

CHAPTER THREE

LANGUAGE AND AUDIOVISUAL TRANSLATION

We now find ourselves on the final leg of our journey where we discuss the language and translation of *Hijack Stories* (2000). Part of the film's appeal is its multilingual dialogue, characterised by code-switching. For Schmitz, it was essential that the language of the characters accurately and expressively reflected their lives and location:

No matter their role, I asked all the actors in the film to be as natural as possible. This is also reflected in the language, which consists of street slang mixed with African languages and English like an American-styled *tchatche*¹ that one hears in yuppie bars and night clubs.

(in Allocine 2005²)

It is for this reason that Schmitz collaborated with Lesego Rampolokeng, a published South African poet and writer. Rampolokeng has lived most of his life in the area where the film is set (Orlando West, Soweto) and was thus able to provide “*fantastic insight into language and nuances of the people*” (Schmitz in SA Film 2005). It was important that the right mix of language and dialect be used, as *Hijack Stories* (2000) is set in a specific part of the Johannesburg township, Soweto, and each area has its own linguistic variety. This is due to historical division of Soweto which has given each area “*its own branded mixture of slang*” (Schmitz 2006).

In discussing this collaboration between Schmitz and Rampolokeng, individual subjectivities are also taken into account³. It is interesting to note that these subjectivities reveal a contention on the part of Rampolokeng concerning the

¹ chit-chat

² Quote translated from French.

³ Interviews with Schmitz and Rampolokeng revealed a difference in opinion. These opinions will be presented as objectively as possible.

script and how it was written⁴. Although there is much praise for the multilingual dialogue of *Hijack Stories* (2000) – “*the vernacular, the slang turn of phrase which Lesego had in some of the scenes was, I thought, absolutely fantastic*” (Tilley 2006) – Rampolokeng to his day remains unhappy with the final script.

Schmitz (2006) described the script writing process: “*I wrote a script and then we wrote another draft, it was with a South African poet, Lesego Rampolokeng*”. From this one could understand that an initial script already existed, and was then reworked with Rampolokeng, perhaps leaving one with the impression that Rampolokeng’s role was solely linguistic (although in the film’s end credits he is credited with Schmitz for the story). Rampolokeng’s participation is therefore seen as a localisation of the script or, to use Appadurai’s (1994: 328) terminology, an *indigenisation*⁵ of the script.

However, Rampolokeng (2006) states that “*...the script wasn’t written in English and then had a slab of choc thrown in. Actually no [...] this stuff got presented like that and Oliver then anglicised the whole work*”. His feelings stem from his perception that he was a means to a perceived authentic end – someone to make the script sound genuine. Although Schmitz (2006) says that they (himself and Rampolokeng) “*worked on a new script together*”, Rampolokeng does not feel that it was an equal collaboration:

⁴ Schmitz was interviewed in February 2006 and Rampolokeng in August 2006. This difference of opinion was made clear when interviewing Rampolokeng. Schmitz was again contacted in order to have the opportunity to respond, but has not yet replied.

⁵ It should be noted that this word is somewhat controversial. It was used in discussion with Rampolokeng, who took great exception to his perceived role of *indigenising* Schmitz’s script. It was from this point that the author was made aware (and through much discussion) of Rampolokeng’s position on the script-writing process.

We sat around talking. I had these ideas and I wanted to do this, this, this is what I think should be done, etc. And, of course, Oliver immediately whipped into his pocket and came out with something that he had set his mind on doing. And I got the sense that throughout the entire creation of that piece, he tried to throw whatever it is that I had to offer into that predetermined little sphere. That was very unfortunate for me.

(Rampolokeng 2006)

As well as working together, Schmitz (2006) describes how both parties worked alone with the script which “*bounced backwards and forwards*” between them: “...he [Rampolokeng] went off to work on stuff with his characters, the township language, then I would incorporate it into the overall script again”. This final step in which Schmitz worked Rampolokeng’s contribution into the script resulted in a script which Rampolokeng (2006) regards as “*cosmotised*”, “*watered down, syrupy, and done in my absence*”. Rampolokeng is not happy that his contribution was incorporated into a so-called “*predetermined sphere*” as it left him with the impression that his contribution was merely to flavour the script – a “*chocolate-factoring*” - rather than a substantial, creative and authentic contribution.

One example of this “*cosmotised*” script is found in one of Zama’s lines to Sox: “*So, this is how you baby food boys live?*” (30: 47). Rampolokeng states that this line was originally scripted as: “*So, this is how you NESTUM boys live?*”. NESTUM, a well known brand of baby formula, particularly among the black population, was removed by Schmitz for the benefit of an international audience who would not know what NESTUM is. Although Rampolokeng understands why this was done and where Schmitz is coming from, it does not change his feelings about it:

And that’s what makes me really uncomfortable. I’m not saying it [the script] should have played towards just satisfying this boy here [referring to his son], that’s not what I’m saying. I know why [this change was made] [...] It actually makes me and my concerns inconsequential. But I do

believe that there are millions out here who have the right to some kind of voice.

(2006)

Rampolokeng (2006) acknowledges that Schmitz made changes to the script with an international audience in mind, but he explains that as a writer, he does not write with a specific audience in mind. Rather, he writes from and for himself according to the life that he has had:

I spring from a specific socio-economic part of this world. I've been shaped by certain political, social and other issues. I was born on a piece of ground that had been predetermined for me, I went to schools set aside for me. I went to hospitals that had been, indeed, placed there for me, with certain standards. [...] That means that I come with baggage. But I stay true to what I perceive real, what determines me, what my essence is, and I tend to engage with that on a day to day, moment by moment level. And I thought that what I could bring, that's what I'm constantly in combat against ... that's what drives me as such. So every single thing that I write has to be there, everything single piece of earth that I've stamped comes to be in what I write, in what I create. So I brought that into it. And that's what I wanted to do.

(2006)

In this way, Rampolokeng (2006) believes that he is true to himself and true to his culture. Important to note here is the context in which Rampolokeng places his contentions with the script - one which subscribes to the theoretical grounding of this research: *"the culture that becomes a product, because that's what it's become, does not get the respect it deserves, does not get the dignity, I think, it deserves"* (Rampolokeng 2006). Here, we recall the refinement by stereotyping which cultural items undergo for trade to the Western, capitalist world. This process turns these cultural items into objects, things, substances, when the notion of culture should denote difference and plurality, as lamented by Appadurai (1996: 12-13). Like Appadurai, Rampolokeng (2006) is also dismayed by the objectification of culture and says that to simply *"take a language and toss it in there just to make it [the script] exotic"* is not, in his view, treating the source culture with respect and dignity.

A further contention of Rampolokeng (2006) concerns most of the actors' pronunciation of their non-English lines which was: "*Something that should have been beautiful – I cringe*". Rampolokeng states that he did not expect to be involved in the film beyond the script writing (and indeed, he was not). However, he was disappointed that there was no language coach to assist the actors, of which only two are actually Sowetan (Owen Sejake, who plays Bra Dan, Sox's uncle, and Percy Matsemala, who plays gang member, Fly), to pronounce their lines accurately.

Yet coupled with Rampolokeng's feelings around his part in *Hijack Stories* (2000) comes the deep understanding and resignation to Schmitz's ultimate role as the film's director: "*I guess also if I give this little corner to this person to direct, then that takes power away from me... and I can understand in a human way*" (Rampolokeng 2006).

Hijack Stories (2000) was translated into French and English⁶ because of its multilingualism – English, Zulu and a variety of township slang⁷. In addition to the South African hire release, the film is also occasionally shown on DSTV's Movie Magic Channel. But neither of these has been translated for the South African audience. This, however, appears to have been unintentional as Schmitz was shocked to learn that the South African edition was without subtitles. He believes that Ster Kinekor must have received the incorrect copy for production. Of course, as Schmitz explained, it is not at all in Ster Kinekor's interest for the film to be without subtitles, as a very large part of the market is excluded.

⁶ Despite the considerable involvement - in both production and financing – of German parties, no German release or translation of *Hijack Stories* was carried out. Schmitz (2006) explained that the German company unfortunately went bankrupt. However, Schmitz added that there is presently a move to translate *Hijack Stories* into German, as the audience response from festivals and special screenings was very good.

⁷ In particular, the slang is listed as Tsotsitaal, Scamtho and Soweto-speak on the DVD. There is also some Afrikaans in the dialogue.

This is certainly the way that many viewers unfamiliar with black South African languages, dialects and slang felt. However, Peterson (2006) argues that there is a fair amount of repetition, so that something which is said in a language other than English is then said again in English, although perhaps in a different way. The following two images are examples of such repetition taken from the British edition. The character Grace (played by Motshegwa) says the same line first in Zulu then again in English. The first line in Zulu is subtitled in a darker font (frame 1) while the second line in English is subtitled in a lighter font (frame 2):



Frame 1 – British edition – 23: 37

Grace [in Zulu]: “Ucabanga ukuthi ngiyisifebe?”



Frame 2 – British edition – 23: 40

Grace [in English]: “Do you think I’m a prostitute?”

More on this approach to subtitling will be discussed further on in the chapter. Peterson added that much could be understood from the context of the scene in question. However, despite this as someone unfamiliar with these languages it is difficult not to feel somewhat in the dark, especially when in many instances there is no such repetition and due to the fact that the South African version does not have any subtitles at all.

Schmitz (2006) explained that for the British edition, a copy of the multilingual script as well as an English translation of all the non-English dialogue was sent to London. There, a South African checked the translation for the British audience. This edition was used for the film’s festival screenings. As demonstrated above,

the British edition subtitles both English and non-English dialogue. Interesting to note is that the very first subtitle for the very first line of the film (still during the opening credits) is preceded by a note in brackets for the viewer:



Frame 3 – British edition – 00: 16

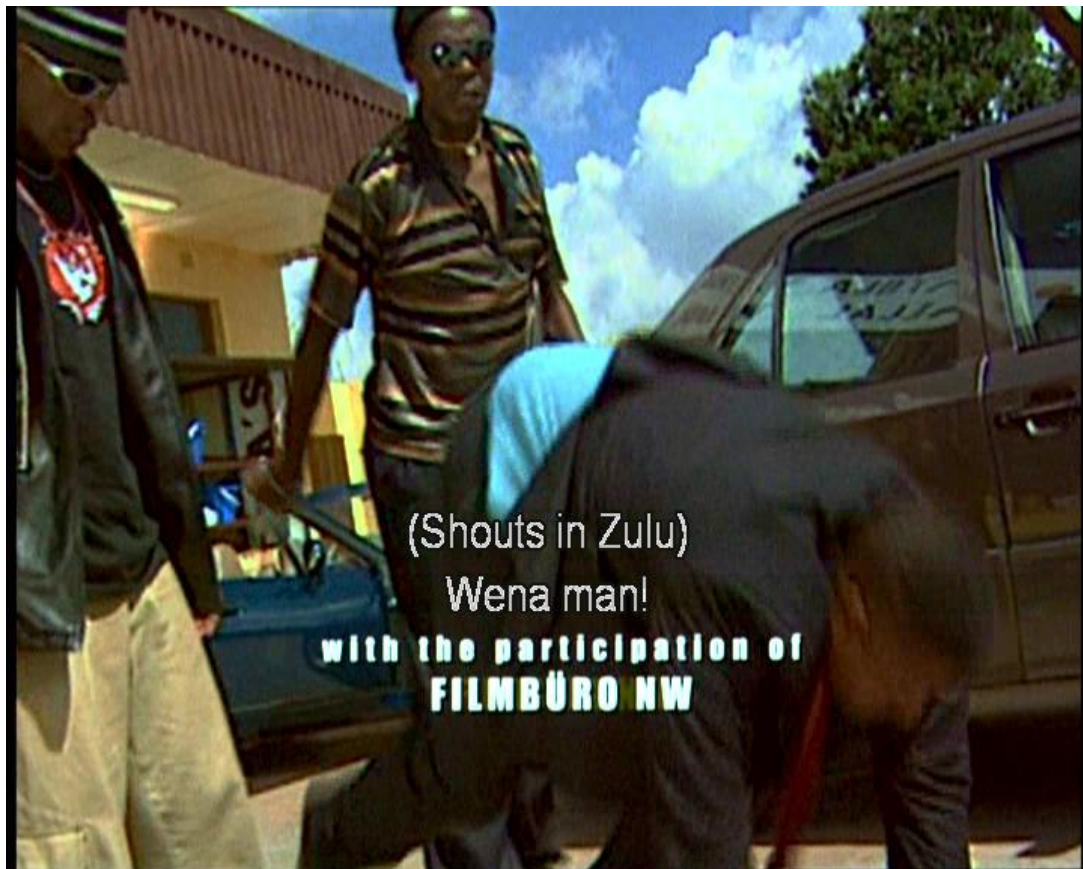
Man [in English]: “You organise a little vegetables.”

This is to alert the British viewer that the speaker is speaking English, but with a South African accent and to prepare the viewer's ear for this variety of English, which at first may even sound like a foreign language. It is also important to note that this very first scene of *Hijack Stories* (2000) is actually a scene from the fictional television series *Bra Biza* – the show whose main character is the role Sox is so desperate to get. It is perhaps for this reason that not all the dialogue in this scene was translated:



Frame 4 – British edition – 00: 35

After the character in frame 3 has said his lines in English, he is jumped by a group of thugs who steal his keys to hijack his vehicle. It is at this point that the dialogue changes to Zulu (although there are a few subtitled lines of English dialogue in between). Because this scene is not part of the film, strictly speaking, the subtitlers have decided that it is not necessary to subtitle the gangsters' flurry of fast dialogue in Zulu and instead inform the reader that the dialogue is in Zulu (frame 4). However, perhaps for flavour just one line of Zulu is subtitled, but in Zulu:



Frame 5 – British edition – 00: 51

The French version of this scene has a different approach, only subtitling some of the gangster's lines in Zulu and in English and not the opening line by the man targeted by the thugs. Furthermore, the opening lines of this character in frame 3 in the French version are barely audible as the volume of his lines is very low.

The French edition is both subtitled and dubbed (dubbing to be discussed in more detail further on), giving the viewer the option of how he or she would like to experience the film. It was after the film's screening at the Cannes film festival that the French producers decided to do a French translation of the film. The French translators worked with the British script to create both a subtitled and dubbed version of the film. Before looking at the particularities of the translations

of these two editions, it is necessary to gain a better understanding of translation for film⁸.

There are two main approaches or *modes* in audiovisual or screen translation. They are subtitling, “*the process of providing synchronised captions for film and television dialogue*” (Shuttleworth & Cowie 1997: 161), and dubbing, “*the replacement of the original speech by a voice which attempts to follow as closely as possible to the timing, phrasing and lip movement of the original dialogue*” (Luyken et al 1991: 31 in Baker 1998: 74–75).

Subtitling is known to be a much faster and cheaper process than dubbing, costing just one fifteenth of the price of dubbing (Shuttleworth & Cowie 1997: 161), which may explain why this approach was used for both foreign editions of *Hijack Stories* (2000; 2001). Yet subtitling is not a simple task as there are a number of constraints to take into account (not to mention those already present in the translation process alone) such as space, time, synchrony, and display⁹.

In terms of space, the subtitles of both the French and British versions are towards the bottom of the screen and centre-aligned. The space occupied by the subtitles is important, as it inevitably interferes with the visual image on screen. Further, it is essential that the subtitles be provided in a clear font and colour in order to ensure their clear visibility and easy legibility (Shuttleworth & Cowie 1997: 161-2). Both editions *Hijack Stories* (2000; 2001) use a clear, white font.

The subtitling of the British edition is unique in that it reflects the film’s multilingualism by using two different fonts. When the dialogue is in English, a

⁸ It is not the purpose of this research to delve into the technicalities of subtitling and dubbing. The technical aspects that are discussed are to give the reader background knowledge into the process.

⁹ Due to the highly technical nature of the timing and synchrony of subtitling which is mostly irrelevant to this study, only space and display are discussed.

plain white font is used and when the dialogue is in a language other than English a much bolder font is used:



Frame 6 – British edition – 16: 12

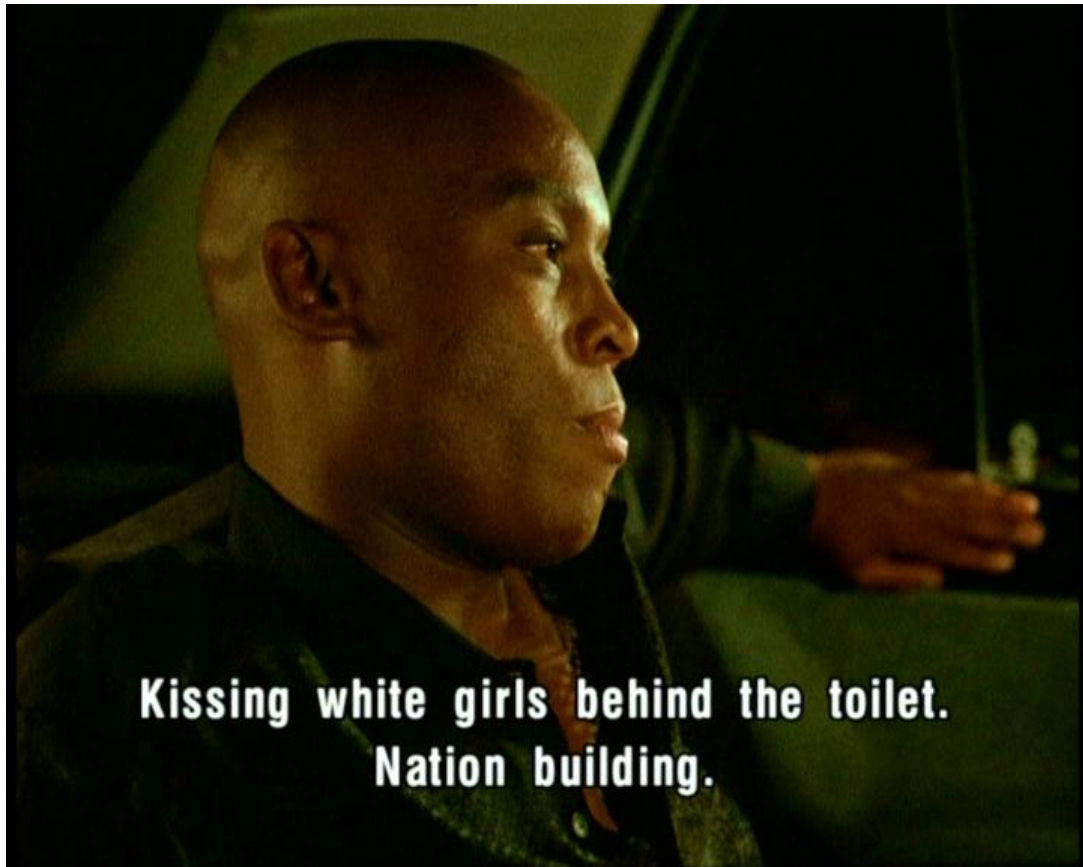
Sox [in English]: "I got you scared for a moment".

Fly [in Zulu]: "Wenzani wena?"

The reason behind this approach is twofold. Firstly, it is an indication of the character code-switching language as the transition from English to another language is mostly unclear in the film, as characters change seamlessly between languages in mid sentence. Secondly, using two different fonts is a way of signalling to Deaf and hard of hearing audiences that there is a change in language, which is important particularly if such audiences are lip-reading.

Subtitles are further distinguished linguistically. The approach used in the British edition to accommodate *Hijack Stories*' (2000) multilingual dialogue means that, linguistically, the subtitles are both interlingual and intralingual. Interlingual subtitles, which is the most common form of subtitling and the only form used for the French edition, is simply translation from one language to another while intralingual subtitles translate into the same language as the original dialogue (Baker 1998: 247). This is done not just for the benefit Deaf and hard-of-hearing audiences, but for audiences which may struggle with a character's accent.

However, there are a few instances in the British edition of *Hijack Stories* (2000) where the intralingual subtitles approach – a bolder font to signal non-English - is used even though the character is, in fact, speaking in English. This is the case for the following example:



Frame 9 – French edition - 18: 12

There are several reasons as to why this was done, one being that the character's accent is too strong for most English audiences to understand. Indeed, the same tactic was employed for certain scenes in Danny Boyle's *Trainspotting* (1996) where the Scottish accent was considered far too strong for most audiences to decipher. This line could also have been subtitled this way as it is in the midst of a purely-Zulu dialogue. It also, quite simply, could have been an oversight on the part of the British subtitlers.

The French edition, however, uses a different approach. Because it is assumed that this audience does not understand English, there is no distinction made between English and non-English dialogue. This would mean that there would be a lot of unnecessary repetition without a difference in language. The French

subtitles cater for this by rephrasing any repetition (see pgs. 62-63) by using synonyms, which is demonstrated in the following two frames – the same frames as frames 1 and 2:



Frame 7 – French edition – 23: 35

Grace [in Zulu]: "Ucabanga ukuthi ngiyisifebe?"

French subtitle translation: "What am I? A whore?"



Frame 8 – French edition – 23: 38

Grace [in English]: “Do you think I’m a prostitute”

French subtitle translation: “A prostitute?”

Subtitling is also distinguished technically with what is known as open subtitling and closed subtitling. Open subtitling is not optional and is a “*physical part of the film*”. The subtitling of foreign films on circuit and of television broadcasts is therefore open. Closed subtitling is optional and is the technical form of subtitles for the French and British editions of the film. Here, the viewer can select on the DVD’s menu whether he or she would like to view the film with or without subtitles.

In addition to optional subtitling, viewers of the French DVD may also opt to have the film’s dialogue entirely in French. This is known as dubbing or, more specifically, lip-sync dubbing, a process by which “*the foreign dialogue is*

adjusted to the mouth movements of the actor in the film (Dries 1995: 9 in Shuttleworth & Cowie 1997: 45). The matching of sound to mouth movements – known as “visual phonetics” – poses a considerable challenge to the translator as the dubbed dialogue must visually match the actor’s mouth movements (1997: 45).

Dubbing has the advantage of demanding less “*cognitive effort*” from the audience as the latter’s attention is not divided between the screen and the subtitles (Goris 1993: 171 in Baker 1998: 75). As a result of matching the dubbed translation to the actors’ mouth movements, the audience is left with the impression that the actors are, in fact, speaking in the target language (TL) (Shuttleworth & Cowie 1997: 45).

Because dubbing is an “*oral translation of an oral source text*” (Baker 1998: 75) it would seem to be the best approach to screen translation. But there are a few disadvantages to dubbing. Firstly, it is a far more expensive process than subtitling due to the necessity of voice artists, editors, sound engineers and costly equipment (Shuttleworth & Cowie 1997: 45). Also, many feel that a dubbed film is less “*authentic*” (Shuttleworth & Cowie 1997: 45 – 46) as the audience does not hear the original dialogue. Lastly, unlike subtitling dubbing does not have the advantage of providing information or explanation for the viewer, as is done in frame 3 (see pg. 68).

Nonetheless, a French dubbed version was carried out – a decision based on France’s traditional preference in screen translation. The choice of dubbing, subtitling, or both will depend on the tradition and “*preference of the country for which the translation is being done*” (1997: 161). Regarding this preference, the world is roughly divided into four groups (Baker 1998: 244), two of which are relevant to the foreign editions of *Hijack Stories* (2000). The first group consists of source language (SL) countries, mainly anglophone. The United Kingdom falls into this category and the preference is to subtitle foreign language films and

categorise them as “art” movies for literate audiences (1998: 244). France falls into the second group, which is made up of other major language countries (Germany, Italy, Spain) where the preference is to dub almost all foreign-language films¹⁰. In this way we see that:

The decision as to which film translation mode to choose is by no means arbitrary and stems from several factors, such as historical circumstances, traditions, the technique to which the audience is accustomed, the cost, as well as on the position of both the target and the source cultures in an international context.

(Szarkowska 2005)

The latter part of this quote raises an interesting area of discussion, and could perhaps explain the reasons for the French edition being both dubbed and subtitled, when the preference for film translation in France is dubbing. Indeed, *“the choice of the translating strategy largely depends on the attitude of the target culture vis-à-vis the source culture”* (Szarkowska 2005) and France has for a long time been interested in South African cinema (starting with the Amiens Film Festival against Racism and for Friendship between Peoples in 1983). This is also evident from the wealth of French material on South African cinema available on the internet.

This means that the French audience might prefer subtitles because it guarantees immersion. To explain this further, we can refer to Lawrence Venuti’s (1995) domestication and foreignisation theory which Agnieszka Szarkowska (2005) links to dubbing and subtitling – dubbing being a form of domestication,

¹⁰ The third group consists of medium-sized speech communities, such as Russia and Poland, which have a tradition of employing voice-over dubbing for screen translation, using only one voice for the entire dialogue. The original soundtrack is not muted but left on at a low volume. The fourth and last group consists of non-European speech communities and small European countries with a high literacy rate. It is for this reason that subtitling is preferred to dubbing. This group consists of the Scandinavian countries, The Netherlands, Belgium, Egypt, and a few countries in the Arab world (Shuttleworth & Cowie 1997: 161).

and subtitling being a form of foreignisation¹¹. By subtitling, “*the foreign identity of the source text is highlighted...Foreignisation privileges the source culture, and it evokes a sense of ‘otherness’, emphasising the foreign nature of the film*” (Szarkowska 2005) which “*sends the reader abroad*” (Munday 2001: 146).

¹¹ It should be noted that this view is only valid on a macro-level. Linguistically, subtitles are very often quite literal which means that they are therefore foreignised, rather than domesticated. For example, in *Hijack Stories* (2000) the character Fly suggests taking Sox for “a spin” in the car (43: 14), meaning taking Sox with on a (criminal) joyride, which is what takes place in the following scene. The French subtitle translates “a spin” quite literally with “*une rotation*”. Although *une rotation* can mean a trip, the first reaction of one French speaker on this translation was that it is too literal and suggested “*un tour (en bagnole)*” instead. Here, *une rotation* is understood literally as either the spinning of wheels, or actually spinning the car in circles in one spot.