

## The Role of Pivot Translations in Asian Film Festivals in Catalonia: Johnny Ma's *Old Stone* As A Case Study

 Helena Casas-Tost 

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

 Sandra Bustins 

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

---

### Abstract

Pivot translations are very often used by film festivals, but have received little attention from an academic viewpoint. This article analyses the role of pivot languages in audiovisual translation carried out for Asian film festivals held in Catalonia. The paper has three aims: (i) to examine to what extent pivot translations are part of the translation process in films screened at such festivals, (ii) to determine why pivot translations are used, and (iii) to analyse the effects of their use from a qualitative perspective. In order to fulfil those aims, the answers to a questionnaire distributed among the directors and organisers of Asian film festivals in Catalonia are analysed. Additionally, the Chinese film *Old Stone* by Johnny Ma (2016), which has been translated into and subtitled in Catalan via English as a pivot language, is presented as a case study.

**Key words:** subtitling, pivot translation, audiovisual translation, Asian.

Citation: Casas-Tost, H. & S. Bustins. (2021). The Role of Pivot Translations in Asian Film Festivals in Catalonia: Johnny Ma's *Old Stone* as a Case Study. *Journal of Audiovisual Translation*, 4(1), 96–113. <https://doi.org/10.47476/jat.v4i1.2021.85>

**Editor(s):** N. Reviere & A. Jankowska

**Received:** June 19, 2019

**Accepted:** November 09, 2020

**Published:** June 04, 2021

**Copyright:** ©2021 Casas-Tost & Bustins. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). This allows for unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

---

 Helena.Casas@uab.cat, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4023-9070>

 sbustins@gmail.com, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3925-8290>

## 1. Introduction

Theatre film screening is currently giving rise to a paradox: a great number of movie theatres are closing down because they are unable to compete with multiplex cinemas targeted at general audiences, whereas film festivals that focus on specific topics or are devoted to specific regions of the world are thriving. That is the case of Asian film festivals in Spain, which actually play a key role in the distribution of films that are not blockbusters or not considered mainstream. According to Casas-Tost (2018), Casas-Tost & Rovira-Esteva (2019), and the latest data published in the online database on Chinese cinema in Spain (Casas-Tost et al., 2019–2020),<sup>1</sup> film festivals are the main vehicle for the introduction of Chinese cinema<sup>2</sup> in Spain, with more than half of all Chinese films arriving through festivals and film seasons, as opposed to the less than 30% that reach movie theatres.

Film festivals usually have tight budgets, which negatively impacts the translation process, especially when the original language of the films is very distant to the official language(s) spoken in a particular country, and finding translators is harder and more expensive. Audiovisual translation (AVT), being the last step in the process before the screening of a film, is subject to time and economic constraints. Therefore, many film festivals resort to pivot translations to translate foreign films from distant cultures.

Although the use of pivot translations is widespread among film festivals, very little academic literature focuses on this practice, of which the average spectator is unaware. This article seeks to examine just how common pivot translation is in film festivals and to analyse its impact with a case study. More precisely, the article aims to answer two questions regarding the use of pivot languages in AVT for film festivals. Firstly, to what extent and for what exact purpose are pivot translations currently being used in Asian film festivals in Catalonia? Secondly, how does using a pivot language affect quality?

In order to answer the first question, shed light on the nature of Asian film festivals in Catalonia, and determine the translation process of the films they screen, an online questionnaire has been designed and sent to the directors and organisers of all such festivals in the region. Although the number of such events is limited, it includes all the festivals exclusively devoted to Asian cinema held in Catalonia. The questionnaire comprises three sections, covering the languages the festivals work with, the translation process they follow, and the profile of the translators they employ.

We tackle the second question by analysing an example of the use of a pivot translation, taking *Old Stone*, a Chinese film directed by Johnny Ma (2016), which was translated into Catalan via English, as

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://dtieao.uab.cat/txicc/cine/>

<sup>2</sup> The term *Chinese cinema* is used in this paper to embrace three distinctive but intertwined cinematographies that share a linguistic and cultural background, comprising films in Mandarin Chinese and other languages spoken in Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, regardless of their origin.

a case study. We have chosen this film because it underwent the usual translation process followed by such film festivals, based on the answers to our questionnaire, and because the festival organisers granted us access to all the materials involved. A comparative analysis of both technical and linguistic aspects is carried out, encompassing the original version in Standard Chinese, the pivot subtitles in English, and the final subtitles in Catalan. Since the target language of both the festival and the film in the case study is Catalan, the comparative analysis of the technical and formal aspects of the subtitles is mainly based on Bartoll's (2012) subtitling parameters. However, it should be noted that this case study is also relevant to other festivals that translate such films into Spanish in Catalonia or even other regions of Spain, as, according to the questionnaire, they follow the same translation process, or screen films that have already been translated and shown in other festivals or venues in Spain.

## 2. Pivot Translations in AVT

The use of pivot translations or intermediary languages, also referred to as *indirect translation*, has been commonplace in literary translation. As Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2007, p. 250) acknowledge, it is also widespread in AVT, where films in lesser-known or, as Ávila-Cabrera (2013) puts it, exotic languages are translated via intermediary languages, usually English. As Vermeulen (2011) states, this is especially true in the case of film festivals.

Except for a brief mention of the lack of information about the number of films translated directly from Chinese into Spanish or Catalan in Casas-Tost and Rovira-Esteva (2019), Chinese-Spanish/Catalan AVT has not been dealt with in any published studies. However, the use of mediating languages is a phenomenon that has been studied in literary translation, especially by Marin-Lacarta (2008, 2017, 2018), who has analysed the topic extensively. She argues that indirect translation is still a common practice when translating Chinese literature into Spanish, contradicting the hypothesis of various authors who claimed that indirect translation would gradually diminish with closer cultural exchanges (Marin-Lacarta, 2018, p. 130).

Despite the general lack of research on pivot translation in AVT, there are notable exceptions. For example, Gottlieb (2004, p. 91) and Díaz-Cintas (2004, p. 30) have referred to pivot translation as a major contributor to the poor quality of translation in films, because it leads to errors, the anglicisation of many translations or corruption of domestic languages. Authors such as Di Giovanni (2007) have analysed the pitfalls of the translation process and the numerous problems translators face in AVT projects for film festivals. For instance, transcripts are often of very low quality or are non-existent, due to festival organisers not providing their translators with the source text and leaving them to infer it themselves from the film. Similarly, Martínez-Tejerina (2014) stresses how important quality subtitles are in film festivals to deliver good results, and how difficult it is for translators to produce them when dealing with low-quality pivot material as a reference or their only source text. She adds that revision, an essential part of the translation process, is usually skipped. Nikolic (2015) analyses the pros and cons of using templates, which frequently entails the use of pivot

translation, and calls for them to be used in a reasonable way, including careful analysis of the differences between languages and genres which might, in turn, mean differences in the number of characters in subtitles, among other things. Finally, Vermeulen (2011) describes the experience of a translator tasked with translating a Dutch film into Spanish via a pivot language, specifically English. Her article is especially relevant due to its analysis of intern pivots, which are those generated with changes in modality, usually from dubbing to subtitling. This practice distorts the final translation even more.

Our case study could prove or refute the claims made by the referenced authors in a context where the use of pivot translation seems to be the norm and remains unchallenged by film festival organisers, as the results of our questionnaire will show.

### 3. Asian Film Festivals in Catalonia

Since this article focuses on the translation of Chinese cinema featured in film festivals held in Catalonia, it is first necessary to look at the main festivals that show Chinese films in the region. According to the website of the Coordinator of Film and Video Festivals and Exhibitions of Catalonia<sup>3</sup> in November 2018, when this article was drafted, there were 45 film festivals scheduled for the whole year in Catalonia. Only two are specifically devoted to Asian films: the Asian Summer Film Festival and the Asian Film Festival Barcelona. As leading actors in the promotion of Asian cinema in Catalonia and, therefore, targets of this study and our online questionnaire, the two events are briefly presented below.

The Asian Film Festival Barcelona (AFFBCN) is organised by Casa Asia, a public consortium and cultural centre “created to strengthen knowledge and dialogue about Asia in Spain”.<sup>4</sup> This film festival has evolved, changing its format, venue and name several times since first being held as the *Muestra de Cine Asiático de Barcelona* back in 1999, when it was established as the first specialised Asian film festival in Spain. With time, it evolved into the Barcelona Asian Film Festival (BAFF), in 2011 changed its name to the Casa Asia Film Festival (CAFF), which later became Casa Asia Film Week until it adopted its present name. AFFBCN is Catalonia’s leading film festival in terms of the number of Asian films it screens every year (between 90 and 120 at the 2017, 2018 and 2019 events), as well as in terms of the variety of Asian countries it covers, including not only Japan, China and Korea, but also smaller countries with less well-known film industries, such as Bhutan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, to name just a few. It also ranks first as regards the screening of Chinese films, in which respect it is among the main film festivals in the whole of Spain (Casas-Tost, 2018). Moreover, Casa Asia has just signed an agreement with the online cinema platform Filmin to create a new channel dedicated exclusively to Asian cinema.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://catalunyafilmfestivals.com/en/about/>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.casaasia.eu/casa\\_asia/quienes\\_somos](https://www.casaasia.eu/casa_asia/quienes_somos)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.casaasia.eu/latest/filmin-joins-casa-asia-to-release-the-best-current-asian-films/>

Ranked second is the Asian Summer Film Festival, which is held every July in the small Catalan city of Vic, north of Barcelona. This festival aims to present Asian culture through its cinematography.<sup>6</sup> According to the data published by Casas-Tost (2018), in the last 14 years the festival has screened almost 90 Chinese films, not counting short films and documentaries, and every year features Spanish or even European premieres. It is therefore one of the most important Chinese cinema events in Spain.

A third festival related to Asian cinema has recently emerged: the Lychee Film Festival.<sup>7</sup> It focuses exclusively on China and has not yet been listed among the 45 film festivals mentioned above as it is very new. It was founded in 2017 and is organised and promoted by the Chinese and Spanish Film Association, in collaboration with the Association of Entrepreneurs of Wenzhou, China. In its first three years it screened a total of 42 films (not counting documentaries and short films) in various cinema theatres in Barcelona and Madrid, giving it great potential to become an influential festival of Chinese cinema in Spain. For this reason, we have included it in the list of organisations to which we sent this study's questionnaire.

There are other film festivals in Catalonia which regularly screen films from different Asian countries despite not focusing specifically on China or Asia. The most important one is SITGES – International Fantastic Film Festival of Catalonia, at which more than 90 Chinese films have been shown since 1972 according to the online database on Chinese cinema in Spain (Casas-Tost et al., 2019–2020). Other minor festivals include the Mostra Internacional de Films de Dones (International Exhibition of Women's Films),<sup>8</sup> which takes place annually in different cinemas and screening rooms in the city of Barcelona, as well as via the VOD platform Filmin. Its aim is to promote films directed by women and to raise the profile of women's audiovisual culture by highlighting the importance of female directors' contribution to the development of audiovisual creation. Over 26 years it has screened many Asian films, including a dozen by Chinese female directors.

In addition to the festivals previously mentioned, there is an important organisation in Barcelona devoted to Asian filmographies: CineAsia.<sup>9</sup> A trademark of Barcelona KineAsia SCP, CineAsia has worked closely with different cultural and educational institutions and film festivals since 2004, organising and scheduling film exhibitions, courses, festivals, etc., all of which have been related to Asian cinema. Together with Casa Asia and the Confucius Institute of Barcelona, among other organisations based in Barcelona, CineAsia schedules weekly film screenings and other activities related to Asian cinema throughout the year. Despite not being a film festival, its role in the distribution and dissemination of Chinese films in both Catalonia and Spain is certainly one of the most relevant. Ten of the 50 films it screened in 2017 were in Chinese.

---

<sup>6</sup> <http://cinemaoriental.com/en/el-festival/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.lycheefilmfestival.com/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.mostrafilmsdones.cat/>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.cineasiaonline.com/>

To obtain first-hand information on the translation process that the aforementioned film festivals and organisations follow for Chinese cinema, we asked each of them to take part in our study. Except for SITGES – International Fantastic Film Festival of Catalonia, they all completed our questionnaire. We believe that, despite them being few in number, the inclusion in our survey of all Catalonia's film festivals and organisations exclusively devoted to Asian or even Chinese cinema guarantees a certain degree of representativeness as regards the translation of Chinese films in this particular context, as they cover the great majority of Chinese films shown in the region.

#### 4. Pivot Translations in Asian Films Screened at Festivals in Catalonia

With the aim of determining the role of pivot translations in Chinese films screened at film festivals in Catalonia, in spring 2018 we designed an online survey and emailed it to the directors or representatives of the festivals and organisations described in the previous section, obtaining a response rate of 83%. The questionnaire comprised 22 questions, which referred to all the films screened in 2017 and were grouped into three different categories: film source and target languages, translation process, and translator profile.

According to the survey, the Asian films screened at the listed festivals had 13 original languages, specifically Standard Chinese (referred to as Chinese from now on), Cantonese, Taiwanese, Japanese, Korean, Thai, Laotian, Cambodian, Vietnamese, Mongolian, Tibetan, Tagalog and Hindi. Chinese was the only language to feature in all five of the film festivals, while Cantonese and Korean featured in four. Therefore, Chinese (including other Sinitic variants, such as Cantonese) is the most prevalent original language of Asian films in Catalonia.

Chinese was not only the sole Asian language to feature in all the festivals, but also the main one in quantitative terms, being the original language of 15% of all the films screened. Notably, 62.2% of all the motion pictures shown at the festivals in 2017 were translated via a pivot language, which was English in every case. Our respondents identified two main reasons for this. The first is the high cost of employing translators who work from Chinese as a source language (60% of cases). The second is film distributors' practice of providing an English translation as a second source text (40% of cases), which is in line with Jin's (2018, p. 199) and Kuo's (2018, p. 248) accounts of Chinese organisations' strategy for disseminating Chinese cinema worldwide. Interestingly, the reasons appear to be economical and practical, as none of the respondents selected the option of difficulties in locating Chinese-Spanish/Catalan translators in the questionnaire.

As for the professional backgrounds of the translators employed, 33.3% held a Translation and Interpreting degree and 25% a master's degree in AVT. Bilingual employees<sup>10</sup> constituted 25% of the festivals' film translators and it is unknown to us whether they held a degree or not. The rest (16.6%)

---

<sup>10</sup> Usually Chinese native speakers whose translation into Spanish is later proofread, according to first-hand sources.

were students undertaking an internship in the festivals. Taking our data interpretation a step further, it can be seen that almost half of the translators held neither a BA or a MA in Translation.

Translator profile varies from festival to festival. Analysing the profile of each translator employed by a festival can be useful for determining their professional status. AFFBCN and the International Exhibition of Women's Films employ Translation and Interpreting degree holders and translators specialised in AVT. CineAsia employs both graduates and bilinguals as translators. The Lychee Film Festival and the Asian Summer Film Festival use graduates, bilinguals and interns. In view of this, two trends can be observed in relation to the academic background of the festivals' translators: firstly, translations are often in the hands of students and bilinguals (whatever their level of linguistic and translation competence may be); and, secondly, the older a festival, the higher the academic status of its translators. This second trend is mirrored in the time translators are given to translate an average-length film, with answers once again varying according to each festival's level of experience and professionalism. Newer festivals usually grant less time to translate a single film (under a week) than those that have existed for longer (which allow one to two weeks).

All the considerations in question undoubtedly have an impact on subtitle quality, which is the focus of the next section, where we analyse a case study.

## 5. Case Study: *Old Stone*

In order to analyse the effect of pivot translations in the kinds of films and festivals described previously, we have taken Johnny Ma's film *Old Stone* (2016), or *Lao Shi* (老石) as it is originally titled, as a case study. The original version of this film is in Standard Chinese and it was translated into Catalan via English as a pivot language. *Old Stone* is a psychological thriller coproduced by the People's Republic of China and Canada and distributed by Asian Shadows. It was internationally released in February 2016 at the Berlin International Film Festival. In Spain it was premiered at the 13<sup>th</sup> Asian Summer Film Festival in Vic in July 2016, in the event's official section.<sup>11</sup>

The reference material made available to us by the Asian Summer Film Festival consisted of the film, an Excel document containing the spotting list and the source text in Chinese and its translation into English, and a .srt file with the corresponding subtitles in Catalan.

We have analysed various aspects of the translation of *Old Stone*, grouping them into two categories. The first encompasses formal matters, technical aspects, and orthographic and typographic standards, which we have examined as they guarantee the conditions necessary to ensure adequate reception. The second is related to subtitle content, to determine whether the result, i.e. the subtitles in Catalan translated via the English subtitles, corresponds to the meaning of the original text or whether there are considerable differences. We analyse the difficulties and pitfalls encountered in

---

<sup>11</sup> <http://cinemaoriental.com/en/pelicula/old-stone/>



the cases where pivot translation has had a negative impact on the final product, and in several instances propose amendments.

### 5.1. Technical Aspects

We have analysed different technical aspects of subtitling. The first is the number of characters per line. According to Bartoll's (2012) study on subtitling standards for cinema, a maximum of 37 characters per line is acceptable. Of a total of 653 subtitles, only nine exceed that maximum (1.38%). In five of the nine cases there are only one or two additional characters, but in others there are as many as seven or 11, making reading the subtitles quite difficult, as Example 1 illustrates.

#### Example 1<sup>12</sup>

Quan vaig arribar allí hi havia / \*un camió bolcat i un cadàver just darrere... (31 / 44 characters).  
When I got there, / this truck was backing up and a body was lying right behind it.

The second technical aspect is the number of lines. In this case, *Old Stone's* Catalan subtitles follow the standard conventions, i.e. they are composed of one or two lines (Bartoll, 2012). However, 28 of the film's subtitles (4.3%) are two-liners that could have been condensed into just one line to make it easier for spectators to read them, especially given that subtitles in Catalan and English are shown simultaneously in this film. That is the case in Example 2, in which a two-line subtitle is used (16 + 20) where one line of 36 characters would have sufficed.

#### Example 2

No se'n sortirà! / Està molt mal ferit.  
He's not gonna make it! / He's hurt badly.

Thirdly, the minimum exposure time, i.e. the time for which a subtitle is displayed on the screen, has been estimated at one second. Of *Old Stone's* 653 subtitles, 27 do not meet the requirement in question. The average duration of those 27 subtitles is slightly less than a second, specifically 0.86 seconds, but it is nonetheless generally still possible to read them. The established maximum exposure time of six seconds is exceeded in five cases, varying from slightly more than six seconds to, occasionally, more than eight seconds.

Closely related to exposure time is reading speed, which falls between 15 and 17 characters per second (cps) for hearing adults according to the standard (Bartoll, 2012). As many as 18.53% of *Old Stone's* subtitles (121 out of 653) exceed this limit, with an average of 20.12 cps, which can certainly affect the readability of subtitles.

---

<sup>12</sup> Examples show the subtitles in Catalan and in English. From Example 9 onwards, the original text in Chinese is also provided.



According to standards and usual practice, subtitles should be segmented on the basis of sense units. That is not always the case in *Old Stone*, where sense units are divided in a total of 26 subtitles, making the text more difficult to understand. It must be noted that the English version is not affected in this regard, as segmentation is correct in English but not always so in Catalan. This is illustrated in Example 3, which is followed by a proposed amendment.

#### Example 3

\*Va abandonar l'escena de / l'accident abans que arribéssim.  
You left the scene of / the accident before we arrived.

Suggestion: Va abandonar l'escena de l'accident / abans que arribéssim.  
You left the scene of the accident / before we arrived.

Finally, we have also closely analysed synchronicity. When examining the spotting list, we discerned that the Catalan subtitles had mostly been synchronised using the same time codes as the English ones. Of the total number of Catalan subtitles, three have a late cue-in time, one has a late cue-out time, and 76 (11.96%) have a cue-in time that is too early, a high figure resulting from a synchronicity error that occurs in subtitle number 592 and is carried over until the end of the film. Since the Catalan and English subtitles were screened simultaneously at the Asian Summer Film Festival, the problem in question, if uncorrected, probably caused confusion among audience members and impaired reception.

## 5.2. Orthographic and Typographic Standards

We have repeatedly detected various orthographic and typographic inconsistencies in *Old Stone's* Catalan subtitles. We examine them below, taking into account the elements most relevant to subtitling, including the use of upper and lower-case letters, italics and ellipses.

In the case of *Old Stone's* on-screen inserts, different formal criteria have been applied to subtitles, with the upper and lower cases being used inconsistently throughout the film in both the pivot and the final translation. This can be seen in the following examples, reproduced in their original format in both languages:

#### Example 4

Tres mesos abans.  
Three Months Ago

#### Example 5

HA SOMRIGUT AVUI?  
"Have you smiled today?"

#### Example 6

Trucada de: Casa

Call from: home

According to Bartoll's (2012) parameters, upper-case letters are used to translate titles and signs that appear on the screen, which are written without full stops at the end. When they are very long and take up more than one line, lower-case letters may be used instead to improve readability. Since this is not the case of any of the film's inserts, we believe the best option would have been to use upper-case letters consistently throughout.

Subtitles for voices emanating from devices must be written in italics. However, in *Old Stone* italics are merely used for the film's initial subtitles, which transcribe a voice-over coming from a car radio. In other cases, such as a telephone conversation, a television voice-over and a voice coming from loudspeakers (Example 7), italics are omitted, again showing a lack of consistency.

#### Example 7

Doctor Chen, presenti's d'immediat a l'UCI...

Doctor Chen, to the ICU...

There are several inconsistencies in the use of ellipses throughout the film. While ellipses are used in incomplete sentences (such as that in Example 7), according to the most recent trends and standards, the best option is not to use them in unfinished sentences that continue in the subsequent subtitle. However, when *Old Stone's* English subtitles include an ellipsis, it is systematically reproduced in the Catalan subtitles. Such reproduction results in cases in which ellipses are even used in finished sentences, as shown in the following example:

#### Example 8

Hi ha en Lao Shi...

Lao Shi is here...

In summary, technical inconsistencies and shortcomings have an impact on the quality of *Old Stone's* Catalan subtitles, and the influence of the pivot translation is obvious in this regard.

### 5.3. Linguistic and Translation-Related Aspects

After carefully viewing the film in its original version in Chinese and analysing the pivot translation in English and the final subtitles in Catalan, we have detected some translation pitfalls that affect content and quality. We have grouped them into five categories: additions, omissions, extralinguistic culture-bound references, inaccuracies in meaning and mistakes, and false friends and unnatural

expressions. Albeit with different names, all the categories in question have also been included in other case studies that analyse pivot translation interference in subtitling, such as that of Vermeulen (2011), which actually had additional categories that do not apply to our study. Furthermore, we have not analysed translation strategies in depth, as Ávila-Cabrera (2013) did in his case study. As those other studies prove, had the film not been translated via a pivot language but directly from the source language, in our case Chinese, the problems examined might not have occurred.

### 5.3.1. Additions

Almost 2% of the final subtitles contain additions, i.e. language units not present in the original version, that were first incorporated into the subtitles in English. That is the case in Example 9, where a group of people gather around a man who has been run over by a taxi. In the original version, only one sentence is pronounced by a passer-by. The second has been added in the English version and transferred into Catalan as well, despite not being said by anyone in Chinese. Therefore, the first sentence alone would suffice.

#### Example 9

人不行了!

No se'n sortirà! / Està molt mal ferit.

He's not gonna make it! / He is hurt badly.

In another Example (10), addition provides information not given in the original. In Chinese, the nature of the relationship between the woman receiving a phone call and the man who had the accident is not spelt out, but it is made explicit in both English and Catalan. Thus, viewers of the translated versions are provided with some relevant information, preventing them from inferring it as viewers of the original version would have done, and making the subtitle 12 and eight characters longer than necessary (in English and Catalan respectively), thus affecting reading speed.

#### Example 10

我... 给你打电话是因为李江的事。

Truco pel seu marit, en Li Jiang...

I'm calling about your husband Li Jiang...

In this case, it would be better to simply state:

Li truco per en Li Jiang.

I'm calling about Li Jiang.

Although the examples from this film are not as striking or misleading as the additions found by Vermeulen (2011), probably because the text provided for translation was closer to the final version of the film, they still affect both the information provided and reading speed.

### 5.3.2. Omissions

There are relevant omissions in 3.73% of the Catalan subtitles in the dialogue list; in other words, the subtitles in question lack important information contained in the original text. For obvious reasons, we have not taken the suppression of vocatives or repetitions justifiable in subtitling into account here. Example 11 shows a case of a relevant omission, in which the Catalan version omits a sentence present in both the English and the original versions despite there being sufficient time and space for a two-line subtitle.

#### Example 11

天气热, 给您买了两个西瓜。

Li he portat dues síndries.

It's hot out, I brought you / a couple watermelons.

Suggestion: Fa calor. / Li he portat dues síndries.

It's hot out. / I brought you two watermelons.

In another Example (12), the on-screen images show a couple quarrelling about their divorce arrangements. The omission of a swearword reduces the intensity of the English subtitle, which in turn affects the Catalan version. Even taking time and space limitations into account, the translation could also include words that would better maintain the tone of the original.

#### Example 12

怎么了? 他妈的!

Què he fet, ara?

What did I do now?

Suggestion: I ara què coi he fet?

What the hell did I do now?

### 5.3.3. Extralinguistic Culture-Bound References

We have selected Pedersen's (2005) model of how to transfer culture-bound elements to analyse the translation strategies employed in *Old Stone* as it applies to AVT and, more specifically, to subtitling. According to Pedersen's definition:

an extralinguistic culture-bound reference (ECR) is defined as a reference that is attempted by means of any culture-bound linguistic expression, which refers to an extralinguistic entity

or process, and which is assumed to have a discourse referent that is identifiable to a relevant audience as this referent is within the encyclopaedic knowledge of this audience. (2005, p. 2)

Generalisation is used in the subtitles in some cases, such as in Example 13, where a reference is made in Chinese to Lei Feng, a People's Liberation Army soldier held up as an example of goodness and altruism in Communist propaganda, and still considered a legend today. We believe this culture-bound reference has been correctly transferred by using a generalisation strategy. Maintaining the original name would not have conveyed the ironic idea of a good Samaritan, as Lao Shi is defined by the captain. In this case, the strategy has been used in the English version, paving the way for the Catalan translator to do likewise. However, the Catalan subtitle could have been slightly shorter than the 40 characters used in Example 13:

#### Example 13

你活雷锋啊!

Què et penses, que ets una mena d'heroi?

You think you're some kind of hero?

We believe the same strategy would have been suitable in Example 14, where the subtitler has opted to translate “身份证” (*shenfenzheng*) or “identity card” as “DNI”, the equivalent official document in Spain, which is less general but more culturally bound. Although the idea is successfully transmitted, we believe using generalisation would have been a better option in this case, taking viewers to a more neutral domain, away from the culture bound to the target language, as it might seem incongruent to refer to Spanish documents in a Chinese context.

#### Example 14

身份证上面地址在河北，来的话要等一段时间。

El seu DNI diu que és de Hebei. / Trigaran a arribar.

His ID says he's from Hebei. It might take a while for them to come.

Suggestion: La seva documentació és de Hebei. / Trigaran a arribar.

His papers are from Hebei. / It might take a while for them to arrive.

### 5.3.4. Inaccuracies in Meaning and Mistakes

We have observed numerous inaccuracies in meaning and even translation mistakes in the 616 subtitles in the dialogue list, including the two examples below. In Example 15, the word “警察” (*jingcha*) “police” has been translated into English and Catalan as “ambulance”. However, since no vehicle is shown arriving in the images, this inaccuracy goes unnoticed and is not very important. In

Example 16, the gender of a person is mistranslated into Catalan. Neither Chinese nor English distinguishes between males and females when words such as 一个 (yi ge) or “one” are used, whereas Catalan requires such a distinction. In this case, the previous dialogue shows that the person mentioned is a female, but the translation into Catalan does not acknowledge this and refers to a male.

Example 15

警察快来了!

L'ambulància arribarà aviat!

The ambulance is going to come soon!

Example 16

现在旅游的老外那么多, 我怎么碰到了。前两天就碰到一个。

Hi ha molts turistes, /l'altre dia vaig portar-ne un.

There are plenty of easy tourists around. /I drove one just the other day.

### 5.3.5. False Friends and Unnatural Expressions

The Catalan subtitles contain several mistranslations that correspond to the second type of potential pitfalls identified by Gottlieb (2001, p. 32) and which would not have occurred if a pivot language had not been used. In the next Example (17), Maomao is looking for a place to establish her business, a kindergarten or nursery, the latter being the term used in the English subtitles. The translation into Catalan is “infermeria”, the meaning of which is not “nursery” but “nursing” or “infirmary”. This mistranslation causes viewers of the Catalan version to misunderstand the statement.

Example 17

今天去看的又一个地方, 还真挺不错的。

Una de les infermeries / que he vist avui no està malament.

One of the nurseries I saw today isn't that bad.

Suggestion: Avui he anat a veure un local que està molt bé.

Today I went to see a store which looks very good.

In the final Example (18), a woman has been run over and lies unconscious on the ground. A literal translation into English of the original in Chinese would be: “There's been an accident. Somebody come and help!”. The Catalan translation of *Old Stone* repeatedly takes the English version as its

reference text, and the resulting Catalan subtitles often sound unnatural and can be difficult to understand.

Example 18

出事了， 来人啊！

Alguna cosa no va bé amb / aquesta dona! Vingui, ràpid!

Something's wrong with this lady! Come, quickly!

Suggestion: Un accident! Que vingui algú!

An accident! Somebody help!

Finally, the Catalan subtitles contain some spelling mistakes, which, while not necessarily attributable to the pivot translation, affect overall quality. The subtitles in which such errors can be found represent 4.6% of the total translated text, leading us to infer that, in all probability, no proofreading or quality assessment has been carried out in the final stage of the translation process.

## 6. Conclusions

This article has analysed how commonly and to what extent pivot translations are used in the translation process of Chinese films screened at film festivals in Catalonia, and what impact the practice has on the final translation for subtitling.

We have reached several conclusions on the basis of data collected from the questionnaires we delivered to the directors and organisers of the most representative Asian film festivals in Catalonia. Firstly, we have verified that Chinese films in particular and those in Asian languages in general are usually translated via a pivot language, most commonly English, rather than directly from the original versions. Pivot translations are mainly used for economical and practical reasons, not because of a lack of translators of the original language. As film distributors provide an English translation of every film, festivals seem to see no need to seek professional translators who work with each specific language pair.

Secondly, translators' professional status varies from festival to festival, although the average translator reportedly holds a degree in Translation and Interpreting but has not undertaken further studies in AVT. Many festivals resort to bilinguals, which effectively entails them translating into a foreign language, in this case from Chinese into Spanish or Catalan, and their translation is later proofread by a person who does not necessarily speak both languages. Another trend we have observed is that the longer a festival has been in existence, the higher the status of the translators it employs. Notwithstanding, it would be interesting to obtain more details regarding the translation process such festivals follow, as budgets are usually tight and translation is not prioritised and frequently receives insufficient attention, as our case study has indicated.



The case study has also shown that the person who translated *Old Stone* into Catalan could not understand the original language and that the pivot translation obviously played a determinant role, making a notable impact on the final version. There are several ways in which using a pivot translation has affected the Catalan version of the film.

Firstly, omissions and additions made in the translation from the original language into the pivot language have not been detected and have consequently been replicated in the final text, producing a clear mismatch between the Chinese audio track and the translated subtitles. Secondly, the influence of the pivot language has sometimes given rise to translation mistakes and unnatural expressions in Catalan, which could have been avoided had the source text used been the original Chinese version or had the translator also understood Chinese. Thirdly, technical aspects related to subtitling standards, including orthographic and typographic inconsistencies, the number of characters per line, and exposure time, have also had a negative impact on the final subtitles. Taking into account that the film's English and Catalan subtitles were shown simultaneously at the festival, a high level of precision as regards exposure time, segmentation, etc., was essential. In general terms, synchronicity has been achieved, but on some occasions it could have been better, which would have improved viewer reception.

On the other hand, and contrary to what might be expected given some of the problems observed, *Old Stone's* cultural references, or ECRs in Pedersen's (2005) terminology, have been correctly translated overall. In this case, the influence of the pivot language has been positive rather than negative, making the Catalan translator's work easier by bridging the gap between the culture of the source language and that of the target language.

Even though the problems we detected in our case study are not as striking as those Vermeulen (2011) found in hers, we believe that a more qualified translator (and subtitler, if they were different people) should have been employed and a more professional approach taken to the whole translation process, with the inclusion of the final proofreading stage in which many of the mistakes made would probably have been corrected, resulting in a better final version of the film in Catalan.

In summary, this article has demonstrated that the use of pivot translation, despite having been paid little attention by translation scholars, is a frequent practice among Asian film festivals in Catalonia, one that has a negative impact on the final translation. With regard to our case study, mismatches between audio track and subtitle content and translation mistakes could make viewers who understand all the languages in use sceptical of the approach taken. Bearing in mind the high degree of specialisation of some film festivals, and the fact that they are the main and sometimes only gateway to Chinese cinema, it would not be strange for speakers of both the original and the target language to attend them. Additionally, simultaneously displaying subtitles in English and Catalan highlights technical and formal inconsistencies that also affect quality. Despite using a pivot translation as a template for cueing subtitles being a common practice that speeds up the translation process, doing so requires a final revision that would avoid some of the problems observed here.

In spite of the shortcomings found in the subtitling of *Old Stone*, we believe that, in general terms, the translation meets the conditions required to convey the intended message to its audience, as the majority of its subtitles are free of mistakes and fulfil their function. While it is true that, from a qualitative perspective, the use of a pivot language may not be the best starting point for translating a film, as our case study has shown, it is also undeniable that, due to economic factors and deadlines in particular, if it was not for pivot translation many of the films that can be watched at Asian film festivals (in Catalonia at least, but probably also in other places) would have never been screened. As Casas-Tost and Rovira-Esteva (2019) and the data in the online database on Chinese cinema in Spain (Casas-Tost et al., 2019–2020) can corroborate, film festivals such as the one involved in our case study are the main distributors of premieres of Chinese films in Spain, and are often the only platform for Chinese films to be shown. Nonetheless, as Kuo (2018, p. 249) states in relation to Chinese cinema at film festivals in France, if a film’s subtitles are not created by a native speaker of the target language who is fluent in Chinese and able to understand all the nuances of the original, it would be wise to have a reviewer check them over.

## References

- Ávila-Cabrera, J. J. (2013). Subtitling multilingual films: The case of “Inglourious Basterds”. *Revista Electrónica de Lingüística Aplicada*, 12, 87–100. <https://eprints.ucm.es/id/eprint/50079/>
- Bartoll, E. (2012). *La subtitulació. Aspectes teòrics i pràctics* [Subtitling. Theoretical and practical aspects]. Eumo.
- Casas-Tost, H. (2018, June 20–22). *La traducció del cine xinès en Espanya: desde la selecció hasta la distribució* [The translation of Chinese cinema in Spain: From selection to distribution] [Conference presentation]. I Congreso Internacional de la Asociación Española de Estudios de Asia Oriental [First International Conference of the Spanish Association for East Asian Studies]. <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/191207>
- Casas-Tost, H. & Rovira-Esteva S. (2019). Chinese cinema in Spain: An overview through audiovisual translation. *Babel. Revue internationale de la traduction*, 65(4), 581–603.
- Casas-Tost, H., Rovira-Esteva, S., Vargas-Urpí, M., Tor-Carroggio, I. (2019–2020). *El cine chino traducido en España. Base de datos en acceso abierto* [Chinese cinema translated in Spain. Open access database]. <https://dtieao.uab.cat/txicc/cine/> DOI: <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/214779>
- Di Giovanni, E. (2007). Films, subtitles and subversions. *Linguistica Antverpiensia, New Series – Themes in Translation Studies*, 6, 51–65. <https://lans-tts.uantwerpen.be/index.php/LANS-TTS/article/view/179>
- Díaz-Cintas, J. (2004). In search of a theoretical framework for the study of audiovisual translation. In P. Orero (Ed.), *Topics in audiovisual translation* (pp. 21–34). John Benjamins.
- Díaz-Cintas, J., & Remael, A. (2007). *Audiovisual translation: Subtitling*. St. Jerome Publishing.
- Gottlieb, H. (2001). Texts, translation and subtitling – in theory, and in Denmark. *Translators and Translations*, 149–192. [http://www.sub2learn.ie/downloads/gottlieb\\_2001c.pdf](http://www.sub2learn.ie/downloads/gottlieb_2001c.pdf)
- Gottlieb, H. (2004). Language-political implications of subtitling. In P. Orero (Ed.) *Topics in audiovisual translation* (pp. 83–100). John Benjamins.
- Jin, H. (2018). Introduction: The translation and dissemination of Chinese cinemas, *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, 12(3), 197–202, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17508061.2018.1522805>

- Kuo, M. (2018). Translation and distribution of Chinese films in France: A personal account, *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, 12(3), 237–249. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17508061.2018.1522804>
- Ma, J. (Director). (2016). *Old Stone*. [Film]. Asian Shadows.
- Marin-Lacarta, M. (2008). La traducción indirecta de la narrativa china contemporánea al castellano: ¿síndrome o enfermedad? [Indirect translation of contemporary Chinese narrative into Spanish: Symptom or disease?]. *1611 A Journal of Translation History*, 2. <http://www.traduccionliteraria.org/1611/art/marin.htm>
- Marin-Lacarta, M. (2017). Indirectness in literary translation: Methodological possibilities. *Translation Studies*, 10(2). 133–49. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14781700.2017.1286255>
- Marin-Lacarta, M. (2018). Mediated and marginalised: Translations of modern and contemporary Chinese literature in Spain (1949–2010). *Meta: Journal des traducteurs / Meta: Translators' Journal*, 63(2), 306–321.
- Martínez-Tejerina, A. (2014). Subtitling for film festivals: Process, techniques and challenges. *TRANS. Revista de traductología*, (18), 215–225. <https://doi.org/10.24310/TRANS.2014.v0i18.3254>
- Nikolic, K. (2015). The pros and cons of using templates in subtitling. In R. Baños-Piñero & J. Díaz-Cintas (Eds.). *Audiovisual translation in a global context. Mapping an ever-changing landscape* (pp. 192–202). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Pedersen, J. (2005). How is culture rendered in subtitles? In S. Nauert (Ed.) *Proceedings of Marie Curie euroconferences 'MuTra 2005. Challenges of multidimensional translation: Conference proceedings*. Advanced Translation Research Center (ATRC), Saarland University. [http://www.translationconcepts.org/pdf/MuTra\\_2005\\_Proceedings.pdf](http://www.translationconcepts.org/pdf/MuTra_2005_Proceedings.pdf)
- Vermeulen, A. (2011). The impact of pivot translation on the quality of subtitling. *International Journal of Translation*, 23(2), 119–134. <https://biblio.ugent.be/publication/4211129>