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**Documentary Subtitling:  
A Participant-Centred Approach**

**Christine York**

**A Thesis  
in  
The Department  
of  
Études françaises**

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**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
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## **Abstract**

### **Documentary Subtitling: A Participant-Centred Approach**

This project addresses one aspect of audiovisual translation: documentary subtitling. It proposes an approach to documentary subtitling that takes into account the specific characteristics of documentary. It identifies three key issues arising from those characteristics: the shared authorship role played by filmmaker and participant; the image-text interaction in the visual channel; and the presence of impromptu speech, as distinct from film dialogue. The impact of these issues on subtitling is discussed through an analysis of three documentaries produced or co-produced by the National Film Board of Canada: *Bacon, le film (Bacon, the Film)*, directed by Hugo Latulippe (2002); *Édith et Michel (Édith and Michel)*, directed by Jocelyne Clarke (2004); and *Le méchant trip (Exiles in Lotusland)*, directed by Ilan Saragosti (2005).

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Audiovisual translation (AVT), a branch of the wider field of translation studies, has been the subject of numerous publications, articles, theses and conferences in recent years. It is an umbrella term whose definition is still the subject of some discussion but that generally covers the translation of film, video, television, radio, multimedia formats like CD-ROM, and print media in some cases, as well as media accessibility formats like closed captioning for the hard of hearing and audio description for the visually impaired. Within this wide field of study, one area has rarely been addressed: that of documentary translation. I suggest that an examination of the specific characteristics of documentary as a mode of cinema can provide insight into the challenges of documentary translation and lead us to view it as a specific practice within AVT. In this project, I will focus specifically on subtitling, rather than voice-over, the other method commonly used in documentary translation. I have observed in my research that documentary studies tends to overlook the fact of subtitling in discussions of foreign films, while AVT research tends to overlook the documentary form in discussions of subtitling. I believe that by focusing on the very intersection between the two, this project can contribute most to research in both fields.

I have identified three key issues related to documentary that, as I will show, have an impact on subtitling: the idea of authorship, particularly the relation between filmmaker and participant; the integration of image, sound and text, particularly in relation to the interview, a basic element of documentary filmmaking; and the notion of orality, particularly the presence of impromptu or spontaneous speech, as distinct from



film dialogue. Each of these issues will be the subject of a chapter that begins by discussing theoretical concepts, drawing on various disciplines, and ends with a case study on a film that illustrates the issue in question. For these case studies, my corpus will be documentary films produced or co-produced in the past five years by the National Film Board of Canada's French Program (Studio A, Studio B and Ontario and West Studio). Over the past five years, the National Film Board (NFB) has produced around fifteen French-language medium- or feature-length documentaries per year, including original productions and co-productions, on film and video. I will focus on three of them: *Bacon, le film (Bacon, the Film)* by Hugo Latulippe (2002), *Édith et Michel (Édith and Michel)* by Jocelyne Clarke (2004), and *Le méchant trip (Exiles in Lotusland)* by Ilan Saragosti (2005).

In these three chapters and the conclusions that follow, I will set out the parameters of an approach to documentary subtitling that I believe is most respectful of the characteristics of this mode of cinema. The approach is participant centred; it involves less reduction and omission than is conventionally recommended; and it maintains the oral register through non-standard language use. In short, this approach recognizes the agency of the translator, who takes on an almost ethnographic role in giving voice to the film's participants.

Before expanding on the three issues set out above, I will provide an overview of existing research on the subject and argue for greater recognition of documentary subtitling, within both AVT and documentary studies.

## Status of current research

In his introduction to the special issue of *META* on audiovisual translation, Yves Gambier sets out 12 modes, ranging from the familiar—dubbing and subtitling—to the less well-known, such as voice-over, interpretation for radio and television, free commentary, opera and theatre surtitling, and closed captioning (Gambier 2004, 2-4). The two modes generally found in documentary translation are subtitling and voice-over, both of which make evident the fact of translation: subtitles leave the original sound untouched, while in voice-over, the original voices are lowered in volume but remain audible. My focus, as noted, shall be on subtitling. This will allow me to examine the double shift that occurs: not only from source language to target language, as in all interlingual translation, but also from speech to writing, from the oral code to the written code. In addition, this focus will allow me to draw on my professional translation experience: since 2002, I have prepared the English subtitles for more than twenty French-language documentaries produced by the National Film Board of Canada.<sup>1</sup> Although I will not analyze any of these films at length, I will at times provide examples from my own practice.

Voice-over in documentary involves superimposing an actor's voice reading a prepared translation over the original voice of a person speaking on camera, whether in an interview, a speech or informal conversation.<sup>2</sup> It differs from dubbing in that the actor's voice is not synchronized to the original utterance; instead it is usually positioned

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<sup>1</sup> Among others, *Médecine sous influence (Medicine Under the Influence)* by Lina B. Moreco; *Zéro tolérance (Zero Tolerance)* by Michka Saäl; and *Marron—La piste créole en Amérique (Maroon—On the Trail of Creoles in North America)* by André Gladu.

<sup>2</sup> Yves Gambier (2004, 3) claims that the term “voice-over” is used in this sense in French only, whereas in English it has the same meaning as narration or commentary. However, in Quebec and many European contexts (see Espasa 2004, 189; Franco 2000, 236), “voice-over” does refer to the documentary practice described above. I will be using the term in that sense.

to start about two seconds after the original voice, at which point the volume of the original is lowered but the sound remains audible under the actor's voice. This gives the impression that a simultaneous interpreter is providing a translation for the benefit of the audience. Broadcasters tend to prefer this mode of AVT for documentaries, as they feel it is easier for viewers to follow. Festival organizers and art cinemas like Ex-Centris in Montréal, however, prefer subtitled versions because they allow viewers to hear the original voices and—of particular benefit in Montréal—they allow French and English audiences to watch the same film simultaneously. The growing popularity of DVDs as a distribution format also favours subtitles, as they are frequently offered as an option on DVD releases in several languages.

In Canada, this situation often results in the production of two language versions of the same documentary: one with subtitles for festivals, theatrical screenings, and DVD releases; and one with voice-over for television broadcast (this is a more expensive undertaking than subtitling, so it is usually done only after a broadcaster has acquired the film). At the National Film Board, at minimum, an English subtitled version is produced for all French-language productions. Depending on the interest in the film in English Canada and internationally, a somewhat more costly version may be produced with subtitles for the speakers and an English narration track that replaces the French. If warranted by the distribution potential and broadcaster interest, the most expensive route may be taken: a version with both English narration and voice-over for the speakers instead of subtitles.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with Johanne Bergeron, line producer at the NFB's Studio B, January 2004.

Few articles have been written that specifically address documentary translation. Eva Espasa's "Myths About Documentary Translation" (2004, 183-197) and Eliana Franco's "Documentary Film Translation: A Specific Practice?" (2000, 233-241) are introductory articles that deplore the neglect of documentary translation within AVT research. Franco points out that only 21 of 1241 entries in the 1997 edition of Yves Gambier's *Language Transfer and Audiovisual Communication: A Bibliography* refer to non-fiction film, and Espasa notes that there were no articles on documentary translation in the November 2003 special issue of *The Translator* on AVT. One of the only other recent articles on documentary translation is Francine Kaufman's "Un exemple d'effet pervers de l'uniformisation linguistique dans la traduction d'un documentaire: de l'hébreu des immigrants de 'Saint-Jean' au français normatif d'ARTE" (2004). She details her experience subtitling a documentary on Israeli immigrants with an imperfect command of Hebrew and the pressure put on her by the French broadcaster to use standardized French for the subtitles.

The neglect of documentary translation within AVT research is reflected in terminology: authors often refer to feature-length fiction films as simply "films" or "movies," while other modes of cinema such as documentary film and animated film are given descriptive adjectives. For example, in his article "Subtitling: The Long Journey to Academic Acknowledgement" (2004), Jorge Díaz Cintas suggests as an area of further research on subtitling "comparison between the subtitling of films and the subtitling of other audiovisual genres such as documentaries or TV series"; he later comments, "Most studies into [*sic*] subtitling concentrate on films, forgetting a myriad of other audiovisual programmes that are considered inferior, such as documentaries, cartoons or series." Yet

film is a medium, not a mode or genre. Documentary has just as often been shot on film as drama (although today, most are shot on video); like drama, documentary may be feature-length and may be shown theatrically. Clearly, there is a need for more research specific to this area that takes into account not only the nature of audiovisual translation (“meaning constructed from the conjunction of images and words” (Chaume 2002, 3)), but also the characteristics of documentary as distinct from those of other modes of cinema.

While documentary translation has received little attention within AVT research, subtitling is frequently overlooked in documentary studies and film studies in general. As Abé Mark Nornes puts it in his article “For an Abusive Subtitling” (1999, 20), “There is no question that English-language criticism about foreign cinema has taken the mediation of subtitles entirely for granted. (...) This absence speaks doubly of the dominance of the image and the utter suppression of the subtitler’s central role in enabling a film’s border crossing.” As an example of the lack of acknowledgement of subtitling in discussions of foreign films in English writing on documentary, let us look at several comments on Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin’s 1961 cinéma-vérité classic *Chronique d’un été* (*Chronicle of a Summer*). In *Rhetoric and Representation in Nonfiction Film*, Carl Plantinga (1997, 143) writes, “In the last words of the film, Morin says, ‘We’re in for trouble.’” In *A New History of Documentary Film*, Jack C. Ellis and Betsy A. McLane (2005, 215) write, “The final words on the sound track are those of Rouch saying to Morin [*sic*], ‘We’re in for trouble,’ as the two separate.” And in *Looking Two Ways: Documentary’s Relationship with Cinema and Reality*, Toni de Bromhead (1996, 91) writes, “(...) at the end of it Rouch’s and Morin’s parting words to each other are: ‘we’re in for trouble.’”

Yet what Morin actually says is, “Nous sommes dans le bain”; “We’re in for trouble” is the *subtitle*. Only one writer makes the distinction: Brian Winston in his article “The Documentary Film as Scientific Inscription” (1993, 53). He writes, “At the end of *Chronique*, walking the halls of the Musée de L’Homme, Morin sums up by saying, “*Nous sommes dans le bain*”—“We’re implicated.” Winston comments in a footnote that the phrase is mistranslated in both the American version of the subtitle (“We’re in for trouble”) and the English version (“I think we are in trouble”). The failure to acknowledge subtitling not only misrepresents what the speaker has said, but in this instance, because of the mistranslation, it leads one of the writers astray in his analysis. Carl Plantinga goes on to comment, “Although it is never clear what kind of trouble Morin refers to, it is at least plausible that the trouble is one of determining what the film has accomplished” (1997, 143).

## CHAPTER 2: DEFINING DOCUMENTARY

To help us understand what sets it apart from other forms of filmmaking and to establish a common understanding of what it constitutes, I believe an attempt to define documentary is in order. I will accomplish this in two ways: by providing a brief overview of its history, and by describing its production methods and the elements used in its construction.

Documentary is one of four basic modes of cinema, along with fiction (also known as drama), experimental film, and animated film—although there is some overlap between these modes, as in docudrama. Historically, cinema was born as non-fiction with the production of the first Lumière brothers films in 1895. Early motion pictures, known as “actualities,” were quite different from films today: they were black and white, had no sound, were shot with a static camera, usually from a fixed position, and lasted no more than a minute, the length of a film reel. But they established the idea of non-fiction filmmaking as “a direct, nonnarrative record of actual people doing actual things” (Barsam 1992, 28). Non-fiction filmmaking is a broader term than documentary, encompassing such forms as the newsreel, travel and ethnographic film, industrial and educational film, war propaganda, the home movie, and archival footage. All these forms record “real-life” events, but documentary is distinct in that it goes beyond reporting to integrate the notion of authorship: the director interprets and presents events from a particular point of view (hence the term “point-of-view documentary”). As Bill Nichols puts it, “Documentary therefore occupies a complex zone of representation in which the art of observing, responding, and listening must be combined with the art of shaping,

interpreting, or arguing” (Nichols 1995, n. pag.). Michael Rabiger gives the following illustration: “a factual film about the way workers manufacture razor blades would be an industrial, but a film that shows the effect upon the workers of repetitive, precision manufacturing and *that invites the spectator to draw socially critical conclusions* can only be called a documentary however well it might also relay the physical process of manufacturing” (Rabiger 1992, 6; emphasis in original).

British filmmaker John Grierson, who would later become the founder of the National Film Board of Canada, is credited with coining the term *documentary* in 1926, in a review of Robert and Frances Flaherty’s film *Moana* (although *documentaire* had been used in France since the turn of the century to describe travelogues). Grierson famously characterized documentary as “the creative treatment of actuality” and believed it should be dramatic, not simply instructional; he felt it should have a social purpose and that it was capable of shaping public opinion. This view of documentary as both a vehicle for social change and a way of drawing attention to issues of concern to ordinary people has remained strong to the present.

It should be noted that prior to the emergence of the feature-length fiction film as the dominant mode of cinema, the conventions that now shape audience expectations with regard to documentary did not exist. Robert Flaherty’s seminal *Nanook of the North* (1922), for example, combined direct recording with re-enactments in a manner that would now probably be called docudrama or be accompanied by a disclaimer, and used fiction shooting techniques like shot–countershot and matching sight lines (Ellis and McLane 2005, 21). Prior to the coming of sound in documentary in the 1930s, the individual shot was expected to record reality in an accurate or at least authentic manner,



but the combination of shots through editing was governed less by realism than by the aesthetics of modernist collage, prevalent at the time in both the visual arts (Hans Richter, Fernand Léger) and literature (James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922)). At first, sound was not used in a naturalistic manner, partly because recording equipment was too cumbersome to be used on location. Nonetheless, by the mid-1930s, the avant-garde or experimental trend in cinema diverged from documentary, and speech rather than non-naturalistic sound came to dominate the soundtrack. Since then, documentary's argumentative impulse has thrived on the central role of speech (Lovell and Hillier 1972, 28-30; Nichols 1995, n. pag.).

Yet speech, as well as music played by the cinema pianist or orchestra, had been part of documentary screenings long before the transition to synchronized sound in "talking" motion pictures. In the early decades of cinema (1896 to the late 1920s), a key figure in interpreting the new art form to audiences was the showman, also called the "lecturer" or "film describer" (Kember 2006, 12). In Quebec, this person was called the "*conférencier*" or "*bonimenteur des vues animées*" (Lacasse 2000, 34). His role was not only to entice spectators into the theatre in the manner of a fairground barker, but also, standing at the edge of the screen, to read the intertitles for illiterate audience members and translate them if the film was in a foreign language. In Quebec, the *bonimenteur* was a colourful personality: so vital was he to the success of screenings that his name was often mentioned on advertisements. We can see in this figure the precursor of the narrator in documentary film. The practice of providing commentary for a film while it was being screened persisted until the 1960s: it was adopted by the filmmaker-priests,

key figures in early Quebec cinema, who made documentaries about the traditional, rural way of life (Lacasse 2004, n. pag.).

Influenced by the Griersonian tradition, many scholars define documentary as being essentially concerned with social analysis or argument; documentary, claims Rabiger, “is the very opposite of escapist entertainment” (1992, 5). However, such a definition seems overly restrictive, as it neglects not only the observational approaches to documentary filmmaking of the late 1950s and 60s, known as “direct cinema” in the United States, Canada and France, but also the trend towards personal or autobiographical documentary that has emerged in recent decades, in which the filmmaker is the subject of his or her work.

Technological advances of the late 1950s had a big impact on documentary: the invention of lightweight portable cameras allowed for hand-held camerawork, and portable tape recorders with synchronization made it possible to record sync sound without the camera and tape recorder being connected by wires. A two-person crew could film the action as it unfolded, often using available light and without staging or lengthy preparations. Jean Rouch saw in this new freedom an opportunity to interact with the subject while recording a way of life, as he had done in his ethnographic films made in Africa. His 1961 *Chronicle of a Summer* is built around interviews with Parisians in the street, who were asked if they were happy. In *cinéma vérité* (or interactive mode), the filmmaker was an active participant and even provoked events, whereas in direct cinema (observational mode), the filmmaker tried to remain invisible, observing without influencing the course of events. A strong direct-cinema tradition developed in Canada, particularly at the National Film Board, pioneered by English Canadian filmmakers like

Roman Kroitor and Wolf Koenig and French Canadian filmmakers like Claude Jutra, Michel Brault and Pierre Perrault.

In recent decades, a tendency towards subjectivity has emerged within documentary, based partly on a critique of direct cinema's claims to "purity" and an awareness that the presence of camera and crew, no matter how discreet, influences the actions being filmed. Bill Nichols (1995, n. pag.) suggests that the foregrounding of the filmmaker's personal position and experiences corresponds to the rise in identity politics (feminism, gay and lesbian issues, etc.), which have displaced unified social movements with their calls for collective action. The "first-person" or "autobiographical" documentary trend includes the popular work of Michael Moore; recent hits like Morgan Spurlock's *Super Size Me* (2004), in which the filmmaker documents his experience eating only food from McDonald's for a month; the tradition of diary films and road movies like Ross McElwee's *Sherman's March* (1985); as well as feminist and gay/lesbian films like Marlon Riggs' *Tongues Untied* (1989). In Canada, we could mention the work of André-Line Beauparlant, who films her family members, and gay activist Richard Fung.

In an attempt to develop a typology of documentary, Bill Nichols sets out six modes of representation in his 2001 *Introduction to Documentary*: the poetic mode, which draws on the outside world for its material but presents it in impressionistic, aesthetic ways, sharing ground with the avant-garde and experimental film and drawing on visual arts traditions; the expository mode, of which the Griersonian documentary is a prime example, which advances an argument, often through narration and from a position of authority; the observational mode, epitomized by the American and Canadian

traditions of direct cinema; the participatory or interactive mode, in which the filmmaker's presence is acknowledged, as in *Chronique d'un été* and later works like Agnès Varda's *Les glaneurs et moi* (*The Gleaners and I*); the reflexive mode, which foregrounds the very process of representation and compels viewers to question conventions and their own expectations, as in the ethnographic films of David and Judith MacDougall; and the performative mode, which stresses the subjective aspects of knowledge through an emphasis on personal experience.

Note that the brief overview I have provided here focuses on the English- and French-language documentary traditions, with a particular emphasis on Canada. However, other countries have strong traditions too, starting with Russia and the pioneering Soviet filmmakers like Dziga Vertov and including India, Brazil, Japan and Eastern Europe. Technological changes over the past few decades have lowered budgets dramatically and made the documentary form accessible to disenfranchised groups in North America and around the world, generating renewed interest in documentary as a vehicle for change. New forms of distribution and exhibition such as the Internet, video on demand, and specialty cable and satellite channels have allowed filmmakers to disregard national boundaries and build up personal audiences on the basis of interest (Ellis and McLane 2005, 327-338).

With the fragmentation of markets comes a clamour of voices in all languages, increasing the need for audiovisual translation and subtitling. Indeed, the process of subtitling has become more accessible with the advent of consumer subtitling software and equipment. This has spawned the phenomenon of "fansubbing," in which fans create their own (unpaid and unauthorized) translations of foreign films or television shows,

particularly Japanese anime, and distribute them for free or at cost through the Internet and local clubs.

### **Elements of documentary**

The second path we might take to arrive at a definition of documentary involves looking at its production methods and the elements of its construction. Just as fiction is produced using actors and scripts and often shot in studio, just as animated film is made using frame-by-frame techniques like stop-motion, clay modelling and paper cut-outs, documentary is based on specific techniques. These techniques have varied through history, but have certain commonalities. There is no script or screenplay, in the sense of a work of imagination that forms the basis of shooting and sets out the film's plot, characters and setting. If a documentary script is written—as is now commonly required for fundraising purposes—it will resemble a research report, with notes on the director's intentions and descriptions of the expected participants. Documentary does not use actors, professional or amateur, who are chosen through casting and wear costumes and makeup. The “characters” (participants or subjects) play themselves and are not directed; they wear their own clothing and have minimal or no makeup. Additionally, sets are not constructed in documentary; shooting is done on location, often using available light, without alterations being made to the setting (Gauthier 1995, 244). Interviews are occasionally shot in studio. The crews tend to be small, ranging in size from a bare minimum of two (camera operator and sound recordist, one of whom is also the director) to about seven (for example, camera operator, sound recordist, director, camera assistant, assistant director, gaffer and interviewer).

Documentaries are constructed with a limited number of elements—building blocks, in a sense. In terms of picture, these include action footage (direct recording of people doing things, landscapes, objects, etc.); existing library or archival footage and still photos; people talking to each other, whether acknowledging the presence of the camera or not; and interviews, more or less formal, with the interviewer either on or off camera. In terms of sound, the building blocks include narration (whether by a professional narrator, the director of the film or a participant); voice-over sound, such as an audio-only interview or an off-camera voice taken from a picture-and-sound interview; synchronous sound, recorded during shooting; sound effects; and music (Rabiger 1992, 277-278).

I will focus on two of these categories: people talking to each other, and people talking to the camera (interviews). Narration is a distinct form of cinematic writing, specific to documentary,<sup>4</sup> that would have to be dealt with in a separate paper to do it justice, so I will only make a few comments here. Also called commentary, narration is an element added to the soundtrack that generally serves to amplify and clarify what is seen in the picture, ideally without repeating the information provided by the visuals. Since the 1930s, the dominant mode of narration has been what is known as the “voice of God.” This was the hallmark of the Griersonian documentary: the disembodied voice of an unseen narrator, usually a man, is heard, addressing the viewer from a position of authority, in order to transmit information and put forward an argument. Such narration remains common in television news reporting and certain documentary genres, like

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<sup>4</sup> An off-camera voice is found in some fiction films, such as *Drugstore Cowboy* (1989), and has recently become fashionable in television series like *Grey's Anatomy*, but it is generally that of a character in the story and is performed by the actor.

wildlife films. The narrator acts as a kind of surrogate or stand-in for the filmmaker, mediating between the film's participants and the viewer. Some filmmakers feel that the authoritative narrator's voice imposes a passivity on viewers rather than engaging them in dialogue, and that narration serves as a crutch for an unimaginative or inexperienced director.

The use of a narrator fell out of favour with the observational approaches to documentary filmmaking of the 1960s. American direct-cinema pioneer Robert Drew felt that only documentaries that told their story without narration, through characters and action, could "soar" into a realm beyond words. As he puts it, "narration is what you do when you fail" (Drew 1983, 271-273). However, as Stella Bruzzi points out in *New Documentary: A Critical Introduction* (2000, 40-65), narration can be used in diverse ways, not limited to the "voice-of-God" model; for example, it can serve as a succinct storytelling tool or provide an ambiguous counterpoint to the image. The latter is illustrated by Luis Buñuel's 1932 film *Las Hurdes (Land Without Bread)*, in which the dispassionate description of an impoverished region of Spain is at odds with the harrowing images.

We can distinguish two forms of narration: the third-person or extradiegetic, in which the voice is anonymous and comes from outside the story, and the first-person or intradiegetic, in which the voice is that of one of the people we see in the film (MacDougall 1998, 101-102). It is fairly common today for the filmmaker to read his or her own narration from a personal point of view without actually appearing in the film—as in *Scared Sacred* (2004), in which Canadian filmmaker Velcrow Ripper travels to the "ground zeros" of the world seeking hope and resilience. This form is midway between

the first- and the third-person narrations. Many point-of-view documentaries, however, eschew narration altogether and are constructed entirely through interviews and direct recordings of participants' actions.

In documentaries without narration, the participants themselves become the stand-in for the filmmaker, as the argument or story is built through their voices. Interviewing is an important element of the art of documentary, in that the filmmaker seeks out access to a person's thoughts and feelings, then shapes them through editing to fit the film's story line. Interviews act as embedded narratives or stories within a story; they are tales told to an invisible audience. It is important to note that the interview segments we see in the final cut of a film—whether formal (known as the “talking head”) or informal (in which a person talks to the interviewer or director while carrying out other actions, or in which people talk amongst themselves)—have been edited and condensed, sometimes from hours of material. The interviewer's questions have in most cases been edited out and the participants' answers have been abbreviated. Because cuts in image and sound together would lead to “jump cuts” (slight but jarring changes in the participant's expression and head position), filmmakers use techniques such as cutaways—shots of scenery or of whatever the person is talking about—to splice together audio sections unnoticeably while continuing the interview in the soundtrack.

Some documentaries—particularly the observational films that take a rigorous direct-cinema approach, sometimes called “fly-on-the-wall”—avoid not only narration but interviews as well. They record action (people doing things, people talking about things) without intervention and without any behaviour being performed for the camera. “We were shooting hand-held, no tripods, no lights, no questions—never asked anybody



to do anything,” insists Richard Leacock, a pioneer of American direct cinema.<sup>5</sup> Films in this category include Gilles Groulx and Michel Brault’s short *Les Raquetteurs* (1958), which records a snowshoe race in Sherbrooke, Quebec, and the films of Frederick Wiseman, which are set in institutions such as a hospital and high school. In the three-way relationship between filmmaker, participant and viewer, these films seem to offer more direct access to the participant, with less mediation on the part of the filmmaker. Yet even such seemingly unmediated films involve considerable authorial intervention, in both the shooting and editing processes. A frequent criticism of observational filmmaking is that it is naive to think filmmakers had no influence on participant behaviour or that subjects entirely forget the presence of the camera; however, the filmmakers themselves are fully aware of their own agency and the impossibility of achieving an “objective” record. “Of course there’s conscious manipulation, everything about a movie is manipulation!” exclaims Frederick Wiseman in *Cinéma Vérité: Defining the Moment*.

Recognition of the filmmaker’s agency and the complexity of his or her relation to a film’s participants leads us to the issue of authorship in documentary, which is the focus of the next chapter.

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<sup>5</sup> From an interview in *Cinéma Vérité: Defining the Moment*, directed by Peter Wintonick (1999).

### CHAPTER 3: NOTIONS OF AUTHORSHIP

In 2002, veteran French documentarian Nicolas Philibert released *Être et avoir* (*To Be and To Have*), a feature-length film about a single-class school in rural France. The film follows a dozen children aged four to eleven over part of a school year as they are patiently taught every subject by their compassionate and dedicated teacher Georges Lopez. The film was an unexpected box-office hit and became the most successful documentary in French history. Mr. Lopez, who retired shortly after the film was shot, turned into a celebrity, attending screenings across France to answer audience questions. But the following year, he shocked both audiences and the documentary community by filing a €250,000 lawsuit against the producers for infringement of his intellectual property rights. His lawyers argued that his lessons were an original intellectual creation and he should be compensated for their use, as in the adaptation of a book. Mr. Lopez also claimed he should have the status of “co-author of the audiovisual work” and should receive payment for the use of his voice and image.

A Paris court ruled in 2004 that in agreeing to be filmed, Mr. Lopez had given consent to the use of his image and should receive no payment for his participation. He appealed the decision but it was upheld by the court of appeal in March 2006. Moreover, the court of appeal ordered Mr. Lopez to pay €12,000 in legal fees to the opposing parties. “*Être et avoir* a été un succès tout à fait exceptionnel,” commented Nicolas Philibert’s lawyer. “Si à l’occasion de ce succès, il avait été jugé que l’on devait payer les

gens participant à un documentaire, c'est toute l'économie du secteur et tout l'équilibre de l'œuvre documentaire qui aurait été mis en question.”<sup>6</sup>

The law in this case was clear: the documentary participant, no matter how central to the film's argument or success, is not its “co-author.” Nor should payments be made to participants—a relief to documentary makers, who feared the case would set a precedent and they would henceforth be required to pay participants, which would likely alter their behaviour and change the nature of documentary filmmaking.<sup>7</sup> The person being filmed has given the filmmaker permission to do so; has given time—often a lot of time; has allowed access—often to personal space; has opened up and shared intimate thoughts and feelings. Yet when the shooting wraps and the release form is signed, the participant's involvement in the film is, in most cases, over. While participants are always acknowledged and thanked in a documentary's end credits, it is rare that they are given shared director credits. Exceptions would include community-based projects and collaborative works in which participants are given cameras and asked to film subjects of interest to them, such as the NFB's *Challenge for Change* series of the late 1960s and 1970s. A more recent example is *Inuvunga—I Am Inuk, I Am Alive* (2004), in which eight teenagers in northern Quebec were selected to document the events of their final year at high school with the assistance of experienced documentary filmmakers Daniel Cross and Mila Aung-Thwin; all eight are credited as co-directors along with Cross, Aung-Thwin, and Brett Gaylor.

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<sup>6</sup> “The success of *Être et avoir* was absolutely exceptional. If as a result of that success it had been decided that people taking part in a documentary should be paid, the entire economy of the sector and the whole equilibrium of the documentary work would have been called into question.” Claire Hocquet, lawyer for Nicolas Philibert, quoted in “La cour d'appel de Paris déboute l'instituteur d'Être et avoir,” *Le Monde*, March 29, 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Mark Lawson, “Whose Life Is It Anyway?” *The Guardian*, October 11, 2003.

In most documentaries, then, given that participants are not considered co-directors or co-authors of the audiovisual work, the participant's voice is filtered through the agency of the filmmaker. The ethical implications of the situation are set out by David MacDougall:

By asking nothing of the subjects beyond permission to film them, the filmmaker adopts an inherently secretive position. There is no need for further explanation, no need to communicate with the subjects on the basis of the thinking that organizes the work. There is, in fact, some reason for the filmmaker not to do so for fear it may influence their behavior. In this insularity, the filmmaker withholds the very openness that is being asked of the subjects in order to film them. (MacDougall 1998, 133)

It is the filmmaker, along with the editor, who screens the rushes and chooses the images that best suit the logic of the storyline—indeed, whether the participant will “make it” into the final film or not. If interviews were done, the filmmaker selects the sentences that construct an argument or tell a story. If there is ambiguity as to what the person “meant”—and this can happen quite often with the impromptu speech of documentary—the filmmaker will decide which interpretation to favour and will not usually contact the speaker to ask for clarification. In making such decisions, the filmmaker draws not only on the words spoken in the scene in question, but also on all the other material that was shot but not used in the film, as well as on other meetings and conversations that were not recorded.

Of course, documentary directors invariably claim that they treat the participants with utmost respect and would not manipulate or distort their words; this is no doubt generally true. However, as translators know, there are always shades of meaning and decisions to be made in the passage from one language to another. At the NFB's French

Program, the director (or in some cases the producer or line producer) is responsible for revising the subtitle list.<sup>8</sup> The director may request changes that reflect his or her interpretation of a particular sentence, or that clarify what a participant has said. An example of this comes from a film that I subtitled for the NFB, *Histoire d'être humain* (*Being Human*) by Denys Desjardins, which follows a year in the life of secondary school students in a disadvantaged neighbourhood in Montréal. At the end of the film, a teacher says goodbye to her students as they leave for summer vacation. To 12-year-old Gerry, whom we have observed struggling with classwork over the school year, she says, “Alors, on se revoit l’année prochaine?” “Oui!” he answers. “Ouais,” she continues as she moves away, “Tu vas être dans la même classe...” The director asked me to subtitle this as follows:

I’ll see you next year—  
you’ll be repeating the year.

He wanted to make clear, to English viewers at least, that the boy had failed Secondary 1. This demonstrates the influence a director can have over the interpretation of a participant’s words.

### **The source text in documentary**

Clearly, it is the filmmaker who has the final say on how a participant’s words should be interpreted. Even in situations that differ from the one in Quebec, where

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<sup>8</sup> This is the usual practice at the National Film Board of Canada and some Quebec production companies; however, it does not appear to be typical of the situation elsewhere in Canada and in Europe. In most cases, the director has moved on to another project by the time versioning is done and is not in contact with the subtitler. Also, a director can only comment on the subtitles if he or she is fluent in the language; this is quite common with French-to-English subtitling in Quebec, but rare in other countries and with other language pairs.

another person such as the version director approves the subtitle list, it is highly unlikely that the participant would be contacted for clarification of anything said on camera. What does this imply for the subtitler? In translation terms, we could phrase the question as follows: who is the author of the source text? The filmmaker, who has directed and structured the work according to an argument or storyline? Or the participant, who has of course spoken the words to be translated, and whose speech and language use reflect both an individual and a social actor? The issue may be seen as one of intentionality, as Basil Hatim and Ian Mason suggest, writing from a discourse analysis approach (1990, 10-12). Translation, like any reading of a text, is an act of interpretation, and the translator, like the reader, seeks to recover what is “meant” by the author of the source text from a range of possible meanings. While I do not question that the filmmaker is the author *of the cinematographic work*, I believe we should consider the participant as the author of the source text—that part of the film that concerns the subtitler.

In fiction film dialogue, there is no ambiguity. The author of the source text is the film director or scriptwriter, not the actor who is speaking the dialogue. In the chapter of *The Translator as Communicator* called “Politeness in Screen Translating,” Hatim and Mason set out the notion of text producer and text receiver in light of Allan Bell’s model of “audience design” (Hatim and Mason 1997, 82-84). This refers to the way speakers adjust their speech to account for different audiences: *addressees*, who are directly addressed and known to the speaker, and have the most effect on the text producer’s style; *auditors*, who are known to the speaker but not directly addressed; *overhearers*, who are listeners the speaker is aware of but does not acknowledge; and *eavesdroppers*, listeners the speaker is not aware of. In fiction film dialogue, characters speak to each

other as addressees, but we know the scriptwriter has written the dialogue to be comprehensible to the audience members, who function as *auditors* according to the above model. Following Bell, Hatim and Mason submit that these mass auditors (the cinema audience) have more influence on the style of a film script than the addressees (on-screen characters). For example, a character may speak in a pretentious manner primarily as a way of signalling his personality to the audience, and only secondarily to establish his authority over the other characters within the fictional world. Given the influence of the mass auditors on film dialogue, Hatim and Mason suggest that, “typically, subtitlers make it their overriding priority to establish coherence for their receivers, i.e. the mass auditors, by ensuring easy readability and connectivity; their second priority would then be the addressee-design of the fictional characters on screen” (1997, 84).

Hatim and Mason present the following schema with regard to film dialogue (1997, 83):

Text producer 1 = scriptwriter (film director, etc.)

Text producer 2 = character A on screen

Text receiver 1 = character B on screen

Text receiver 2 = cinema audience

(Text receiver 3 = other potential receivers)

Can we apply the same schema to the unscripted speech of documentary? I believe we would have to modify it as follows:

Text producer 1 = participant

Text producer 2 = film director

In other words, the source text originates with the participant and is subsequently shaped by the film director.

Text receiver 1 = another participant or off-screen interviewer

Text receiver 2 = cinema audience

(Text receiver 3 = other potential receivers)

Because speech is unscripted, the participant's words are primarily addressed to other participants or to the interviewer. Unlike film dialogue, they may not be designed to take into account the cinema audience. Whereas the "overriding priority" of subtitlers dealing with film dialogue is to establish coherence for the audience, the documentary subtitler may make it his or her priority to respect the intended meaning of the speaker.

It is true that the director has broader knowledge of the scenes in the film and knows the participant better than the subtitler. Yet there is a danger if we conclude that as a result, the director should have authority over the participant's words. As the film takes shape in the editing process, the living person who took part in shooting and interviews tends to fade from the filmmaker's mind, to be replaced by a two-dimensional representation of that person, a figure constructed to serve the film's ends. Documentary directors often implicitly acknowledge this process by referring to a person who "becomes" an important character in a film—indeed, by the way they inevitably refer to participants as "characters." The choice of participant often depends on the person's "expressive capacity," as Bill Nichols puts it, or ability to convey "some sense of an interior dimensionality" (Nichols 1991, 120-121). There is an instrumentalization of the historical person, who is transformed into a cinematic character. Of necessity, the character represents a reduction of the individual's complexity and emphasizes those



aspects of the person that contribute to the film's storyline. This kind of reduction can lead to typecasting or pigeonholing an individual into his or her social role. The subtitler, who enters the filmmaking process during the last stages, when the film is completed or nearing completion, only has access to the character, the constructed representation of an actual person that appears in the film. It is all too easy to translate the words of the *character*—yet I believe the subtitler has a responsibility to the *participant*. Through careful translation decisions, the subtitler can offset the reduction of an individual person to a social type in order to recover individuality and emphasize personal identity. This is what I call a “participant-centred” approach to subtitling.

We may gain insight into how a subtitler might take this approach by considering the deconstructive strategy of text reading put forward by Derrida and other thinkers (see Gentzler 1993, 145-153). Equivalence-based theories like those of Eugene Nida take an uncritical view of the original as being fixed and knowable, produced through the creative impulse of the author. It is the author who instils meaning in a text, which itself is a unified entity. Meaning can be broken down into “kernels” or “deep structures” and transferred from one language to another. A hierarchy is established between the “original”—superior, pure, authentic—and the “translation”—secondary, derivative. In contrast, deconstruction calls into question the idea of the text as a unitary structure and the concept of “determinable meaning that can be transferred to another system of signification” (Gentzler 1993, 147). Instead, it posits a “chain of signification,” in which the translated text refers back to another translation, words represent only other words, and so on. This notion of “perpetually deferred meaning,” as Tejaswini Niranjana points out (1992, 56), recalls Roman Jakobson's early claim that “the meaning of any linguistic

sign is its translation into some further, alternative sign” (Jakobson 1959, 232). The formulation calls into question the concept of the original and, by extension, of the author. The author, as argued by Michel Foucault, does not produce a work through spontaneous inspiration, but uses pre-existing words and discourses whose meaning is not entirely within the individual author’s control. Within such a model, “gaps, reversals, differences, contradictions, and silences are just as important in determining ‘meaning’ as that which is coherent, unified, and explicitly articulated” (Gentzler 1993, 150).

This model can be applied to the process of constructing a documentary film. On the raw or pre-existing material formed by the words of the participant, who is the initial author, the filmmaker performs an act of interpretation, in effect creating the original and occupying the function of both author and translator. Within a deconstructionist view, “[t]he notion that the translator creates the original (...) serves to undermine the notion of authorship and with it the authority on which to base a comparison of subsequent translated versions of a text” (Gentzler 1993, 149). The filmmaker’s “original” is a valid but not authoritative interpretation of the participant’s words. The subtitler then performs a further act of interpretation by translating the material of the constructed film into another language. Yet this process need not be consecutive; the subtitler may consider the participant’s words as open to interpretation independently from the filmmaker’s use of them in the construction of a character or storyline. Such an approach would find common ground between the deconstructive strategy—which involves “tun[ing] into the language speaking itself, listening for the unheard, the ungraspable” (Gentzler 1993, 153)—and the ethnographic approach advocated by David MacDougall: “There is always the risk that people in ethnographic films will be reduced simply to their social roles. The

way in which subtitles are written can help to offset this by stressing personal identity and individuality” (MacDougall 1998, 169).

### **Case study: Bacon, the Film**

In this section, I shall examine *Bacon, le film (Bacon, the Film)*, a 2002 documentary directed by Hugo Latulippe and produced by André Gladu of the National Film Board. The translation and subtitles of the English version were done by Kathleen Fleming. The film examines the social and environmental consequences of large-scale hog production in Quebec. In the 1980s, the provincial government supported the industrialization of traditional hog farms, spurring Quebec to become Canada's largest pork producer and a major pork exporter. Within a decade, the price of such huge operations on the environment and social fabric of rural Quebec had become evident: pigs produce enormous quantities of manure which is spread over fields, causing contamination of drinking water and rivers as well as sterility in the soil. Communities were affected by decreased tourism, loss of jobs, and growing health problems. Unable to have their voices heard by the government or industry, citizens joined forces to protest these operations; the Union paysanne was formed to champion small-scale farming operations in opposition to the industrial model favoured by the Union des producteurs agricoles. *Bacon, the Film* contains interviews with government representatives, pork producers and opponents of the large-scale operations, while documenting the struggles of rural citizens to put limits on the industry's expansion.

On its release, the film generated intense media interest and public debate. Hugo Latulippe attended screenings of the film all across Quebec and led discussions on the issues after the screenings. As a filmmaker, he viewed his role as contributing to reviving interest in the democratic process, by showing individuals the impact they could have when they worked together as a community. In June 2002, shortly after the film was

released, the Quebec government declared a moratorium on expansion in the hog industry—just as citizens in rural municipalities had been demanding.

In a scene early in the film, Hugo Latulippe attempts to set up an interview with Quebec Minister of Agriculture Rémy Trudel. The director of communications responds by saying she hopes the film will not be another *Erreur boréale*. She is referring to Richard Desjardins and Robert Monderie's *L'erreur boréale (Forest Alert)*, a 1999 documentary that was highly critical of the Quebec logging industry and forestry practices and that sparked considerable controversy. Other environmental films in the same vein include Alain Belhumeur's *J'ai pour toi un lac* (2001), on water pollution in Quebec's freshwater lakes, and Ève Lamont's *Pas de pays sans paysans (The Fight for True Farming)* (2005), on the sustainability of industrial agricultural practices. Within the typology of documentary films presented earlier, all these films would fall under the expository mode of representation. More specifically, we can describe them as *advocacy documentaries* in that while both sides of an issue are presented, the filmmaker clearly takes a stand and attempts to persuade viewers of the merits of his or her position.

One feature of advocacy documentaries is the use of both *sympathetic testimony*—interviews with people whose viewpoints coincide with or support the argument of the filmmaker—and *oppositional testimony*—interviews with people whose positions are in opposition to those of the filmmaker (Plantinga 1997, 163-164). Through structure and stylistic treatment, the filmmaker may subtly grant more weight to sympathetic interviews, while undermining those that are oppositional. Carl Plantinga analyzes Bonnie Klein's *Not a Love Story* (1981) to show how “the voice of the film makes itself heard through technical choices” (1997, 163). For example, feminist writer

Susan Griffin's testimony is given more authority by being positioned at the beginning and end so that it "literally frames the film," whereas the manager of a sex emporium is interviewed with his face in shadow, making him appear disreputable. Think also of Michael Moore's *Bowling for Columbine* (2002), an examination of gun proliferation in the United States that takes as its starting point the 1999 massacre at a Colorado high school. In the film, Charlton Heston, then president of the National Rifle Association, agrees to be interviewed at his home. Michael Moore, himself an NRA member, asks him why he thinks the United States has a higher rate of gun crimes than other developed nations and why he attended rallies in Columbine and Flint, Michigan, after gun tragedies had occurred.<sup>9</sup> Although Heston is friendly at the start of the interview, Moore is clearly trying to bait him and provoke an angry or discriminatory response—what some critics call a "gotcha" moment.

Similarly, in *Bacon, the Film*, the filmmaker's voice comes through clearly in the way various characters are treated—as well as through the narration, spoken by the filmmaker himself, which sets out his personal background and opposition to industrial agriculture practices in general. The film opens with comments by Élise Gauthier of the Union paysanne. Seated outdoors, she speaks directly to the camera, in a confident, somewhat theatrical manner, giving her version of the history of industrial hog farming in Quebec: that the government encouraged large farming operations to expand, but that eventually, small farmers would join forces and become stronger. Like the testimony of Susan Griffin in *Not a Love Story*, her words are given authority by their temporal positioning at the very start of the film (even before the opening credits), where they act

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<sup>9</sup> This interview and other aspects of *Bowling for Columbine* have been criticized as misleading or deceptive. See the Wikipedia entry on the film at <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bowling\\_for\\_Columbine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bowling_for_Columbine)> [consulted August 11, 2006].

as an introduction to the entire subject. The “gotcha” moment in *Bacon, the Film* occurs when Hugo Latulippe interviews Deputy Minister of Agriculture Jacques Landry. He is filmed in a formal setting, with a Quebec flag and potted plants in the background. His eyes are wide and he looks nervous and uncomfortable as he defends the government position. When Latulippe asks him who foots the bill to clean polluted rivers in Quebec, he starts to answer, then breaks off mid-sentence. Latulippe steps in to say, “Ce sont les citoyens, je vous en informe, c’est tous les citoyens québécois, via le gouvernement.” (Subtitled as: “It’s the citizens. / I’m telling you. It’s all Quebecois. / Via their government.”) Landry purses his lips, looks away from the camera, and says nothing more; the camera stays on him for a full five seconds.

In our earlier discussion of authorship, we saw that documentary, unlike fiction, is characterized by a shared authorship of the source text. Now we see that those two authors—the filmmaker and the participant—may speak from opposing positions or have different communicative intents. This is an unusual situation in translation. Perhaps the only other situation in which this occurs is in the translation of quotations. In newspaper articles or social science essays, for example, an author might quote another’s work to take issue with it. Because so little research has been done on documentary translation in general and the impact of the specific characteristics of documentary on translation in particular, documentary subtitlers are no doubt unaware of the challenge this type of situation presents. The tendency, I believe, is for subtitlers to uncritically accept the filmmaker’s interpretation of a participant’s words and make word choices that reinforce the filmmaker’s position. In the participant-centred approach that I advocate, the subtitler would attempt to translate the participant’s words without the filter of the filmmaker’s

interpretation, in a reading that would be on the same plane as, rather than consecutive to, that of the filmmaker.

Let's look at some examples from *Bacon, the Film*. One key participant in the film is Bernard Paquette, a major Quebec hog producer and entrepreneur. He is an affable man who describes his various companies and projects in a modest manner. For much of the interview he is driving a pickup truck, wearing a backwards-turned cap, sipping a soft drink, and listening to Jimmy Buffett's *Margaritaville* on the radio. But given that he represents the industrial hog producers that the film is denouncing, his position is in opposition to that of the filmmaker. Here is one exchange (at 05:55), along with the English subtitles:

Hugo Latulippe: Ton père sera surpris de voir la ferme aujourd'hui?	Would your father be surprised to see the farm now?
Bernard Paquette: Ouais. Il trouvait que...	Yes. He thought...
j'allais raide pas mal, t'sé que...	that I was quite ruthless...
il trouvait que j'allais trop vite.	that I was going too fast...
(...)	(...)
B.P.: C'était pas comme lui il pensait. J'achetais un voisin, il disait "qu'est-ce que tu fais là?"	I bought out a neighbour. He was astonished.

If the film had been a positive portrayal of Paquette's entrepreneurial success, would the subtitler have chosen the word "ruthless" to translate "raide pas mal"? Would the translation not have been "that I was quite driven" or "that I was pushing it" or some similar expression? In the last sentence, "he was astonished" is stronger than the father's mild reaction, which might have been translated as "He said, 'What are you up to?'"



Hugo Latulippe questions Paquette respectfully and he answers in a half-sheepish, half-proud manner. He is a complex character—a down-to-earth local farmer who expanded his operations, rather than a money-driven outside owner. Incidentally, he appears in another NFB documentary, Carole Laganière’s *Country* (2005), about the people who follow Quebec’s country and western festival circuit. In that film, we see a more vulnerable side of Paquette when he talks about his mother. In *Bacon, the Film*, the subtitle word choices tend to diminish his complexity. Cumulatively, such word choices can alter the perception of the film by viewers.

Here is another example (at 16:28). A local resident, Guildor Michaud, has set up a sign protesting the pork industry at the edge of the highway, but has to lock it to a post to prevent it from being stolen.

H.L.: Qui c’est qui vient la chercher?	Who takes it?
G.M.: Ça, j’ai aucune idée.	I have no idea.
Sans doute des gens qui sont dans l’opposition par rapport à notre... prise de position quant à la venue des porcs chez nous.	Undoubtedly, it’s people who oppose our position on the invasion of pork here.

Michaud is careful not to accuse a particular group of people, merely suggesting that those who steal the sign oppose his position. Why is his neutral phrase, “la venue des porcs,” translated as “the invasion of pork”? The subtitler has, probably unconsciously, given a more extreme formulation to his words, knowing that the filmmaker’s sympathies lie with the rural citizens who protest the large hog farms. Later, at a municipal council meeting, a resident says to the representative of a pork operation, “Je vous ai demandé si la population avait le droit—si vous reconnaissiez à une population

locale le droit de refuser la venue d’une partie de votre filière porcine.” Here, “la venue” is translated more neutrally as “the installation”: “I asked you whether you recognized / a local population’s right / to refuse the installation of a subsidiary / of your pork franchise.” At the same meeting, Guildor Michaud says angrily to the panel of councillors and industry representatives, “Lorsque les intégrateurs débarquent chez nous, avec des porcheries qui sont des industries (...).” In this case, the word “invade” is appropriate as a translation of “débarquer,” and the subtitle reads “But when entrepreneurs invade us / with farms that are industries / (...).”

Here is a final example from the opening comments by Élise Gauthier (01:01):

E.G.: Ce bonhomme là ou cette bonne femme là à Québec, là,	That person in Quebec
il va finir par péter au frette. Parce qu’à devenir trop gros, là,	will end up pissing in the wind. Because it’s getting too big.
puis à vouloir devenir trop gros puis à manger le petit, là,	The desire to overexpand and assimilate the small ones...
ben le petit à moment donné, ils serrent les coudes.	At some point, they’ll link arms,
Puis ils deviennent beaucoup plus gros en serrant les coudes que un gros tout seul.	and as a solid unit, they’ll be much stronger than 1 monopoly.

The subtitles in this passage could be improved in several areas: “Québec” refers to the government and should be subtitled as either Quebec City or Québec (with an accent); the expression “péter au frette” means to die suddenly, give up or be eliminated,<sup>10</sup> whereas “pissing in the wind” means to do something to no effect or against

<sup>10</sup> Pierre DesRuisseaux, *Dictionnaire des expressions québécoises*. Bibliothèque québécoise, 2003.

one's own interests<sup>11</sup>; and "1 monopoly" is a questionable translation of "un gros tout seul." The part to which I would like to draw attention, however, is Ms. Gauthier's conditional construction—*if* the large hog farms continue to expand and buy out the smaller ones, the smaller ones will eventually join forces. This is translated by a statement, "Because it's getting too big," followed by an incomplete sentence, followed by another statement. The substitution of a statement for a conditional makes her seem more forceful and unequivocal than she actually is. Again, I submit that the subtitler's translation decisions were influenced by the filmmaker's position, in this case the weight he has given to Ms. Gauthier's words.

*Bacon, the Film* is clearly intended to spark outrage against not only industrial hog production but unsustainable agricultural practices in general, and to spur viewers to action. (Hugo Latulippe sets the tone early in the film when he says in the narration, "I am making this film instead of becoming a terrorist.") While it does not claim to be objective, nor does it does not oversimplify the debate by presenting the hog producers as uniformly "bad guys" and the rural citizens as "good guys." Along with Bernard Paquette, the local guy gone big, the hog producers are represented by Luc Veilleux, who seems out of his league as he amusingly attempts to use business jargon but gets completely bogged down in his words. The complexity of the characters is one of the strengths of the film; they remain individuals rather than being typecast. The subtitler has not entirely maintained that complexity, tending to make word choices that reinforce the filmmaker's argument rather than fully respecting the participant's words.

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<sup>11</sup> *Oxford Canadian Dictionary*.

In this film, as in advocacy documentaries in general, the subtitler is faced with the particular challenge of translating oppositional testimony. I believe a participant-centred approach, which would consist in dismantling the chain of interpretation and considering the participant's words independently of the filmmaker's interpretation, is most respectful of both the individuals involved and the audience. Instead of reducing the richness of the raw material, it leaves viewers open to a variety of responses. This corresponds to the idea that "the translator's task should be to preserve, as far as possible, the range of possible responses; in other words, not to reduce the dynamic role of the reader" (Hatim and Mason 1990, 11).

In this case study, we have focused on word choice and its role in translation. In the next section, which looks at the interaction between image and text—a feature of all audiovisual translation—our focus will be on rhythm and its impact on documentary subtitling.

## CHAPTER 4: IMAGE-TEXT INTERACTION

Many discussions of subtitling start with the notion that the process is bound by constraints—the existing constraints on translation, coupled with specific constraints on subtitles. Hatim and Mason (1997, 430) list four: the shift from speech to writing, which makes it hard to represent certain features of speech like non-standard dialect; the constraints of space (limited number of characters per line and of lines on the screen) and time (limited duration of subtitles, reflecting the pace of dialogue); the resulting reduction of the source text to a more concise target version; and the requirement for coherence between the moving image and the subtitled text. Similarly, Henrik Gottlieb (1992, 164-165) points out that subtitling is bound by both formal (quantitative) constraints, which result from time and space limitations, and textual (qualitative) constraints, imposed by the relation between text and visuals.

Note that not all the above constraints lead to a need for text reduction or compression—yet commentators tend to conflate constraints with reduction. Jorge Díaz Cintas writes, “la característica principal de los subtítulos reside en la reducción que el contenido oral de la versión original sufre en su metamorfosis en material escrito de la versión subtitulada.”<sup>12</sup> In his polemical fashion, Abé Mark Nornes speaks of a “violent reduction” and calls subtitlers “corrupt,” claiming “they conspire to hide their repeated acts of violence through codified rules and a tradition of suppression” (1999, 18). Teresa Tomaszewicz (2000, 381-382) states that subtitlers are constantly making “*décisions de*

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<sup>12</sup> “The main characteristic of subtitles lies in the reduction that the oral content of the original version undergoes in its transformation into the written material of the subtitled version” [our translation]. Jorge Díaz Cintas, quoted in Aline Remael, “A Place for Film Dialogue Analysis in Subtitling Courses.”

suppression,” because reading speed is slower than the perception of sound by the ear. Gottlieb (2004, 87) notes that subtitling generally condenses dialogue, partly because it “crosses over” from speech to writing in the translation process, and partly because of technical and perceptual constraints. And Hatim and Mason suggest that the subtitler “seeks to provide a target language guide to what is going on in the source text” (1997, 433) and state that “given that some elements of meaning must be sacrificed, our interest lies in the kinds of meaning which tend to be omitted and in the effects such omission may have” (1997, 444).

Does subtitling necessarily involve reduction? In fiction film, are there not cases—certain action films or stylized films where there is not a lot of dialogue—where little or no omission is required? Are there differences in subtitling style, with some subtitlers choosing to condense dialogue less than others? Do certain languages require less compression, because target texts in that language already tend to be shorter than the source texts? What about documentary—how do the differences between fiction film dialogue and the impromptu speech of documentary affect the need for condensation or omission in subtitles?

Some answers to these questions can be found in the studies conducted by Zoé de Linde and Neil Kay in *The Semiotics of Subtitling*, which consider subtitles according to various types of television programs (1999, 39-51). Nonetheless, more research is required before we can make blanket statements about reduction in subtitling. In particular, we should be wary of putting a figure on the amount of reduction required. Mario Paolinelli, vice-president of AIDAC, the Association of Italian Translators/Dubbers for Cinema and TV, claims that “subtitling means reducing the

original text by 40–70%,” but gives no source for that figure, saying only “These are the facts” (Paolinelli 2004, 176). French subtitler Paul Memmi, speaking from lengthy experience and referring to the subtitling of fiction films from English to French, asserts that subtitlers must reduce dialogue by an average of 30%, with some passages requiring a 50% reduction and others virtually none (Assises de la traduction littéraire 1999, 120). Sylfest Lomheim cites a similar figure after comparing the word count of the original dialogue for three programs in English and French to the word count of the Norwegian subtitles: he concludes that subtitling condenses the dialogue by 20-40% (Lomheim 1999, 191). His study seems misdesigned, however, as it is based on only three programs and does not compare the word count difference in subtitles to the word count difference in text translations between the same source and target languages. For the study to be useful, we would need to know the extent to which any reduction involved in subtitling is over and above that which occurs in other modes of translation between those two languages. Nonetheless, Henrik Gottlieb quotes Lomheim’s study as a generality: “unlike dubbing, subtitling tends to condense the original dialogue by 20–40%” (Gottlieb 2004, 87).

Not only does the need for reduction in subtitling appear to vary according to factors like language and mode of cinema, it has varied over time. Subtitles, first used in theatres in 1929 and on television in 1938, grew out of the intertitles of silent movies (Ivarsson 1998, 11, 20). The format of early subtitles was similar to that of intertitles: according to Paul Memmi, they often had three lines, covered half the film screen, and stayed on screen for 10 or 15 seconds (Assises de la traduction littéraire 1999, 119). They were intended to give only a general understanding of the film and condensed the

dialogue quite extensively. Abé Mark Nornes gives the example of the Japanese subtitled version of King Vidor's *The Champ* (1931), in which only 328 of the film's 869 lines were subtitled (Nornes 1999, 24). Today, subtitlers are expected to translate as much of the dialogue as possible—as Paul Memmi puts it, “non plus d'intervenir comme un simple relais de compréhension, mais de traduire l'intégralité des dialogues.”<sup>13</sup>

I believe we should consider reduction to be a *convention* of subtitling, rather than an inherent characteristic of the process. We have seen that there is less text compression and omission today than in the past, due to a changing conception of the purpose of subtitles. It may well be that in the future, the norm will change further and the subtitling process will involve even less reduction than it does today. Henrik Gottlieb mentions several Belgian studies of reading speed that suggest viewers can read subtitles more quickly than previously thought, and concludes that “this must result in a total revision of the hitherto prevalent view of subtitling as a necessarily reductive mode of verbal transmission” (Gottlieb 1992, 165). Studies of the reading behaviour of viewers done by de Linde and Kay show that “[r]eading times tended to follow the pace of discourse; quicker subtitle rates induced quicker reading, and vice versa. Subtitles displayed for unusually long periods produced the longest reading times, with very slow subtitles encouraging re-reading” (de Linde and Kay, 1999, 72). If viewers are able to adjust reading speed to subtitle length, longer subtitles might be processed as easily as shorter ones. More research needs to be done to confirm this hypothesis and find out whether reading comprehension is affected by subtitle rate and length.

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<sup>13</sup> “To no longer act as merely a go-between for comprehension purposes, but to translate the dialogue in full” [our translation]. (Assises de la traduction littéraire 1999, 119).



## **Constrained translation**

While I question the assumption that subtitles inevitably condense dialogue or omit information in the source text, I do find useful the idea of constrained translation as set out in an influential article by Christopher Titford, “Sub-Titling—Constrained Translation” (1982). He considers space and time limitations imposed by the medium in relation to three dimensions: “the first has to do with the fact that STs are read (not listened to), the second to do with the coherence and cohesion of the texts produced in sub-titling, and the third to do with the interplay of visual and linguistic factors” (1982, 112).

The first dimension means that the viewer must assimilate two kinds of visual information, on-screen action and written text, causing tension between dynamic and static information. Titford offers the example of a classic Western scene in which a tied-up hero is loosening his knots and reaching for his gun, covering up his actions with dialogue while his movements are unseen by the bad guys who have their guns on him. The subtitler may be justified in condensing the dialogue in the subtitles to free up the viewer’s eye to follow the crucial information presented in the image. Conversely, static information (dialogue) may in certain situations be more essential to the storyline than dynamic information (action in the visuals). In such cases, the subtitler may choose to fill the subtitle lines to the maximum. Here, Titford gives the example of a Western scene in which the heroes are holed up in a saloon or hiding behind some rocks discussing their plan of attack.

The second dimension of constrained translation is based on distinctions between the terms *coherence* and *cohesion*, and between *discourse* and *text*. The glossary of Mona

Baker's *In Other Words* defines *coherence* as "the network of semantic relations which organize and create a text by establishing continuity of sense," and *cohesion* as "the network of lexical, grammatical, and other relations which provide formal links between various parts of a text" (Baker 1992, 284-285). Film dialogue is an example of discourse, whereas subtitles are text. Titford takes up an example given by Widdowson in "Directions in the Teaching of Discourse" (1979, 56).

Q. Can you go to Edinburgh tomorrow?

A. Yes I can.

Q. Can you go to Edinburgh tomorrow?

A. B.E.A. pilots are on strike.

The first exchange is "a cohesive text," whereas the second exchange is "coherent as discourse without being cohesive as text" (Widdowson 1979, 56; Titford 1982, 114). According to Titford, on-screen dialogue, being discourse, is coherent but not always cohesive; in cases where it is less than fully cohesive, the visuals supply cohesion by supporting the dialogue. Subtitles, on the other hand, are processed by the viewer as text, so they should attempt to be both coherent and cohesive; however, due to space/time constraints, they may be less cohesive or only minimally cohesive. Because the visual image continues to support the original dialogue, the subtitler must rely on the viewer's ability to supply cohesion in order to follow the dialogue.

Titford's third dimension of constrained translation relates to the problems of equivalence that arise when a linguistic expression is acted out in the visuals. He gives the example of a character who says "Cross my heart and spit," then proceeds to spit. As Germans do not spit on making promises, the German subtitle had to explain this action

so it was not misread (Titford 1982, 115). Lukasz Bogucki (2004) gives a similar example with the following exchange:

Do you mind if I sit down?

No, not at all.

Usually this would be rendered in Polish as

*Przepraszam, czy mogę usiąść?*

*Tak, bardzo proszę.*

(literally: “Excuse me, may I sit down?” “Please do”).

However, if we see the second character shaking his head as he answers “No, not at all,” the subtitle would have to reproduce the negation so as not to confuse viewers. This is similar to the common problem of translating culture-specific terms, but with the added constraint of the image, which continues to reflect the source-language expression. The subtitler has a limited range of translation procedures to deal with such problems, as it is usually not possible to substitute a “cultural equivalent” (see Newmark 1988, 103).

This discussion of subtitling as constrained translation has allowed us to recognize the process as involving not simply omission or reduction, but an interplay between written and visual information. The concept of constrained translation was taken up by Roberto Mayoral et al (1988) and applied to all forms of translation involving more than one communication channel, such as theatre, advertisements, music lyrics and comic-strip dialogues. Gottlieb (1998, 245) distinguishes between *monosemiotic* texts with only one channel of communication, in which “the translator therefore controls the entire medium of expression,” and *polysemiotic* texts in which the translator is constrained by other communicative channels. He notes that film and television have

four simultaneous channels: verbal auditory (dialogue, background voices), non-verbal auditory (music, natural sound), verbal visual (subtitles, written signs), and non-verbal visual (picture). Subtitles can serve the intended message by avoiding *intersemiotic redundancy*—information in more than one communicative channel—and *intrasemiotic redundancy* in the dialogue or speech.

### **The verbal-visual channel**

Like a lot of theoretical work on subtitling, the concept of constrained translation was developed on the basis of feature-length fiction films. The examples in Titford's article are all drawn from King Vidor's *The Texas Rangers* (1936), a classic Hollywood Western. From that perspective, subtitles are viewed as an extraneous or extradiegetic element, superimposed on the image after production is completed. I would like to suggest that text—the verbal-visual communicative channel—has always been present in movies and more particularly, in documentaries. If we are to base an approach to documentary subtitling on the specific characteristics of this mode of cinema, we must recognize that text is very often present not only in the foreign-language *version* of documentaries, but also in the *original*.

The intertitles of early silent movies—both fiction and documentary—are an obvious example of the presence of text in the original. They usually take the form of white letters on a black background spliced in between the film's shots to explain the action and provide indications such as time and setting. For example, Robert and Frances Flaherty's ethnographic documentary *Moana* (1926), which describes daily life among the Pacific islanders of Samoa, opens with the words, "Among the islands of Polynesia

there is one where the people still retain the spirit and nobility of their great race.”

Intertitles are also used to represent dialogue. In *Moana*, we find instances of translated dialogue, such as “*Pua’a tele!* / A big fellow!” and “*Lelei lenei!* / Good hunting!” The film credits Fialelei, “granddaughter of the famous chief Seumanutafa—hero of the Apia hurricane of 1889 and an intimate friend and counselor of Robert Louis Stevenson,” with being the Flahertys’ interpreter during their two-year stay on the island.

Another example of the presence of text in the original—again, in both fiction and documentary—is film credits. Opening credits are often woven into the first scene and superimposed on the visuals, while closing credits are usually presented against a black background after the main body of the film. In addition, signs are sometimes visible on screen and characters occasionally read letters. However, there are uses of text that are specific to documentary and not usually found in fiction: they include titles identifying the participants, computer graphics such as charts and maps, and still or rolling captions that present disclaimers (“This story is based on fact...”) or updated information (“In the two years since this film was shot...”). For example, the English version of *Histoire d’être humain* starts with the following message: “This film was shot in a public secondary school whose mandate is to accept all students in the neighbourhood without selection or exception.”

Not only text but subtitles themselves are often found in the original versions of documentaries. Participants are usually interviewed in their mother tongue; the edited interview is then translated into the language of the original film and presented through subtitles or voice-over. In many Canadian films, some of the participants speak in French and are subtitled in the English version, while others speak in English and are subtitled in

the French version. *L'appétit d'Ève (The Nature of Eve)*, directed by Fabienne Lips-Dumas and produced by the National Film Board in 2003, contains interviews with a number of leading biologists and paleontologists, including Richard Dawkins and Stephen Jay Gould who speak in English, and François Jacob and Yves Coppens who speak in French. Thus each language version has subtitles; there is no “clean” original.

Subtitles are even more integral to ethnographic films, as virtually all of the participants speak in languages other than that of the original version. The subtitle list is usually prepared during the production process by the filmmaker, who either knows the language or works with an interpreter. Prior to the 1970s, almost all ethnographic films used narration, but subsequently “[s]ubtitling became one of the creative ingredients of the filmmaking process,” notes David MacDougall (1998, 167). He goes on to describe a dilemma he was faced with in subtitling a rapid exchange of formal greetings in his 1972 film *To Live with Herds*. Because the subtitles could not keep pace, he considered spacing out the greetings on the soundtrack so as to have enough time to subtitle them. He settled on another solution, which was to allow the subtitles to continue long after the greetings had finished (1998, 173). Thus matters of translation, far from being an afterthought, were taken into consideration during the film’s editing.

We have seen that text is a common element of film and constitutes one of the two visual channels. In documentary, several forms of text, including subtitles, may be present in the original version. While subtitling is constrained by the image-text interaction, this does not necessarily create a need for extensive reduction or omission. I contend that the common perception of subtitling as requiring extensive reduction draws on the notion that fiction films, particularly in the mainstream Hollywood tradition, are

composed purely of image and sound. Subtitles, as text, are viewed as an intrusion on the picture and therefore should be reduced to a minimum—even when more space and time are available. In documentary, given that verbal-visual signs are more frequent, we need not view subtitles as an extraneous appendage to be used sparingly, but as an important communicative element. Let us turn to a second case study to see how the subtitler deals with issues of constraint and image-text interaction.

### **Case study: Édith and Michel**

*Édith et Michel* (*Édith and Michel*) (2004) was directed by Jocelyne Clarke and produced by Les Productions Érézi in co-production with the National Film Board of Canada. The translation and subtitles are credited to C.N.S.T. (Centre national du sous-titrage, a Montréal company specializing in closed captioning and subtitling). The film focuses on Michel Moreau, a well-known Quebec documentary filmmaker, and his wife Édith Fournier, a psychologist and writer. After Michel is diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, Édith becomes his primary caregiver. Their relationship is transformed as Michel's mental and physical health declines, yet the couple remains united by a strong bond. The film sheds light on the difficulties experienced by people with Alzheimer's and those who care for them.

There is no third-person narration in *Édith and Michel*; the story is told in large part by Édith, through interviews and excerpts from her diary, which we hear her read off camera. We also hear excerpts from Michel's diary, read by Jean-Pierre Lefebvre. IN addition, there is some interaction and dialogue with Michel's caregivers. Édith lets us know at the start of the film that she has made a conscious decision to let viewers in on the intimate details of her marriage, in an act of love and homage. She is extremely articulate as she reflects on the changes the disease has wrought on their relationship and the difficulties of living day to day with Alzheimer's. She is also a good storyteller, describing incidents in a few well-chosen words; her facial expressions and gestures add to the impact of her stories.

In this film, the main building blocks are footage of people doing things, mainly Édith caring for Michel; excerpts from Michel's previous films as well as family films



and photos; and interviews with Édith. I would like to focus on interviews as a key element of documentary and a particular kind of speaking situation, not usually found in fiction. The interviews in *Édith and Michel* are formal, with the interviewer unseen and unheard. Most of the excerpts come from a single session at the couple's country house in Baie-St-Paul, in which Édith is seated at a table before a window with a snowy landscape visible in the background; these make up almost a quarter of the film.

Interviewing, as mentioned, is one of the basic elements of documentary. Even when a film unfolds through direct recording rather than "talking heads," research interviews were probably conducted in the pre-production stage and contributed to the director's understanding of the subject. Interviewing involves more than getting the facts; it is about unearthing truths that will evoke a response in viewers and take the film beyond the realm of reporting. "For to interview," writes Michael Rabiger, "is to face another human being; it is to probe, to listen, to respond through further questioning, and to assist in the expression of a life" (1992, 139). An interview represents a moment of contact between the director (along with his or her crew) and the participant. Each has a stake in the outcome: the director seeks to draw out the participant's thoughts and emotions in such a way as to get "good material," in filmic terms, while respecting the trust the person has placed in him or her. The participant, having agreed to be in the film, wishes to tell a story or share some personal insights that no one else could express quite as well. As Rabiger puts it, "I have come to believe that most people privately consider they are living in rather undeserved obscurity and that nobody properly recognizes their achievements or their true worth" (1992, 45). Thus they consider the offer to participate in a documentary as an opportunity to be seized.

Interviews may be formal, with the participant speaking to an off-camera interviewer, or informal, with the participant speaking while doing other things—at home, in a public space, or at the workplace. They may be one-on-one or involve several people: a married couple, two people with differing viewpoints, a group of people. Whatever the interview situation, the participant’s answers are unrehearsed. While the interviewer has probably prepared a list of questions, the answers may lead to other lines of questioning and spontaneous comments. Although interviews are controlled situations and the participant often thinks carefully about how to phrase certain answers, they remain examples of impromptu speech. As such, they contain a certain amount of redundancy, false starts, repetition and hesitations. Directors usually tighten up interview segments to speed up the film’s pacing, by using cutaway shots to make cuts in the audio track.

In *Édith and Michel*, however, director Jocelyne Clarke chooses to let Édith speak for long stretches with no cutaways. This is partly an acknowledgement of her articulateness and partly a way of giving her a degree of control over the film’s storyline, allowing her to *write* the film in a sense. Several interview segments are more than a minute long and one lasts almost three minutes without a single cut—a rarity in documentary! The director allows Édith to tell her stories from start to finish, recognizing that her ability to construct a narrative is an indication of her personality. As viewers, we have plenty of time to study her face and listen to her way of speaking.

I would like to return to the three dimensions of constrained translation as set out by Christopher Titford and summarized earlier in this chapter. In the first dimension, Titford distinguishes between static information conveyed through speech and dynamic

information conveyed through on-screen action. He suggests that the subtitler take into consideration the amount of action going on in the scene and adjust the length of the subtitles accordingly. Transposing this idea to documentary, I submit that interviews are perfect examples of scenes in which “the storyline is not being built up dynamically but statically” (Titford 1982, 114). As a result, there is little tension between the subtitles and the rest of the image, which is basically unmoving; the viewer has time to read the subtitles without any risk of missing the action. This means the subtitler is not faced with the same space/time constraints as in scenes characterized by dynamic information. This idea is supported by the studies of viewing behaviour done by de Linde and Kay (1999, 71-72), which observed the impact of shot changes and visibility of the speaker on reading speed. They concluded that it was easier for viewers to process subtitles in images containing an on-screen static speaker than off-screen speakers.

In *Édith and Michel*, given that the director allows Édith to tell much of the story in her own words without editing the interview segments, we need not view the subtitles as simply “a target-language guide to what is going on in the source text” (Hatim and Mason 1997, 433). A participant-centred approach to subtitling would seize the opportunity afforded by the static background to render all the subtleties of Édith’s words. In the English version, however, the subtitler has condensed speech fairly extensively, more than I believe was necessary within the space/time constraints.

Let us look at the longest interview segment, which is nearly three minutes long. This is a good example of an “embedded narrative.” Édith tells of finding a magazine in a hospital waiting room with an article that lists the symptoms of Alzheimer’s disease, realizing that her husband exhibited those very symptoms, leaving out the magazine for

him to read, wondering if she had done the right thing, and seeing his reaction on realizing that indeed he had the disease. This is how she starts the story (15:30):

Édith: Alors un jour, j'étais avec ma fille dans une salle d'attente dans un hôpital, je l'accompagnais, et je tombe...	One day, I was in a hospital waiting room with my daughter.
il y avait dans toute la salle d'attente il y avait rien, rien, rien, il y avait pas un magazine, il y avait absolument rien.	There wasn't a scrap of reading material—
Puis on avait long à attendre.	and we had a long wait ahead of us—
Sauf traînait—déchiqueté, tellement sale que j'avais peur de le prendre dans mes mains—	except a tattered, filthy old copy
un vieux numéro de la revue <i>Le bel âge</i> .	of a seniors' magazine.

No essential information has been eliminated in the subtitled version, which is 38 words long compared to 73 in the original passage. If the goal is to reduce without losing information, it has been achieved. However, there are spaces between the subtitles during which we hear Édith speak but there is nothing on screen. In particular, the subtitle “except a tattered, filthy old copy” goes off the screen when Édith has reached the word “déchiqueté” and there is a three-second space before the onset of the next one. During the space, we see Édith wrinkle her nose and hold out her fingers as if gingerly grasping the magazine. This could have been subtitled as “except a tattered old copy, / so filthy I was afraid to touch it,” so that viewers could understand her gesture.

Towards the end of the film, Édith speaks of her regret at not being able to share her own fears and problems with Michel. She puts it like this (49:14):

Édith: De pas pouvoir pleurer avec lui,	Not being able to cry on his shoulder,
de pas pouvoir l’entendre me dire, « Allons, allons, tu sais bien que ça va s’arranger. »	have him reassure me.
De pas pouvoir penser que lui va trouver aussi sa part de solution.	To count on his input.
Mais qu’au contraire je dois trouver toutes les solutions moi-même.	On the contrary, I must do it alone.
Et que je dois composer aussi avec lui, en plus.	And be there for him as well.

Here again, there is a space in the subtitles after “have him reassure me” while Édith continues speaking, a space made longer by the fact that she sighs and pauses at the end of the sentence. The subtitle did not have to be made shorter because of space/time constraints. More importantly, Michel’s words as quoted by Édith have been eliminated from the subtitle—“reassuring” someone could be a physical gesture, but she is more specific, saying he used to comfort her through words. This could have been subtitled as, “to hear him say, ‘Come now, / you know it’ll work out.’”

In addition to condensing Édith’s words more than was strictly necessary, there is a second way in which I believe the subtitles of this film are affected by reduction. Michel Moreau is the other main character in the film, as indicated by the title. Although very ill, he seems aware of the camera: he *participates* in the film. As the director of some 80 documentaries himself, he is intimately familiar with the filmmaking process. He says little, mostly responding to Édith’s simple questions and loving banter. When he repeats what Édith says, the subtitles do not usually show his words. Subtitlers are

generally advised to eliminate repetition, so this would appear reasonable. However, I feel that repetition is Michel's way of communicating with his wife and expressing himself at this stage of his life, and his words should have been subtitled. In the following scene, Michel is in a wheelchair and Édith is helping him on with his coat, preparing to take him for a walk (11:28):

Édith: Tiens. Michel: Bon.	
E.: L'autre bras. M.: L'autre bras.	Other arm.
E.: Bon, tu fais comme de Gaulle, là. M.: Comme de Gaulle, oui.	Do like de Gaulle now.
E.: Hein? M.: Oui, de Gaulle disait... (inaudible)	De Gaulle used to say...

A little later in the scene (13:54), Michel returns to the subject of de Gaulle:

Édith: Bon. Michel: Eh bien. Ah non, de Gaulle je l'aimais pas beaucoup.	
E.: Hein? M.: J'aimais pas beaucoup de Gaulle. E.: De Gaulle. M.: Non. E.: Non. M.: Pas beaucoup.	I didn't like de Gaulle.
E.: Il n'était pas ton style. M.: (laughs) Il n'était pas mon style, non! Eh, non!	He wasn't your cup of tea.

Here, in addition to the fact that very little of the exchange has been subtitled, there is the questionable subtitle “He wasn’t your cup of tea.” I believe Michel is insisting that he does not like de Gaulle because he is thinking back to the Algerian war. We learn earlier in the film that his disgust at that war led him to emigrate from France to Quebec. The expression “your cup of tea” seems too light-hearted—although granted, Édith doesn’t appear to be taking Michel very seriously either.

Later in the film, we see Édith giving Michel a sponge bath (42:48). He is sitting naked on a special chair in the shower, with his back to the camera. Édith chats as she soaps his back—“Bon, ça fait du bien de se faire frotter le dos?” (“Does that feel good?”)—then his front—“Aie, je te dis que... je te frotte ça, hein?” (“I’m really scrubbing you clean!”) At this comment, Michel looks over his shoulder and says to the camera, with a mischievous grin, “Oui, tu me frottes ça!” This line is not subtitled. I believe Michel is not merely repeating Édith’s words, but making a sly joke. To ignore his words is to diminish his contribution to the film and fail to recognize his awareness of the filmmaking process. The exchange might have been subtitled as, “I’m really scrubbing you!” / “Scrubbing me, eh?”

In this chapter, I have tried to show that while there are constraints in subtitling and, more generally, in audiovisual translation, these do not necessarily result in a need for reduction. The constraints are not brought about by the pacing of films and television programs, which varies widely, but result from the multiplicity of communications channels and the diasemiotic nature of subtitling (the shift of speech from auditory channel to visual channel and to written form). In terms of constraints and image-text interaction, we can identify two specific characteristics of documentary that have an

impact on subtitling: the frequent presence of text in the visual channel, indeed of subtitles in the original film; and the use of the interview as a common element in the structure of documentaries. I have shown that a participant-centred approach might result in more subtitles, but that this would not necessarily make it more difficult for viewers to follow the flow of the film. In particular, the static background of interviews gives subtitlers an opportunity to translate fully without reduction. While this chapter has focused on pacing and rhythm in subtitling and the previous chapter considered word choice, the next chapter, containing our final case study, will revolve around questions of register and standardization.



## CHAPTER 5: IMPROMPTU SPEECH IN DOCUMENTARY

No matter how much fiction film dialogue models itself on natural speech, it remains an imitation. It may appear spontaneous, but it is actually the result of a lengthy process: it has been written by a scriptwriter and revised and corrected at several stages; it has been rehearsed by an actor then performed to the director's satisfaction; it may have been performed again in dialogue post-synchronization; and in its final form, it has been edited and mixed with other elements of the soundtrack. Dialogue performs a number of functions, which are examined by Sarah Kozloff in her study of film dialogue (2000, 33-63). These include creating the fictional world of the narrative; moving the plot forward through "verbal events," such as the declaration of love; and revealing the characters' personalities, via both the words spoken and the way they are spoken (accents, verbal tics, etc.). Dialogue has a double purpose: it occurs between on-screen protagonists, but is written for the benefit of viewers, who may know more or less than the individual characters at various points in a film. Sometimes dialogue serves to represent small talk or everyday conversational exchanges, but even such representations of the phatic dimension of speech are carefully scripted. "The actual hesitations, repetitions, digressions, grunts, interruptions, and mutterings of everyday speech have either been pruned away, or, if not, deliberately included," notes Kozloff (2000, 18).

It is more common for the "excesses" of everyday speech to be pruned away than deliberately included, for since the early days of sound in film, theorists have advocated minimal use of dialogue (Kozloff 2000, 6-9). In film studies, cinema is traditionally considered to be primarily a visual medium. (This is reflected in language: we "watch"

movies and are referred to as “viewers” or “spectators.”) Some theorists believe too much dialogue strips cinema of its “specificity”—that which makes it distinct as a medium—and makes it too similar to theatre. One of the most commonly found rules in scriptwriting manuals is that “Dialogue should be kept to a minimum” (Kozloff 2000, 28). This tendency may also be due to the fact that dialogues are written late in the scriptwriting process, after the film theme and storyline have been established (Remael 2003, 227). In documentary, one can hardly ask participants to speak sparingly, but the antipathy towards dialogue in fiction film described by Kozloff may find its equivalent in the desire to do away with narration that marked documentary filmmaking starting in the 1960s with the direct-cinema movement.

Let’s look at an example from *538 x la vie (Life Times 538)* (2005), an NFB documentary that observes students at a secondary school in a disadvantaged neighbourhood of Montréal over the course of a year. Claude, a 16-year-old Secondary 5 student, is complaining about homework (14:09):

Claude: Ben, c’est plus euh... j’écoute en classe. Je comprends, je comprends pas.	In class, I listen. I don’t always understand.
Si je comprends pas, je demande.	If I don’t understand, I ask questions.
Faque je vais le comprendre, pis je vais pas à avoir à l’étudier chez nous.	That way I don’t have to study at home.
Parce que je trouve que, tsé déjà là... on passe 8 heures à l’école...	We already spend 8 hours at school.
C’est ça, 8 heures, pis....	That’s right, 8 hours.
Oui, 8 heures avec l’heure du dîner.	8 hours including lunchtime.
Faque tsé, déjà là 8 heures... c’est comme une journée de travail tsé. Tu vas pas aller	Like a workday—and you don’t do more work after work.

travailler après le travail, là me semble.	
Tu vas aller chez vous, tu vas dormir, tu vas manger, tu vas vegger.	You go home, rest, eat and veg out.
Mais c'est la même chose là tsé, c'est ...	Same thing with school.
T'es pas sensé arriver chez vous pis ouvrir tes livres là.	You're not supposed to start studying when you get home!
Tu viens de finir l'école là c'est fini là pour la journée là.	You just finished school for the day.

In terms of dialogue, this is quite redundant—it takes the speaker more than half a minute to make an argument that could be summed up in a few words (“I don’t do homework because we spend as long at school as at work, and you don’t do more work after work.”). After saying “On passe 8 heures à l’école... C’est ça, 8 heures, pis....” he pauses, as if wondering whether that’s the correct figure. He then stops speaking entirely for several seconds and smiles self-consciously. After a cut, he continues with “Oui, 8 heures avec l’heure du dîner.” It is highly unlikely that a scriptwriter would have added such a moment of hesitation, as it seems to serve no real purpose and breaks the flow of the narrative. In the documentary, nonetheless, it lends spontaneity and adds to our understanding of the speaker’s personality.

Film dialogue and spontaneous speech belong to two distinct “speech genres,” to use Mikhail Bakhtin’s term (1986, 60). By analogy with literary genres, he defines speech genres as relatively stable types of utterances that share thematic content, style and compositional structure. He emphasizes the heterogeneity of oral and written speech genres and gives a wide range of examples:

[S]hort rejoinders of daily dialogue (...), everyday narration, writing (in all its various forms), the brief standard military command, the elaborate and detailed order, the fairly variegated repertoire of business documents (...), and the diverse world of commentary (in the broad sense of the word: social, political). And we must also include here the diverse forms of scientific statements and all literary genres (from the proverb to the multivolume novel).” (Bakhtin 1986, 60-61)

He insists on the fundamental difference between primary (simple) speech genres that take shape in “unmediated speech communion,” and secondary (complex) speech genres such as novels, dramas and scientific research—to which we could add fiction films. When the primary genres enter into the secondary ones, they are altered and “lose their immediate relation to actual reality and to the real utterances of others” (Bakhtin 1986, 62).

Clearly, if there are differences between scripted film dialogue and the spontaneous speech found in documentaries and certain categories of television programs, translators must take these differences into account. Furthermore, in their research, translation studies scholars must distinguish between the subtitling or dubbing of fiction films and that of documentary or other programs that contain spontaneous speech.

Yet this is not always the case. Frederic Chaume (2004) proposes to study “discourse markers indispensable to the logical composition of ordinary conversation or written discourse,” specifically “the particles *now, oh, you know, (you) see, look and I mean*, particles which clearly help in the production of coherent conversation and, especially, make clear the speaker’s intentions and show what the speaker intends to do with words” (2004, 844). Although he notes in passing that there are several text types

within the genre of audiovisual texts—“films, documentaries or cartoons” (2004, 844), and here again by “films” he means feature-length fiction films—Chaume chooses as his corpus three Spanish translations of Quentin Tarantino’s *Pulp Fiction* (1994): the published written translation, the dubbed version, and the subtitled version. He fails to acknowledge that these are all translations of scripted dialogue, not “ordinary conversation.” Surely discourse markers in fiction serve different purposes than they do in everyday speech. As Sarah Kozloff puts it, “linguists who use film dialogue as accurate case studies of everyday conversation are operating on mistaken assumptions” (Kozloff 2000, 19).

A similar confusion between scripted dialogue and spontaneous speech colours the notion of “orality” in Isabelle Vanderschelden’s analysis of the English subtitles of the French comedy *La Vie est un long fleuve tranquille* (2001, 361-379). Although she acknowledges the difficulty in defining *oralité*, she generally uses it to mean spoken language in general, as opposed to written language. However, she also uses it to refer to a specific characteristic of scripted film dialogues, namely their realism or resemblance to actual speech, as in the phrase “Ces formules sont faites pour être dites, pas lues, et elles illustrent l’oralité des dialogues” (2001, 366). She also refers to *oral characteristics*: “Il est clair que les traducteurs sous-titres optent par convention contre la reproduction de certaines caractéristiques orales dans les sous-titres, comme la langue incorrecte ou sub-standard, pour des raisons qui sont bien compréhensibles” (2001, 372). In her conclusion, Vanderschelden expands the definition of *oralité* to include non-verbal aspects of communication such as gestures, facial expressions and intonation (2001, 376-377). She suggests that the space/time constraints that a subtitler must respect are

compensated by the extralinguistic elements of a film, to which viewers of the subtitled version continue to have access.

### **Spoken and written language**

To avoid the ambiguity as to whether the term “orality” refers to speech itself or its representation in scripted dialogue, I prefer to speak of “spontaneous speech” or “impromptu speech” as characterizing documentary film.<sup>14</sup> Over the past few decades, a number of studies in discourse analysis have attempted to set out the properties of spoken and written language and the differences between them (Halliday 1989; Horowitz and Samuels 1987; Tannen 1982). Chafe (1982, 37) notes that observers of spontaneous spoken language have found it is produced in spurts or “idea units” that are about two seconds long and bounded by pauses, and that this fragmented character of spoken language contrasts with the “integrated” quality of written language. He concludes that “formal written language [differs] from informal spoken language by having a larger proportion of nominalizations, genitive subjects and objects, participles, attributive adjectives, conjoined phrases, series, sequences of prepositional phrases, complement clauses, and relative clauses. These are all devices which permit the integration of more material into idea units” (Chafe 1982, 44-45).

Several years later, Chafe and Danielewicz (1987, 84) note that this research had studied extremes of “spokenness” and “writtenness” whereas, in fact, there is

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<sup>14</sup> Both terms are used. Nils Erik Enkvist prefers “impromptu”: “For we know there is impromptu speech which does not arise spontaneously but may be elicited from a speaker, or even extorted from him against his will” (1982, 11). He points out that writing may also be impromptu, giving the examples of telex and deaf friends conversing in writing (1982, 12). Today, of course, we would think of text messaging and chatting as examples of impromptu writing.

considerable overlap between the two. They compare the style of language in four samples—conversations, academic lectures, letters and academic papers—and show that while some of the differences can be attributed to the fact of being spoken or written, “[m]ore often, there were additional factors of language use which interacted with the spoken–written distinction” (Chafe and Danielewicz 1987, 86). For example, because speakers must choose their words “on the fly” and cannot edit them once they have been uttered, “speakers tend to operate with a narrower range of lexical choices than writers” (1987, 88). The study found that academic lecturers, in informal settings, employed a similarly restricted vocabulary and used about the same number of hedges (“sort of” and “kind of,” suggesting that they were not entirely satisfied with their word choices) as speakers in conversation. On the other hand, in terms of colloquial and literary vocabulary and such variables as the use of contractions like *it’s* and *don’t*, academic lectures (spoken) were more similar to letters (written) than to conversations (spoken) (1987, 93).

Speeches that are scripted rather than impromptu may have been extensively edited and rewritten before being delivered, and exhibit characteristics similar to written texts. In this category, we can include the narration of documentary films, which is not usually impromptu and differs in that respect from the other forms of spoken language in documentary; that is one of the reasons I have not been considering narration in this study of documentary subtitling.

Conference interpreters are called upon to deal with several types of discourse, ranging from impromptu speech and conversation, to semi-prepared speech such as lectures based on notes, to formal written texts read aloud. Danica Seleskovitch observes

that because impromptu speech stems from the thinking activity in a speaker's mind, it is more easily rendered orally in the target language. "Impromptu speech is readily understood and translated, while prepared speeches make greater demands on him [the interpreter] and prove less amenable to successful rendering" (Seleskovitch 1982, 241). Andrzej Kopczyński makes a similar point, claiming that the interpretation of spoken discourse (unprepared oral monologues or dialogues and semi-prepared oral monologues such as lectures) is simpler than the interpretation of written texts read aloud, because the target language version, although it is translated orally by the interpreter, must maintain the typical structures and terminology of writing (Kopczyński 1982, 257-258).

With this discussion in mind, we can identify a key difference between film dialogue and impromptu speech. Whereas film dialogue is written (scripted—sparingly as we have seen, and with the aim of carrying out specific narrative functions), then spoken (performed), then once again written (subtitled), impromptu speech moves only from spoken to written. The subtitles of film dialogue are connected to their initial scripted form in a way that does not exist in the subtitling of impromptu speech. As a result, the distance that must be covered in the transformation of impromptu speech into subtitles is greater.

While all forms of subtitling are diasemiotic in that they transform speech into writing (Gottlieb 2004, 86), documentary subtitling poses the particular challenge of transforming speech *that was not initially conceived as writing* into written form. I believe that the most appropriate way to deal with this situation is to move the subtitles closer to speech, by making an effort to integrate the characteristics of impromptu speech



into its written representation. This would amount to an approach to documentary subtitling that takes into account the specific characteristics of this mode of cinema.

### **Case study: Exiles in Lotusland**

The last film we shall look at is *Le méchant trip (Exiles in Lotusland)*, directed by Ilan Saragosti and produced by Claudette Jaiko of the National Film Board of Canada in 2005. The English subtitles were done by Nancy Harvey Productions. The film follows the harsh lives of Ti-Criss and his girlfriend Mélo, two Montréal teenagers who run away from the youth protection system and travel to Vancouver in search of adventure and escape. They end up drug addicted and on the streets, joining the French-speaking Quebecers who make up a quarter of Vancouver's itinerant population. With the help of social workers—including Karl Desmeules, who is researching the phenomenon for La Boussole, a community centre for francophones living in Vancouver—the couple find housing and check into detox. They quickly become bored in their new lives and return to Montréal, where they are separated when Ti-Criss is confined to a group home. Eventually, they go west again and live in a tent in the Okanagan Valley for the summer, settling into a marginal yet manageable lifestyle. But Ti-Criss's childhood demons catch up to him and he commits suicide, leaving Mélo bruised but stronger. The filmmaker records intimate moments in the teenagers' lives over a number of months. He takes a non-judgmental approach, allowing events to speak for themselves and treating the young people with respect.

Because the main participants in the film are marginal street youth, *Exiles in Lotusland* offers a good illustration of the challenges of subtitling non-standard language. There are no “sit-down” interviews, only moments when the teenagers speak amongst themselves, to the social workers or informally to the camera. The film contains

numerous examples of the characteristics of impromptu speech: hesitations (uh... umm...), hedges (“c’est comme...,” “t’sais genre...”), repetition (“Quand j’étais... quand j’étais à Joliette”), false starts (“Mais à moment donné—Quand tu restes...”), repairs (“J’aimerais ça, man, avoir comme... mais comme, *pas* avoir rien”), incomplete sentences (“Il me semble...” —repeated twice without the sentence being continued) as well as non-standard speech (slang, frequent swearing and colourful expressions such as “Y pense qu’elle est p’t’être partie sur une autre full gros dérape de shit-là”).

Many commentators have noted a tendency towards standardized speech in subtitles; this could be considered one of the “norms” of subtitling. Yves Gambier writes that because of “a certain sanctity attached to written discourse in our culture” (1994, 280), linguistic features of speech tend to be neutralized in subtitles. He makes an analogy with simultaneous interpretation, in which overly colloquial oral discourse is given a more “cultivated” or “deoralised” form in its interpreted version. Isabelle Vanderschelden speaks of a “tendance normalisante du sous-titrage comme forme de traduction” (2001, 371).

To an extent, the shift towards standardization is an inevitable consequence of the transformation of speech into writing. As David MacDougall puts it with regard to ethnographic film, “[t]he randomness and indeterminacy of everyday speech is transformed into a more formal text, projecting a greater air of intentionality and coherence” (1998, 174). Subtitles perform an organizing function: a chaotic conversation in which several people interrupt each other and speak at the same time becomes a series of distinct phrases, one lines of subtitles neatly following the next. Subtitles also direct the viewer’s attention to parts of the screen and provide emphasis: barely audible

background voices, if the subtitler chooses to translate them, are given the same weight (size, lettering) as comments spoken directly to the camera.<sup>15</sup>

Yet the bias in favour of standardization may diminish our knowledge of the participants' way of expressing themselves. Francine Kaufman (2004, 155-156) describes her frustration subtitling an Israeli documentary on the integration of immigrants. One of the characters, Suzanna, who is from Argentina, speaks a confused mix of several languages, mainly English. In response to a matrimonial advertisement, she writes a letter describing herself and reads it aloud on screen: "Mr. American man. I read your avis in the 'Jerusalem Post.' I have fifty years old. I am professor of History. I speak eight language. I like very much the good music, good theatrone [*sic*], film and picture. The Impressionism is my favorite picture. I read very much and I cooking very well." Under pressure from the broadcaster, ARTE/FRANCE, and although the subtitling company supported her desire to represent the woman's idiosyncratic language in the subtitles, Kaufman was obliged to completely standardize her speech: "Monsieur l'Américain. J'ai lu votre annonce dans le *Jerusalem Post*. J'ai cinquante ans. Je suis professeur d'histoire. Je parle huit langues. J'apprécie beaucoup la bonne musique, le bon théâtre, le cinéma, la peinture. Mes peintres préférés sont les impressionistes. Je lis énormément. Je suis très bonne cuisinière."

As mentioned in Chapter 1, films subtitled for the National Film Board of Canada are not subject to the kind of pressure from broadcasters described by Francine Kaufman.

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<sup>15</sup> In an interview conducted by Atom Egoyan, Claire Denis discusses a scene in *Vendredi soir* (*Friday Night*) in which a female character is watching a man inside a café. The dialogue inside the café is barely audible in French, but the English subtitles make the words perfectly clear. Claire Denis says, "I was actually against that. I asked the guy who did the subtitles if we could perhaps print them with one letter missing or one word missing—as artists, you know... And he said that that doesn't exist in subtitles. Either we have subtitles or we don't have subtitles." "Outside Myself," Claire Denis interviewed by Atom Egoyan, in Egoyan and Balfour 2004, 75.

English subtitled versions are produced systematically for French-language documentaries and are distributed, not primarily for broadcast, but on the festival circuit, in theatrical screenings, and via DVD sales and rentals. The subtitler who works for the NFB has considerable freedom to experiment with non-standard language, colloquialisms and informal spellings. In *Exiles in Lotusland*, the English subtitles successfully maintain the oral flavour of the participants' speech. The following short exchange, typical of the film's subtitling style, contains interjections, contractions, colloquialisms and informal spelling (11:05):

Dominique: Salut, ça va?	-Hey, my friend!
Friend: Hé, ça va bien, et toi?	-How're you?
D.: En pleine forme.	
F.: Ça va bien dans la rue, avec ton métier?	-How's your street work going?
D.: Je le sais pas, on va aller voir ça!	-I dunno, we're going to check.
F.: Ok mon ami!	OK, buddy, see you later.
D.: Salut, à la prochaine!	

Here are some other examples of colloquialisms and slang words in the film's subtitles:

Someone ripped off my smokes!

They think she's back on another bender / doing shit.

That pisses me off.

My sister's off the radar.

Jeez, you've been around.

Gimme a light.

C'mere, babe!

Non-standard spellings such as “I dunno” and “C’mere” are sometimes criticized as being hard to read. One of the five characteristics of subtitling, as defined by Henrik Gottlieb (1992, 162), is that they are *immediate*: “all discourse is presented in a flowing manner, beyond the control of the listener-viewer-reader.” Thus the words must be understandable within the time they are on screen. Speaking from a relevance-theoretic point of view and with regard to simultaneous interpretation, Ernst-August Gutt (2000, 123) makes a comment that is applicable to this discussion: “Since the stream of speech flows on, the audience cannot be expected to sit and ponder difficult renderings—otherwise it will lose the subsequent utterances; hence it needs to be able to recover the intended meaning instantly.”

This need for minimal processing effort is evoked by Peter Fawcett in his criticism of the phrase “Whadda ya doin’?” in the English subtitles of Jean Beaudin’s *Being at Home with Claude* (1992). “The translator’s attempt to avoid information loss by reproducing rather than repressing the sociolect is ruined by an increase in the decoding effort involved in mentally ‘oralising’ a sound on the basis of a written script” (Fawcett 1996, 78). Similarly, subtitler Paul Memmi says, “Les liaisons, les verlans, les mots mâchés par un accent régional ralentissent la lecture. On croit bien faire en imitant typographiquement un accent, un défaut de prononciation, mais au final on devient illisible” (Assises de la traduction littéraire 1999, 121). Yet are such spellings unreadable? I have not seen any research to support the claim that decoding non-standard spellings like “dunno,” “gonna,” and “whadda” requires more effort or takes more time than reading “don’t know,” “going to,” or “what are”—especially in this era of e-mail and text messaging. In fact, I suggest that decoding such spellings may even take less

time, as the words match the viewer's expectations of how the person on screen would speak.

Another aspect of subtitling impromptu speech is the treatment of interpersonal forms of address. Traditionally, cinema subtitling omits names that are spoken, greetings, and simple forms of address (Ivarsson and Carroll 1998, 93). They are considered redundant because the audience hears the names and is likely to understand basic greetings in the source language or figure them out from the context.<sup>16</sup> However, in documentary subtitling, and more precisely in a participant-centred approach to documentary subtitling, we must ask ourselves what is lost with this kind of omission. What purpose is served by interpersonal forms of address such as terms of endearment and affection? Although they may contribute little to semantic meaning, they do play a role in interpersonal meaning. The impromptu speech of documentary records not only *what* people say, but *the way* they say it. This information is made available to viewers of the original version and I believe it should remain available to viewers of the subtitled version.

In *Exiles in Lotusland*, Mélo and Ti-Criss use the English word “babe” when speaking to each other in French and the word “man” among friends. Some might argue that there is no need to repeat these words in the space/time constrained translation of subtitles as they are already in English and can be eliminated without loss of meaning. However, in many instances, the subtitler has chosen to maintain these words in the English version:

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<sup>16</sup> Ivarsson and Carroll (1998, 93) point out that among television viewers, a small but not insignificant percentage have some degree of hearing loss. They advise that in television programs these phrases be subtitled for their sake. For more on subtitling for the hard of hearing, see Zoé de Linde and Neil Kay, *The Semiotics of Subtitling*.

(08:01) Mélo: Ah, ça m'aidait beaucoup, man.	It's helped me a lot, man.
(09:00) M.: Attend, mon sac, babe!	Wait, babe, my bag.
(01:23) M.: Ah man, t'as p't-être un scoop. Amène ta caméra.	Hey man, this could be a scoop. Bring your camera!

(In the last example, Mélo is speaking directly to the filmmaker/cameraman. The participants do this a number of times during the film, acknowledging the filmmaking process.)

(40:57) M.: Y en as tu assez de beurre, tu penses, babe? Ti-Criss: Mais oui.	-Is there enough butter, babe? -Yeah.
M.: Moi là, j'suis habituée avec une poêle, man.	I'm used to a stove, man.

The teenagers' casual use of "babe" to address each other shows the easy familiarity of a couple that has spent a lot of time together, while pointing to the influence of English-language mass culture, particularly pop music lyrics, on their speech. "Man" is sometimes used as a mode of address, but often it serves no real purpose other than to add emphasis, as in the last example ("I'm used to a stove, man."); it is quite rare for this kind of word use to be found in subtitles.



The final aspect of subtitling impromptu speech that I wish to discuss is the use of profanity and expletives. Mélo, Ti-Criss, and their friends in *Exiles in Lotusland* swear often and casually. Occasionally, they swear in anger, as in this example:

(13:01)	
T.: Quelqu'un a busté mes smokes, là là.	Someone ripped off my smokes!
T.: Away, il faut ben qu'y a un hostie de trou de cul... (inaudible) hostie de criss!	Some fucking asshole ripped me off!

More often, they throw in swear words in the middle of sentences. In the following example, the subtitler has not only incorporated an expletive, but positioned it at the end of the sentence, as is usual in English, especially among young people:

(13:14)	
T.: OK, c'est correct, hostie, tu peux arrêter de filmer, s'il vous plait, là.	OK, you can quit filming any time, fuck.

Here, Mélo has just rented a room to get off the street:

(21:05)	
Filmmaker: Comment tu trouves ça, comparé à la rue?	How is it, compared to the street?
M.: Hum! Ça fait du bien en hostie en tout cas. Mets-en. J'en avais besoin en hostie d'un break, là.	A lot better. I needed a fucking break.

Here, Mélo and Ti-Criss are on their way to an abortion clinic, reading signs like “It could have been you” set up by anti-abortion groups:

(49:48)	
T.: Fucké, huh?	-Fucked up, eh?
M.: Mets-en c'est bizarre, huh.	-Strange as hell.

Swearing in written form tends to appear stronger than when spoken, so some subtitlers tone down the language to compensate. In *Exiles in Lotusland*, the subtitler has not hesitated to use profanity, even when it arguably could have been left out. This is an effective strategy, as it gives the young participants a consistent voice throughout the film.

Compare the decision to subtitle expletives and interjections in *Exiles in Lotusland* with an example from a Swiss documentary, *Pas les flics, pas les noirs, pas les blancs* (2002). Alain Devegney, a Geneva policeman, is a former member of a far-right party. He changes his outlook when he witnesses racism personally and becomes an intercultural mediator. Here, he is at a meeting to convince community leaders to participate in the program he has developed:

Alain: Si chacun fait la moitié du terrain, putain, on doit y arriver, quand même. Et là, vous devez m'aider.	If each one goes half way, it will work. But you must help.
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He uses the word “putain” on several occasions to add emphasis to his words. In each case, it is simply omitted from the subtitles. Yet his use of language gives a clue to his character: he has overcome his prejudices but maintained a tough manner of speaking. The subtitle could have represented this as “If each one goes half way, it’ll work, goddammit! But you must help.”

Hatim and Mason (1997, 97-110) distinguish between use-related variation in language, which relates to the registers used in different language situations, and user-related variation such as social dialect, geographical dialect and idiolect. Idiolect is an individual's distinctive way of using language through particular word choices, pronunciations, and overused syntactic structures. When idiolectal variation recurs systematically and is used for a specific purpose ("functionally motivated"), it "becomes a noteworthy object of the translator's attention" (Hatim and Mason 1997, 103). I believe that in documentary subtitling, features of idiolect help maintain the individuality of the participants and should be preserved.

In a similar vein, Alexandra Assis Rosa (2001, 216) notes that subtitles "mainly consider *referential function*, ignoring expressive and phatic functions" and "emphasise *content* and not interpersonal involvement" [emphasis in original]. The expressive function of language reflects the speaker's state of mind, emotions and feelings, as well as attitude towards the content of the message; the phatic function is the use of language to establish and maintain contact as well as to express general sociability. When these functions along with interpersonal involvement are de-emphasized in subtitles, the information content is foregrounded. In documentary, this means that viewers of subtitled versions may maintain a greater emotional distance from the subject matter than viewers of the original—thus falling short in fulfilling the intentions of both the filmmaker in making the film and the participants in agreeing to take part in it.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

“Professionals [subtitlers] need to provide viewers with the shortest possible subtitles and spare them unnecessary shades of meaning that hinder the process of image reading. To do this, they need to identify the precise role of each segment of dialogue in moving the image-story forward and try to achieve the same end with the fewest possible words” (Hajmohammadi 2005, n. pag.). So advises Ali Hajmohammadi in his article arguing for a “viewer-oriented, image-bound approach to subtitling.” He believes that the vital information of film is contained in the image, not in the dialogue, and that effective subtitling is characterized by brevity. “[Subtitles] intrude on the watching process, since reading and decoding of subtitles partly disrupt image reading” (2005, n. pag.). Granted, he seems to be referring only to the subtitling of fiction films, but his approach is diametrically opposed to the one I have been proposing in this project. I contend that far from subtitles being an intrusion on the image, the verbal-visual (text) and non-verbal visual (image) channels work together, along with the auditory channels, to provide a full understanding of the film.

A very different viewpoint is expressed in “For an Abusive Subtitling” by Abé Mark Nornes (1999)—the only other article, to my knowledge, that actually sets out and champions a particular approach to subtitling. In contrast to conventional subtitling practice, which he lambastes as “corrupt,” Nornes claims that “[t]here is a potential and emerging subtitling practice that accounts for the unavoidable limits in time and space of the subtitle, a practice that does not feign completeness, that does not hide its presence through restrictive rules” (1999, 28). He calls this approach “abusive,” following Philip

Lewis's idea that "the strength of translation lies in its abuses" (Lewis 2000, 270).

Analyzing the "weak" English translation of Derrida's "La mythologie blanche," Lewis calls for "fidelity to much more than semantic substance, fidelity also to the modalities of expression and to rhetorical strategies" (2000, 270) and advocates "translation that values experimentation, tampers with uses, seeks to match the polyvalencies or plurivocities or expressive stresses of the original by producing its own" (2000, 270). According to Nornes, abusive subtitling would involve experimenting with language and graphic effects to foreground the translation process. "[R]ather than smoothing the rough edges of foreignness, rather than converting everything into easily consumable meaning, the abusive subtitles always direct spectators back to the original text" (Nornes 1999, 32). Abusive subtitling "strives to translate from and within the place of the other by an inventive approach to language use and the steady refusal of rules" (1999, 29).

Nornes offers several examples of this approach. Donald Richie experimented with a kind of formal court English in the subtitles of Akira Kurosawa's *Ran* (1985), but later regretted his attempts: "Something like 'I want you to go,' I foolishly rendered as 'I would with you go.' Not incorrect but, in dialogue titles, completely inappropriate" (Richie, quoted in Nornes 1999, 30). In Rob Young's English subtitles for Yamamoto Masashi's experimental comedy *Tenamonya Connection* (1990), expletives are translated in comic-book style as "!%&\$#@!!" (Nornes 1999, 30). Perhaps the most daring examples of abusive subtitling come from the fansubbed versions of Japanese anime. Not only do fansubs contain subtitles of different colours, fonts and sizes, positioned all over the screen, they occasionally provide translator's notes and glosses to explain cultural references and untranslatable words (Díaz Cintas and Muñoz Sánchez 2006, 47). These

take the form of lengthy subtitles that fill the entire screen, and are sometimes referred to as “overlays.” The viewer must pause the DVD, read the subtitle, then continue watching the film. Since these versions are intended for home viewing only rather than theatrical distribution, the practice seems quite acceptable. It opens up new possibilities for translation at a time when technological advances are transforming distribution and when home viewing is becoming the dominant method of watching audiovisual material.

The participant-centred approach I have been outlining shares some common ground with Nornes’ abusive subtitling. I agree with his call for an inventive approach to language use and a foregrounding of the foreignness of the original. Subtitles that followed these ideas would not necessarily be less readable than conventional subtitles, as we have moved into a period of generalized media literacy in which audiences have “the ability to manage complex text/image relations” (Nornes 1999, 32). But whereas abusive subtitling refers to “film” in general and fiction film in most instances, my concern is to base an approach on those characteristics of documentary that *distinguish* it from fiction film. Such an approach could not necessarily be applied or extended to other forms of cinema. One could, however, set out an approach to the subtitling or dubbing of animated films or to the translation of televised news reports that would take into account their specific characteristics.

In conclusion, I would like to return to our discussion in Chapter 2 of the definition of documentary. In “Towards a Poetics of Documentary,” Michael Renov (1993, 25) lists what he considers the four fundamental tendencies of documentary.

1. to record, reveal, or preserve
2. to persuade or promote

3. to analyze or interrogate, and

4. to express.

I wish to focus on the first aim, “to record, reveal, or preserve.” It reminds us that documentary, like ethnography, attempts to record and preserve voices that might not otherwise be heard—voices of minorities, of alterity. In each of the films I have analyzed, the goal of preserving the memory of people and places is explicit. It is expressed by either the filmmaker or the participants.

In *Bacon, the Film*, rural citizens are fighting to prevent the industrialization of family farming and the pollution caused by large-scale hog farms. The narrator, filmmaker Hugo Latulippe, sets the scene in the opening minutes of the film (03:15):

I grew up in a vast, wild country. My parents were politically conscious, politically active, working towards a social democratic vision of society, where the state aims at keeping things on a human scale and is responsible for the common good and the good of the land. Hard to say exactly when, but there came a point where everything fell apart. In just a few years, big companies had harvested all the fish in the St. Lawrence, right in front of my grandmother’s house, and the green forest behind was turned into white pages of *The New York Times*.

In *Édith and Michel*, again in the opening minutes of the film, Édith tells us why she has decided to take part in the film.<sup>17</sup>

(01:55)	
Édith: Lorsque je parle de toi,	When I talk about you,
lorsque j’écris sur toi,	when I write about you,
lorsque j’ai l’audace de rendre public...	when I feel bold enough
un pan de notre histoire,	to make public

<sup>17</sup> The excerpts from Édith’s diary were translated by Sheila Fischman.

	some part of our story,
j'offre le plus intime de nous deux au regard des autres.	it's our most deeply private life I offer up to other people's eyes.
C'est dangereux,	It's dangerous,
douteux,	questionable,
hasardeux.	risky.
Mais je ne résiste pas au plaisir de te dire, de te raconter.	But I can't resist the pleasure of talking about you.
Je déroule notre histoire	I set down our story
et c'est une tendre distance qui s'empare de mon présent	and I feel myself removed, tenderly,
autant que de mon devenir.	from what I am now and what I shall become.
Est-ce cela me préparer au pire?	Does this mean I'm preparing myself for the worst?
Peut-être.	Perhaps.

The desire to preserve operates on a more personal level in this case, but remains a driving force behind the film.

As for *Exiles in Lotusland*, the film is dedicated to Dany “Ti-Criss” Nadeau, 1987-2005. One of the two main participants in the film, he committed suicide during the shooting, which was spread out over a period of about two years. The film stands as a record—perhaps the only record—of the short life of this troubled young man.

Subtitling can participate in this drive to preserve the memory of individual lives or collective ways of life. Some documentaries record a particular way of speaking, such as Pierre Perrault and Michel Brault's *Pour la suite du monde* (1962), an acknowledged masterpiece of Quebec cinema. The filmmakers were drawn to Île-aux-Coudres by the



language of the fishermen who had lived on the small island in the St. Lawrence for centuries. Decades later, as traditional fishing communities disappear in Quebec and around the world, the film stands as a tribute not only to the lives of the people in the film, but also to their speech. The English version, with subtitles by Kathleen Fleming, was re-released on DVD by the NFB in 2005 and continues to reach audiences.

This project has identified three characteristics of documentary that set it apart from fiction as a mode of cinema: the shared authorship role played by both filmmaker and participant; the image-text interaction in the visual channel and the prevalence in documentary of static visual information, particularly during interviews; and lastly, the presence of impromptu speech, as distinct from film dialogue. For each of these characteristics, we have discussed the impact of subtitling in terms of word choice, pacing, and register, respectively. These discussions have allowed us to view documentary subtitling as presenting a particular set of challenges, which I believe can best be resolved by adopting a participant-centred approach. By maintaining an allegiance to the film's participants—and not primarily to the filmmaker, producer, broadcaster, initiator of the translation project, or viewer—the subtitler can capture an individual way of speaking and contribute to the drive to preserve that animates documentary. In the future, we may see innovative attempts at subtitling that take advantage of technological advances and new modes of distribution in order to challenge conventions of placement, lettering, subtitle rates and language use. Meanwhile, it is hoped that this project will be of use to both translation scholars and documentary subtitlers.

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*538 x la vie (Life Times 538)*. 2004. Directed by Céline Baril. National Film Board of Canada. 92 minutes.

*L'appétit d'Ève (The Nature of Eve)*. 2003. Directed by Fabienne Lips-Dumas. National Film Board of Canada. 74 minutes.

*Bacon, le film (Bacon, the Film)*. 2002. Directed by Hugo Latulippe. National Film Board of Canada. 52 minutes. Subtitled by Kathleen Fleming.

*Being at Home with Claude*. 1992. Directed by Jean Beaudin. Fox Lorber. 86 minutes.

*Bowling for Columbine*. 2002. Directed by Michael Moore. Salter Street Films, VIF 2, and Dog Eat Dog. 119 minutes.

*The Champ*. 1931. Directed by King Vidor. Warner Home Video. 86 minutes.

*Chronique d'un été (Chronicle of a Summer)*. 1961. Directed by Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin. Argos Films. 85 minutes.

*Cinéma Vérité: Defining the Moment*. 1999. Directed by Peter Wintonick. National Film Board of Canada. 103 minutes.

*Country*. 2005. Directed by Carole Laganière. Productions de la Chasse-Galerie and National Film Board of Canada. 72 minutes.

*Drugstore Cowboy*. 1989. Directed by Gus Van Sant. Live / Artisan. 104 minutes.

*Édith et Michel (Édith and Michel)*. 2004. Directed by Jocelyne Clarke. Productions Érézi and National Film Board of Canada. 52 minutes. Subtitled by C.N.S.T.

*L'erreur boréale (Forest Alert)*. 1999. Directed by Richard Desjardins and Robert Monderie. National Film Board of Canada. 68 minutes.

*Être et avoir (To Be and To Have)*. 2002. Directed by Nicolas Philibert. Maïa Films, ARTE France Cinéma, Les Films d'ici, Centre National de Documentation Pédagogique. 104 minutes.

*Les glaneurs et moi (The Gleaners and I)*. 1999. Directed by Agnès Varda. Zeitgeist Films. 82 minutes.

*Histoire d'être humain (Being Human)*. 2005. Directed by Denys Desjardins. National Film Board of Canada. 107 minutes.

*Inuvunga—I Am Inuk, I Am Alive*. 2004. Directed by Bobby Echalook, Sarah Idlout, Laura Iqaluk, Linus Kasudluak, Dora Ohaituk, Rita-Lucy Ohaituk, Willia Ningeok, Caroline Ningiuk, Mila Aung-Thwin, Daniel Cross and Brett Gaylor. National Film Board of Canada. 58 minutes.

*J'ai pour toi un lac*. 2001. Directed by Alain Belhumeur. Productions Point de Mire. 52 minutes.

*Las Hurdes (Land Without Bread)*. 1932. Directed by Luis Buñuel. Ramon Acin. 27 minutes.

*Le méchant trip (Exiles in Lotusland)*. 2005. Directed by Ilan Saragosti. National Film Board of Canada. 71 minutes. Subtitled by Nancy Harvey Productions.

*Marron—La piste créole en Amérique (Maroon—On the Trail of Creoles in North America)*. 2005. Directed by André Gladu. National Film Board of Canada. 85 minutes.

*Médecine sous influence (Medicine Under the Influence)*. 2004. Directed by Lina B. Moreco. National Film Board of Canada. 77 minutes.

*Moana: A Romance of the Golden Age*. 1926. Directed by Robert J. Flaherty and Frances Hubbard Flaherty. Paramount Pictures. 64 minutes.

*Nanook of the North*. 1922. Directed by Robert Flaherty. Revillon Frères. 75 minutes.

*Not a Love Story: A Film About Pornography*. 1981. Directed by Bonnie Sherr Klein. National Film Board of Canada. 69 minutes.

*Pas de pays sans paysans (The Fight for True Farming)*. 2005. Directed by Ève Lamont. Productions du Rapide-blanc and National Film Board of Canada. 90 minutes.

*Pas les flics, pas les noirs, pas les blancs*. 2002. Directed by Ursula Meier. Ciné Manufacture. 72 minutes.

*Pour la suite du monde*. 1962. Directed by Pierre Perrault and Michel Brault. National Film Board of Canada. 105 minutes.

*Pulp Fiction*. 1994. Directed by Quentin Tarantino. Miramax Entertainment. 154 minutes.

*Ran*. 1985. Directed by Akira Kurosawa. Wellspring Media. 160 minutes.

*Les Raquetteurs*. 1958. Directed by Gilles Groulx and Michel Brault. National Film Board of Canada. 14 minutes.

*Scared Sacred*. 2004. Directed by Velcrow Ripper. Producers on Davie Pictures and National Film Board of Canada. 105 minutes.

*Sherman's March*. 1985. Directed by Ross McElwee. First Run Features. 157 minutes.

*Super Size Me*. 2004. Directed by Morgan Spurlock. The Con. 100 minutes.

*Tenamonya Connection*. 1990. Directed by Masashi Yamamoto. 119 minutes.

*The Texas Rangers*. 1936. Directed by King Vidor. Universal Studios. 99 minutes.

*To Live with Herds*. 1972. Directed by David MacDougall. University of California, Los Angeles. 70 minutes.

*Tongues Untied*. 1989. Directed by Marlon Riggs. Frameline. 55 minutes.

*Vendredi soir (Friday Night)*. 2001. Directed by Claire Denis. Arena Films/France 2 Cinéma. 90 minutes.

*La Vie est un long fleuve tranquille (Life Is a Long Quiet River)*. 1988. Directed by Étienne Chatiliez. TF1 Vidéo. 90 minutes.

*Zéro tolérance (Zero Tolerance)*. 2004. Directed by Michka Saäl. National Film Board of Canada. 76 minutes.

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