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Areas and Methods of Audiovisual Translation Research



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CHAPTER ONE

TAXONOMISING AUDIOVISUAL TRANSLATION

Toward appropriate nomenclature and categorisation

Although the genre under scrutiny here has thus far been referred to as “audiovisual translation”, the terminology still appears to be in a state of flux. “Film translation”, a term also commonly used outside academic and scholarly circles, is self-explanatory, but it narrows down the scope of research to films, leaving out other audiovisual material that could potentially constitute the source text. Other names include “screen translation” (used in the name of the association ESIST⁶, but excluding surtitling for the stage), “language transfer” (see Díaz-Cintas and Anderman 2009; note that the term itself has a much broader meaning in second language acquisition), “versioning” (now used predominantly in information technology and practically absent from literature in audiovisual translation), “constrained translation” (Mayoral et al. 1988; misleading, since it may be a tautology, as according to some approaches [e.g. Zabalbeascoa 1997: 330] all translation is constrained by definition; see also the discussion on norms in chapter three), and “(multi)media translation” (Gambier and Gottlieb 2001). Throughout this work, we will refer to the genre under analysis as “audiovisual translation”, as this particular term seems to have been adopted by most scholars researching film translation. Furthermore, it highlights the multisemiotic nature of the audiovisual text and the multisensory nature of its reception.

Zabalbeascoa (2008: 34) notices that “neat compartmentalisation (i.e. typologies and classifications with uncrossable, everlasting, unmovable dividing lines) is almost completely out of the question given the constant progress of technology and social dynamics.” Audiovisual translation is no longer restricted to providing foreign language versions of feature films but has expanded to include sitcoms, animated productions (including cartoons), documentaries, commercial clips, corporate video material and (partially) video game localisation. Its development, enhanced by technological headway, will certainly continue to be dynamic as well as largely unpredictable. Just as translation scholars centuries or even only decades ago had no way of predicting the massive semantic and semiotic expansion of the source text concept, now including mobile phone interfaces, video game contents and websites, translation scholars now cannot hope to imagine how translation will evolve and how long the current translation terminology will continue to be relevant. The increasing popularity of 3D technology alone may soon bring audiovisual translation to previously unimagined dimensions (pun not intended) and perhaps make it lose its name altogether.

6 European Association for Studies in Screen Translation, www.esist.org.

It is not only that the future headway of audiovisual translation cannot be adequately predicted, though; the state of the art with respect to audiovisual translation types is also debatable and compromises are inevitable. This work, for example, includes live subtitling among audiovisual translation types, but stops short of investigating interpreting under the same umbrella (see below), though technically live subtitling as respeaking is very similar to shadowing (repeating the original input) in simultaneous interpreting (though interpreting is interlingual, as opposed to live subtitling, there are many similarities in terms of process and skills).

Traditionally, translating audiovisual material is done by supplementing the original with captions in the target language (captioning, or much more frequently subtitling) or replacing (or drowning out) the original dialogue with a translation (revoicing, usually made to be diegetic, that is as if coming from a source visible on screen, usually actors) read out by professional voice talents. A nondiegetic variation of revoicing based on so-called Gavrilov translation, whereby the translation is superimposed on the original, remains the third most popular technique of audiovisual transfer, despite its limited spread (chiefly Poland and other post-Soviet-bloc countries). Subtitling and dubbing (ostensibly diegetic revoicing⁷) have already received ample consideration in the literature on audiovisual translation. For this reason, the present volume does not aim at a coursebook-style inventory of the dominant modes (though “dominance” is relative, as the interest of researchers does not always correspond with the number of viewers, and vice-versa). Voice-over is also not described, because, as the main mode of audiovisual transfer on television, it is endemic to former Eastern Bloc countries, especially Russia and Poland. This chapter departs from a cursory look at how the two best-described types of audiovisual translation were treated in early literature on film translation, proceeds to discuss voice-over and then launches into a comprehensive treatment of the more recent (and less familiar) kinds of audiovisual transfer.

In lieu of a historical perspective: dubbing and subtitling in audiovisual translation research

Many theoretical courses on translation estimate the birth of translation studies as an academic discipline at around 1960, concurrent with such publications as Jakobson (1959) or Nida (1964), but acknowledge that writing on the nature of translation started much earlier. Similarly, it is generally believed that academic writing on subtitling and dubbing started only at the turn of the 1990s (Bakewell 1987; Delabastita 1989; Gottlieb 1992; Ivarsson 1992; Luyken and Herbst 1991;

7 Baker and Hochel (1998: 96) make a distinction between dubbing and revoicing (the latter comprising voice-over, narration and free commentary).

Mayoral et al. 1988; Tomaszekiewicz 1993; Whitman-Linsen 1992); however, earlier publications must not be overlooked, notably Dollerup 1974, Marleau 1982 and Laks 1957 (arguably the first comprehensive text devoted to subtitling, albeit never published). Additionally, certain early publications on the language of film are relevant to film translation (Fodor 1969). Even earlier, the very conception of dubbing spurred some debate (see Yampolsky 1993 for a discussion of Artaud's article "Les souffrances du 'dubbing'" dating back to 1933 and Borges's essay from 1945).

Early research into (chiefly) subtitling and dubbing was marred by the lack of a sufficiently broad paradigm; ostensibly positioned between translation and adaptation, audiovisual transfer did not appear to be an attractive area of study. Whitman-Linsen (1992: 17) expressed her criticism of "literary intelligentsia, who seem to dismiss film translating and the degree of difficulty involved in it as not worthy of their attention." Díaz-Cintas (2004a: 51) observes that this has resulted in scholars unwilling to devote themselves to "complicating their academic life with the re-elaboration of existing postulates or the development of new theories capable of accounting for the specificity of AVT."

The research difficulties on the theoretical plane were only exacerbated by practical cumbrousness. Scrutinising material recorded on a VHS tape was considerably more difficult and time-consuming than in the contemporary digital era. Furthermore, the dissemination and consequent impact of audiovisual material were a far cry from today's standards.

For the reasons indicated above, subtitling and dubbing researchers concentrated on characterising both modes, usually separately, trying to establish relevant norms and present appropriate constraints, applying principles and concepts of general translation studies to revoicing and captioning (for example, Gottlieb [1994: 265] makes parallels between the criteria for appropriate interlingual subtitling and Nida's principle of equivalent effect). Many early publications were in fact guidelines for film translators, presenting the linguistic transfer of audiovisual products as a new craft (Luyken and Herbst 1991; Ivarsson 1992; and later Ivarsson and Carroll 1998; Dries 1995). Naturally, this does not detract in any way from the quality and usefulness of these publications; however, they were written chiefly by professionals for would-be professionals, concentrating on the technical aspects of film translation, e.g. the positioning and length of subtitles, frequently from a prescriptive stance. Many of these works contained elitist overtones, presenting audiovisual translation as a difficult enterprise that only a few can master (this can be observed in the subtitle of Ivarsson's book: *A Handbook of an Art*; see also Díaz-Cintas 2004a: 58). Among the scarce works that positioned audiovisual transfer in a broader semiotic perspective were Delabastita (1989) and de Linde and Kay (1999).

Voice-over: the orphan child of audiovisual translation

Despite attempts at introducing Polish subtitles for televised programmes and the common practise of providing English captions to Polish soaps on channels targeting Polish immigrants, Polish television remains a stronghold of voice-over, a practice treated by foreigners with “a slight sneer of disdain” (Szarkowska 2009: 185). Some professionals (e.g. BTI studios) restrict the term “voice-over” to factual, non-fictional genres such as documentaries, corporate videos, interviews, news, current affairs programmes, and bonus tracks on DVDs (see also Franco et al. 2010) and prefer to use “lectoring” to describe the practise that is said to have originated from Gavrilov translation, which consists of a single voice⁸ reading out the audible translation on top of the original, fainter dialogue. The official Polish term for this procedure is “wersja lektorska”, the jargon name being “szeptanka” (the latter may, however, be confused with a type of simultaneous interpreting called whispering, or “le chuchotage” in French). Despite the terminological conundrum, the mode of screen translation preponderant on Polish television will henceforth be referred to as voice-over.

There are parallels between voice-over and dubbing; Gambier (2003) speaks of half-dubbing to refer to what is commonly known as voice-over. The latter should not be confused with narration, though there are obvious similarities (cf. Luyken et al. 1991). Gambier (1996: 9) notes that while narration is a text read out by a professional voice talent, voice-over is used for film dialogues, therefore exhibiting features of simultaneous interpreting (see Gavrilov translation above, originally performed by Soviet simultaneous interpreters). Thus narration should be seen as a variety of voice-over, but used for monologues, e.g. in documentaries. Interestingly, while voice-over versions of film dialogues are performed by male voice talents in Poland, narration is typically done by females, a paragon being Krystyna Czubówna, the award-winning TV presenter. Narration may be more condensed and less faithful to the original than voice-over. An even less faithful and less formal type of audiovisual translation is free commentary. The present work will not consider these two techniques, as they do not seem to exhibit technical or methodological concerns other than the main modes described here in detail.

Eliana Franco (quoted in Orero 2009: 133) raises a valid point when she remarks that the terminological confusion is due to the fact that the nomenclature originally comes from the discipline of film studies, “whose concepts do not imply

8 In Russia, the translation of dialogue spoken by male actors is delivered by a male voice, while a female voice reads the Russian version of dialogue performed by actresses.

any translating activity.”⁹ From an Eastern European perspective, Woźniak (2011: 383) notes that “the Polish equivalent ‘wersja lektorska’ is in this regard a more lucid term, but it is not applicable to all types of voice-over translations, for instance the strategies used in Russia and Ukraine” (translation mine).

Poland was predominantly a dubbing country between the end of WW2 and the late 1980s (the tradition was seriously hampered by the tragic demise of arguably the most famous dubbing director, Zofia Dybowska-Aleksandrowicz, who was murdered in her apartment in 1989), but is now recognised as a paragon of voice-over. The popularity of voice-over on Polish television is remarkable. In the 1990s, according to a Canal Plus poll (Bogucki, 2004: 69), it was favoured by 50.2% of Polish respondents. Garcarz (2007: 131) quotes a more recent poll, whereby the modality is equated with dubbing in terms of popularity (approximately 45% each). Some Polish DVD releases of foreign box office hits are still advertised as having the Polish voice-over version as added value (Chmiel 2010: 124). In 2008, the Polish daily newspaper *Dziennik*, supported by high-ranking government officials and cinema directors, including world-famous Academy Award nominee Agnieszka Holland, promoted the eradication of voice-over. Consequently, a nationwide public TV station announced the introduction of subtitles¹⁰. However, four years later no significant changes in this respect are observable on Polish television. Incidentally, this self-perpetuance seems to characterise all audiovisual translation modalities; Mera (1999: 73) observes that “over-exposure to one or other technique affirms its acceptability and continued use.”

One type of audiovisual medium where interlingual subtitles are used increasingly frequently on Polish television are commercials. Here, the choice of the audiovisual translation mode depends on the intended target audience and, to borrow a popular translation term, the *skopos* of the given commercial clip. In a recent bank campaign¹¹, one of Poland’s most popular actors, Piotr Fronczewski, advertises a new deposit. To the viewers’ surprise, and to his own acted disbelief, he is speaking Czech rather than Polish. Since the intended absurdity of the commercial would fall flat if the translation mode was voice-over, subtitling is used. Admittedly, this is an instance of pseudotranslation, as there is no actual translation as such, only a clever marketing technique. This term is the

9 However, links between film studies and translation studies are being established, not necessarily in direct connection with film translation. Cattrysse (2011) makes parallels between Descriptive Translation Studies and Descriptive Adaptation Studies, discussing screenwriting in Toury’s normative framework.

10 Source: newspaper article dated August 5th, 2008, available online at: <http://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl/wydarzenia/artykuly/127212,typ-odpowiada-beda-napisy-zamiast-lektora.html>.

11 Getin Bank; sample available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EgeX2b8hWU8>, accessed on November 28th, 2012.

opposite of what Pym (2010: 76) labels “assumed” translation, a theoretical concept rooted in the Descriptive Translation Studies approach (Toury 1995), an offshoot of the philosophical discussion of what makes a translation a translation. Toury (1995: 33-35) explains that an assumed translation implies the existence of a source text, a transfer (the process of translation) as well as a relationship between the assumed translation and its assumed original. In the case of the Czech dialogue in the commercial, the three postulates do not hold good.

Beyond the triad

The two factors that have made the traditional triad of subtitling, dubbing and voice-over insufficient as a taxonomy of audiovisual translation are (a) massive technological development, and (b) the trend to make audiovisual content accessible for a broader range of viewers, including handicapped ones. For example, out of 73 papers delivered at the 2011 Krakow conference “Points of view in audiovisual translation”, 15 were devoted to audiodescription for the blind, 8 focussed on subtitling for the deaf and the hard of hearing, 11 concerned state-of-the-art technological advances in audiovisual translation, while 3 papers described the somewhat elitist practice of opera and theatre surtitling. Thus half the presentations did *not* in fact concern subtitling, dubbing or voice-over in the traditional sense. The proportions seem to be similar at other events of this type.

The following subsections will concentrate on the less documented varieties of audiovisual translation. Aspects of subtitling, dubbing and voice-over pertinent to the discussion in hand will be presented in later sections.

Accessibility - audiodescription and subtitles for the deaf and the hard of hearing

A particularly strong movement in audiovisual translation is accessibility, understood as making audiovisual content accessible to those who otherwise could not have access to it (Díaz-Cintas 2005: 5), that is primarily people with sensory impairments. According to prof. Davis of the British MRC Institute of Hearing Research, the total number of hearing-impaired people will exceed 700 million by 2015 (90 million in Europe alone) and 900 million by 2025¹². The WHO puts the number of visually impaired people at about 284 million¹³. It must be noted, though, that there are different categories of hearing loss and visual impairment, from mild to profound, only some of which prohibit reception of audiovisual material. Additionally, most impaired people live in developing countries with poor

12 <http://www.hear-it.org/page.dsp?area=134>, accessed on August 24, 2011.

13 <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs282/en>, accessed on August 24, 2011.

health services (and limited access to media texts). However, even in the developed world, which is the default collective recipient of audiovisual material, the issue concerns an increasingly significant percentage of the population. The wordplay in audiodescribers' jargon, referring to the blind and the partially-sighted as VIPs, that is visually-impaired people (Chmiel and Mazur 2012: 59) is a subtle hint at the importance of accessibility.

Accessibility in Europe is guaranteed by applicable laws. The European audiovisual policy is based on the 1989 "Television without frontiers" directive (Council Directive 89/552/EEC¹⁴), which was amended in 1987 and several times since then. A major amendment took place in 2007, whereby the directive assumed a new name, viz. the "Audiovisual media services" directive (2007/65/EC). In line with EU legislation, the Polish parliament amended the 1992 bill on radio and television services¹⁵. The amended version, effective as of January 1st, 2012, introduces, among other changes, Article 18a, which stipulates that accessibility of audiovisual material to the hearing- or vision-impaired must be provided for at least 10% of airtime. The written declaration 099/2007 on the subtitling of all public-service television programmes in the European Union (incidentally, put forward by a Polish MP, Lidia Geringer de Oedenberg), is another small step in the direction of EU-wide accessibility.

EFHOH (the European Federation of Hard of Hearing People) has published a report under the title "State of subtitling access in EU 2011"¹⁶. The conclusion of the document is that deaf and hard of hearing Europeans are still deprived of access to audiovisual products. EFHOH members claim that many Member States are ignoring the AVMSD (directive 2007/65/EC, see above). Thus, EFHOH calls for granting the deaf and the hard of hearing full access to media via subtitling by the year 2020.

The two main types of accessibility are audiodescription for the visually-impaired and subtitling for the d/Deaf¹⁷ and the hard of hearing. Audiodescription and subtitling for the deaf¹⁸ are particularly prominent in English-speaking countries (Díaz-Cintas and Anderman 2009: 6) and seem to be the focus of audiovisual translation-oriented research in these countries, since audiences there are in little need of interlingual audiovisual transfer. Those scholars who include

14 http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/audiovisual_and_media/l24101_en.htm.

15 2011 Journal of Laws Nr 43, item 226, with amendments.

16 <http://www.efhoh.org/subtitling/>.

17 A distinction is usually made between deaf people who live among and integrate with the hearing majority, and Deaf people whose mother tongue is sign language (see e.g. Neves 2008).

18 For the sake of readers' convenience, the name of the audiovisual translation modality in question will henceforth be abbreviated; the common acronym (SDH) will not be used, as acronyms are avoided wherever possible throughout this work; also, an alternative acronym (SDHH) is in use.

interpreting among audiovisual translation types (see below) mention a third kind of accessibility, viz. sign language interpreting. All of the above are listed in Article 18a of the aforementioned regulation. In Poland, sign language interpreting has received little attention from audiovisual translation researchers, but a fair share of criticism from the target audiences, who complain that it makes use of an artificial system called Signed Polish instead of the more common Polish Sign Language and that the sign language translator is allotted too little space on the screen (Szarkowska 2009: 198).

Audiodescription was conceptualised in the USA in the 1960s, researched in the 1970s, and finally implemented in the 1980s (Snyder 2008: 191-192). It took longer to appear in Europe. The Polish community of visually-impaired viewers had to wait until 2006 to watch the first audiodescribed movie at a cinema in Białystok. This resulted in other screenings featuring live audiodescription and finally in recorded audiodescribed versions. The DVD release of Andrzej Wajda's 2007 film *Katyń* was the first Polish production to have recognised the need for accessibility, as it features both an audiodescription track and subtitles for the deaf.

Audiodescription tends to be prepared by a team of at least two, preferably three people, one of whom is blind. Such teams are in fact common in audiovisual translation; voice-over versions also require collaboration between different professionals, each of whom is responsible for either translating, editing or delivery. It is deemed that two sighted describers complement each other, as "two people who watch the same scene will not always see the same things" (Benecke 2004: 79). Audiodescription is a three-stage process. First, the media to be audiodescribed are decoded. Then the authoring phase begins, whereby the script is created and the commentary recorded, with appropriate timecodes. Finally, the description is orally delivered from the script¹⁹.

Audiodescription consists of "transforming visual images into words, which are then spoken during the silent intervals in audiovisual programmes or live performances" (Díaz-Cintas 2008: 7). Benecke (2004: 78) notes that it "describes the action, body language, facial expressions, scenery and costumes. The description fits in between the dialogue and does not interfere with important sound and music effects." Audiodescribers strive to objectively describe the picture, rather than provide their own interpretation of it (however, it must be borne in mind that the picture itself is the director's interpretation of reality). Audiodescription is selective by definition - the time constraints mean that the audiodescriber must decide which elements of the picture are relevant. Common errors in audiodescription include overinterpretation, revealing the plot and using complex structures or compound sentences.

Audiodescription is prepared according to industry standards, the best-known of which is arguably the Independent Television Commission Guidance on

¹⁹ See www.starfish.tv for a complete description.