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THE ROLE OF SUBTITLING IN ADVANCING INDIGENOUS VERNACULAR FILMS

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ABSTRACT

The oral nqture ofmost indigenous vernacular fIlms in Nigeria indicates that a lot has to be put in place to make their messages more accessible to a wider audience. Because the fIlms are so word)7, they end up becoming more like radio drama and losing all thefrtmic essence. This is not unconnected with the oral nature of our society where almost every action is painted in words to make impact. Film is fIrst of aU a visual medium; the audio is complementary. This makes Nm experience quite different from radio experience. Replacing actions with more dialogue is not the desire of the fIlm audience. Many indigenous vernacular fIlms are towing this path; more words, less action. This paper explores the need to take advantage of the emerging art or technology of subtitling to make the indigenous vernacular fIlm more accessible to the wider fIlm audience. Unfortunately, the current ine#ectiveness ofthose involved in subtitting the indigenous fIm dialogues is a hindrance to the growth of the vernacular fIlms. Just as a fIlm maker undergoes rigorous training to make good$1ms, those charged with the task of subtittingfr Ims should not see their assignment as any less crucial. The impact of a wrong translation of a dialogue to the overall impact of the fIlm cannot be quantified. By calling attention to this very important aspect of fIlm post production, the paper is suggesting that Blm subtitling should not be left in the hands of just anybody, but professionals profIcient in the language of the fIlm and the language of the subtitles. It is also suggesting more crucially, that advantage should be taken of emerging technological soft-wares and applications that can most accurately subtitle.

Keyword: Subtitling, Indigenous, Vernacular

INTRODUCTION

Every film is a foreign film. Foreign to some audience somewhere around the world. It is therefore through subtitles that an audience can experience different languages and cultures, And behind every foreign film that brings a culture to a viewer, is a

subtitler. . .
-Sandeep Garcha "The Invisible Subtitler"

Film must be seen as a slice of life not life in full. Life by itself can be boring if presented on screen verbatim. This is why editing has become a very essential ingredient of film post-production. By presenting this slice, stories can be told conveniently within the attention span of the audience. In film, actions are carefully selected to represent a story. These actions tell the stories visually. For clarity and specificity, actions are usually accompanied by dialogues. Like the action, the dialogue should also be carefully selected and phrased. Many times, the dialogues are left to flow without control, making the film more like life itself, as the dialogues dominate the program. As dialogues are usually accompanied by local nuances and idiosyncrasies, they leave the viewer confused about the meanings of what is being said if not controlled. As Eichenwald in Charles (2000) posits, "it is only to the stupid that you explain everything in words". This is more so if the viewer is not a native or fluent speaker of the language of the film and situation tends to exclude many viewers from the patronage of such films and accounts for why many ethnic vernacular films are not readily patronized by non-speakers of the film dialogue. This disconnect here can be bridged by the technology of subtitling. Subtitles have made a lot of difference in the understanding of many films that would have gone unappreciated because ofthe language barrier.

Defining the Term

Subtitles have become inseparable from film and video as they give legitimacy to the medium. In media parlance, a subtitle is seen as a textual version of the dialogue in films, usually displayed at the bottom of the screen. It usually helps to translate a foreign language dialogue. The text helps the sound where there is no clarity and supports the film by bridging the language barrier. For easy assimilation and to avoid visual confusion, a subtitle should not be more than 2 lines and 37 characters(Millan, 2013). Many times the problems of subtitling arise from the carelessness of the translator inform of direct translation of dialogues, grammar and spelling errors. With proper training however, these lapses can be minimized for more effectiveness.

The Magic ofSubtitling and Dubbing

The increasing interest in foreign films (films not indigenous to the viewer's culture) has left film distributors with no option but to seek ways of making the films more widely acceptable to the viewers. Dubbing and subtitling are two very important arts distributors have found for pushing the films to non-speakers of the film language. Although dubbing and subtitling have existed since the 1960s, the role they now play in vernacular films are becoming more pronounced because of cultural

globalization. Globalization here is seen as the interaction between different cultures. In dubbing, “actors working from a specially prepared script attempt to match their words to the lip movements of the actors on the screen". \\ben properly synchronized, this shows the foreign actors speaking in the language the film is dubbed into. This has proved very successfhl in the JESUS FILM dubbed into many Nigerian indigenous languages. On the other hand, a subtitle is a dialogue of the film translated into another language in a text form and displayed simultaneousjy u-ith the dialogue. This usually appears at the bottom of the screen. The two styles magically create access for non-speakers of the film language to fully access the meaning of the film

In a period in history, about the 1960s, the process of dubbing and subtitling became so prevalent that it sparked a controversy between the 'pro-dubbers' and the proponents of the subtitle. While those in support of dubbing contended seriously that dubbed versions of foreign films invariably received more booking than subtitled prints, thus making it possible for more people to enjoy their artistry, the “opponents who argued in favor of subtitling contended that dubbing destroyed the artistic integrity of the original, and in some instances, their meanings as well, whereas subtitling preserved the flavor ofthe work”.

In many parts of the world, appeals are still going out to film distributors in favor of making all films available in subtitles, even in the same language or the vernacular of the locality. This is in view of the extent the excessive use of words are sidelining local vernacular productions. While it is true that several societies around the world are oral in nature where words play significant roles in such societies, where their art is “controlled, shaped and influenced by the society which creates it, owns it and consumes it” (Bakare, 2000), the fact still remains that a good film should be able to eonvey its message elearly without the over-pse of words. The need to return to good acting, scripting and drastic reduction in dialogue is the emphasis ofthis paper.

Gains and Advantages

It is important to understand the gains and the added value subtitles bring to films. It is for this that more film distributors are pushing for their implementation, especially in vernacular films that would havQ gone unappreciated. A subtitle in a film translates the film dialogue in a text form and displays it usually at the bottom of the screen. Subtitles have become so inevitable, especially for films requiring the appreciation of audiences foreign to the $1m's language ofproduction. They are not just additional visuals in the film1 they help to translate or interpret in writing whgt is being said. In that sense! they bridge the language barrier, thereby allowing for rnore viewership and understanding.

Subtitling is not about directly translating the dialogue of film. It is about "creatively evolving a constrained translation which summarises what is beingsaid, but still retains the core message". It is about carefully selecting the most suitable word choice that conveys the meaning of the dialogue. This gives the viewer a clear understanding of the film. Subtitle has thereforecome to solve the problem of poorscripting by adding flavor to the acting. The dialogue translated in texts make almost everyone a partaker of the film. They are also able to solve the problem of poor sound and voice recording since they clarify what is being said. With subtitles, even actors with speech impairment can be clearly understood.

Promoting Vernacular Productions

It is no longer necessary to restrict vernacular films for the mere reason that many people do not understand the language of the dialogue, the intonation of the actors or a noisy environment. All that is needed is the arrangement for a proper subtitling of the film in any language of choice. This proper arrangement includes the engagement of professional subtitle translators who use proof readers to "all agree on the best translation that conveys the message". This assignment must not be left for just anybody. It is a task for the trained who must see the role as crucial to the success of the film. Like film editing, subtitles can make or mara film.

The emerging use of software/applications for subtitling is a welcome development that will see more vernacular films migrating across cultural boundaries to showcase their worth to international viewership. This is also an open door for the indigenous vernacular films whose historical relevance has been in oblivion. Such films can now possibly be entered for films for festivals to compete for laurels around the world.

Available Trending Software/Applications

The rule here is to use trials and demos to find the suitability of a soRwwe that matches one's needs. Some applications are already being engaged in subtitling films appropriately. They include:

> Teletex
> Streaming Localization
> Real Time Captions

Others are:

> WINCAP Q4
> EZ Titles

>EZ Titles Plug-ins (this works with video editing software such as Adobe

Premiere or Avid to burn subtitles).
> Annotation Edit (for Mac only)
>Subtitle Edit (this is free and has a vast selection of tools and capabilities).

Matinee Multilingual is also a company of experts that provide professionalsubtitling services in over 80 languages. They can be contacted on: sale@matinee.co.uk. Although technologies now dominate the art of subtitling, subtitles are still being added to videos manually using video editing programs like Adobe Premiere, Avid, Final Cut Pro or Sony Vegas.

CONCLUSION

Subtitling has made it possible for films of whatever indigenous vernacular to be accessible to non-speakers. No film can now be kept in oblivion because of its vernacular language dialogue. Emerging technologies(software and applications) now give access to all films through this display of film dialogue in texts. This is also an expansion of market and opening for both the film and the creative dialogue translators. The paper has been able to show that the subtitling ofa film dialogue is able to create the access to advance the film to the next level, especially indigenous vernacular productions.

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