

# Communicative Subtitling – Six Levels of Functionality

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# Two Traditions in Subtitling

- Verbatim – goal and ideal word for word, but, alas...
- Communicative



# The Verbatim Tradition – The Origins

- **Intralingual** subtitling; deaf or hard-of-hearing (DHH) audience
  - Political motivation: "No sensorship!"
  - Receptional factor: Synchrony between subtitles and lip movement
- ⇒ Focus on ***microlevel equivalence*** even in **interlingual** subtitling (goal and ideal)
- ⇒ Reported problems in the reception (e.g. reading speed)



# The Communicative Tradition – The Origins

- Subtitling practices in the traditional subtitling countries (particularly the Nordic countries)
  - Guiding principle: The reception of subtitled AV content vs. spoken AV content (whether by hearing or DHH audience)
- ⇒ Focus on ***holistic correspondence*** & viewing experience vs. Microlevel equivalence on verbal level



# A Not So Untypical Case of Communicative Subtitling

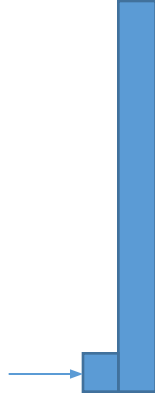
Snap out of it! - Kakista ulos! (Spit it out!)

*(Magnolia, DVD)*

- => No semantic equivalence on the verbal level



# 10 Minutes of a German Comedy Subtitled into Finnish

- 13/96 TT lines – No semantic correspondence
- 11 ST lines – No translation in TT
- 75/96 TT lines – Partial adaptation
- 8/96 TT lines – Semantic correspondence 



# Subtitling as Translation & Communication

## – Theoretical Foundations, Part 1

- Teleological concept of subtitling as a form of translation (Vuoristo; Toury; functionalists, such as Nord, Vermeer)
  - Communication precedes language
  - Linguistic communication
    - Purpose
    - Time & Place
    - Six Levels of Functionality (Vuoristo 1982)

⇒ Context-dependent

- Applies to all translation



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# What is Special About Subtitling?

## – Theoretical Foundations, Part 2

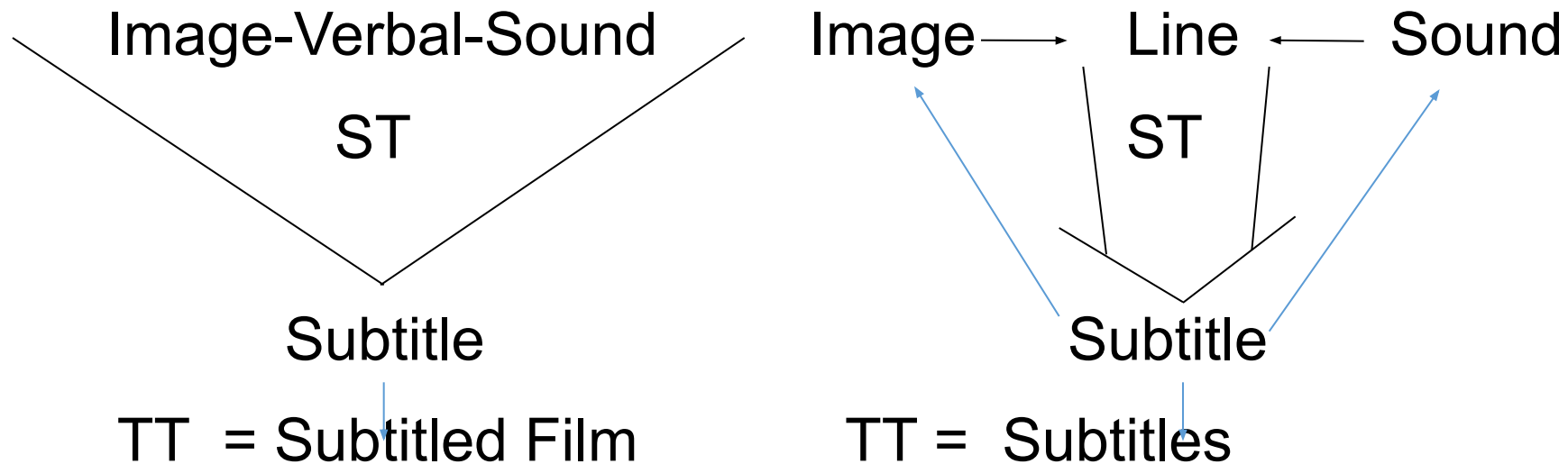
### The nature of audiovisual texts

- Media of emotions => viewing experience
  - The verbal element **AV-context-specific** vs. **context-dependent** in terms of meaning, function & style
- ⇒ AV context part of source text & target text (cf. Zabalbeascoa 2008)
- Highly target communication oriented
- <= paramount communicative function: viewing experience
- <= conditions for the reception of **subtitled** AV content
- ⇒ Subtitling solutions highly **specific** to not only the **target language** and the **target culture** but also the **target text & medium**
- ⇒ Microlevel, **verbal equivalence** **not** the goal **nor** the ideal





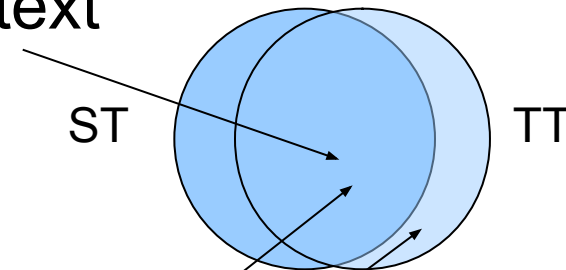
# Communicative vs. Verbatim - The Task



# Another Definition

- The task is to create a **subtitled script** for *specific* audiovisual material

- elements from the entire source text



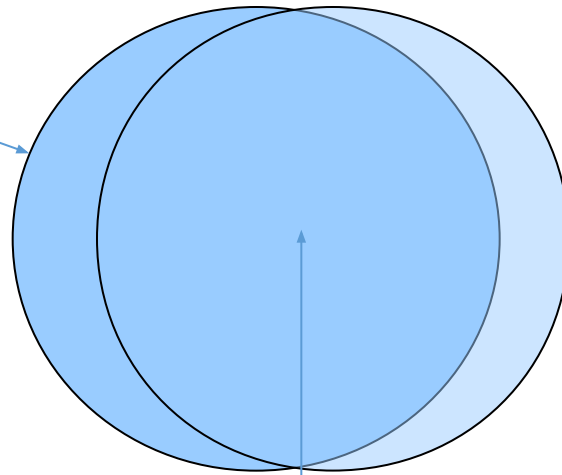
- *specific* target language, target culture, & target medium



# Two Different AV Texts

• Spoken Film (ST)

Subtitled Film (TT)



Shared functionality

- Communication
- AV message



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# Six Levels of Functionality

Socio-culture

Action

**Communication**

**AV Message**

(AV) Textuality

Verbal language

nt



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# Example – Role of the Verbal Element in the Subtitled Film

GE: Da unten auf dem Kalbfell ist noch ein Plätzchen frei.

(EN: There is still some room on the calf skin.)

FI: Tuolla vasikannahkataljalla on vielä vähän tilaa.

Finnish subtitle:

Istumaan. (Do sit down.)

*(Der bewegte Mann; Yle)*



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# Levels of Functionality - Example of Hierarchy

Yeah, and now **it** shows up at the same time as an anthrax outbreak.

**Doesn't sound very likely.**

Nyt **tauteja** esiintyy yhtä aikaa.

**Kumma juttu.** (Verbatim: Funny thing. That's funny/weird.)

(Canadian TV Series, *Regenesis*; Yle)

=> The **style** of the subtitle was determined by the levels of

- 1) communication (programme/text genre: fiction/dialogue)
- 2) AV message (the style of the character)



# Levels of Functionality

## – Example of Interdependence

- Socio-culture
- Action & Actors – e.g. Image of the TV Company
- Communication – e.g. Viewing experience
- AV message – e.g. unclear (formulation of) message
- Textuality – e.g. poor cohesion or coherence
- Language – ungrammatical or unidiomatic language



# Benefits of Thinking on Functionality Levels

Students learn to

- understand the complexity of subtitling (and all translation; incl. conventions viz à viz context-specific "interventions")
- conceptualize the subtitling process and their subtitling solutions
- think holistically, i.e., communicatively
- focus on the functionality of the TT (subtitled film/TV programme) for the target audience, beyond the meanings in the ST (original spoken film/TV programme)
- Combine theory and practice

⇒ Discuss and argue for their solutions; give founded feedback (professionality)

⇒ Demand reasonable terms and conditions for their work (professionality)

⇒ Do research with a holistic tool





# Further Implications for Teaching, Part 1

- Film & TV studies from the point of view of AV translation
  - The nature of AV texts
    - media of emotions (Hietala 2007) => viewing experience
    - Interplay of the various modalities (Zabalbeascoa 2008, Chaume 2004, Gambier 2013)
    - Script writing (e.g. Martínez-Sierra 2012)
  - The medium: Film, TV, DVD, video games, etc.
    - Production process, production of manuscripts, etc. (e.g. Cattrysse & Gambier 2008)
  - Genres, including text genres (functions, norms & conventions)
    - Analysis of dialogue (e.g. Remael 2004, based on Linell, P.)
    - Subtitles as a text genre (functions, norms & conventions)



# Further Implications for Teaching, Part 2

- Hands-on exercises
  - Analysis of professionally subtitled AV content
    - Initial focus on one level or aspect at a time
  - Intralingual subtitling
  - Subtitling of "Greek" AV content into L1 Language
  - Subtitling from L2 Language into L1 Language



# Selected Bibliography

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Thank you!  
Спасибо!

Q & A



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# Example of subtitled script

Sinähän olet Kööpenhaminassa. You're in Copenhagen, right?

Myös Francis D'Haese **According to this credit card transaction,**  
**näyttäisi** olevan kaupungissa. so is Francis D'Haese.

Hän maksoi siellä juuri **luottokortilla**, He just made **a transaction** at a **pub** right  
muutama sekunti sitten. there in C. We are talking seconds ago.

**Kielsin käyttämästä korttitietoja** (How do you know it was seconds ago when)  
jo muutamia minuutteja sitten. **I asked you to stop running it** minutes ago?

Haluatko **pubin** osoitteen vai et? Do you want **the address** or not?

