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Under-voiced and Over-voiced Characters in Film Translation

1. Introduction

My article explores the question of how and to what extent the characters' individual idiom can be reflected in subtitling and voice-over, the two methods of audiovisual translation popular in Poland. Presenting a case study of Ben Stiller's classic comedy *Zoolander* (2001) in two Polish versions, it focuses on the possibilities and limitations of oral and written translation modes in reconstructing the protagonists' distinct "voices."

Poland belongs to the block of Central and East European countries, where the dominant method of film and television translation is voice-over translation. However perplexing for the international audience (c.f. Woźniak 2008: 51), the concept of a single narrator "interpreting the lines of the entire cast" while "the volume of the original soundtrack is turned down" (Gottlieb 1998: 246) is nothing unusual for the Polish viewers, who allegedly favour this method over subtitling and dubbing (c.f. Garcarz 2007: 130–133). Yet, despite its omnipresence in the Polish media and its relative popularity with the Polish audience, voice-over has been remarkably unpopular with translation scholars, who have either completely neglected it, or stigmatized it as a method of no aesthetic value and consequently of no academic interest (Woźniak 2008: 51–2). As the Polish translato­logist Monika Woźniak stresses, this conspiracy of silence needs to be broken. I therefore hope that this study will be a small-scale contribution to a more global analysis of the Polish voice-over tradition.

2. Research Question

Below, I wish to compare the strategies used in the voiced-over¹ and subtitled² versions of Ben Stiller's comedy *Zoolander* in order to find out, what opportunities each method offers to reconstruct the characters' distinctive idiolect, i.e., "individual's special unique style" shaped by "linguistic mannerisms and stylistic idiosyncracies" (Simpson 2004: 102). Obviously, not all characters are lucky enough to be endowed with a distinctive idiom, as some film genres are more likely than others to individualise their protagonists through language. Thus, in thrillers, action and erotic films, it is mainly the characters' appearance and non-verbal behaviour that constitute their identity. In drama and comedy, by contrast, it is their verbal portrayal that counts. The characters owe their psychological and social identity to the combined efforts of screenwriters and actors. The former devise for each protagonist an individual mode of expression. The latter, on the other hand, breathe life into these paper creations, interpreting the lines and enriching them with specific phonetic and prosodic features. It is in those films that the verbal portrayal of characters becomes also the most important task for a translator.

In my article, I would like to discuss how the two Polish translators handled this task, preparing the voiced-over and the subtitled versions of Ben Stiller's comedy *Zoolander*, released in 2001 by Paramount Pictures. I have chosen this film for two reasons. First of all, it is a polyphonic masterpiece, written, directed and performed by Ben Stiller, who is an expert semiotician among American screenwriters and actors, a brilliant observer and parodist of the latest pop-cultural trends. The screenplay is sparking with verbal humour, and each character is endowed with a tailor-made idiolect, reflecting his/her social and intellectual identity.

The film portrays the American fashion scene and it is the cream of the cream, i.e., models, designers and clothing executives, who are a butt for Stiller's mild mockery. The eponymous Derek Zoolander (played by Ben Stiller) is a "really, really ridiculously good-looking" male supermodel, whose popularity starts to wane, as his younger colleague Hansel (played by Owen Wilson) wins the annual Male Model Award. Suffering from a serious personal and professional crisis, Derek starts to work for a devilish designer Mugatu, who brainwashes him to kill the Prime Min-

¹ Prepared by Agata Deka for ITI Home Video in 2001 and available on VHS.

² Prepared by an anonymous author for Paramount Home Entertainment in 2006 and available on DVD.

ister of Malaysia, because he promised to raise the minimal wages for Malaysian sweatshop workers, who manufacture all designer clothes.

The absurd plot, ripe with conspiracy theories and intertextual allusions, allows Stiller to present a motley crew of colourful, memorable characters, united by the glamorous world of fashion and media, yet individualized by characteristic mannerisms and linguistic idiosyncrasies. Verbally, the comedy resembles a box of chocolates: all protagonists are sweet, but each has a different stylistic flavour.

What the characters have in common is the social and professional milieu they represent. They mostly belong to the fashion pack of models, designers, stylists, journalists and celebrities, and use a professional jargon sometimes described as *fashionese* – a variety of language characterized by the use of specialist terminology related to clothing and make-up, as well as numerous loanwords, blends and abbreviations.

Although most of the characters in the film use this professional jargon, each gives it an individual stylistic tone, recreating a different fashion pack stereotype. Thus, in the film we encounter the exaggerated communicative styles of a **trendbot** (as represented by Derek, who speaks with Marilyn Monroe's accent); a **hippie** (represented by Hansel, who speaks surfer slang) and a **creative** (represented by the devilish designer Mugatu, who speaks like a typical design visionary). Obviously, one of the most important tasks of the Polish translators is reconstructing this stylistic variation to achieve a comical effect.

The other reason for choosing this particular film for my research was personal curiosity. Having seen the film in the voiced-over version, I was convinced it was most hilarious. Subsequently, I came across the subtitled version, and much to my disappointment, I found it less amusing, in spite of the fact that I could hear the original soundtrack, which made the experience aesthetically more pleasing. Hence, I wished to explain my impressions and compare the two versions in detail, analyzing the strategies used in translation to recreate the characters' individual mode of expression.

3. Reconstructing Idiolect in Subtitling and Voice-over

Comparing the two versions, I was conscious of the fact that each method offered the translators different tools. I wished to find out, which are more useful in reconstructing the characters' distinctive "voice." Is it the **di-**

asemiotic and **synchronous** subtitles (Gottlieb 1998: 245)? They do not interfere with the auditory channel and hence – provide access to the original intonation and prosody. But they also transform speech to writing and involve radical text reduction to meet the perceptual requirements of the audience. One might therefore suspect them of compressing and smoothing out the characters' stylistic idiosyncrasies. Indeed, scholars often accuse the subtitles of having the “levelling effect,” as “features of speech which are in any way non-standard tend to be eliminated” (Hatim and Mason 1997: 79) to simplify the dialogue and adapt it to the norms of the written medium (Hamaida 2007: 4).

Or is it perhaps the **isosemiotic** and **non-synchronous** voice-over technique? It seems to be free from temporal and spatial restraints of other audiovisual translation methods. Unlike dubbing, which replaces the original utterances with “attempts to follow as closely as possible the timing, phrasing and lip movements of the original dialogue” (Lukyan *et al.* 1991: 31), voice-over is superimposed on the original soundtrack, and can either anticipate, accompany or follow the original utterances, which remain partly audible to the listeners. It is not bound by the restrictions of synchronization and hence it might involve less radical modifications than dubbing and subtitling (Gottlieb 1998: 246). But the longer the lines of the voice artist, the more inaudible the original becomes and the more difficult it is to enjoy the “polyphony” of the film.

All in all, each method maims the original in a different way and each offers it a different set of prostheses. The subtitles interfere with the visual channel and impoverish the visual aesthetic perception of the film. As Gottlieb remarks, “although subtitling retains the original dialogue, which allows the target audience to enjoy the voice quality and intonation of the original actors, the authenticity gained in this way is partly lost when it comes to reconstructing the polysemiotic whole” (1998: 246). Besides, the norms of the written language and technical limitations may deprive the characters of their stylistic individuality and render them “undervoiced.” On the other hand, the graphic form of subtitles can also be used to the characters' advantage. The translators can more easily reflect certain non-standard phenomena (e.g., mispronunciations, speech defects or spelling mistakes presented onscreen) crucial for character individuation in writing, i.e., by means of misspellings than in speech, because the voice artist is expected in Poland to pronounce the words clearly and to remain as transparent and uninvolved as possible.

Voice-over, by contrast, interferes with the auditory channel. The voice actor jams parts of the original dialogue. But depending on the conciseness of the translated text and his individual reading strategy, he can leave various fragments of the utterances intact, allowing the viewers to appreciate the characters' original accent and intonation. Besides, unlike subtitles, the method preserves the spoken mode of the original. Indeed, viewed in terms of semantic gain rather than semantic loss, it can enrich the characters' original intonation with that of the Polish reader's, thus apparently "doubling" their voice and allowing them to speak polyphonically. The voice-over technique can actually result in the characters' being "overvoiced," doubling their expressive potential with that of the voice actor's speaking on their behalf.

4. Comparative Analysis

Comparing the voice-over and subtitled versions of Ben Stiller's *Zoolander*, I wished to find out which method was more sensitive to the characters' idiolects. Recalling my own positive reactions to the former, I suspected the voice-over technique to portray the characters more precisely than the subtitles, because of its spoken mode and the lack of severe spatiotemporal restrictions. The comparative analysis showed, however, that the situation is much more complex.

As has already been mentioned, the film portrays various archetypes of the American celebrity scene, caricaturing their typical communicative styles. The characters are deliberately over-expressive, showing off their stylistic idiosyncrasies as often as possible for satirical purposes. Yet at the same time their distinct voices form a choir – that of American fashionists speaking their own professional jargon. Both Polish translations managed to preserve some of the characters' stylistic idiosyncrasies, yet each focused on different ones and recreated them by different means.

The subtitles highlight individual differences, but they fail to produce a consistent image of the fashion pack and its communicative habits. They are much longer than the voice-over version and they often calque the characters' lexical and syntactic idiosyncrasies, preserving particular colloquialisms, vulgarisms and stylistic tropes more often than the voice-over version. At the same time, however, these local decisions do not embody any global translation strategy. It is difficult to notice any regularity in the portrayal of particular characters or the social group they belong to.

The voice-over version, by contrast, highlights group identity, but tones down individual differences between the characters. It involves maximal text compression, allowing maximal access to the original soundtrack. The translator seems deliberately to neglect some of the characters' idiosyncrasies and focuses on creating a uniform version of *fashionese* that most protagonists use. Their Polish utterances are characterized by repetition, excessive use of qualifiers (such as *beautiful*, *attractive*, *charming*) and metaphors, as well as syntactic simplicity, which reveal the speakers' naïve, emotional attitude to life. The translator carefully preserves all the arc words, catchphrases and verbal tics that recur in the characters' conversations, to make their verbal portraits more consistent. Thus, each time a person mentions *beauty*, *good looks* or *chiselled abs*, the translator reapplies the same lexical solutions. Combined with the calm voice of the reader who tries not to interfere with the original soundtrack, this strategy produces quite a successful result.

In order to illustrate these remarks, let us consider how the Polish translators recreated the verbal style of three main protagonists, shaping their image in the eyes of the Polish viewers.

4.1. Translating *Fashionese* – Derek Zoolander

The most enjoyable task for the Polish translators must have been the verbal portrayal of the eponymous character, Derek Zoolander, played by Ben Stiller. Apart from being “really, really ridiculously good looking,” he is ridiculous in other respects, too. He always misses the point and betrays his ignorance and self-absorption in a variety of ways. On the verbal plane, he excels in redundancy and tautology. He often mispronounces and misuses words, mixes metaphors and idioms and covers up his inarticulateness with a variety of discourse particles, such as *like* or *whatever*. He also seems to be a verbal fetishist, repeating certain catch phrases over and over again. And, most importantly, he speaks with Marilyn Monroe's accent, as the fans explain at the *TV Tropes* website (<http://www.tvtropes.org/pmwiki.php/Main/Zoolander>).

Although the peculiarities of Derek's pronunciation cannot be echoed in translation, the other idiosyncratic features of his idiom are possible to preserve. Thus, what both Polish versions manage to reflect is Derek's proclivity towards repetition and tautology, as shown in the following utterance:

- (1) ORIGINAL: Modelling, to me, isn't just about being good-looking . . . or having a lot of fun and being really, really good-looking.
- (1a) VOICE-OVER: Nie chodzi o to, żeby świetnie się bawić i pięknie wyglądać, bo jesteś bardzo, bardzo urzekający.
 "It's not about having a great time and looking beautiful, because you're really, really charming."
- (1b) SUBTITLES: Nie uważam, że bycie modelem oznacza jedynie dobry wygląd, wiele zabawy i naprawdę dobry wygląd.
 "I do not think that being a model means good looks, a lot of fun and really good looks."

Derek evidently has a one-track mind, as he mentions the idea of *good looks* twice and he intensifies it by reduplicating the adverb *really*. The way both translators reflect this peculiarity is characteristic of their general translation strategy, or possibly the lack thereof. The voice-over author reconstructs the double qualifier *bardzo, bardzo* ("very, very") and introduces the adjective *beautiful* in her version, repeating it as often as possible in order to transform it into a recurrent "arc word" in her text. She also uses simple, colloquial syntactic structures, which makes Derek sound effeminate and naïve. The subtitler, by contrast, decides to repeat the entire noun phrase *dobry wygląd* ("good looks"), which reflects well the vacuity of the original utterance, but results in stylistic clumsiness and grammatical complexity, portraying Derek as more eloquent than in his other American and Polish incarnations.

Generally, most examples of redundancy in Derek's utterances tend to be preserved in both Polish versions. What seems most likely to be lost in translation is Derek's illogicality, reflected in various forms of tautology. In the next example, it seems that both translators missed his intention to *talk about the conversation*, although it was easy to preserve:

- (2) ORIGINAL: But I'd really like to continue talking about this conversation.
- (2a) VOICE-OVER: Pomówimy o tym, jak wrócić.
 "We'll talk about that when I come back."
- (2b) SUBTITLES: Chciałbym po powrocie kontynuować tę rozmowę.
 "I would like to continue this conversation on my return."

Analogously, in the next example, they failed to convey the nonsensical idea of allowing people to *see a side* of somebody's *versatility*, focusing on versatility itself:

(3) ORIGINAL: The calendar was great . . . because it gave people a chance to see a side of my versatility.

(3a) VOICE-OVER: Ten kalendarz pokazał, że jestem wszechstronny.

“This calendar showed that I am versatile.”

(3b) SUBTITLES: Kalendarz miał udowodnić ludziom, jak bardzo jestem wszechstronny.

“The calendar was to prove how versatile I am.”

And in yet another scene, where Derek expresses his wish to *help teach* children *to learn how to read*, this subtle logical inconsistency also disappears from both Polish versions:

(4) ORIGINAL: The other day, I was thinking about volunteering . . . to help teach underprivileged children to learn how to read. Just thinking about it was the most rewarding experience I've ever had.

(4a) VOICE-OVER: Chcę pomóc biednym dzieciom czytać. Myślę, że to mi da największą satysfakcję.

“I want to help the poor children to read. I think I will get the greatest satisfaction from it.”

(4b) SUBTITLES: Myślałem, żeby uczyć czytać dzieci upośledzone społecznie. Sama myśl o tym dała mi wiele satysfakcji.

“I've been thinking of teaching the socially underprivileged children to read. The thought itself gave me much satisfaction.”

This example illustrates well the strategies used by both translators. The voice-over version condenses and simplifies Derek's utterance, disregarding both his lack of logic and his mechanical political correctness, manifest in the expression *socially underprivileged children*. At the same time, it presents him consistently as simple-minded and naïve. Derek always remains colloquial and mindlessly formulaic, hence the choice of a clichéd phrase *biedne dzieci* (“poor children”), instead of a more elaborate equivalent. The subtitles, by contrast, use the calque technique.

They retain the repetitive effect of Derek's preoccupation with *thinking* and *thought* and his sensitivity to political correctness, manifest in the phrase *dzieci upośledzone społecznie* ("socially underprivileged children"), which sounds quite sophisticated in Polish. Yet, they disregard the tautology inherent in *helping to teach children to learn how to read*. This results in an inconsistent image of the character that uses elaborate structures to express painfully simple thoughts.

Another characteristic feature of Derek's idiolect, which both Polish translations managed to preserve, is his tendency to use malformed words. Let us have a look at an example, where Derek refers to the eulogy he has just delivered at his friends' funeral:

- (5) ORIGINAL: Oh, I thought you were gonna tell me what a bad "yougoogolizer" I am. . . . A "yougoogolizer." One who speaks at funerals. Or did you think I'd be too stupid to know what a "yougoogoly" was?
- (5a) VOICE-OVER: Myślałem, że skrytykujesz moją nekrologię. Czy jestem za głupi, żeby wiedzieć co to nekrologia?
 "I thought you were going to criticise my *obituary*-malformed. Am I too stupid to know what an *obituary*-malformed is?"
- (5b) SUBTITLES: Myślałem, że chcesz mi powiedzieć, jaki ze mnie kiepski *panegirzysta*. *Panegirzysta*. Gość przemawiający na pogrzebach. Myślałaś, że nie wiem, co to *panegirzyk*?
 "I thought you were going to tell me what a bad *panegyrist*-malformed I am. *Panegyrist*-malformed. A guy who speaks at the funerals. Did you think I do not know what a *panegyric*-malformed is?"

As can be seen, both translators decided to reflect Derek's malapropisms by coining various funereal neologisms in Polish. Since *eulogy* does not have a foreign equivalent in Polish, which could justify Derek's mistake, the translators created malformed variants of the words *nekrolog* ("obituary") and *panegiryk* ("panegyric"), thus portraying the character as even more dim-witted than he is in the original, forcing him to speak about delivering obituaries at the funeral.

Although Derek's lexical creativity attracts both translators' attention, we can find more examples of neologism in the subtitles, which calque the original word-formation processes. Thus, when Derek complains about his inability to turn left on the catwalk, it is only the subtitles that reflect his lexical idiosyncrasy:

(6) ORIGINAL: I'm not an ambi-turner.

(6a) VOICE-OVER: Nie obracam się w dwie strony.

"I do not turn in both directions."

(6b) SUBTITLES: Nie jestem *obuskrętny*.

"I'm not ambigrate."

Here, the subtitler coined an adjective to describe a person who does not turn in both directions. The voice-over author followed her characteristic strategy of rendering Derek as simple-minded and naïve as possible, making him confess with endearing simplicity that he "does not turn in both directions."

Another characteristic feature of Derek Zoolander's idiolect is his use of slangy, colloquial expressions (e.g., *wacky*, *dumdum*, *cuckoo*) and his idiomatic creativity (e.g., *Hansellout*, *Hansellass*, used to describe his rival, Hansel), which can be seen in the following examples:

(7) ORIGINAL: What a cuckoo dream.

(7a) VOICE-OVER: Szalony sen.

"A Crazy dream."

(7b) SUBTITLES: Ale zakręcony sen.

"What a zappy dream."

(8) ORIGINAL: What, are you having a wack attack? I saw you this afternoon, dum-dum.

(8a) VOICE-OVER: Odbiło ci? Widziałem cię dziś po południu.

"Are you nuts? I've seen you this afternoon."

(8b) SUBTITLES: Robisz ze mnie dupka! Widzieliśmy się dziś po południu.

"You're making a prat-vulg out of me. We've seen each other this afternoon."

(9) ORIGINAL: Good. I deserve to die if I can't beat Han-suck-ass in a walk-off.

(9a) VOICE-OVER: Zasłużyłem na to, skoro przegrywam pojedynek z Hanslem.

"I deserve it since I lost my duel with Hansel."

- (9b) SUBTITLES: I dobrze. Nie dałem rady dupkowi pokroju Hansela. Zasługuję na śmierć.

“Good. I couldn’t handle a prat like Hansel. I deserve to die.”

Unfortunately, this stylistic quality tends to disappear from the voice-over version. Worse still, it finds inadequate reflection in the subtitles, which often replace linguistic creativity with vulgarism and combine various levels of formality, as can be observed in such stylistically inconsistent utterances as *nie dałem rady dupkowi pokroju Hansela* (9b).

All in all, both translations have managed to preserve several aspects of Derek Zoolander’s idiolect. The voice-over version portrays him consistently as simple-minded and naïve, thanks to the lexical and grammatical simplicity of his utterances and careful reconstruction of the repetitiveness and clumsiness of his utterances. The subtitles, by contrast, picture Derek as more trendy, slangy, and crude. He uses more complex grammatical structures, more neologisms and macaronisms, but his utterances tend to be stylistically inconsistent: accidental colloquialisms are often combined with formal expressions, characteristic of written language. Thus, he seems more of a trendrobot than an effeminate simpleton.

4.2. Translating Surfer Speech – Hansel

Derek Zoolander’s greatest rival in the world of male modelling is Hansel, played by Owen Wilson. Hansel is a new-agey Hippie, who loves bungee jumping and living on the edge. This relaxed attitude to life is reflected in his mode of expression: he speaks with flowing, breathless rhythm, mixing elements of stoner and surfer slang (c.f., <http://www.tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main?AmericanAccents>). Thus, he revels in discourse markers (*like, I mean, or whatever*), addresses his interlocutors as *dudes, bros* or *capitans* and uses specialist vocabulary to talk about various herbs and illegal substances. As it turns out, it is quite challenging to recreate Hansel’s stylistic individuality in Polish. Let us have a look at an example of his conversation with Derek, which illustrates the difficulties the translators must have faced:

- (10) ORIGINAL:

Hansel: Excuse me, bro.

Derek: You’re excused. And I’m not your bro.

Hansel: Whatever, dude. Whatever. Peace. God bless . . .

Me and my friends have been too busy bathing off of St. Barts . . . with spider monkeys for the past two weeks. Tripping on acid changed our whole perspective on shit.

(10a) VOICE-OVER:

Hansel: Wybacz, brachu.

Derek: Wybaczam. I nie jestem twoim brachem.

Hansel: Jak chcesz, stary. Pokój. Idź z Bogiem. . . Przez dwa tygodnie kąpałem się w Zatoce Meksykańskiej. Odjazdy na kwasie zmieniają perspektywę.

Hansel: "Forgive me, bro."

Derek: "I do. And I'm not your bro."

Hansel: "Whatever, old buddy. Peace, God bless . . . I was bathing in the Mexican Bay for the last two weeks. Trips on acid change your perspective."

(10b) SUBTITLES:

Hansel: Przepraszam, bracie.

Derek: Przeprosiny przyjęte. I nie jestem twoim bratem.

Hansel: Cokolwiek powiesz, koleś. Pokój z tobą. . . Byliśmy zajęci pławieniem się w wodach St. Barts i braniem kwasu. To zmienia spojrzenie na świat.

Hansel: "Sorry, brother."

Derek: "Apology accepted. And I'm not your brother."

Hansel: "Whatever you say, pal. Peace, God bless. . . . We were busy bathing in the waters of St. Barts and taking acid. This changes your perception of the world."

Clearly, both translators tried to reflect Hansel's slangy speech. Yet, the voice-over version sounds more natural than the subtitles, because it allows Hansel to use simpler grammatical structures, typical of oral discourse, and more colloquial expressions, typical of Polish junkie slang (e.g., *odjazdy na kwasie*). In the subtitles, by contrast, the character uses complex grammatical structures, such as *byliśmy zajęci pławieniem się... i braniem kwasu*, which seem more appropriate for written than spoken language, in spite of the slangy expressions they incorporate. Such stylistic conflicts in Hansel's Polish utterances are further exacerbated by the use of vulgarisms in the otherwise formal utterances. Thus, when Hansel accuses the fashion designer Mugatu of an assassination attempt, he re-

mains consistently slangy in the original, mildly colloquial in the Polish voice-over version and stylistically inconsistent in the subtitles:

- (11) ORIGINAL: That's bullshit! Listen up, everyone. Mugatu's a dick! He tried to brainwash Derek to kill the Claymation dude.
- (11a) VOICE-OVER: To bzdura. Mugatu to gnój! Chciał, żeby Derek zabił facia z Malezji.
 "That's rubbish. Mugatu is scum. He wanted Derek to kill the guy from Malaysia."
- (11b) SUBTITLES: To nieprawda. Sluchajcie. Mugatu to niezle ścierwo. Próbował zrobić Derekowi pranie mózgu, aby zabił Plastusia.
 "That's not true. Listen. Mugatu is quite a scum – vulg. He tried to brainwash Derek to kill the Plasticine Guy [proper name of the Polish cartoon character, A.H.]"

Hansel's linguistic creativity and colloquialism is blossoming here. Not only does he coin a new name for Malaysia, i.e., *Claymation*, to patch up his vocabulary gaps, but he also calls its Prime Minister *dude*. As usual, the voice-over version uses short, simple sentences and colloquial expressions (such as *gnój*, *facio*), although it flattens out some of the original crudeness (e.g., using *rubbish* instead of *bullshit*). The subtitles, by contrast, mix formal with informal language, sharpening the crude effect with the pejorative expression *ścierwo* ("scum") and then weakening the effect with reference to the Polish children's cartoon character, *Plastuś*, incorporated in a complex syntactic structure introduced by a literary conjunction *aby* ("in order to").

The same tendencies are visible throughout the film. In the voice-over version, Hansel's surfer speech is consistently rendered as colloquial, but stylistically unmarked. In the subtitles, by contrast, it is heterogeneous and inconsistent, incorporating various levels of formality. Let us have a look at the way Hansel confronts Derek in one of the scenes:

- (12) ORIGINAL: But first, me and him gotta straighten some shit out. Why have you been acting so messed up towards me?
- (12a) VOICE-OVER: Musimy sobie coś wyjaśnić. Czemu tak się zachowywałaś wobec mnie?
 "We've got to get one thing straight. Why have you acted like that towards me?"

- (12b) SUBTITLES: Ale najpierw my dwaj musimy sobie coś wyjaśnić. Skąd to dziwne zachowanie w stosunku do mojej osoby?

“But first, we two have to get a few things straight. How to explain your strange behaviour towards me-formal?”

In the above example, Hansel’s markedly slangy utterance sounds neutral in the voice-over version and literary in the subtitles, thanks to the formality of the expression *dziwne zachowanie w stosunku do mojej osoby*, favoured by the translator over more colloquial possibilities.

Apart from the use of surfer slang, another characteristic feature of Hansel’s idiolect is his weak spot for macaronism, which reveals his cosmopolitan interests. This tendency has been partly preserved in the subtitles, where such utterances as: *The results are in, amigo!* or *No way, Compadre!* retain their exotic addressative forms (e.g., *Chciałbyś, compadre* – “You’d wish, Compadre”) and disregarded in the voice-over version, where Hansel does not use any foreignisms. This is symptomatic of the two translation strategies applied in voice-over and subtitled versions, respectively. The former involves domestication. It is therefore more understandable and less pretentious. The latter, by contrast, is based on foreignisation, carefully reflecting the original hyperforeignism, sometimes at the cost of clarity. Thus, the Polish Hansel often uses foreign expressions, such as *Capitan*, *Compadre*, *peyote* and *Derelicté*.

On the whole, Hansel’s image of a modern Hippie is more consistently reflected in the voice-over version, which allows him to use colloquial language with elements of stoner slang. In the subtitles, his identity is not clearly outlined – his utterances often sound formal or literary, although he intersperses them with occasional vulgarisms and foreignisms.

4.3. *Translating Designerese – Mugatu*

The character of Mugatu, played by Will Ferrell, embodies an archetypal figure of a devilish visionary artist, who is overemotional, exalted and looks like his own pet dog. He has been endowed by the screenwriters with a unique “voice”: he uses creative idiom and rich imagery; he is also more literary than the other characters and tends to be hyperforeign – hence his strange pronunciation of the word *derelicté*, stressed on the last syllable. Both translators managed to preserve his lofty style. What they seemed to struggle with, however, was Mugatu’s idioms and catchphrases, especially the periphrastic tools he uses to describe/address

his opponents. In this respect, it is the subtitles that reconstruct the designer's idiolect more carefully than the voice-over version. Thus, dissatisfied with Derek's absence, Mugatu remarks:

(13) ORIGINAL: That little toad-face better show. I'm a hot little potato right now.

(13a) VOICE-OVER: Lepiej, żeby się pojawił. Jestem bardzo wkurzony.
"He'd better show up. I'm quite put out."

(13b) SUBTITLES: Lepiej, żeby ten ropuch się zjawił. Jestem już niezłe wkurzony.
"That toad had better show up. I'm quite put out."

Apparently, it is only the subtitles that retain – at least partly – Mugatu's toad metaphor. The voice-over version, aimed at maximal text compression, disregards these stylistic peculiarities. The same strategy produces quite opposite effects in the next scene, where Mugatu attempts to kill the Prime Minister of Malaysia, because Derek fails to perform this task. In an act of rage, he delivers a theatrical monologue, where colloquialism blends with exaltation:

(14) ORIGINAL: I feel like I'm taking crazy pills! I invented the piano key necktie! I invented it! What have you done, Derek? Nothing! You've done nothing! Nothing! And I will be a monkey's uncle if I have you ruin this for me! Because if you can't get the job done, then I will! Die, you wage-hiking scum!

(14a) VOICE-OVER: Czy nikt tego nie widzi? Przecież mi nie odbiło! Wymyśliłem krawat z klawiaturą. Ja wymyśliłem. A co ty masz? Nic! Nic nie masz! Nic. I nie pozwolę, żebyś mi popsuł plan! Jeśli ty nie możesz, ja to zrobię. Giń, śmieciu!

"Can't you see? I haven't gone round the twist, have I? I invented the piano key necktie! What have you got, Derek? Nothing! You've got nothing! Die, you scum!"

(14b) SUBTITLES: Czy nikt tego nie widzi? Wychodzę w tym momencie na głupka. Ja wymyśliłem krawat-klawiaturową... To moje dzieło. A co ty osiągnąłeś w swoim życiu, Derek? Nic! Zupełnie nic. Nie pozwolę, abyś zrujnował mój plan. Jak ty nie chcesz, ja to zrobię! Umieraj, ty podnoszące płace ścierwo!

“Can’t you see this? I’m making a fool of myself now. I invented the piano key necktie. It is my work. And what have you achieved in your life, Derek? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. And I won’t let you spoil my plan. If you don’t want to do this, I shall! Die, you wage-raising scum-vulg.”

The subtitler evidently aims to reconstruct Mugatu’s idiomatic vibrancy. He heightens the dramatic tension with such formal expressions as: *dzieło* (“work”), *osiągnąć coś w życiu* (“to achieve something in life”) and *zrujnować plan* (“to ruin somebody’s plan”). Yet, by calquing Mugatu’s exclamation *Die you wage-hiking scum!* the final effect is crude and clumsy. It is again the voice-over version, characterized by syntactic simplicity and consistent colloquialism (as exemplified by the expressions *przecież mi nie odbiło* and *popsuć plan*) that reflects Mugatu’s angrish more successfully.

What is also noteworthy, Mugatu is the only representative of the fashion pack in the film who is clever enough to adapt his style to the needs of his interlocutors. Thus, while trying to brainwash Derek to kill the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Mugatu resorts to baby talk:

(15) ORIGINAL: You learn martial arts. . . . Prime minister of Malaysia bad! Martial arts good! Kill naughty man! Obey my dog!

(15a) VOICE-OVER: Poznasz sztukę walki. Premier Malezji – zły. Sztuki walki – dobre. Zabić złego człowieka. Zabić złego człowieka. Słuchaj mojego psa.
“The Prime Minister of Malaysia bad! Martial arts good! Kill the bad man. Obey my dog.”

(15b) SUBTITLES: Poznasz wschodnie sztuki walki. Premier Malezji – be. Sztuki walki – cacy. Zabij złego człowieka. Bądź posłuszny memu psu.
“You will learn martial arts. The Prime Minister of Malaysia – ugh. Martial arts – hunky-dory. Kill the bad man. Be obedient to my dog.”

Here, the subtitles are more experimental in reconstructing this stylistic idiosyncrasy, as they use Polish interjections *be* (“ugh”) and *cacy* (“hunky dory”) to criticize the Prime Minister and praise the martial arts.

On the whole, the subtitles reconstruct more carefully the stylistic richness of Mugatu’s idiolect. Yet, plagued by recurrent grammatical calques, which sound awkward and unnatural in Polish, they seem less successful than the voice-over version, with its spoken flow and stylistic consistency.

5. Summary

The comparative analysis of two Polish *Zoolanders* showed that both translators were sensitive to the verbal individualization of characters. They tried to make the best of the available tools to present the world of fashion in a suggestive and comical way.

The subtitles focused on reconstructing lexical and phraseological idiosyncrasies of particular characters. They retained more similes, metaphors and vulgarisms than the voice-over version. What they seemed to disregard was pragmatic adequacy. The translator focused on the local stylistic phenomena (particular neologisms, idioms, macaronisms), but failed to arrive at a global strategy of their reconstruction. This resulted in the incorporation of slangy/crude expressions in complex grammatical structures, that are typical of written and unusual for spoken discourse, which the subtitles are supposed to reconstruct. This in turn influenced the portrayal of characters. They appear to be inconsistent (mixing formal and informal language) and “over-voiced” (in the sense of being at times excessively expressive – sounding too crude or too theatrical in particular communicative situations).

The voice-over version, by contrast, focused on the consistent verbal portrayal the fashion community, disregarding the stylistic idiosyncrasies of its particular representatives. Agata Deka sacrificed the characters’ individual identity to emphasise their group identity. She diminished the protagonists’ idiomatic vibrancy, neutralising creative metaphors and similes and simplifying floundering structures to create a coherent portrait of the fashion pack and its linguistic mannerisms. She reconstructed carefully the recurrent catchphrases and arc words to caricature the character’s preoccupation with looks and fashion. She also consistently used simple and paratactic sentence structure, characteristic of oral discourse, which reflected intellectual simplicity of the protagonists, at the same time adjusting the text to the needs of oral performance. Thus, the technical requirements of the voice-over method, which preserves the spoken mode of the original, helped the translator to avoid the artificial formality of the subtitles.

Moreover, Agata Deka evidently aimed at maximal text reduction, allowing the voice actor, Piotr Borowiec, to use his interpretive skills and avoid excessive interference with the original soundtrack, an approach particularly recommended by Monika Woźniak (2008). Thus, in the ver-

sion prepared for ITI, the reader delivers his short lines in a non-intrusive fashion, usually anticipating the characters' utterances not to drown out their original accent and intonation. He sounds like a dispassionate interpreter, who is conscious of the characters' eccentricity and determined to remain transparent, so that they can speak for themselves. This turns out to be a very successful translation solution. Paradoxically, on the textual plane, the voice-over translation rendered the characters slightly "under-voiced," i.e. devoid of individual stylistic identity. Yet combined with the reader's interpretive competence, this strategy produced excellent results.

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