be difficult. Hence, subtitles, which are in visual and translated forms occur in brief structural forms and they quickly move, as the dialogues are displayed.
The quick movement and the shorter time span in the display of the subtitles, may create problems in the comprehension of dialogues by the viewers. This is mainly controlled by the common readable speed of written language. In films some scenes have more or lengthy dialogues/songs, and some have very little number of lexical usage. Hence, time factor, the quickness in the display of the shorter form of subtitles for longer form of dialogues create problems in comprehension and they function as affective factors. Moreover, the time factor in the production of subtitles, during the release period of the film may also function as a factor affecting the deficiency of the subtitles.

7.2. Space

The visual delivery of subtitles upon the films, certainly deviate the course of film viewing as both are simultaneously propagating same information/message to the viewers. As subtitling is primarily meant for foreign language viewers for different purposes like gathering of information and entertainment, normally, they are displayed either as a single line or two lines at the lower part of the screen. This spacial restriction is adopted to provide more space in the screen for the cast of the film. Because of the spacial restriction related to the subtitles, certain occasions arise where the utterance in the dialogue will be
different when compared to the utterance displayed in the subtitles. In the film *Pad*, due to the speedy delivery and dialectal usage of Tamil language by most of the characters, the oral dialogues are found to be omitted in subtitles. This incompatibility in the display of the oral dialogues and the visual subtitles arises due to the spacial limitations. This situation also brings problem for comprehension and interpretation of the dialogue utterance and scenes in general by the viewers of the film.

7.3. Grammar

Sometimes, one could observe that the subtitles represent the erroneous rendering of the words and phrases found in the dialogues. Though these renderings may not be considered as erroneous to the core, they may be given due consideration, because, they will favour inappropriate interpretation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tamil Dialogue</th>
<th>English Subtitle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>...a:na:l na:n canto:camalva:lamu:tiyum enpatucante:kam. kalya:nap po:nnukkutta:liyaip pa:nayam vaikkum tairiyam irukkalam. a:na:lennakku en talaiyaip pa:nayam vaikkum tairiyam kita:iya:tu. ...</td>
<td>... But, will it bring me lasting peace? The bride may be bold to stake her jewels- But, I lack to stake my head</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Thevar Makan)
In this example, the word *ta:li* found in the dialogue utterance is rendered as “jewels” in the subtitle. This rendering leads to a shift in the interpretation by the viewers. And in that respect, such erroneous renderings may affect proper interpretation of dialogues. And, almost all the subtitled statements are presented in the narration of first person.

### 7.4. Economic factor

The economic factor that causes for the non-appointment of professional translators may function as factors for the emergence of imperfection in the subtitles. Though a single translator could make subtitles for films, the process of imposing those translations upon the film strips or with video tapes, need much advanced and highly valued electronic equipment and sophisticated storage. While the demand arises in the world market for such subtitled movies, the subtitled firm can have economic benefits. So, economy also plays a vital role in the production of subtitles.

### 7.5. Translator

The factors like the educational, social, economic, cultural and psychological background of the translator certainly affect the quality of subtitles generally in all films. When the data subtitles were studied with the collected information from NFDC, all the above said factors
are identified as causes for the existing quality of subtitles. In data films, usage of proverbial and colloquial forms reveal the interest of the translators. In film data, normally, the proverbs and colloquial forms are used in an identifiable manner. While their occurrences are found very high in the films Achchamillai Achchamillai and Paci, it is less in number in the Roja, Thevar Makan and Anjali films. In subtitling, most of them were dropped by the translators.

In the above example, the utterance in the dialectal form representing an enquiry about the pregnancy of Krishnan's wife is reduced in subtitle in a more general way and the dialogue effect is not therefore, captured in the subtitle. Very often, one could come across omission of many dialectal or registeral expressions in the subtitles and this may be due to the lack of knowledge about the meaning of the dialectal expressions on the part of the translator.
So, the settlement due to various reasons like job and prolonged gap with the SL group, the lack of knowledge about the use of dialectal forms in the dialogues of the film, the whole some linguistic knowledge about SL society and that of the target societies of the translator also contribute for the imperfect rendering of the dialogues into subtitles.

Film dialogues, since they represent the actual communications taking place in a society, reflect dialectal forms, registers, etc. Moreover, these dialogue forms carry culturally specific expressions like addressing terms, endearment words, abusive terms, hedges, words maintaining the speech flow and words used for avoiding disfluencies in speech like gap fillers, etc. So, in general, dialogue forms are natural representatives of the oral conversations occurring in a society. Since subtitles are in another form, the nuances like the dialectal and other forms found in the dialogues are not naturally captured in the subtitles. Moreover, subtitles make use of a homogeneous language variety for rendering the dialogue utterances and hence subtitles are incompatible in relation to the dialogues. This may also be taken as an affective factor because, by mere looking at the subtitles, the viewers of the film may not be able to comprehend and conceive the nuances of the dialogues, the variation in the use of different terms, etc. in dialogues.
7.6. *Attitude of viewers*

Subtitling, in general, is also affected due to the response and feedback drawn from the viewers. Sometimes, for one and the same film, different agencies assign subtitles, and the subtitles assigned by some agencies were accepted as intelligible, accurate and brief. If the foreign viewers are satisfied with the subtitles, and they feel that these subtitles really favour smooth interpretation or comprehension of the story displayed in the film, there will be an increase in the purchase of the video cassettes with subtitles designed by a particular firm. This indirectly favours the development of subtitling industry. The point emphasized here is that foreign viewers' response has a role to play in the promotion of the activity of creating subtitles associated with films.

In general, if the subtitles satisfy the conditions like intelligibility, accuracy and brevity, which favour the smooth interpretation of the dialogues and lyrics, they will be treated as appropriate. Otherwise, they will be treated as text with constraints or with affective factors. Such constraints and affective factors are to be minimized if films are to be promoted and popularized among foreign viewers.