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(ed.)

Diálogos intertextuales 5:
Between Text and Receiver:
Translation and Accessibility
Entre texto y receptor:
traducción y accesibilidad



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Connecting the dots in audiovisual translation research: Translation, reception, accessibility and children

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1. Preliminary reflections

Translation, reception, accessibility, children.

These are the key words which emerge from a survey of the papers gathered in this volume. Three of them appear in the main title and a fourth is easily inferred by taking a look at the book index. These four words highlight a common core, a thread which runs through all fourteen contributions, despite their diverse nature and focus. Moreover, each of these four words points to a vast domain, a wide territory made of theories and practices which willingly lowers its barriers to let in theoretical reflections and practical experiences from other, not necessarily bordering domains.

Encountering the universes these four words evoke is perhaps only possible within the multidimensional, multifaceted and multidisciplinary realm of translation studies, whose ever changing face is reflected in the extremely varied and eclectic publications available on the subject. To mention but one, here follows a short excerpt from *Changing the Terms. Translation in the postcolonial era*, by Sherry Simon and Paul St. Pierre:

The internationalization of networks of translation studies has led to new conversations among scholars from a wide variety of countries. This sudden diversification and true globalization of the field is exciting (2000: 12).

If it is true that the internationalization of translation studies (TS) has given way to unprecedented diversification in terms of research, and its worldwide diffusion has made it a truly global discipline, it is perhaps not so true that such an expansion has been sudden, having roughly occurred over a twenty-year span. However, it has to be noticed that remarks on the internationalization and thematic expansion of TS are often to be found in publications like the one by Simon and St. Pierre, whose conceptual framework is strongly interdisciplinary. It is very often the case, though, that nowadays such remarks appear in most books which offer an overall view of TS and its state of the art. In the very first lines of his recently reviewed version of *Introducing translation studies*, Jeremy

Munday states that TS is by (its) nature “multilingual and multidisciplinary” (2008: 1), a fact, he claims, that makes it difficult to control and survey the amount of publications and reflections devoted to such a discipline.

Over the past decade, translation studies has been passing its multidisciplinary essence onto its offspring, i.e. the sub-disciplines which have stemmed out of it and developed somewhat independently. Among them is audiovisual translation studies (AVTS), undoubtedly one of the fastest developing research areas under the huge umbrella of TS, whose constant growth reflects a parallel, unrelenting increase in the practice of audiovisual translation worldwide. In fact, one of the great merits of research and researchers in audiovisual translation is their observing, discussing, questioning and testing real practices, with meetings and conferences enlivened by a fruitful mixture of professionals and academics.

Having inherited an interdisciplinary dimension from its parent discipline, AVTS has opened up to new inputs from the market but also from a large number of fields of study, thus enhancing its very expansion and establishing strong ties with such areas of research as cognitivism, sociology, cultural studies, and the like. It has also come to encompass new practices and their scientific investigation, as is the case for accessibility and all the language-related activities that it implies. And if accessibility in the USA is studied within psychology, or occasionally engineering¹, in Europe it has carved an increasingly important niche within AVTS, leading the discipline towards unforeseen expansions. The study of accessibility at the European level, to which this volume provides a meaningful contribution, has also had the merit of awakening the conscience of national and supra-national bodies entrusted with the enhancement of accessible services, but also of the national associations gathering people with visual and hearing impairments.

What seems particularly relevant about the recent developments in the study and promotion of accessibility is that it has drawn the attention of a number of countries where accessible audiovisual entertainment was only an occasional luxury until recently (Italy, Poland, Greece) and also that it more and more frequently comes to reflect on, and act in favour of, important sections of the viewing population like children and teenagers.

Children are indeed important, although their approach to the media and their contents are very often neglected. If the output and translation of audiovisual material for children is on the increase, with a proliferating amount of dedicated TV channels as well as animated films in cinemas, when it comes to studying the viewing habits and the needs of this segment of the audience hardly

1 With reference to the technology that is designed and employed to provide accessibility.

any contribution is to be found. And yet it is certainly true that more attention is needed, as Eithne O'Connell points out:

In view of the long hours spent by most children in front of the television screens, in particular, studies of translations produced for children must broaden their scope to include the analysis of screen translation for children as it is currently practised (2006: 22).

This lack of attention is, in all probability, to be ascribed to the stereotyped and superficial view which sees the world of children as simple, one sided and generally unworthy of “serious” investigation. This seems to be especially true of audiovisual products for children, regardless of their increasingly complex nature, narrative structure and ultramodern, computer-generated contents. This lack of attention on the part of the academic community, especially within audiovisual translation studies, seems to recall the carelessness which is at times to be found in the practice of cartoon translation for television in certain countries (see Di Giovanni, 2010), whose observation often highlights a non-systematic, hasty and too literal approach to translation, resulting in an inconsistent and incoherent use of language.

In order to dismantle the superficial, clichéd views described above and, perhaps more significantly, to raise awareness on the inadequacy of certain translation practices for children, I am inclined to believe that a joint effort from academics and practitioners would be the ideal although probably utopian solution. However, embarking on a systematic observation of the strategies and trends applied to the translation of audiovisual texts for children, from different angles and in different countries, would certainly prove a valuable starting point to foster awareness, even on the professional front. Fostering awareness would imply not only attributing the right value to young viewers and the audiovisual products conceived for them, but also bringing to light other important issues related to the growth, education and integration of children within society.

Five of the papers presented in this volume address several of the issues hinted at above, all of them laying a brick towards the foundation of an integrated, multidisciplinary study of audiovisual translation for young viewers. Bringing to the fore the practices of subtitling for the deaf, audio description and dubbing for children, as well as minority language translation of animated products, these papers provide food for thought to all scholars who have considered turning their attention to this very special segment of the viewing population.

Turning attention to the viewers, a basic requirement for all analytical enquiries with a claim to exhaustiveness, is as important when studying texts for children as it is when dealing with those for the general audience. After all, can the audience ever be considered “general”? Can we really generalize when re-

flecting upon the impact of audiovisual texts and the appropriateness of their contents? Can we possibly make comments on translation strategies without having a clear picture of the audience which an original and a translated text appeal to? And can we ignore the fact that the media shape their own audiences but are, in turn, also shaped by the viewers themselves?

Questions like these immediately draw our attention to the notions of reception and receiver, whose importance is more or less evident in all the papers presented in this volume, offering inputs as to how different segments of the viewing population (children, adults, individuals with visual or hearing impairments, etc.) appreciate and understand audiovisual texts. Nonetheless, even though issues of reception are said to be a priority for most scholars in this field, audiovisual translation studies focusing primarily on them are still scanty. In most cases, remarks on reception are to be found towards the end of papers and books, as a sort of exhortation to proceed with further research without really providing any sound reflection or insight. This is all the more paradoxical if we consider the strong ties between reception studies and the observation of the media, their communicative power and their consumption, which is very often mediated by translation. A reason for this lack of a consolidated research path bringing together AVTS and reception studies lies in the undeniable difficulty to identify media audiences². However, difficult though they may be to identify and explain, media audiences are indeed the driving force behind the success or decline of the media themselves; they are a dynamic, increasingly diverse and demanding force, whose specific identity and requirements are also extremely relevant for the translation process.

If no comprehensive investigation of the links between reception studies and AVTS has yet seen the light, a good starting point in this direction is, indeed, provided by studies which encompass socio-cultural reflections, questions of identity and cross-cultural relations in their investigation of audiovisual translation, as is the case for some of the papers in this volume (see Rodríguez; García González and Veiga Díaz). Even more promising are the opportunities which are opened up by research on accessibility, which almost by default requires a thorough consideration of the audience and their needs. On the whole, we could say that boosting reception-oriented approaches would prove beneficial to all areas of investigation within AVTS, as the identity of the audience and the way it is shaped by the *mediation* (Schroeder et al.: 2003) exerted by the media between people's lives and their viewing experiences, is of outmost importance, regardless of the analytical approach or case study which is selected.

2 “Audiences are hard to analyze because, in the first instance, they are difficult to define.” (Ruddock, 2001: 8)

Thus, by drawing attention to reception and its great relevance within the study of audiovisual translation, the circle has been closed around the four concepts which have been said to be at the core of this volume. Concepts which, as outlined above, can enter into countless associations with each other, in research as well as in everyday life. The latter also lend themselves to generating different chains of thought, different lines of investigation, different reflections and analyses. As this volume shows, there is no limit as to how they can be drawn together and tackled by researchers, providing heterogeneous reflections, making use of different methodologies and observing very different case studies, but ultimately (and constructively) contributing to the reinforcement and growth of research activities within a domain which is “acting as a microcosm” (Neves and Remael, 2006: 11), attracting multiple stimuli and adjusting to the ever-changing face of media consumption worldwide.

And if research cannot but follow the development of practice in every context, hard though it may be in situations of rapid, almost uncontrolled expansion, the future of AVTS lies precisely in promoting multifarious (multidisciplinary) approaches like those which are gathered in this volume. They are the only ones which can help define new research avenues and contribute to the building of a solid theoretical framework to support the ever-growing, ever-changing face of media production, translation and reception.

2. The volume

Now that the main concepts at stake have been introduced, I shall proceed to outline the volume’s structure and rationale behind each chapter. Before doing so, however, I wish to point out that the Spanish and English papers have been intentionally juxtaposed in the book’s two sections. This has been done in order to emphasize the thematic rather than linguistic and cultural connections among the contributions; to identify a continuum among them, which leads from comprehensive reflections to more specific analyses.

2.1 Translation and receivers

The first section in the volume is the largest and most eclectic: it features one contribution on the translation of contemporary literary works whose structure recalls that of film narratives, two papers on screen translation, one on film translation, two on dubbing and one on subtitling. It follows a path which covers the most important issues, strategies, methodologies and techniques relevant for