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MEDIATING SCIENCE FICTION FILM THROUGH TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY: THE STAR WARS EPISODE “ATTACK OF THE CLONES” IN KISWAHILI

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The mediation of foreign films for Swahili audiences is an established cultural and linguistic practice in Tanzania that combines translation with commentary and story-telling. It helps audiences make sense of films whose original language and cultural background are unfamiliar to them. Today, an industry has grown around translated foreign films of all genres and from all regions. The practice also makes genres accessible that are still under-represented in Tanzanian film production, such as science fiction. The genre’s depiction of a futuristic, technically advanced and strange world presents a challenge to commentators. Through the analysis of a particular episode of the *Star Wars* saga, I show how the commentator acts as an ethnodramaturg, who through translation, re-narration and intertextual reference explains and re-enacts the strange cultural universe of the source film and brings it closer to the audience.¹

Introduction

The translation of foreign films into Swahili, coupled with explanatory commentary, is the domain of so called *veejays* in Tanzania, both in live performance in video cinemas as well as recorded on DVD. Translated films of many origins and genres can be bought, rented or watched in numerous parts of the country. Much of the popularity of these films derives from the highly entertaining commentary directly addressed to the audience, a practice rooted in oral storytelling and football commentary (Krings 2014, Kimani & Mugubi 2014, Waliula 2012a, 2012b). Through an additional narrative layer, film commentators create a new work of art out of the original film. The product is a *mélange* of several media genres, foreign movies, storytelling, commentary practices and a distinct Swahili genre of storytelling (Krings 2014). In this way, the film commentator’s role as a cultural translator of the film and mediator between the foreign film and the local audience can also be described as that of an ethnographer (Englert 2010; Englert & Moreto 2010; Groß 2010a, 2010b; Kimani & Mugubi 2014, Krings 2010: 97).

¹ This paper was first presented at the Swahili Colloquium in Bayreuth in 2017. DJ Nash from Dar es Salaam, who was invited to the colloquium as a DJ and singer, was enthusiastic in his response to my paper and then imitated the late film translator Captain Derek Mukandala to show how he used to imitate the dialogues in the films in amending his voice to different characters. I want to thank DJ Nash for his comments. I am also especially grateful to DJ Mark for allowing me to use his translated film in this paper and for answering my many questions on his translation. Special thanks go to the editors of this special issue for their work and support in improving the systematic and theoretical outline of this paper.

Regarding a science fiction film, especially a long and complex epos like *Star Wars*, cultural translation is particularly important and at the same time challenging for the film commentator. Like other science fiction films, *Star Wars* is characterised by a detailed display of life and technologies in the galaxy with its inhabitants of various species, cultures and languages. Fans of *Star Wars* have played a crucial role in the making of the films' universe as they have contributed to the creation of characters and storylines and offered detailed ethnographic descriptions on fan pages. Gunnels and Cole employ the concept of the ethnodramaturg, developed by Victor Turner (1979) and Johannes Fabian (1999), to describe "how the fan works within a fictive universe to study and create dramatic story lines based within that world. Performatively, the fan enacts the ethnographer's in-betweenness. Both fan and ethnographer are not of the culture and yet not not of the culture they explore and attempt to explain" (Gunnels & Cole 2011: 1). Similar to the science fiction fan, the translator as ethnographer stands in between the foreign film and the Swahili audience. He is of a different culture than the filmmaker and has to deal with the strangeness of the film. The science fiction genre in particular presents a maximum of strangeness for the audience. Through research on the film and watching a film several times, the commentator gains expert knowledge, which he then transmits to the viewers. He does this like a dramaturg, who uses theatricality² in his verbal performance to dramatise the story and create new dramatic story lines. To look at how the commentator acts as an ethnodramaturg and deals with this maximum of strangeness, I have chosen to analyse a Swahili version of a *Star Wars* episode commented by DJ Mark, one of the younger Tanzanian film narrators, who has translated many fantasy and science fiction films. I will look at his role as an ethnodramaturg who, through his knowledge and expertise of the story, translates and culturally explains, or annotates, the film to his viewers. An analysis of particular scenes will show how DJ Mark makes use of translation, narration and commentary to deal with the specific characteristics and challenges of the science fiction film.

In the following, I will firstly give a brief history of film translation in Tanzania to contextualise DJ Mark's practice in the background of a historical continuum. This will be followed by a biographical sketch of the film translator DJ Mark and how he positions himself vis-à-vis the narrative of the film. Some scenes of the translated Episode II *Attack of the Clones* (2002) will be analysed in order to show how, with his oral storytelling, the commentator transmits the visual and textual narrative of the film to a Swahili speaking audience. Any translated version can, according to Chatman (1978:4), be described as a "satellite" of the original story, which contains embellishments that do not essentially determine the course of the plot (Rauscher 2013:77-78). Therefore, in the following I want to show how DJ Mark with his Swahili commentary creates such a satellite, or an embellished version of the film epos.

² Understood as "performativeness in communication, skills of representation, invention of forms of presentation, actual performances" (Fabian 2004: 43).

Mediating film in Tanzania: between translation and oral storytelling

The translation and commenting of foreign films in East Africa can be traced back to colonial times, when The Colonial Film Unit and its mobile cinema used films as a pedagogical and political propaganda tool. The Bantu Educational Kinema Experiment (BEKE) produced some such films from 1935 to 1937 and hired local commentators to translate the films live into local languages (Krings 2014:2, Smyth 1988, Bouchard 2011). This practice was adopted by local entrepreneurs working in the area of commercial mobile cinema from the 1970s onwards. When video and later digital film equipment became available, Tanzanians not only produced their own movies in Swahili but also started to translate foreign movies for the Swahili-speaking audience. Today, the *mtafsiri* ('translator'), DJ, video jockey, deejay or *veejay* has become an established, yet informal, profession in East Africa.³ Despite the informality of the profession, veejays are organised in associations like the Union of Videojockeys/Translators Association (UVJA) in Uganda and their art is celebrated via the VJ Slams contest during the Amakula Kampala International Film Festival in Uganda (Amakula Kampala Cultural Foundation 2007: 260-261; Achen & Openjuru 2012, Kimani & Mugubi 2014, Dovey 2015, Scheier 2006, Lagarriga 2007).

Film translation is an intermedial form combining film and oral storytelling (Krings 2014: 87). As in oral storytelling, the translator uses verbal and prosodic means to dramatise the story, engaging and interacting with the (imagined) audience. He uses the stylistic means of repair and distraction, repetition and switches between narrative perspectives. Finally, in evaluating the story he sometimes adds a moral message to it (Groß 2010a: 48-120). One of the differences to traditional oral storytelling is that the story is told in the present (with the use of present progressive *-na-* or perfect *-me-*) instead of the narrative past (*-ka-* tense) (Groß 2010a: 93-94). As during football screenings, the narrator comments on the film as if the story was currently happening and in this way creates a presentness of the shared film-viewing experience (Waliaula 2012a, 2012b).

All translated films in Tanzania share a common structure. In the first part, the translator introduces himself, his company and the film. In the main part, he relates the film using several types of speech acts. There are epic passages in which images are translated into oral speech, dialogue scenes presented in direct speech in modulated voice, addresses to the viewers, commercial promotion, explanations of actions and of cultural differences, as well as the introduction of actors. In the final part, the translator resumes and evaluates the film, gives his contact details and ends with a cliff hanger for another film (Krings 2013: 94-96; Groß 2010a: 68-75).

³ Until now the profession has remained a male domain in Tanzania, hence the masculine pronoun "he" is used often in the description of the practice. The only exception is when Mukandala's wife helped her husband to imitate speeches of female actors in the films.

Although DVD translation has replaced the live performance of the shows, in which the translator could talk directly to the audience, the translator still engages with the imagined audience in his commentary. Actual communication between translators and their viewers takes place via mobile phone, email or internet, when viewers ask for further explanation of the story or a more correct translation for individual passages, a practice related to the writer-reader interaction in Tanzanian newspaper and internet novels (Reuster-Jahn 2013). For many viewers, the translation helps them understand the films and learn something from different parts of the world. The film translator in this way functions as a mediator between the foreign story/film and the local audiences.

As Matthias Krings (2013) has highlighted, film translating was introduced to Tanzania by Derek Gaspar Mukandala, known as Lufufu, who learned of the practice during his military training in China in 1971/72, where he was exposed to translated northern Vietnamese propaganda videos. In addition, during a visit to Uganda in the 1990s he got to know the techniques of voice capturing.⁴ Until his sudden death in 2015, Mukandala had translated over 1000 films from India, Nigeria, the USA, Hong Kong and China (Krings 2013: 91) and set standards for film translation in Tanzania. He paved the way for young entrepreneurs following in his footsteps.⁵ Despite increased efforts through copyright control and regulation, the film translating business increased and, according to a survey by Media for Development International (MFDI) Tanzania published in 2012, at that time there were approximately 110 translators in Tanzania (Bob Rich Interview).⁶

The Veejay G Machine Dj Mark

Ahmada Abdulrahmani Abdallah, better known as DJ Mark,⁷ G Machine or *Jogoo* ('rooster/cock'), belongs to the second generation of film commentators, who has specialised in the translation of Hollywood, Nigerian and Korean films. He was born in Zanzibar and came to mainland Tanzania as a youngster with the dream of becoming a music DJ. As this dream

⁴ In the 1980s, he started touring the city of Dar es Salaam with a 16mm film projector, showing American Western and action movies and later on with his wife established a mobile cinema with a bike touring Bukoba region. In the 1990s, during a visit to Uganda, he learned how to do dubbing with VHS cassettes. He began selling translated video films in his own video shop in Bukoba which he transferred to Kariakoo, Dar es Salaam in 2000, and opened a video cinema in the quarter of Vingunguti in Dar es Salaam (Krings 2013: 91).

⁵ Mukandala and his younger colleagues also caught the attention of the international press in the news feature *Heute journal* by the German television station ZDF (Brase 2010), an article in *The Guardian* (Hoad 2012) and *Little white lies* (Johns 2017). The video artist Maix Mayer engaged Mukandala to translate the GDR-produced children's film *Ein Schneemann für Afrika* ('A snowman for Africa', DEFA 1977) and hired DJ Mark for live translation of the science fiction film *Der schweigende Stern* ('The silent star', DEFA 1960) into Swahili. He included the recorded events in his exhibition *African Tales, Schneemann im Quadrat* and *Afronautic Tales*.

⁶ Recently, translated Korean films have become extremely popular with the Tanzanian audience. However, due to rising competition and government anti-piracy measures, the business has begun to decline (DJ Mark via FB messenger 26.05.2017). With the use of the internet and social media, film commenting has received a new platform and a place for negotiation between producers and consumers. Translators advertise themselves and their translated films online, where viewers and fans discuss the pros and cons of the practice as well as evaluating the work.

⁷ The original name of his Facebook account is "G Machine Djj Mark".

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did not work out, he decided to try film translating like Mzee Lufufu, whom he admired (Groß 2010a:14). He dropped out of school and, with financial support from his father, he was able to start his own film business (Polea n.d.). In 2003, he went to Arusha to open a video cinema, where he started live translating of English-language films. However, as there was no real market for video films in Arusha, he came back to Dar es Salaam, where he went to live translations of movies to learn from his colleagues. Like other film translators, he ended up working with Ajay Chavda, a Tanzanian businessman (Polea n.d.). At that time, there was only a small payment of *kufuta jasho* ('wipe the sweat') to be earned from live translation (Groß 2010a: 16, 33).⁸

Thus, he decided to produce and distribute translated movies himself with a home delivery service via mobile phone order. He rented an office in Kariakoo, sharing it with two other translators (Polea n.d.).⁹ DJ Mark soon became one of the most popular translators in Tanzania. He has translated about 2,000 films in his 20 years in the business (DJ Mark via FB Messenger, 26.05.2017). In particular, his comedic style of translating films has made him popular with younger audiences (Johns 2017). His translating ability has earned him respectful nicknames, such as *kuku ngwendu* ('big rooster')¹⁰ or *jogoo* ('rooster/cock'). Now his fans call him *G Machine* ('big machine'), not only because of his body size (DJ Mark via FB Messenger 26.05.2017) but also possibly to a giant computer, as a G-Machine was one of the first computers. The names reflect the power and abilities attributed to film translators (Kimani & Mugubi 2014:14). Like other film translators, DJ Mark uses the internet and social media to promote himself and his work. With his Facebook account in particular he connects with friends and fans alike. DJ Mark's life and career is typical of the many film translators who have learned from the late Mukandala/Lufufu and have carried on with the practice of live translating foreign films. Over time, film translation has changed due to technical development from live to on-tape translation, from analogue to digital technology and from a more serious to a younger style of translation.

In the following, I will show how and with which linguistic and narrative strategies DJ Mark translates *Star Wars* into Swahili. In analysing how he translates, comments and narrates this episode of the science fiction epos, my aim is to unravel how, through his narration as an ethnodramaturg, he especially engages with the characteristics of the genre. I will start with a

⁸ When he started working with Chavda in 2007, he received 6,500 Tanzania Shilling (TSh) and after complaining he earned 8,500 to 15,000 TSh for one finished cassette. With four films in a month, he could hardly make ends meet. In 2009, the film distribution company Steps Entertainment called him to work for them with a salary of 50,000 TSh for one translated film. But when Chavda was arrested, Steps stopped its translation business (Polea n.d.).

⁹ Currently, DJ Mark is working with his sponsors New Kizibo Entertainment and Chris Gay Professional under his own production unit, ACHECHE Production. When business was good, he received up to 10,000 TSh for one film; nowadays, however, it is only 5,000 TSh (DJ Mark via FB Messenger, 26.05.2017).

¹⁰ Sese Seko *kuku ngwendu* (*kidume*)/*kuku ngebendu wa zabanga* (literally: 'the powerful rooster who climbs all hens'), "the all-powerful warrior who will go from conquest to conquest, leaving fire in his wake" was an additional Lingala name of Joseph Desiré Mobutu.

brief summary of *Star Wars* as a transmedia epic tale and the *Star Wars* films, to which Mark adds his Swahili layer.

***Star Wars* with a Swahili commentary**

With its first release in 1977, the science fiction saga *Star Wars*, produced and directed by George Lucas, was a surprise success marked by computer-generated imagery displaying strange beings, futuristic machines like droids and spaceships, and traditional folk tale figures of kings, queens or knights. The story's popularity lies in its basis of an arrangement of the showpieces of the Cinema of Attraction¹¹ as well as its rich intertextual and trans-medial citations. Although *Star Wars* belongs to the science fiction genre, its story is located not in the future but in a possible past world: "A long time ago in a galaxy, far away" (Rauscher 2013: 67-68).

The story of the saga follows the traditional model of a hero's journey: Luke Skywalker on his quest to become a Jedi knight. A group of Jedi under their leader Master Yoda, who possesses a kind of positive force, has to fight against a negative or dark force. This dark force is personified by Darth Vader, who happens to be Luke's father, the former Anakin Skywalker, who has passed to the evil dark side. The galaxy's democracy is threatened by the unscrupulous senator Sheev Palpatine (Darth Sidious), who wants to take over the galactic republic as a dictator (Rauscher 2013:72-73).¹² *Star Wars*, with its story world produced across many media within the framework of a giant franchise system and spin-offs in novels, comics and games, is itself an example of transmedia storytelling.¹³

The story of *Star Wars* is situated in a world with all kinds of inter-species relations, technical progress and moral decay in a time of war. While the galaxy, with its many species and planets, is a strange world to all of us, the story of its heroes, good and evil forces, love, companionship, betrayal, corruption, war and decay are familiar narratives. This is probably why *Star Wars* has been translated (through subtitles or dubbing) and commented into over 50 languages, including Navajo (Taylor 2014: vii-xx) and now Swahili.

¹¹ The term Cinema of Attraction was coined by the film historian Tom Gunning in an article on the parallels between the early funfair cinema which was not yet narratively organized and based mainly on exhibition values, and the effect oriented Hollywood genre cinema of the 1980s (Gunning 1996: 25-34).

¹² The *Star Wars* saga comprises the early trilogy Episodes 4 to 6 *A New Hope* (1977), *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980) and *Return of the Jedi* (1983), which built one plot and achieved the status of cult films, and the prequel trilogy Episodes 1 to 3 *The Phantom Menace* (1999), *Attack of the Clones* (2002) and *Revenge of the Sith* (2005), which were less successful. Disney bought the rights for *Star Wars* from Lucasfilm in 2012 and released Episode 7, *The Force Awakens* in 2015, Episode 8 *The Last Jedi* in December 2017 and forthcoming the last Episode 9, *Rise of Skywalker* (<http://de.starwars.com/>). Through its aggressive franchise system and kind of "world building", it is part of a growing media convergence in which older and newer media are combined. Through an expanded universe of novels, video games and comics, it reached narrative variations as a "pop cultural myth patchwork" (Rauscher 2013).

¹³ "Transmedia storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story" (Jenkins 2009).

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DJ Mark watched *Star Wars* for the first time in 2011. His excitement prompted him to immediately translate the episodes one by one, watching each film twice to improve his understanding. When he embarked on translating the *Star Wars* series, DJ Mark was confronted with several challenges. Although *Star Wars* merchandise is well known in Tanzania, the film itself has not been widely circulated. Thus, he had first to make himself familiar with the long and complex narrative of the *Star Wars* saga with presently eight episodes released over a time span of over 40 years.

Not aware that there was a prequel to the *Star Wars* series, DJ Mark started with the fourth episode. Because of specific scientific and technical vocabulary, he had to work with a dictionary. He also carried out research on the internet to give the viewers more background information to the film. DJ Mark thought it important to make *Star Wars* accessible to Tanzanian viewers and to inform and educate them about other creatures and stars, which have more life than planet earth.¹⁴

I have chosen to analyse the Swahili-commented Episode II- *Attack of the Clones* from 2002, the second film of the prequel trilogy, as it can be situated between the older classics (original trilogy) and the newer episodes (sequel trilogy). In this episode, the viewer finds himself ten years after the invasion of planet Naboo, when the galaxy is on the brink of civil war. Under the leadership of a renegade Jedi named Count Dooku, thousands of solar systems are threatening to break away from the democratic Galactic Republic. When an assassination attempt is made on Senator Padmé Amidala, the former Queen of Naboo, twenty-year-old Jedi apprentice Anakin Skywalker is assigned to protect her. In the course of his mission, Anakin discovers his love for Padmé as well as his own dark side. Soon, Anakin, Padmé, and Obi-Wan Kenobi, the Jedi master and mentor of Anakin Skywalker, are drawn into the heart of the separatist movement and the beginning of the clone wars.

The film on DVD, which is the basis of the analysis, has been creatively amended from the original version. Firstly, the introduction is from Episode IV - *A New Hope*, replacing the original introduction to Episode II - *Attack of the Clones*. Secondly, the film has been reduced from its original length of 142 minutes to only 70 minutes. Usually if a film is more than two hours long, the *veejays* cut it into half, due to the length of film screenings in a video cinema. If the film is too long, the cinema owners lose money. The viewers have missed more than one hour of the original story when this translated version starts. This includes the attacks on senator Padmé Amidala ordered by Jango Fett, which led the Jedi to decide that Anakin should accompany her to Naboo, Obi-Wan Kenobi's travel to the planet of Kamino in search of the head hunter and the beginning of Anakin and Padmé's love relationship. DJ Mark fills this gap by giving a short summary of the plot against Padmé Amidala.

As is typical for Swahili translated films, DJ Mark introduces the film and himself while the introductory pre-text of Episode IV, *A New Hope*, is running. DJ Mark starts by praising the

¹⁴ Personal communication with DJ Mark via FB Messenger, 23.05.2017.

American film production companies as “*kampuni bora kabisa*” (‘the best companies’). Then he addresses the viewers in first person plural “we” as a lucky community able to watch the film: “*leo tunapata fursa na bahati nyingine tena ya kuweza kuangalia*” (‘today we are getting the chance and luck again to watch’). He orientates the viewers to the episode and afterwards promotes his own company and himself, giving his contact details in his special style of self-reference (see Krings 2013: 99): “*mtetezi wa Diamond baba-amesimama tuli – tuli, tuli, tuli*” (‘The Supporter of Diamond daddy, he is standing...’). With these final phrases and titbits, he prepares the viewers and raises their expectations. Then he draws the viewers’ attention back to the film. With the phrase “*tukae mkao wa kula*” (‘Let’s sit down for eating’)¹⁵ he promises an enjoyable viewing session and then repeatedly reminds viewers of the previous part and alerts them to get ready. After the introduction, DJ Mark comments the film with quickly changing modes of speech throughout the course of the narration. In the following, I will give some examples of DJ Mark’s verbal strategies in translating and re-narrating the film to show how he acts as an ethnodramaturg, who through performance and re-enactment culturally explains the film and mediates between the film and its audience.

Description of strange characters

Science fiction films like *Star Wars* are full of alien characters living in the galaxy. But how can they be described in Swahili? To answer this question I look at DJ Mark’s description of strange characters and the vocabulary he used. The commentator as omniscient narrator is introducing and re-introducing the film’s characters to the viewers to remind them of important characters as well as to orient them in the course of the narrative. This is especially important with regard to the multi-episode and highly complex nature of *Star Wars*, whose episodes were released many years apart. DJ Mark introduces characters by raising his voice and accentuating syllables with *anaitwa* (‘he is called/his name is’) as in “*Huyu anaitwa master Obi-Wan Kenobi*” (1:41) or simply by stating their names, like *R2* (3:35), *Master Windu* (50:08), *Master Yoda* (54:19). The most extensive re-introduction is received by Master Yoda as he is flying into the arena on Geonosis to rescue Anakin, Padmé and Obi-Wan:

50:49 *Ah lakini ndugu yangu palepale msaada ulikuja. Linaibuka kundi la makomanda kutoka eh kwa waheshimiwa wazee wa mapanga wakiwa na mzee mzima. Master, master, master Yodiya*

‘Ah but my brother, right here help is coming. There comes the group of commanders of eh of those respectful old men of swords together with the old man. Master, master, master Yodiya.’

51:08 *Mwenye kumfanana kama Jadu. Yeye ndiye yuko hapa kwa ajili ya kuliongoza jeshi hili*

¹⁵*Tukae mkao wa kula* is a common introduction to a translated film. The practice of translating films was also described as “turning rice into pilau” by Mukandala, who compared the commentary with the added spices to the rice in a pilau dish (Krings 2009).

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‘Comparable to Jadoo. He is the one here to lead this army.’

51:14 *Ni kafupi sana huyu kabwana lakini ni noma, yaani ukisikia noma ni noma ile mbaya baba*

‘This little man is very short but extraordinary, I mean if you hear extraordinary it is his very extraordinariness, baba’¹⁶

To over exemplify the role of Master Yoda in the film, DJ Mark calls Yoda respectfully “*mzee mzima*”, repeats his master title three times and changes his name to a euphonious Yodiya, which makes this character in a humoristic way local. He also compares Yoda with Jadoo (‘Magic’), who is the alien character in the Indian science fiction movie *Koi Mil Gaya*¹⁷ from 2003, a movie similar to the US science fiction film *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial* from 1982. Jadoo resembles Yoda in his appearance, size and magical powers and like Yoda wears a hooded coat. As the Indian Jadoo is well-known in Tanzania, DJ Mark uses a comparison with the Bollywood character to familiarize the viewers with Yoda. The example shows how important intertextual references are for film narrating and how *veejays* can make use of a common knowledge of other films the viewers must have seen or that he has already translated. The re-introduction of characters can also be accomplished through the perspective and voice of another character:

6:06 *Anamkumbuka huyu binti. Binti anaitwa malkia Amidala*

‘He is remembering this girl. The girl is called queen Amidala’

Certain extraordinary and funny characters are marked by DJ Mark’s laughter and comical repetitive speech style. This is the case with Jar Jar Binks, a male Gungan of the Otollo race from planet Naboo, who, due to his appearance of a humanoid amphibian with long ears, sloppy behaviour and a twisted form of the galactic “basic” language, is designed as a funny alien character to create comic relief for the viewers.¹⁸ In the middle of a meeting of the Jedi Council, when the camera shows a head and shoulder shot of a serious looking character listening attentively, DJ Mark introduces him with:

24:38 *Huyu anaitwa Jar Jar Aha. Baba baba baba Jar Jar Bik – Jar Jar Biks*

‘He is called Jar Jar Aha. Baba baba baba Jar Jar Bik – Jar Jar Biks’

¹⁶ *Baba* (‘father’), besides being used to address one’s father, can be used as an informal but respectful form of addressing any person. Here, it makes anybody in the audience feel personally addressed.

¹⁷ *Koi Mil Gaya* is about a mentally disabled boy named Rohit who happens to meet an alien. Rohit’s father was a hobby astronomer who was able to get into contact with aliens. When they first come to earth, Rohit’s parents have a car accident, in which the father dies. His unborn son Rohit suffers brain damage during this crash. When Rohit grows up, together with his girlfriend he is again able to contact the aliens and helps one of them who was lost in the forest. They call him Jadoo, which means magic. Jadoo helps Rohit to regain more than his mental strength and Rohit rescues him from military capture and helps him to get back on his spaceship (see also Alessio & Langer 2007).

¹⁸ http://jedipedia.wikia.com/wiki/Jar_Jar_Binks (last visited 02-08-2019).

He does this by lowering his voice and repeating the ideophone *baba*, which he uses as titbit to make the film accessible. After this very vivid commentary, DJ Mark stays quiet for the rest of the scene.

Cultural comparison and explanation

DJ Mark explains characters, scenes and actions to the audience through comparison with local phenomena and concepts. Thus, he describes the intergalactic parliament of the federation by comparing it with the Tanzanian parliament called *bunge*, differing only in size:

28:30 *Yaani tuseme kwamba hii ndiyo kama bunge lao hili na humu ndio kama unamhitaji mtu ndiyo vitu vyote vinafanyika humu humu ndani*

‘So let’s say this is like their parliament and in there, if you have to deal with somebody, everything is dealt in there’

29:09 *Watu ni wengi sana*

‘People are so many’

29:11 *Yaani wanaingia humu ndani ni hatari*

‘I mean, how many fit inside here, it’s amazing’

With the use of the first person plural prefix *tu-* and second person singular *u-* DJ Mark again creates a community with the viewers and asks them to think of a Tanzanian parliament as he stresses the mass of people seen on the screen.

In the scene mentioned above, when Anakin, Padmé and Obi-Wan are captured and sentenced to fight against giant monsters in an arena on the planet Geonisos, DJ Mark refers to the creatures with Swahili terms for amphibians or insects.

38:46 *Sizungumzii watu kama wewe ulivyo hapana nazungumzia eh hawa ni viumbe*

‘I am not talking about people like you, no, I am talking about eh these are creatures’

40:35 *Mmoja ni mfano wa kasamende*

‘One is like a *kasamende*’

40:43 *Hiki hapa*

‘This one here’

40:45 *Mambo ya kasa mende kinachokozwa kinakasirika kwamba*

“*niache mimi niende bwana*” kwani siyo mnyama “*mie niende bwana*”

‘You know how they are, the *kasamende*, if they are provoked they get angry, like “let me go, man” because it is not an animal, “let me go, man”’

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42:14 *Mjusi siyo mjusi, kenge siyo kenge ayaa*

‘The lizard is not a lizard, the monitor lizard is not a monitor lizard, ayaa’

43:17 *Yaani yuko mfano kama wavunjachungu hivi*

‘this one is like those praying mantises somehow’

The veejay starts with the statement that the beings in the film are not normal people like those present in the audience, and with the remark that ‘The lizard is not a lizard’, he emphasises that even if those creatures in the film resemble existing ones, they are not the same. The use of the term *kasamende*, literally ‘sea turtle cockroach’ for a huge green insect-like amphibian with six spiky legs, is a coinage of Mukandala from the film *Star Ship Troopers*, which has entered film translators’ vocabulary.¹⁹ Through these statements, DJ Mark creates intertextual references and helps the viewer understand the film. Moreover, he articulates his expertise and knowledge of the different species in the film.

In an earlier scene, in which the droids R2-D2 and C-3PO find themselves caught in the factory where the battle droids are produced, 3PO accidentally falls onto the assembly line. In the process, 3PO’s head is exchanged for a clone’s head. Mark explains the process in great detail, although it becomes quite clear from the visual information:

34:51 *Kwa hiyo hapa kuna robot aliyewekewa kichwa cha yule robot ambaye amekuja hapa mgeni na huyu robot mgeni amewekewa kichwa cha huyu robot ambaye ni mwenyeji anayekaa hapa. Hebu angalia hii vice versa iliyofanyika*

‘So here, there is the robot he is put on the head of this robot who has come here like a stranger and this other robot is put on the head of that robot who is a resident who lives here. Look how the vice versa is done.’

Mimicking voices

Through direct speech, the commentator takes over the voice of the characters, lending them new voices and amending the dialogue. He speaks on behalf of the people (here characters in the film) he represents to bridge the cultural difference between the film and the audience. Depending on the knowledge and interpretation of the dialogues, the commentator either literally translates or creates a completely new dialogue with alternative meaning as he puts his words into the mouth of the characters.²⁰ Within direct speech, the translator shows his art of performance. It is a place for satire, cultural translating or even political commentary. In the following scene, the evil chancellor, Sheev Palpatine is giving a speech before the intergalactic

¹⁹ DJ Mark via FB Messenger, 27.05.2017.

²⁰ Mukandala has become famous for engaging his wife and children to act as different characters and later on for mimicking them all by altering his voice to sound like older, younger or female characters. This re-enactment, along with the sometimes obvious change of meaning, had an especially comical effect and was carried on as speech comedy later on by other translators.

parliament. In his talk, he is announcing the founding of a grand army of the republic to support the supposedly overwhelmed Jedi against the separatist movement. DJ Mark changes the first sentence from English first person singular *I* to Swahili first person plural *tu-* and the new voice of Palpatine mainly expresses his satisfaction with the regime and his resistance against any change:

28:44 “*Jamani tunapenda sana democracy*”

‘Hey, we like democracy very much’

28:47 “*Kama siasa tunazipenda tunapenda maendeleo pia*”

‘As we like politics we also like progress’

28:55 “*Tunapenda kusema kwamba utawala wetu uko palepale hatukubali utawala huu uende sehemu nyingine*”

‘We want to say that our government should stay as it is. It should not move in another direction’

In a later scene, when Obi-Wan Kenobi and Count Dooku have a fierce and intense duel with their lightsabers, DJ Mark gives the scene a new dialogue with his typically comical speech style:

63:18 *Hapa sasa baba*

‘Here now baba’

63:20 “*Baba yaani huniwezi kama uchawi na mimi ninao tena wa form six*”

‘Baba you can’t defeat me as my sorcery is of form six’

63:27 “*Basi kama wa form six mimi nina uchawi wa form seven*”

‘So if it is form six I have sorcery of form seven’

63:33 “*Nataka nikukomeshe kwa upanga huu*”

‘I want to finish you with this sabre’

Translating the powers of Jedi with *uchawi* or a lightsabers with a *panga* and relating *uchawi* then to school levels not only culturally explains the events but also takes the seriousness away from the original scene and makes fun of it. Moreover, as *Star Wars* is a military science fiction film, DJ Mark uses lively action speech in indirect or direct speech, as in the following extracts:

2:36 *Piga moto! – wee – mdogo na mbaba wanajibu mashambulizi*

‘Shoot! – wee – the young one and father are responding to the attacks’

3:10 *Rusha kombora kummaliza. [...]*

‘Shoot a rocket to finish him’

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52:27 *Shika shika shika shika shika*

‘Get it, get it, get it, get it, get it’

43:41 *Kata huo mkuki! Hii ni hatari baba hii. Hii ni baba baba baba ni noma*

‘Cut that spear! This is dangerous, baba, this one. This is baba baba baba it’s crazy’

Action speech is marked by DJ Mark’s direct address to the characters of the film, as if he could talk to them. With the use of the imperative, he is giving them orders and afterwards comments on the action with youth slang. Kiswahili youth language or *Kiswahili cha mitaani* has become a typical marker of DJ Mark’s speech. The use of slang words and phrases makes the commentary more lively, funny and attractive for the younger audience. As Uta Reuster-Jahn has shown in her analysis of reader comments of newspaper and online novels, the direct address to the characters can be interpreted as a special form of reception through which characters or actions are evaluated with a change from external to internal and “real” perspectives, a strategy also used in oral storytelling in Tanzania (Reuster-Jahn 2013: 178, 180-182).

Action speech contributes much to the liveliness of the oral performance of the translator, making the film more entertaining and thrilling for the audience. Comedy and humour are especially important in the cultural mediation of the movie to deconstruct the “power” of the foreign or Western film and to make it easier for the viewers to understand.

Intertextual filmic references

In his role as an ethnodramaturg, the commentator uses intertextual references to other science fiction films as a strategy to explain certain scenes to his viewers, which would otherwise not be easy to understand. In the following scene, DJ Mark directly asks the audience to remember another film. In the original scene, Count Dooku is interrogating Obi-Wan Kenobi, entrapped in a kind of transformer, trying to extort his support for the republic to be under the influence of the Sith.²¹ In the Swahili version, DJ Mark just ignores Dooku’s speech and explains the complicated picture of the transformer with another film. According to the oral storytelling techniques of repair (Reuster-Jahn 2005: 170, 2013), he fills gaps of meaning for the viewers and distracts them from the original film:

25:25 *Maskini ya mungu, Master Obi wan Kenobi, wamemkamata. Wamemwingiza katika mtambo wao maalum*

‘The poor Master Obi-Wan Kenobi, they caught him. They have put him in their special machine’

²¹ The Sith or Sith Order are the main antagonists of the Jedi; they are an ancient organisation of supernaturally gifted fighters devoted to the Dark Force.

25:36 *Huu mtambo maalum kwa wale ambao wametazama picha zile za kihindi eh hh nafikiri mtakumbuka ile Krish*

‘This is a special machine, those who have seen this Indian movie eh hh I think you will remember that ‘*Krrish*’

25:42 *Ehhh wakati Krish alipokwenda kumwoko a baba yake, eh Rohit Mehra, alikuwa katika mtambo ya namna hii. Ni ndio huu mtambo*

‘Ehhh the time Krrish went to rescue his father, eh Rohit Mehra, he was in a machine like this. It is this machine.’

27:51 *Haya yote yamefanana kabisa na ile muvi ya kidosi,²² eh?*

‘All this resembles exactly with this Indian movie, eh?’

While admittedly distracting viewers from what is happening in the film, he simultaneously makes the scene understandable to them with this intertextual reference and comparison. *Krrish* (2006) is the sequel to the previously mentioned Indian science fiction film *Koi Mil Gaya*, both of which were very popular in Tanzania. Krishna, the son of the main character of *Koi Mil Gaya*, has inherited the superpowers of his father and in the following acts as Krrish, a superman who helps people while disguising his identity with a black facemask. The presence of a huge Indian community in Tanzania makes Indian movies very popular in the country— compared to US productions. A parallel with Indian movies in this context function as a valuable reference to explain and familiarise what is happening on the screen.²³ DJ Mark does this by directly addressing the viewers, especially by use of the question particle *eh?*. With this final comment on the scene, he performs an imaginative dialogue with the viewer with a question whose answer remains outstanding.

Science-fiction specific vocabulary

As has become clear above, the science fiction genre presents a special challenge for the translator due to the rich genre-specific technical and species-related vocabulary. It is its own language, one which the commentator has to learn and translate for the viewers. The translation of some terms was not a challenge for the Swahili commentator, such as *sayari* (‘star’ or ‘planet’), *jeshi* (‘army’), *mkuki* (‘arrow’), *kombora* (‘missiles’) or *mashambulizi* (‘attack’). However, in other cases DJ Mark translates most of the specific vocabulary using Swahili terms with a more general semantic spectrum. This happens, for instance, with *panga nyekundu* (‘red lightsabre’), *mtandao* (‘communication, network’), *kiumbe*, *viumbe* (*vya ajabu*) for strange creatures that appear in the movie or *ndege* (‘airplane’) for starship. Other strategies used by DJ Mark are borrowings from English, as for droids rendered as *robot*, *roboti* (pl. *mirobots*), or

²² *Muvi ya kidosi* is the slang term for Indian movie.

²³ Brian Larkin (1997) coined the term “parallel modernities” for the cultural similarities of Indian movies and Hausa culture in Nigeria to explain the popularity Indian movies receive in Northern Nigeria.

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employing the untranslated original English terms, as with Jedi and Master. Codeswitching is often used during the film, as it is also part of DJ Mark's usage of youth language:

3:55 "*Mwanangu naomba uniamini baba yako mimi nina control za ukweli*"

'My child I beg you believe me your father, me, I have the real *control*'

13:25 "*Ah mwanangu umeshakuwa handsome umekuwa mkubwa kweli*"

'Ah my child you have become handsome you have become really big'

As can be seen in the translated dialogue, DJ Mark uses codeswitching to stress these utterances and as a comical tool in the dialogue, which he imitates with changing voices for the different characters.

Priming audiences

DJ Mark repeatedly mentions the title or part of the film in a praising manner throughout his commentary and in this way, just like in oral storytelling, relocates or primes the viewers to the film. He does this sometimes abruptly, even during a thrilling action scene. Through this, DJ Mark not only assures the viewers that they have made the right choice to watch the film but also highlights the commented version as his own work of art. In the middle of a fighting scene, during the war of the galaxy, DJ Mark just says:

55:52 *Tunazidi kuitazama ya sinema yetu nzuri kabisa ya Star Wars*

'We are watching further this very nice film of *Star Wars*'

Besides praising, DJ Mark very often evaluates parts of the story and action. By doing this, Mark assists the viewers in their own judgements and expresses his ideas of what the viewers might think. This not only creates the imagined community of viewers but also, as DJ Mark's comments are mostly highly ironic, adds another comical layer to the story. He comments on strange or dangerous situations and creatures and uses the conditional tense to evaluate certain actions of the characters. To relate to the "craziness" of the scenes, DJ Mark uses slang words like *noma* ('amazing'), *mbaya* ('bad', 'very'), *balaa* ('crazy').

When Anakin and Padmé enter the above-mentioned droid-producing factory on Geonosis, fighting bat-like creatures on their way and Padmé falls several meters down onto the assembly line, DJ Mark says "*Sehemu mbaya hiyo*" ('This is a bad part'). In describing one of the amphibian creatures in the arena where Anakin, Padmé and Obi Wan-Kenobi have to fight, he comments "*Kiumbe kibaya hiki hapa baba*" ('This is a bad creature here baba') as talking to himself and the audience.

And talking about Master Yoda, we hear DJ Mark saying:

51:14 *Ni kafupi sana huyu kabwana lakini ni noma, yaani ukisikia noma ni noma ile mbaya baba*

‘This little man is very short but extraordinary, I mean if you hear extraordinary it is his very extraordinariness, baba’

Finally, when Anakin and Padmé kiss after getting married, DJ Mark comments:

69:48 *Ah, wanazopeana raha za dunia siyo mchezo ndugu yangu ni noma hizo. Hiyo ni balaa!*

‘Ah when they give each other worldly pleasures this is not a game my brother, this is crazy. This is totally crazy!’

DJ Mark’s frequent use of slang sets him apart from former translators like Mukandala and makes his translated movies especially attractive for the younger audiences.

Mwisho wa stori, ‘The end of the story’

In line with the developed structure of the translated narrative, in the third and final part, DJ Mark closes his cinematic narrative with a formularised ending, which gives a frame and a form of closure to the oral event. During the highly romantic scene of the newly married Anakin and Padmé standing on a veranda and gazing at the beautiful landscape of Naboo’s lakeland during sunset, DJ Mark comments in loud voice and motivated tone:

70:04 *Sinema safi kabisa iliyotoka chini ya udhamini ya New Kizibo Entertainment inayopatika na maeneo ya Mtoni Mtongani karibu na ile roundabout. Mnaweza mkafanya mawasiliano ya [number] au mnaweza mkatembelea mtandao mwingine [network code] eeehh [number]*

‘A very nice movie, which was released under the support of New Kizibo Entertainment which can be found in the area of Mtoni Mtongani near that roundabout. You can call us on [number] or you can use another network [network code] eeehh [number]’

70:27 *Chris Gay Professional mwana shinyanga nafika tamati tukutane na mimi tena katika mwendelezo wa sehemu ya nne*

‘Chris Gay Professional the one from Shinyanga, I am finishing, you will meet me again in the proceedings of the fourth part’

70:32 *Asanteni sana na kwa herini*

‘Thank you and good bye’

70:40 *So, tuendele mwendelezo wa sehemu ya tano, fuatilia sana!*

‘So let’s get on with the proceedings of the fifth part, follow up!’

In this way, the commentator closes as he started by praising the film, advertising himself and giving his contact details. Using a cliff hanger with open questions about the further

development of the story, he ends his comments by thanking the viewers and, using a persuasion strategy, invites them to join him in the next part of the film.

Conclusion

The translation of foreign films into Swahili with live or on DVD commentary is a by now nearly century old cultural practice in Tanzania. From educational colonial films where the commentator worked under the strict instructions of his master, the *veejays* of today are independent popular and renowned storytellers and mediators who are quick to translate any new blockbuster from Hollywood or elsewhere. This paper has discussed Swahili film commentary with the example of the translated version of one episode of the science fiction film *Star Wars* by DJ Mark to show how the translator deals with genre challenges and which linguistic, narrative and performative strategies he uses to present and explain this cinematic text to his audience. As I have shown, film translators like DJ Mark act like ethnodramaturgs, who through their dramaturgic performance mediate between the foreign film and the local audience. Like an ethnodramaturg he immerses himself deeply into the film and its plot; he selects important parts of the source material, interprets and reinterprets them for the audience. Then he constructs a dramaturgy of his own commentary in line with or sometimes contrary to the dramaturgy of the film. His approach to this task is a mixture of translation and new narrative. The outcome is a theatrical performance of the dramaturgical assembly of the audio-visual film and the verbal commentary. DJ Mark accomplishes this through a mixture of commentary and translation, along with strategies such as explication, evaluating and praising. In this way, he brings the film closer to the audience.

Science fiction films are especially challenging to translate as they present a maximum of strangeness through their display of futuristic technically advanced worlds, together with the many different and diverse species, cultures and practices. By employing different terms or descriptions, he is able to explain to them the technical and futuristic worlds they are viewing. An important translation strategy DJ Mark applies is the use of intertextual references to other science fiction films to explain alien characters or strange techniques used in the film. This exemplifies how the translator and the viewers can refer to a common film/translated film lexicon with communicative and performative strategies as well as with certain terms or canon as a shared cultural knowledge. These strategies have been carried on from translator to translator and have come to build a repertoire of common film translation techniques in Tanzania. In DJ Mark's commentary to the film he makes use of all his speech art, using different speech codes, varying voice and tone, talking in character voices or sometimes directly talking to the viewers as if they were with him in the same room. DJ Mark's commentary dominates the film, and it is as if he integrates the original sound of the film into his story and not vice versa. In taking the viewers with him through the film, he entertains and makes *Star Wars* accessible and attractive for the audiences. Through his speech comedy, DJ Mark appropriates the film and transforms it into his own Swahili audio-visual show.

The practice of film translation into Swahili must, like other film translation cultures, be analysed and interpreted as a performance practice which allows important insights not only into intercultural media reception and translation but also into interculturality in a more general sense.

May the force be with you! Nguvu iwe pamoja na wewe!

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