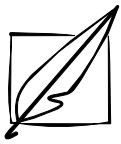

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"The (video)game is afoot": Subtitling deductions in *Sherlock Holmes*'s adaptations

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ABSTRACT

Adaptations from novel to TV series to videogame imply that prominent features of the texts are inevitably prone to change. In the case of detective fiction, the deductions of Sherlock Holmes have been rendered in the TV series *Sherlock* (2010) with modern-looking on-screen text, which inspired similar strategies in the videogame *Sherlock Holmes: Crimes & Punishments* (2014) to illustrate verbal clues on screen. Creative on-screen text aimed at representing the thoughts of the detective affects the translation process because of its multi-layered and semiotically complex nature. As additional linguistic elements that enrich story and dialogue, on-screen deductions characterize and narrate, as well as adding a ludic, game-like quality to the first season of the TV series. The relevance and impact of this feature is observed in different Italian translations, focusing particularly on omission and reduction of the verbal material, and the concurrence of deductions with character dialogue.

Keywords: detective fiction, audiovisual translation, subtitling, creative subtitling, game localisation, adaptations.

1. Introduction

Subtitling as a subject of academic studies has received consistent attention in the past three decades, as well as copious noteworthy contributions. In the definition of the practice proposed by Díaz-Cintas (2020: 150), subtitling includes the translation of "the original dialogue exchanges uttered by different speakers, as well as all other verbal information that appears written on-screen". By including information that appears written, this definition encompasses both dialogue subtitling as well as the subtitling of on-screen text, the latter being the main focus of this study. While on-screen text could often be something as

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simple as a street sign or a sentence on paper framed by the camera, there are instances in audiovisual texts in which it is connoted with the personal sense of artistry or aesthetics of the authors, often in the form of animated intralingual subtitles. Of course, this complicates things in (interlingual) audiovisual translation, where subtitling elicits problems and "constraints imposed on the translator by the medium itself" (Titford 1982: 113), which are manifested in the formal and technical requirements of subtitling practice. In contradiction with the expected standards of subtitling practice (line length, readability, shot change etc.),[1] scholars have not only evidenced the use of subtitling that is animated, styled and overall part of the photography of the audiovisual texts, but they have also endorsed it as positively foreignizing (Nornes 1999). Others have addressed creative subtitling practice as an "aesthetic mode of film translation" (McClarty 2014: 593) and as an "approach that is professional and yet of artistic value" (Foerster 2010: 95).

With the exception of selected audiovisual texts, subtitling that employs designs more creative than the normative couple of lines at the bottom of the screen are observed mainly in two sites: fansubbed audiovisual texts and, more relevantly to the matter at hand, videogames. Translation in the context of game translation and localisation has been surging as a modern and attention-demanding field. The relevance of studies on videogame translation specifically are significant to the present purpose as videogames employ on-screen text (and its interlingual subtitling) as a communication vector with considerable consistency. Bernal-Merino (2006) has highlighted how much different art forms – including cinema – and communicative styles influence videogame dialogue with repercussions on its translation, as well as noted how, differently from strictly filmic texts, video games seem to "reserve the right to use text onscreen in whatever way they see fit" (Bernal-Merino 2015: 72). On the links between film and videogame subtitling, Mangiron (2013) has described in detail the differences between filmic subtitling norms and videogame subtitling norms, not without assessing the polysemiotism of videogame texts and taking into account the quantity of paratextual content (i.e. user interface).

The peculiarities of on-screen text converge in the case studies addressed in this article. The legacy of Conan Doyle's detective, Sherlock Holmes, has generated countless adaptations in different shapes and declinations. Particularly, BBC's *Sherlock* (2010-2017) and Frogwares's videogame *Sherlock Holmes: Crimes and Punishments* (2014) present strong similarities in their

[1] For a list of conventions on subtitling practice, see Díaz-Cintas – Remael (2020).

creative use of intralingual on-screen text. After commenting on the relevance of deductions in detective fiction and the game-like quality of the genre, the textual functions of on-screen text are discussed, and their presence in both the videogame and the TV series is employed to highlight a ludic function of on-screen text specific to detective fiction. This study then addresses the translation of these deductions in the first season of *Sherlock* (BBC), by comparing the translations of the Italian DVD, of Netflix, and of Amazon PrimeVideo.

2. The detective

Detective fiction, at its core, is about a mystery and a solution, rather than a specific hero (or heroine) and their personality. Several elements in the canon texts corroborate the idea that Holmes's ability to solve every case is of higher importance than Sherlock Holmes as a person, and these elements are addressed in this section to highlight Holmes and Watson as characters, their relationship, and the detective's cerebral skills as the true protagonist. The centrality of the deduction, compared to the centrality of the detective, offers relevant insight on how Sherlock Holmes was adapted in the TV series and videogame, as well as laying the foundation to discuss the function of on-screen deductions in the audiovisual texts.

Doyle's detective debuts in 1887 in a story titled *A Study in Scarlet.* Retired military doctor John Watson makes the acquaintance of Sherlock Holmes upon his return to London, initially unaware of his profession. From this point onwards, in journal fashion, Watson will periodically recollect his thoughts and impression on the detective, and later report his cases and deductions. It is in fact through Watson, as the narrator, that information on Sherlock is divulged early in the texts. However, apart from few physical details (*A Study in Scarlet*, Chapter II, *The Science of Deduction*, 1887 [2015]), Holmes is never described in detail. Regarding his personality, Watson describes the detective as a pensive recluse with sudden bouts of activity, devoted to science and with a passion for music. More controversial features are observed by Watson: a general disinterest in romance, a sense of friendship and companionship that is owed more to a gentlemanly demeanor than to an honest feeling, a disregarding and at times deliberate condescendence towards the entire sphere of human emotions. Holmes is cold, unattached, and conveniently aligned with justice when morality is involved, despite showing little investment in how it unfolds.

More importantly, and in contrast with the scarcity of detailed descriptions, the relationship between Holmes and Watson, despite being amicable, is never mutual in terms of power. This is because the role of John Watson is that of witness to the remarkable cerebral capabilities of the tall and cynical detective. John Watson is juxtaposed to Sherlock Holmes in sheer contrast: the stories recollect Watson's emotions and thoughts and indicate a warmer, more sociable, and less extreme character, but most of all Watson embodies the ordinary man, self-appointed testimony of the great and exceptional feats of his companion, which are even more spectacular in stark comparison with the mediocrity of Watson's character. Having now advanced the nature of this relationship, it is fundamental to stress, in compliance with the inherent features of detective fiction, that the real protagonist of these adventures is not Sherlock Holmes the man as much as it is Sherlock Holmes the mind. This is because moving forward from *A Study in Scarlet*, Holmes experiences little to no character progression, and the entire canon follows a linear and superficially repetitive structure consisting of Holmes collecting clues, commenting them and cleverly finding the culprit: detective fiction, after all, revolves around the mystery first and foremost, making it safe to assume that the true protagonist of every tale is Holmes's distinguished intellect and the mystery (or puzzle) he faces. In the case of Doyle's detective, this particular statement is reinforced by how little time is spent delineating Holmes's features, while his scientific method is described in depth. The role of detectives and investigators in detective fiction is always tied, in fact, to a double narrative, comprised of a story about the crime and a story about its investigation (Hühn 1987: 452). Given this twofold narrative structure of detective fiction, a detailed description and characterization of the detective is purely corollary to the aims of the text, although it aids the detective in maintaining certain aspects recognizable and axiomatic, such as his status as a "mythological culture-hero in his ability to oversee and read the city" (Tambling 2019: 111).

This is significant for many adaptations of Sherlock Holmes that have been made over the years, and in which Arthur Conan Doyle's text often underwent substantial modernization, in particular the TV series *Sherlock* (BBC) and the videogame *Sherlock Holmes: Crimes & Punishments* (Frogwares). The focus of these adaptations shifts slightly from the plot to include character development, which can be considered a customary tendency in TV series (and serialized narratives in general), nevertheless the main protagonist of every episode is still the brilliant mind of the detective and how it unravels the mystery at hand. In his compelling study on different adaptations of

the detective throughout the 20th and earlier 21st century, McCaw noted how "Sherlock Holmes has become palimpsestuous, continually erased and written over" (McCaw 2019: 206), and in particular how the detective has a "cultural currency across the world […] despite the fact that there is no fixed, homogeneous, shared vision of who precisely he is" (McCaw 2019: 206). By virtue of this recognizable fluidity of the characters, adaptations of Sherlock Holmes have not only proliferated but have also taken numerous creative liberties in delivering an original take on the story and characters. Since both videogames and TV series are heavily visually coded texts, it follows that the relevance of this kind of adaptations lies in a combination of verbality and aesthetics. On-screen text deductions are perfect examples of said combination, and are featured consistently in both *Sherlock* and *Sherlock Holmes: Crimes & Punishments*. Because of this, these specific adaptations have been selected for this study, as they showcase modernity and scientific methods through visually-coded verbal text on screen.

3. *Sherlock* (BBC)

Sherlock (2010-2017) was written by Mark Gatiss and Steven Moffat, was produced by the BBC, and it consists of four seasons. Each season features three 90-minute-long episodes centred on famous cases from the literary canon of the detective. The first three seasons were critically acclaimed, while the fourth received mixed (if not negative) reviews. The adventures of Sherlock Holmes (Benedict Cumberbatch) and John Watson (Martin Freeman) unfold in contemporary London, and the change in setting is highlighted by the recurring and effortless use of modern technology: Holmes communicates via SMS, Watson recounts their cases and escapades on a blog rather than a diary, and instead of publishing a book on his deductive methods, Holmes describes his skills and methods on his professional website as a way to self-advertise and recruit clients. More key differences in the transposition from Victorian times to the 21st Century are noteworthy: Watson suffers from PTSD from his past as a military doctor in Afghanistan, and his blog is initially a suggestion from his therapist, which he later transforms, arbitrarily, in a "virtual diary" of his adventures with the detective. Furthermore, Holmes's infamous use of drugs (from tobacco to morphine and cocaine) is diluted in the series and softened into a nicotine addiction. While Holmes is mostly poised and collected, as well as condescending, in the original stories, in the BBC adaptation the detective is arrogant and tactless, at times almost immature. This could be

imputed to the texts being updated to the current century, but it could also be a consequence of the screenplay focusing on a Sherlock Holmes with a very different sense of social etiquette compared to the original. Modernity is a key point in the BBC adaptation, and considering that the leading role is taken by the character's brain rather than the character itself (as it is the case in the books), the strong presence of modern technology and Sherlock's social insensitivity culminate in an almost machine-like demeanour, to the point that his deductive method behaves and "looks" like a computer would. In a sense, the successful adaptation comes from exaggerating the cerebral features of the detective to the point of turning him into a contemporary paragon of intellect. The importance of the "Science of Deduction" of the protagonist has been rendered in the TV series via aesthetic devices and special effects, particularly with the use of on-screen text to display how Holmes's mind processes the world around him and deducts clues from his observations.

From the point of view of the narrative, this textual material is used with inconsistent frequency: in the three episodes that make up the show's first season, the first and last episode see copious use of on-screen text, especially to signal the fact that Holmes is deducing a clue. However, as the show progresses, the visual-linguistic representation of clue collection diminishes gradually, with some episodes showing no on-screen text (*The Blind Banker,* Season 1 episode 2) and others employing it in a very different way (*The Hounds of Baskerville*, Season 2 episode 2). The decrease in the use of on-screen text could have multiple reasons, in particular the diminishing needs of the writers to "reify the source text" (McClellan 2017: 32). In the pilot episode, *A Study in Pink*, which echoes the original meeting of Holmes and Watson, the detective's first display of his cerebral and deductive skill is effectively rendered with a visual representation of the clues he gathers from looking at the scene (see Fig. 1).

Figure 1. Clue collection in the first episode of *Sherlock* (BBC)

Sherlock's text on screen has been both the object of critical praise and scholarly study, and it has been remarked how it "still signals perceptual shifts resulting from technological transformation" (Dwyer 2015: 7) and the praise it received "firmly anchors this strategy to technology and its newly evolving forms" (Dwyer 2015: 4). More importantly, other scholars have highlighted how displaying the use of technology and Holmes's intellectual prowess are to be considered original in their rendition, yet "using the latest technology is a trait of the literary character" (Rodríguez Domínguez – Martínez Martínez 2015: 165). On-screen text in *Sherlock* is not only an artistic or modernizing choice, but also a characterizing one: it creates a "shared space of affinity between Holmes and the viewer" (Pérez-González 2014: 274) and is employed to "remind audiences of the show's affiliation with the original source text" (McClellan 2017: 24).

4. *Sherlock Holmes: Crimes & Punishments* (Frogwares)

In 2014, Frogwares, a Ukrainian videogame studio, published the seventh instalment of their investigation game series based on the literary canon of Sherlock Holmes, titled *Sherlock Holmes: Crimes & Punishments*. Like many other instalments from the series, this videoludic adaptation combines a faithful transposition of the original texts with original and/or cross-literary references. To exemplify the latter, a terrorist group is part of the overarching plot of the game, and their name, the Merry Men, is a clear reference to the tales of Robin Hood, as well as *Crimes & Punishments* referring to the famous novel by Dostoyevsky. Set in Victorian times, *Sherlock Holmes: Crimes & Punishments* presents the viewer (or in this case, the player) with a very canon-abiding Sherlock Holmes: from the hawk-like nose and tall stature up to his cold politeness and eccentric behaviour. Coherently, John Watson is depicted with similar faithfulness, with additional details to further the contrast between the two: he is shorter and burlier than Holmes, and sports his trademark moustache, as well as behaving as the classic (if not bland and forgettable in this transposition) sidekick.

The videogame features six levels in which the player, impersonating Sherlock Holmes, must solve cases by exploring the areas for clues and then connecting them in chain-reaction fashion on a separate interface, the Deduction board. In order to collect clues, the player-Sherlock has to interview different characters, inspect the crime scenes and sometimes conduct experiments. The six cases include original ones, devised by the

game studio, as well as a combination of popular and more obscure cases from Doyle's texts. In *Crimes & Punishments* specifically, three of the six cases are adaptations from the canon, while the rest consist of original composition. The canon-compliant cases, case 1, 2 and 4 from the videogame, are adapted from *The Adventure of Black Peter*, *The Story of the Lost Special* and *The Adventure of the Abbey Grange*. The first and the last of these tales are part of the collection *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* (1905). *The Story of the Lost Special* (1922), while authored by Conan Doyle, does not explicitly mention having Sherlock Holmes as a protagonist. Despite the link between the famous detective and this lesser-known text being purely speculative, both the videogame and the BBC series adapted or referenced *The Lost Special* with Sherlock Holmes as a protagonist (in the TV series, episode 1 from season 3, *The Empty Hearse*; in the videogame, case 2, *Riddle on the Rails*).

While textual material is part of any videoludic experience, be it in the form of dialogue subtitles, instructions, menus, or on-screen text for other purposes, it is worth mentioning that *Sherlock Holmes: Crimes & Punishments*, as an investigative adventure game, employs verbal text as a core component of the experience it provides. Since the game progresses only once the player has settled on a solution to the current case, action and interaction with and within the game consist in either reading the clues provided and the case summary or exploring the crime scene with the aid of the specific tools provided to the player. In both cases, however, written words and sentences are of absolute importance and authority in the game: once the player formulates a solution to the case, the only clues from the crime scene that can be combined are those that the game translates into text on its separate interface.

In compliance with the claim of historical faithfulness to the original texts, the game makes an attempt at technological modernisation wherever possible, to reflect Sherlock Holmes being always up to speed with scientific and technological progress. In doing so, the game actually ties itself to the TV series here analysed, as they both prioritized rendering the scientific (and in BBC, digital) prowess of the detective. Chronologically, *Sherlock* was aired and released first, which leads to arguing whether the series influenced the videogame. To confirm this suspicion, in an interview with the online magazine *Polygon* (Corriea 2013), Frogwares's business developer Olga Ryzhko confirmed this link, stating that the inspiration drawn from the BBC series is "probably one of the reasons we're making the series more dynamic and modern". In practice, this inspiration is concretized in a game mechanic called "Sherlock Vision", which switches to different camera settings and is

the main tool for scanning crime scenes in the video game. In very similar fashion to his television counterpart, videogame Holmes effortlessly notices clues, traces and useful details from every crime scene as well as allowing the player to obtain more information via "character portraits", game segments in which the interviewed is scanned by the detective. This new information appears as on-screen text in both adaptations in the same exact way, minus a few artistic details (see Fig. 2 and Fig. 3).

Figure 2. *Sherlock Vision*, from *Sherlock Holmes: Crimes & Punishments*

Figure 3. On-screen text in *Sherlock Holmes Crimes & Punishments*

Of course, this entails that, similarly to BBC's *Sherlock*, text on-screen in the videogame acts as a characterizing feature, as an aesthetic (or artistic) component, and as a narrative device. However, given the centrality of the mystery and its solution, text on-screen arguably features a ludic element as well. Detective fiction possesses an inherently game-like quality, because it engages the reader with a mystery and has them measure their intellect against the detective, who is a professional puzzle-solver. This makes it a literary genre that lends itself effortlessly to game and video-game adaptations, and on-screen text as a part of the gameplay allows players to actively interact with the game. On-screen text showcases effectively the clue collection process and eases the attempt at deducing the culprit in the videogame, therefore acting as both a gamification element and a tie with the ludic component of detective fiction. Since the videogame itself has been heavily inspired by the TV series in its rendition of the detective's mental process, the same ludic component applies to on-screen text in *Sherlock* as well. Because of having such a consistent influence on the final outcome of the text, the translation of on-screen text in both adaptations has an often underestimated but definitely non-neglectable impact on its reception, both in the dubbing and the subtitling of the texts. This is because any difficulty (whether purely lexical or technical) resulting in ineffective translation choices would inevitably compromise the ludic aspect of the text, thus forcing the viewer (in the case of *Sherlock*) to undertake a passive role: rather than actively play along with the detective-protagonist, and be aware of false leads and specific clues that advance the plot, viewers that cannot experience on-screen text deductions cannot consequently experience its ludic element. In other words, if the clue collection transfer fails in translation, so does the ludic aspect, and the audience cannot participate in the mystery solving.

The translation of videogame text is assisted with more powerful and refined (and in most cases proprietary[2]) software that allows a mostly seamless translation and localization of textual content (from a technical point of view). This means that *Sherlock Holmes: Crimes & Punishments* does not incorporate the same technical difficulties of translating on-screen text in TV series, as a consequence of different technology being involved. Issues such as concurrency between spoken dialogue and on-screen text are absent or neglectable in the videogame adaptation, especially since players have the option to retrace their step and consult the deductions at any time, while viewers do not. Nevertheless, the fact that on-screen text deductions

2 Proprietary software is usually exclusive to a company (sometimes designed under commission) or available by purchasing a license.

have been transposed from the TV series of the videogame and have been gamified, coupled with the game-like quality of detective fiction, highlights the importance of a possible ludic aspect when the text is being translated.

5. Translating on-screen text

As previously mentioned, *Sherlock*'s use of text on-screen is inconsistent throughout the series, in spite of its fundamental role in showcasing Sherlock's intelligence and method, as well as representing a ludic nuance to resonate with the game-like quality of detective fiction. These on-screen deductions represent a restriction (Zabalbeascoa 1999) in translation for various reasons. In order to assess their role in detail, however, certain considerations on the technical and formal level must be made. First, regardless of whether the final product is dubbed or subtitled, on-screen text retains its visual verbal dimension (Delabastita 1989), hence taking the role of an additional line of text (with its own formatting parameters) in the case of subtitling, as well as converting the dubbed version into a partially subtitled one. Secondly, on-screen text can present (as it does in this case) aesthetic qualities such as animation, artistic design, a particular font or positioning on the screen. The original design is left untouched in audiovisual translations, as technicalities impede translating text that ends up irreversibly embedded on the visual axis (subtitles are professionally juxtaposed on the original film by digital means, leaving the photography and imagery untouched). Therefore, on-screen text is both text *and* image, in a way, and communicates via more than one signifying code. As noted by Chaume (2004), films communicate via a plethora of signifying codes, namely: linguistic, paralinguistic, musical, special effects, sound arrangement, iconographic, photographic, planning, mobility, graphic and syntactic. However, the fact that on-screen text is animated and juxtaposed to items and characters means that there are additional signifying codes involved, as it interacts with the elements on the screen. For example, on-screen text in *Sherlock*, in being text and image, makes use of the linguistic code, as well as the graphic code:

> The spectator perceives written language (*captions*) in the form of titles, intertitles, texts, and subtitles. The presence in a film of these four conventional genres directly influences the translation, since most of the time the translator needs to transfer their meaning to the target text, within the formal constraints that each one of them brings with it (Chaume 2004: 21).

This consideration regarding on-screen text making use of different codes means that its significance and function, from a translation purpose, is multi-layered by default. It follows that since on-screen text in *Sherlock* has a significant impact on aesthetics, characterization, and narration, the translation has to take into account more than the original textual material: positioning, line length and other formal features are key, particularly since the translated product will likely present two (or more) contemporary instances of on-screen text. In the Italian dubbed version, the product offers English on-screen text and translated subtitle of on-screen text, with dubbed dialogue. In Italian subtitled version, the product presents English on-screen text, interlingual subtitles of on-screen text, and dialogue subtitling (in the event of characters speaking during Holmes' clue collection).

The first relevant instance of clue collection via on-screen text in *Sherlock* occurs during the first episode, titled *A Study in Pink* (in reference to the debut title of the detective stories in the literary canon, *A Study in Scarlet*). Watson, still unaware of Holmes's profession, joins him at a crime scene where a lady, entirely dressed in pink, lies dead, face down on the floor. Watson's aid has been requested by Sherlock as both a way to confirm information that was given to him beforehand by Scotland Yard and in order to receive a fresh medical inspection of the body. The scene also lays the ground for the relationship between different characters, as it is a pilot episode after all, and to showcase Sherlock Holmes's intelligence and how much it distances him from other characters. As Sherlock observes the corpse up close, barely touching it, the viewer can observe his reasoning via animated on-screen text. The animation is purposedly evoking technology, modern internet imagery and smartphones, both in the use of carefully chosen sans-serif fonts (easily found in the user interface of smartphones and websites) as well as sleek animations to reflect his train of thought. To exemplify the latter: as Sherlock observes a word scratched by the victim on the wooden floor as she died, and a detective by Scotland Yard remarks that it's the German word for revenge, Sherlock brashly dismisses him. Meanwhile, the viewer can see the word surrounded by the textual elements typical of a dictionary entry. The text then animates into to a whirring alphabet, as Sherlock deducts that the woman intended to scratch the name "Rachel" on the wooden floorboards, but did not manage to complete the word in time. The word is later revealed to be the password for the victim's personal phone. On-screen text keeps flowing around different details and body parts as the detective inspects them – showcasing mostly single words (such as "wet", "dry", "clean", "dirty") – while the same animated trick is employed as he observes her wedding ring,

deducing her infidelity and length of marriage. More on-screen text occurs a few seconds later as Holmes searches for maps and weather forecasts on his smartphone, and the animation shows his selected options (fig. 4). This latter occurrence, while not belonging to clue-collection *sensu stricto*, is still a relevant one as it fulfils the same role, that of showcasing Holmes's mental process (considering options, pondering, deducing) while he calculates the possible solutions to the case, as well as providing the audience with all the necessary clues to reflect on the crime.

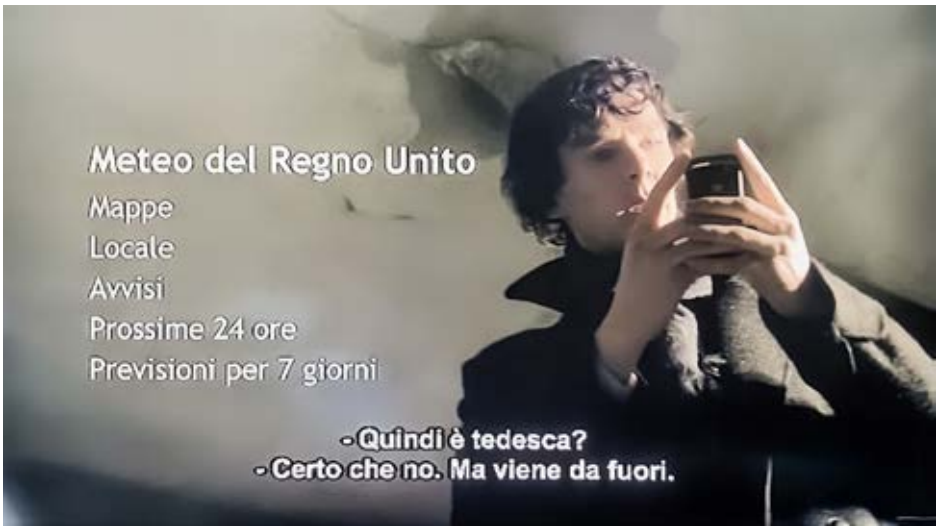

Figure 4. Clue collection in the subtitled version of the Italian DVD of *Sherlock* (BBC)

The problematic feature of this use in translation arises mainly by the fact that it hinders the linearity of the translation process because of the semiotic complexity of animated on-screen text. In practical terms, while more classic audiovisual texts have (mainly) a singular translated output, such as a dubbed track or subtitles, on-screen text this pivotal to the structure of a scene (or to an entire episode or series) requires a flexible translational approach that can account for both the dialogue and the message conveyed by on-screen text. As mentioned earlier, the final result is a dubbed audiovisual text with subtitling lines or a subtitled text that may have to employ multiple lines or drastic omission strategies in order to comply with the temporal and spatial requirements of subtitling practice (as well as company policies, in the case of Amazon Prime Video and Netflix).

In the DVD version of *Sherlock*, produced by BBC, the translation was probably aided by granting the translator access to a so-called virgin track (an audiovisual text before the on-screen text is added in post-editing),

so that on-screen text in the TT language could be added. This means that the DVD offers a "pure" dubbed version, that did not have to resort to any workaround such as subtitling on-screen text, although it had to sacrifice certain aesthetic features, for example animation smoothness or text animation altogether. The subtitled version provided in the same DVD (English audio, Italian subtitles), as it was produced to be marketed in Italy, presents Italian on-screen text with the original English audio.

Vice versa, both the Amazon Prime Video and Netflix versions had to opt for subtitling the on-screen text (in the dubbed version as well), as a virgin track could probably not be accessed. While it is hard to obtain objective information on the why (or nearly impossible, as the professionals may not want to disclose that information), it is easy to hypothesize different reasons that partially explain additional subtitling in both the dubbed and subtitled version of *Sherlock* on the streaming platforms mentioned:

- Firstly, as already implied, they were granted no access to the virgin track.
- Secondly, due to the technical nature of streaming platforms, hosting multiple video tracks in numerous languages (all of which postedited accordingly) may have not been feasible for technical reasons (such as server space) or simply against company policy.
- Thirdly, the platforms may have had access to the virgin video track, but the professional translators employed were not trained in postediting animated on-screen text.
- Lastly, due to time differences (*Sherlock* was released in 2010, while Netflix reached Italian audiences in 2015 and PrimeVideo in 2016), the virgin track was simply not available anymore (likely being corrupted, incompatible, or simply deleted).

Needless to say, dubbing *Sherlock* gets around a considerable constraint – that of having to subtitle dialogue *and* on-screen text at the same time. An example of this occurs in the previously mentioned scene during which the detective is checking maps and forecasts on his smartphone, while Lestrade and Watson are conversing with him. As he is both talking and talked to while the on-screen text conveys additional information, PrimeVideo's subtitling translates the dialogue and disregards on-screen text entirely, probably to avoid unconventional positioning (subtitling not at the bottom of the screen) following company policies.

A compelling scene for this specific issue – that of dialogue concurring with on-screen text – occurs around minute 50 of the third episode (*The Great Game*), while Sherlock Holmes and John Watson have a fight about

the detective's lack of empathy. In the middle of the argument, the detective receives a new challenge from his adversary; in turn, Holmes and Watson put their differences aside to work out the solution, mainly through digital search engines, leading to a considerable amount of on-screen text. While Holmes surfs the web, Watson browses various newspapers, reading them out loud and thus clashing with on-screen text in subtitling (Fig. 5, Fig. 6).

Figure 5. Drastic reduction of on-screen text in the Italian dubbing (Amazon Prime Video)

Figure 6. Omission of on-screen text in the Italian subtitling (Amazon Prime Video)

On PrimeVideo (English audio, Italian subtitles), the first on-screen text instance of the scene is subtitled for a short amount of time, disappearing with the shot change and hindering its overall readability. Both the Italian subtitling and the subtitles in the Italian dubbing employ the omission of different parts of the on-screen text in this scene. As Watson conversates with Holmes, the Italian subtitling complies with the decision taken in previous instances: subtitling the dialogue exchange and sacrificing the information being displayed via on-screen text. The Italian dubbing available on Prime Video offers the same dubbing of the BBC DVD, and often omits portions of on-screen text (omitting on-screen text subtitling entirely in the second season), thus forcing a non-English speaking viewership into a passive role with regards to the ludic component, not to mention that what Holmes deducts from the scene remains unintelligible until referred to in the dialogue.

On-screen deductions can range from single words (nouns or adjectives), to simple-structured sentences, to worded layouts with a technologic aesthetic (e.g. a list of search results from a webpage). The words used are not particularly obscure or complicated in the source text, so the translation is made complex by the features of the transposition described previously. Linguistically speaking, they are not inherently complex, rather the complexity lies in the interaction between the linguistic content of the deduction and the linguistic content of the dialogue. Amazon PrimeVideo has handled the subtitles with hasty and inattentive timing and spotting, with the on-screen text translation lasting too little to be read in many cases. For example, in *A Study in Pink*, the thoughts and deductions made by Holmes on the cadaver attempt to comply with the restrictions of the medium via a slight delay, to give the viewer time to assess the original on-screen text before reading its translation elsewhere on the screen, but due to the fast-paced animation and rapid change of the subtitles, the final result distracts the viewer from the scene almost completely. On the other hand, the omission of portions of sentence in the subtitles of *The Great Game* is completely arbitrary in both translations: the dubbed version opted for subtitling the static (as in not animated) portions of on-screen text, while in the subtitled version, after initially subtitling (at the top of the screen) the on-screen text content and reducing it drastically to fit, the dialogue subtitle overrides the necessity to subtitle deductions, thus translating the dialogue only.

The translation of these small, short-lived, animated text segments into Italian was conducted mostly literally both in the dubbed and subtitled version, with mixed results. For example, "serial adulterer" is translated as "adultera seriale", which, while arguably not a collocation in use in the Italian language (alternatives such as "traditrice seriale" or "adultera compulsiva" are more frequent), is still perfectly understandable for the audience. Interestingly enough, both Netflix and PrimeVideo resorted to similar (if not identical) translating solutions for on-screen text – for example, the aforementioned "adultera seriale" is the translation choice adopted by both streaming services. Having PrimeVideo and Netflix producing almost identical translations for the first episode – both of which uncredited[3], is an occurrence that requires further clarification, especially when considering that both platforms present similar or identical omission choices. For example, the already discussed internet browsing that occurs during *The Great Game* does not encounter the same difficulties in the dubbed version, compared to subtitling: simultaneous dialogue that can be heard arguably does not interfere with on-screen text subtitling, as it partly removes the issue of subtitle spatiality. Nevertheless, Netflix alters the overall content of the on-screen text and its deduction, as well as employing an interesting choice for salience: as Sherlock scrolls down the different news, the on-screen text subtitling only includes a reduced title of the search ("Tide Times" and "Thames Water Quality", translated as "ORARI DELLA MAREA – QUALITÀ DELL'ACQUA"). Most of these lines of text inform the viewer of how Sherlock's reasoning unfolds, but its translation omits the vast majority of lines. Interestingly, the platforms do not subtitle any of the following on-screen text scenes, which consist of different localities along with the sentences "no reports" and "no new reports". Coherently, as the Italian dubbing incorporates subtitle lines based on the Italian subtitled version, this omission occurs in both the Italian dubbing and the Italian subtitling of episode 3. These excerpts represent the deduction process as it has been described so far in this study, particularly so as they represent unfruitful searches and discarded theories, and serve as plot progression to showcase Sherlock facing a mental block of a sort.

Needless to say, the interest of these on-screen deductions lays not exclusively on the lexical level as much as on the formal one: the issue lies

[3] It is customary for subtitlers for streaming services to insert their name at the end of the audiovisual text, often in correspondence with credits.

in the verboseness of these on-screen sentences, their concurrence with audioverbal dialogue, and the consequent struggles for subtitling practice. In the Italian dubbing of the episode, Netflix transposed the relevant on-screen text subtitling lines from the subtitled version without any modification. This, in turn, maintains omissions (even drastic ones) in spite of simultaneous (spoken) dialogue not acting as a constraint in the dubbed version. As a consequence, the employment of clipped subtitle segments in the dubbed version, rather than a tailored subtitling of on-screen text, maintains the same issues and struggles of the Italian subtitled version. In fact, by "recycling" the subtitles, the dubbed version does not get around the constraint of simultaneous dialogue and on-screen text in practice, despite being able to do so in theory (as advanced earlier in this study).

6. Conclusions

Transmedia adaptations of Conan Doyle's texts often feature the involvement of technology, both in terms of narrative and formal aesthetics, and adaptations sometimes affect other adaptations, such as a TV series influencing a narrative-driven videogame. In the series *Sherlock*, its use has been justly praised and has reverberated onto other audiovisual adaptations of the detective, namely Frogwares's videogames. On-screen text has been discussed here as a complex and multi-layered component of modern audiovisual texts, undertaking narrative, aesthetic and characterizing functions. In addition, a ludic function of on-screen text has been proposed here, drawing from both the gamification of Conan Doyle's text and the impact of the TV series on Frogwares's videogame. Despite its significant role, on-screen text translation is being heavily neglected on streaming services, which are arguably the most popular way to currently consume audiovisual products, resulting in the loss of a significant portion of the function of the text. On-screen text deductions are omitted or maintained with poor salience choices. This demonstrates not only a superficiality in the translation practice carried out on these platforms, but also calls for an equal technologization of the tools of the translators: many of the shortcomings in the Italian versions of *Sherlock* could have been circumvented by employing translators trained in post-editing, as is the case in the DVD version.

After highlighting issues of on-screen text in theory and in practice, the complex semiotic configuration of on-screen text discussed in this study

calls for further development. Possible future paths for research include other relevant case studies in detective fiction, where on-screen text can reconfirm the ludic aspect proposed in this study, as well as innovative subtitling choices employed for on-screen text in audiovisual adaptations of different genres.

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