

Here's Looking At You, Baby Goat

Outsourcing the subtitling of movies may save costs, but at a price

It's not as if the movie business is any stranger to confusing language, given the habit of the legendary Hollywood producer, Sam Goldwyn, of spitting out sentences such as, "Every director bites the hand that lays the golden egg". But news that movie plotlines are being garbled as a result of their subtitling being outsourced to countries in Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America, where subtitling labour is cheaper to hire than in London, has introduced a fresh brand of bafflement.

As we report today, lines of dialogue such as, "Jim is a Vietnam vet" have been cruelly mis-

translated as "Jim is a veterinarian from Vietnam"; while, "You've got ivory skin" appears in subtitles as, "You've got skin like an elephant."

For foreign-language film auteurs hoping that English versions of their work may land them a three-picture deal in Hollywood, the frustration is considerable. For specialist subtitlers, it is complete. This niche community, which prides itself on conveying all the idiomatic texture of the original with the brutal concision required by film, complains that outsourcing is putting it on the breadline or even out of business.

But for audiences there is the consolation of unintended farce. "Flying into an asteroid field," becomes "flying into a steroid field". "She died in a freak rugby accident" becomes "She died in a rugby match for people with deformities".

Is this simple human incompetence at work, or the overuse of automatic online interpreters? Either way, it is only a matter of time before the new school of subtitling gets its hands on the classics. "Proceed," Clint Eastwood will intone. "Create my day." And Jack Lemmon will round off *Some Like It Hot* with "No-one is very good".