

INTRODUCTION

AIMS

This research report examines the journey of a South African film in translation, using Oliver Schmitz's *Hijack Stories* (2000) as a case study. It takes the context of the South African film industry past and present as its point of departure. Along the way, this journey makes several stops to consider the film's genesis, distribution, foreign releases, packaging, local and foreign reception, and aspects of its language and audiovisual translation. The destination is an in-depth understanding of the processes – namely those of state, institution and the individual - which allowed for the creation and foreign co-production and distribution of this modern South African film.

This research uncovers the reasons for *Hijack Stories*' (2000) overseas screening by examining the value ascribed to it. Why were foreign production companies interested in becoming involved in a South African film and what draws non-South African audiences to watch it? Karl Marx's 1887 commodity theory (translated into English in 1971) provides a very useful theoretical framework with which to address these questions. Although essentially an economic theory, it is expounded on by Arjun Appadurai (1986, 1996) in a way which gives the theory a more literary application. It is useful for this research as it addresses the broader issues of culture and exchange of texts such as *Hijack Stories* (2000). This research examines how *Hijack Stories* (2000) has acquired a kind of cultural commodity status outside of South Africa through its circulation to foreign audiences, ultimately increasing its cultural value within the context of globalisation and intensified cultural exchange. Applying commodity theory involves an examination of all factors – social, cultural, financial, and political – which brought *Hijack Stories* (2000) into existence, enabling it global circulation consequently resulting in its translation.

In the processes of being created and then screened, *Hijack Stories* (2000) becomes a cultural item, packaged for circulation within the Western capitalist world. The film is marketed as what Graham Huggan refers to as a “postcolonial exotic” which is what attracts Western audiences, for whom the film was intended.

METHODOLOGY

In tracing this journey it is accepted that *Hijack Stories* (2000) is a product entered onto the cultural market intended for exchange and consumption and that translation allows for this circulation. Translation is also seen as just one of the many processes which form part of *Hijack Stories*’ (2000) existence but also as a process which is shaped by many other factors. It is for this fundamental reason that Marx’s commodity theory provides the appropriate foundation on which to examine the film’s journey.

Linguistics-oriented approaches to translation have long been criticised for being too conservative and “*reluctant to take into account the social values [and ideologies] that enter into translating as well as the study of it*” (Venuti 1998: 1 in Karoubi 2005). Commodity theory, on the other hand, offers a broader framework with which to address the larger issues of ideology and the cultural¹ in translation, making it a particularly relevant theory for this translation case study. This research does not take the conventional route of film translation research, known as comparative analysis, in which the quality of the translation is assessed by comparing it to the original text². In the latter case, a linguistics-oriented approach would be highly suitable given the textual nature of such research.

¹ Appadurai (1996: 12-13) objects to the word *culture*, stating that its noun form objectifies and implies singularity in its meaning. Instead he suggests the adjectival form of *cultural* to reflect the notion of culture, as it “*moves one into a realm of differences, contrasts, and comparisons that is more helpful*” (1996: 12). See further discussion on this in chapter two.

² Because a comparative analysis is not being carried out, it is not essential for this researcher to be familiar with the black South African languages and slang spoken in the film’s dialogue, although mother-tongue speakers have been consulted where necessary.

There is also a temporal context to consider and that is that the world is in the throes of globalisation. The effects of this phenomenon are seen and felt everywhere and are clearly evident in *Hijack Stories* (2000) which was created with a truly global ensemble. Globalisation has meant that films such as *Hijack Stories* (2000) can travel more widely than before as there are new avenues through which it is able to gain exposure.

It has been said that *Hijack Stories* (2000) was created and is marketed with a mostly foreign audience in mind (Tilley 2006). It is therefore interesting to explore the film's reception with foreign audiences and with South African audiences by looking at reviews (see pg. 26-28). Investigating these differences is theoretically aided with Lydia Liu's (1999) discussion on the circulation of ideas, a movement intensified by globalisation.

How differently foreign audiences receive *Hijack Stories* (2000) from local audiences is a reflection of two very different markets and who the film is aimed at. This aspect of the film is worthy of consideration as how it is received by different audiences significantly affects its value locally and outside South Africa. Graham Huggan (1994; 1997) provides a very compelling debate for this area, fitting in well with commodity theory.

The overall theoretical structure of this report is Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS), as theorised by Gideon Toury (1985; 1995) and Itamar Even-Zohar (1978). The report aims to make observations rather than prove a theory; therefore the broad theoretical approach of DTS is appropriate as it *describes*, *explains* and *predicts phenomena* in translation (Toury, 1995: 1). It is an empirical research tool, which means that it accounts for situations in the real world "in a systematic and controlled way" (Toury, 1995: 1). DTS does not make assumptions about the universal nature of translation and avoids making historical and universalist claims about translation. It is a socio-semiotic cultural approach, looking at translations in context (their situation: time, culture, etc.).

Thus this report considers the socio-political as well as linguistic context in which the "text" – which in this case study is *Hijack Stories* (2000) - has taken place.

Toury asserts that translation studies should be target-oriented, acknowledging the importance of the target culture, as translations are "facts of one system only: the target system" (Toury 1985: 19). This means that the "acceptability" of a translation is described from a target-culture perspective. This in turn, as Venuti writes (2000: 123), transforms the concept of equivalence; deciding whether or not a translation is "adequate"³ to the ST is "an unproductive line of enquiry" because of the occurrence of shifts and the application of a target norm.

However, overemphasis on the target system presents itself as a limitation (Hermans 1999: 218). This is because elements of the source system, such as the cultural, politics, time and ideology, and the possibility of the source culture promoting its own literature, and the effect of this on the source culture system, is overlooked. This shortcoming is compensated for by exploring the source culture and considering the context in which the film is made and screened.

Within DTS there are three different approaches for research (Toury 1995: 36–39; 102, and expanded on by Munday 2001: 112). These are function-oriented DTS; process-oriented DTS; and product-oriented DTS:

- Function-oriented DTS examines and situates the function of the text within the target cultural system and what influence it may have in the system.
- Process-oriented DTS concerns the psychological analysis of translation by looking at the process of translation and examining what goes through the mind of the translator.

³ The terms "acceptable" and "adequate" used by Toury came into disrepute because they were perceived as having evaluative overtones. However, by "adequate" Toury simply means that the translation is source text (ST) oriented, meaning that it is closer to the ST.

- The third approach is product-oriented. Toury (1995) provides three steps which illustrate how to use this approach effectively. These allow for the systematic description of the product in relation to its position in the target system and, therefore, allow the identification of norms and constraints. The first step is to situate the product (text) within the target culture system while looking at the way it is integrated and received by the target system. Respectively, the second and third steps involve identifying shifts through comparison of the ST and the TT and then drawing implications for approaches to future translations. For this research, the first step is useful for it examines the system in which the text occurs. The second and third steps are less so, due to the fact that this research does not involve comparative analysis of the text.

However, there are also elements of a process-oriented approach in this research, albeit not in the strictest sense as described above. Using a process-oriented approach involves addressing extra-textual factors and the system in which the text finds itself. Examining the system involves looking at powers and institutions which affect a *thing*, which for this report is *Hijack Stories* (2000). In fact, examining the system is also an aspect of a function-based approach, which means that all three approaches are employed in this report.

The benefit of function, process and product-oriented approaches is that inferences can be drawn about how translations were carried out within a certain genre at a certain time in history. In this report, considerations are made about films in South Africa made in the period from the end of the 1990s to the early 2000s, and about the factors which affected the film and its journey.

Although DTS is corpus-based, meaning that it examines and makes inferences on the basis of a body or collection of texts, this report takes the form of a case study. The case study involves “*a single unit to be analysed: a single translation, a single translator, a single translation company...*” (Williams & Chesterman

2002: 65). *Hijack Stories* (2000) does, however, belong to a greater whole - South African films – and from this individual analysis, inferences can be drawn about South African films of this period.

By its nature, DTS is non-judgemental and open-minded in its approach to each individual translation, striving for an objective approach (Toury 1995). It is dynamic (due to the actively shifting nature of translation itself), flexible (because of the freedom which translation researchers enjoy in choosing their analytical tools), and scientific (Toury calls DTS an “empirical science”) in that it is impartial and based on fact and uses scientific methods. In conducting research it is natural that subjectivity may affect the outcome, meaning that research cannot be entirely objective. If the conditions of the study of the translation process were static, then perhaps it would be possible to be objective. Given the dynamic nature of research, a degree of personal judgement and subjectivity is unavoidable. Research is inevitably influenced also by personal experience and background. For example, as a young white female, I might have a different view on the subject matter from that of an older black male. There is no doubt that my subjectivities have affected the research in one way or another. Furthermore, unfamiliarity with black South African languages, dialects and slang is most certainly a factor, given that *Hijack Stories* (2000) is not only in English. It is interesting to consider how individual judgements and subjectivities have played out in the case of *Hijack Stories* (2000), one example being conflicting opinions between *Hijack Stories*’ (2000) two scriptwriters (one of whom is the film’s director). Part of the objective of this research is to unpack these subjective processes and discover how they have impacted on the final product.

Regarding the case study methodology, Denscombe (2003: 30) writes that “*when researchers opt for a case study approach they buy into a set of related ideas and preferences which, when combined, give the approach its distinctive character*”. This notion of buying into a set of related ideas and preferences is true especially since this is qualitative research which is “more subjective” and

“often requires empathy [...] and imagination” (Williams & Chesterman 2002: 65). Characteristic of the case study approach is that it hones in *“on just one instance of the thing that is to be investigated”* (Denscombe 2003: 30).

This research is also what Denscombe describes as an “extreme instance” of a case study because the *Hijack Stories* (2000) is “far from being typical” and “provides something of a contrast with the norm”. This is evident in the fact that the film was subtitled into a foreign language even before its South African release. A case-study approach has been adopted for the very reason that it allows for the examination of the particularities and intricacies of the film.

For this case study insight into the South African film industry and into *Hijack Stories* (2000) was obtained mostly from first hand research through interviews and correspondence. Given the limited material available on South African cinema today, and given the importance of subjectivity and its impact on the final product, this method was found to be the most appropriate. Furthermore, *Hijack Stories* (2000) is also a relatively new release which means even less relevant available material. It was for this reason that interviews were carried out with parties involved in the film and in the film industry. The most important interviews were with director Oliver Schmitz, and co-screenwriter Lesego Rampolokeng. Both the film’s leading actress, Moshidi Motshegwa, and script editor Brian Tilley were also interviewed. Interviews were also conducted with people in the film industry, such as Bheki Peterson (screenwriter and producer), Catherine Meyburgh (director, editor, deputy chair of the South African Screen Federation) as well as discussion with Fay Amaral (CEO of Nu Metro). The case study approach meets the criterion, defined by Denscombe (164-165) of providing *“detailed information”* which can be *“gathered from a small number of informants”* who are *“key players in the field who can give privileged information”*. The interview was therefore the main data collection tool. Interviews were semi-structured (2003: 167) and open-ended (Knobel and Lankshear in Sprott 2002) which encourages flexibility.

RATIONALE

This research falls within the ambit of Translation and Interpreting Studies, School of Literature and Language studies at the University of the Witwatersrand, whose intention it is to build a body of research on South African film and literature. This research is funded by the National Research Fund (NRF).

In February 2006 South Africa was abuzz with the nation's – and, in fact, Africa's – first Oscar award for Best Foreign Language Film for Gavin Hood's interpretation of Athol Fugard's *Tsotsi* (2005). In the words of top South African producer, Anant Singh, "*the South African film industry is peaking. Never before have we had so many accolades in such a short space of time*" (in Enslin 2006). This has meant that many of the issues surrounding the South African film industry which were researched at the outset of this report have subsequently entered the public domain.

Oliver Schmitz, the director of *Hijack Stories* (2000), is another South African film maker gaining international acclaim.

Hot on the heels of *Tsotsi* scooping the Oscar, comes the news that left-field South African film maker Oliver Schmitz is one of the directors of a collection of short films chosen to open the *Un certain regard* sidebar at the Cannes Film Festival in May.

(Dodd 2006)

German South African Schmitz (2006) is now based in Europe, where there are a lot more opportunities as a film maker. His final cinematic stamp on South African film is *Hijack Stories* (2000), which first came to my attention when seeing its trailer was flighted at a local cinema in 2003. It drew my attention for two reasons: it is a South African film – a rare feature on the local film circuit – and surprisingly, the trailer was subtitled in French. I was intrigued by the question of why the film had already been subtitled into French even before its release onto

the South African circuit. Further investigation revealed that the film is a shared production between France, Germany and the United Kingdom. The film also received financing from the European Union Co-Production Fund and Germany.

Given increasing international interest in South African films and given that *Hijack Stories* (2000) is a multinational production with French and English screen translations, it is highly appropriate that it should be the subject of a translation research report. This research does not take the conventional route of film and translation and instead is approached as a journey. By doing so, the context in which the film was made, its creation, its distribution, its different releases, foreign and local reception and, of course, its translation by way of subtitling into English and French and dubbing into French is taken into account.

Chapter one sets the scene by looking at South Africa's film industry from towards the end of apartheid to today, highlighting the challenges faced by film makers and how these affect the film making process. It then moves onto the creation of *Hijack Stories* (2000) – how it came about, what it is about, where it has gone, how it has been received and by whom.

Chapter two is also twofold. The first section introduces the theoretical approaches for this study, namely, Appadurai's literary expansion of Marx's commodity theory, Huggan's postcolonial exotic, Liu's circulation of ideas, and how they are relevant to *Hijack Stories* (2000) and how they help to explain why value is ascribed to it. The second section of chapter two deals with the commercial packaging and presentation of *Hijack Stories* (2000) as a product entered on the DVD market and how different editions reflect different aspects of South Africa's appeal to foreign markets.

The final chapter, chapter three, is dedicated to issues of the film's language and translation. It begins by addressing the creation and, indeed, the creators of the script and how their subjectivities come into play. The film's multilingualism,

represented by code-switching, and audiovisual translation in the form of subtitles (in French and British English) and dubbing (in French) are then explored.

To my knowledge, no prior research has been carried out on *Hijack Stories* (2000). This research report is therefore of interest to the School of Arts, in particular its department of Television and Film.

WITSELD