Recibido / Received: 15/02/2017
Aceptado / Accepted: 02/11/2017

Para enlazar con este artículo / To link to this article:
http://dx.doi.org/10.6035/MonTI.2019.ne4.9

Para citar este artículo / To cite this article:
GOUTTEFANGE, Sébastien. (2019) "Subtitling the profusion of the "human secretions" in Jacques Tati's *Playtime*: a mayor challenge" In: Pérez L. de Heredia, María & Irene de Higes Andino (eds.) 2019. *Multilingüismo y representación de las identidades en textos audiovisuales / Multilingualism and representation of identities in audiovisual texts. MonTI* Special Issue 4trans, pp. 253-276

SUBTITLING THE PROFUSION OF "HUMAN SECRETIONS" IN JACQUES TATI'S *PLAYTIME*: A MAJOR CHALLENGE

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Abstract

This study aims at shedding light on the challenge that English-speaking translators face when dealing with the subtitling of French filmmaker Jacques Tati's *Playtime*. How can they possibly reconcile its linguistic abundance with a limited textual space; the overlapping dialogue with the necessity to present information successively when writing a text; the uncertain status of "human secretions" (alternating between the intelligible and the unintelligible) with the written code, which, as it will not allow a play with volume adjustment, imposes a clear-cut choice: translating or not translating. The dialogic chaos orchestrated by Tati constitutes an aesthetic commentary on the sociological identity of post-war France as the country was painfully entering the era of globalization. In the subtitled versions, do the constraints imposed on the translators hinder a proper representation of this identity or is the subtitlers' creativity able to meet the challenge?

Résumé

Cette étude s'intéresse aux défis multiples que constitue le sous-titrage anglophone de playtime de Jacques Tati. Comment, s'interroge le traducteur, réconcilier le foisonnement langagier avec l'espace textuel limité, la simultanéité des répliques avec la contrainte d'exposition successive propre au texte écrit, le statut incertain des « sécrétions humaines » du dialogue (entre intelligible et inintelligible) avec un code écrit qui, parce qu'il ne permet pas de jouer sur le volume sonore, impose un choix tranché : traduire ou ne pas traduire ? Le chaos dialogique orchestré par Tati constitue un commentaire esthétique sur l'identité sociologique de cette France de l'après-guerre qui entre avec difficulté dans l'ère de la globalisation. dans les versions professionnelles, les contraintes du sous-titrage mettent-elles à mal la représentation de cette identité ?

La créativité des sous-titreurs est-elle au contraire à même de relever le défi posé par le film?

Keywords: Jacques Tati, subtitling, *Playtime,* overlapping dialogue.

Mots-clés: Jacques Tati, sous-titrage, *Playtime,* chevauchement des dialogues.

1. Introduction

An important part of recent research in translation studies has touched on the question of subtitling mainly from the perspective of the constraints weighing on this practice. For example, it has been established that subtitling a spoken dialogue results in a loss of text approximating 43 percent (Pérez González 1998: 15). Indeed the target-text is bound to be far shorter than the spoken text inasmuch as it must be ensured that, while reading the subtitles, the viewer is able to watch the pictures without getting the feeling that they are confronted to pure reading. This rule turns out to be particularly relevant when the dialogue is unusually rich from a quantitative viewpoint (Chiaro 2009: 148). In relation with the first point, Linde and Kay (1999: 6) discuss the question of spatial and temporal constraints: two lines maximum and around forty characters for each subtitle on the one hand; synchronicity with the spoken voice and sufficient exposition time enabling the viewer to read the whole text under acceptable conditions on the other hand. Gottlieb (1994: 101-103) apprehends subtitling as a form of "diagonal translation" relating oral and written language, contrary to what happens with dubbing. Thus not only does this form of translation lead to adding one text to another rather than substituting one text for another, but the copresence of the original dialogue and its translation adds yet another constraint given that the viewer would probably find troublesome the non-translation of a cue they have heard. Nevertheless the readily redundant nature of filmic text (Georgakopoulou 2009: 25-29) constitutes an objective criterion that can often account for the quantitative reduction of the target-text and for non-translation. From a more qualitative point of view, Gottlieb (1994: 105-106) remarks again that going from spoken to written language necessarily brings about reductions or modifications due to the non-correspondence between the norms of oral and written language (especially as far as grammar, lexicon, syntax, stylistics, speech pauses, and false starts are concerned). According to Lavaur and Şerban (2008: 91), in the passage from dialogue to subtitles, "Domestication, normalization, and simplification occur most of the time" (my translation).

Another series of constraints adds up to the one mentioned above and lies in the nature of the code used: written words require a successive presentation of the information; meaning gets built as the written chain unfolds, whereas audiovisual expression allows simultaneity (overlapping dialogues, simultaneous conversations, or lyrics mixed with dialogues, for instance), as well as a more synthetic apprehension of meaning. Various strategies are employed by subtitlers to attempt to account for these stylistic film devices: devoting one line to each character in the subtitle for example, or using cumulative subtitles (Díaz Cintas 2005: 25). A third limit for the translator resides in the public's expectations as far as the nature of film dialogue is concerned. There is little doubt that these expectations are linked to the dominant fictional mode of representation, namely the traditional narrative structured around a cause-and-effect logic, exposing a problem and leading to its resolution, and propelled by psychological mechanisms (Self 2002: 45). From this perspective, dialogue acquires a most utilitarian function for the audience, whether they are aware of it or not: allowing access to the characters' thoughts, exploring their motivations, and moving narration forward.

But what about films that dare to defy that logic? What about those which, since the end of the 1950s, undermine the classical narrative, deconstruct the linear and causal conception of time, grapple with the world's complexity, state straightforwardly that bringing to light people's deepest motivations is largely illusory, and refuse to reduce film dialogue to the role it plays in drama or literature (Thoret 2006)? *Playtime* (1967), French filmmaker Jacques Tati's masterwork, may turn out to be an interesting means to tackle this question. Undeniably, it represents a major challenge from the viewpoint of the three aforementioned elements. First, what characterizes this film which appears to be both narrativeless—it comprises six sequences organized around different places in Paris— and almost characterless—there is no main protagonist as such—, is the extraordinary abundance of its dialogues, which cannot fail to inconvenience a translator, who issubmitted to drastic constraints in terms of textual space. Secondly, as Tati is a close-up hater —with the exception of *Parade* (1974) — and systematically favours long shots and depth of field, he is also the director of multitude and simultaneity within the frame. Not only are some of the detail-rich shots from *Playtime* reminiscent of certain paintings by Bruegel the Elder (Laufer 2002: 85), but their reading requires going beyond traditional causal or chronological apprehension. Indeed, as several scenes are unfolding simultaneously, no organizing principle can endorse meaning-building on behalf of viewers any longer: they are the ones who should engage in form decoding, temporal, spatial and causal rapprochement as needed. Thirdly,

translating *Playtime* is also a major challenge because Tati questions the function generally assigned to film dialogue. The man who said, "dialogue is just like any other sound to me" (Dondey 2002: 163, my translation) undoubtedly had a very personal vision of cinema cues, which he talks about in the French radio programme *Les grandes heures* in 1977:

> I've stylised dialogue. By stylizing dialogue, all you can hear is bits and pieces of conversation. When you're in a café, you hear, "two beers." You can't tell who the beers are for or who ordered them. That's not dramatic construction. It's just how people use dialogue in real life. While the audience need to hear the dialogue, I've taken it away from them. What I did is what is called "impressionism" in painting. Those are kind of impressions of dialogue (my translation).

As reminded by Guerand (2007: 176), Tati stands against the conventional French cinema of his time—characterized by its intelligible, grammatically-correct, profound utterances never interfered with by other noises or conversations—one of which manifestations was the French "réplique d'anthologie" (memorable line). The goal of most actors was then to "hit the mark" with the text. Chion (2009: 48) might go even further when he argues that there is no *real* dialogue in Tati's movies insofar as what the filmmaker interrogates is the referential function of the cue. Beyond the drama—or radio-like use that is made of film dialogue, the critic purports that there exists "for Tati, for Fellini, for Tarkovski […] a third type of dialogue use akin to human secretion, *partially intelligible and lost words*, flowing out of man's body" (my translation, my emphasis). Thus Tati aims less at illustrating the communicative function of language than at staging the incommunicability he perceives in late 1960s France, faced with the then-new globalization of exchanges. According to Stéphane Goudet (2002: 25) for example, if speech reflects the efforts accomplished by the characters to establish exchanges, it also signals fake communication, hence the presence of overlapping dialogue and unfinished, inaudible, interminable or superfluous sentences (like the cues deliberately redundant with the pictures). These "human secretions" are characterized by their startling multiculturalism (French, English, German, Italian, and Spanish). It will be noticed that Tati chooses to leave the segments in foreign languages untranslated in the original version so as to better immerse the viewer into the Paris of those days, thus placing them in the same situation as the movie characters, both limited by their linguistic knowledge and potentially "threatened" by cultures and languages which are not yet totally part of their daily lives. That is partly how Tati constructs this somewhat caricatural Parisian identity made up of a combination of multiple fragments of French and

other foreign languages. As Ede and Goudet (2002: 23) put it, "As a dialogue writer, Tati takes the disarticulation of language one step further and creates a very amusing mixed linguistic system, the sort of 'sabir atlantique' conjured up by Etiemble in his book *Parlez-vous franglais?*"

The concept of "profusion" used in the title of this study may be appropriate to qualify Tati's dialogue as the different acceptations of the word refer to the dialogue characteristics mentioned so far. First, the concept evokes the idea of great abundance. Then, it can also be synonymous with excess ("a profusion of rules," for example). Finally, it is not forbidden to see the idea of overflowed spaces / porous borders in its etymology (the latin "profundere" meaning "spill, flow"). If there is such a thing as a profusion of dialogue in Tati's work, the subtitlers of *Playtime* will have to reflect on the best ways to preserve it in translation. How, then, to reconcile its linguistic abundance with a limited textual space; the overlapping dialogue with the necessity to present information successively when writing a text; the uncertain status of the "human secretions" (alternating between the intelligible and the unintelligible) with the written code, which, given it does not allow to play with volume adjustment, imposes a clear-cut choice: translating or not translating.

Through his play with defocalization—the dislocation of the linear narrative, the main characters making room for secondary ones, and dialogue apprehended as an "open window" on the world, to use the director's words (Guerand 2007: 307)—, refocalization—the highlighting of a given cue during postsynchronization—, and the multiplication and juxtaposition of foreign languages that undermine the importance of the mother language, Tati incites us to believe that he aims at a level of abstraction never attained before in his previous movies. The filmmaker is less concerned with unfolding a narrative thread structured around different spaces than with letting the viewer observe the city of Paris, bustling with life; he is less concerned with focusing on the actions of just a few characters than with giving an account of the Parisian society of the late 1960s. The dialogic chaos orchestrated by Tati constitutes an aesthetic commentary on the sociological identity of post-war France as the country was painfully entering the era of globalization. In the subtitled versions, do the constraints imposed on the translators hinder a proper representation of this identity or is the subtitlers' creativity able to meet the challenge?

2. Theoretical and methodological frame

In this study our perspective will remain deeply pragmatic. Indeed we wish to show that, not only is *Playtime*'s dialogue indissociable from the context constituted by the different semiotic systems associated with the film, but also

that its aesthetic frame radically modifies the usual function of film cues. As early as 1983, Toury showed that the notion of equivalence could go hand in hand with that of "relevant features." According to him, as by its very nature translation leads us to make choices, it inevitably entails a hierarchization of the elements deemed most relevant in the source-text (Toury 1983: 117), which in turn can serve as a potential basis for the selection of the elements preserved in the translated text. One of the key characteristics of this concept is its relativity: an element is deemed relevant only relative to other features which are less so. To quote the example he provides in his article, if characters walk along an alphabet-shaped path, the rendering choice into another language—and the mode of presentation of the ground covered—will be more or less important depending on the symbolic value this letter may (not) take in the novel and on the possible impact this translation choice may have on other textual units. In the same perspective, it could be argued that in a work of art, the aesthetic factor outweighs all the others. In the particular case of *Playtime*, it may even be contended that the aesthetic function of dialogue most of the time surpasses its communicative function.

This study aims at determining whether the DVD translations of *Playtime* do fair justice to the aesthetics of this movie. For this purpose it will put into perspective two professional subtitled versions of Jacques Tati's film. The first one was edited by BFI (British Film Institute) and dates back to 2010. There is no reference to any translation company in this first DVD. The second one was made by the Eclair Group in 2014 and edited by StudioCanal. No translator's name is available for either of the two versions. In light of the aforementioned remarks, a number of hypotheses will be made, which the study will allow to confirm or reject:

- Considering the differences in nature between spoken dialogue and subtitles on the one hand; the space constraints and the differences in information processing between a viewer confronted to spoken dialogue and another one reading subtitles on the other hand; the nature of Tati's dialogue (very abundant in some scenes, sometimes hardly audible or overlapping), a reduction in dialogue even more drastic than that encountered on average in subtitled films can be hypothesized, as well as more radical forms of simplification and rephrasing.
- Considering Tati's massive use of overlapping dialogue, it may be assumed that the subtitler, submitted to the constraint of successive presentation of the information, will be poorly armed to render this informational simultaneity, however meaningful it may be. It is also very likely that the effect produced on the viewer will fall into the

category of analytical rather than synthetic apprehension (words side by side on the syntagmatic axis).

– Considering the frequent move from foreground to background sound in Tati's work (technically conveyed through higher sound volume on the segments to be highlighted) as well as the non-existence of an equivalent effect in the framework of subtitling (beside the use of capital letters, which remain a rare occurrence), it may be predicted that the subtitler will either have to leave the least audible segment untranslated or to come up with an equivalence between sound volume and high-content information (the audience will first be fed the high-volume elements, then the rest of the information).
– Considering the very precise function of dialogue in the movie, it may be anticipated that a subtitling which would stick to the letter of the source-dialogue and render as many cues as possible might end up producing a text that would ignore the nature of the "human secretions" by focusing the viewer's attention on elements whose function is not primarily referential. From this perspective, the effect produced might go against Tati's aesthetic project.

Last but not least, it must be noted that this will be a clearly descriptive and non-normative study of the subtitling of *Playtime*. Admittedly, putting all translation choices at the same level cannot be regarded as a viable strategy: Tati's exacting artistic project is in no way compatible with such arbitrariness. Yet I will abstain from judging to strive to better understand. It is quite obvious that although I personally consider the aesthetic factor as the core element of artistic translation, the degrading working-conditions of subtitlers over the past few years (Cornu 2011: 22-23) constitutes a factor weighing strongly on translation choices and might account for a certain form of radical rendering. This study is structured around four possible strategies for the subtitling of *Playtime*: non-translation, rephrasing and simplification, (de-/re-)focalization, and translations that aim to stick to the source-text.

3. Non-translation

The non-translation strategy occupies a significant place in the subtitling of *Playtime*. It does first because the language of the film often appears as a flux of signifiers, pointing both to the reduction of language to "human secretions" on the one hand as well as to the uncanniness of certain cultures as compared to others. The second factor lies in the nature of subtitling: faced with a plethora of cues, the viewer might find the pictures help greatly in understanding, which

therefore makes the translation of certain passages superfluous. The third cause is to be found in the presence of multiple foreign languages (at Orly airport, during the international exhibition, and at the Royal Garden restaurant). In the original version aimed at the French audience, Jacques Tati decided to leave those languages untranslated, a choice also made by the subtitlers most of the time. Finally, the last factor is the deliberate inaudibility of some cues, which is beyond the realm of translation choice.

The study of the professional subtitled versions leads us to remark that some forms of non-translation are related to segments that serve a narrative or explicative function in the original version created by Tati. Those translations obviously have an impact on the way the viewer reconstructs the sociological blueprint of Tati's Paris. So it goes with **example 1** (BFI 00: 21: 45; EG 00: 21: 12), a loudspeaker announcement:

Original dialogue	BFI translation	Eclair Group translation
— Monsieur Giffard. Düsseldorf au téléphone. — Oh !	N.T.[1]	*Mr Giffard. Düsseldorf calling.//*

To start with, one point worthy of note is that this call *does* have a narrative function: the announcement and Giffard's hasty leave are causally associated by Tati since Giffard, who is supposed to interview Hulot for a job, is called on the phone. He therefore cannot keep on looking for Hulot as he had been doing before. BFI's non-translation might be accounted for by the assimilation of this segment to one of the numerous background noises that can be heard in the Orly airport scenes. Nonetheless, it must be admitted that it can hardly allow the audience to understand Giffard's sudden behavior change. For instance, they could put this down to his being overworked, a point mentioned in one of his previous utterances: "Just a moment, I'm very busy" (00: 20 43). Although this causal attribution is not of paramount importance, the non-translation tends to cause a displacement of the reasons why Giffard cannot manage to meet Hulot: while Tati points the finger at a world in which a job can prevent people from paying any attention to others, the translation

1. N.T.: not translated; "/" implies the presence of overlapping cues; "//" placed just after a segment indicates that this segment normally appears on the same line in the subtitle; "?": part of the dialogue is inaudible; (GER): some words are pronounced in German; EG: Eclair Group. When the lines in the center or on the right are subdivided into two or several lines, each new line refers to a new subtitle.

adopted may let the viewer believe that Giffard simply decides to fulfill other commitments.

Besides, though Tati's aesthetics aims at dehierarchizing the relation between speech and noise (Dondey 2002: 163), professional actors/stars and amateurs (Guerand 2007: 124), main and secondary characters (Fieschi 1996: 16), and foreground and background (Laufer 2002: 148), the social world depicted is still deeply stratified. A case in point is Tati's poking fun at the invisibilization of the lower class in places frequented by high society, as in **example 2** (BFI 01: 02: 24; EG 01: 01: 52). At the beginning of the scene, the architect of the *Royal garden* restaurant gives the owner of the place some information about the decoration when, a few minutes away from the restaurant's opening, he finds out that a few employees are still hard at work:

Original dialogue	BFI translation	Eclair Group translation
— Croyez-moi, ça va avoir beaucoup d'allure, car je vais vous entourer l'orchestre de *spotlights* !	*The orchestra will be spotlighted //*	*It'll look great.*
		I'll surround the band with spotlights.
— Des clients ! **— Pardon ?** **— Ce sont des clients !** **— Ah ! Oui !**	**N.T.**	***Customers.***

BFI opts for a non-translation of the second part of the conversation, which might prevent a non-French speaker from understanding that the boss will not let his customers see behind the scenes: the workers, the tools, and the unfinished decoration. Even though the pictures show the architect turning to the aforementioned customers, one is entitled to wonder if the reason for the manager's anger is very clear, at least in the early part of the scene. Thus the non-translation might potentially silence the duality constructed in the film between the people that matter and the "invisible."

The microcosm depicted by Tati appears to be keen on modern communication, whereas what mostly characterizes it is a verbal excess akin to a form of inability to share. Example 3 (respectively 00: 05:15 / 00: 06: 54 / 00: 45: 29 for BFI and 00: 04: 43 / 00: 06: 19 / 00: 44: 56 for EG) is a case in point. The following utterances are meant to be mere snippets of conversation in the movie:

Original dialogue	BFI translation	Eclair Group translation
— (?). — Ne t'inquiète pas, j'ai tout mon temps. (?) **je téléphone à Pierre**. — (?).	N.T.	*And **call Pierre**.*

— Non, non. — Quelques mots pour notre journal ! — Non, non. / — Juste un mot, juste un mot, juste un mot, s'il vous plaît. — Monsieur le Président ? — Non, non, merci. (?) **tout ce que j'ai à dire pour l'instant** (?).	N.T.	A few words for my paper.
		Just a word, please!
		Mr President!
		All I can say now is...

Pour vos moquettes, pour vos tapis, pour vos carpettes, un seul produit (?).	N.T.	***For your rugs and carpets,***
		a single product...

It should be noted that in BFI's subtitling those utterances are not rendered in English (the three examples are quite representative of this subtitler's frequent use of non-translation throughout the film). The translator seems to equate them with the "human secretions" Chion refers to. From this perspective all the non-narrative, "cumbersome" elements are to be done away with. The cue, "tout ce que j'ai à dire pour l'instant" is only part of a sentence since the beginning and the end of it are not audible. The first segment in bold characters is uttered by a passenger that will not be seen again afterwards; the third one is an advertisement probably heard on a bus or a car radio. Interestingly EG takes a different stance on that. A strictly technical assessment of these opposite choices should obviously be ruled out insofar as both have their advantages and drawbacks: although rendering the snippets allows to place the English-speaking viewer in conditions similar to those experienced by the French audience—in that sense it participates in the identity construction of that period—, it nevertheless runs the risk of overburdening the subtitles and making picture reading more difficult, a major handicap as far as this movie is concerned.

But the Paris of the late 1960s is not only characterized by verbal excess, but also by non-communication, as shown by **example 4** (BFI 00: 12: 30; EG

00: 11: 56). In the following situation, a man coming from outside approaches a security guard (standing inside the airport) for a light:

Original dialogue	BFI translation	Eclair Group translation
— (?). — Oui, oui, oui, attends mais va par là... C'est ça, mmmm. — Merci bien, chef ! Au revoir, Messieurs !	N.T.	*Thanks, chief!* *So long, guys!*

Admittedly, the dialogue *does* demonstrate a low degree of narrativity and explanation, yet the non-translation is still problematic insofar as it ignores Tati's discourse on incommunicability. Indeed, though the beginning of the scene is apprehended from the guard's viewpoint (visually speaking he is the source of perception), at the end it is the man outside who is the focalizer. Tati chooses to point out communication difficulties by staging characters enclosed in their respective points of view. The first translation leads to relegating this dialogue to the rank of background noise, making it arduous to distinguish this passage from all those which were also left untranslated. By rendering only the words of the man outside, the second translation makes it hard to convey the idea of compartmentalized viewpoints. It might have been more appropriate to translate only the words of the guard at the beginning of the scene and those of the man outside at the end.

Another interesting phenomenon in connection with non-translation is the way the songs are dealt with in the movie. Just like any other artistic forms, movie songs cannot be attributed a fixed function. As René Prédal (2007: 20-21) wrote about the long final travelling shot in Truffaut's *The 400 blows*:

> A moving shot is not meaningful by itself; it is indissociable from the setting, the character and its place within the narrative. Therefore there is no such thing as movie grammar, for although cinema is a "langage," it is not a "langue" [in the Saussurian sense] and it cannot be said that a high-angle shot makes the character seem weaker while a low-angle one makes them look stronger (my translation).

From this perspective, the function of a song can only be assessed through a study of the context in which it appears: for instance, a given song may be used in two different movies and take on radically dissimilar functions (intra- or extra-diegetic uses, focalization on the lyrics, on the melodic character of the song, on its ability to bring us back to the past, etc.). Our comment will focus on Aristide Bruant's song *À la Bastille* (1889), struck up by the customers at the Royal Garden restaurant by the end of the film. Both BFI and EG opt for a

non-translation of the lyrics. It may thus be deduced that they both equate the song with its capacity to create a typically French ambiance. Obviously that is quite a legitimate choice—rendering the entire lyrics would definitely have overloaded the subtitles—, but it fails to give account of one major element: the reference to the Bastille conjures up the spectre of the French Revolution, a wink that makes perfect sense in the context of the film. For Tati, the Paris of the 1960s has to engage in a revolution, both social and technical, meant to rid people of deleterious hierarchies and of our dependence on the world of objects. The director also reminds us that French identity is made of past battles, that art bears traces of that, and that our memory can inspire today's fights. An alternative option, discarded by the translators, might have been envisaged: rendering only the chorus, a solution half-way between the awkwardness likely caused by a whole translation and the loss probably engendered by a non-translation.

If the examples analysed so far might induce a different construction of Parisian social identity in the viewer, the more radical translations made by BFI —they opt for non-translation in most cases— turn out to be very relevant in a number of occurrences, particularly when non-translation can be accounted for by the viewer's ability to deduce the meaning of the cues from the situation. For lack of space we will deal only with one extract from the soundtrack (**example 5**; BFI 00: 12: 00; EG 00: 11: 28). Tati stages Monsieur Hulot speaking to a passer-by who has just got off a bus:

Original dialogue	BFI translation	Eclair Group translation
— Pardon, monsieur, s'il vous plaît ! (?).	N.T.	*Wait!*
		Over there.

The viewer can hear the beginning of the scene quite distinctly, but not the end of the conversation due to the noises from the engines and the city. Even for a non-French speaker, Hulot's gestures are explicit enough to leave no doubt as to what he is expecting from the other man (probably some information about his destination), which might account for BFI's non-translation. But perhaps it could prove useful to ponder more about the meaning of this scene. Does Tati's strategy only aim at lightening his dialogue by ridding it of cumbersome elements, or should this passage be interpreted as a comment on the city and its living conditions? Thus if one admits that the conversation is probably voluntarily drowned by the city noises, doesn't translating a passage that is hardy audible—as Éclair Group does—go against the filmmaker's intentions? In the end, does the core of the scene lie in the content of the conversation, or

rather in the idea that even the most commonplace form of communication has become difficult in this ultramodern city?

4. Simplification and rephrasing

In their attempt to translate the rich soundtrack of *Playtime*, one notices that the subtitlers regularly resort to a form of rendering closer to rewriting than to literal translation. First, with **example 6** (BFI 00: 12: 52; EG 00: 12: 19), the changes affecting the sociolectal dimension of speech will be touched upon. In the following scene, the old guard greets Hulot and attempts to communicate with one of his superiors via a very sophisticated-looking machine:

Original dialogue	BFI translation	Eclair Group translation
— Ouais, ouais, ouais, ouais. Ouais, bon, alors (he clears his throat). Là, c'est parfait. Alors, monsieur, si vous voulez bien, je m'occupe de vous. J'en ai pour deux minutes. Voilà.	*Sit here, I won't be a moment*	*Yeah...*
		O.K. So...
		There.
		If you don't mind, sir...
		This'll only take a minute.
Alors, euh... Voyons voir, euh... (?) bien. Ça... Bon. (?) voilà. J'appelle. Euh... Voyons, ah ! Deuxième. Oui, oui, oui, oui, oui, oh, oui ! (?) alors. — (?) Qu'est-ce que c'est ? — Ah ! (?) Alors, euh... je demande le 440.....2.	*I want four hundred and forty-...//*	*Let's see...*
		I want...
		This one...
		Who is it?
		Well...
		I want 4... 4...
		...2
Je répète...	*I repeat*	*I repeat...*
(In a low voice) 440. (Out loud) ...2 !	*...two*	— *4... 4...*
— Non, pas « un », deux ! — Ouais ! Alors là, c'est bien, ça, ça va, ça va, alors là, ouais, là! Bon. Là ! Et voilà !	*Not one, two!*	— *2.* — *Too?*
		— *Not too! 2!*
		— *2?* — *Yes.*
		There.
Tous ces trucs électriques... À savoir qu'est-ce qu'y a là-dedans, faut s'y connaître. Avec tous leurs boutons. Eh ! (He whistles).	*These electrical gadgets are all very// well if you know your way around //*	*Who understands all this electronic stuff?*
		All these buttons.

It should first be noted that BFI focuses on the denotative aspect of the dialogue ("sit" / "I won't be a moment") while Tati's use of lexicon and language register places particular emphasis on the mismatch between the guard's professional speech (« si vous voulez bien, je m'occupe de vous ») and his more spontaneous utterances (« Ouais, ouais, ouais, ouais. Ouais, bon alors »). The linguistic characterization of the employee (jerky syntax and colloquial language register on the one hand; neutral syntax and lexicon on the other hand) is thus altered, despite the throat clearing moment and the cigarette in the guard's mouth, which might be regarded as social status markers. What is more, the meticulousness with which the filmmaker describes the struggle of the guard with the machine and the complexity of this operation are largely lost in translation. Tati is targeting the useless contortions technology sometimes submits people to (the point is just to call someone after all). In the initial dialogue, that effect is created through a thorough description of the different steps of the calling process, which are then commented by the character. The translation only renders the most meaningful sentences—even though the actor's performance seems to partially compensate for the dialogue simplication—while the original cues concentrate on the details. EG's translation tends to do more justice to the sociological dimension of the passage inasmuch as it is highly concerned with lexical (colloquial register: "Yeah" / "O.K." / "stuff"; orality markers: "There") as well as syntactic (unfinished utterances, verbless sentences: "All these buttons") matters.

The importance of the sociological dimension is also reflected in Tati's use of anglicisms, a sign of a certain snobbery (as in Proust's novels) as well as of France's inferiority complex towards its American cousin. **Example 7** is a case in point (from 00: 46: 34 for BFI; from 00: 46: 00 for EG). The character of Schneider has just caught up with Hulot, a friend from his army days:

Original dialogue	BFI translation	Eclair Group translation
— Ah, tu sais, ce trafic, dis-donc, ouh ! Et, comme ils disent, hein : « ***Time is money !*** ».	*Such traffic! As they say:* ***Time is money***	*What traffic!*
		But like they say… **Time is money**.
Alors, tu vois, c'est le modèle ***Deluxe***.	*It's the* ***de luxe*** *model*	*It's the* ***deluxe*** *model.*
Je l'ai depuis deux jours. Je l'ai payée ***cash***, hein, mon vieux !	*I've had it for two days. I paid* ***cash*** *down*	*I got it 2 days ago.*
		I paid ***cash****.*

— Allez, viens mon vieux ! Je vais te faire visiter mon ***home***.	*I'll show you my* ***home***	*Come see my* ***home****.*

— Allez, allez, viens mon vieux, tu vas boire un ***glass***, là. — Ah non non. — Mais si, quoi. Tu vas bien prendre un petit scotch là ! Mais si, mais si ! Depuis le temps qu'on s'est pas vus, là ! (?).	Come in for a moment, ***have a drop of Scotch***	*Come in for a drink.*
		Have a scotch.

It may be noticed that Schneider's speech includes its share of anglicisms aimed at establishing his social superiority: as in *Jour de fête* (1949), the American people is viewed as perfectly virtuous—especially from a technological point of view— by some characters. BFI and Eclair Group's suggested translations will not allow the viewer to have access to Tati's intended ironical use of these essential markers since the translators simply use the same words as in the original version. But English is not the only language Tati confronts the viewer to with no resort to translation. It may even be argued that the Paris of the late 1960s is presented as significantly multilingual. With **example 8** (BFI 00: 35: 06; EG 00: 34: 32), the case of German will be studied—but it must be born in mind that other languages sprinkle the soundtrack of *Playtime*. In the following passage, an employee and his boss, both German, talk about a man who showed great disrespect a few moments before:

Original dialogue	**BFI translation**	**Eclair Group translation**
— *Guten morgen, Herr Direktor.* (GER) il avait un long pipe, il avait un long écharpe. Il était assis à le bureau. — (GER). — (GER) il a fouillé dans tous les papiers, comme ça, vous voyez. — (GER). — (GER) sans se gêner. — (GER). — Ah vraiment ! Je...	*When I was busy a man rifled the desk drawer*	N.T.
	He had a long pipe and a long scarf//	*He had a pipe and a long scarf.//* *He sat down there.*
	He went through the papers	*He went through all the papers.//*
	He walked off with some, cool as you please	N.T.

In this scene not only are the sentences in German left untranslated—which may be regarded as perfectly acceptable if one admits that English-speaking viewers must be placed in the same conditions as their French counterparts—but in the BFI version, the English dialogue seems to simply summarize what is being said in German. For instance, the segments "When I was busy" or "He walked off with some" find no equivalent in the French dialogue. It is also possible that those two utterances sum up what can be seen on the screen. The adopted translation may still legitimately be questioned since it gives a totally

different image of the relationships the languages have with one another in the universe of *Playtime*: while Tati stages juxtaposed languages, making it difficult for the viewer to apprehend the meaning of the scene, the use of English only in the two translations conveys a feeling of unity and of linguistic and cultural coherence. As to whether or not one should be faithful to the source-text, the EG translator adopts a different stance from that of his competitor insofar as he will not go beyond what is actually said in French.

In *Playtime,* four different places evoke the growing technicization of people's lifestyle: Orly and its glass and steel buildings, the invention exhibition (the door that is slammed silently, the luminous broom, etc.), the modern block of flats of Hulot's army friend, and the Royal Garden restaurant (its sophisticated décor and air-conditioning system). Unsurprisingly, the characters' language bears traces of that and may sometimes be assimilated to a real technolect, as shown by **example 9** (from 00: 33: 57 for BFI; from 00: 33: 24 for EG). In the subsequent scene, a German salesman presents a so-called revolutionary door model to a customer:

Original dialogue	BFI translation	Eclair Group translation
— Après vous, monsieur. — Alors, d'après vous, vos portes sont totalement **insonores** ? — Absolument, je explique à vous.	N.T.	*Your doors are **soundproof**?*
		Absolutely. Let me explain.
— Regardez. La porte, elle a fabriquée dans un **matière totalement insonorisée** (?). / — (?) Ah, oui, on n'entend rien lorsqu'elles sont fermées. Très bien. Très intéressant. — Vous entendriez même pas... — Mais dites-moi, est-ce que je peux fermer cette porte sans qu'elle fasse le moindre bruit. — Je vous fais un démonstration. Grâce à **la épaisseur de la porte en Sonex**, voyez-vous...	*This door is made of **sound-proofing // material***	*It's made of totally **soundproof materials.***
		— Very interesting. *— You can't even hear...*
		I can close it in complete silence?
		*Let me show you. Thanks to this **layer of Sonex...//***

— Auriez-vous l'obligeance de me montrer vos prix. — Ah, ah, alors voici nos prix et ici **les références de nos différents articles.** — Je vous remercie. — A votre disposition, monsieur. — Merci.	N.T.	*Here are our prices...*
		*with the **various reference numbers.//***
		At your service, sir.

Once again a different treatment is to be noticed between the two professional translations. EG clearly strives to preserve a greater number of technical words than BFI's: *soundproof, layer of Sonex, reference numbers,* for example. In BFI's suggested translation, it is all the identity-building around the technical object (a competent salesman has a perfect command of his technolect, which makes him prone to convince his audience) that is undermined through non-translation and simplification.

5. Final remarks

As mentioned above, what most characterizes the soundtracks of Tati's films is the dismantling of traditional hierarchies between various elements. It is a known fact that Tati systematically postsynchronized sound. Laufer (2002: 57), for example, recalls that the director recorded no fewer than 365 different wave noises while preparing *Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot* (1953). As a consequence there is no "realistic" sound in Tati's work: the soundtrack is stripped of unnecessary material and at the same time, some elements are emphasized. For instance, camera placement relative to the filmed object or character never determines sound volume. Only aesthetic composition decides on those parameters. The translator must therefore have a close look at those (de-)focalization effects if they want to account for Tati's aesthetics. In the following conversation between people meeting casually at the restaurant, it seems that all the guests want to talk at the same time:

Original dialogue	BFI translation	Eclair Group translation
— Oh / — Oui ! / — Chérie, comment vas-tu ? C'est pas vrai / — C'est pas possible. — Qu'est-ce que vous faites ici ? — Bonjour (?) Henri !	*What are you doing there?*	*What're you doing here?*
— Ce que je suis contente. J'avais commandé une excellente table. Venez avec nous ! (?). — (?).	*Join us at our excellent table*	*We reserved a good table. Come with us.*

In his film, Tati undoubtedly demonstrates his willingness to mix several conversations simultaneously and at the same volume so as to dynamize the scene and express the idea that exchanges do not result in any genuine communication. In contrast the subtitlers, constrained by written language, have to make do with a juxtaposition of cues and a drastic reduction of the dialogue to avoid both text overload and lack of clarity. The simultaneous conversation effect

gives way to a simple juxtaposition of utterances (for example, "What are you doing there?" / "Join us at our excellent table").

In this play with (de-)focalization, partial or erroneous decoding seems unavoidable, thus leading to the impairment or distortion of Tati's subtle sociological discourse, as demonstrated by **example 11** (BFI 01: 13: 23; EG 01: 12: 49). At the Royal Garden, the manager discreetly lectures his waiter; the customers are all around him and in no way should they be inconvenienced:

Original dialogue	BFI translation	Eclair Group translation
— Garçon, eh bien, (?). — Ah, non non non non. Là ! Pas là !	*Waiter, have you attended to that table?*	*Waiter.* *Can't you handle this table?*

What is crucial in Tati's mind is to illustrate the question of the hierarchical games within the restaurant (between the manager and the waiter on the one hand; between the customers and the manager on the other hand). However, the subtitlers reproduce these words quite intelligibly, thus neglecting to account for the social dimension of the scene and its resulting humour. The point is not to allow the audience to understand *everything*, but for them to be placed in the conditions imagined by Tati: in this precise context, the viewer is sitting in the middle of the restaurant and cannot ask for more explicit signs than those the guests have access to.

There are yet a number of occurrences for which the filmic means aiming at focalizing the viewer's attention coincide with the use of a subtitle that will have the same function, as in **example 12** (BFI 00: 55 57 ; EG 00 : 55 : 23), referring to a radio advertisement:

Original dialogue	BFI translation	Eclair Group translation
Mesdames, utilisez *Quick Cleaner*, parce que *Quick Cleaner* est le...	*Ladies, use* Quick Cleaner, *because* Quick Cleaner...	*Ladies, use Quick Cleaner because Quick Cleaner is…*

Tati, who incidentally never resorts to close-ups in this film, *does* use an insert in this scene—a form of visual focalization—, that the translators render by means of a subtitle—a form of linguistic focalization by nature (text as opposed to no text). They then both ignore the almost total meaninglessness of the sentence in order to translate best Tati's intended effect, whose function is probably to allude to the prominent place taken by marketing in these people's lives in the late 1960s.

6. Translations that aim to stick to the source-text

Attention will not be focused on the literal translations that efficiently render the original dialogue, but rather on those which paradoxically end up running counter to the filmmaker's artistic project due to excessive transcoding. It has been shown so far that an appropriate translation of *Playtime* cannot do without a reflection on the function of dialogue in the film. Indeed it is easy to imagine how hazardous it could be to render those "human secretions" literally pervading the whole film by means of systematic literal translations. It may be wondered, for instance, how necessary it is to translate the cues found in **example 13** (BFI 00: 09: 15; EG 00: 08: 43). In the subsequent scene, a trip organizer is addressing his customers:

Original dialogue	BFI translation	Eclair Group translation
— *Come on ladies*, par ici. Suivez-moi ! Alors *you stop here, please. Ladies, please stop*... Ah ! Alors écoute : de là jusque là, le Royal Hotel.	*From here to here: Royal Hotel//*	*From here to here : Royal Hotel.//*
Et alors de là jusque là, le Moderne, hein ? —Donc, bon voyage ! Par ici !	*From here: the Moderne*	*And here to here… the Moderne.//*

What function do these subtitles serve? Are they just landmarks enabling the audience to get mentally ready for their future discovery of the Royal Garden restaurant? Are they a form of pointillistic effect, triggered by the translators' fear of leaving too many segments untranslated? Beyond the risk of overloading the subtitles, in the context of this film, it appears that willingness to translate every single element may in fact go against its aesthetics. What about **example 14** (BFI 01: 05: 20; EG 01: 04: 47), in which a waiter is explaining to his manager that he cannot get his dish through the hatch because the opening is too small?

Original translation	BFI translation	Eclair Group translation
— Qu'est-ce qui va pas, vous ? — Alors, regardez la sauce. Je peux pas le prendre par le haut. Aaah ! — Passez dans l'autre sens ! — Dans l'autre sens ? Alors là, vous allez voir ! Dans l'autre sens, tenez ! — (?). — Alors passez le par la porte !	N.T.	*Look at the sauce.*
		Turn it around.
		In the other direction? There.
		The fish is 50. *You have 50 here.*
		It should go through.
		Then go through the door.

In those cases where a gag is based on universal visual elements—inasmuch as it can be understood by any individual, whatever his language or culture—and where the function of the language used on that occasion is just to create a reality effect—, it may legitimately be asked whether or not subtitling the gag in question is the best solution. As it is, although the French dialogue is rather long, non-translation does not appear to pose any comprehension problems, for the gestures of the different protagonists unquestionably show what is happening and what they are thinking, at least as much as their words do. Interestingly, EG's choice is radically different: admittedly, their rendering of the dialogue is quite detailed; yet, the question remains whether the words in the subtitles might not be redundant with the pictures. Considering the mostly visual nature of the gag, does that not needlessly draw the viewer's attention on a text that could easily be disposed of? Which should be focused on: the sociolinguistic elements—which *do* matter obviously, but which could be easily compensated for in other parts of the film—or the visual humour?

7. Conclusion

This study quite clearly confirms a drastic text reduction by both translators, although BFI's strategy is much more radical than his competitor's on this point. It also endorses (with a few exceptions) that Tati's subtle play with focalization/defocalization gets often lost in translation. Furthermore, it bears witness that in both versions, the synthetic apprehension of the soundtrack—in the form of overlapping dialogue—makes room for translations that put forward an analytical approach of meaning. It must be borne in mind, though, that in the case of audiovisual translation, the subtitles are synchronized with the soundtrack, thus giving the viewer a context allowing to relativize the distortion the subtitles submit the soundtrack to. That is particularly relevant when it comes to a soundtrack that can be apprehended in certain scenes as a noise rather than as clearly-articulated cues. Finally, the study emphasizes that in some contexts, willingness to translate as many cues as possible may go against the filmmaker's aesthetic project.

The comparison between the two versions studied brings us to suggest that the translation conceptions of both subtitlers about the function of dialogue differ strongly, leading to two dissimilar constructions of "Tati's France." For EG, "good" subtitling is equated with explicit and faithful translation, hence a greater respect for the sociological and technolectal features of the source-dialogue; hence, also, a more detailed rendering than that of his competitor. Nevertheless, perhaps for want of adequate reflection on the role played by language in the film, this approach might prove counterproductive on some

segments by denaturing the effects of focalization or defocalization intended by the author and by switching the viewer from the "language noise," the linguistic and cultural secretions of Tati's France, to semantic banality. With EG, the audience have access to more markers allowing reconstruction of the French identity as seen by Tati; however, their willingness to render as many cues as possible sometimes tends to focalize the viewer's attention on what is deemed accessory by the director. BFI's version, which does not adhere strictly to the letter of the text, sometimes proves less rigourous from a semantic point of view, yet reflects their concern with the aesthetic function of the language spoken in the film.

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