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TRANET
TRANS-NATIONAL EUROPEAN THEATRE

# SURTITLING AND SUBTITLING GUIDELINES

By Mara Logaldo and Donatella Codonesu

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**TraNET – (Trans)National European Theatre** is a Creative Europe project that reimagines ways for creating and sharing theatre across linguistic and national borders.

Coordinated by Avignon Université with partners PACTA dei Teatri (Milan), multiculturalcity e.V. (Berlin), and IULM (Milan), TraNET blends live performance with digital technology to offer a shared European stage.
Its core is the Clashing Classics Festival, a biennial event where three national classics—reinterpreted by each partner—are performed and live-streamed simultaneously with multilingual surtitles. Audiences across Europe take part in a single, transnational experience, extended by cross-border debates.
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# 1. Purpose of the Guidelines

The translation of theatre plays is a form of audiovisual translation aimed at making performances accessible to an audience that does not understand the language or has some hearing impairments that prevent them from having access to the dialogues. At the international theatre festival Clashing Classics. Multilingualism on Stage, stemming from the European Collaboration TraNET-CREA-CULT 2023 project, texts were simultaneously experienced live and live-streamed and later, in their recorded form, on the online platform Vimeo embedded in the project website. Therefore, this task was made even more challenging by the intermediality that characterised the fruition of the texts.

These guidelines originate from this experience. They cover the surtitling of the live performances and the subtitling of the live-streamed and filmed performances, starting from the intralinguistic and interlinguistic translations of the plays that originated them. They include general rules for audiovisual translation (AVT) and specific processes and outcomes related to the project. They address translation techniques, rules, and criteria influenced by the multimodal, polysemiotic, and intermedial nature of theatrical performances, while also considering cultural and linguistic issues and audience reception.

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide general and specific instructions for surtitling and subtitling practices, following the multifaceted experience gained with the Clashing Classics Festival. More specifically, in the next paragraphs we will define the best practices implemented to make accessible:

a) synchronous multimedia environments (both physical and virtual)
b) asynchronous online fruition

Delving deeply into the process leading from the original play to the fruition of the performance, specific attention will be paid to linguistic, cultural, and technical challenges posed by the sur/subtitling within the project as well as accessibility (interlinguistic and for SDH) and the alignment of translation standards with audience reception.

# 2. Overview of the Project

These guidelines were developed as part of the three-year European Collaboration TraNET-CREA-CULT 2023 project, which aims to internationalise theatre through live performances and live-streaming with live sur/subtitles. In addition, the performances, filmed, edited and subtitled, have been made available on the project's website (https://tra-net.eu/) for further dissemination. The project partners include artists and linguists from Italy, Germany, and France, committed to producing two editions of the Clashing Classics International theatre festival (in 2025 and 2026) featuring plays in Italian, German, and French. The project explores intercultural artistic collaboration and the sharing of artistic products through the translation and surtitling (SDH) of the theatrical texts developed into performances and staged in the respective countries.

During the first year, three classic texts were presented and adapted: *Angst essen Seele Auf* by Fassbinder (1974), *Il giuoco delle parti* by Pirandello (1918), and *L'île des esclaves* by Marivaux (1725). The latter consisted, in fact, of the translated and adapted version by British actress Catherine Clive *Slave Island* dated 1761, thus introducing British English into the project, which was also used for video subtitling.

In 2025, each performance took place physically in one theatre and was live streamed to the other two venues, according to the following schedule:

- 27 February: *Angst essen Seele auf* (Theater im Delphi, Berlin)
- 3 March: *Il giuoco delle parti* (Salone PACTA, Milan)
- 6 March: *Slave Island* (Théâtre de l'Archipel, Avignon)

The three performances were then recorded, uploaded to Vimeo, and made available on the project website with interlingual SDH subtitles[1]. The post-performance debates held live across the three audiences were also recorded and uploaded with both intralingual and English closed captions.

The synchronous environment was particularly challenging, as it required the simulta-

[1] Fassbinder's play *Angst essen Seele auf* will be made available on the project website in a 5-minute excerpt showcasing selected highlights from the performance. This is due to the fact that the rights holder (Verlag der Autoren) has denied permission for the full version of the play to be publicly distributed.

neous launching of on-stage integrated intralingual surtitling for the live performance and on-screen open captions in the target languages for the live streamed plays in the other two theatres. The asynchronous environment involved traditional closed captions in the four languages of the plays and post-show debates (simultaneously translated from/into French, German, Italian) available on demand on Vimeo and embedded in the dedicated website (also in English).

An essential part of the project was the organisation of training sessions for the students majoring in Specialized Translation and Conference Interpreting who collaborated to the sur/subtitling of the plays. Eleven students from IULM Milan and a PhD candidate from Avignon participated in two hybrid training sessions (at IULM and on Teams) on 21 November 2024 and 20 January 2025 and three in-person meetings held at IULM between December 2024 and February 2025. These guidelines incorporate the linguistic and cultural challenges faced by the students during the translation process and discussed during the meetings. Much of these guidelines, therefore, are based on the interaction between trainers and students' insights and feedback.

Additionally, two IULM students specialising in Interpreting Studies translated the post-show debates connecting the three audiences in Italian, French, and German. The interpreting was conducted in the RSI (Remote Simultaneous Interpreting) and relay mode. All the interpreters were provided with materials (project description, show brochures, scripts, etc.) in advance and trained by two professional interpreters coordinated by a third professional trainer.

The project's context is linguistically complex, with performances in three original languages and cultures, plus a fourth linguistic and cultural filter – English – used in Clive's adaptation and in the captions uploaded with the videos of the performances. This resulted in twelve translations, in Italian, German, and French for the sur/subtitles of the live performances in the three countries, plus an English translation for all the recorded plays (Fig.1).

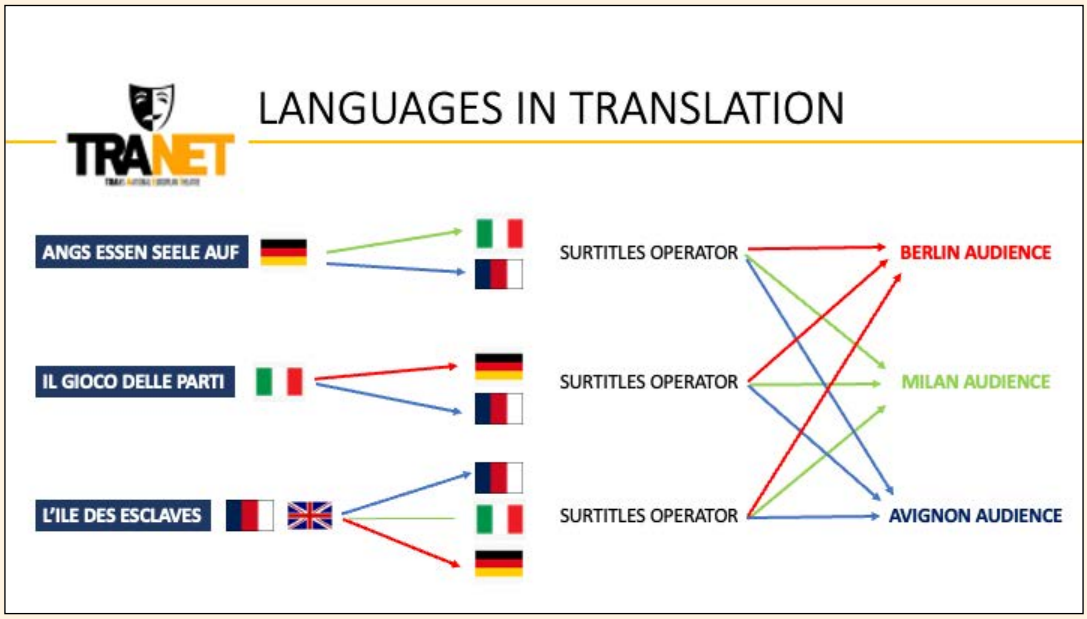



Fig. 1. The languages in translation in the Tra-NET project.

The whole process produced almost 8,000 surtitles and over 13,000 subtitles, highlighting a similar trend in the number of surtitles/subtitles needed (Fig. 2). This divergence, recurring in all the languages, is mainly due to the different technique in reproducing the lines (see § 8): the surtitles are operated live by a surtitle operator and therefore segment the dialogues more approximately, by following the lines spoken by the actors as precisely as possible, while the subtitles are aligned to the exact timing, and can therefore be more numerous and shorter.

| **Play** | **Surtitles** | **Total surtitles** (3 languages) | **Subtitles** | **Total Subtitles** (4 languages) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Fassbinder* | 754 | 2,262 | 836 | 3,344 |
| *Pirandello* | 971 | 2,913 | 1333 | 5,332 |
| *Marivaux* | 931 | 2,793 | 1090 | 4,36 |
| | | **7,968** | | **13,036** |

Fig. 2. Surtitle vs subtitle numbers in the Tra-NET project.

In the next sections, we are going to explore the differences between surtitling and subtitling in terms of medium, translation techniques, formats, and workflow.

# 3. Translating for theatre

Theatre performances are multimodal texts perceived through both acoustic and visual channels. The acoustic channel conveys not only the verbal texts of the dialogues but also prosodic elements (voice, pitch, rhythm, intonation) that are inseparable from the performance, along with equally important non-verbal aural elements such as music, noises, and other sound effects.

The visual channel conveys both verbal (cards, signs, newspaper titles) and non-verbal (costume and mise-en-scène, including lights and props) information, along with kinesics (blocking, stage movements, gestures, and facial expressions of the actors).

All these elements combined constitute the multimodal, polysemiotic and, in our case, multimedial nature of the source texts as emphasised, for example, by the presence of screens in the staging of *Angst essen Seele auf* created by visual artist Yukihiro Ikutani, who filmed the actors and simultaneously projected their images on the stage background (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3. Ali reading today's news magazines (*Angst essen Seele auf*, Theater im Delphi, Berlin).

As this example shows, the translation needs to be integrated and perceived as part of a coherent meaning-making process, avoiding semiotic tension between what the audience sees on stage and reads in the surtitles (Pedersen 2020).

The translation of theatrical performances is therefore subject to the constraints of the medium: time, space, and their complex multimodal, polysemiotic nature. Before we delve more deeply into the technical details of translations, we will give an overview of the specificities of theatre as a medium.

Theatre, according to the dual Greek etymology θέατρον [théatron] and θεάομαι [theáomai], refers both to the public place "from which one watches" (the audience area, as opposed to σκηνή [skené], the stage) and the act of observing, watching. This origin evidently presents a dual aspect, physical and temporal, which can be summarised in the Latin phrase *hic et nunc* (here and now), identifying the essence of theatre as a representation physically tied to a place, where an "observer" and an «object of observation» meet, establishing a two-way communication between actor and spectator, a gaze reflecting in the other's gaze.

Semiotics distinguishes between "drama" and "theatre", that is, text and representation. This dichotomy confines the former (the written theatrical text) to the realm of literary criticism and exposes the latter (the scenic representation) to a constantly relevant "investigation of the ephemeral" (Elam 1988: 10). Indeed, while the text is evidently tied to the time it is written, the representation is equally tied to the moment it is staged. It will reflect the moment it comes to life on stage in front of an audience, in terms of language, form, social and cultural references.

The physical encounter between spectator and actor, aimed at building a two-way communication, and the outcome of this encounter, i.e., the enjoyment of the representation, is based on the complex intersection of verbal and visual communication channels, of which the word, i.e., the written text (script, in technical terms), is just one element. This premise is necessary for these guidelines because, when approaching the translation of a theatrical text, one cannot ignore the awareness that this text constitutes the "graphic form" of something that will, in fact, exist extemporaneously in a "physical form" (the scenic one) (Griesel 2005: 1-3), which is three-dimensional, polysemic, metalinguistic, multimodal, and increasingly multimedial.

It follows that, when translating for the stage, the literary text becomes partly implied and ephemeral. The production as a whole will constitute the source text, and the surtitles will become part of it, making it accessible to spectators who do not understand the lines, due to a lack of linguistic skills or to hearing problems.

If the performance is live-streamed, little changes need to be made in terms of the on-stage surtitling. However, in our case the system immediately took on an additional technical apparatus, i.e., the audiovisual recording, editing, and projection of the performance. Even without considering the linguistic code, this entailed that the surtitles integrated on stage could not be effectively visualised on screen, given the distance and the in-depth embedment. Therefore, for the live-streamed performances, the

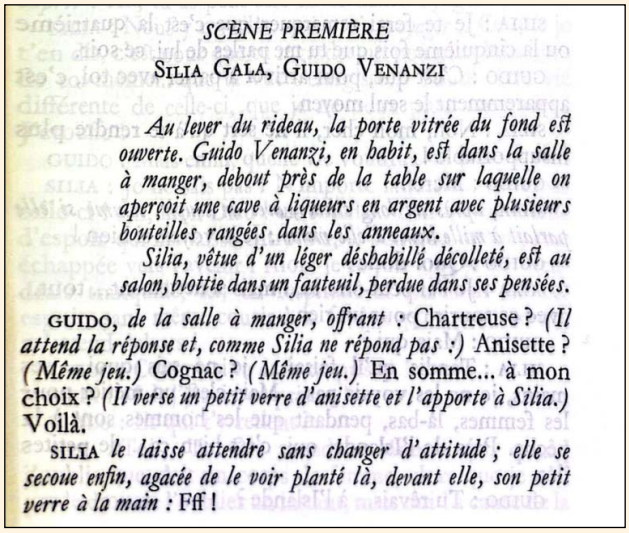
surtitles needed to be made available on screen as subtitles. These on-screen captions, in the languages of the target audience, were synchronised with the surtitles projected on stage, thus maintaining the same, verbatim nature. By contrast, making the pre-recorded videos of the performances available online with on-demand captions entailed a change of the sur/subtitles, since subtitles can be tested and reviewed. Dealing with the live surtitling, the live-streaming subtitling and the video subtitling required different approaches, methods, and skills. The practical guidelines contained in these pages indicate how to tackle this multiple complexity.

In the translation of the scripts, a general principle was followed: the plays had to be adapted based on the target language and culture all while keeping their alterity. The process of localisation or domestication (Venuti 1995) was kept to a minimum, to preserve the audience's perception of unity within diversity suggested by the title of the festival, Clashing Classics.

The same principle was followed to make the sur/subtitles accessible to the hearing-impaired: plot-relevant sound settings in the local language were added, but no other invasive methods were used, such as colours or names for the different characters or simplified language. This method was adopted after consulting the guidelines of the ESIST corpus, containing the set of standards and best practices developed by the European Association for Studies in Screen Translation, and attending the conference "Researching Audiences of Subtitled Media" held at the University of Leeds in January 2025, which investigated the issue or sur/subtitling combining the academic approach with empirical surveys on audience reception, along with the professional view of providers of audiovisual contents and translators. As the latest results show, sur/subtitles need to be truly inclusive, envisaging, rather than two distinct audiences made of abled/disabled people, a composite, unified audience of individuals with different abilities, education, and expectations. As the Ofcom guidelines (2025) state, «[P]eople are not defined by a single characteristic and disabled audiences reflect the full diversity of [UK] society. Audiences should be able to see/hear themselves authentically represented on-screen, including by audio describers and signers. Teams involved at all stages in the making and distributing of programmes should also reflect the diversity of their audiences to fully understand and effectively meet their needs and preferences».

# 4. The pre-translation stage: from prototext to script

The first stage of the translation process entailed a close analysis of the original classic plays (a screenplay in the case of Fassbinder) and of their respective pre-existing, published translations, which were used as primary texts of reference. These were useful to understand the original intentions of the authors and the textual features of the prototexts - particularly regarding themes, style, register, historical and cultural context - and annotate syntactic and lexical choices that could already belong to the encyclopaedia, the cultural background of, at least, part of the audience.



SCÈNE PREMIÈRE

SILIA GALA, GUIDO VENANZI

*Au lever du rideau, la porte vitrée du fond est ouverte. Guido Venanzi, en habit, est dans la salle à manger, debout près de la table sur laquelle on aperçoit une cave à liqueurs en argent avec plusieurs bouteilles rangées dans les anneaux.*

*Silia, vêtue d'un léger déshabillé décolleté, est au salon, blottie dans un fauteuil, perdue dans ses pensées.*

GUIDO, *de la salle à manger, offrant :* Chartreuse ? *(Il attend la réponse et, comme Silia ne répond pas :)* Anisette ? *(Même jeu.)* Cognac ? *(Même jeu.)* En somme... à mon choix ? *(Il verse un petit verre d'anisette et l'apporte à Silia.)* Voilà.

SILIA *le laisse attendre sans changer d'attitude ; elle se secoue enfin, agacée de le voir planté là, devant elle, son petit verre à la main :* Fff !

Fig. 4. Pirandello, *Le jeu des rôles*, translated by André Bouissy,
In *Théâtre Complet I* edited by Michel Arnaud, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Gallimard, 1977.

The translation of authoritative texts implies a higher level of attention to and philological accuracy towards the original texts: although in audiovisual translation the script and the dialogues themselves normally undergo a radical work of adaptation, due to time and space constraints (see § 7), "when the performance that is surtitled is itself a translation of a "canonical original dramatic text", the canonical original is

«treated as a so-called sacred text, and the translator does not dare to make serious interventions in the textual structure, so as not to change the style and language of the original» (Griesel 2005: 10). The need for adherence to the prototext can also be engendered by copyright issues, i.e., agreements regarding adaptations based on these texts, especially when authors are still alive. In our case, we had to come to terms with both these aspects, negotiating between fidelity to the prototext, compliance with copyright regulations and agreements, and the necessary need to provide well-made, accessible sur/subtitles.

The performances included in the first Clashing Classics Festival edition had very different origins and styles, each requiring unique translational strategies.

*Angst essen Seele auf,* based on the modern classic film written and directed by Rainer Fassbinder (1974), relied on the poor, often incorrect German spoken by immigrants as a means to show the struggle of these characters to communicate with the native German people. Director Monika Dobrowlańska chose to keep her adaptation for the stage absolutely faithful to the screenplay (as per copyright agreement).

*Il giuoco delle parti* was based on Paolo Bignamini's adaptation of Pirandello's play (dated 1918). Being also the director, Bignamini chose to keep the complexity of the original bourgeois language, stressing the philosophical references and mindset, while simplifying the production by cutting many characters and scenes. The result is a dense performance with strong symbolic nuances.

For Marivaux's *L'île des esclaves* (1725), British director Helen Landau (based in Avignon) made a totally different choice, staging her own adaptation of the 1761 English translation and adaptation by British actress Catherine Clive. A story on relationships among different social classes, the play relies on formal/informal language to describe the characters' fight to find their place in society, performed by a very young cast, it is a fresh, contemporary exploration of the topic. In this latest case, the performance was based on a script that had undergone several adaptations and the process leading to sur/subtitling posed a totally different challenge.

The scripts were generally made available only in the original language, with the exception of Helen Landau's adaptation based on Marivaux/Clive's *Slave Island*, which contained not only the original language (English) but also the translations into French and Italian (Fig. 5).

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| IPHICRATE S'ils souhaitent des discussions bilatérales, qu'ils envoient le ministre. Tu le sais, Dromio. Assure-toi que ce soit le cas. Voici les modifications que j'ai apportées à mon discours. | IPHICRATES *(Cutting him off with a hand gesture.)* If they want bilaterals, they send the guy himself. You know that, Dromio. See that it happens. Now here are the changes I made on the speech (*handing over papers*) | IFICRATE Se vogliono incontri bilaterali, che mandino il ministro. Lo sai, Dromio. Assicurati che sia così. Ecco le modifiche che ho apportato al mio discorso. |
| DROMIO Ah, Lord Iphicrate, on nous a recommandé d'éviter ce chiffre, selon les dernières recherches scientifiques... | DROMIO (*Scanning through the papers* ) Ah, now, Lord Iphicrate, we've been advised not to use that number, the latest science - | DROMIO Ah, Lord Ificrate, ci hanno consigliato di evitare le cifre, secondo le ultime ricerche scientifiche... |

Fig. 5. Script of *Slave Island*'s adaptation by Helen Landau.

The abudance/scantiness of details within a script varies greatly from author to author and is often linked to theatrical practice: those who are also directors or actors know how to bring a detailed scenic vision into the writing. On the other hand, when the author, director, and performer coincide, the script sometimes limits itself to the actors' lines, as the stage directions are self-explaining to those writing for themselves and therefore unnecessary. In our case, being the playwrights also the directors, the scripts did not include many notes to support the translations.

The first, preliminary step we followed for the intra/interlinguistic surtitling was a pre-translation of the scripts. Scripts generally contain, at least, minimal stage directions and the names of the characters who utter the lines (fig. 6). Although these deserve much attention as they contain a lot of relevant information about narrative structure (Act, Scene, Prologue, Epilogue), characters, context and mise-en-scène, stage directions and characters' cues were not translated, as they do not appear in the sur/subtitles. Only the lines were first transcribed in the original language, then translated in the other two languages and saved in a Word file (fig. 7).

**PROLOGO**
*Il salotto in casa di Silia Gala.*

*Leone, Silia e Guido Venzanzi. Leone inizia a leggere.*

"Tutte le fortune a Memmo Viola!
E se le meritava davvero quel buon Memmone, che cacciava le mosche allo stesso modo con cui guardava la moglie, cioè con l'aria di dire:
«Ma perché v'ostinate, santo Dio, a molestarmi così? Non sapete già, che non riuscirete mai a farmi stizzire? E dunque sciò, care; sciò…».

Fig. 6. Script of *Il giuoco delle parti* by Paolo Bignamini.

Segmentation (see § 6) at this stage was very tentative:

Alles Glück hat Memmo Viola!
Und er hat das wirklich verdient, der gute Memmone,
der die Fliege genauso verscheuchte,
wie er seine Frau ansah, nämlich als wolte er sagen:
«Aber warum besteht ihr so darauf, mich zu stören?
Wisst ihr denn bereits nicht,
dass ihr mich nie ärgern werdet?
Also, husch, husch, husch…»

Fig. 7. First German draft translation of the lines in *Il giuoco delle parti*.

Whether the text derives from an original work or a previous translation, the translator will therefore face an unpublished work, a text that is not edited for publishing but structured in a form functional to the stage, and thus containing directorial notes, indications for actors, annotations on lights and sounds, etc.

It should be noted that the script carries indispensable information for the staging, such as story (plot and context), character (ethnicity, gender, status, education levels, expressive register), acoustic elements (sounds and music), visual elements (lights, set design, costumes), acting (voice timbre, gestures, actions, choreography), etc. All these elements, even when not explicitly indicated in the stage and personal directions, emerge through the dialogue lines and are fundamental because they contribute to the effectiveness of communication between actor and spectator, and thus to the success of the performance.

When translating a theatrical text, therefore, it is essential to manage to transport these elements into the translated text, both when they are explicitly expressed and when they exist only “between the lines”. A recurring example is the definition of characters through their way of speaking: grammatical errors to indicate foreignness or a low level of education, an accent/slang to define a geographical/cultural area of origin, etc. (see § 9.4). Since audiovisual translation, unlike translation for publishing, allows no translators’ notes visible on stage/screen, these pieces of information must be contained in the translations themselves. In practice, when translating the text,

i.e., the set of lines, the translator must also manage to transfer possible indications on setting and age/character/relationships of the characters, the ways in which the characters express themselves, their register, their intentions, in a word, the subtext. Clearly, any deviation of the translation from the directors' vision, which is infused in the actors so that they can make it their own and restore it on stage, can lead far away, even distort the sense of the staging.

The three translations of the scripts were therefore only a necessary starting point. They were then transformed, firstly, into surtitles for the live performances/subtitles for the live streaming and, secondly, into on-demand captions made available for an international audience along with the videos of the performances, which were filmed and then edited, uploaded and embedded in the project website. During these passages, these pre-translations underwent a radical editing process aimed at reorganising and further refining the sur/subtitles for readability and accessibility. Both processes will be described in the ensuing sections.

# 5. From script to stage

The staging of a performance always involves the reinterpretation and presentation of a text in a new scenic setup, constructed with the aim of presenting that story as relevant to a contemporary audience. In this sense, the script, even when it is based on a classical play, effectively becomes a new theatrical text, adapted by the director according to their artistic vision.

At an early stage, directorial notes, which in this project were made available to the translators, may greatly help envision how the play should be read and interpreted. When creating the surtitles, however, it is necessary to start from the performance itself. Viewing the rehearsals, or a video of the rehearsals, provides the rhythm of the performance, especially pauses, known as the "actor's breath". Since surtitles need to be ready beforehand and it is usually not possible to physically follow the latest phases of production, a video of the rehearsals will assist in the translation, making visible information that is experienced through communication channels (Fig. 18) other than the written words contained in the script, such as pitch, intonation and rhythm, the acting, the mise-en-scène, the lighting and costumes, the music and sound effects, which, as reported in § 3, are of the utmost importance for the meaning-making process.

The staging itself is indeed a form of intersemiotic translation, from script to stage, which, in addition to having to restore the sense and intentions of the original text, must meet criteria of representability, i.e., the text must literally come to life in the body and voice of the actors. Translation for surtitling is an additional, or "additive" in Gottlieb's words (1999), form of translation which needs to support the performance in the original language. This distinction opens two completely different scenarios, which, as mentioned, maintain the same ultimate goal: the shared enjoyment of a live work. Within these guidelines, we specifically explore this scenario from the latter perspective, considering translation «as being in a mutually dependent, inherently dialogic, symbiotic relationship with performance» (Misiou and Kostopoulou, 2024: 1).

The creation of surtitles starts from the philological analysis of both the prototext and the script through an intratextual passage. Then the text is segmented and, if necessary, condensed to perfectly adhere to the rhythm of the acting. The process materia-

lises in meticulous work carried out in various successive steps, all based on viewing the performance (ideally during rehearsals, more realistically starting from the full video of the show and then with a final live test before going on stage). The ultimate goal is to make the experience enjoyable and fluid. Surtitles should be perceived as elements that are integrated into the performance and accompany the scenic action in the least invasive way possible.

# 6. Theatre surtitling

Surtitles are intended to appear on stage basically as linguistic elements presented in a concise form and projected during the performance. However, their physical visuality cannot be overlooked: surtitles are usually strings of white texts on a black background, consisting of one-two lines containing between 40 and 47 characters per line, that appear in boxed or unboxed rectangles projected on a "safe" area (so called since it should be easily accessible without covering salient elements of the performance), usually placed on top of the stage background or foreground (hence, originally, their being called "surtititles" instead of "subtitles") or sometimes on a screen placed at one side. In principle, the purpose is to find a place where surtitles can be read by everyone without being too intrusive. In small, non-theatrical spaces, projecting surtitles presents logistical challenges that depend on the setup, room depth, projector power, and other visual elements. For frontal setups, the optimal position for easy reading is at the back of the stage, since a pelmet at the front makes it hard for front-row spectators to read. Side screens are more invasive and uncomfortable to read. Central stage setups or actors moving among the audience complicate surtitle projection, often requiring experimental and costly technological solutions. Whatever the case, the visual presence of surtitles cannot be overlooked, hence the need to accept the fact that they become part and parcel of the performance, and even the possibility to come up with creative solutions while preserving their function.

There are different views on captions, according to whether they are perceived as complementary, "additive" in Gottlieb's words (1994), potentially invasive texts and therefore aiming at a sort of transparency or, on the contrary, experienced as a visual-verbal component of the screening or staging (see Misiou and Kostopoulou 2024). During the surtitling process, and in writing these guidelines, we have adopted the latter view: the intra/interlingual surtitles have been considered as an integral part of the performances, as also stated in the project. This was particularly evident in the staging of *Angst essen Seele auf* in Berlin, where the surtitles were projected on a large screen that showed the performance itself filmed from different camera angles (Fig. 8).


Fig. 8. Integrated surtitles (*Angst essen Seele auf*, Theater im Delphi, Berlin).

It is important to underline that the audience experiences the surtitles along with all the elements that constitute the performance, including the acting. As the post-show surveys highlight, perception of the intrusiveness of the surtitles on stage may greatly vary. In general, audiences that are used to experiencing sur/subtitled media find them less invasive than people unaccustomed to them (see § 10).

Surtitling is entirely at the service of the staging, supporting the original performance, which it must adhere to, rhythmically, and be integrated with, semiotically. In other words, surtitles and scenic elements should converge in the enjoyment of the theatrical experience, becoming complementary codes within the same communication flow. This entails that it is important to ensure synchronicity with the dialogues as well as cohesion with other scenic elements. In practice, surtitling can be described as "reading the voice". Although, as we will see in § 7 and 8, there is a degree of flexibility in live surtitling compared to the subtitling of pre-recorded plays, the surtitles should be segmented so as to ensure not only that they are semantically consistent units (see § 6) but also that the rhythm of the dialogues is respected.

The segmented surtitles can be functionally transcribed either on an Excel worksheet (each box corresponds to a surtitle; Fig. 9) or in a PowerPoint presentation (each slide, white font on a black background, corresponds to a surtitle; Fig. 10). For this project, Excel files were used for the official festival, while PowerPoint was used when the Vmix software and the technical staff were not available, as was the case with the staging of *Angst essen Seele auf* during the students' workshop held in Berlin in the morning of 28 February.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Uno si era finanche inginocchiato.<br>Ma ella non aveva voluto sentir nulla; | Einer kniete sogar nieder.<br>Aber sie wollte nichts hören; | L'un d'eux s'était même agenouillé.<br>Mais elle n'avait pas voulu entendre |
| aveva preteso conto dell'oltraggio,<br>e tanto aveva insistito, che alla fine uno, | sie verlangte Rechenschaft<br>und sie bestand so sehr, | et elle avait tellement insisté qu'à la fin |
| forse il meno insolente,<br>aveva lasciato il suo biglietto da visita… | dass einer der vier seine<br>Visitenkarte abgegeben hatte… | peut-être le moins insolent<br>avait laissé sa carte de visite. |
| | | |
| [Farfuglia] | [Er lallt] | [Il bredouille] |
| Buonasera, Guido! | Guten Abend, Guido! | Bonsoir, Guido ! |

Fig. 9. Excel file with multilingual surtitles for *Il giuoco delle parti*.

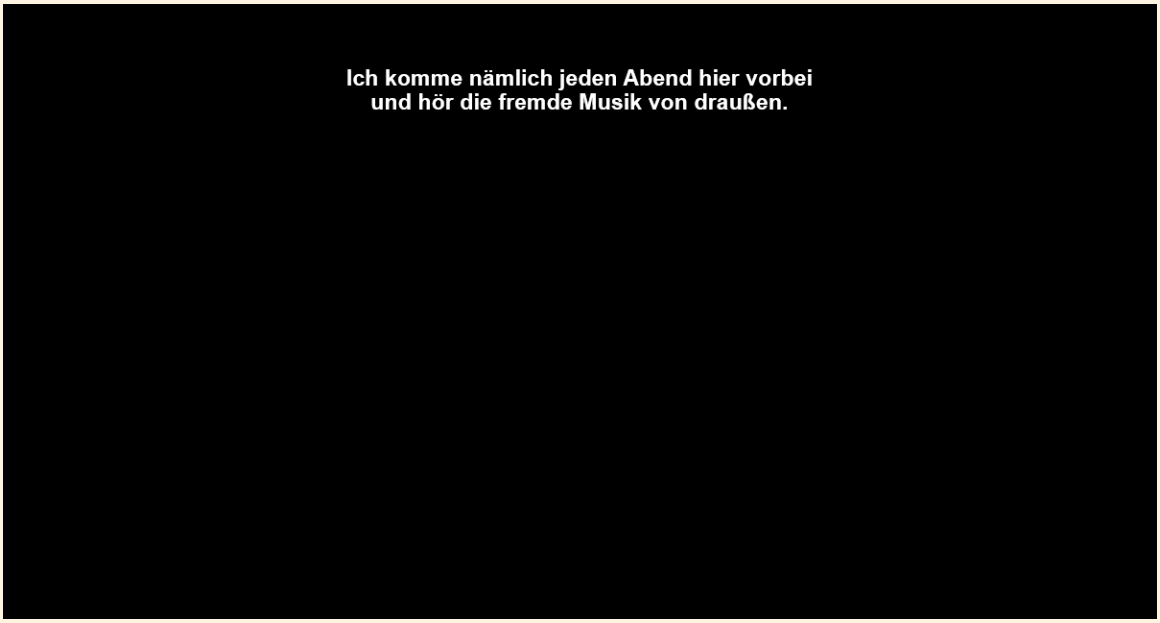



Fig. 10. PowerPoint slide with a surtitle for *Angst essen Seele auf*.

As highlighted so far, surtitles must be synchronised with the spoken word and follow the actor's breath, regardless of the reproduction medium. This rule should be followed also when projecting the surtitles: the Excel box or the PowerPoint slide with the surtitle is projected from a laptop onto the stage, or on a screen placed on the stage. Ideally, the change of a slide or surtitle slot should correspond to the actor's

"breath": the content of the text uttered in that breath should rhythmically correspond to the concise content written on the projected box/slide.

This means that the surtitle operator must simultaneously deal with the pre-edited surtitles and the live performance, ensuring consistency between what the audience reads and hears. One of the challenges of surtitling is that, during the live performance, actors may make unforeseen pauses, skip lines or repeat them. Although little can be done to change the textual segments — unless they are written verbatim — the person who projects the surtitles must understand when it is necessary to insert a blank slot or a black slide, to make a pause or to move backward/forward to the previous/next surtitle. In doing so, the surtitle operator is actively, even physically engaged in the performance, although from the backstage. The operator, usually sitting in the control booth next to the lighting and sound technician, must act live. S/he should be able to see and hear the show and preferably have skills in both languages to align the performance with the projected slides and quickly manage the situation in case of problems.

Standards for segmentation in surtitling and subtitling are basically similar. However, in surtitling blank slots or black slides need to be included when pauses or changes occur. The most frequent unforeseeable events are, for example, moments of very fast pace, improvisation (projecting the text for an improvised line would be a contradiction), the skipping or inversion of one or more lines by the actor, especially in monologues. The black slide mode can also be activated with a simple key on the laptop or dedicated switchboard (we used the Vmix software), thus allowing the operator, through the move backward/forward mode, enough time to look for the right surtitle to be projected next.

For multilingual translations, theatrical surtitling should be managed by an operator who understands all the languages involved. This operator works simultaneously and complementarily with the rest of the technical staff, following both the acting and the content of the slides/xls file. Ideally, an operator fluent in all the languages of the translations should manage the surtitles live, aligning them with the performance and handling any unforeseen events. S/he should visually follow the show and synchronise the surtitles with the acting. Alternatively, operators can either be assisted by someone who understands the languages or orient themselves using the printed script, thus accepting not having full control of the situation on stage. In our case, the operators either knew the three languages involved or benefited from the assistance of native speakers.

Fig. 11. Vmix operator during the talkback in Theater im Delphi, Berlin.

Fig. 12a. The project's surtitle operators in Theater im Delphi, Berlin.

Finally, it is important to remark once again that surtitles must always be custom-built for a specific show and audience and cannot be used for different productions of the same work, as changing direction and performers will necessarily make the performance different in terms of rhythm and contents. Indeed, no performance is ever the same as another, not even within the same production, as it is subject to the breath of the human beings (the actors) on stage, the different reactions of the audience, and the possible unforeseen events related to the live performance.

Fig. 12b. The project's surtitle operators in Theater im Delphi, Berlin.

# 7. Surtitling live vs live-streamed performances

In the live-streamed performances this scenario was further complicated by the intermedial and interlinguistic dimensions involved. Regarding the former, it should be noted that the flow of information, from the stage where the live performance was taking place to the screens displaying the live-streamed versions, was in fact perceived as fluid. This notwithstanding the fact that the vision was not the same, since the performance was filmed by three cameras, and consequently experienced through different, film-like shot-types (wide/medium/close-up, over-the-shoulder shots) and camera angles (high/low, tilted angles), although whenever possible a frontal shot was preserved, including part of the audience seen from the back, to increase the illusion of sharing the same physical space.

Regarding the latter, it is relevant to report that the same texts, translated into the three different languages and formatted in three columns on an Excel file, were simultaneously launched as surtitles in the theatre of the live performance and as subtitles on the screens implemented in the two other venues. This was done with the aid of Vmix technology, which simultaneously allowed the technical staff in the theatre to launch the surtitles on the stage and the subtitles on the screens of the other two venues where the performance was live-streamed.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Puoi fare quello che vuoi. | Du kannst doch machen, was du willst. | Tu peux faire ce que tu veux. |
| So bene quanto sono vecchia. | Ich weiß doch, wie alt ich bin. | Je sais très bien à quel point je suis vieille. |
| Lo vedo ogni giorno allo specchio. | Ich seh mich ja jeden Tag im Spiegel. | Je me vois chaque jour dans le miroir. |
| Quindi non ti posso vietare nulla.<br>Ma, vedi, quando stiamo insieme, | Ich kann dir doch nichts verbieten. Nein.<br>Weißt du, wenn wir zusammen sind, | Je ne peux rien t'interdire.<br>Mais tu sais, quand nous sommes ensemble, |
| Dobbiamo essere buoni l'uno con l'altro. | Dann müssen wir gut sein zueinander. | Alors nous devons être gentils l'un envers l'autre. |
| Altrimenti... la vita non vale nulla. | Sonst... ist das ganze Leben nichts wert. | Sinon... sinon la vie ne vaut rien. |

Fig. 13. Excel file with the multilingual surtitles of *Angst essen Seele auf*.

It is important to keep in mind that timing is the essence of the medium. It is directly linked to aligning the acting with the audience's perception and response, which is crucial for each individual spectator, the audience as a whole, and the actors themselves. The clearest example is comic timing, which aims to elicit a loud reaction from the audience (laughter), essential for the actor(s) to maintain the timing of their next line. Aligning the acting, surtitling, and the audience's reaction, including both those who understand the language and those who need to read, is indeed a significant challenge. When this alignment is not achieved, and laughter occurs at different moments, it feels awkward for the audience and disrupts the actor(s)' rhythm. Similar challenges arise with other forms of acting, such as improvisation, breaking the fourth wall, and direct interaction with the audience, where anticipating audience responses can jeopardise the overall effect of the performance.

# 8. From surtitles to subtitles: technical challenges

For the live/live-streamed sur/subtitles priority was given to the rhythm of the performances and therefore to conveying the sense of the narrative by following the timing of the acting - the actor's voice and "breath" - inevitably with limited accuracy regarding both semantic contents and duration. In fact, due to the verbatim nature of live theatre and to the fact that surtitles have to be pre-edited according to the rehearsals, which could not be exactly like the staged performances, both preparing and projecting them are always work in progress, delivered with the best possible degree of approximation. In other words, both the actors and the surtitle operator share the live experience, the "waves of energy", with the audience. Conversely, when the video of the performance is made available online, it becomes a fixed audiovisual product, which cannot be changed by the interaction. In this scenario subtitles can be tested, adjusted and aligned millimetrically. As a consequence, expectations about the subtitling of the recorded videos include a higher degree of semantic adherence to and synchronicity with the lines.

When editing subtitles for video reproductions of performances, it is essential to adhere to all subtitling rules, particularly the spotting of Time Code in and Time Code out for each text segment. These indicate the exact moments when the actor starts and stops speaking, respectively. Time Codes in subtitling must be marked with the highest possible precision, down to milliseconds (e.g., 00:02:18,530 --> 00:02:22,060).

In our project, the goal was to create SRT (SubRip Subtitle) files for each video in the languages of the performances and audiences involved, as well as in English for an international audience. The subtitles were then made available on Vimeo as closed captions, uploaded with the videos, offering a full range of linguistic options (French, German, Italian, and English). A total of twelve SRT files were produced, amounting to approximately 13,036 subtitles. Consequently, the surtitles underwent a radical editing process, according to the specific standards used in audiovisual texts to enhance visibility, readability, clarity, and accessibility.

```
1
00:01:51,780 --> 00:01:55,940
[Note di pianoforte]

2
00:02:13,830 --> 00:02:18,530
[Voce fuori scena. Jingle.]
Passeggeri del volo 761,

3
00:02:18,530 --> 00:02:22,060
avvicinatevi all'area di imbarco.

4
00:02:29,210 --> 00:02:31,030
Ho controllato il programma.

5
00:02:31,030 --> 00:02:34,640
I greci hanno nominato il viceministro
per il mio incontro a colazione.

6
00:02:34,670 --> 00:02:38,430
Fate in modo che mandino il ministro
altrimenti me ne vado.
```

Fig. 14. SubRip Subtitle file (srt) with the Italian translation of *Slave Island*.

Audiovisual translation is subject to the following constraints and formatting rules:

**Space**. This was the aspect that required least effort, since both live theatre surtitles and video captions need to appear in what is known as the “safe area”. We have already discussed this issue extensively in relation to the area of the stage in which surtitles are more likely to appear safely, that is, without covering relevant visual information in the action or in the mise-en-scène while, conversely, remaining visible to the entire audience. On screen, the safe area is normally centre-bottom, although subtitles can be placed in other positions (top-centred, aligned to the right or to the left) whenever important information is present in the centre-bottom area.

**Timing**: Synchronicity between the spoken lines and the surtitles or subtitles is another important point they have in common. While for surtitles this aim is achieved manually in real time and therefore with a margin of tolerance regarding accuracy, in subtitles the time codes can exactly be spotted either manually or with the aid of dedicated software. In our case we used Aegisub, a freely downloadable, open-access programme. However, it is a myth to believe that the software does everything: although the spotting can be done automatically, subtitles require the presence of a human audiovisual translator who knows how to optimise timing and segmentation according to syntax, rhythm, semantic consistency and scene change. Regarding

time, two general rules should be kept in mind: 1) each sur/subtitle should remain visible on stage/screen between 1 and 6 seconds: appearing on stage/screen for less than one second would produce a flashing effect, while lingering for more than 6 seconds would "freeze" the narrative flow; 2) reading time should be respected; studies confirm that reading time is longer than listening time: adults can read, on average, 15 characters per second (15 cps). This entails that the text often needs to be condensed. The general rule is to reformulate the dialogues more concisely through several strategies (for example, by changing the passive into active voice or embedded questions into straightforward ones), preserving essential information and omitting parts that are supposed to bear the least semantic weight, such as exclamations and hesitation fillers (for a different view, see § 9.5.). Other general formatting rules are hours and numbers in digits or the shortest spelling for some words (e.g. "OK" instead of "Okay").

**Layout.** The need for readability also entails that both surtitles and subtitles can consist of one or two lines only. When two characters are co-present in a scene and each of them says a line, each line is preceded by a hyphen (fig. 15).

51
00:10:24,785 --> 00:10:27,698
- Vielleicht kann ich nicht mehr tanzen.
- Mach nichts.

Fig. 15. Subtitle with two characters speaking.

The maximum number of characters for each line may vary. Until recently, the maximum number of characters in surtitles was determined according to the average reading time in each language (e.g. 40 for English and 47 for Italian). In subtitles, each studio or provider has its own standards, which must be indicated in the set up when using dedicated software such as Aegisub and Subtitle Edit. These will automatically indicate any excess in the number of characters relative to the average reading speed. However, the increasing habit of experiencing sur/subtitled media has uniformised these data. For this reason, we adopted the same number of characters for all the languages involved: we allowed a maximum of 47 characters per line in the surtitles and a maximum of 42 characters per line in the subtitles.

**Font.** The font used is Arial or Helvetica. Italics indicates off-stage/screen (O.S.) and voice over (V.O.). This information is important as it helps understand the position, mode, and source of the spoken lines (e.g. when the voice is heard through a telephone). Italics is also used for sung parts, which are written between hashtags. Information about music, sound effects etc. in SDH is written in square brackets. Finally, it is important to note that cards reporting plot-relevant verbal-visual information appearing on stage or screen (signs, panels, notes, etc.) are capitalised.

**Segmentation.** Each sur/subtitle and each line within the sur/subtitle should be as far as possible a unit of meaning, ending either with a sign of punctuation or, in any case, constituting a self-standing sentence. In other words, the sur/subtitles and sur/subtitle lines should break at logical points or at the highest syntactic knot (Karamitroglou 1997). For instance, a noun and its adjective should not be separated into two different lines, nor a noun and a verb. The parallelism, which had by necessity to be preserved in the surtitles launched simultaneously in the three languages, could cause problems due to the different syntactic structures of the four languages. On the other hand, parallelism could be overlooked in the closed captions, given that, on the website, captions in different languages were experienced independently from one another.

**SDH sur/subtitles**. In sur/subtitles for the hearing impaired, it is also necessary to add indications of the tone of voice, e.g. [shouts] and the transcription of plot-relevant sound effects, e.g. [a bell rings]. This information usually appears between square brackets. Please note that the deaf and hard of hearing can see the acting, so indications such as [laughs] have been used sparingly, only when the mouth of the actor/tress was covered or the situation could not be detected from the visual context. It is relevant to note that in SHD sur/subtitles some languages require extra changes in the construction of sentences. Concerning the use of pronouns, for example, Italian is the most problematic language. In fact, while German and French use subject pronouns explicitly - e.g., “sie isst” and “elle mange” meaning “she eats”), Italian can drop subject pronouns thanks to verb conjugation indicating the subject (e.g., “Mangia”, meaning “he/she/it eats”). This made it necessary to add pronouns in the Italian sur/subtitles, having in mind the needs of the hearing impaired, who may not always easily identify who is speaking or which character/s the dialogue lines refer to. Music plays an important role in conveying emotions and the mood of the scene: therefore, information about the genre or the exact title of the lyrics were also included in the sur/subtitles.

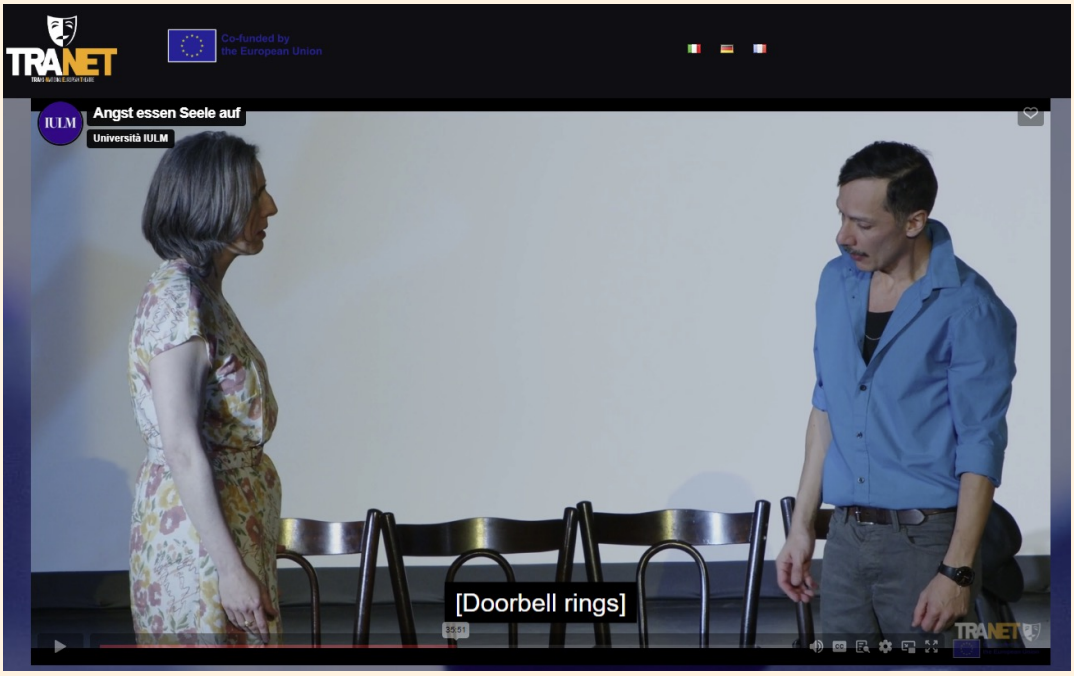



Fig. 16. SDH subtitle for *Angst essen Seele auf*.


Fig. 17. SDH subtitle for *Il giuoco delle parti*.

# 9. Linguistic and Cultural Diversity

## *9.1 Functions of staged dialogue*

Great attention has traditionally been paid to the study of dialogue in theatre, to the extent that Kozloff (2000) comparatively denounces the relatively little interest shown by scholars and critics in the analysis of film dialogue. Compared to cinema, staged dialogue has often been dismissed as too "dressed up" and false (Sontag 1977). It is widely agreed that staged dialogue is different from real speech. As stated by Eugene O'Neill, "[I]t operates by duplicity: it is not spontaneous but must appear to be so. It is permanent but must appear to be as ephemeral as the speech it imitates. The actor must seem to speak what in reality he recites. In sharing the convention, the audience in the theatre has a share in the duplicity. We simultaneously accept the illusion of spontaneity and know that it is a pretense." (cit. in Kozloff 200-201). Despite crucial differences (especially with regard to levels of stylisation, cf. Braudy 1976) between the two media, this is a characteristic shared by both theatre and film. Chaume refers to it as "prefabricated orality" (Chaume 2004).
We can therefore apply Kozloff's analysis also to our plays. These are the main functions of staged/screened dialogue. All these functions were central to the performances and had therefore to be investigated and accounted for in the translations.

**9.1.1. Characterisation** (character self-revelation or revelation through other characters' speeches, communication between characters, anchorage of the diegesis and characters or "dialogue hooks"). Each character should maintain their linguistic style, distinguishing them from other characters and providing information about status, education, language skills, etc.

*Ex.*

| *ORIGINAL LANGUAGE* | *TRANSLATION IN ENGLISH* |
|---|---|
| **GUIDO** Ma che vita vorresti, scusa? | **GUIDO** But what kind of life would you like, sorry? |
| **SILIA** Non lo so! Una qualunque… non così! Ah Dio, un alito… almeno un alito di speranza, che mi schiudesse appena appena, nell'avvenire, uno spiraglio! Ti giuro che me ne resterei ferma, qua, a respirare soltanto il refrigerio di questa speranza, senza correre ad affacciarmi alla finestra a vedere che cosa c'è di là per me! | **SILIA** I don't know! Any life... but not this one! Ah, God, a breath... at least a breath of hope, that would open up a glimmer of hope for me in the future! I swear to you that I would stay still, here, breathing only the refreshment of this hope, without ever looking out of the window to see what's out there for me! |

**9.1.2. Narrative function** (exposition, communication of narrative causality, enactment of narrative events). Dialogue can create atmosphere, bring detail into focus, or convey the speaker's response to unseen events. In fact, dialogue can explain what happened before and give hints at what is going to happen next. It can also, at some points, summarise the story.

*Ex.*

| *ORIGINAL LANGUAGE* | *TRANSLATION IN ENGLISH* |
|---|---|
| **LEONE** Ma insomma posso sapere che cosa è accaduto? Perché sarei sfidato? Perché dovrei sfidare? | **LEONE** Am I allowed to know what happened? Why would I be challenged? Why should I challenge? |
| **SILIA** Perché sono stata insultata, oltraggiata. Vigliaccamente, sanguinosamente, capisci? In casa mia, per causa tua… perché sola, senza difesa… con le mani addosso, qua… a frugarmi… qua, in petto… capisci?… perché hanno sospettato ch'io fossi… ah! | **SILIA** Because I was insulted, outraged. Cowardly, bloodily, you understand? Because of you, I was at home, alone, helpless. With their hands on me, here... rummaging me... here, in my chest... do you understand? because they mistook me for a... ah! |
| **LEONE** Ma come?… Da questo marchese? | **LEONE** But how?… By this marquis? |
| **SILIA** Erano in quattro… Tu li hai visti! | **SILIA** There were four of them… You saw them! |
| **LEONE** Ah! Quei quattro signori ch'erano accanto al portone? | **LEONE** Ah! Those four gentlemen who were at the gate? |
| **SILIA** Quelli, quelli, sì; sono saliti, hanno forzato la porta… | **SILIA** Those, those, yes. Yes, they came up, they forced the door… |

**9.1.3. Contextualisation** (adherence to the code of realism, description, representation of ordinary conversational activities as "verbal wallpaper", to replicate everyday encounters, etc.).

*Ex.*

| |
|---|
| **IPHICRATES** We alone have escaped from the Shipwreck, all our Companions have perished, & I now envy their fate.<br>**DROMIO** Alas! they are drowned in this Sea, & we have a very convenient opportunity to go after' em, if we chose it. |

**9.1.4. Exploitation of the resources of language**, opportunities for "star turns" (for example monologues that highlight the performing skills of the actors).

*Ex.*

| *ORIGINAL LANGUAGE* | *TRANSLATION IN ENGLISH* |
|---|---|
| **LEONE** Ma perciò appunto la cucina! Che il caso ti trovi cuoco, è una gran cosa! Del resto, non devi mai guardarti dal caso, veramente. Scusa: che vuol dire il caso? Gli altri, o le necessità della natura. | **LEONE** But that's why, I say. Precisely for this, here comes the cooking! It is great if chance finds you a cook! Besides, you should never guard yourself from chance, actually. No, no, and what is chance in the end? Nature, the necessity of others? |
| **GUIDO** Appunto, che possono essere terribili! | **GUIDO** Exactly, which can be terrible! |
| **LEONE** Ma più o meno, a seconda di chi le subisce. E perciò ti dicevo! Tu devi guardarti da te stesso, del sentimento che questo caso suscita subito in te e con cui t'assalta! Immediatamente, ghermirlo e vuotarlo, trarne il concetto, e allora puoi anche giocarci. Guarda, è come se t'arrivasse all'improvviso, non sai da dove, un uovo fresco… | **LEONE** But this depends on who suffers it. E perciò ti dicevo! That's why I tell you: you must guard yourself from yourself, from the feeling that chance is preying on you! You must be ready to seize it and empty it, to extract the concept, so that afterwards you can even play with it. Look, it's as if suddenly you get hit by something from nowhere… say… a fresh egg. |
| **GUIDO** Un uovo fresco? | **GUIDO** A fresh egg? |
| **LEONE** Un uovo fresco. | **LEONE** A fresh egg. |
| **GUIDO** E se t'arriva invece una palla di piombo? | **GUIDO** And what if you get a lead ball instead? |
| **LEONE** Allora ti vuota lei, e non se ne parla più. | **LEONE** In that case it empties you, and that's the end of it. |

**9.1.5. Thematic messages/authorial commentary/allegory.** The characters' attempt to come up with ideological solutions, especially where they assume the mantle of the conscious spokesperson. Dialogue can offer a consistent, powerful perspective on very serious issues. The border between engagement and the aesthetic intent of the performance can be rather blurred, yet there are dialogues or monologues in which we perceive that the content of the message is even more important than the way they are conveyed through language.

*Ex.*

| *ORIGINAL LANGUAGE* | *TRANSLATION IN ENGLISH* |
|---|---|
| **SALEM** Alles gucken. | **SALEM** Everyone is watching. |
| **EMMI** Mach dir nichts draus. Sind bloß neidisch, die Leute. | **EMMI** Don't worry about it. They are just jealous, the people. |
| **SALEM** Nix verstehn neidisch. | **SALEM** Not understand jealous. |
| **EMMI** Neidisch ist, wenn jemand nicht sehen kann, dass ein anderer was hat. | **EMMI** That's someone who can't stand that someone else has something. |
| **SALEM** Ah, verstehn | **SALEM** Ah, understand |
| **EMMI** Und die sind bloß alle neidisch. Alle. Alle. | **EMMI** They are just all jealous. All of them. |

*Ex.*

| *ORIGINAL LANGUAGE* | *TRANSLATION IN ENGLISH* |
|---|---|
| **LEONE:** | **LEONE:** |
| Già... quando uno ha capito il gioco... | Exactly... when you have understood the game... |
| Da bambino, il mio sogno era: diventare uno schermidore. | As a child, my dream was to become a fencer. |
| Una passione campata per aria, come sono le passioni dei bambini, la possibilità di maneggiare la spada, la divisa bianca, la maschera traforata che nasconde il volto… Uno spadaccino! | A passion plucked from the air, like the passions of children are, the possibility of handling a sword, the white uniform, the grid-like mask that hides the face… |
| Da bambino quello era il mio sogno. | A fencer! |
| Chiesi a mia madre e a mio padre di poter tirare di scherma. Ero certissimo che la mia vita sarebbe stata migliore, bellissima, se avessi imparato la scherma. I miei genitori liquidarono la mia richiesta con una risata. | This was my dream as a child. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Come quello che era, la bizzarra passione di un ragazzino. | I asked my mother and father if I could fence. I sensed my life would have been beautiful if I had learned fencing. My parents dismissed the request with laughter, it was like the bizarre passion of a little boy. |
| Da allora non ho mai tenuto in mano una spada. | Since then, I have never held a sword. |
| Da quel giorno, da quella passione frustrata, non ho mai più chiesto nulla. | Since that frustrated passion, I have never asked for anything again. |

### 9.1.6. Control of viewer evaluation and emotions.

Under the text – the "skin" or "surface" of words – dialogue may have a deeper layer of meaning, a "subtext" which can be related to thematic issues (Braga 2019), trigger emotions or intensify them and, more generally, convey communicative intentions.

*Ex.*

| *ORIGINAL LANGUAGE* | *TRANSLATION IN ENGLISH* |
|---|---|
| **EMMI:** Weil... weil ich so glücklich bin auf der einen Seite, und auf der andern Seite halt ich das alles nicht mehr aus. Dieser Hass von den Menschen. Von allen, allen. Von allen. Manchmal wünsch ich mir, ich wär mit dir ganz allein auf der Welt und keiner um uns rum. Ich tu natürlich immer so, als macht mir das alles gar nichts aus, aber natürlich macht es mir was aus. Es macht mich kaputt. Keiner sieht einem mehr richtig ins Gesicht. Alle haben immer so ein widerliches Grinsen. Lauter Schweine. Schreit. Lauter dreckige Schweine! Glotzt doch nicht, ihr blöden Schweine! Das ist mein Mann, mein Mann. | **EMMI:** Because… because on one side I am so happy. On the other hand, I can't take it all anymore. This hatred from the people. From everyone. From everyone. Sometimes I wish we were completely alone in the world and no one around us. Of course, I always act like none of this bothers me. But it does bother me, it breaks me. No one really looks you in the face anymore. Everyone always has such a disgusting grin. Nothing but pigs. Nothing but dirty pigs! Don't stare, you stupid pigs! This is my husband, my husband. |

## *9.2 Register and Style*

More than in any other medium, in theatre register and style are fundamental to characterisation and plot construction. Due to the symbolic nature of the setting, where props are mainly evocative elements, the acting and all its communication elements are crucial for the story. Even if communication on stage relies on several other channels (Fig. 18), all the rhetorical elements of the dialogues are essential to the fruition and need to be rendered as accurately as possible in the surtitles.

In this regard, during the whole process we had to face many challenges, which were quite different for each author.

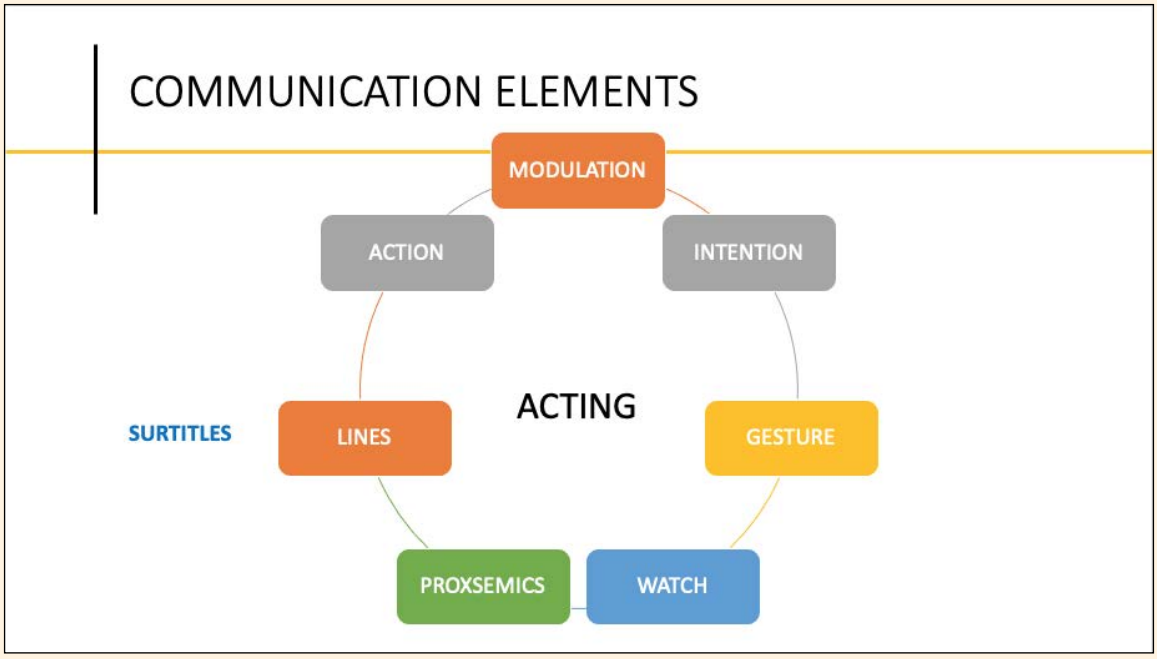



Fig. 18. Communication elements on stage.

In *Angst essen Seele auf*, Fassbinder uses language to show the struggle of immigrant and outcasted characters to communicate with German people as they try to exit their isolation and become visible in the German society of the 1970s.
These are the main features of his style:

- Register: The immigrants' German is basic and often incorrect; also the German characters belong to the working class and speak a poor, sometimes coarse German.
- Stress of language and tone: Emmi's evolution is continuous. Her acting relies heavily on tones that evolve and change according to the pragmatic situation. At first she is quiet, wise and realistic, but the more she acquires consciousness about society rules the more her lines become eloquent to express anger. Her tone becomes firmer and occasionally louder. Ali is a newcomer to German society. He is marginalised and his solitude is expressed through a restrained and angry tone.
- Advocacy expressions**:** through explicit "political" statements, Emmi brings on-

stage Fassbinder's solidarity with a classless society and his advocacy of sexual liberation rooted in love. These people, she says, come here and experience hardship, and then they die young.

In *Il giuoco delle parti*, Luigi Pirandello uses standard Italian with a literary and formal tone, as the characters are cultured bourgeois and Leone is basically talking philosophy. The author's language is characterized by:

- Elaborated dialogues crafted to reveal the psychological depth and the existential dilemmas of the characters, often using irony and subtle nuances. Pirandello's use of language in this play is designed to enhance the exploration of identity, reality, and the roles people play in society.
- Complex Sentence Structures: Pirandello often employs intricate sentence constructions, reflecting the intellectual and philosophical nature of his themes. He plays with logic, often leaving the characters with elaborate theorems to be presented.
- Rich Vocabulary: The play features a diverse and sophisticated vocabulary, suitable for the educated characters and the dramatic context.

In *L'Île des esclaves*, Pierre de Marivaux uses standard French with a distinctive style known as marivaudage. The language in *L'Île des esclaves* serves to both entertain and provoke thought, making it a rich text for analysis and performance. Catherine Clive's adaptation of Marivaux's *L'Île des esclaves* into *Slave Island* reflects her unique style and the theatrical conventions of her time. The adaptation by Helen Landau also resorts extensively to Shakespeare. This play is characterised by:

- Elegant and Refined Language: Marivaux's dialogue is sophisticated and polished, reflecting the social status and intellectual depth of his characters.
- Witty and Subtle Humour: The play features clever wordplay and irony, often highlighting the absurdities and injustices of social hierarchies.
- Philosophical and Social Commentary: Through the interactions between masters and slaves, Marivaux explores themes of power, equality, and human nature.
- Stress of language and Tone: Clive's adaptation uses contemporary English of the 18th century, making the text accessible to her audience while retaining the essence of Marivaux's original play. The language is direct and engaging, suited to the comedic and dramatic elements of the play.

## *9.3 Linguistic and Cultural Challenges*

The first challenges to be considered were those related to language and culture. The three plays were characterised by extreme diversity, both linguistically and culturally. By linguistic diversity, we intend not only the combination of three official languages (Italian, English, and German) with their own vocabulary and syntax, but also a complex dynamics involving the pragmatics of verbal exchange. More specifically, when transposing the dialogues into surtitles/subtitles, audiovisual translators should be aware of linguistic diversity, sociolinguistic variants and changes required in the shift from orality to writing.

### 9.3.1. Linguistic diversity

Since the sur/subtitles were simultaneously launched in French, German and Italian, word formation and syntactic differences between the three languages represented a challenge.

#### *9.3.1.1. Word formation*

Italian, French, and German each have unique approaches to word formation. Italian frequently uses suffixes to create new words, such as the suffix -zione to form nouns from verbs (e.g., “informare” to “informazione”). Compounding is less common in Italian, but when used, it involves simple combinations like “portaombrelli” (umbrella stand). French also relies heavily on suffixes, with -ment being used to form adverbs from adjectives (e.g., “rapide” to “rapidement”). Compounding is rare in French, which often prefers phrases over compound words, such as “porte-monnaie” (wallet). German also uses prefixes and suffixes to form new words, like the prefix un- to create opposites (e.g., “glücklich” to “unglücklich”). However, this language is known for its extensive use of compound words, which can be quite long and descriptive (e.g. “Gastarbeiterkneipe”, a type of bar or pub that was frequented by guest workers, Gastarbeiter in Germany, particularly during the 1950s to 1970s). This can be challenging in sur/subtitles where space and time are limited by the constraints of the medium.

#### *9.3.1.2. Grammar & Syntax*

All three languages typically follow the Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) order in main clauses. They also use definite and indefinite articles, though their forms and usage

rules differ. However, German places the verb at the end of subordinate clauses, while Italian and French maintain the SVO order. This can represent a challenge in the segmentation of the sub/surtitles in German, since every sur/subtitle should be as far as possible a semantic unit, a unit of meaning. We tried to avoid the risk of postponing relevant information carried by the main verb by paraphrasing the sentences.

### *9.4 Sociolinguistic variation*

Sociolinguistic variation has been classified by Coseriu and Geckeler (1981) as follows:

- Diachronic variation: in different historical periods, different variants of language are spoken
- Diatopic variation: in different places and regional areas, different languages and dialects are spoken
- Diastratic variation: in different social groups – class, age, gender, social role – different sociolects are used
- Diaphasic variation: in different communicative settings, different levels of style/register are used
- Diamesic variation: in different communicative codes or channels (written/oral), different registers and standards are used

All these sociolinguistic dimensions were accounted for in the translation of the three plays.

#### 9.4.1. Diachronic variation

We were faced with three texts belonging to three different periods: an eighteenth-century play (*Slave Island, fig. 19*), a post-World War I text (*Il giuoco delle parti*) and a work from the 1970s. This aspect was made even more complicated by the contemporary slant given to the scripts, achieved through different devices such as a modernisation of style and, especially, vocabulary (*Slave Island*), the use of more recent songs and music (*Il giuoco delle parti*), references to the contemporary political context (*Angst essen Seele auf*). To complicate the situation, the French/English play, although set in the 18th century, presented several lexical and prosodic references to a previous linguistic canon, that of Shakespeare's plays. Also the Italian play, mixed the circumvoluted syntax of the Decadent period with a more modern articulation of

interpersonal relations, while the German one expressed in the two main characters a naïve and poetic timelessness, which contrasted with the cynical, aggressive obtuseness of society.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Ah, Lord Iphicrate,<br>on nous a recommandé d'éviter ce chiffre, | Ah, Lord Ificrate,<br>ci hanno sconsigliato quella cifra, | Ah, Lord Iphikrates,<br>uns wurde geraten, diese Zahl zu meiden, |
| les dernières recherches scientifiques… | le ultime ricerche scientifiche… | die neuesten wissenschaftlichen Forschungen… |
| Dromio, je présente une vision ici.<br>J'ai besoin de parler en grands chiffres. | Dromio, qui sto delineando una visione.<br>Devo parlare di grandi cifre. | Dromio, ich entwerfe hier eine Vision.<br>Ich muss über große Zahlen sprechen. |
| La science évoluera chaque mois,<br>quoi que je dise. | La scienza cambierà ogni mese,<br>qualunque cosa io dica. | Die Wissenschaft ändert sich jeden Monat,<br>egal was ich sage. |
| Peu importe les chiffres que j'utilise,<br>l'essentiel, c'est d'inspirer les gens, | Non importa quali numeri uso,<br>l'importante è ispirare le persone, | Egal welche Zahlen ich benutze,<br>wichtig ist, die Menschen zu inspirieren, |
| leur faire croire au changement possible. | far credere possibile il cambiamento. | die Veränderung möglich erscheinen lassen. |

Fig. 19. Multilingual sur/subtiltes Excel file for *Slave Island*.

In conclusion, these guidelines intend to highlight that in fictional dialogue diachronic variation is by no means automatically associated with a time and with the way people were supposed to speak at that time, but can undergo a process of modernisation, contain parodies of that style or reflect through other linguistic resources more contemporary ways of communicating. The translator should therefore be aware of diachronic variation in the widest possible sense and reproduce it with respect to the author's/director's intentions.

### 9.4.2. Diatopic variation

We were faced with diatopic variation particularly in *Angst essen Seele auf.* The performance was in German but had as its main character an immigrant from Morocco, therefore a non-native speaker, and it was important to preserve this distinct trait of his talk.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| –Tu ballare con me?<br>– Come, scusa? Ballare? | – Du tanzen mit mir?<br>– Wie bitte? Tanzen? | – Toi danser avec moi ?<br>– Quoi, pardon ? Danser ? |
| Sì. tu seduta da sola. Fa molto triste.<br>Seduti da soli non bene. | Ja. Du allein sitzen. Macht viel traurig.<br>Allein sitzen nicht gut. | Oui. Toi assise toute seule. Ça fait très triste.<br>Assis seuls pas bien. |

Fig. 20. Multilingual sur/subtiltes Excel file for *Angst essen Seele auf*.

Broken syntax, grammar mistakes, poor vocabulary and frequent misspellings were not only part and parcel of the character but functional elements that triggered the plot, as they engendered frequent misunderstandings.

The cast included a few Turkish actors. One of them said some Kurdish lines that were subtitled but not sur/subtiled during the live performance because it was impossible for the operator to follow her lines. However, the irruption of this little-known language suggested incommunicability, precisely because the audience was not able to understand these lines.

### 9.4.3. Diastratic variation

One dimension was shared by all three plays: diastratic variation, that is, linguistic features related to class, gender, and age. These guidelines intend to draw attention to the innumerable undertones that can be added to diastratic variation by characterisation, which requires attentive perusal in the rendering. Fassbinder's play presents a working-class variety of the language with several subtle nuances: waiters are a step up the ladder compared to cleaning ladies, but Emmi is a delicate soul, which gentrifies her talk; the shopkeeper uses colloquial language, the Schwäbish dialect of Bayern, with a rude, vulgar effect. Pirandello's play presents an upper middle-class dimension (we understand that Leone, Sidia and Guido are not true aristocrats as their (un)ethical world contrasts with that of Marquis Miglioriti), while *Slave Island* is based on the interchange between upper and lower-class variants of English. This sociolinguistic issue is at the core of Clive's adaptation: the speech patterns of the masters are often more formal and elaborate, while the servants use more colloquial and direct language. Back to Pirandello, it should also be noted that Silia speaks differently from the two male characters, thus revealing that gender is, or used to be at that time, another important diastratic variable in language use.

### 9.4.4. Diaphasic variation

The diastratic function is often coupled with the diaphasic dimension of language.

Characters speak differently in different places and situations. In *Angst essen Seele auf*, for example, Emmi doesn't speak to Ali, her co-workers, and the waiter at the expensive restaurant in the same way. In *Slave Island*, the diaphasic dimension is particularly evident: along with the change in their social status, from masters to servants and, conversely, from servants to masters and back again, characters speak differently before, during, and after the experience on the island.

### 9.4.5. Diamesic variation

Finally, the diamesic dimension was also to be considered, especially in the shift from the oral dialogues to the written sur/subtitles. Unlike dubbing, which involves translating spoken language into another spoken language and is thus an isomesic form of translation, subtitling translates spoken language into written text, making it a diamesic form of translation. Gottlieb considers interlinguistic subtitles as a form of "diagonal translation", as they entail the shift from one language to another language and, at the same time, from orality to writing (fig. 13).

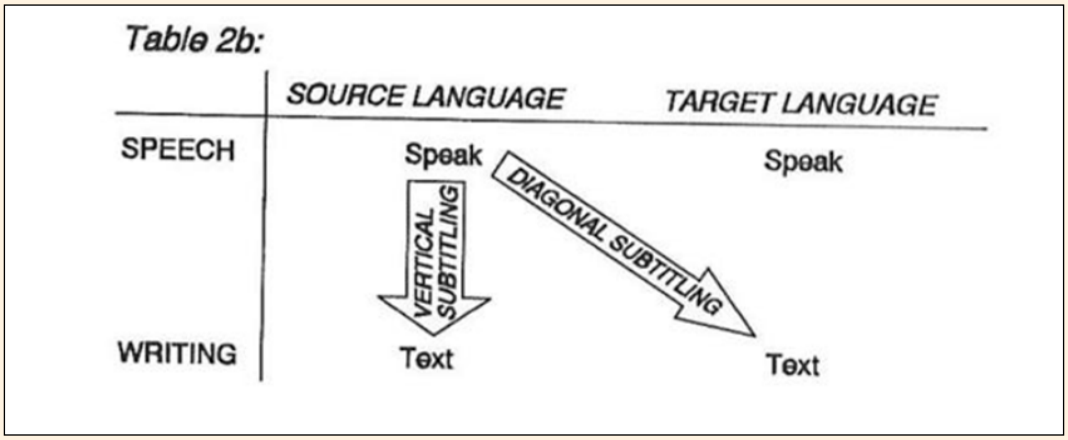



Fig. 21. Diagonal translation (Gottlieb 1994: 104).

However, since they aim at an effect of spontaneity, sur/subtitles are usually considered an intermediate form of discourse between the unstructured nature of everyday conversation and the fixed organisation of written texts. In sur/subtitling the texts a decision was made to preserve, whenever possible, the expressivity of oral discourse, all the more so since the medium we were dealing with was theatre rather than film.

### *9.5 Orality Markers*

The limited space available for subtitles and their "written" nature routinely necessitates the exclusion of certain linguistic elements from the original text, particularly those deemed to carry minimal semantic weight. This process, known as "condensation", often involves the omission of orality markers, which are labelled as 'redundant' or unnecessary since the audience can perceive them through the acoustic channel. Yet, their omission can lead to a loss of meaning, particularly for the hearing impaired (see § 8).

Orality (or discourse) markers are features that distinguish spoken language from written language. They include elements like exclamations, hesitation fillers (Um…, Well, Yes), formulaic expressions (e.g. "as I said"), interactive elements such as direct addresses ("do you understand?"), question-tags ("isn't it?"), and responses that engage the listeners. Schiffrin (1987) argues that discourse markers serve multiple ideational and pragmatic functions. These include an indexical function, which provides contextual coordinates for the conversation and engages the interlocutor, and a syntagmatic function, which expresses causality, organises transitions, and constructs dialogue. In their everyday use, discourse markers are a common feature of spoken or conversational style: they help manage the flow of conversation, enhance communication and provide cues about the speaker's intent, attitude, and the structure of the discourse. Words like "you know" and "you understand" are aimed at making the conversation more interactive and engaging.

Orality markers are indeed a feature of spontaneous conversation in all known languages. However, in fictional dialogues, where orality is "prefabricated" (Chaume 2004), "scripted and rehearsed" (Kozloff 2000), they can play different expressive functions. Orality markers convey the characters' emotions and intentions more vividly. Changes in tone, repetition, and exclamations may express feelings like anger, frustration, or joy. Furthermore, characters use discourse markers to navigate complex social interactions and power dynamics, reflecting their psychological states and intentions. Markers such as "eh", "well", and "I mean", for example, convey the speaker's attitude, hesitation, or emphasis, adding emotional depth. The use of these markers contributes to the naturalistic style of the dialogue, making the characters' speech more authentic, relatable and engaging for the audience. Indeed, although orality markers may lack explicit significant semantic content, they are not merely "hesitation fillers"; on the contrary, they play a crucial role in the pragmatics of fic-

tional dialogue. This was particularly important for surtitles aimed to be inclusive also for the hearing impaired and therefore as informative as possible about the way dialogues were conducted. In fact, while for the hearing audience orality markers can be detected, even in a different language, through the auditory channel, the deaf and hard-of-hearing have to retrieve the information from the surtitles combined with the action and the mise-en-scène.

Despite their different styles, orality markers are used by Fassbinder, Pirandello, and Marivaux/Clive for a variety of reasons. In *Angst essen Seele auf*, discourse markers play a vital role, contributing to realism and emotional depth. They underscore the play's themes, such as the critique of social hierarchies and power dynamics.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Beh**, che c'è? | **Na**, was ist? | **Eh bien**, qu'est-ce qu'il y a? |
| **Ah, bene. Allora, non posso fare altro se non dirle** | **Ah, gut. Also, ich kann nicht anders sagen,** | **Bien. Alors, je ne peux que vous dire** |
| È come tutti.<br>Né meglio né peggio, **insomma**. | Der ist wie alle. Nicht besser<br>und nicht schlechter, **weißt du**. | Il est comme tous les autres.<br>Ni meilleur ni pire, **tu sais**. |
| Chi? **Intendo**, chi hai sposato? | Wen – **ich meine**,<br>wen hast du geheiratet? | Avec qui? **Je veux dire**,<br>qui as-tu épousé ? |

Fig. 22. Multilingual sur/subtiltes Excel file for *Angst essen Seele auf*.

The strategic use of discourse markers enhances the play's authenticity and emotional resonance, making it a powerful exploration of human relationships. Expressions such as *ach* (oh), *na ja* (well), and *eben* (just) convey the characters› emotions, hesitations, and attitudes, adding layers to their interactions. More generally, the use of everyday speech patterns and fillers like "äh" and "*hm*" enhances realism, making the dialogue more natural, grounding the play in its characters' lives . For example, the interactions between Emmi and Ali often include discourse markers that highlight their attempts to connect despite their cultural and linguistic barriers. However, discourse markers are also used to reflect the social dynamics and power imbalances between characters. For example, they can underscore the themes of racism, loneliness, and societal prejudice, making the social commentary more poignant and impactful.

Also repetitions and reformulations, as typical features of spoken discourse, are ex-

tensively used in *Angst essen Seele auf*:

> **EMMI** Verzeihn Sie, aber draußen regnet es so stark – verstehn Sie? **Und da hab ich mir gedacht**... **Emmi, hab ich gedacht**, geh doch einfach rein in die Wirtschaft.

Originally meant to emphasise a point or ensure understanding, engaging the listener and creating a more interactive dialogue, they may also become instrumental to highlight, by contrast, incommunicability or the lack of cooperation (Grice 1975), as in the following exchange between Ali and the shopkeeper:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Cosa prende? | Was kriegen wir denn? | Qu'est-ce que vous prenez ? |
| Un Libelle. | Ein Libelle. | Une Libelle. |
| Libelle? | Libelle. | Libelle ? |
| No limonata. Uguale a burro. | Nicht Limonade. Gleiche für Butter. | Non une limonade. Pareil que beurre. |
| Burro. | Butter. | Beurre. |
| No. No burro. Uguale a burro…<br>Libelle. | Nein Butter. Gleiche für Butter.<br>Libelle. | Non. Non beurre. Pareil que beurre…<br>Libelle. |
| No, Signore, no questa. | Nein, Herr. Nicht diese. | Non, Monsieur, pas ça. |
| Ora mi dice cosa vuole davvero? | Jetzt sagens halt, was wirklich wolln. | Bon, dites-moi ce que vous voulez vraiment. |
| Non posso stare qui per un'ora<br>a discutere solo con Lei. | I kann mi net a Stund lang<br>mit Ihnen allein beschäftigen. | Je ne peux pas passer une heure.<br>juste avec vous. |

Fig. 23. Multilingual sur/subtiltes Excel for *Angst essen Seele auf*.

Pirandello's strategic use of orality markers enriches the dialogue, providing insights into the characters' minds and enhancing the overall dramatic effect of the play. In this author, discourse markers have a more distinct literary slant and often resemble rhetorical questions. Question tags and direct addresses, for example, rather than enhancing communication have provocative undertones. Even the recursive terms of apology, such as "Scusa" ("I beg your pardon") are actually aimed at underlining a

contrast of views. The lack of understanding, which in Fassbinder is a sign of cultural closure, acquires in Pirandello an intellectual and existential slant. These discourse markers were replaced in German by a more overtly aggressive phrasing, while some corresponding expressions were found in French.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Ma** che vita vorresti, **scusa**? | Aber was für ein Leben **willst** du? | **Mais enfin**, quelle vie voudrais-tu vivre ? |
| E mi pare, **scusa**, che tu non abbia nessuna ragione di lagnartene. | Es scheint mir, dass **du keinen Grund hast**,<br>darüber zu klagen. | **Mais enfin** je ne vois pas<br>pourquoi tu t'en plains. |
| **Ma** questa è una fissazione, **scusa**! | **Aber das ist etwas,** auf das du fixiert bist! | **Mais, pardonne-moi**, c'est une fixation ! |
| Ma perché, **scusa**,<br>giusto questa sera che ci sono io? | **Aber warum** gerade heute Abend,<br>dass ich hier bin? | **Mais juste** le soir que je suis ici ? |
| - Non voglio vederlo!<br>- Ma nemmeno io, **scusa**! | - Ich will ihn nicht sehen!<br>- **Ich auch nicht**! | - Je ne veux pas le voir !<br>- **Mais moi non plus** ! |

Fig. 24. Multilingual sur/subtiltes Excel for *Il giuoco delle parti*.

Therefore, repetitions and reformulations, as features of orality retained by dramatic dialogue, were whenever possible kept in the translation, despite the common rule according to which they should be avoided in subtitles, due to time and space constraints. Leone's frequent repetitions, for example, which are tell-tale of this character's vicious indifference and hidden aggressivity, were either reproduced or rendered through pre-modifiers: "Bene, bene, bene…", becomes "So, so, so…" in German, and "Très bien…" in French. In conclusion, also Pirandello's characters, like Fassbinder's, flout the cooperative principle (Grice 1975), yet they obtain this effect through a feigned excess of cooperativeness rather than by a lack of it.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Scommetto che se tua moglie ti diceva:<br>"Litighiamo!" | Ich wette, hätte deine Frau dir gesagt:<br>"Lass uns streiten!" | Je parie que si ta femme te disait<br>« Battons-nous ! » |
| Io le rispondevo:<br>"Litighiamo!" | Dann hätte ich geantwortet:<br>"Lass uns streiten!" | Je répondais :<br>« Disputons-nous ! » |
| - Tua moglie ti disse: "Separiamoci!"<br>- E io le risposi: "Separiamoci!" | - Deine Frau sagte: "Lass uns scheiden!"<br>- Dann antwortete ich: "Lass uns scheiden!" | - Ta femme t'a dit : « Séparons-nous ! »<br>- J'ai dit : « Séparons-nous ! » |
| Vedi? Se tua moglie ti avesse gridato:<br>"Ma così non possiamo litigare!" | Siehst du? Hätte deine Frau dir gesagt:<br>"Aber dann können wir nicht streiten!" | Tu vois ? Si ta femme t'avait crié :<br>«Nous ne pouvons pas nous disputer ainsi » |
| "E allora, cara, non litighiamo!" | "Dann streiten wir nicht, meine Liebe!" | « Ma chère, ne nous disputons pas ! » |

Fig. 25. Multilingual sur/subtiltes Excel file for *Il giuoco delle parti*.

Orality markers also include prosodic traits, such as changes in pitch, tone, and rhythm, that convey meaning and emotion. These were extensively used in Marivaux/ Clive. The literary nature of the dialogues made it easier to reproduce them in the written sur/subtitles.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Peut-être que je serai un peu insolent,<br>à cause que je suis le maître, voilà tout. | Sarò forse un pochino arrogante<br>per il fatto che sono il padrone, ecco. | Vielleicht bin ich ein wenig arrogant,<br>weil ich der Herr bin. |
| À cause que je suis le maître ;<br>vous avez raison. | Per il fatto che sono il padrone;<br>avete ragione. | Weil ich der Herr bin;<br>da haben Sie recht. |
| Oui, car quand on est le maître,<br>on y va tout rondement, sans façon, | Sì perché, quando si è padroni,<br>si va via lisci senza complimenti, | Ja, denn wenn man der Herr ist,<br>kommt man glatt durch, ohne viele Umschweife |

Fig. 26. Multilingual sur/subtiltes Excel for *Slave Island*.

Hence, whenever possible, orality markers were preserved in the translation. Only when the number of characters exceeded reading time and no other solution could be found, a choice was made to omit them, despite awareness of their importance.

### *9.6 Colloquial Expressions and Strong language*

Informal phrases and idiomatic expressions are common in spoken language, adding a conversational tone, making the speech sound more like spontaneous conversation. This use was particularly apparent in *Angst essen Seele auf*:

*Ex.*

| | |
|---|---|
| **SALEM** Das ist dein Zuhause? | **SALEM** This is your home? |
| **EMMI** Ja. | **EMMI** Yes. |
| **SALEM** Gut Kaffee. Sehr gut. | **SALEM** Good coffee. Very good. |
| **EMMI** Alle in der Familie sagen, Emmis Kaffee weckt Tote auf. | **EMMI** Everyone in the family says, Emmi's coffee wakes the dead. |

In this play we had also to deal with foul language and make decisions about how to translate it, considering that the effect of written words is stronger than that of words heard in passing.

| | |
|---|---|
| **KATHARINA** Weiter. | **KATHARINA** Continue! |
| Komm. | Come. |
| Na, was is? Kommst mit heut oder nicht? | Well, what's up? Are you coming today or not? |
| **SALEM** Nein. | **SALEM** No. |
| **KATHARINA** Ach. Und warum? | **KATHARINA** Oh. And why? |
| **SALEM** Schwanz kaputt. | **SALEM** Dick worn out. |
| **KATHARINA** Dann eben nicht. | **KATHARINA** Then rather not. |

After discussion, we decided to maintain the swear word. What made it really strong was actually the adjective, so we worked on the whole sentence to convey the character's intentions. We also studied the dubbed versions of the film to see how the problem had been solved. The Italian dubbing replaces "Schwanz" with "Liebe". Although it might sound a really edulcorated translation of the word, after discussing this with the director, we decided that it conveyed the sense quite accurately (Salem was too tired and bored to have sex). In the end, "Schwanz" was literally translated for the night performance, while "Liebe" was used in the morning performance meant for school students. In fact, guidelines (see the ESIST corpus) generally suggest that sur/subtitles should be tailored as far as possible to the audience and translators should opt for solutions that are acceptable within the particular context (place, time, participants) of the performance.

# 10. The revision stage. Quality Control and Consistency

The stages of sur/subtitling may vary, but the revision of the sur/subtitles is the one step that cannot be skipped. Regarding theatre surtitles, significant improvement in translation editing (surtitles) and timing will be necessary in every production after two crucial steps: a) the studio dress rehearsal; b) the costume rehearsal in the theatre. In our case, the revision for the surtitles of the live performances was carried out during the final rehearsals. As far as the subtitles for the recorded performances are concerned, the simulation was conducted during a screening of the videos with the completed subtitles.

Revision/simulation involves checking sur/subtitles for both timing and accuracy. You need to ensure that they appear and disappear at the correct moments, that the lines do not exceed the maximum number of characters and that reading time is respected. The criterion to be prioritised is sufficient duration: the viewer must be able to read everything. If the viewer does not have enough time to read the sur/subtitles or has to devote too much time to them at the expense of the performance, the sur/subtitling is not effective. In this case, condensation is required. Moreover, since sur/subtitles are forms of written discourse, they must adhere to all the rules of grammar, spelling, and style. Ideally, the simulation step should be conducted with a fresh reader who is seeing the text for the first time, to avoid any bias, similar to standard proofreading practices (Logaldo 2020). Particular attention should be paid to:

- **Punctuation**: it's better to use the clearest possible punctuation to aid immediate reading. Use fullstops and commas whenever needed. Semicolons should be used more sparingly, as they look very “literary”; however, we used them quite profusely for Marivaux/Clive’s play, since we were dealing with a text that constantly claimed its literary essence. Ellipses are used at the end of a line to indicate that the sentence continues in the next line, to avoid confusing the viewer or creating ambiguity. In general, it is good to always end a line with a punctuation mark, whether it is a period, comma, ellipsis, or other. Suspension dots are strictly three […] and are

attached to the preceding word. It is advisable to use them only when truly necessary, and especially not to emphasize sentences, as they are an overused and worn-out formula that is difficult to manage.

- **Spelling**: no grammar or spelling mistakes should appear in the sur/subtitles. In our case we had to make an exception for *Angst essen Seele auf*, since the pidgin-German spoken by Ali had to be faithfully reproduced.
- **Consistency**: Ensure the consistency of the dialogues. A sentence may appear to be perfectly translated but make no sense in context. In that case, first check if it has been correctly translated, if certain words might have other meanings, or if it is an idiomatic expression. Also make sure that characters and objects are referred to consistently throughout the texts. This can be particularly challenging when the translation is conducted as teamwork. In this case, shared glossaries and frequent meetings can be necessary as useful moments of debate, for fixing lexical choices and rendering culture-specific words and sentences.

  The whole surtitling and subtitling process can be summarised in this, partially overlapping, workflow. (Fig. 27)

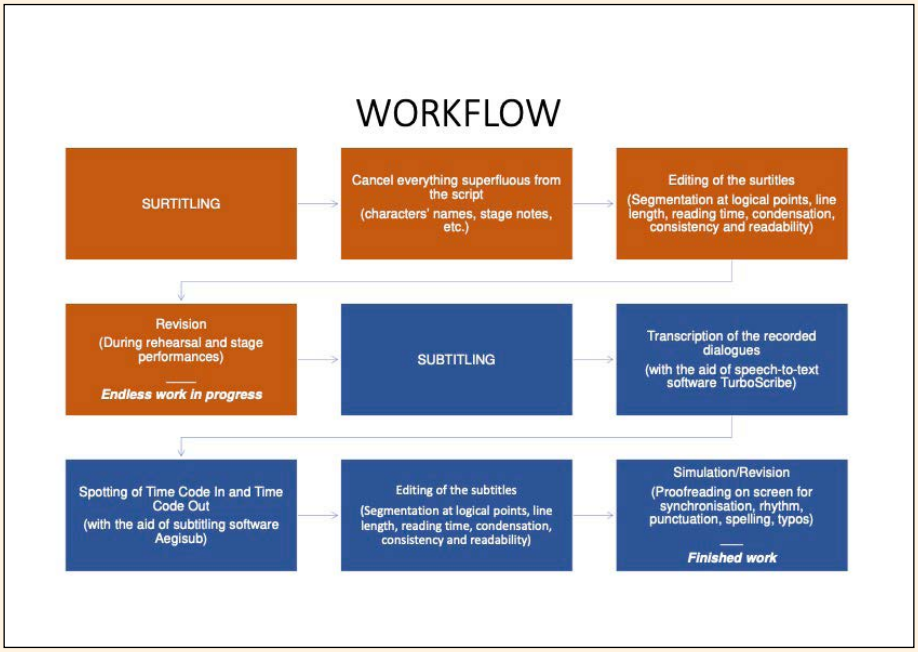



Fig. 27. Workflow of the surtiltling and subtilting process.

# 11. Audience reception (surveys)

The projection of the surtitles and the reading must be perfectly coordinated with the action, to ensure both the individual spectator's enjoyment and the audience's shared experience. As said above, this is particularly important in mixed audiences, where some read the surtitles while others understand the dialogues.

Our survey focused on the audience reception of live surtitles and live streaming subtitles during the first edition of the Clashing Classics Festival. According to the survey, the audience of the live performances was mainly local, speaking the same language spoken in the performance. Therefore, in front of the live performance the main beneficiary of the surtitles were SDH people attending the show. By contrast, the people who attended the live-streamed performance mostly needed to read the subtitles. In this case, the sur/subtitles were generally appreciated, though they were considered "too slow" (probably compared to the television subtitles that everybody is accustomed to). With reference to the emotional evaluation, 100% of the streaming audience said that they "helped involvement", while the audience attending the live performance found them "distracting", probably because they attracted their attention although they did not need to read them.

This leads to some immediate considerations, confirming what has already been explored above: the audience that does not understand the original language will need to visually access the comprehensible linguistic element, thus subtracting part of the time dedicated to observing the scene to read the surtitles. Consequently, in the case of linguistically heterogeneous audiences, the audience that understands the original language and those who need to use the surtitles may have different comprehension and reaction times. The surtitles must necessarily align these times in order to ensure that the audience shares the live experience in unison. The more precise this synchronisation is, the more effective the surtitling will be.

As a further consequence, the actors on stage, who in their two-way relationship with the audience need to capture the reactions of the room to measure their acting times, will be disoriented by a different correspondence between scenic action and room reaction, as well as among the audience itself. Perceiving the different reactions in the room is a disturbing element and a sign of a lack of harmony in sharing the same experience.

# 12. Conclusions (lesson learned)

The act of translating for the stage—whether through live surtitling or subtitling of pre-recorded video—demands far more than a transfer of linguistic content. As the experience of Clashing Classics has demonstrated, theatrical translation is a profoundly complex and situated practice, shaped by a constellation of artistic, technical, and cultural variables. It involves not only a negotiation between languages, but also an active engagement with the temporal, spatial, and affective dimensions of the performance. In this sense, translation must be understood not as an auxiliary technical support, but as an integral component of theatrical creation.

One of the central insights that emerged from the festival is that surtitling and subtitling occupy a hybrid space: they are simultaneously tools for accessibility, instruments of mediation, and performative devices. Their effectiveness is not determined solely by semantic accuracy, but by their ability to resonate with the rhythm, tone, and dramaturgical architecture of the live or recorded event. Translators are therefore required to navigate multiple, and often conflicting, demands: fidelity to the intentions behind the source text versus clarity for the target audience; respect for the poetic or idiomatic texture of the original versus the constraints of reading speed and screen space; the desire to preserve ambiguity or irony versus the need for intelligibility.

This balancing act is never neutral. Every translational decision carries interpretive weight and implies an ethical stance. Particularly in a project like Clashing Classics Festival, which staged canonical European texts across four languages (Italian, English, French, German), translation became a site of cultural negotiation, foregrounding the politics of language, authorship, and reception. Moreover, working across both live and digital formats further complicated the translational framework. Synchronisation, spatial calibration of surtitles, the placement and permanence of subtitles, the audience's line of sight and eye movement—all of these material conditions affected the translator's work and had to be factored into the process from the outset.

Another key outcome of the project is the recognition of theatrical translation as a necessarily collaborative enterprise. Translators must work in dialogue with directors, ac-

tors, dramaturgs, and technical staff; their choices cannot be detached from mise-en-scène, blocking, or scenographic design. In fact, translation in this context becomes a co-authored layer—an additional voice on stage that must be attuned to the visual and acoustic dramaturgy of the performance. It translates not only dialogue but also tone, gesture, silence, and the paraverbal dimensions of performance. It encompasses the whole semiotic and cultural experience.

The scale and ambition of the Clashing Classics project inevitably led to moments of imperfection. Some inaccuracies were due to the enormous volume of translating and sur/subtitling work required within limited timeframes and a complex production schedule. These issues, far from being marginal, underscore the need for integrated workflows and sufficient time for quality control. For future editions, particular attention will be given to the processes of revision and simulation of surtitles and subtitles, which should be treated not as final technical steps but as integral moments in the co-construction of meaning and audience experience.

The guidelines offered here emerge from this specific and demanding context. They are not prescriptive norms, but rather a framework for critical reflection and professional practice. They are designed to be adaptable to different production contexts, yet grounded in the principles of intersemiotic coherence, ethical responsibility, and aesthetic sensitivity. They affirm, above all, the need to recognise subtitling and surtitling as creative acts—acts that require training, dialogue, and intellectual rigour. The translator, far from being a “neutral” conduit, becomes a dramaturgical agent, whose interpretive labour actively shapes the audience’s reception.

By foregrounding these dynamics, Clashing Classics contributes to rethinking the role of translation in contemporary theatre. It invites institutions, producers, and artists to move beyond reductive understandings of accessibility, and to embrace translation as a space of invention, encounter, and transformation—where languages do not simply mediate, but perform.

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**Further Reading**

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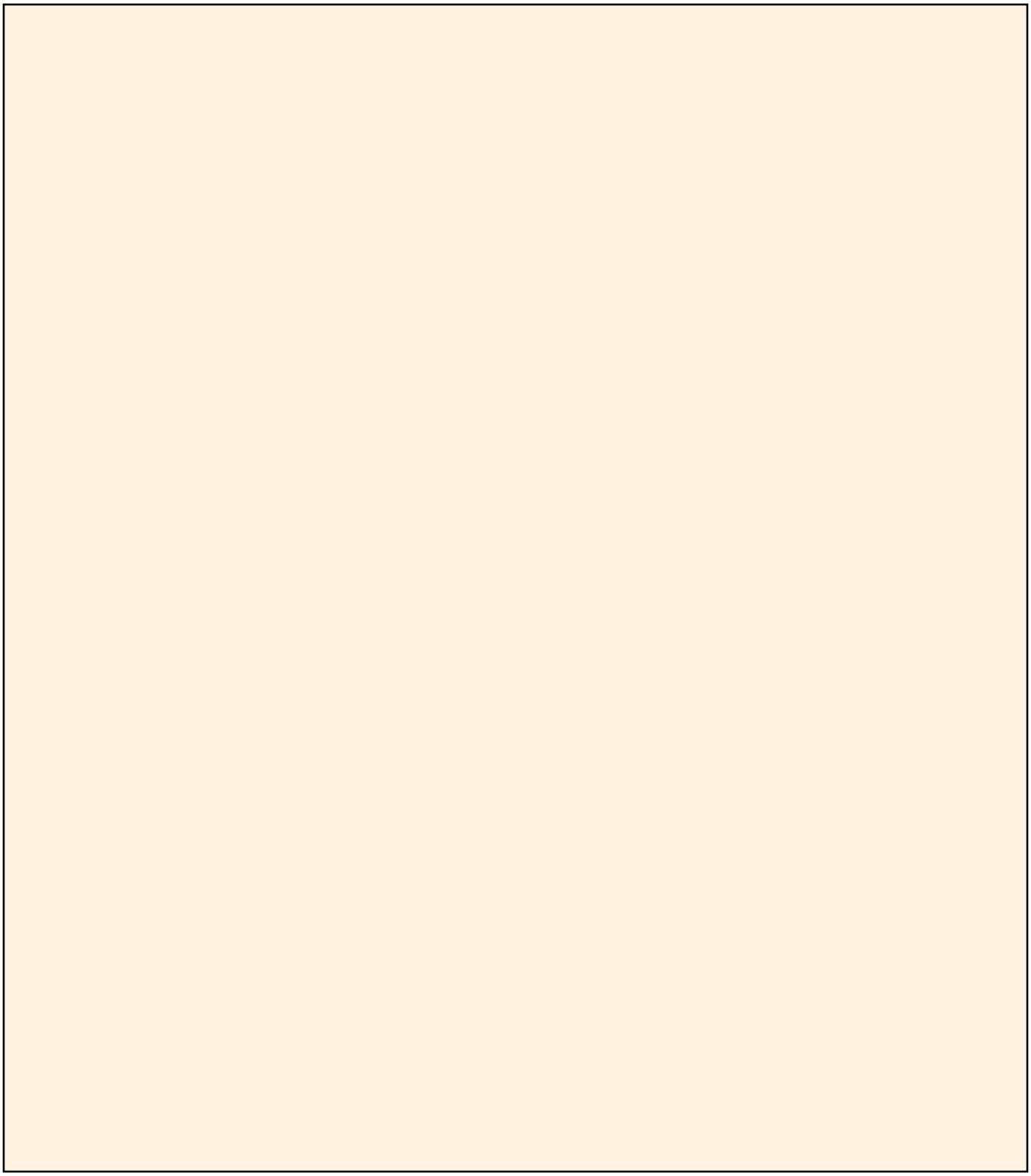

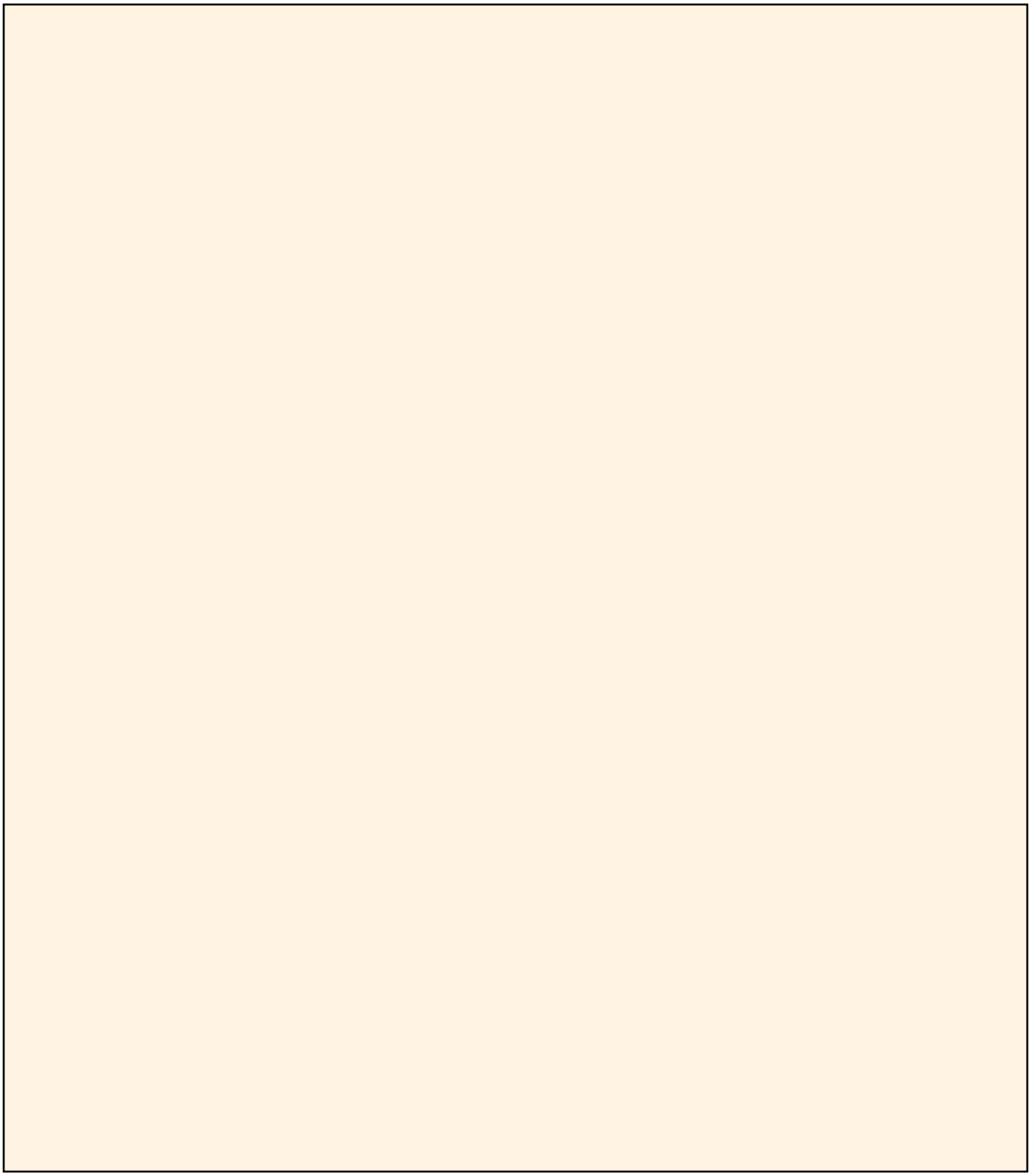


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