The Translator

Multimodal Transcription in the Analysis, Translation and Subtitling of Italian Films

Christopher J. Taylor[a]

[a] SSLMIT, University of Trieste, Italy
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Multimodal Transcription in the Analysis, Translation and Subtitling of Italian Films

CHRISTOPHER J. TAYLOR
SSLMIT, University of Trieste, Italy

Abstract. *Multimodal transcription, particularly as devised by Thibault (2000), provides an effective methodological tool in the analysis of audio-visual text. The method involves breaking down a film into single frames/shots/phases, and analyzing all the semiotic modalities operating in each frame/shot/phase. The purpose of the present article is to show how this methodology can be adopted (and adapted) to formulate strategies for subtitling, particularly in relation to the translation of Italian film material into English, but also into German, French and Spanish. The method provides insights into how meaning is 'made' (in the Hallidayan sense of the expression) via the combination of various semiotic modalities, and thus how the verbal message in the form of subtitles interacts with other sources of meaning. Adopting a modified version of the Thibault model in the search for reasoned translation choices is put forward as a valid methodological approach, at least in teaching how multimodal texts work and how subtitling practice can be integrated into this model. As a tool for the professional it is, as so far developed, time-consuming and not commercially viable on a cost-benefit basis, but this article attempts to show that as an instrument for sensitizing translation students to the particular demands of multimodal translation, it takes us a step further along the road to optimizing subtitling strategies.*

In the search for suitable and useful tools for the analysis of multimodal film text, and with a view to exploiting that analysis for the purposes of translation, an extremely important development is marked by Paul Thibault (2000) and Anthony Baldry's devising of the multimodal transcription. The latter, which involves breaking down a film into single frames/shots/phases and analyzing all the semiotic modalities operating in each frame/shot/phase, provides an extremely effective methodological tool in the analysis of audio-visual text. The method consists in dividing a videotext into individual frames, which are then arranged in sequence, vertically or horizontally,

flanked by boxes arranged in columns or rows that systematically describe the various semiotic modalities of which the film is composed. The purpose of the present article is to show how this methodology can be adopted (and adapted) to formulate strategies for subtitle translation, particularly in relation to the translation of Italian film material into English, but also into German, French and Spanish. Basically, the Thibault model is slightly simplified, depending on the text and the particular level of delicacy required for the analysis, while still providing a breakdown of the various semiotic modalities at work. A study of the transcription and its description of the multimodal text in its entirety provides a basis for making reasoned choices in translating the verbal element of the text.

In the above-mentioned article, Thibault analyzes a television advertising text for an Australian bank (see Figure 1), providing a meticulous description in successive columns which shows the following:

(1)   the duration in seconds of each frame and the chronological order of the presentation, marked by the letter T (time)
(2)   the visual frames themselves
(3)   a description of the components of the visual image portrayed in terms of the camera position (CP), the horizontal (HP) or vertical (VP) perspective, the visual focus (i.e. gaze vectors – VF), the virtual distance of the shot (D), the visually salient items (VS), the secondary items that are visible on screen and which provide some meaningful content, for example the clothes people wear (VC = visual collocation), the colours used (CR), and the coding orientation (CO), describing whether the scene is natural or in some way surreal (see Bernstein 1990).
(4)   the kinesic action of the participants, including body movements, facial gestures, etc.
(5)   the complete soundtrack (dialogue, music, sounds, etc.)
(6)   a metafunctional interpretation of how the film creates meaning as it unfolds over time.

Superimposed on this analysis is a breakdown of the action into shots, the traditional filmic unit where the transition between one shot and another is dictated by the camera moving to a different position, and finally into phases and sub-phases following the Gregory model (2001), within which various semiotic modalities are seen to function together as a set before giving way to a new set of modalities, again following an identifiable 'transition' between them.

This tripartite division into frames, shots and phases represents, at one level, a breaking up of the film 'text' into analyzable units. In the case of frames, this breaking up is effected fairly arbitrarily in that the resulting stills can be of varying duration depending on the degree of delicacy required for the analysis. A fast moving feature film may well require frames of even one

second's duration while a slow moving documentary, where the scenes change only slowly, can be successfully analyzed using longer stretches. At another level, the tripartite division represents an attempt at a 'grammatical parsing' of a film text, especially in the analysis of shots and phases. Shots, which are more easily measurable in that they are the visual units which change when the camera moves to a new position, can be seen as multimodal textual building blocks, while in the case of the phase, transposing Gregory's analysis of written and spoken texts to the multimodal plane, the parsing of the film can be seen as a way of dissecting a multimodal text into converging semiotic chunks. Gregory does not envisage a grammatically hierarchical arrangement of the parts of a text but rather a more abstract linear development (he speaks of a conveyor belt).

> The scale of abstraction … is that of delicacy, not rank. Phasal analysis distinguishes and plots similarities and differences of meaning, from the general to the particular, in the continuum of communication; it strives to leave the continuum more or less intact. It seeks to characterise discourse as process rather than as object … It provides a basis for the investigation of how speakers construct reality. (Gregory, 2001:342)

Transferring this concept to the multimodal text, a film can be analyzed as a series of phases, sub-phases, etc. at ever greater levels of delicacy, many of which intertwine as they interrupt each other in the unfolding of the story/ plot/action.

Figure 1: Thibault's analysis of a television advertising text

1. Multimodal transcription and subtitling

A variant on the Thibault methodology illustrated above has since been adopted by this author in formulating strategies for subtitling, particularly in relation to the translation of Italian and English film material, but also German, French, Spanish and Serbo-Croat. Taking the multimodal transcription grid as a starting point, I decided to reduce the very high level of detail in the original and dispense with some of the more finely tuned descriptors (for example, the measurements of volume and pitch, the marking of rhythm groups, etc.) and the final 'metafunctional interpretation' column. This is not, of course, to suggest that the interpretative element is not useful; on the contrary, the final column then became available for the insertion of subtitles, based on a global interpretation of all the semiotic modalities present in the text. This methodology was thus designed to provide insights into how meaning is 'made', in the Hallidayan (1994) sense of the expression, via the combination of various semiotic modalities, and thus how the verbal message interacts with other meaning resources. This in turn would provide justification for adopting certain translation strategies in formulating subtitles, particularly those involving condensation, deletion or decimation, to use Gottlieb's (1992) terminology.

The main underlying theoretical basis of this work lies partly in the functional-systemic tradition, as expounded in Thibault's (2000) metafunctional interpretation, and partly in the Kress & Van Leeuwen (1996, 2001) approach to visual grammar, where the various meaning-making elements are seen to integrate with one another. Indeed, Kress & Van Leeuwen (1996:182-83) see the composition of the visual elements in, for example, a film (they refer to Bergman's 1961 movie *Through a Glass Darkly*) as relating "representational and interactive meanings". Further, they identify two semiotic integration codes, the "code of spatial composition" and the "code of temporal composition", which they also denote as "rhythm": film as a medium utilizes both these codes, with the addition of a verbal (spoken) component and other sound elements ranging from classical music to slamming doors. The idea of 'addition', however, is misleading as a way of describing the kind of integration that occurs in a multimodal text. Thibault's metaphors of "wave-like" and "chains of interacting cohesive elements" (2000:320) better illustrate the kind of combining of semiotic resources that is involved.

From this it can be seen that the meaning potential of a film far transcends the spoken dialogue, and that any translation of film material should pay heed to the other semiotic modalities interacting with the verbal. Multimodal transcription offers a means of tracking down the meaning-making resources and providing a basis for a reasoned approach to subtitling. The research carried out using this methodology has involved the study of various screen genres – feature films, advertisements, news programmes,

cartoons, etc., but this paper will focus on the more extended exemplars, including the feature film *La vita è bella* directed by Roberto Benigni, the popular Italian TV soap opera *Un posto al sole*, as well as the popular American cartoon series *The Flintstones*. Multimodal transcription can assist the subtitler in many ways, and different text types require very different degrees of analysis. The three examples chosen reflect this.

1.1 La vita è bella

In Benigni's film, the analysis is particularly useful in the process of 'spotting', that is deciding on the exact moment to insert and remove the titles. The space and time restraints involved in subtitling (Ivarsson 1992) dictate that great care must be taken in the timing of these operations. In *La vita è bella*, the situational components of time, place, culture, etc. – what Gregory (2001: 319) refers to as the "communicating community culture" – are carefully portrayed so as to 'set' the overriding message that it is possible to resist the most dreadful violence and cruelty, at least in the eyes of a child, through love and imagination.

Perhaps the most well-known scene in the film is the one set in the concentration camp hut just after the arrival of the protagonist Guido and his young son Giosué. The boy is more than a little apprehensive about the situation, finding himself in a prison-type hut surrounded by emaciated men in a gloomy, doom-laden atmosphere. Benigni's brilliant comic invention, Guido, decides to do all he can to allay the boy's fears, and when a German officer accompanied by soldiers enters the room to lay down the camp regulations, Guido volunteers to be the 'interpreter'. His 'interpretation' (he knows no German) is a total invention: what emerges from his lips is a list of instructions for an elaborate game, the prize for which is a tank. His son is, at least temporarily, relieved and even eager to take part in the imaginary competition.

A multimodal transcription of this entire scene (see Figure 2 for a short section thereof) shows how it can be divided into 156 frames of 1-second duration, 29 shots of varying lengths, and 3 main phases (the entry of the soldiers; Guido's performance; the general and personal feeling of relief at the success of the operation), characterized by considerable fluctuations in tension and anxiety. The detailed transcription highlights all of the factors contributing to the many-faceted meaning-making whole, as the various semiotic modalities are seen to operate in unison.

The scene is pregnant with foreboding, but midway through shot 8, the second phase begins as Guido approaches the officer with his hand up and turns to begin his 'interpretation'. The tension eases palpably as Guido settles into his act: however incongruous his performance, and particularly that of the other prisoners who listen expressionless but with evident connivance,

T	Visual frame	Visual image	Kinesic action	Soundtrack	Subtitle
28		CP static HP frontal D medium VF Guido > officer VS Guido & officer contrasted clothing CR blue/grey CO natural	Guido moves eyes to left. Officer's lips move as he begins to speak.	(officer) Ihr seid nur aus einem einzigen Grund	No title (as in original)
29		CP static HP frontal D medium/long VF towards Guido VS Giosuè VC prisoners, bunks CR blue/grey/brown CO natural, suffused	No movement	in dieses Lager transportiert	
30		CP static HP frontal D medium/long VF towards Guido VS Giosuè VC prisoners, bunks CR blue/grey/brown CO natural, suffused	No movement	worden Volume f. Tempo medium (pause)	
31		CP static HP frontal D medium VF Guido > officer VS Guido v soldiers contrasted clothes CR blue/grey/brown CO natural	Guido turns towards officer, begins to speak.	(Guido) Si vince a mille punti… il primo	The first one to get 1,000 points… Le prenier qui obtient 1,000 points…
32		CP static HP frontal D medium VF Guido > prisoners VS Guido v soldiers contrasted clothes CR blue/grey/brown CO natural	Guido turns back. Begins to gesticulate.	Classificato vince un carro armato. Volume f. Tempo medium (pause)	wins a real tank gagne un vari char.

Figure 2. Multimodal transcription of scene from La vita è bella

the trick works (the officer does not know Italian). Nonetheless the nervous glances Guido throws at the German, and the latter's rueful expressions at Guido's changes in tempo and timbre, keep the pressure up. The contrast between facial expressions and body movements, particularly between the immovable Germans and the bemused but obedient prisoners, the immensely mobile Guido and the excited boy, is highlighted by camera perspective. What is interesting, and crucial for the translator, is that this performance actually does emulate the work of a real interpreter. The timing, the pauses, the tone, the volume and the rhythm are those of the professional, considerably assisted by the staccato style of the officer. The difference between this and a normal interpreting situation is that on this occasion the audience,

both on and off screen, are not only listening, but watching. The transfer to another language, even in the form of subtitles, must adhere to the standard that has been set. The transcription of scenes of this type can provide useful guidelines for the subtitler. In terms of 'spotting', the entries and exits of the titles, given the previously-mentioned 'interpreting' nature of the exchange between the German officer and Guido (the German's contribution remains in the original language, as in the original film), the transcription provides precise points of reference. The detailed layout gives the subtitler an accurate picture of, for example, how facial expressions and body movements are matched, and how shot changes are linked to utterances.

In a scene of this type, the interpersonal component is extremely important and is carried largely by the voice prosodics and the kinesic action, all captured in detail in the multimodal transcription. Armed with this information, the subtitler can also carry out trimming operations and omit verbal elements when meaning is conveyed by some other semiotic modality. But this aspect is even better illustrated in the following example.

1.2 Un posto al sole

The popular Italian soap opera *Un posto al sole* (A Place in the Sun) is set in Naples and conforms to the conventional soap opera pattern of exploring the relationships of families and friends and the interaction of different groups within a single environment.

In one typical episode involving the central Poggi family, a row takes place between father and daughter, while mother is attempting to play the role of mediator. The row is about daughter Angela's decision to go and live with her boyfriend, a rather ambivalent character of whom the father does not approve. This family spat involves a great deal of non-verbal meaning-making; although there is no accompanying music after the opening sequence (in which the familiar theme tune sets the scene for the words UN POSTO AL SOLE to appear on a sky-blue background, and one of the Os turns into a bright sun to emphasize the fact that we are in the sunny Mediterranean – see Figure 3), there is an inordinate amount of movement, specifically facial and body movement. The stereotypical southern Italian penchant for gesture, at times histrionic gesture (the father, in his anger, throws a pile of papers on the floor), is exploited to the full. Similarly, a great deal is said, or shouted, as tempers flare and the atmosphere degenerates. Again typically, given both the geo-sociological setting and the particular situation of the 'row' genre, the words follow one another at a rapid rate, at times not properly formulated as frustration sets in. This is a scenario that calls for some judicious subtitling.

The scene begins (see Figure 3) with Angela sitting disconsolately, yet defiantly, in an armchair while her father Renato begins to pace up and down the living room, evidently in a bad mood. Before anyone speaks, a certain

amount of meaning is conveyed. Even to the first time viewer of the programme (a rare animal), it is clear from the tidy and tasteful furnishings, and the way the people are dressed, that this is a bourgeois family household, and therefore that even in a charged atmosphere, the kind of language used will not transgress certain limits of decency (quite apart from any question of self-imposed censorship for a peak-time television programme). We are, however, primed for some unpleasantness, and probably verbal unpleasantness.

T		Visual image	Kinesic action	Soundtrack	Subtitles
1		CP stationary HP frontal D long VC sun & sea VS title CR blues, yellow, orange CO hyperreal	The words UN POSTO descend from top of screen while the words AL SOLE ascend from the bottom. They draw close to form title of soap. Tempo slow	Keyboard plays the familiar theme tune of the porgramme. Volume ff	
2		CP stationary HP frontal D long VC sun & sea VS title CR blues, yellow, orange CO hyperreal	The 'O' of the word SOLE turns into a blinding sun.	idem	
3		CP stationary HP oblique D medium VC furniture of bourgeois family living room VS Angela, upset CO natural VF close, self involvement.	Angela sitting in armchair. Eyes closed. Left hand raised to forehead. Right arm resting on chair.	(silence)	
4		CP moving back HP oblique D medium VC furnishings VS Angela, upset; Renato with angry expression CO natural VF Angela, averting gaze; Renato, off screen	Angela sitting in armchair. Looks right Left hand still on forehead. Right arm resting on chair. Renato standing. Left hand on hip. Right hand by his side. Head turned slightly left.	Senti Giulia. Io forse non ho capito bene.	(maximum) Listen, Giulia. I'm not with you. (minimum) Giulia,
5		CP moving back HP frontal D medium long VC more furnishings VS Angela, surly; Renato, remonstrating CO natural VF Angela, still looking away; Renato, looking at Angela.	Angela sitting in armchair, averting her eyes. Looks right, bending head further. Renato standing. Gesturing with both hands.	Questo non è un desiderio. Questa è una pazzia.	(maximum) This isn't a wish. This is sheer madness! (minimum) This is madness!

Figure 3. Multimodal transcription of scene from Un posto al sole

As Renato progresses across the room, he suddenly turns to address the previously unseen Giulia, his wife, who is now brought into focus sitting in the middle of the settee in the foreground. She maintains a mid position

throughout the scene, either on the settee or getting up and positioning herself, symbolically, between the two antagonists. All this is seen even more clearly in the opening frames of the multimodal transcription.

Renato says to Giulia, in an already flustered voice:

> *Senti Giulia, Io forse… non ho capito bene. Questo non è un desiderio. Questa è una pazzia!*

A total translation of this line, adopting the strategy that Gottlieb refers to as "transfer" (1992:166), would provide the following English subtitled line:

> *Listen Giulia, I'm not with you… This isn't a wish, it's sheer madness!*

Notice that 'transfer' or total translation does not mean literal 'word-for-word' rendition, but a capturing of as much of the original message as possible, even if certain parts are redundant, repetitive or insignificant. There is always a place for this kind of film translation (which we shall now call maximum subtitling), especially for didactic purposes, where the time constraint is less crucial, in that a video recording can be frozen at any point or played back any number of times. However, in a scene like this one from *Un posto al sole*, time is a serious constraint and condensation procedures are called for. The look of angry bewilderment on Renato's face, and the tone of his voice, the first captured in the multimodal transcription, the second obvious in whatever language, tell us that he is not content with Giulia's role in this affair. The lexical item 'madness' is then enough to inform us of his displeasure at a situation yet to be revealed. The subtitles can thus be condensed:

> *Giulia…,*
> *this is madness!*

Giulia responds in the calm, relatively appeasing manner she will maintain throughout the scene:

> *Renato, calmati. Non partire in quarta come tuo solito.*
> *Cerchiamo di discutere… senza alterarci.*

The maximum subtitle, converting the Italian colloquial expression which literally means *Don't set off in fourth, as usual* to an equivalent colloquial expression in English, should be something like:

> *Renato, calm down. Don't go off the deep end, as usual. Let's try to talk about it, without losing our tempers.*

Giulia's hand movements and mildly exasperated expression, which the multimodal transcription shows in meticulous detail, show that she is

exhorting Renato to get a grip on himself, while he is showing, by his gesticulations and his pacing around, that he is losing that grip. A simple appeal is sufficient to convey this, and is important in that it establishes Giulia's temporary role as the peacemaker.

Renato, let's just talk.

A little later, as Angela joins the fray and asks why living with her boyfriend should be such a problem, Renato replies in a rather dramatic fashion, suggesting that the effect would be like a stab in the back:

Per me e tua madre è come se fosse una pugnalata!

Full translation*: for me and your mother it's as if it were a stab (in the back)*

This can be contracted effortlessly through pronoun use and a slight dampening of the melodrama:

For us...
It's a blow.

The melodrama, however, continues, as Angela rounds on her father, pouting and adopting a rather theatrical stance. She admonishes him:

Ohhh, come ti piace fare il drammatico! Non ho capito, mi hai chiesto tu quello che volevo!

In the second part of this speech, Angela deliberately, and slyly, changes the subject slightly. Here is the full translation and maximum subtitle:

Ohhh, how you love being so melodramatic! I don't follow, it was you who asked me what I wanted!

The key terms here are 'melodramatic' (the transcription clearly shows Renato's and Angela's theatricality) and 'want' (Renato continues to criticize her 'wanting' philosophy); the rest is expendable:

How melodramatic!
You asked what I wanted.

It is at this point that Renato loses linguistic control, as he realizes the trick being played regarding his purportedly asking his daughter what she wanted. He stumbles over his words, he loses grammatical consistency and loses the thread of his argument, as he tries to unravel the ambiguity:

*Ma che stai dicendo? Ma come puoi pensare che uno... ti dice quello
che volevi... per..per..per*

Gottlieb's strategy of "transcription" (1992:166) could be used here (this
involves transcribing not only words but also non-standard elements of
speech, e.g. a st..st..stutter), but is not necessary – the garbled delivery can
be heard and the exaggerated hand movements show his frustration. The
following could suffice as a minimum subtitle:

*What?!
I asked you what you wanted?!*

Unabashed, Angela senses she is gaining the upper hand and pursues the
point. As she continues to bait her father with what he thought she 'wanted',
she lists a number of items, theatrically pushing out her chest, screaming
and raising her eyes to heaven, to emphasize each one. The transcription
shows the exact point where each subtitled item should appear (Figure 4).

*No, no aspetta, fammi capire. Per farti contento che dovevo dirti?
Che volevo un auto, un cavallo..., oppure un vestitino bellino?*

36		CP stationary HP oblique D medium close VC pictures, door VS an angry Angela CO natural VF up and off screen	Angela standing. Mouth wide open. Eyes rolled upwards, in display of mock astonishment. Vol. f	Un cavallo!!	A horse!?
37		CP stationary HP oblique D medium close VC pictures, door VS a defiant Angela CO natural VF off screen towards Renato	Chest thrust forward. Eyes blazing. Mouth pouting before exploding.	Un vestitino bellino!!	A nice little dress!?

Figure 4. Multimodal transcription of Angela's list of items

The minimum subtitle needs to capture the play on the key term 'want' and
punctuate the 'list':

*Hang on! What should I have said?
I want a car... a horse... a nice little dress!*

The taunting use of the two Italian diminutives 'vestitino bellino' also needs
to emerge. Hence the 'nice little dress'.

Eventually, Giulia gets up from the settee and deliberately makes her way to stand between father and daughter, symbolically occupying the middle ground. Her speech is conciliatory, reflected by the tone of voice, the hand movements, and the long-suffering expression. She attempts a compromise:

> *Allora…, forse qui stiamo correndo tutti un pocchino troppo.*
> *Angela non ha le idee chiarissime… va bene?*
>
> *Lei sta pensando… a questa cosa … e magari tra qualche anno…*
> *quando avrà finito gli studi…*

The maximum subtitle reads as follows:

> *OK…, maybe we're all getting a little bit carried away here.*
> *Angela doesn't really know what she wants… Right?*
>
> *She's thinking about… this thing … and maybe in a few years time…*
> *when she leaves college…*

The opening 'OK' is important as it marks Giulia's determined entry into the argument, and coincides precisely with her rising from the settee. The ensuing part can be left out, especially as Giulia's back is turned to the camera as she speaks (for a full five frames in the transcription). As she turns to face the camera (frame no. 56 and shot no. 17 of this scene), she also initiates a new sub-phase, and thus the dialogue needs to be picked up again. It is also necessary to translate the end of her speech when she trots out the clichéd line 'when she leaves college…'. Thus the minimum subtitle might read as follows:

> *OK…*
> *Angela's not sure… when she leaves college…*

The last clause is also important because it provides Angela with the cue to foil her mother's attempts at conciliation, and to take an ironic swipe at her mother's euphemism 'questa cosa/this thing'.

> *Mamma, non ci prendiamo in giro.*
> *Io, 'questa cosa', la voglio fare subito e non c'è nessun motivo per aspettare.*

She uses the idiomatic expression 'prendere in giro/to make fun of', translatable in this instance by 'to mess about', providing the maximum title:

> *Mum, stop messing about!*
> *I want 'this thing' right now, and there's no reason at all why I should wait.*

Angela's forceful expression, in close-up, will allow a cutting down to 'Mum. Stop it!'. The play on 'this thing' would not have the same force in English and can be replaced by a simple' ìt', allied to the determination Angela shows with her contorted look:

Mum. Stop it!
I want it now.

So in the case of this scene from *Un posto al sole*, a fast-moving TV genre with fast-moving dialogue, the multimodal transcription can assist the subtitler in actually reducing the strictly verbal element, while maintaining the semantic content that is not covered by other semiotic modalities. While it could be argued that an experienced, talented subtitler (of whom there are very few in 'dubbing' countries such as Italy – see below) would automatically make the right decisions based on a judicious comparison of sound and image, it is my contention that those learning the art can best be made aware of the artistic and technical constraints facing the subtitler via the type of multimodal analysis described above.

2. Testing the use of subtitles

As an extra dimension in the soap opera example described above, two sets of subtitles were envisaged, which I labelled maximum and minimum. One of the purposes of this strategy was to help in experimentation designed to gauge the acceptability of subtitles in a non-subtitling country. Basically the larger countries in Europe, particularly in the centre-south, have traditionally opted for dubbing while the smaller countries, particularly in the north, have favoured subtitles. In order to ascertain whether subtitles would meet with the approval of various target groups, and what kind of subtitles would be preferred, it was decided at the University of Trieste to show both maximum and minimum versions of an American cartoon film (*The Flintstones*) to two groups of viewers, one consisting of 50 non-English speakers, the other of 50 competent speakers of English as a second language. The groups consisted exclusively of students, and thus were not particularly heterogeneous, but the essential criteria of language competence and lack of language competence were met. Both groups were asked to express their opinions, via a questionnaire, on the efficacy of the two versions in providing a suitable translation for what we shall term entertainment purposes. Both groups were very familiar with the series in question, though in dubbed, translated form. So although there was no problem of contextualization, it was assumed that the first group would prefer more detailed titles, while the second group would opt for the minimum version. In the event, although some individual preferences differed greatly, the broad picture showed that both groups preferred the minimum version. Indeed, 95% of the second group, those who

knew English, opted for the minimal version, but 74% of the non-English speakers also did so. On verbal questioning, and on perusal of the question-naires filled in by both groups, it transpired that the disturbance caused by having to concentrate on the maximum titles outweighed the benefits of the extra information.

Interestingly, several individuals pointed out that quite often the mean-ing could be gleaned from the contextualization created by the other semiotic modalities, so although by no means conclusive, this evidence would begin to suggest that, at least in terms of this particular genre, judicious reduction strategies receive greater appreciation than the use of more elaborate titles, at least by audiences looking to be entertained. The subtitling of the film clip had been carried out by students working on their graduation theses and had been based on multimodal transcriptions.The experiment is documented in an unpublished graduation thesis (Marchetti 2002).

Finally, I would like to add that the research described in this article is now continuing with the development of a computerized authoring system incorporating a 'relational database'. The latter consists of a large amount of film material tagged in terms of the various semiotic modalities operating in each 'text', and is designed to allow users to match dialogue/subtitles with other semiotic resources such as gesture or music. In this way it is hoped that it will be possible to identify patterns of use involving various semiotic modalities (for example particular facial expressions with particular linguis-tic expressions). This is, for the moment, work in progress, but multimodal transcription, as described in this article, has provided the basis for these future developments, and it is hoped that what has already been created can be seen as a useful tool for the aspiring subtitler in developing strategies for an ever more complete translation of multimodal texts.

CHRISTOPHER TAYLOR
SSLMIT, University of Trieste, Via Filzi 14, 34132, Trieste, Italy.
taylor@sslmit.univ.trieste.it

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