

## TTR

### Traduction, terminologie, rédaction

# *The (Globalized) Three Amigos: Translating and Disseminating HIV/AIDS Prevention Discourse*

Luise von Flotow

---

Traduction engagée

Volume 18, Number 2, 2e semestre 2005

URI: [id.erudit.org/iderudit/015770ar](http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/015770ar)

<https://doi.org/10.7202/015770ar>

[See table of contents](#)

---

Publisher(s)

Association canadienne de traductologie

ISSN 0835-8443 (print)

1708-2188 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

---

Cite this article

von Flotow, L. (2005). *The (Globalized) Three Amigos: Translating and Disseminating HIV/AIDS Prevention Discourse*. *TTR : traduction, terminologie, rédaction*, 18(2), 193–207. <https://doi.org/10.7202/015770ar>  
Tous droits réservés © TTR: traduction, terminologie, rédaction  
– Les auteurs, 2007

#### Article abstract

The effects of a translated text are notoriously hard to trace and establish. However, in the case of *The Three Amigos*, a series of short public service announcements on HIV/AIDS prevention that feature three comic figures (animated condoms) and accompany them through numerous adventures in 50 languages, the effects have been hugely successful—measurable in numbers of condoms sold! This article studies some of the translation problems posed by this Canadian production, and examines aspects of the Anglo-American source culture that are now hampering the distribution of this highly successful work. It thus positions translation dissemination as an issue related to source culture policies and politics that may play a bigger role in translation “effects” than a felicitous translation.

**Keywords:** translating HIV/AIDS discourse, translating animation, translating wordplay and jokes, translation and source culture politics.

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online. [<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>]

---



This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research. [www.erudit.org](http://www.erudit.org)

# ***The (Globalized) Three Amigos:*** **Translating and Disseminating** **HIV/AIDS Prevention Discourse**

**Luise von Flotow**

It is never simple to assess the effects of a translation, or to measure its influence. For contemporary literary texts, the problem is often ascribed to the reviewers, those arbiters of literary taste, and their often unwitting disregard for the fact of translation. Antoine Berman (1995), who has devised arguments and methods for engaging in reasoned and productive translation criticism, writes about critics' perennial lack of interest for "les problèmes de la traduction" [translation problems], and their tendency to report on translated texts "dans leur langue [...] en 'oubliant' qu'il s'agit d'une version; elle (la critique) étudie une oeuvre étrangère" (pp. 40-41). Critics conveniently "forget" that they are reading translations and simply report on "a foreign work," if they even mention this fact. To go beyond the work of these professional readers, and seek out the broad effects of a wave of translations (from English into German, say<sup>1</sup>) usually means engaging in comparative literary studies that gauge the influence of a certain era on the texts of the next generations.<sup>2</sup> This leaves the contemporary effect aside.

In AV/multimedia translation, the effects are equally hard to gauge, for one thing because the text is not alone but is surrounded and

---

<sup>1</sup> I have just completed such a study of the translation of contemporary Canadian writing into German (from 1967-2000). The "effects" of this wave of translation can so far only be described anecdotally.

<sup>2</sup> Such work is currently in progress by Sergei Tyulenev (University of Ottawa) on the "Westernization" of Russian thought through the translations from English, French and German in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

carried, and sometimes overpowered, by the images. While there are always opinions on translation quality,<sup>3</sup> and arguments about dubbing vs. subtitling, the effects of a certain type of translation usually elude description. I know of only one instance where an approach similar to the historical comparative literature methodology has addressed AV/multimedia translation. A recently published piece by Caroline-Isabelle Caron (2003) on *Patrouille du Cosmos*, the Quebec-dubbed *Star Trek* series (done from 1971 to 1972) addresses the neutralization of language in the series, which saps actors' verbal power and has the crew of the Enterprise speak "in a manner that implies an extensive education, some degree of refinement, great psychological strength in the face of danger and an underlying uniformity of social provenance" (p. 343). Caron takes her work a step farther, however, and is able to study the effects of this translation. Given the time gap of 30+ years since the dubbing of *Star Trek*, she can show how the dubbing language, and especially the disjunctures it causes between language, image, characters and story line has entered Quebec creative work—for laughs. Space explorers, devised in Quebec, routinely speak in "pathos-filled, longwinded speeches [...] (where) accent and vocabulary are in perfect International French" (p. 348), and the lack of coherence between audio and visual elements, specifically "the exaggerated linguistic characteristics and uninspired acting inherent in most dubbing performances" (p. 347)—where the prototypes were first encountered—are exploited for comic effect. In other words, a generation later, the constructed dubbing language, often referred to as "le synchronien" has entered the creative realm of the generation of young filmmakers and artists that grew up aware of and laughing at this language.

How singular, then, for an AV/multimedia translation and distribution project to receive the following, immediate, and gratifying information on its "effects":

I am happy to inform you that PSI's sales and distribution of male and female condoms in South Africa increased from 1 million units in 2003 to 40 million in 2004 [...] We understand that this increase in condom distribution occurred at the same time that your Three Amigos campaign was being implemented in South Africa. Although we have

---

<sup>3</sup> A current MA study underway at the University of Ottawa by Marie Alnwick focuses on French chatroom responses to *Buffy contre les vampires*, a dubbed TV series. Very few threads address the translation and its effects; those that do are reactive and emotional. Cf. Allociné.com "Une VF pitoyable."

no data to support it, it seems logical that your campaign contributed to that increase.<sup>4</sup>

This statement from Population Services International, a non-profit organization based in Washington, DC., that is devoted to public health projects in many parts of the world, recognizes the enormous impact in South Africa of a creative series of PSAs (Public Service Announcements) promoting condom use. An increase in sales from 1 million to 40 million is indeed enormous! Created and disseminated exclusively by volunteers who collaborated over three continents, in South Africa, Canada, and India, *The Three Amigos* uses a globalized genre—animation—to carry its message to 15-24 year-olds, some of the most endangered in regard to HIV/AIDS infection in the world. Translated into 40 languages, the series could now be available to millions more people, with potentially the same effect on human behaviour as it has had in South Africa.

This article describes a case where translation has been effectively deployed for the purposes of global social activism, and where this globalized aspect plays a more positive role than usual.<sup>5</sup> In fact, one of the more ubiquitous forms of globalization—Hollywood animation for children—underlies its phenomenal success. This article also looks, however, at the two forces affecting the possibilities and the effectiveness of this translation project, two different and ultimately opposing elements, both located in the source culture, that are struggling for control over HIV/AIDS prevention policies: these are secular forces, on the one hand, that support and teach consistent condom use for safe sex as THE most effective “technical” way to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS, and right-wing, fundamentalist, religious forces, on the other, who preach abstinence and faithfulness in marriage as the best way to fight the epidemic. This article will describe the translations (looking at only 4 languages), and address the split source culture, of which the secular group has produced highly creative and effective methods to control an epidemic, yet whose products are systematically undermined by the other source culture faction.

---

<sup>4</sup> Letter from PSI to Firdaus Kharas, producer of *The Three Amigos*, June 16, 2005.

<sup>5</sup> In studies of audiovisual translation, “globalization” often carries negative connotations that invoke the cultural imperialism of the USA/Hollywood (Gottlieb, 2004).

## The Series

*The Three Amigos* is an audiovisual HIV/AIDS prevention project. Initiated by Brent Quinn, a South African designer, produced in Canada by Firdaus Kharas, with animation drawings done in India, it consists of twenty short sketches that present the adventures and lessons learnt by three animated condoms—Stretch, Dick, and Shaft; the announcements are 15, 30, or 60 seconds long, and are designed to be played repeatedly on TV, in cinemas, and in other public places such as screens at bus stops and subways stations, in hospitals, barracks, and prisons. Addressed to adolescents and young adults, the series uses humour rather than moralistic messaging to get across the information that HIV/AIDS is a preventable disease, and that this prevention depends solely on changes in human behaviour, in this case, on the consistent use of condoms.<sup>6</sup> Originally conceived of and created in English, the series has been translated into many of the languages of cultures most at-risk from AIDS in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century: in Africa, South East Asia, India, East Central Europe and China. It is also available in all the European languages and in Spanish, English, French, and Brazilian Portuguese for the Americas.

A solid example of globalization rather than localization, in the sense that only *one* media product was produced and only those texts were translated and dubbed through voice-overs,<sup>7</sup> *The Three Amigos* does not, however, engage in some of the other marketing ventures often associated with audio-visual globalization: no paraphernalia (T-shirts, dolls or fanzines) are being sold (or translated) alongside.<sup>8</sup> But the series does, inevitably, mobilize the cultural assumptions of a certain *secular* Anglo-American perspective.<sup>9</sup> Its mission is to promote social change

---

<sup>6</sup> Other possible human behaviours to prevent AIDS infection are “abstinence” from sexual activity and “being faithful” to one’s partner.

<sup>7</sup> Other localizing approaches might include tailoring the visual materials, the presentation, the content, etc. for greater local impact. See “Think local,” an article from *The Economist*, April 11, 2002 that describes such localizing ventures on the part of CNN and Disney. [http://www.economist.com/displaystory.cfm?story\\_id+1066620](http://www.economist.com/displaystory.cfm?story_id+1066620), accessed March 31, 2006.

<sup>8</sup> Compare this with the animated Italian *Winx* series for young teens, that is “fighting back” against traditional globalization by creating entire product lines of paraphernalia (Unpublished MS, Di Giovanni, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> One could argue that to promote condom-use is to promote promiscuity.

and change human behaviour by spreading much-needed information on HIV/AIDS prevention in such a way as to effectively reach the most vulnerable young people, those just becoming or just recently sexually active. This approach could be, and has been, seen as inviting this age-group to indulge in promiscuous sex. But rather than a recipe for promoting promiscuity, the series can, and should probably, be seen as a form of edutainment that addresses a very real problem no amount of moralistic preaching about existing sexual practices or belief in human self-control will ever solve. It dares to override cultural differences and address a highly sensitive issue currently affecting all cultures.

The main creative choices that were made in order to achieve these goals are the choice of genre, which is animation, and the focus on humour. Indeed, the *Three Amigos* have all kinds of communicative fun as their adventures are implemented as edutainment to combat a disease that, in the words of producer Kharas, “from the very beginning [...] has been plagued by silence. It is a huge communication problem” (Shoumarova, 2005).

The antics of these new ambassadors for safe sex were ready for airing in English on World AIDS Day, December 1, 2003, their adventures and jokes designed to remove the stigma from condom-use, make it something matter-of-fact, something that can and should be discussed and that can provoke laughter. However, the fun ends with the end of each clip when a strict female voice cuts in to say: “Use a condom. Stop the spread of AIDS.” This not only brings home the message, but is also meant to help empower women to insist on condom use.

The three amigos are a tall black dude who wears a baseball cap backwards, a lanky blond guy in a Hawaiian shirt, and a short blue guy, the “star” who has the best lines, and who speaks with a light Latino accent in the English source versions. They are cool and easy-going, and looking to get “lucky;” they’re also non-threatening and funny, and ultimately there to edutain: at a soccer match, for example, they (and their audience) discover “you just can’t score without a condom.” Bungee-jumping, they learn “Never make a leap of faith. Always wear a condom.” And in an appearance on a talk show with a crabby host discussing the considerate and thoughtful new man, they hear her say, “Trust your instincts, not your date. Carry a condom.”

These are the “lessons” that the punch line makes explicit with that strict woman’s voice. The *Amigos* themselves are good at a certain

witty banter, full of insinuations and innuendo, wordplay, and double meaning, all of which support the humorous effect created by the images. In one clip, for example, Shaft, Dick, and Stretch are seen from the waist up. They are looking down, apparently comparing body parts. They say, one after the other, “How could anyone put one of these in their mouth?” “Is it true what they say? Size doesn’t count?” “Yeah, dynamite comes in small packages.” “How come mine’s all shriveled up?” “At least it’s not bent to the left like mine.” The reference seems clear, and is doubtless amusing for most of the viewers targeted by the series. But when the camera pans away, or the drawings reveal that they’re actually discussing chili peppers at a chili eating contest, the surprise is equally amusing. The punch line, “Don’t play with fire. Always use a condom. Stop the spread of AIDS” neatly, briefly, and clearly pushes the message.

The series has won numerous awards—for humour, for short film, for animation—and it quickly acquired cult status in South Africa where the South African Broadcasting Company ran the PSAs up to 20 times a day, and where it continues to run. Its humour is designed to make an issue that is often considered embarrassing or inappropriate for TV and public discussion of any kind more accessible. The humour breaks open the communication problem, and allows the material and the message to travel the world. Producer Kharas says: “I believe comedy is the best way to transform perceptions. Communicating a message of prevention to sexually active adults has a far better chance of getting across via comedic rather than solemn old-fashioned moral messaging.”<sup>10</sup> Contrary to PSAs created with real condoms, these animated condoms that have faces and arms, and that talk, are abstractions, that both personalize the means to safe sex, and create the suspension of disbelief required for a shift in mindset. As one commentator put it, “To call a condom an amigo, is to make it a friend that can save your life.”<sup>11</sup>

### Translation Questions

And this brings us to the first translation question: the word “amigo.” How was this selected? Why? Is it a sign of globalization of the worst sort? Does it refer back to a silly comedy film of the late 1980s? Or is it a

---

<sup>10</sup> Citation from Joanna Sterkowicz, *The Three Amigos* press dossier.

<sup>11</sup> Info Mer *Screen Africa*, 17 July 2004.

nod to the current world-wide impact of Latino music and dance? And if so, to another form of “globalization?” There is no obvious answer,<sup>12</sup> except the *The Three Amigos*’s statement of objectives, which reiterates that “condoms are ‘friends’ or Amigos.” It is, perhaps, just a simple calque.

Spreading this particular safe sex message across such wide territory means extensive translation—and by March 2004, the multiple translations were available. In South Africa, where the “effects” were recorded in condom sales, the PSAs were broadcast in English—but also in Zulu, Sotho, Afrikaans.<sup>13</sup> Given the humour, the sexual innuendo, the wisecracks and colloquialisms used by Stretch, Dick and Shaft, on the one hand, and the multiple target languages and cultures on the other, the translation labour was an enormous challenge, met with a shoestring budget, and again, numerous volunteers. The translations were all done and recorded in Ottawa, Canada, financed by a private Canadian TV network. Groups of international students from the local universities, diplomats, and/or recent immigrants were brought together by a coordinator and spent whatever time it took to hammer out and record the most workable versions. These sessions were not always easy—and this is understandable, when we consider to what extent sexual activity can be politicized and rendered a public scandal, if not a crime, in even the most secular cultures. Producing globalized versions of these sensitive texts, versions that could travel equally well to places as diverse as Haiti, Thailand, Pakistan, Iran or Swaziland involved considerable adaptation by all parties concerned.<sup>14</sup>

Very generally, the translations render the gist of each clip, only sometimes managing to reflect pithy wordplay and the innuendo of the English. In the chili pepper clip, every comment seems to have been translated in the languages I can check, though considerably adapted—in

---

<sup>12</sup> Another possible title suggested by creator Quinn was “Dicks.” This was rejected as being beyond globalization.

<sup>13</sup> English is the only language for which regional versions have been made—Caribbean, Hong Kong, and South African English.

<sup>14</sup> This adaptation applies as much to producing the translations as voicing-over the texts in the studio. Some translations could not be recorded because of the difficulty in finding a dubbing actor willing and able to perform (Interview with Firdaus Kharas).



German, French and English, and in Persian.<sup>15</sup> “Dynamite comes in small packages” is adapted in French as “le bon vin vient dans des petites bouteilles,” [good wine comes in small bottles] and in German as “je kleiner desto gemeiner,” [the smaller the meaner] and none of the other comments about “mine bending to the left” or “mine being all wrinkly” are censored. However, this complete translation is the exception. For example, in one of the PSAs, Shaft, Dick and Stretch arrive at a truck stop. A voice-over says “Truckers are always on the move,” and we hear a strange hubbub as the three amigos climb out of the truck. Then we see a line of trucks behind the restaurant literally bouncing on the spot from all the (presumably sexual) activity going on inside. The three amigos take one look, and one of them says laconically “Better keep on trucking.” They end up camping out by the roadside, only to be stalked by a pack of hyenas they have to scare off with a flare. A voice-over warns “Don’t get too friendly with the locals.” None of this Anglo-American talk is translated (into French, German, Spanish, or Persian): the double entendre of “truckers always being on the move” disappears; the feel of quiet resolution and working class perseverance in “better keep on trucking” disappears, and the reference to the “locals”—hyenas as symbols of HIV-positive sex workers—is silenced. The only thing that is translated is the equivalent of “let’s keep going” for “better keep on trucking”: “Mejor pasamos de largo” in Spanish, “Lasst uns weiterfahren” in German, and “Il vaut mieux continuer la route” in French, translations that evacuate the illocutionary force of “keep on trucking”<sup>16</sup>, and are typically orthonymic. The punch line, however, is maintained: “*Truckers beware. Always use a condom. Stop the spread of AIDS*” becomes “*Fernfahrer, schützt euch,*” “*Camioneros, tengan cuidado,*” and “*Camionneurs, faites attention.*” Although the meaning of the menacing hyenas may be rather obscure with such non-translation, the final message is clear—and very appropriate to the reality of long-distance truckers in India, South Africa, and other parts of the world who are particularly endangered as victims and carriers of AIDS. In general then, much is omitted or neutralized in translation, and the translations focus on the punch line, the aspects of the text that are most necessary for the message. The humour is carried by the images—the three active, humanoid, condoms, bouncing around on the hard rubber edge of their opening, alert and active, wanting to “live life to the fullest” to use a contemporary cliché.

---

<sup>15</sup> My Persian informant is Daryoush Ghamari, also a translator.

<sup>16</sup> In Persian, the translation is as innocuous. Back-translated into English “Let’s go our own way” and “Truckers, always use a condom.”

As is the case in much multimedia or audiovisual communication, the image carries enormous weight although it can seldom do so without accompanying, clarifying, language (Remael, 2004). However, even the reading of images can require common cultural knowledge, and in multimedia/AV translation this puts an additional strain on the linguistic transfer, often burdening it with an “information overload” (Tymoczko 1995)<sup>17</sup>. In the examples discussed above, this problem might be represented by the pack of hyenas stalking the *Three Amigos* camped out by the roadside. When the line “Don’t get too friendly with the locals” is omitted in the translations, the hyenas suddenly seem superfluous, or simply random; they are an example of the image “overload.” There are doubtless many more such *Three Amigo* images that do not pass easily into languages such as Bengali, Swahili, Somali, Amharic, Mandarin, or Arabic, or into the cultures that use them. Yet, given the animation genre, and the widespread circulation of Anglo-American cartoons in TV series for young people over the past 50 years, there is reason to assume that much can be understood even when the translations are not adequate. While the Hollywood media industry may have affected other cultures negatively, in this case of edutainment via animation, its effect has also been to pave the way for characters such as Stretch, Shaft and Dick to travel relatively easily and lightly.

The glowing accounts of the series from various international HIV/AIDS conferences and journalists, its widespread use by broadcasting agencies in countries as diverse as South Africa and Thailand, its adoption in January 2004 by UNAIDS, and finally its support from Archbishop Desmond Tutu, whose endorsement is used on the publicity blurb, are witness to its success. But perhaps most importantly, a measurable aspect of its impact is a boost in condom sales, as cited at the outset of this piece.

### **The Source Culture Divide**

In translation studies there is often an unspoken assumption that the source culture in which the texts we study originate is a relatively homogeneous whole. Seldom, if ever, are there discussions of the many factions in any source culture, whose divisive presence can affect the creation, production, and dissemination of materials prior to their

---

<sup>17</sup> Tymoczko uses the term “information overload” to refer to the difficulties in translating text from marginalized cultures.

translation. In the case of the *The Three Amigos* and, more generally, of the North American discourse on HIV/AIDS prevention, the source culture divide is enormous.

Committed to condom-use as the best, if not the only, preventative measure for the spread of HIV/AIDS, *The Three Amigos* represent one side of the Western/North American source culture. This is the side that over the past 20-25 years has been plying the public in many parts of the world with safe sex campaigns, sex-education programs in schools, and free condoms. This is also the side that one might describe as “secular,” in the sense that it is concerned with “worldly matters rather than with religion” and “is not under the control of a religious body” (*New Webster’s*, 1987). Indeed, as discussed above, its texts are so secular that, in terms of the translation challenges, they are sometimes extremely neutralized, thus hardly making the transfer into languages/cultures where religious authorities or simply other religio-cultural values play a greater role.

While such nervous translation or simple silencing was expected by the creators of the series who deliberately made a variety of clips for broadcasters to choose from, the de-secularization of the HIV/AIDS prevention discourse and the resulting anti-condom campaign in the Anglo-American source culture (and most importantly, in its largest funding body, the USA) is another, more recent, story. Pioneered in the United States, and now an inherent part of the Bush regime’s HIV/AIDS prevention strategies, the focus has turned from ‘safe sex’ to ‘almost no sex’—or the ABCs of HIV/AIDS prevention: A for abstinence, B for being faithful, and C for consistent condom-use. This focus does not, however, offer even these three options to the various bodies that lobby for HIV/AIDS prevention money worldwide—the NGOs, religious organisms, health agencies, public education organizations, and governmental bodies. PEPFAR (the “President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief 2003”) imposes “abstinence from sexual activity until (heterosexual) marriage” as the most important preventative measure.<sup>18</sup> This means that in order to get *any* funding for communication, education, or information, bodies working in HIV/AIDS prevention must prioritize this message. One youth worker in Uganda comments: “With funding coming in now for youth activities, if you talk about abstinence in your proposal, you will

---

<sup>18</sup> [www.avert.org/pepfar.htm](http://www.avert.org/pepfar.htm), accessed Jan. 25, 2006.

get the money.”<sup>19</sup> Not only has this top funding body prioritized abstinence, it has also created a situation where teaching abstinence on the one hand and condom use on the other is confusing and contradictory, especially for the young people it purports to reach. As a result, the “C” portion (consistent condom-use) has been relegated to a distant third place.

This development has been vehemently criticized by organisms such as Human Rights Watch and UNAID, and been written up in publications such as the New York Review of Books (Epstein 2005), yet the religious and ideological forces behind the politics of abstinence have an interesting upperhand. Helen Epstein describes what she calls the “unseemly battle” over US government contracts waged by evangelical Christian groups against secular HIV/AIDS organizations, and shows what the stakes are. She writes that “with so many people on the verge of death, AIDS has created an evangelism opportunity for the body of Christ unlike any in history” (Epstein 2005). In other words, the religious right, the born-again and evangelists (increasingly in Africa, though funded by their overseas sponsoring churches)<sup>20</sup> are not only imposing their sexual politics on HIV/AIDS prevention campaigns but are looking to benefit from the evangelism opportunity at the same time. One is invited to imagine a situation where the more people fall ill, the more converts will be promised evangelical salvation. Even more dangerously, the discourse within this particular faction and the Bush administration focuses on the “poor” quality of condoms and their untrustworthiness.<sup>21</sup> In the words of some, anyone who teaches and

---

<sup>19</sup> *Human Rights Watch* publication at <http://hrw.org/reports/2005/uganda0305/1.htm>, accessed Jan. 23, 2006. HIV/AIDS journalists also report on numerous African leaders dancing to the new tune from Washington in order to continue receiving funding. See “The United States ‘War on Condoms,’” a *Human Rights Watch* text, <http://hrw.org/backgrounder/hivaids/condoms1204/2.htm>, accessed Jan. 1, 2006.

<sup>20</sup> Kapuściński, Ryszard (2001). *The Shadow of the Sun*, tr. from Polish by Klara Glowcsewska, Knopf, New York/Toronto, pp. 289-290.

<sup>21</sup> Regarding new regulations on HIV/AIDS prevention Doug Ireland in *The Nation* writes, “The [current funding] regs demand that any sex ed[ucation] ‘content’ include information on the ‘lack of effectiveness of condom use’ ... Little will be left of sex ed[ucation] after the regulations’ effects are felt except the failed policy of abstinence—which actually increases unsafe sex.”

supports condom-use is a “killer,” urging young people toward their deaths.

The *Three Amigos* producer, Kharas, has commented drily that “Arguing about abstinence vs condoms ‘is sterile’ because 5.3 million people got the HIV virus last year,” but the series is strongly affected by this socially conservative religious development. Despite having managed to translate the edutainment series into dozens of languages and cultures, the plan to actually have the *Three Amigos* “on TV in 100 countries with \$100 million worth of donated air time so that one billion people can see them”<sup>22</sup> is now being foiled at home, in the very culture where the impetus for the project originated, the culture where the volunteers and the donations were found, and the culture where the genre of animation was so strongly developed that the series was easily globalized.

In Fall 2005 Kharas refused to be interviewed about *The Three Amigos* by *The Economist*, since there are no funds available to finance further dissemination of the series. Requests for the thousands of copies that such an article would elicit—from China, Russia, Eastern Europe, and India—cannot be met. Available monies support abstinence, not the dissemination of safe sex programs and initiatives. In conditions such as these, the details of translation, the focus on the small variations in or occasional censorship of text, and the questions about the relationship between image and words suddenly dim in importance, set as they are in a political and ideological context that is pushing aside the entire initiative, and burying its possible achievements in the sand.

**University of Ottawa**

### **References**

BERMAN, Antoine (1995). *Pour une critique des traductions: John Donne*. Paris, Gallimard.

CARON, Caroline-Isabelle (2003). “Translating Trek: Rewriting an American Icon in a Francophone Context.” *The Journal of American Culture*, Vol. 26, Number 3, pp. 329-355.

---

<sup>22</sup> <http://argus.lakeheadu.ca/news07.htm>

EPSTEIN, Helen (2005). "God and the Fight Against AIDS." *The New York Review of Books*, Vol. 52, no. 7, April 28, 2005. Accessed March 12, 2006. Available at:  
<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/17963>

GOTTLIEB, Henrik (2004). "Anglicisms and TV Subtitles in an Anglified World." (*Multi*)*media Translation*, eds. Yves Gambier and Henrik Gottlieb. Amsterdam, Benjamins, pp. 249-259.

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (2005). "The Less They Know, the Better: Abstinence Only HIV/AIDS Programs in Uganda—Summary." Accessed January 23, 2006. Available at:  
<http://hrw.org/reports/2005/uganda0305/1.htm>

— (2004). "Access to Condoms and HIV/AIDS Information: II. The United States' 'War on Condoms'." Accessed January 1, 2006. Available at:  
<http://hrw.org/backgrounder/hivaids/condoms1204/2.htm>

IRELAND, Doug (2004). "Bush's AIDS Hypocrisy Cons the *NY Times*." *The Nation*, June 30, 2004. Accessed January 23, 2006. Available at:  
<http://www.thenation.com/doc/20040712/ireland>

KAPUŚCIŃSKI, Ryszard (2001). *The Shadow of the Sun*, tr. from Polish by Klara Glowcsewska. New York/Toronto, Knopf.

PEPFAR (President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief), (2003). Accessed January 25, 2006. Available at:  
<http://www.avert.org/pepfar.htm>

REMAEL, Aline (2004). "Some Thoughts on the Study of Multimodal and Multimedia Translation." (*Multi*)*media Translation*, eds. Yves Gambier and Henrik Gottlieb. Amsterdam, Benjamins, pp. 13-23.

SHOUMAROVA, Lina (2005). "Make the condom your amigo and help prevent AIDS." *Concordia's Thursday Report*, Vol. 29, no. 10, February 10, 2005. Accessed March 12, 2006. Available at:  
[http://ctr.concordia.ca/2004-05/feb\\_10/11/](http://ctr.concordia.ca/2004-05/feb_10/11/), accessed.

"Think Local" (2002). *The Economist*, April 11, 2002. Accessed March 31, 2006. Available at:

[http://www.economist.com/displaystory.cfm?story\\_id+1066620](http://www.economist.com/displaystory.cfm?story_id+1066620)

TYMOCZKO, Maria (1995). "The Metonymics of Translating Marginalized Texts." *Comparative Literature*, Winter 1995, pp. 11-21.

**ABSTRACT:** *The (Globalized) Three Amigos: Translating and Disseminating HIV/AIDS Prevention Discourse* — The effects of a translated text are notoriously hard to trace and establish. However, in the case of *The Three Amigos*, a series of short public service announcements on HIV/AIDS prevention that feature three comic figures (animated condoms) and accompany them through numerous adventures in 50 languages, the effects have been hugely successful—measurable in numbers of condoms sold! This article studies some of the translation problems posed by this Canadian production, and examines aspects of the Anglo-American source culture that are now hampering the distribution of this highly successful work. It thus positions translation dissemination as an issue related to source culture policies and politics that may play a bigger role in translation "effects" than a felicitous translation.

**RÉSUMÉ :** (Mondialisation de) *Three Amigos* : traduction et diffusion du discours sur la prévention du VIH/SIDA — Chacun sait qu'il est difficile de déceler et de déterminer les effets engendrés par une traduction. Toutefois, dans le cas de *Three Amigos*, une série de courts messages d'intérêt public sur la prévention du VIH/SIDA qui met en scène trois personnages comiques (des préservatifs animés) et relate leurs nombreuses aventures dans 50 langues, on a amplement réussi à en mesurer les effets... au nombre de préservatifs vendus! Cet article traite de certains des problèmes de traduction qu'a posés cette production canadienne et des aspects de la culture source anglo-américaine qui entravent actuellement la distribution d'un travail très réussi. L'auteure y soutient donc que la diffusion de la traduction est un problème lié aux politiques et à la Politique de la culture source, car il est possible que celles-ci aient davantage de poids sur les « effets » de la traduction que la rigueur de la traduction elle-même.

**Keywords:** translating HIV/AIDS discourse, translating animation, translating wordplay and jokes, translation and source culture politics.

**Mots-clés :** traduction du discours sur le VIH/SIDA, traduction d'un dessin animé, traduction des jeux de mots et des plaisanteries, traduction et politique de la culture source.

**Luise von Flotow: School of Translation and Interpretation,  
University of Ottawa, 70 Laurier Ave. East, Room 519, P.O. Box 450,  
Station A, Ottawa ON K1N 6N5, Canada.  
Email: vonfloto@uOttawa.ca**