

TRANSÜD – Arbeiten zur Theorie und Praxis
des Übersetzens und Dolmetschens



Translation, Mediation and Accessibility for Linguistic Minorities

María Pilar Castillo Bernal /
Marta Estévez Grossi (eds.)

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ELEONORA SASSO

Subtitling the cinema of Inuit minorities

Canadian film industry is recently promoting the flowering of an indigenous Inuit cinema, a cultural phenomenon which appears to be confirming the existence of what Barry Barclay calls 'Fourth Cinema' (Barclay 2015), aimed at foregrounding the indigenous peoples. Watching an Inuit movie is a dynamic and unforgettable experience, involving a process of renewing attention to create and follow the relations between words, images, and subtitles. Due to the polysynthetic nature of Inuit language,¹ characterised by a very rich morphological system according to which words begin with a root morpheme to which other morphemes are suffixed, interlingual subtitling appears to be the sole AVT modality in order to avoid ethnocentric violence and respect the exoticism of this aboriginal language. As a multimodal and interlingual form of discourse, subtitling Inuit films in Canada means to include minority cultures, becoming aware of the existence of alien communities or to put it into George Melnyk's words, '[to] embrac[e] that internal foreignness which prevents Canadians from accumulating a simplistic or exclusionary sense of self' (Melnik 2004: 263).

The aim of this paper is to investigate the linguistics of subtitling applied in two Inuit movies *The Snow Walker* (2003) and *The Necessities of Life* (2008) whose survival dramatic stories are endowed with parabolic power. Text reduction shifts, segmentation, punctuation, and all other subtitling strategies appear to be preserving the alterity of the Inuit language. Furthermore, *The Snow Walker* and *The Necessities of Life* can be analysed through the lens of cognitive narratology according to which audiences process stories by prioritizing information. In such Inuit films it is essential to analyse the stories narrated in images from what Vercauteren calls 'audience-oriented, story-reception perspective' (Vercauteren 2012: 212). The cognitive narrative force, which is

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1 On the lexical and grammatical features of Inuit see Thibert 2004.

made up of discourse and story, of both Inuit films will be taken into account, in order to establish the relationship between film images and mental imagery.

The Snow Walker directed by Charles Martin Smith, and produced with participation of Telefilm Canada, Canadian Television Fund and British Columbia Films, has been defined as a 'powerful, poignant and transcendent film' (Bruce Kirkland, *Jam! Showbiz*) whose young Inuit female character (Annabelle Piugattuk), sick with TB, 'displays a naturalism that allows her to display the emotional and spiritual nature of her people' (Kirkland, *Jam! Showbiz*). After a plane crash, Kanaalaq and Charlie, a bush pilot in the Canadian Arctic during the 1950's, find themselves isolated in the harsh, unforgiving tundra. Unable to contact the outside world, they are forced to try to survive and to co-exist despite their divergent personalities and cultural differences.

As far as DVD language settings are concerned there are two multilingual versions: an English version with French subtitles, and an English version with Dutch subtitles confirming the trend to respect the pursuit of realism as part of the new wave amongst filmmakers seeking to represent what Wahl defines as the conditions of 'migrant and diasporic existence' (2005). The subtitler needs to be aware of this in order to decide what can and must be subtitled, and what needs not or must not. In this particular case, Kanaalaq who speaks basic English is able to communicate with Charlie who, in his turn, tries hard to learn Inuit language and culture.

From a cognitive perspective, Kanaalaq is a trajector tracing a path from an initial position (the Inuit tundra) to a final resting position, the so-called landmark (the Inuit camp) leading her to accomplish her destiny of death. While travelling northward Kanaalaq projects in her mind mental pictures, namely *image schemas*², that she uses as basic templates for understanding the situation on the basis of her bodily interaction with the Inuit world and customs. Kanaalaq projects such image schemas as JOURNEY, SURVIVAL, ENDURANCE as exemplified by such locative expressions as ON THE RIVERS, IN THE WOODS, IN YOUR LAND. The image schemas underlying these prepositions all involve a dynamic movement in reaction to the clash with non-Inuit culture. Always striving to save Charlie's life, thanks to her Inuit survival skills, Kanaalaq projects the

.....
2 See Stockwell.

conceptual metaphor INUIT ARE SURVIVAL PEOPLE as expressed by the repetition of the action chain pattern *hunting* → *eating* → *sewing* → *walking* in which Inuit are active agents of survival (she says “my boots will lead to my people”).

At timecode 39 minutes and eleven seconds, there is the first clash between white and Inuit cultures, since Kanaalaq, who saves Charlie from death, explains what a *sitsik* (ground squirrel) is by alternating Inuit and English.

	Original Voice	Subtitles
1	- Sleep.	- Dors.
2	- What do you speak English?	- Tu parles quand meme anglais?
3	- Little bit.	- Un petit peu.
4	- <i>Nikiniak</i> . Eat	- Mange.
5	- Thank you.	- Merci.
6	- Oh, it's good	- Cest bon.
7	- <i>Kuyannamik</i>	NO SUBTITLE
8	- Where did you get this? - What is this?	- Ou tu as trouvé ça? - Qu'est que c'est?
9	- <i>Sitsik</i> .	- <i>Sitsik</i> .
10	- What is <i>sitsik</i> ?	- Qu'est que c'est que <i>sitsik</i> ?
11	Onomatopoeic sounds	NO SUBTITLE
12	- You caught this?	- Tu l'as attrapé?
13	- <i>î</i>	NO SUBTITLE
14	- Where the hell you found this?	- Où tu as déchiné ça?
15	- I don't even know your name.	- Je ne sais même pas ton nom.
16	- What's your name?	- Comment tu t'appelles?
17	- Not your tag	- Pas ton matricule.
18	- Your name. What I call you?	- Ton nom. - Comment je dois t'appeller?
19	- Kanaalaq.	- Kanaalaq
20	- Kanaalaq.	NO SUBTITLE
21	- Charlie.	- Charlie
22	- Charlie?	- Charlie?
23	- Nice to meet you.	Enchanté.

Like any form of iconography, Kanaalaq's body-postures and gestures communicate information non-vocally and are often culture-bound imbued with what Díaz-Cintas defines as "the kinesic heritage of different communities" (2007: 52), whose culture-bound movements and gestures can be quite challenging for the subtitler in themselves. Kanaalaq's mimicking the movements of the squirrel may be explained with kinesics, that is to say the way in which body movements and gestures convey meaning. The challenge for the subtitler resides in the detection of coherence between movement or closeness and intonation, word choice, as well as other linguistic features such as culture-bound words (*Inukshuk*, *caribou*, and *kamik*) that are, of course, codetermined by the narrative situation and the scene as a whole.

It is highly interesting that a few Inuit words are not subtitled since their meaning is detectable by the situation and the audience can be expected to understand them. See for example when Kanaalaq says *Nikiniak* and immediately afterwards she self-translates it into English or when Charlie, after eating the *sitsik* (squirrel) soup addresses such a polite word to Kanaalaq as *Kuyannamik* meaning "thanks" or even when Charlie wants to know if it was Kanaalaq who caught the squirrel and she replies 'yes' in Inuit (-i). Even though the linguistic gap between Inuit and English cannot be bridged these occurrences are not subtitled and need no translation in any other language since the context and the character's gestures make perfectly clear what is going on. As aptly explained by Díaz-Cintas:

Today, films whose stories travel or take place in multilingual environments tend to be more realistic in their use of language. Generally speaking, dialogue exchanges in a second – or third – language, which [...] the audience will understand because of the context in which they occur, do not need to be subtitled. (2007: 59)

Likewise, at timecode 45 minutes and 20 seconds, Kanaalaq, who appears to be more resourceful than Charlie in providing food, teaches a few Inuit words to him providing an unforgettable lesson on Inuit word pronunciation. Charlie soon discovers the immense gap between English and Inuit. The Inuit lesson scene demonstrates not only the presence of allophones in Inuit language (Wa-

ter is *eemuk*; drinking is *eemak*; skin is *Amerk*) but also the subtitler's strategy which is aimed at subtitling Inuit words in their phonetic transcription in order to facilitate the pronunciation of Inuit words.

The Inuit word for water is *Immerk* (iimak; the /i/ is pronounced as /ee/ imak: *eemak*) but it is subtitled as it is pronounced *eemak*. It is also worthwhile noting that only 7 out of 17 utterances are subtitled confirming the type of multilingualism employed in this Canadian film. Apart from *eemak* and *eemuk*, other Inuit terms such as *Atataul*!, *-Amerk*, *sitsik* and *î* are not subtitled confirming the tendency of smaller languages to demand recognition because in Díaz-Cintas's words 'A proliferation of languages and voices also means a proliferation of human relations, hierarchies and interactions' (2007: 230). As already explained if a film is mainly in English and most of its characters speak English, the scenes shot in another language will not always require translation. Charlie and Kanaalaq's story take place in a multilingual environment in order to achieve realism in their use of language. Dialogues which are merely part of the setting and which the audience will understand because of the context in which they occur, do not need to be subtitled.

The meaning of the word *Atataul*!, literally 'be careful, danger' according to the *Eskimo Inuktitut-English Dictionary* by Arthur Thibert is misunderstood with 'hot', but the noun phrase *-Amerk*, *sitsik* is easily comprehensible since Kanaalaq is pelting the squirrel.

Original Voice		Subtitles
1	- Do you want some water? Do you want some?	- Tu veux de l'eau? - Tiens tu en veux?
2	- <i>Immerk</i>	NO SUBTITLE
3	- <i>Immerk</i>	NO SUBTITLE
4	- Water.	NO SUBTITLE
5	- Hot.	- Chaud.
6	- <i>Atataul</i> !	NO SUBTITLE
7	- <i>Atataul</i> !	NO SUBTITLE
8	- <i>Immark</i> . Drink.	- Boire.
9	- Oh, drinking is <i>eemak</i> ?	- Boire c'est <i>eemak</i> ?

	Original Voice	Subtitles
10	- i	NO SUBTITLE
11	Water is <i>eemuk</i> .	- Et l'eau c'est <i>eemuk</i> .
12	Drink, <i>eemak</i>	- Boire, <i>eemak</i> .
13	What's that?	- Qu'est que c'est?
14	- <i>Amerk, sitsik</i>	NO SUBTITLE
15	- <i>Amerk, eemak, eemuk, and amerk.</i>	NO SUBTITLE
16	- Water, <i>eemuk</i> .	NO SUBTITLE
17	- I will never remember all of this.	- Je ne retiendrai jamais tout

Such a strategy is aimed at achieving intersemiotic cohesion in subtitling which refers to the way it connects language directly to the soundtrack and to images on screen, making use of the information they supply to create a coherent linguistic-visual whole. The subtitler coherently applies this non-subtitling strategy also with songs whose function is of utmost importance for conceptualizing the cultural difference between Charlie and Kanaalaq.

At timecode 55 minutes and 39 seconds while crossing the tundra at sunset Kanaalaq sings an Inuit mood song, which, according to the Greenland ethnographer Knud Rasmussen, is reflective and involves no central action, a song that she has been singing for three days, and whose words are not subtitled. Both Charlie and the viewer do not understand the words wondering about their meaning and becoming seriously frustrated. This is the reason why Charlie asks Kanaalaq to stop singing or at least to change song but Kanaalaq invites Charlie to sing his own song. At this very moment, Charlie starts singing Dean Martin's *That's Amore*, the most popular lyric of the 50's, a post war song conveying optimism, which is internationally known and suggests a certain historical period.

When a moon hits your eye like a big pizza pie
That's amore
When the world seems to shine like you've had too much wine
That's amore
Bells will ring ting-a-ling-a-ling, ting-a-ling-a-ling

And you'll sing "Vita bella"
 Scuzza me, but you see, back in old Napoli
 That's amore
 Amore, that's amore

Not subtitling such a song is a good strategy, since as for songs by The Beatles, there is no need to provide redundant information. It is safe to say that if the director decides to include a song, this is usually done for a purpose, and *That's Amore*, which is characterized by code-switching and the language of love is the best choice to convey the essence of the movie. It would have been interesting to know the meaning of Kanaalaq's song in order to estimate its relevance but it seems to be contributing to the story in a more indirect sense, by suggesting a mood or creating an atmosphere.

But the most interesting subtitled scene is at timecode 1 hour and three minutes when at dusk Kanaalaq introduces INUIT SPIRITUALISM to Charlie revealing that 'The world has many spirits and that all things breathe. *Aniyauksak*'. The viewer sees a close-up of Kanaalaq's character sitting in the dark intent on telling the story of the spirit of Tarcuq and death rituals.

If it is true that subtitles should never anticipate, or be ahead of visual narration on screen, then it is equally true that *The Snow Walker* is characterised by an approximate synchrony between image and subtitle. Such a synchronous delivery is obtained through one-line subtitles which are easier to read since they 'elicit proportionally less viewing time' (Díaz Cintas and Remael 2007: 87). The use of 22 one-liners out of 25 subtitles in Kanaalaq's narration confirms Sylfest Lomheim's conviction that the overall reading time in one-liner seems to offer the viewer more reading comfort (1999: 192).

Kanaalaq's subtitled storytelling is also characterised by body movements and gestures conveying the ideas of breathing (*aniyauksak*), watching (*taku*), and inviting to follow (*mallikpok*). When describing the Inuit paradise in which hunters may find a great variety of animals such as seals, fish and walrus, Kanaalaq starts mimicking the walrus tusks since she is not able to find an equivalent for the Inuit word *Aiverk* = walrus.

By alternating self-translation to sign language, Kanaalaq reveals Charlie that Tarcuq lives on the moon (*tatkret*) and that when you die Tarcuq, a Cha-

ron-like figure invites you to hunting. In this particular scene there are no referential vacuums, i.e. culture-bound terms tied up with Inuit culture, because Kanaalaq consecutively self-translates from Inuit into English or from Inuit into sign language her story which is characterized by a large use of triple dots functioning as a bridge at the end of the first sub to facilitate reading when a sentence is not finished. The only one Inuit word which is subtitled is *piyaquiti* meaning tools and it is italicized because when dealing with lexical borrowings from other languages the Díaz-Cintas's recommendation is to transcribe single foreign words or expressions in italics if they are considered not to be fully integrated in the vocabulary of the target audience.

5 *The Necessities of Life*

Another multilingual film about Inuit culture is *The Necessities of Life* (2008), winner of the Grand Prix des Amériques as Best Film at the 2008 Montréal World Film Festival, an absorbing and emotional tale from Québec director Benoît Pilon, making his feature film debut after a career making documentaries. Unlike *The Snow Walker*, *The Necessities of Life* is in French with English subtitles projecting the parable of the noble savage who has not been corrupted by civilization and therefore symbolizes humanity's innate goodness. In this movie, Tivii, an Inuk hunter from Baffin Island affected by tuberculosis, experiences a profound cultural shock when he is separated from his family and brought to a hospital in Québec City. Inspired by a tuberculosis epidemic that broke out in the Inuit population of Canada's Far North in the 1940s and 1950s, *The Necessities of Life* envisions the clash of European and Inuit cultures resulting in Tivii's isolation and loneliness (he is the only dark face among the TB sufferers of Room 245).

In this story of an Inuk hunter fighting to save his life from the diseases peculiar to civilized men, the viewer may find the meaningfulness of this movie mapping from aboriginal domains on to his/her own model of the world. By selecting the most meaningful scenes of this aboriginal movie, I intended to show how subtitling may be a useful AVT modality to preserve cultural diversities and linguistic minorities.

From a cultural point of view, Tivii is shocked and amazed by such technological innovations as x-ray machines, public telephones, clocks and last but not least by washrooms. The following are only a few of Tivii's questions resulting from his condition of disorientation: 'where the water / in the taps come from?' (timecode 00: 51: 52); 'And the fish I ate, / where did it come from?' (timecode 00: 52: 15). Suddenly exposed to an unfamiliar culture and its set of attitudes, Tivii experiences a series of what Carol M. Archer defines as 'culture bumps'³ (1986: 170–171), or in Georgios Floros's words 'a coherence gap' (2003: 43). In Floros's theory, culture systems are understood as categorizations of background cultural knowledge that viewers need to be acquainted with in order to understand audiovisual content. He calls 'concretizations' the set of features of any cultural system, which can be assembled into groups of interconnected features, i.e. 'holons' (names, functions, structures, variations and so forth).

Ultimately cognitive science applied to texts explains the mental processes involved in reading texts, subtitles and watching a movie. Tivii's journey to Québec city traces a mental path towards a metaphorical landmark, the hospital in which he achieves his destiny of blender of Inuit and French Québécoise cultures (14:00). If it is true that stories are at the heart of cognitive understanding, then *The Necessities of Life* is an emblem of how to trespass cultural boundaries.

From a linguistic angle, Tivii is only able to communicate through sign language and drawings of his Inuit life and wildlife. The only French-speaking wardmate who is interested in Tivii is Joseph who learns the Inuit word *Tuktu* (caribou) by watching Tivii's macabre drawings of killed bears, seals, and caribous. In this first exchange of words on hunting caribous, the viewer attests the temporal synchrony with Tivii's utterances since accurate timing is crucial for optimal subtitling which reinforces the internal cohesion and comprehension of the translated text. In the example below, it can be calculated how long the first exchange has lasted, by working out the time that has lapsed between the in

.....
3 'a culture bump occurs when an individual finds himself or herself in a different, strange, or uncomfortable situation when interacting with persons of a different culture' (Archer 1986: 170–171).

and out cues: 2 seconds (until 00: 26: 20). There is then one-second silence until Tivii starts talking again in subtitle 002. This time, the sentence lasts slightly longer (3 seconds) than the previous example for obvious reasons: one-word noun phrase is followed by a five-word noun phrase (it takes longer to utter a 5-word noun phrase): *Tutku illua illuanitu* = A caribou and its insides.

Nevertheless, a certain degree of asynchrony is allowed in the presentation of the subtitles. Throughout the film, subtitles disappear a fraction of second before Tivii has actually finished talking. This strategy is used to avoid the viewer's tendency to read the subtitle again because studies show that when a sub remains on screen longer than the time the viewer actually needs to read it, there is a tendency to read it again.

Furthermore, this poor synchronisation is mainly due to the polysynthetic nature of Inuit language. The length of time English subtitles remain on screen depends, therefore, on the delivery of the original dialogue and the assumed reading speed of the target viewers. In English each word has its own meaning while in Inuit words are much longer and can express a whole sentence or idea. For this reason, the reading time cannot be assessed on an absolute basis but it is conditioned by such factors as vocabulary and the presence or absence of action.

See for example the Inuit words pertaining to the semantic field of colours (black = *krernertok*; blue = *tungortok*; red = *aupaluktok*; white = *kakortok* and so forth), directions (east = *unani*; north = *kannernark*; west = *wagnark*) and numbers (one = *atauserk*; two = *malrok*; three = *pingasut*; four = *sitamat* and so forth) which appear to be longer than their English equivalent and it takes proportionally more time to utter them. Other Inuit expressions as *niri-junga* (I eat) or *taku – junnaq – tunga* (I can see) whose numbers of characters are double or even more than double the numbers of characters in English, may well render the idea of asynchrony between Inuit spoken dialogues and English subtitles. If English subtitles appear at the precise moment the Inuit person starts speaking, then they sometimes do not disappear when the person stops speaking.

At timecode 00: 45: 46 there occurs a linguistic twist in the film when Carole, one of the resourceful nurses introduces Tivii to an Inuit orphan, Kaki familiar with both languages and cultures. From this moment on, with the help

of Kaki who plays the role of the interpreter, Tivii reacquires his Inuit pride and spends time carving wooden sculptures and narrating Inuit folk tales. By projecting the conceptual metaphor SUBTITLING IS NARRATION, the film gives prominence to the cultural heritage of Inuit people. The first significant subtitled scene is when Tivii tells Kaki how Inuit used to hunt caribou in his grandfather's time literally mimicking the hunting scene with the help of his wooden toy figures.

Like Kanaalaq in *The Snow Walker*, Tivii's body-postures and gestures recall the already mentioned notion of the kinesic heritage of Inuit communities whose culture-bound movements and gestures can be quite challenging for the subtitler in themselves. Any single frame of the hunting story is characterised by semiotic cohesion representing a perfect interaction between speech and gesture and any English subtitle, transmitted with accurate timing, appears to be almost a literal translation of the ST, preserving its extra-linguistic references.

Another meaningful story narrated by Tivii is 'The Story of an Invisible Man' which, on Carole's request, is interpreted consecutively by Kaki. Due to the nature of consecutive interpreting, one-liners and two-liners are delayed with respect to Tivii's mimicking utterances but after a few frames the viewer sees English subtitles superimposed over Carole's close-up revealing her pleasure of listening to Tivii's wondrous story. This latter, echoing the story of Cupid and Psyche, tells about an ordinary woman who after marrying an invisible man becomes so eager to see her husband's face that she stabbed him to death. By alternating centre-aligned one-liners and two-liners, the subtitler tries to respect the way Inuit utterances are structured syntactically. In the case of two-liners, the top line is kept short whenever possible since short top lines are aesthetically more pleasing. However, sense blocks and readability are taken into account in order to give emphasis and suspense to some climactic parts of the story. Always following the rule of comfortable and easy reading, subtitling in 'The Story of an Invisible Man' is able to render the power of Inuit storytelling by respecting its sense of wonder and didacticism.

The blending of European and Inuit cultures occurs when at Christmas, Tivii gives Carole a hunter wooden carved figure as a gift by uttering such French words as: 'Pour toi, Noël'. Surprisingly, Carole thanks Tivii in Inuit by

saying *Kuyannamik!* ('thanks') and he replies in his own native language: *Ilaali* ('you're welcome').

Such an exchange of expressions of politeness, the so-called concretization of the 'kuyannamik and illali' holon, already occurred at timecode 00: 50: 53 in a previous scene when Carole provides Tivii some fresh salmon, will be repeated in the final scene of the film as if to convey that there exists a universal language of compassion that can bind people together despite their cultural differences. It is highly significant that in the farewell scene Tivii addresses such a polite word as *nakkorami* instead of the already mentioned *kuyannamik!*. According to the *Eskimo (Inuktitut) Dictionary* edited by Arthur Thibert, *nakkorami*, a typical expression of gratitude used by the Eskimos of Baffin Land, means 'thank you' (Thibert 2004: 111), which appears to be a more formal way with respect to *kuyannamik!* ('thanks!'). Not only does this verbal variety appears more appropriate in a farewell scene establishing some kind of formality between a French nurse and an Inuit patient, but it is also aimed at underlining Tivii's origins which are rooted in Baffin Island. Subtitling Tivii's stories means translating Inuit culture whose primary needs are first and foremost the needs of the soul embodied by such holons as seals (*netjerk*), caribou (*tuktu*) and geese (*kanguk*), i.e. the necessities of life suggested in the movie title.

To conclude, *The Snow Walker* and *The Necessities of Life* project powerful conceptual metaphors in their subtitled dialogues imbued with culture-bound words and linguistic strategies which are aimed at preserving the cultural heritage of Inuit people. All the text-reduction shifts investigated in this paper show how subtitling is able to respect ethno-cultural diversity and national pride. Even though translating a minority culture into another language may appear to be inadequate from a cultural point of view, it is a necessary practice for spreading out minority cultural systems with their concretizations and holons. By emphasising the narrative saliency of the different visual elements in both movies, audiovisual translators are able to combine visual prominence and narrative saliency. From this perspective, *The Snow Walker* and *The Necessities of Life* achieve equivalence between film images and the mental imagery that is recreated in subtitles.

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