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**Title: Cognates in Subtitles of TV Comedies as Aids to Foreign Language Acquisition**

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**Abstract**

This research deals with the field of audiovisual translation in conjunction with the field of foreign language teaching and acquisition, and more specifically that of the teaching and acquisition of English as a foreign language. The research investigates some of the processes involved in incidental foreign language acquisition, which takes place outside formal settings, during the language learners' free time and through activities and materials which they choose for themselves of their own will and for their own pleasure. The incidental acquisition of foreign languages nowadays is largely related to the exposure to media in those languages and to the exposure to audiovisual translation.

The aim of this research is to find whether different modes of translation within subtitles may be relevant to and may influence the incidental acquisition of English as a foreign language by learners at the intermediate level. The focus is on cognates, a term which is widely discussed throughout the paper, and which for the purposes of this research mainly refers to the similarity of lexical items in different languages on the phonological and the denotational level, disregarding the source and the process by which this similarity came to exist. Examples for the cognate phenomenon are these pairs of words and collocations in English and Hebrew: album-אלבום, astronaut-אסטרונאוט, carnival-קרנבל, pathetic-פתטי, cyber-סייבר, shopping-שופינג, new media-ניו מדיה. Cognates are an instance of the general phenomenon of translation equivalence which is combined with formal correspondence. Equivalence is a key concept in translation studies and it has bearing on the very core of the definition of translation as a special connection between texts. Formal correspondence between a source text and a target text may take different forms, such as keeping the same number of words, the same number of morphemes, similar word order and syntax, similar punctuation and words with similar sounds. This research focuses on sound-formal correspondence between words in the source language and those in the target language. Since English and Hebrew do not share similar orthography and since this research deals with a comparison between an oral source text (a soundtrack) and a written target text (translation subtitles), the term "sound-formal correspondence" refers to the similarity between the sounds of the word in the source language as they are heard in the soundtrack and the sounds of the word in the target language as it is read by the consumer of the subtitles.

Two well-established findings from previous research provide a basis for the current work: First – the consumption of audiovisual material in a foreign language, especially when it is provided with L1 subtitles, contributes to the consumers' foreign language acquisition; Second – cognates and identifying the similarities between lexical items in L1 and those in the foreign language are an important basis for foreign language acquisition, especially at the beginner and intermediate levels. Based on this existing knowledge, the current research examines the possibility that the mode of cognate translation in audiovisual material can affect the consumers' ability to identify the cognates.

The audiovisual material in this research is episodes of English-speaking sitcoms which were aired on TV channels in Israel. Some of the sitcoms were created specifically for teens and some are sitcoms for adults or for the whole family. This genre of audiovisual material was chosen based on findings from previous research which show that it is the preferred genre to watch in English by the research population – Hebrew speaking junior high students (ages 13-15).

There are two parts to this research: One is a comparison of source text and target text and the other is an experiment. The text comparison was conducted on a wide sample of episodes from sitcoms. The aim of this part of the research is to describe the actual mode of translation in this type of audiovisual material. Frequent cognates in the data base were identified and the different modes of their translation were quantitatively compared: Cognate-translation – meaning translation by a lexical item in Hebrew which is sound-formally similar to the item in the English soundtrack; or noncognate translation – meaning translation by a lexical item in Hebrew which is not sound-formally similar to the item in the source text. As an example, the word "pathetic" may be translated by the cognate-translation "פתטי" (/pa'teti/) or by a noncognate translation such as "עלוב" (/a'luv/).

The experiment in the other part of this research was done on a sample of 12 English classes learning at the "aleph" (high) level within the ability grouping system in three public junior high schools. The subjects were divided into three groups: The first group watched an episode of a sitcom for teens in English with Hebrew subtitles that included many cognate-translations for the cognate items in the source soundtrack; The second group watched the same episode with Hebrew subtitles that included many noncognate translations for the cognate items in the source soundtrack; The third group watched the episode with no translation at all. All the subjects were instructed to record the cognates they identified while watching the episode, and a quantitative comparison and statistical analysis were conducted on the lists created by the subjects in the different research conditions. In-depth analysis of some of the most identified items was carried out as well.

The results of this research show that cognate-translation in subtitles significantly improves the ability of junior high students, who are intermediate level English learners, to identify cognates in the audiovisual material they consume. In addition, the results show that in the translation subtitles of English sitcoms broadcast on Israeli TV channels there is a quantitative preference to noncognate translation for the cognate items in the source soundtrack. Thus, the findings show that the common mode of translation for cognates in sitcom subtitles is not the one most helpful for the identification of the similarity between Hebrew and English, and therefore is not the most beneficial for the promotion of foreign language acquisition by the consumers of the sitcoms who are English learners at the intermediate level. These findings may have practical and operative implications for the manufacturers of audiovisual translation, for those working in the field of foreign language teaching, and for the consumers of audiovisual translation.