

BASIL HATIM & IAN MASON

“Politeness in Screen Translating” (1997)

Keywords:

discourse, face, face-threatening acts, film subtitling, interpersonal meaning, politeness theory, pragmatics, text analysis

1. Author(s) information

Basil Hatim is a renowned translation theorist, specializing in English/Arabic translation, as well as a bidirectional translator (English/Arabic and Arabic/English). Throughout the years, Hatim has worked closely with Ian Mason – the result of their work together are several publications on the subject of translation, more precisely the art of communication within translation and intercultural communication.

Ian Mason is a translation scholar who has taught at the Centre for Translation and Interpreting Studies at Heriot Watt University in Edinburgh. He is interested, similarly to Basil Hatim, in the pragmatics of interpersonal communication in regard to translation. He is also a member of the editorial board of *The Translator*.

2. Abstract

The aim of the article is to analyse discourse in respect to audiovisual translation, more precisely film subtitling. The study focuses on the examination of the role of context between different modes (speech and writing) as well as that of the paralinguistic features that are omnipresent in such kind of medium as a film. By using a subtitled version of a foreign film production as a research sample, the authors investigate the limitations and constraints of the film translation. The research has been based on Brown and Levinson’s *politeness theory*, principles of which are discussed in the text and aid the authors in arguing their case.

3. Terminology

The authors of the article base their research primarily on Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness, thus they refer to some sociological terms connected with the aforementioned theory. Some of the terms below were explained in the text, yet I have included them here for those readers who are not overly familiar with the subject, but those who may want to read the text once they get an idea of what those keywords, in fact, mean.

Source text term	Meaning	Polish term
prosodic features	those features related to the rhythm, stress and intonation of speech	cechy prozodyczne
“face”	the public self-image that everyone lays claim to, consisting of two related aspects ¹	„twarz”
face-threatening acts	a linguistic action that speaker intends to make that may threaten their “face”	akty zagrażające twarzy
audience design	the extent to which speakers accommodate to their addressees ²	projekt widowni
paralinguistic features	nonverbal properties of speech such as intonation, speaking tempo, vocal pitch	czynniki paralingwistyczne

¹ The definition was used by the authors and in that form appears in their article.

² See above.

4. Methodology

The pair of translators have used qualitative analysis, rather than the quantitative one. Hatim and Mason have brought under a deeper scrutiny and dissected a French film “Un coeur en hiver” which, in their opinion, proved to be the most adequate sample that they could have used. The film is said to contain a great number of politeness phenomena, which is of great help for the authors in respect to their case. The authors both admit, however, that a more thorough empirical research would be in order, to “test the generalizability of these limited findings to other films and other languages.”

5. Links with other publications on the subject

Hatim, B. and I. Mason. 1990. *Discourse and the Translator*. London: Longman.

Hatim, B. and I. Mason. 1997. *The Translator as Communicator*. London: Routledge.

Mason, I. 1989. “Speaker Meaning and Reader Meaning: Preserving Coherence in Screen Translating,” in: R.Kölmel and J.Payne (eds.), *Babel: The Cultural and Linguistic Barriers between Nations*. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press. 13–24.

6. Critical commentary

The article is first and foremost of interest for those readers that are either interested in pragmatics, or in audiovisual translation. Personally, I have to admit that, at first, I have been swayed and persuaded to read it because of the latter. I suppose that there is a large group of students interested in audiovisual translation for whom the article in question may be a satisfying and a thought-provoking read. Apart from being well-written, the article incorporates the elements of sociolinguistics which make the text even more interesting and challenging to read. Granted, the *politeness theory* is vital here and must have been used, being a base for research, yet the fact is still worth acknowledging. The one drawback would be that, in order to fully comprehend all the nuances, at least an intermediate knowledge of French would be needed as the examples are partly in this language.

7. Quotation to remember the text by

“As a translator, the subtitler is seeking to preserve the coherence of communication between addressees on screen at the same time as relaying a coherent discourse from screenwriter to mass auditors. Given the severe constraints of the task as detailed above, hard choices have to be made. Elements of meaning will, inevitably and knowingly, be sacrificed.”

8. References

Hatim, B. and I. Mason. 1997. “Politeness in Screen Translating”, in: Lawrence Venuti (ed.), *The Translation Studies Reader*. London: Routledge. 430–446.