

All movies are foreign

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Resumo

O artigo toma as figuras da legenda e da dublagem como pontos de partida para a exploração das várias formas de estrangeirice no audiovisual. Tais figuras são apenas as marcas mais visíveis e impositivas da maneira como os filmes envolvem questões relacionadas com a diferença, a alteridade e a tradução. Em seguida, o artigo também discute o que pode ser um filme estrangeiro no contexto da globalização e da internacionalização da produção cinematográfica. Enfim, ele invoca o conceito de «cinema com sotaque», ou seja, o cinema criado ao mesmo tempo nos interstícios das formações sociais e das práticas cinematográficas, especialmente nas comunidades exílicas e em situações de diáspora.

Palavras-chave: cinema estrangeiro, cinema internacional, cinema com sotaque, legenda, dublagem

Abstract

The article takes the figures of the subtitle and doubling as a point of departure in exploring the varieties of foreignness in audiovisual. Such figures are only the most visible and charged markers of the way in which films engage matters of difference, otherness and translation. Afterwards, the article also discusses what can be a foreign film in the context of globalization and internalization of the film production. Lastly, it invokes the concept of «accented cinema», that means, the cinema created astride and in the interstices of social formations and cinematic practices, mainly in exilic and diasporic communities.

Key words: foreign cinema, international cinema, accented cinema, subtitle, doubling

All movies are foreign

The word «foreigner» comes from old French *forain* and from Latin *foras* (outside). Although dictionaries define «foreigner» as person or thing from another country, the strongest connotation is one of strangeness, something or someone I cannot understand. There is a subtle difference between the way we use the word “foreign” and the word “exotic”, even though they have a similar semantic meaning (*exotikós*), in ancient Greek, meant “coming from another country”). But “exotic” ended up receiving a more positive connotation of something different that fascinates me. Exotic is something foreign that seduces me. When I travel abroad, I like to buy local handcrafts (since, for me, these objects don’t have any cultural or sacred value). There are people who like to collect objects from distant countries and which generate attraction exactly for being different. It is not by chance that these collections are named *chinoiserie* by the French, even when they are not Chinese. The word “foreign”, however, carries connotations that are more associated with the fear of what is strange. Foreign is what I don’t understand, what bothers me and scares me. In Muntadas’ videos of the project *On Translation: Fear*, people who live close to the border of Mexico and the United States (*Fear/Miedo*, 2005), or on both sides of the straits of Gibraltar, between Spain and Morocco (*Miedo*, 2008), talk about people who live on the other side as something frightening, unpredictable and that protection is needed. On the other hand, from the point of view of the one who is in the situation of being a foreigner, the most common feelings are isolation, discrimination and having to deal with hostility.

Néstor Canclini, in his text *Los Otros Etranjeros* (2007), proposes the use of the word “foreign” in a broader sense, maybe even in a metaphorical sense as a way of dealing with relationships of strangeness, discrimination and fear among social subjects, inside or outside a certain geographic region. He also proposes that call “translation” operations all attempts of approximation, conciliation and understanding among strangers or foreigners. My article is

based mainly on Canclini's ideas about foreignness, but for reasons related to theme focus, my investigations tackle only foreignness and translation issues regarding my present object of interest: contemporary audiovisual production.

Atom Egoyan and Ian Balfour (2004: 21), editors of *Subtitles: on the Foreignness of Film*, start the book with the following sentence: "Every movie is a foreign movie, at least to some publics – and not only in terms of language". Actually, there are different levels of foreignness in a movie. Subtitles and dubbing express directly how audiovisual faces difference, alterity and translation issues. But it is necessary to observe that both resources are already foreign to the language and aesthetics of audiovisual. It is strange to go to the movies and read a text; wouldn't it be more logical to stay home and read a book? Some people even consider cinematographic subtitles to be distractive, diverting the attention from what is most important in cinema: the images and the sounds. Especially in North-American and European cultures, many people can't read subtitles in the movies, so some countries usually dub foreign films. It is also necessary to consider countries with a high level of illiteracy and public in pre-school age, in both cases these people have difficulty with subtitles. Although necessary, in most cases as translation resource, subtitles are an undesirable prosthesis in the movie's aesthetics; they are usually done by professionals who are not familiar with the cinematographic universe and without knowledge or monitoring from the director of the movie.

Subtitles can be considered to be strange objects, an intrusion in the space of the movie. They refer directly to the physicality of the film itself (subtitles are printed by physically burning the emulsion of the film support) compromising the transparency effect or the sensation of reality, which according to critics, has always characterized the dominant aesthetics of cinema. Reading subtitles demand from the public intellectual effort and distance from the diegesis, which, in a certain way, can conflict with the seduction or pleasure of cinema. It is difficult to give yourself away entirely to the fascination produced by images and sound if there are texts to read. During two hours, which is the estimated length of a movie, frequent reading can produce fatigue and be distractive from the plot that is being developed on the screen.

But dubbing can be even more mistaken, well done or not. Nothing is stranger than a samurai screaming to its enemies in Portuguese with a Lusitanian accent or a Brazilian Northeastern bandit speaking with British accent. I cannot imagine Bolivian indigenous peasant from Jorge Sanjines' movies speaking a different language than Quechua; not even Spanish would make sense. Certain images are associated with specific languages and dubbing misplaces and deterritorializes these images. In a certain text about (against) dubbing, Jorge Luís Borges said that this procedure is a generator of monsters. Greta Garbo – he explains – is half of her image and half her voice. If we can switch her voice for Aldonza Lorenzo's, why not switch her face for Betty Boop's? Garbo without her voice is mutilated and carries a prosthesis instead of her vocal cords, or she can be compared to ventriloquist's puppet: she moves her mouth, but another person is actually speaking (Borges y Cozarinsky, 1983: 65). One of the most disturbing experiences I've had was in a movie theater in San Juan. I was watching Almodovar's *Tacones Lejanos* (High Heels/ 1991) dubbed in English and with Spanish subtitles!

If translation is exactly the operation that brings cultures closer, something that allows us to understand the other, it can also be – mainly through dubbing – what separates them, something that standardizes differences, mainly by means of vulgarization. Subtitles and dubbing involve the work of many people and most times their names don't even appear in movie credits. On the top of the list is the professional who transcribes in paper the character's dialogues. Most times, the director, actors or final producers don't fully respect the transcript:

there is always some improvising, adaptation to filming conditions. So, it is necessary to transcribe the dialogues that really are in the final production of movies. It seems simple, but it is very common for the “transcriber” to appear with some kind of problem we usually call cinematographic “deafness”. The character says something and the “transcriber” hears something else. Henri Béhar (2004: 82) tells that in the movie *Drugstore Cowboy* (1989), A character says “*no hat on the bed*”, but the “transcriber” understood “*and God made a bet*”.

There are movies in which characters speak with a very heavy accent and specific vocabulary that are often not understood by the “transcriber”. Movies by the Colombian Victor Gaviria, such as *Rodrigo D* (1989), *La Vendedora de Rosas* (1998) and *Sumas y Restas* (2004), are spoken with a very heavy *Paisa* accent, from poor and marginal neighborhoods of Medellín. Even Colombians have difficulty in understanding Spanish spoken in these movies and the director himself has already admitted that many times he does not understand what his characters say, because his actors are not professionals and come from where the movie takes place. They also improvise a lot and make up texts that are not on the screenplay. There is also the case of characters that are immigrants and speak very poorly the language of their country they went to. In cases like this, the “transcriber” rights down what he understood or what he thinks it is, but in some cases, he doesn’t write anything or right “inaudible”. Anyway, there is always a certain level of simplification and even adulteration when oral dialogues are written in paper. Besides this transcription work, this professional also writes down the length of each line in photograms to guide the translation work.

Based on these written dialogues and, many times without even watching the movie, the translator has to translate the text from a source language to a target language. Actually, the complicated work of this professional is not only to translate, but also to guarantee that the text “fits” in the same amount of time as the oral text in the other language. Usually, the “subtitler” and the “dubber” work under very strict rules. For subtitles, it is fundamental to obey the rule of one character for each photogram, maximum of 40 characters per line (including spaces) and no more than two lines per subtitle and paying attention to avoid the continuation of one sentence in the next subtitle. The aim is to allow the public to read the text comfortably. Dubbing is even more complicated because the translated text has to coincide with the lip movements of the characters of the original text as much as possible, when the person who dubs speaks it. This is a very difficult task, because words have different extension in different languages. Some languages, such as English and Chinese, are very condensed, have simple structure and a majority of words with one or two syllables only. Others, such as German and Russian, have structures that are much more complex (including declinations) and very long words. For example, a simple expression in English such as “*Hello, teacher!*” can be transformed in “*Здравствуйте, преподавательница!*”, in Russian. It is impossible to fit in the same number of photograms. Usually, the translator needs to summarize and translate only “*Hello!*”.

Condensation (in some cases, also expansion) is a common procedure in dubbing and subtitling. Most times, the original lines cannot be entirely translated to the target language, because they don’t “fit” in the same number of photograms, or because lip movements we see on the screen do not correspond. So, translation in audiovisual nearly means the invention of a different text. Besides being necessary to consider that reading is always slower than hearing an oral discourse, first of all, because in audiovisual, it is necessary to consider the average of all readers (some read faster, others don’t), but also because it is necessary to give the spectator time to look at the image. Let’s not forget that in cinema, the text stays in the screen for a while

and then disappears. This is different from reading books and it is not possible to go back and read it again.

THE TRANSLATOR AS A TRAITOR

We cannot forget that translation can also be a mistake. Languages, as well as cultures, are «superposable», which means that there is no exact correspondence between its elements when moving from one nation to another. Languages are the result of the collective imagination of a people throughout a historical process. Different peoples build different linguistic imaginaries throughout different historical circumstances. No word can have an exact equivalent in another language from semantic, syntax or pragmatic point of view. Ezra Pound expressed well this issue with his famous sentence “*traduttore traditore*”, which can be (badly) translated as “every translator is a traitor”. It is a fact that no dubbing or subtitle would be able to translate the significant density, ambiguities and imprecisions of the dialogue of a movie such as Kenji Mizoguchi’s *Ugetsu Monogatari* (*Tales of Moonlight and Rain*, 1953). The title itself is impossible to be translated: *ugetsu* is a word from Japanese poetic vocabulary and refers to a specific image of the moon, pale, mysterious and full of presages, which can be seen in the fog that is formed after the rain. There is no word even remotely correspondent in another language. The only thing we can do are approximations that are not very precise (such as *vague moon*, in its translation to Portuguese), in order to bring two or more cultures in contact, but there will always be a margin of impossibility to translate in all linguistic act. This is why, despite all the advances in the field of computer science, there will never exist a trustworthy translation software.

This is a generic observation about translations in general, good or bad. In the case of audiovisual translation, this work is badly paid e done within a short period of time, sometimes by foreign language students. There are great translations in the field of literature, but nobody can expect that cinema hires an Octavio Paz or a José Saramago to subtitle a movie. Behar (2004: 80) tells that, while he was in Paris, he saw the American movie *Cross of Iron* (*A Cruz de Ferro*, 1977). There was a sequence in which a battalion of German army, sheltered in their trenches, tensely waited the arrival of the enemy and the beginning of the combat. Suddenly, one of them sees something at a distance and shouts: “*Tanks, tanks!*”. At the same time, subtitles in French translated: “*Merci, merci!*”. This is why subtitles and dubbing can many times cause incomprehension and strangeness between cultures.

Moreover, the fact that many times the translator cannot see the movie he/she is translating, working only with the transcription text, results in serious mistakes. Words and expressions have a wide semantic field, so it is necessary to know the context in which they are said in order to translate them properly. A teacher confessed (cf. Béhar, 2004: 84) that in the movie *Boyz n the Hood* (1991), a character frequently said “*five thousand*”, especially in situations in which he was running away. The expression itself was hard to translate, but the translator wasn’t able to understand why this was said in contexts where numeric expressions didn’t fit. Later, when he could finally see the movie, he found out that the car used by the character was an Audi 5000 and that every time the character had to run, he immediately thought of his car.

But the translation issue in the field of audiovisual does not depend only on linguistic precepts, difficulties related to semantics or professional limitations. The relationship among languages is usually asymmetric and heterogeneous not only due to linguistic reasons. Slangs, expressions and jargons used by specific groups, words that have specific meanings in certain communities, neologisms resulting from fusion or contamination of cultures are very difficult to translate due to the fact that the translator is not part of the groups that are speaking and,

therefore, does not dominate their linguistic code, or because there are no equivalents in the target language. In some white communities of the United States, to call a Caucasian person a nigger may not be offensive, as we can think at first, but a way of calling a friend. In some communities of Hispanic America, to call someone *gordita* is not necessarily impolite, but an expression that shows affection. In audiovisual translations, expressions used by certain groups are usually reduced to the standard speech of an official language. Besides, translation can be a very useful resource for censorship regarding loud, aggressive or pornographic languages. There is a lot of swearing in movies that deal with gangs, poor communities, brothels and violent places, especially words that refer to body waste, sexual organs and practices. In English, for example, the words ‘fuck’ and ‘shit’ more commonly said by characters from these social groups and disappear in most translations. When the character Frank Booth in *Blue Velvet* (1986) screams to his wife: “Don’t fuck look at me”, the Portuguese subtitle says only: “*Não me olhe*” (Don’t look at me).

It is very common the use of subtitles and dubbing to adapt the original text to rules, prejudices, interdictions and prohibitions of the target language. During the Brazilian dictatorship, Eisenstein’s movie *Aleksandr Nevskii* (1938) was granted permission to be exhibited only after any kind of reference to Russia was removed: Russians were referred to as Slavs. When *Thérèse* (1986) was shown in the United States, the subtitles in English received severe critics from American newspapers. The main character, who later would be Saint Theresa of Lisieux, is talking to Christ and, in the English translation she refers to him as ‘he’ or ‘thine’. The American press said that since Christ is a sacred name, the correct way to write it should be ‘He’ or ‘Thine’, otherwise, the interaction would be too intimate and it could seem that Thérèse was intending to have an affair with the son of God (Béhar, 2004: 85). But the truth is that Alain Cavalier’s movie does work with the ambiguity of the character, which is divided between sacred and profane, and the subtitle, which was exceptional in this case, intends to maintain it. So, audiovisual translation, in some cases, can be a tool for “domesticating” alterity. It is through it that noise, violence and strangeness towards the other are erased to result in consumption of culture.

Many times, the use of foreign languages in cinema is already the result of a stereotype process. When the foreigner is seen with seriousness in cinema, the native voice is respected and there is the need to translate its discourse. But it is more common that the voice of the other (the one who does not speak the same language of the movie) be simply imitated through guttural noises that mimic stereotypes about the way the other speaks. In some moments of *The Great Dictator* (1940), when Chaplin plays the role of Hitler and makes a speech in front of a crowd, he is not really speaking German, but a German-like stereotype, many times based on oral distortions that were generalized through discriminative or racist jokes. In most part of American westerns movies, Indian characters (usually played by Caucasian actors) don’t speak any Indigenous idiom, but produce stereotyped noises that correspond to the way white men hears (and reduces) the voice of the other. In *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984), the main characters whose action is developed in the first plan speak in English, but native Indians we see at the back only produce guttural noises that imitate Hindu or what producers think it is Hindu. In all these cases, the voice of the other is not translated in subtitles or dubbing in order to make clear that nothing is really being said and for the stereotype to be noticed for comic reasons (in Chaplin’s case) or discrimination (in *Indiana Jones’ and American westerns’* case). In those cases, the vast linguistic diversity of a people is reduced to clichés and common-places that denounce audiovisual producers’ (or local distributors’) hidden intentions of confining the other inside prejudicial linguistic frames in order to confirm their own superiority.

WHAT IS A FOREIGN MOVIE?

It is evident that translation operations are only necessary for the so-called “foreign movies”. But I frequently ask myself: what is a foreign movie? In the United States, video rental shops usually divide movies in categories: comedy, drama, suspense, horror, children, western, erotic etc. but this classification is only made for American movies, therefore, English-speaking. movies from other countries are not included in this division and are grouped in the generic category of “foreign movies”. It is fine that things work like that in the United States. I don’t know how this would work in Iran, where most of American movies are forbidden, or in India, which has an enormous cinematography of their own, but it is surprising to see that most countries follow the American standard division. In Brazil or Argentina, for example, movies are divided into «comedies», «dramas», «westerns» etc., but they are only applied to North-American movies. Movies made in Brazil have their own category, called “Brazilian movies”, and the same goes for movies produced in Argentina. Movies produced in other parts of the world are generically called «foreign movies». It is curious that North-American movies are not considered to be foreign in Brazil, in Argentina or in the rest of the world, not even in Cuba, where – surprisingly – the same classification is kept. On the other hand, since they are put in a separate category, Brazilian movies in Brazil and Argentinean movies in Argentinean are considered to be, in a certain way, “foreign”. Brazilian or Argentinean comedies are not considered to be “comedies” as the other, but respectively “Brazilian movies” or “Argentinean movies”. It is a way of being foreign in your own country.

In the phonographic industry, things are not different. If we enter a music store, its products will be divided in «jazz», «rock», «blues», «techno» etc. but the only albums considered are North-American (and British, since they are also hegemonic in the field of music). Music from other countries is put under the generic category «world music», which is a more subtle way of saying «foreign music». North-Americans will never make «world music», even if they want to, except Indians, immigrants, tourists, crazy people and convicts, who are foreign in the United States. Brazilian samba and Argentinean tango will always be «world music», except in Brazil and Argentina, respectively. On the other hand, «jazz», «rock» or «blues» are not considered to be «world music» by Brazilian and Argentineans, even when interpreted by North-Americans or British. «World music» is a sort of music *chinoiserie*, the natural music from peoples around the world interpreted with “exoticism”. There is no problem in people liking Andalusian «flamenco», Japanese «shakuhachi», Indian «raga». The problem starts when this taste defines only a consumption-oriented interest of lovers of exoticism and «chinoiserie», which is unaware of the force and truth that define these music genres as living expressions of specific cultures.

With the internationalization of cinema, which started in the 1960’s, movies started to be produced in two different versions, in English for international distribution and in local language for national distribution. So, it was possible to escape from the stigma of “foreign movie”, which restricted the market. In Luchino Visconti’s *Il Gattopardo* (The Leopard, 1963) Burt Lancaster speaks English in the shooting and is later dubbed in the Italian version. Claudia Cardinale speaks Italian in the shooting and is later dubbed in the English version. Actually, the two actors never dialogue in the shooting of the movie, they read their roles, each one in his/her own language. Therefore, there is no original version of *Il Gattopardo*. All versions are dubbed, the movie is foreign in any country, including Italy, but in the United States, he was one of the nominees for the Oscar in the category “Best Movie” (and not “Best foreign movie”) and, in video rental shops, it is put under the section «drama» and not « foreign movie ». In 1997, Luc Besson provoked a scandal in France when he directed the movie *The Fifth Element*, in 1997,

whose original title is in English and with British and North-American actors speaking in English. The movie was shown with subtitles in French in its own country! In these globalized audiovisual times, it's impossible to receive the stigma "foreign movie" and stay at the back aisle of the video rental shop, the movie has to be in English and its main characters have to be played by actors who are from English-speaking countries.

Although this seems to be a tendency of a more market-oriented cinema, this practice is actually being more common in all spheres of culture, even and mainly in the most refined ones. Many videoartists all around the world have adopted English as the universal language. In video festivals it is uncommon to listen to another language inside exhibition rooms. Even the original titles of the videos are in English. And, in general, when these artists are going to make their audiovisual documentation of their works, they do it directly in English and don't even think about subtitling in any other language. When we access the internet, it is almost inevitable that we turn our linguistic button to English, the official language of the cyberspace. To use any other language would be taking the risk of being considered a "foreign surfer" who produces pages in weird characters in a "foreign website". It also means taking the risk of not being understood and condemned to ostracism.

It has always bothered me the fact that a whole generation of brilliant writers and philosophers from the Czech Republic (Franz Kafka, Karel Kosik, Vilém Flusser, among others) have written most part of their work in German, official language at the time in which the country was politically subordinated to the monarchy of the Habsburgs of Vienna. Czech was the language spoken on the streets; it was useful for grocery shopping or to talk to maids. But literature and thought could only be conceived in German, no one even thought of using Czech, a language that lost its significant density exactly due to not being spoken. The current generalization of English reminds me of the generalization of the German language during the Austro-Hungarian Empire. We become foreigners in our own country, our language is no longer useful and our culture does not express us anymore. Portuguese and Spanish are only useful to go to the supermarket and to talk to maids. Afraid of being foreigners and of being discriminated for it, we let ourselves blend in a vague universality whose Esperanto is the English language. The excuse is always communicability, but do we still have something to communicate when we are no longer anyone?

ACCENTED CINEMA

Cinema has always been considered a universal art, due to the (mistaken) assumption that the language of images is universally understood, but this so-called universality disappears when characters start to talk. Suddenly, in the 1920's, we find out that if cinema becomes "spoken", it must face the planet's linguistic diversity. But, even though in movie theaters, most languages that constitute the universal glossalalia have been manifested in bigger or smaller proportions (in television, always smaller), the truth is that the official language of cinema is English. Hollywood made us believe that, in cinema, Egyptians Pharaohs, Roman gladiators, Russian czars and Japanese samurais have always spoken English, just like in opera times, when the Brazilian Indian Peri and the Ethiopian slave Aida always sang in Italian. In American science fiction series, when a creature from another planet appears, the human (I mean, American) character always talks to it in English: "*Who are you? Where are you from?*". A Hollywood screenwriter doesn't even consider the possibility that a Martian or Saturnine may not speak English or may not even speak at all. In conventional cinema, everybody speaks English, including Indian, African or Latin-American characters, even though they keep an accent that identifies their ethnic-geographic difference.

However, as a result of the globalization process, peoples and nations that were closed in their territory started to have more mobility and visibility, at the same time in which diasporas and communities in exile are more common everywhere, due to economic or political reasons. So, a cinema that intends to be synchronized with this movement emerges and is sometimes produced within this movement by people who are living the diasporic experience. Hamid Naficy (2001) calls these movies produced in these communities in movement “accented cinema”. If hardcore cinema is considered to be universal and without accent (which means English-speaking), movies produced by exilic and diasporic subjects have, on the other hand, strong accent. This accent comes mostly from the directors’ state of displacement and their collective, artisanal way of production, which is strange to audiovisual, than from the characters’ accent itself. In this sense, the accented cinema is at the same time local and global: it denounces the current cinematographic production practices and, at the same time, profits from them, participating sometimes in official circuits (cinema international festival, exhibition rooms, distribution in DVD, etc).

Most of accented movies are not spoken in only one main source-language because they are produced in the interstice of various cultures and languages at the same time. The “glossolalic” characteristics of these movies, or, the fact that they are spoken in different languages at the same time, mixed or not, make an intense subtitling activity almost mandatory. The subtitle starts to be an intrinsic part in the movie to the point of sometimes interfering in the design of the cinematographic frame, transforming it in a calligraphy page. The previously mentioned Muntadas’ project *On Translation: Fear* was aimed at being exhibited simultaneously in televisions of border countries that have migration and repression problems. In the case of *Fear/Miedo*, all parts in which Spanish is spoken have subtitles in English and parts in which English is spoken have subtitles in Spanish. The same took place in *Miedo!*, in which Spanish-speaking parts have subtitles in Arab, and vice-versa. In this case, it is important to observe that subtitles are an intrinsic part of the video. There is no version of the video without them and, actually, the movie was conceived because of them. When the video is shown in any other country and needs subtitles in a third language, English and Spanish subtitles are kept, because in this case translation is part of the approximation process Muntadas’ project wants to promote.

So, subtitles can be structurally integrated to images and sounds, in particular cases, to the point of producing an interesting counterpoint and introduce new sense relations derived from translation. Under this perspective, Simone Michelin’s vídeo *Lonesome* (2004) is interesting. It is almost a videoclip about Elvis Presley’s song *Are You Lonesome Tonight?*, and shows a Korean couple taking pictures in front of the World Trade Center, a little while before the September 2001 disaster. One of the characteristics of the English language is that the majority of the words is neutral and, therefore, doesn’t make gender distinction. But, when translating to a Latin language, it is necessary to specify gender to words and to do so, it is necessary to observe the context in which words are being used, specially to whom or what they refer to. “My dear”, for example, can be translated as *meu querido* or as *minha querida*, depending on the gender of the person. The same happens with “sweetheart” or “lonesome”. In Michelin’s video, subtitles in Portuguese (in French, in the international version) translate correctly Elvis Presley’s song, but in a completely unpredictable way, assuming that the addressee of the song is a man and putting in the masculine all the words that are neutral in English. So, what was a romantic and heterosexual song is transformed in a vigorous declaration of homosexuality. So, without altering the original meaning of the song, Michelin reinterprets it in a completely new perspective, using subtitles that translate the original speech in an unexpected way.

Still according to Naficy (2001), one of the characteristics of the accented cinema is its “epistolarity”. Since actions take place in different countries at the same time and involve attempts of contact between the ones who leave and the ones who stay, these movies use various resources of epistolary communication (letter, phone, e-mail etc.) that end up by configuring the basic structure of its formal construction. Naficy believes that exile and epistolarity are constitutively linked because both are conducted by notions of distance, separation, absence, loss and, at the same time, by the desire of making bridges between these numberless ditches.

In this sense, Sandra Kogut’s documentary *Um Passaporte Húngaro* (A Hungarian Passport 2003) is a good example. It documents the director’s *via crucis* to obtain Hungarian nationality after being submitted to a Kafka-like process of bureaucracies and interdictions. Exiled in France, Kogut tries to get in touch with the Hungarian embassy and with Hungarian Police authorities, besides being constantly asking relatives in Brazil to organize her documents. All is done by phone and intensive use of the answering machine, which ends up by becoming one of the main “characters” of the plot. At the same time, the movie is spoken in French, English, Hungarian and Portuguese, which therefore, demands the frequent use of subtitles in different languages and many times translators following the director’s Odissey and translating live other people’s speech.

A radical solution is not translating and let different publics experiment the difference. An HBO television program called *Habla* (directed by Alberto Ferreras and Trina Bardusco) and aimed at the Latin-American community in the United States found an intelligent solution to the problem of spectators who had difficulty with English or Spanish languages: the program is spoken in “Spanglish” (mix of English and Spanish) and, therefore, does not need translation.

A different experience was carried out by Sandra Kogut in her movie *Parabolic People* (1991). The movie was done with testimonies collected in different parts of the world and all people speak in their own language. When editing, Kogut put various parallel «windows» on the screen and let different testimonies overlap one another. Not yet satisfied with this, she also overlapped texts and images in many different languages. The final result is a globalized Babel, with everyone speaking simultaneously in different languages and texts on the screen all the time, in English, in Portuguese, Spanish, French, Japanese and Russian, sometimes translating one another, sometimes leaving this task to the spectators. A video like this one is impossible to be subtitled, because there would not be enough space on the screen for so many simultaneous “translations”.

In the beginning of the 20th Century, Russian formalists, especially one of them, Victor Chklóvski (1973: 26), formulated the “strangeness” (*остранение*) theory. They defended a group of artistic construction techniques whose purpose was to disturb our daily perceptions and force sensibility to “find odd” the symbolic arrangement that is presented to us: the difficult and tortuous discourse, the unfamiliar point of view were supposed to prevent the innocent involvement and demand the reader/spectator to make efforts to decode a “text” that is apparently refractory and strange. The idea of writing books and make movies in a foreign way by using aesthetics that are not used in the market, techniques that are not part of the “quality” and with languages that are unknown even in places where they come from. To speak strange languages, as do the Pentecostals or like *Themroc* (1973), Claude Faraldo’s unusual movie in which the actor Michel Picolli walks on the streets of Paris roaring like a wild animal and shouting incomprehensible and untranslatable words. Or, to make “silent” movies such as done by Jacques Tati, the only international movie-maker in its strict sense, which do not need subtitles or dubbing, even though its movies remain confined to the “foreign movies” section at

the back of video rental shops. To be strange or foreign in your own house, country or in any other. Never exotic.

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