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Collaborative Self-Translation in the Screenplays of *The Godfather* Trilogy

MA. Thesis

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## **Abstract**

This study examines the collaborative self-translation of the novel *The Godfather* for screenplays by author Mario Puzo and director Francis Ford Coppola. *The Godfather* trilogy was chosen as a case study both because it is an example of inter-semiotic translation (see Jakobson, 1959 [Hebrew]) and because it combines adaptation, sequel and prequel (see Hutcheon, 2006), which enabled the examination of the relationship between these three forms of intertextuality as three variations of inter-semiotic translation. For this purpose, I used the adaptation model proposed by Perdikaki (2016). The model distinguishes between the descriptive component, which encompasses the changes made in the adaptation compared to the source material, and the interpretive component, which consists of the explanations for these changes. The model enables analysis of both the textual relations and the relations between the professionals involved in the adaptation process. In the current study, the interpretive component includes the screenwriters' explanations for changes occurring in each screenplay compared to the source material and the previous screenplays, while the descriptive component includes the identification of these changes within each screenplay. The underlying assumption was that in this manner it would be possible to learn about collaborative self-translation both as a process and as a final product.

The main research question was: How is the collaborative self-translation expressed in adaptation, sequel and prequel? The first research hypothesis was that the power relations between the two screenwriters were unequal in all the three screenplays, so that the director, Coppola, had a greater influence on the decisions made in the process of adapting the novel and writing the screenplays than the author, Puzo, whose role was more marginal. The second hypothesis was that the farther away from the adaptation, which was central in the first screenplay, giving a more central place to sequel and prequel in the next two screenplays, the more the screenplays become Coppola's personal work based on Puzo's materials.

The study was conducted in several stages. First, I examined the interpretive component in the adaptation model by using epitexts documenting the collaboration between Coppola and Puzo,

including documentaries and radio and newspaper interviews (for epitext, see Genette, 1997). The epitexts revealed the power relations between the two screenwriters and made it possible to examine the main changes made in each screenplay. After identifying the changes indicated by the screenwriters, I examined the descriptive component, i.e. how these changes are actually expressed in each of the screenplays, and I tried to categorize them into adaptation shifts – the changes in terms of the adaptation model (Perdikaki, 2016). The final stage was formulating the findings by combining the interpretive and descriptive components so that for each screenplay a comprehensive analysis was performed, including the process of preparing it and its relationship with the source material and/or the previous screenplays.

The findings confirmed the first hypothesis that the power relations between Puzo and Coppola were unequal in their first collaboration and did not change throughout their later collaborations in the trilogy. According to the epitexts, Coppola was the main writer and had the last word in most of the decisions, while Puzo's job was to examine and improve Coppola's drafts. In the first screenplay, which is fully an adaptation of Puzo's novel, it was Coppola's decision which events and characters from the novel would appear and which of them would be omitted. The unequal power relations did not change either in the second screenplay, which is a combination of adaptation, prequel and sequel, or in the third screenplay, which is fully a sequel. In each of the screenplays I examined some of the major changes the screenwriters had discussed in the epitexts, most of them suggested by Coppola. Puzo accepted most of Coppola's ideas, although in some cases they disagreed and had to reach a compromise (4.2.3). However, since Puzo was identified with *The Godfather* novel, his involvement was important in order to give authenticity to the screenplays and to create continuity between them, and between them and the source.

Moreover, in accordance with the second hypothesis, it was found that the further away from the adaptation in the first screenplay, the more the screenplays became individual creative works by Coppola based on Puzo's materials. The first screenplay was based entirely on Puzo's materials, i.e. Coppola took events and characters directly from Puzo's novel and left them almost unchanged. This screenplay mainly contained shifts that enabled the adaptation of a novel for a screenplay in light of the differences between the two media, written and cinematic, as well as shifts intended to improve the quality of the screenplay compared to the novel according to Coppola's vision (4.1). These shifts stemmed mainly from personal creative considerations, in Perdikaki's (2016) terms, but to some extent also from social considerations. As a result, there was simplification of secondary characters and events that Coppola saw as

"cheap" and an amplification of the events and themes from Puzo's novel that Coppola considered to be the most important. However, only part of the second screenplay was based on Puzo's materials, and the rest was Coppola's invention. As emerged from the epitexts and the analysis of the second screenplay, Coppola's considerations in the second screenplay were both social and creative, according to the interpretive component in the adaptation model, and he had more freedom to create a personal film based on Puzo's materials. Hence, more significant shifts were made in the structure of the screenplay (4.2.1) and in certain characters from the novel, who appeared in the first screenplay almost unchanged (4.2.2 and 4.2.3). In contrast to the previous two screenplays, the third one contained no events from Puzo's novel; it was entirely Coppola's invention, based on some of Puzo's characters, while consulting with the author throughout. Accordingly, shifts were found only in the characterization category in the adaptation model – shifts intended to complete the trilogy according to Coppola's vision (4.3). In the analysis of this screenplay, in section (4.3.3), another category was proposed in order to extend the use of the adaptation model to sequels/prequels as well.

Several conclusions emerge from the current study. First, it sheds new light on generalizations made in regard to inter-linguistic self-translation and collaborative self-translation about the author's central role (see Grutman & Van Bolderen, 2014; Manterola Agirrezabalaga, 2017), since in this case Puzo's role was secondary to that of the director. This may imply that the authors' position in the translation of their own work into another medium differs from their position in translating their work into another language. Additional case studies are required to expand the discussion on the position of the self-translator in inter-linguistic translation compared to inter-semiotic translation. Second, it was found that the boundaries between adaptation, sequel, and prequel are not necessarily sharp and clear, contrary to Hutcheon's (2006) view of these boundaries. In the current case study, the blurring of the distinction between these three forms of intertextuality was expressed in various ways: the adaptation was also a prequel (4.2.1), and the sequel was based on certain parts of the source not included in the first screenplay (4.2.2). In addition, the adaptation model has also allowed discussion about the shifts occurring in the sequel/prequel, although it was used more narrowly in the analysis of the third screenplay, which is a full sequel. In order to formulate a model for the study of adaptations which can be used with certain adjustments for the study of sequels and prequels as well, it is necessary to continue examining the model by applying it in additional case studies from different genres. Finally, in this case, the collaborative self-translation made it possible to shed new light on the reality portrayed in Puzo's novel. The combination between Coppola's artistic style as a screenwriter and director, and Puzo's materials and his involvement as a

screenwriter, offers new perspectives on various social, family and cultural themes that appeared to some extent in *The Godfather* novel thus creating a trilogy that moves away from the conventions of the genre of crime, the genre of the novel, in new and surprising directions.