

Nollywood across Languages

Issues in Dubbing and Subtitling

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Abstract

The language of Nigerian video films, its choice, and those of subtitling and dubbing, have long escaped scrutiny, and only attracted scholars' attention within the past ten years. The present study, based on the analysis of 19 films in English, French, Dutch, Igbo and Yoruba and on data gathered from three personal surveys and interviews dated 2009, 2012 and 2013, seeks to add to this burgeoning field by considering whether the language issue hinders the reception of Nigerian films outside their linguistic area, and surveying what has been done so far in that regard. Its findings first reveal that, while European audiences seem to prefer dubbing, Africans opt for subtitling; they also confirm that in the end, the true success of Nigerian films, whether subtitled or dubbed, will be measured in the way they cut across cultures, not just languages.

Keywords: *Nigeria, Nollywood, Reception, Dubbing, Subtitling*

Introduction

As highlighted by McLoughlin, Biscio and Mhainnin (2011), “an increasing number of contributions have appeared in recent years on the subject of Audiovisual Translation (AVT), particularly in relation to dubbing and subtitling”, considered as particularly “challenging because it brings together diverse disciplines.” Gottlieb (1992)'s seminal publication on “Subtitling: A new university discipline” triggered a flurry of publications on the subject. Bartoll (2006) considered how to translate a film in which more than one language appears – a subject immediately relevant to Nigerian video films which generally offer a mix of English and Nigerian languages. Espindola & Vasconcellos (2006) investigated the treatment given to culture-bound terms in subtitles. Diaz-Cintas (2009: 8) highlighted the importance of translation to fight prejudices, given that “films and other audiovisual productions now represent one of the primary means through which commonplaces, stereotypes and manipulated views about social categories [...] are conveyed: dubbing, voiceover and subtitling enable such views to be made accessible to wider audiences unfamiliar with the language of the original production.” Dries (1995) and Jordão Coelho (2007) noted the growing use of subtitling in southern Europe and the Middle East. Guillot (2008) explored the expressive potential of punctuation in subtitling, the important role it plays in the dialogue and its added value. In McLoughlin, Biscio & Mhainnin (2011) and Ghia (2012), subtitled text is explored as a source of language acquisition, and its dialogue and subtitle components are focused on as sources of linguistic input.

Yet, apart from a few paragraphs in Johnson (2000), Larkin (2000), Ogunleye (2003 & 2008), Ondego (2008) and Barrot (2008), the language of Nigerian video films, its choice, and those of subtitling and dubbing, had long escaped scrutiny, at the very time both Nigerian video films were being exported and daily screened both online and on satellite channels.[1] Then, within the past few years, Adejunmobi (2004 & 2007) and Adedun (2010, 2011) both devoted several publications to the reasons behind the dominance of English in Nollywood movies and the interaction between foreign languages, Nigerian films and their audiences. Krings' unique contribution (2010: 81-84) examined what he termed “turning rice into pilau: the art of dubbing” as practised in Southern Africa – mediated through local artists who were “simultaneously interpreter, translator [...], voice mime” and commentator, “a guide through foreign audiovisual terrain” (2010: 81). The latest book on the subject has been that of Hamilton & Daramola

(2012). The present study, based on the analysis of 19 films in English, French, Dutch, Igbo and Yoruba and on data gathered from three personal surveys and interviews dated 2009, 2012 and 2013, seeks to add to this burgeoning field by considering the extent to which the language issue hinders the reception of Nigerian films outside their linguistic area, and surveying what has been done so far in that regard.

A potential linguistic challenge

The latest statistics from the Nigerian Film and Video Censors' Board/NFVC (2007-2008), quoted in Adedun (2010: 120), show that video films are only produced in some six of the country's languages[2]: Nigerian English, Yoruba, Hausa, Bini, Ibibio and Efik. This no doubt led Sanghi to comment, on January 18, 2012, that "some in Western media [...] think that Nollywood's success is probably linked to that 'most of the movies are in English, allowing for the widest possible crossover appeal.' But statistics prove that English language may not be the biggest reason for Nollywood's success." [3] Quoting a May 2009 UN report[4], Sanghi added that "as the UN report confirms, the survey also revealed that about 56 per cent of Nollywood films are made in local languages, while English remains a prominent language, accounting for 44 per cent, which may contribute to Nigeria's success in exporting its films." We know that "language as an integral part of a people's culture and communication is not only a unifying factor but also a vital contributive factor to the success and acceptability of the various genres of the video film production" (Oyewo 2003:145). Yet it has sometimes acted as a barrier to a quality appreciation of film contents and rendered a proper historical account of the development of Nigerian video-films difficult.

Even though one can rightly argue that film productions in Nigerian languages, restricted by the language barrier, are primarily targeting local audiences and their diaspora[5], one cannot deny the fact that a good number of Nigerians are keen to access films in other Nigerian languages - "you get people in Calabar watching Igbo stories and Yorubas learning about Oron[6] warriors." [7] According to Olushola Adenugba's blog[8] dated May 9, 2007, this has been the case right from the start: the first Igbo video film, *Living in bondage* (1992), "became a major hit among the Igbo audience and was also well accepted by non-Igbo speaking audience." Hausa films might be considered as having fared relatively better in this regard: data show them as having now found their way into the whole of Northern Nigeria, then into Niger and Chad, reaching out to other Hausa-speaking groups - "what's the problem when we have the same culture, the same religion and when, quite often, even the stories are drawn from our own repertoire?" says a TV Director (Abdoulaye 2008: 100). In spite of a decline in their production and circulation within the past five years, linked to the extension of the Sharia law to the twelve northern States of the Federation, these films are now spreading into the whole Sahel where their cultural impact is strongly felt and commented. Meanwhile, productions in Yoruba reach out to the Yoruba communities in Benin Republic and Togo, as well as to the important US-based Diaspora, the UK and South America in spite of the significant drop in the use of Nigerian languages by British-born Nigerians (Detokunbo-Bello 2010:14). As for Igbo-produced video films, knowing their widespread Diaspora and its keen attraction to the English language, it is not surprising that most of them should favour 'Engligno', enriched with all-Igbo music.

The attraction of Nigerian productions is usually so great in African countries that the language medium they use does not seem to deter French-speaking audiences, as explained by Mba Bizo, a journalist-translator from the Cameroon Radio Television, Yaoundé, in his paper, 'The Reasons for Nollywood Craze in French-Speaking Cameroon', presented at the 2009 Ife film festival. Those films have entered Tanzanian, Ugandan and Zambian markets, with Igbo language making an in-road in the Congo where films function as an alternative language school.[9] For Okhai (2008), "Africa Magic, the Trans-African movie channel, is proof enough that there is a cultural neo-colonisation of the African continent by Nollywood films. People now speak Igbo words and Pidgin English in far-off places like South Africa as a result of this. It is now hip to shout Igwe!!!" [10] Wilfrid, a French of Congolese origin, did not consider his lack of Nigerian experience as a hindrance and, relying on his knowledge of life in the Congo, concluded that "Africans feel at home" watching these films "because life is more or less the same whatever the country"(Author 2009b). This corroborates Katsuva's findings: for him, what attracts most Congolese to Nigerian films is that "the type of language in these films (although English), easily translates an African culture [...] similar to the Congolese culture in general [and that] the themes utilised

in these video films are [...] similar to the Congolese lifestyle" (2003:92). African respondents from other nationalities highlighted the same cultural similarities.

On November 15, 2006, the BBC website reported a Kenyan video boom, with illegal outlets mushrooming around small markets in urban centres and in slum areas of the country's major towns and offering mostly Nigerian video films.[11] But Ondego highlighted some of the difficulties facing foreign viewers:

Harrison Kamau, a [Kenyan] law student, feels that it doesn't matter which language Nigerians use in their films as 'the dialogue is spoken with a heavy accent, so you don't know whether they are speaking vernacular, Pidgin or English'. Nigerians also punctuate their videos with proverbs and sayings in vernacular, usually without translations or subtitles [...], an indication that the primary audience is not international but mainly Nigerian, able to understand the message in its context (2008: 115).

Reaching out and attracting support

Most Nigerian actors, who tend to be university graduates, learn/practise other Nigerian languages when needed: one blogger[12] reported having seen Patience Ozokwor, a star Igbo actor, "speaking Yoruba fluently" in the film *Eyin Oka* (2004); and the producer/actor Zachee Orji, an Igbo born in Gabon who schooled in both French and English in Cameroon, Benin and Togo, is bilingual.[13] Yet, given the reported decline in the use of Nigerian languages among diasporic communities, the widening circulation of the video films had made it imperative for another solution to be found in order to facilitate audience reception. According to recent publications (Dipio 2008, Krings 2010, Englert & Moreto 2010), the African continent found its own way of approaching Nigerian video films, seeking, not to translate their content, but comment on important moments, thereby facilitating viewers' understanding. Krings's study on live commentators, considered as "a new narrative genre", recounts the solution found by an amateur,

the first mythical video jockey of Uganda, who appeared in a Kampala video hall in 1988 [...]. People could not watch movies without him because they didn't understand. He moved around from the front sit to the back to the front, [...] telling to the audience what the movie was about, and everything. This man [...] didn't understand English well, but he could get the story, what was the movie about, like 'the boy buys a sweet, enters in the car ...' or he (would) tell you that a certain person is going to die ... [...] Those who followed in Lingo's footsteps began to use electronic equipment – sound mixer, microphone and amplifier – with which they could reduce the volume of the original sound track and insert their own commentary, and a decade later, started dubbing live performances on VHS tapes and sold these to video libraries (2010: 6).

He further comments on this technique he calls "remediation, as a means to translate technologically mediated words into oral discourse. [...] Patience Ozokwor thus turns into *Mama mkanga sumu* (Mama, the poison maker), Ramsey Noah into *Loverboy*" (2010: 11). For him, commentators, while acting "as a guide through foreign audio-visual terrain" (2010: 14) and as "an expert for a different culture [...] who hopes that through his translations and explanations the strange may become understandable to his own people" (2010: 26), add to the entertainment offered by the film. This running commentary in the viewers' language, only reported in Southern Africa so far, may not be suitable for mixed audiences as those having some knowledge of the original language could well consider those live commentaries as a distraction. The solution to bridge the language gap has so far been to disseminate Nigerian films in English, as diasporic Nigerians do not readily patronise films in Nigerian languages.

Nigerian films, massively plebiscited by the highly mobile Nigerian community, follow them in their relocations. They have now reached European shores and, after penetrating Britain and Ireland, are discreetly making their way into Germany, France, Italy, Spain and other countries across language barriers – a move encouraged by scholars. Meanwhile, Google, who owns YouTube, is stepping up its efforts to offer more and more Nigerian films to international audiences, targeting the African continent

but also European countries, banking on demand from a huge market. To fit into this scheme, Nollywood films are now being cut into bite-size parts suited to the development of mobile devices. The ever-widening circulation of those films definitely offers a challenge and has now been calling for the complex issue of subtitling and dubbing to be addressed.

Subtitling



Subtitling has been defined as “the translation of the spoken (or written) source text of an audiovisual product, usually at the bottom of the screen” (Luyken 1991: 31), or, more elaborately, as the act of “transferring, language from longer units to shorter ones, from spoken language to written text, from one language to another, and [the] interpretation of verbal speech combined with numerous other cultural and socio-symbolic signs or with other types of semiotic systems” (Gambier 1994 quoted in Sadat Mousavi 2012).[14] The numerous studies on this issue have established that subtitling is generally preferred by foreign audiences[15], particularly those viewers who may be familiar with English and prefer to hear the

original dialogue. It has even become the most read type of text in European countries - in the UK, some six million people regularly use DVD or TV subtitles. This condensed version of the spoken text has turned to be a quick, cost-effective option which, when written with clarity and readability in mind, can aid the viewer’s understanding whilst retaining the flavour of the original film. Ralph Simon (2012) reports that New York-based GlobalVocal has a special dubbing and translation platform that allows an artist singing, say, in Xhosa or Zulu, to have their words digitally dubbed and translated into, say, Swahili or Yoruba, and in doing so, make South African content suitable for Nigeria or Kenya. This is going to bring in a whole new era of language content cross-pollination in Africa, and for the first time seeing artists develop a pan-African rather than just their own country, following.[16]



When available, subtitling, which “helps to transcend ethnic and cultural barriers that local languages imposed within the multilingual Nigerian market” (Esan 2008), has so far been overwhelmingly preferred to dubbing in Nigeria, and applied to both Igbo and Yoruba video films since the early 1990s, as illustrated by *Love in vendetta* (1996). This film, which features an Igbo-Hausa couple in love struggling against their parents’ memories of the 1987 Kano riots and massacres,[17] is subtitled in French, with its introduction subtitled in both English and French targeting neighbouring countries. Other producers like Kelani are now subtitling or dubbing their films in French for the West African

market, and Kelani’s French-titled production *Pourquoi moi?* (2008) set in Benin Republic, is multilingual. Nkem Owoh, the star of *Osuofia in London*, starred in a new comedy with a West African focus, *Bonjour, Osuofia speaks French*, shot in Nigeria and Benin with dialogue in both French and English (Adejunmobi 2007).

Illustrated here by two stills taken from the Igbo films *Nneka the Pretty serpent* (1992) and *The Snake Girl* (2006), whose titles only are in English, subtitling has generated lots of comments from viewers. Those interviewed (Author 2009b) were all French native speakers but multilingual, and two of them practiced an African language (Igbo and Lingala respectively) at near native level. They considered subtitles to be less invasive and more respectful of the authenticity of the film, yet judged them rather inadequate and too succinct to convey the full meaning of the scenes.[18] Emilie, fluent in Igbo, considered subtitles as a distraction.

Since their first experience, these respondents have watched 10-30 Nigerian films, sometimes more, the only criterion of selection being the language (English/Englilgbo), as most of the films available to them were not subtitled. All expressed their struggle to fully understand the dialogues, blaming:

- the African accent, quite different from the British accent they were introduced to at school
- the habitual use of code switching by Nigerian actors.[19]
- the Nigerian variety of English, with its “words borrowed from the many languages of Nigeria, English words which have acquired new meanings in Nigeria, and words coined for local situations” (Igboanusi 2002:1).
- their difficulty to make sense of allusions to cultural traits, especially those relating to traditional beliefs. This may explain that Nigerians and Africans who share some of the Nigerian customs and traditions remain Nollywood’s first public, and that some viewers prefer watching and discussing Nigerian films in the company of spouse or friends.

One 20-30 year-old explained that the films “depict life in a cultural context that I am familiar with through my background and in a way they keep me aware of how things are like in Nigeria [...]. If you are not fluent, it’s a great tool, as you can relate to what the actors are saying to the English subtitles and over time, you understand more of the language.” The respondents’ attitude to subtitles was rather ambiguous: most of them acknowledged that they found it very difficult to follow a story in a foreign language, and needed subtitles, even though this often meant a less enjoyable viewing. On the other hand, these often failed to convey the full meaning of the scenes; as one man put it, “I will rather have an understanding of the original language because there are some words that cannot be translated directly, hence the meaning is lost and you will not get the full impact of what the author intends.” Many of those films do not offer any subtitles anyway, and this does not seem to have been a problem – as an African-American remarked: “I get the plot from their acting. I don’t understand the conversations, which makes me even more curious to learn the language.” This particular respondent tried to learn Igbo from the films, starting with words often repeated. She also used her cultural background to elucidate words from “body movements, expressions and gestures” she found to be similar to those familiar to her. Another respondent reflected: “although I might not understand what they are saying, the body language speaks volumes”. A third person explained: “if the words are accompanied with motions, then you can figure out what the meaning is, however this is only with single words or short sentences.”

The Yoruba, unlike the Igbo, have always kept to the use of their language: today, Yoruba remains “the medium of communication for the video film productions [because it] suits the category of people who patronise the industry.”(Oyewo 2003: 145). Olatunbosun (2011), while confirming the frequent use of subtitles in the first few years of Nollywood, bemoans the gradual lowering of the academic standard in their use in those films, blamed on producers’ commercial focus:

many non Yoruba-speaking fans of Yoruba home videos have said that subtitles are key to buying or viewing. It is most probable then that many indigenous filmmakers, in their quest for satisfying popular taste for cross-over appeal, plunge into hastily-prepared, poorly-edited subtitles for human consumption. This careless job of translation done by the movie makers defaces the industry. For a sparsely-informed foreigner who tunes to AfricaMagic, the impression the substandard subtitles give is that Nigeria is a country full of illiterates who have English as the official language but lack the mastery of the language.



Olatunbosun proceeds to illustrate his argument with excerpts from the Yoruba film *Yanmu Yanmu* (2008)[20], quoting subtitles such as “When do you said that you coming?”, “I have partake from your success”, “But who is injures will let go of the knife” - all errors frequently associated with subtitles in Yoruba videos. A second problem highlighted is the absence of subtitles accompanying sequences screening divination and incantations. The blogger concludes by enjoining filmmakers to follow Kelani’s example and employ graduates to ensure the linguistic quality of their subtitles.

[21] Another online blogger adds to the above comments: “for the subtitle-dependent viewer, watching movies made in Yoruba language is an ordeal, as the English subtitles, blighted by ghastly grammar and spellings, cause consternation.” In some films like *Ayo Aye* (2001), on the other hand, subtitles are faint or so unstable that reading them is almost impossible,

proving the need for more regulation of the text production and strict guidelines on the number of characters that can appear per line and how long they must stay on screen.

Given that more than one third of Nigerian video films are still produced in Yoruba and that more Nigerian languages are accessing Nollywood production, the issue of subtitling and dubbing remains a major concern. Adedun's paper (2011) titled: 'From Yoruba to English: The Untranslatable in Selected Nollywood Movies', focuses on the subtitling of conversation in Yoruba movies to English, and the translational problems that occur in the process. For the author,

the essence of translation is to facilitate communication with people who do not share the primary language of communication with the communicator. It is also to widen [...] the scope of communication beyond the speakers of the primary language. It is in the light of this that most Yoruba movies are subtitled in English. However, it is observed that certain aspects of filmic interactions are completely omitted in the course of subtitling. Aspects such as proverbs, aphorisms, wise-sayings, cultural /traditional philosophy, divinations and esoteric statements are either completely left out or glossed over in the process of subtitling. We find words like 'incantation', 'singing', and so on, used in place of translation of the conversation or the language used. In most cases, the translator may employ silence as a strategy. When movie interaction gets to the aspects identified above, subtitling simply seizes and automatically resurfaces thereafter.[22]

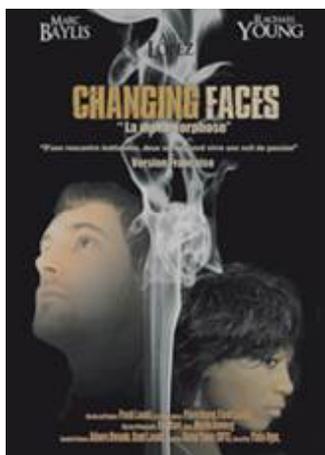
The end result, according to Adedun, is "that Yoruba movies contain linguistic and cultural inadequacies which cause a gap in communication with the audience." [23]

The latest publication on subtitling in Nollywood is that of Hamilton and Daramola (2012), a booklet titled *Nollywood and the Challenge of Movie Subtitles: Assessing Problems of Subtitling in the Nigerian Home Video Industry and Showing the Way Forward*, presented at the 2011 Conference of the African Council on Communication Education held in Lagos and intended for producers and marketers' use. The authors, again focusing on Yoruba films, analyse samples from movie subtitles and consider issues related to language, linguistics, understanding, poor national imaging as well as findings from readability studies. [24]

Dubbing

Given the flaws associated with subtitling, dubbing, which consists in providing a film with a complete soundtrack in a different language, could be considered as a better option for Nollywood films. Yet this is not likely to be widely adopted, as dubbing is generally more expensive and more suitable for films with a narrator. In addition, it requires careful scripting - to ensure that the voiceover matches the on-screen action - as well as the use of professional voice actors to ensure that the foreign language performance matches the original as closely as possible. [25] This presents another challenge to Nigerian producers, as many Nollywood films still rely partially on actors' spontaneous performance, while detailed scripting is gradually developed.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nollywood became very popular on television after being dubbed in Lingala. Yet, dubbing into French was the obvious option for Nigerian filmmakers, whose country is surrounded by francophone countries. There, Nollywood movies are sold as 'African movies' after being dubbed in French in Cameroon and Gabon. In 2003, a South Africa-based distributor, Nu Metro, keen to dub a Nigerian celluloid film in French, applied for sponsorship to Africa Cinemas, a joint programme just launched by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the European Union and the Francophony Agency to support the distribution of African films in Africa. [26] In 2004, the National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI, founded in 1978), based in Accra, Ghana, then created the Jean-Rouch studio, dedicated to dubbing, with the support of the French government. [27] This resulted in hundreds of directors, writers and technicians from Ghana and other African countries being trained in dubbing under Nigerian, Ghanaian, Cameroonian and Zimbabwean specialists and technicians. As explained on the project website,



Many professional studios in developing countries are still employing calligraphers to copy the dubbing dialogues onto transparent strips called "Rythmo bands", which are comparable to old-fashioned teleprompters. This process can no longer be transferred to countries where the dubbing industry is yet to be created. CIFAP, the training centre involved in the Jean-Rouch studio project at NAFTI, decided to use the "Rythmo" software developed by a French software designer, Dominique Giral (www.syncode.fr). Another software is now available: Synchronos, also marketed by a French company, Kin-Helios (www.kinhelios.com).



This project has now facilitated the successful dubbing of a number of foreign films, and a good number of Nollywood films are expected to benefit from these new facilities - Imasuen's *The Apple* (2000) has already been dubbed; Kelani's *Thunderbolt* (2001) and Amata's *The Amazing Grace* (2006) have already been selected. Since then, the Cotonou post-production centre of the Francophone network (CIRTEF) has dubbed several short films into African languages and one Nigerian film, *The White Handkerchief* (1998) by Kelani, into French. Other specialists and filmmakers have now been dubbing a number of films from

South Africa, Tanzania and Zimbabwe into French, English and Swahili.

The first film to be dubbed in French for commercial distribution in France and francophone countries, thanks to a grant from the French Embassy, was *Changing Faces / La Métamorphose* (2008), whose first dubbing, done in Lagos, made it possible for it to be premiered at the pavilion 'les Cinémas du Sud' during the 2008 Cannes festival (Barlet 2008). The task of dubbing was given to four Paris-based companies and the final dubbed version was handed over to the producer on February 27, 2009.[28] It was then screened in Dakar in 2009, presented at the 2009 FESPACO, at the Écrans noirs film festival in Yaoundé and Cairo international film festival, and featured on Canal France international in August 2009.[29] The film was eventually screened in Nigeria and Ghana at the Silverbird and other cinemas in December 2011 during Christmas and New Year.[30] Even though the dubbing definitely made it possible for *La Métamorphose* to enjoy an immediate worldwide dissemination, it could be construed that the success of the film - and its being selected for dubbing - must have been prompted, in part, by the fact that its producer, Faruk Lasaki, graduated from the New York Film Academy. Added to this is the producer's admission that his film was different – “an African story but shot in a European way” (Barlet 2008).

Lasaki's success, which shows how technical support can make a difference, has opened the door to new ventures directly benefiting Nigerian films. A newsletter from the Nigerian Thema TV (Issue no. 140 dated 11 October 2012) reported their launching of a new TV channel sourced from the library of the South-African channel « Africa Magic » (MNET / Multichoice group) and targeting France and French-speaking territories in the first week of October. This Nollywood TV offered through Free (Canal 260), one of the popular French multiplay operators, “is part of Thema's Bouquet Africain Premium [covering nineteen French-speaking African channels and counting more than 140.000 subscribers]. The other novelty is that it offers Nollywood films entirely in French via full dubbing and not simply sub-titling or synths”, a decision which made the new channel an instant hit, with many Africans in France now hooked to Nollywood. Free subscribers will be able to watch a film every two hours and a new film every evening. According to Clémentine Tugendhat, Head of Content and Director of Nollywood TV, the company purchased distribution rights for francophone territories and started dubbing films in January 2012. She explained that “dubbing these programs was quite difficult since Nollywood film masters did not have background noises and voice split. [It meant that their] editing partner had to re-create sounds - including music - and programme voices in French. That is more expensive and takes longer to process than simple dubbing.”[31] Meanwhile, on the African continent, the reflection on dubbing continues,

echoed by Englert and Moreto's (2010) article on "Inserting Voice: Foreign Language Film Translation into Kiswahili as a Local Phenomenon in Tanzania."

Reading culture

As Nigerian movies reach out further and further afield to new audiences and explore new collaborations in a globalised market, reflecting on the relevance and value of dubbing and subtitling has become a central issue. Viewers have frequently expressed their preference for subtitling, justifying their opinion with a number of arguments. First, subtitling is easily overlooked: "Within a few minutes, I have completely forgotten that I am reading words at the bottom of the screen. I am completely immersed. For this reason [...], I think subtitling is always a superior solution to dubbing foreign films" (Stacey 2012). Another reason, according to the same, is that subtitling preserves the acting and allows viewers to enjoy the original while being supported in their accessing the film content:

the actors in a film have put a lot of work into their performances, including their voices. Tone, delivery – it's all part of the character they have painstakingly created for your entertainment. Subtitling allows you to at least hear these aspects of their voices while still giving you the sense of what they are saying. Dubbing, on the other hand, removes this. Suddenly there is another actor entirely speaking the lines, making their own artistic decisions. While I would imagine they make an effort to match the tone and delivery of the original actor, this remains an interpretation, and is sometimes limited when the languages don't sync up well with mouth movements or the amount of time the voice actor has to squeeze the translated line in. This sometimes results in rewritten lines, further distorting the meaning. And dubbing just looks silly. Words that don't match up with the mouth movements of the actors have been played for laughs by everyone from Benny Hill to Woody Allen. You simply can't take a dubbed film seriously (Stacey 2012).

When used as linguistic support, subtitles have been helping viewers beyond the film content, into a progressive knowledge of the language, something very important to Nigerians who value their ancestral languages:

As someone who loves language and thinks everyone should be learning a new one, I also think that subtitling gives the world's easiest and most passive language lessons in the world. As a child I can recall picking up phrases simply by watching the movies – a character would say something my adolescent mind thought was very cool, and the words would stick in my head. Even if you don't necessarily remember anything from watching a subtitled movie, you're still exercising that part of your brain, and brain exercise is what keeps us young. So, for me, dubbing is never a good solution. Happily in the modern age filmmakers seem to agree with me; while dubbing was once common, most foreign films are now distributed with subtitles, and that is a good thing.[32]

One must add that, although the Igbo and Yoruba's attitude to their language is very different, both proudly showcase their culture in the films, a move supported and encouraged by viewers' response. The (Author 2009b) audience survey gathered that, for all respondents with Nigerian family connections, video films are the occasion to discover Nigerian cultures or reconnect with them. Their viewing offer the occasion of endless family discussions on customs; they also watch some films on their own, enjoying the songs and the entertainment. Apart from assisting audiences in overcoming linguistic challenges, dubbing and subtitling have an obvious role to play in facilitating viewers' approach to the cultures embedded in the movies. Both have thus been used in recent years as a way of reaching out to foreign audiences beyond the African continent and facilitating their approach of Nollywood, with mixed success. As Nigerian filmmakers face challenges linked to these techniques, they will have to consider which of the two has the greatest potential to support diasporic and foreign audiences' appreciation of regional cultures embedded in Nollywood movies.

Subtitling may be considered as enhancing the presentation of these cultures, partly silenced by the dubbing process. Customs and allusions to cultural traits (especially those relating to traditional beliefs) embedded in the films are better translated through subtitling than dubbing, as dubbing erases the Nigerianness of the film. There is a strong link between language and culture and dubbing severs this link, making it more difficult for viewers as the implicit cultural content hidden in the language is erased. While dubbing facilitates a superficial approach, it can be construed as deceptive, making viewers feel they fully understand what the story is about, when they actually miss all that would have been passed on through the original language. On the contrary, subtitling keeps a healthy distance between viewers and the film, keeping them on their toes, always attentive to the potential difference and keen to bridge it. Time will tell whether the current situation will evolve: at the moment, while preliminary surveys (author, 2009 and 2012) on the reception of productions in Nigerian languages tend to indicate a European preference for dubbing, Nigerians and other African viewers have so far felt more at home with subtitling, a technique which better enhances the original Nigerian flavour of the film while discretely guiding viewers through the storyline.

Conclusion

One thing is sure: for Nollywood filmmakers, producing films embedded in Nigerian cultures, the sharing of history and language is a choice encouraged by African and diasporic audiences' appreciation of what makes Nollywood different. Nollywood films, even those recent co-productions with Hollywood and British filmmakers, whether in English or in dubbed/subtitled Nigerian languages, do retain a distinct Nigerian flavour and can be read as an avowed proclamation of the Nigerian identity, an affirmation of the national pride, independence and values, both in the subject treated and in the kind of English spoken, with its accent, intonations and code-mixing. While "from the linguistic point of view, the odds [...] seem stacked against the unification of Nigeria, the most populous and one of the most linguistically diverse countries in Africa" (Omoniyi 2010: 246), dubbing and subtitling may be viewed as participating in the gradual moulding of a national identity, facilitating the global circulation of Nigerian movies well beyond their respective linguistic areas while unveiling the broad traits of a shared identity. In the end, the true success of Nigerian films, whether subtitled or dubbed, will be measured in the way they cut across cultures, not just languages – a fact which the producer of *Changing Faces* recognised: "I wanted, like I said, a story that cut across, I wanted an issue that could be seen in any part of the world. [...] I wanted a story that somehow, whether you are African, French, British or American, there's a trace of you inside and there's part that you go home with. That's what I have done" (Barlet 2008).

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[1] Africa Magic (launched in 2003), OBE, Nollywood, NTA, AIT Movistar, BEN and Nigeria Movies.

[2] Nigeria counts more than 450 living languages.

[3] <http://2ndlook.wordpress.com/2012/01/18/nollywood-new-kid-on-the-global-filmi-block/> accessed 24/11/12

- [4] 'Nigeria surpasses Hollywood as world's second largest film producer' <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=30707#.UKJX6uQl6cV> accessed 24/11/12
- [5] The carving out of Nigeria by the British divided the Hausa and Yoruba linguistic areas, leaving half of them across the borders in neighbouring Niger and Benin Republic. The huge Igbo and Yoruba diaspora worldwide is equally an avid consumer of Nigerian films.
- [6] Oron, a seaport south of Calabar, is the third largest city in Akwa Ibom State, cited in 'A Congoman in Nollywood, [...] in which language do we shoot?' October 24, 2006 <http://bongodoesnollywood.blogspot.com> accessed 24/11/12
- [7] <http://www.naijarules.com/vb/business-nigerian-movies-legal-industry-matters/30921-global-cash-crunch-hits-nollywood-6.html> , November 25, 2008, 4h38, accessed 24/11/12
- [8] <http://filminnaija.blogspot.com/2007/05/history-and-development-of-nigerian.html> accessed 24/11/12
- [9] Cf. Dipio 2008 and Krings 2010 for the reception of Nigerian movies in Uganda and Tanzania respectively.
- [10] Victor Okhai, Director, *International Film and Broadcast Academy*, Lagos, "Emerging Talents: Nollywood and the future of African Cinema", paper presented at the BOB TV 5th African Film and Television Programmes Expo on March 11, 2008 at the Ladi Kwali Hall, Sheraton Hotel and Towers, Abuja, and published on 22/06/2008 at <http://www.nigeriansinamerica.com/articles/2688/1/Emerging-Talents-Nollywood-and-the-future-of-African-Cinema/Page1.html> accessed 24/11/12. 'Igwe', Igbo word for 'Chief', used as a salutation and praise word, was equally mentioned by one of the respondents as learnt while viewing Igbo movies.
- [11] Kenya is now producing its own video films (Kinyanjui 2010).
- [12] <http://www.nairaland.com/nigeria/topic-106899.64.html>, May 6, 2008, 03:17 pm, accessed 24/11/12
- [13] Cf. http://www.zackorji.net/2005/01/place_holder.html accessed 24/11/12
- [14] <http://www.translationdirectory.com/articles/article2385.php> accessed 24/11/12
- [15] The best example of this is the American production *The Passion of the Christ* (2004), directed by Mel Gibson and based on the Gospels, whose entire dialogue is in reconstructed Aramaic and Latin with subtitles in various languages (depending the place it is screened). The film has been a major commercial hit, which proves the success of carefully scripted subtitles.
- [16] <http://laf.ee/wp/?p=5223>, dated October 9, 2012 and accessed 24/11/12.
- [17] Cf. Ugochukwu 2009. The intercultural theme, already present in Nigerian novels such as Ike's *Sunset at Dawn* (1976), in short stories such as Momodu's 'Daughter-in-Law' (1979), and in video films like *Thunderbolt* (2001, 90mn), Tunde Kelani's story of a young Yoruba-Igbo couple, appeals to the growing number of viewers directly or indirectly involved in mixed relationships.
- [18] Subtitling is mostly done in English, and no respondent ever saw more than one example of French subtitling. Personally, I only came across one: that of *Love in vendetta* (1996) directed and subtitled by Zack Orji. Kelani's films produced in Benin Republic now offer French subtitles.
- [19] Cf. Katsuva (2003:98) on the reception of Nigerian films in the Congo: "there are two linguistic elements in these movies which sometimes make them difficult for non-Nigerians: pronunciation [...] and some cases of code-mixing in the film."

[20] The same film is singled out for grammatical errors and typos by another blogger, along other films, notably *Ayo* (2001), *Kulende* (2009) and *Ogidi Omo* (2010).

[21] Yinka Olatunbosun (2011, May 23) *Lost in translation*, <http://www.thisdaylive.com/articles/lost-in-translation/91900/> accessed 24/11/12. Kelani, a respected Yoruba director and producer, is known for the quality of his films.

[22] <http://readingnollywood.wordpress.com/abstracts/> accessed 24/11/12

[23] <http://youthng.com/yoruba-movies-subtitling-as-eyesore> accessed 24/11/12

[24] <http://www.tower.com/nollywood-challenge-movie-subtitles-assessing-problems-subtitling-in-kunle-hamilton-paperback/wapi/122477493> accessed 24/11/12

[25] <http://www.thetranslationpeople.com/translation-services/subtitling-and-voiceovers.html> accessed 24/11/12

[26] <http://www.africafilmclubbing.net/AfricCine.html> accessed 24/11/12

[27] *Africa Film Dubbing Forum*, <http://www.africafilmclubbing.net/partners.html> accessed 24/11/12

[28] <http://www.balancingact-africa.com/news/broadcast/issue-no140/top-story/thema-tv-launches-a/bc> & <http://www.ark-resources.net/news.php> accessed 24/11/12

[29] <http://www.supplemagazine.org/faruk-lasaki%E2%80%99s-nigerian-premiere-of-changing-faces-at-2011-ekoiff.html> accessed 24/11/12

[30] <http://www.nairaland.com/762570/changing-faces-selected-christmas-new> accessed 24/11/12. The international version of the film was mixed in Hamburg.

[31] <http://www.telesatellite.net/chaines-bouquets/nollywood-tv-une-nouvelle-chaine-de-cinema-africain-en-francais> accessed 24/11/12

[32] Stacey (*October 10, 2012*), *Translating Film – Subtitles vs. Dubbing*. <http://www.onehourtranslation.com/translation/blog/translating-film-%E2%80%93-subtitles-vs-dubbing> accessed 24/11/12