A Polish-German story told in English? *The Zookeeper's Wife* in the thicket of AVT

On language choices in movies

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Abstract
The feature film *The Zookeeper's Wife* follows the Żabińskis, zoo directors in German-occupied Warsaw, who use the grounds of the zoo to provide shelter to Jews trying to escape the Holocaust. The plot unfolds in English, whereas German and Polish, the two languages anchored diegetically in the film, are reduced to background noise. This therefore represents yet another example of a film where the choice of language seems to be highly illogical and almost entirely the result of commercial factors. My paper aims to highlight the manifold relationships between film plots and the language of their narration, including the question of whether and how these can change in the course of audiovisual translation processes. To achieve this, I examine linguistic logic in movies in general, and describe a variety of "linguistic replacement" strategies with reference to additional examples and alternative solutions. I then draw attention to the dubbed and subtitled versions available for *The Zookeeper's Wife* in Polish and German, and argue that in this case neither language can truly replace the other. Multilingual films with plots in clearly determined linguistic settings are inevitably prone to a loss of credibility if linguistic logic is disregarded from the outset. This applies even more so if they are screened in regions where the diegetic languages of the films are spoken and understood.

Keywords: linguistic logic, movie production, multilingual movies, dubbing, subtitling

Introduction

The levels of production, distribution and reception of movies interpenetrate and interact with one other, with the result that decisions on one level have consequences for another. Included amongst these are various linguistic decision-making processes that extend from the idea and the screenplay through casting, setting, filming and distributing, to the actual choice of a reception mode by primary and secondary audiences worldwide. Financiers, producers, screenwriters, directors, distributors, translators and finally consumers contribute to determine the choice of language(s) in which a film is produced, the choice of the translation options to be offered in a specific region for a specific audience, the translation strategies to be used according to how widely these are accepted and expected, and the particular film version to be ultimately viewed. Depending on how culturally specific the plot is, the production-based selection of languages and their relation to the diegetic level of the film can be pushed into the foreground and draw considerable attention, or, conversely, remain unobtrusive. This in turn has a lot to do with the extent to which we highlight and / or tolerate discrepancies between the written and spoken word, between the spoken and sung word, between actions and settings and audible languages, and in short, between the story narrated and the language(s) in which the story is narrated. Key factors in this process include how we have been socialised with respect to films, what

our habitual forms of film reception are, and what particular means of reception we apply depending on the system or device actually used for viewing.

Language choices on the level of movie production, distribution and reception

The relationship between the narrated story and the language of the narrative can be taken as self-evident in many films and therefore need not be addressed in these prevalent cases. In other films, however, discrepancies between narrated content and narrative language can move to the fore. A number of elements can have an impact on the choice of language at the level of production, distribution and reception of films. On the production level they almost always include:

(1) thematically and substantively justified arguments, such as

- assumptions about the cultural specificity or universality of a story told or topic addressed
- the existence of literary originals (e.g. biographies, diaries, novels, plays) or other text formats (e.g. prequels, computer games etc.) to which reference should be made

(2) film-specific considerations, such as

- traditions, experiences and expectations regarding certain genres and formats (e.g. mini-series, period dramas, RomCom)
- artistic demands (e.g. arthouse cinema)

(3) technical and cast-related arguments, such as

- the film crew, including financier(s), producer and director
- the actual casting (including the popularity of actors and their current availability)
- filming schedule and locations available

(4) commercially based arguments, such as

- the expected financial success
- the primary and secondary target groups
- the potential focus on festivals and nominations

(5) linguistically based arguments, such as

- the recourse to a language as the (presumed) language of discourse regarding a specific topic (e.g. English as the language for globalised representations of the Holocaust and WWII-related topics)
- the roles that language(s) play in the film plot itself
- general language awareness and individual language skills of the people involved.

On the level of distribution, the expected commercial gain mentioned above (4) appears to be of particular significance, as it is closely linked to culturally related considerations regarding whether a given film plot may be of any interest or significance to audiences in the area(s) of distribution in the first place. Apart from that, film distribution is always closely related to linguistically motivated arguments (5). Accordingly, the languages spoken (understood) in the area(s) in which a movie is distributed, as well as the tradition(s) of audiovisual translation (AVT) dominating there, are of vital importance.

This takes different forms in countries that dub films versus those that subtitle them (just to mention the two main AVT modes). The different technical conditions that dubbing and subtitling are subjected to (e.g. lip sync in the case of the former, and the number of words and retention time in relation to reading speed in the latter) inevitably entail changes to the original text. Apart from this, many cultural factors have an impact on decision making in the field of AVT, such as, for example, the expected degree of domestication.[1] By its very nature movie translations are different in most European countries when compared to the Anglo-American world which produces the largest share of films distributed worldwide and in which the mainstream audience is hardly confronted in any serious way with the linguistic thicket of AVT.[2] On the level of reception it is the individual's skills related to language (5) that are decisive, accompanied by technical based issues, which include the reception mode and the technical devices deployed (TV, cinema, DVD, internet) and the language options they offer .

In many cases, producers and directors will look for a logical connection between the story told, the setting where the action takes place, the people involved, and the languages spoken in the film. For example, the English-language film *1917* (USA / UK / India / Spain / Canada 2019, Sam Mendes)[3] deals with the fate of British soldiers in the trenches of WWI; the German-language series *Babylon Berlin* (Germany 2017, Henk Handloegten, Tom Tykwer, Achim von Borries) uses a German-language retro-city crime series[4] to show events in the German capital Berlin, starting in 1929; and the French-language film *J'accuse* [*An Officer and a Spy*] (France / Italy 2019, Roman Polański) takes up the fate of French officer Alfred Dreyfus, who was charged with high treason from 1894 to 1906 (the film uses the famous quotation from writer Emile Zola,1898, as its original title). In all three films the plot, setting for the action and language(s)[5] form a logical unit. In the course of distribution across language borders, however, this unit is in danger of dissolution, especially if the original language version is dubbed: Soldiers clearly recognisable as members of the British Army would then speak German with each other in "British" trenches; police detectives in late-1920s Berlin would communicate with each other in fluent Italian; and members of the French Army would negotiate the fate of Dreyfus in Spanish.[6] The habits, interests, language awareness and skills of film viewers are what ultimately determine how important such discrepancies are to them and whether

1 Polish dubbing, for example, is known for its extensive domestication, cf. Leszczyńska / Szarkowska (2018). For AVT-related issues in general cf. Pérez-Gonzalez (2014).

2 See the reference to "the one-inch-tall barrier of subtitles" made by South Korean director Bong Joon Ho in his acceptance speech for receiving the awards for Best Picture, Best Director, Best International Feature and Best Original Screenplay at the 2020 Academy Awards for *Parasite* (Garcia 2020).

3 Information on all films mentioned is given in the following order: country / countries of production / year of production, director(s). For this information I rely on: www.imdb.com.

4 Cf. Volker Kutscher's crime series about commissioner Gereon Rath, that has appeared continuously since 2007. *Babylon Berlin* is based on part 1 (*Der nasse Fisch*) and part 2 (*Der stumme Tod*) of the series (Cf. Kriminalkommissar Gereon Rath n.d.).

5 In *1917* we can hear short utterances in German and French and in *Babylon Berlin* in Russian, all diegetically justified.

6 The German-, Italian- and Spanish-speaking film markets are among the dubbing strongholds in Europe, alongside French-speaking areas.

they prefer to be exposed to the latter at most in a moderate way (via subtitles or voice-over) or not at all (in the original version).

There are, however, films that from the outset display inconsistencies between their plots, setting for action and protagonists, and the language(s) chosen for production. On closer inspection, it may come as a surprise to see how stark the discrepancy between plot and linguistic implementation can become. A meaningful example is *War & Peace* (UK 2016, Tom Harper). This six-part British / US-American television mini-series is based on Leo Tolstoy's famous and widely translated novel from the years 1865-1867. As is well known, the story takes place among the aristocracy in Moscow and St. Petersburg, against the background of the French invasion of Russia in 1812. With a few exceptions (singing in Church Slavonic, short sequences among French officers in French) this truly Russian story is told in English. Vital for this decision, one can suppose, was the global familiarity with the story and the producers' long cinematic experience with the genre. In a similar way, the story of the rediscovery of the French film pioneer Georges Méliès is portrayed in *Hugo* (UK / USA / France 2011, Martin Scorsese). Although the entire plot is located at the Parisian train station Montparnasse, where the young Hugo discovers the roots of film history, the story is told in English. The existence of a literary model in the form of the 2007 graphic novel *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* by American author Brian Selznick, and the availability of well-known actors (among them Ben Kingsley) may have been a determining factor here. A genuine "German" story is told in English and by an entirely Anglo-American cast in *Swing Kids* (USA 1993, Thomas Carter). The plot is set in the town of Hamburg in the year 1939, where a group of German teenagers live out their music-based opposition to enforced conformity. The story mirrors the well documented opposition movement of the "Swingkids" between 1933 and 1941 in Germany and Austria.[7] In this case the American origin of swing and a strong adherence to British and American role models could certainly build a bridge to the English language. Two more recent examples that depict resistance to National Socialism in Germany and Austria are worthwhile mentioning here: *Alone in Berlin* (UK / France / Germany 2016, Vincent Pérez) and *A Hidden Life* (USA / UK / Germany 2019, Terrence Malick). The existence of the famous German-language novel by Hans Fallada (*Jeder stirbt für sich allein* [Every man dies alone], 1947) obviously did not present a sufficient argument to choose German as the language of narration, let alone the fact that the story is set in exclusively German-speaking environments. Both movies were directed by renowned directors and produced by international crews, with the British actress Emma Thompson starring alongside the Irish actor Brendan Gleeson, as the grieving and desperate Quangel couple in *Alone in Berlin*.[8] In *A Hidden Life* the whole Austrian and German cast is made to speak English, a decision widely criticised by the English and German speaking film communities.[9] Evidently the aspirations for global distribution and financial success were

[7] See Swingjugend (2020).

[8] See the various comments on the topic of language choice, e.g. in *The Guardian*: "Cinematically, despite the high calibre of its performers, this film version certainly suffers from its nakedly ambitious attempt to be an 'international' proposition: English dialogue, with Gleeson and Thompson adopting German accents – as does Daniel Brühl, a fluent German speaker […]." (Pulver 2016)

[9] See the many user reviews referring to this aspect as something of "a gross mistake" (cf. A Hidden Life User Reviews n.d.).

predominant also in these cases. Further examples of this type of scenario, where films depict "endolingual and monolingual communicative situation[s]" (Bleichenbacher 2008a:12) in a language somehow surprisingly different from the language of the plot, can be identified at will.[10]

If the plot and visual realisation are convincing – which definitely is the case for each of the films mentioned above – linguistic inconsistencies can, to a certain extent, remain in the background and hardly affect the reception. A comparable effect is familiar in regions where dubbing is the rule. Film viewers accustomed to this mode of translation are known to have little difficulty with having their film heroes speak in languages other than expected from the perspective of the filmic diegesis.[11] If the narrative is based on a plot situation that is linguistically constructed in a uniform way, if language(s) is / are not relevant to the plot, or if the story is considered "universal," then a lack of linguistic logic evidently remains largely acceptable. Actual logical consistency between the story and the language in which it is narrated could only be established in these films if they were to be viewed in Russian (*War & Peace*), French (*Hugo*) or German (*Swing Kids*, *Alone in Berlin*, *A Hidden Life*). This would ultimately imply a decision to dub and solve the logical contradiction at both the narrative and the distribution and / or reception level. The extent to which dubbed performances by globally known British or US-American actors are acceptable to viewers depends to a large degree on their cinematic socialisation.[12] "Yet, throughout the history of film, literature, and theatre, audiences and critics have mostly accepted this sacrifice of realism for the sake of comprehension." (Bleichenbacher 2008a:55)

The questions regarding language choice and its impact in film become even more complicated when several languages are involved on the diegetic level, i.e. when the filmic plot at least partially portrays exchanges between speakers of different languages, or if the plot is set in potentially multilingual contexts. It will come as no surprise that these are often documentary and feature film productions, generally made as international co-productions, that explore topics such as migration, cross-border travel and working relationships, inter-ethnic and multilingual relations (prominent among them being so called culture- and / or language-clash comedies), (historical) encounters in the context of war, occupation and flight, relations between neighbouring countries, and globally oriented stories and themes. Significant examples of films in this vein, which also have a good international reputation, include migration stories such as *A Thousand Years of*

[10] Cf. Bleichenbacher's (2008a:12) definitions of endolingual ("A dinner table conversation of French L1 speakers in the Provence, which takes place in French only") and exolingual communicative situations ("An American tourist talking to a French policeman, who knows English, in Paris. The American does not speak French, and the conversation is entirely in English").

[11] A good illustration of this is the classic film *Spartacus* (USA 1960, Stanley Kubrick). The fact that Kirk Douglas, impersonating a Roman gladiator in 73 B.C., speaks American English only causes limited surprise to the worldwide audience, as does the fact that Spartacus speaks German in the German-speaking distribution area. For the sake of completeness, it should be noted that Kubrick's film is based on a novel written in English (Howard Fast, 1951, *Spartacus*).

[12] In fact, the "unacceptable contradiction" between (known) actors and the language they speak in films is the main argument made against dubbing by viewers accustomed to subtitling. In the case of *Spartacus* this would imply that although Kirk Douglas (a.k.a. Spartacus) could well speak American English, he should not speak German, French or Italian.

Good Prayers (USA 2007, Wayne Wang – incorporating English, Mandarin, Persian) and *Almanya* (Germany 2011, Yasemin Şamdereli – German, Turkish); culture-clash comedies such as *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (Canada / USA 2002, Joel Zwick – English, Greek) and *Hochzeitspolka* (Germany / Poland 2010, Lars Jessen / Przemysław Nowakowski – German, Polish); the presentation of war-related events such as *Anonyma – eine Frau in Berlin* [*A Woman in Berlin*] (Germany / Poland 2008, Max Färberböck – German, Russian) and *The Railway Man* (Switzerland / UK / Australia 2013, Jonathan Teplitzky – English, Japanese); the exploration of cross-border activities such as *Sicario* (USA / Mexico / Hong Kong 2015, Dennis Villeneuve – English, Spanish) and *Bron / Broen* [*The Bridge*] (Sweden / Denmark / Germany 2011-2018, TV – Swedish, Danish) and, of course, globally designed episodic films such as *Night on Earth* (France / UK / Germany / USA / Japan 1991, Jim Jarmusch – English, French, Finnish, Italian, German) and *Babel* (France / USA / Mexico 2006, Alejandro González Iñárritu – English, Arabic, Spanish, Japanese, French, Russian and others).

The Zookeeper's Wife...

The Zookeeper's Wife (USA / UK / Czech Republic 2017, Niki Caro) is a typical example of a film set in the context of WWII.[13] It is not surprising that in one form or another German (as the language of the perpetrators and occupying forces) plays a role in this type of film. The action takes place between summer 1939 and spring 1947 in the Polish capital Warsaw, and includes interactions among Jewish Poles, non-Jewish Poles and Germans. It covers a remarkable period in the lives of Dr. Jan Żabiński (1897-1974) and his wife Antonina (1908-1971), who directed the Warsaw zoo from 1929 to 1951. At that time the Warsaw zoo was one of the largest and best equipped in Europe. Following the outbreak of WWII on 1 September 1939, the couple face ever greater pressures. They have to care for the animals under the conditions and regulations of the occupation, while resisting the professional and personal ambitions of the German head zoologist, Lutz Heck. An initially collegial and even amicable relationship between the German and his Polish colleagues turns increasingly hostile. After the Warsaw Ghetto is established in October of 1940, the Żabińskis manage to smuggle around 300 Jews out of this location and hide them in the cellars and sheds of the extensive zoo grounds, to thereby save them from certain demise in the death camps. In recognition of their courage and willingness to help, the Żabińskis were awarded the title "Righteous among the Nations" by the State of Israel in 1965. The fate of the educator and author Janusz Korczak (1878-1942) appears as a subplot, as does the Warsaw Uprising (1944). The film has a happy end – the family is reunited after the war; and Heck, who symbolizes Nazi ambitions in general, is thwarted in both his unwelcome advances and megalomaniacal breeding projects.

The film was directed by New Zealand native Niki Caro and is based in large part on a book published in 2007 by the US-American author Diane Ackerman, that in turn was based on the memoirs of Antonina Żabińska from 1968 (written in Polish). It was filmed

[13] Poland faced the longest occupation by Nazi Germany of any country in Europe, lasting from September 1939 until the end of WWII. It became the scene of unprecedented atrocities by German perpetrators against Polish civilians and the Jewish population from all over Europe. These included the establishment of ghettos and subsequently the construction of extermination camps on the occupied territory.

in Prague and other locations in the Czech Republic, which are meant to portray war-time reality in occupied Poland. The film crew was mainly Czech. The two main "Polish" figures are played by Belgian actor Johan Heldenbergh and US-American actress Jessica Chastain, and the main German character is played by Spanish-German actor Daniel Brühl. The film also features Israeli, Irish, Czech, Bosnian, Croatian and Slovenian actors, as well as a few German and literally one Polish actress. Linguistic logic on the diegetic level would lead one to expect that Poles would speak with each other in Polish and the Germans in German. When members of the two groups communicate with each other, German would be the most likely choice, with the Polish side speaking it as a foreign language. Many Poles, including the Żabińskis as a prominent example, would in fact have had a reasonably good command of German whereas Heck and the other Germans could hardly be expected to have commanded sufficient Polish. Moreover, due not least of all to the time and circumstances of the story, there would be a clear linguistic hierarchy. Given their military and administrative power, the occupiers would impose their language as the means of communication, and therefore dominate the occupied population in the linguistic sphere as well. *The Zookeeper's Wife* certainly contains "endolingual and monolingual" (Poles speaking to Poles, Germans speaking to Germans) as well as "exolingual and monolingual communicative situations" (Poles speaking to Germans or vice versa) (cf. Bleichenbacher 2008a:12).

The producers chose to address this specific linguistic constellation by using English as the lead language of the film, a decision for which there are many reasons. In reference to the arguments mentioned above, I would argue that the following reasons were prevalent for the choice of language:

- thematically and substantively justified reasons, such as assumptions about the universality of the topics explored: courage, bravery and solidarity under life-threatening conditions, comparable to the stance taken by Oskar Schindler (cf. *Schindler's List* [USA 1993, Steven Spielberg]), as well as the existence of an English biography;
- production and cast-related reasons, such as the sources of funding, the nature of international film collaboration and a crowd-pulling English-speaking cast; and
- linguistically based reasons, according to which English is seen as the lingua franca of globalised Holocaust discourse.

English is the idiom for all of the dialogues that advance the plot. "Poles" communicate with each other without exception in English. They address "Germans" in English too, whereas "Germans" tend to talk to "Polish" interlocutors in English, but to shout at them in German, depending on the level of the implied hierarchy. "Germans" among themselves speak English on more important matters, but German on topics that are meant to underline their characterisation as "disagreeable," "patronising" and "disdainful." An interesting example of language contact shows two German soldiers commenting in German on the appearance of "Antonina Żabińska" in a sexist manner within her earshot (00:22:27-00:22:38).[14] "Żabińska" turns around and gives a pointed response in German ("Guten Tag, meine Herren"), thus revealing her language skills and shaming the speakers. The precise content of their remarks is not understandable without a solid

[14] For all data concerning time I rely on the DVD version of the film.

knowledge of German, but it is obviously considered unimportant and therefore remains unexplained and untranslated. In another scene (00:21:11-00:21:40), an official radio broadcast for civilians is given in both English (spoken with a "German" accent) and German, in this way mirroring the original linguistic juxtaposition of occupying forces (German) with occupied civilian population (Polish) and providing the latter with a consecutive oral translation. The dominant position of English as the lead language of the film is underscored by mostly short background utterances in German, Polish and also Hebrew. They can be heard in the form of brief calls by visitors at the zoo, passers-by, street traders and a conductor (in Polish); shouts, commands and short comments by soldiers (in German) and fragments of prayers and songs (in Polish or Hebrew). Most of the background interjections in German include the one- or two-syllable words "typical" for WWII-movies such as "halt," "los," "schneller," "hierher," "verschwinde" and so forth.[15] Other examples include the addressing of people as "Herr" or "Frau." Furthermore, there are pronounced differences in the English pronunciation of the actors, none of whom speak English as their first language, except for Jessica Chastain. Some appear at times to articulate English by intentionally using a foreign accent, which in the case of the main actress seems strangely artificial – as noted in reviews.[16] The only person to pronounce German names and places correctly (i.e. with the voice of German actor Daniel Brühl) is "Lutz Heck," but he naturally has trouble with the pronunciation of Polish proper names – as do all the other actors. These include the family name "Żabiński," the first name of their son "Ryś," that of their trusted employee "Jerzyk," and "Zalesie," the place the family wants to flee to, which are all pronounced in simplified phonetic form throughout the film. The linguistic spectrum is supplemented by elements alluding to a Polish,[17] German and Hebrew linguistic landscape – especially shop-, town- and street signs, labelling on buildings, posters and event descriptions.

The film's linguistic presentation thus displays a mix of strategies used in many "multilingual" film productions. It is mainly thanks to the Swiss Anglicist Lukas Bleichenbacher (cf. 2008a, 2008b) and the German film scholar Chris Wahl (cf. 2005, 2008) that we have a useful framework for describing the presence of several languages on the diegetic level of films and for classifying and interpreting their actual realisation in film. Based on the work of the Czech linguist Petr Mareš and an extensive film corpus, Bleichenbacher developed a list of replacement strategies that are also applicable to *The Zookeeper's Wife*. They all serve the purpose of indicating and alluding to the supposed presence of languages other than English, to the (primarily intended) English-speaking target audience:

[15] Longer utterances include commands such as "Weitermachen!," "Weiterfahren!," "Auf den Boden!," "In einer Reihe aufstellen!" The phonetic, lexical and grammatical features of the German language in WWII films represent a topic of great linguistic interest.

[16] This especially refers to a scene in which Chastain's character reads a bedtime story to her son (00:27:31-00:27:50), one of the most intimate examples of linguistic communication conceivable. Her accent displayed in this scene is described as "just ridiculous" (Review of *The Zookeeper's Wife* n.d.). Some of the "German"-speaking soldiers in the background in turn display an unintentionally strong Czech accent – because they are played by Czech extras.

[17] Attentive observers with a sufficient command of Polish will note some striking lapses here. First of all, the word "ogród" [garden] as in "ogród zoologiczny," placed prominently above the entrance to the zoo, is spelled incorrectly, since the acute accent on "o" is missing (00:18:32).

> In the case of replacement, one task of cinematic narration is to prevent the viewer from assuming that in the fictional world of the story […], the characters would really have spoken English, especially if mistaken assumptions about the sociolinguistic setting can result in serious misunderstanding of the narrative. (Bleichenbacher 2008a:55)

Bleichenbacher discusses these strategies according to their "different stages of making the replaced language known to the viewer" (2008a:56) and distinguishes between "elimination," "signalisation," "evocation" and "partial presence." These strategies occur alternately and can be considered to complement each other. In the original version of *The Zookeeper's Wife* German and Polish, the presence of which can be presumed diegetically, are indicated by evocation and partial presence. On the level of evocation, a "marked variety of English (the base language) characterised by interference from the replaced language" (Bleichenbacher 2008a:59) is used repeatedly, but only for the replaced "Polish" and clearly dominated by phonetic elements (a "Polish" accent in English). Other forms of evocation contain "words or expressions from the replaced language which, due to their cultural specificity, index a different language and are hard to render in English anyway." (Bleichenbacher 2008a:66) They are usually conveyed by typical proper names ("Jan," "Punia") and geographical designations ("Zalesie," "Bramki," "Foksal street"), as well as by "cognates and well-known expressions" (Bleichenbacher 2008a:178) such as forms of address ("Herr" and "Frau"). Background utterances indicate "partial presence," and represent one of the main replacement strategies for languages in films (cf. Bleichenbacher 2008a:70-82). This clearly follows a mainstream cinema "rule":

> […] conversations which reveal vital narrative information feature replacement of the other language, but irrelevant or easy understandable utterances remain in the other language. (Bleichenbacher 2008a:70)

Prayers, songs and elements of the linguistic landscape also indicate the replaced languages (German, Polish, and Hebrew) as "partly present." The captions provided in the original SDH mode[18] clearly focus on English as the lead language of the film. Passages of code switching from English into German are marked by summarising announcements in brackets[19] or by altering the font of the captions into italics.[20]

The fact that different approaches are possible for films set in a diegetically multilingual context, is demonstrated by productions that tell stories of universal interest that are set against the historical backgrounds of neighbouring countries, but nonetheless offer much more nuanced linguistic solutions. Recent examples include the coproduction *Unser letzter Sommer / Letnie Przesilenie* [*Summer Solstice*] (Poland / Germany 2015, Michał Rogalski) and the Polish production *Wołyn* [*Hatred*] (Poland 2016, Wojciech Smarzowski), the latter tackling a linguistically challenging situation involving speakers of several Slavic languages (Polish, Ukrainian and Russian). In both these films, and in

[18] Along with audio description (AD), subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing (SDH, closed captions) is one of the two intralingual AVT modes (which adapts a text to a new purpose within the same language, namely from spoken to written form). SDH differs from conventional subtitles mainly in its reference to sounds (in this case there are especially many instances of onomatopoeia), music, and languages.

[19] See the information given in brackets, e.g.: (General Rommel continues in German) [00:21:30], (Soldiers shouting in German) [00:21:34] or (Snickering) [00:22:30].

[20] See the information given in italics, e.g. *Guten Tag, meine Herren.* [00:22:35], *Heil* Hitler [01:32:00].

many more, the languages are appropriate to the characters speaking them, the historical contexts, and the actors themselves – with the form (i.e. the linguistic expression) thereby supporting and strengthening the content (i.e. the narrative). It is noteworthy, however, that the two films have had a relatively limited distribution thus far, because rendering them linguistically comprehensible in third-language territories, without diluting their linguistic diversity, is certainly a great challenge. As we need not restrict ourselves to European arthouse productions, it is worthwhile recalling the shining example of *Inglourious Basterds* from 2009 (USA, Quentin Tarantino) in this context (cf. Badstübner-Kizik 2015). In Bleichenbacher's taxonomy these movies (and many, many more) display an (almost) full presence of diegetically justified multilingualism (cf. Badstübner-Kizik 2017:236).

... in the thicket of AVT

The Zookeeper's Wife drew my attention on account of the bilingualism (German / Polish) it would need to address on the diegetic level, and also, as indicated above, on account of how this might be achieved in a US-British-Czech coproduction. But beyond that, there was also the surprising fact that it was one of very few films for an adult audience shown in Polish cinemas and available on DVD in both a subtitled and a dubbed version. This promised interesting comparisons with the version presented to viewers in German-speaking countries, where mainstream movies shown in cinemas and TV are generally dubbed. German film distribution and German film audiences share this feature with France, Spain and Italy, but clearly differ in this respect from other European neighbours.[21] A film such as *The Zookeeper's Wife*, which features a historical episode involveing two neighbouring countries and languages, is certainly predestined to be shown in both countries. For the distributors, this raises the legitimate question as to the form in which the film can be presented, so that it allows a broad domestic audience to understand it in terms of both content and language on either side of the (language) divide.

As far as the short presence of *The Zookeeper's Wife* in Polish cinemas is concerned, the film was shown in both dubbed and subtitled versions, a solution highly unconventional for Poland.[22] The DVD available on the Polish market offers not only the original version, but also versions dubbed in Polish, Czech and Hungarian, as well as the English SDH, and versions with subtitles in Polish, Bulgarian, Czech, Hungarian, Romanian and Slovenian. In the dubbed Polish version all of the English passages are replaced by Polish. This includes both the endolingual and exolingual situations: Poles now speak Polish with

[21] The majority of European countries use subtitling for making foreign-language film productions accessible to their domestic (adult) audiences. Apart from the English-speaking countries (UK, Ireland, Malta), these include primarily the Benelux area and Scandinavia, as well as large parts of Eastern Europe (including Poland) and Southern Europe (including Greece and Portugal). Many of these countries currently are in transitional stages between different modes of AVT (cf. Badstübner-Kizik 2012:136-137).

[22] Usually only animated films and films for children are dubbed for Polish cinemas. Until recently, voice-over was common practice in television. However, due to the increasing number of transmission channels, the number of reception modes is about to diversify further. Usually several translations are simultaneously available on the DVDs distributed in Poland: Polish voice-over, subtitling in Polish and several other languages, sometimes SDH captions in the original language, and, on rare occasions, Polish dubbing.

Poles, Germans speak Polish with Germans, and Poles and Germans also communicate with each other in this language. Whereas in the original version German actor Daniel Brühl naturally pronounces all the German names correctly but has slight difficulties with the Polish ones, the dubbed Polish version offers it the other way round: Now a Polish actor is speaking the role of "Lutz Heck," who in turn pronounces all the Polish personal and place names correctly but not the German ones. The "foreign" accent of Jessica Chastain, used to mark the fact that she is "in reality" speaking a language other than English, now transmutes to the language of a native speaker who, naturally, would pronounce all Polish proper names correctly. In neither the dubbed nor subtitled versions are German passages translated or indicated (in contrast to the original version in English), only the graphic marking (i.e. the italic script) for code-switching between "Polish" and "German" is maintained (*Heil, Herr* and *Frau*). In the broadcast scene mentioned above, the version dubbed in Polish is now replaced by the historically correct combination of Polish (replacing the English of the original film version) and German. The dubbing and subtitling are identically phrased and obviously done by the same translator.

The DVD available on the German-speaking market offers the original and a version dubbed in German, plus a version dubbed in French and versions with subtitles in German, English (neither of which are identical to SDH), French, Danish, Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish.[23] In the German dubbed version, all conversations between protagonists that advance the plot are now conducted in German. The background utterances remain in their "original" version (German and Polish), but Polish as the diegetically dominant language (of the location where the action takes place, of the "Polish-speaking" protagonists and of the situations in which communication takes place) appears to be greatly reduced and is just present in the linguistic landscape and a few cognates.[24] Compared to the original version and the version dubbed in Polish, in both of which the presence of German is a marked deviation from "normality," the version dubbed in German suffers a noticeable loss of drama as soon as these linguistic shifts – however small they may be – vanish. Thus "Frau Żabińska" simply appears to be strangely polite when she responds to the sexist comments, whereas the visible surprise of the Germans at having been understood, does not exactly make sense. Analogously, the bilingual radio address that turns into a monolingual German message loses its dramatic significance: The second part is not a translation anymore but a paraphrase of the first.[25] There are slight lexical and grammatical differences between German dubbing and subtitling.[26] The graphic marking (*Herr* and *Frau*) of code-switching in the subtitles

[23] The division of DVD markets according to language differences is striking in some ways (e.g. south-eastern European market, northern European market), but this issue recedes with the gradual decline in DVD production. Interestingly enough, it is hardly ever possible to find an originally English-speaking film on DVD with German *and* Polish translations at the same time.

[24] Interestingly enough, the German dubbing introduces the Polish word "Pani" [Ms] with proper names, whereas the original version in such cases is consistent with "Ms (Poznanska)" (e.g. 01:28:27).

[25] Since no speaker is visible, a lip sync problem does not arise. The version with German subtitles simply omits the second, paraphrasing part of the speech.

[26] In a conversation between "Heck" and "Żabińska," for example, the original sentence "I don't understand what you mean" is translated once as "Ich, ich verstehe nicht, was Sie damit sagen wollen" (dubbing) and once as "Ich weiß nicht, was das heißt" (subtitling) [00:23:42-44]. German subtitles for

now became superfluous and is – naturally – omitted. If a whole utterance is sufficiently marked by corresponding gestures (as in the case of "Heil Hitler") a subtitle in German does not appear at all.

The version dubbed in Polish comes closest to the authentic linguistic setting of the plot – although that would require us to believe that "Lutz Heck," at least, had acquired a superb command of the language of the occupied country. For its part, the version dubbed in German is somewhat closer to the historical reality, as Poles and Germans would be likely to speak German with each other in occupied Warsaw, although in this case we would have to accept Poles speaking German among themselves. As for the subtitled Polish version, it leaves the English dialogue unchanged but requires Polish viewers to bridge a considerable disjoint between correct spelling and incorrect pronunciation for Polish names of people and places. Dubbed versions in every other language (e.g. Hungarian on the DVD distributed in Poland, or French on the DVD distributed in Germany) simply replace the problematic logic of English as a lead language with that of yet another language. Every other subtitled version (e.g. Bulgarian on the DVD distributed in Poland, Swedish on the DVD distributed in Germany) enables viewers to follow the story, but obscures the concrete historical setting even more. Perhaps the price for distributing a film around the globe consists of watering it down linguistically – and therefore losing historical and cultural precision and credibility? As Jorges Díaz Cintas (2008:3) put it:

> [T]he reality is that the visual-nonverbal [dimension of communication, CBK], i.e. the image, seems to carry more weight than the word, at least in the production of the most blockbuster films touring the world. The priority given to the star system and to special effects testifies this unbalance.

One might add to this the notion of comfortable and undisturbed linguistic accessibility and the reception mode in accordance with the viewer's cinematic habits.

That other solutions are possible is clearly evident in the example of *Frantz*, a Franco-German co-production (France / Germany 2016, François Ozon). This anti-war arthouse film, shot primarily in black-and-white, tells the story of a young German woman and a former French soldier who killed her fiancé at the front in WWI. The action takes place in both Germany and France and implies the presence of both languages on the diegetic level. Both are in fact used consistently by the German and the French cast alike, speaking them once as mother tongue and once as a foreign language on different levels of proficiency. The film lives from the presence of the two languages and the ability to switch between them. Distribution in the two neighbouring countries, Germany and France (on both domestic markets as well as across borders), takes place by virtue of reciprocal subtitling. In this way, both languages remain equal and – against the backdrop of the armed conflict of WWI – their speakers appear to be truly interested in and concerned about each other, as suggested in the story. Uniform dubbing – all the more so in either French or German – would allow the audience in either language to follow the plot smoothly, but rob the story of much of its charm and credibility.[27] What we see in the

an English-speaking movie (called reversed subtitles) could be quite interesting for learners of German (cf. Boeckmann 2016).

[27] Some reviewers consider this a major drawback for English-speaking audiences (cf. *Frantz*: User Reviews n.d.). The film was shown primarily at festivals and in arthouse cinemas.

versions distributed in Germany and France is complete – and exemplary – implementation of diegetically based multilingualism. This is in keeping with the model expounded by Bleichenbacher (cf. 2008a:173-191) which is applied because of the necessity of rendering such movies comprehensible.[28] The conditions for this are to be found in the pre-production (idea, screenplay) and production (cast, location, crew) stages, with consequences felt on the level of distribution and reception: The movie seeks a narration that underpins comprehension and understanding and is clearly oriented towards the arthouse cinema track, the audience of which by definition is more open to multilingualism and subtitling. Christine Heiss (2016:12) points to the readiness of many movie goers to embrace such a depiction of multilingual reality in movies:

> [D]ie Zuschauer [sind] durchaus bereit […], hier den Illusionspakt der monolingualen Synchronsprache zugunsten einer teilweisen Overt-Translation (House 1977 / 1981) mit Untertiteln aufzugeben.

Conclusion

From a linguistic perspective, *The Zookeeper's Wife* is a film in which the story told and the language of the telling is seriously out of sync. Moreover, when two languages are anchored diegetically in a film, film translation cannot proceed by one of them replacing the other. When the film is screened in regions where at least one of the two languages is spoken and understood and when the story takes place in a clearly determined linguistic setting involving both of them, disregard for linguistic logic inevitably leads to a loss in credibility – as is the case for *The Zookeeper's Wife* in Poland and Germany. In Poland the film was screened only briefly, in Germany it was denied an opening in movie theatres at all, and in neither country can it be considered a commercial success.[29] The best that can be hoped for in a case such as this is to have different modes of translation that can compensate at least to some extent. That is surely the reason why *The Zookeeper's Wife* has been dubbed in Polish, in marked contrast to Polish custom. At least the characters would then speak Polish in a Polish story taking place in a Polish town, the more so as the story told is well known to a Polish audience. The film has triggered lively debate in Poland on the topic of national heroes, including (positive) self-reflection and (negative) portrayal of others, but also, of more interest here, on the linguistic credibility of movies. Part of the discussion touches on the atmosphere that a credible choice of language can give (or deny) a film, and weighs this against the "educational value" in the illumination of history. This is a fascinating debate for linguists, AVT translators and media specialists that offers deep insight into what truly interests moviegoers. Nevertheless, there seem to be no simple answers of universal validity here. The issue of acceptability and accessibility of films to different audiences include multiple layers and different aspects. Each individual film represents a case study in its own right: Its balance between authenticity,

[28] Cf. Bleichenbacher (2008:190): "Subtitles typically cater for OL [Other Language] turns that are high in number and carry special narrative relevance."

[29] Cf. The Zookeeper's Wife (2020). The opinions presented on the Polish review forum "filmweb" are divided at best, and the matter of linguistic implausibility is addressed several times. Most Polish reviewers note the positive portrayal of Poles in an English-language film production, often with a good deal of satisfaction (cf. *Azyl*: User Reviews n.d.). The reviews on IMDb are varied too (cf. *The Zookeeper's Wife*: User Reviews n.d.). For examples of the muted criticism in Germany, cf. Armknecht (2017).

credibility and expected financial success (on the production level), technical and linguistic accessibility (on the distribution level) and enjoyment (on the reception level) must always be evaluated anew. In my opinion, gaining insights (and providing them to others) by means of linguistic analyses of multilingual films (and their translated versions) represents a precious opportunity to move closer to the oft-cited objective of language (and media) awareness.

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