# Dubbing, Film and Performance

## Uncanny Encounters

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# Introduction

Popular culture TV series and films reach millions of people and are usually remembered through their main characters. However, as they travel the world in translation, audiences may perceive these very same characters differently even though the images remain the same. The premise of this monograph is my deep conviction that translation is a complex multi-layered process that has an impact on the way fictional characters are presented to their new audiences. Specifically, my point of entry is characterization: the way characters are created and presented in original and translated texts in an audiovisual context. I am particularly fascinated by audiovisual texts, which prove complex to deal with in translation owing to the fact that elements from various channels need to be taken into consideration; translators have to navigate both images and sounds, including words.

Characterization in the framework of Film Studies refers to the way characters are created on-screen through features such as actors' performance, voice quality, facial expressions, gestures, camera angles and soundtrack (Dyer 1979/1998). This book will investigate how characterization and performance (including voice quality, facial expressions and gestures) are intrinsically linked and show how dubbing affects performance. My main interest is in voice, since in dubbing the original actors' voices are replaced by new ones from the target culture. Film Studies and Audiovisual Translation Studies have seen little discussion of actors' voices as an integral part of their identity and of the way actors use language, i.e. their idiolect. Therefore, the primary goal of this monograph is to raise further awareness of the multimodality of the translation process and demonstrate how important it is to consider the above-mentioned aspects in original texts and in translation.

Audiovisual Translation is arguably the most widespread mode of translation: foreign movies and television series or programmes reach us through translation every day. However, less research has been done in this field in comparison to other genres (such as literary translation). Research

started in the late 1980s with an emphasis on the media constraints inherent in dubbing and subtitling and the relative merits of these two modes of translation; it also focused on the search for norms or conventions that operate when translating into the target culture. Various studies have addressed issues such as the translation of ideological and cultural elements and the translation of humour. However, only a limited number of studies have looked into the presentation of characters, i.e. characterization and the potential impact of translation on characterization. This monograph therefore intends to fill this gap by investigating performance in the context of Audiovisual Translation and suggesting a new line of development in Audiovisual Translation research that has the potential to galvanize further studies and inspire other scholars and academics.

In this monograph specifically, I elaborate a methodological tool for studying characterization through performance in audiovisual texts by means of acoustic (or oral) and visual analysis. My two principal objectives are to delve into an area that, so far, has been overlooked in Translation Studies – characterization and performance shifts in Audiovisual Translation – and to foster a new line of research that will be instrumental in the analysis of audiovisual material, using a multimodal approach focusing on elements from both acoustic and visual channels.

The material chosen for investigation is the popular culture series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003) and its dubbed French version. Through close analysis of shifts in performance between the original and dubbed versions, I will seek to establish which visual and oral (including linguistic) elements of a narrative audiovisual product need to be taken into account when investigating possible translation-induced characterization shifts. This meticulous analysis shall show the extent to which dubbing affects the portrayal of characters by identifying shifts in the presentation of these characters and any possible patterns in the translation strategies applied.

When looking at characterization and performance, I am ultimately interested in the 'feel' of the text, i.e. the fictional universe presented in the text and how this is conveyed in translation. In Bosseaux (2007), I developed a model that uses linguistic elements derived from Systemic Functional Grammar (markers of deixis, transitivity and modality) to identify how point of view is manifested in the original and shifted in translation. This

work has been crucial to my understanding of the complexity of the translation process. However, as I had been dealing with novels, my main consideration was the linguistic aspect of translation. In this present monograph on audiovisual material, I will be focusing primarily on elements from the acoustic and visual channels. This is not to say that the linguistic component is not important; given that we are also dealing with words, there will have to be a linguistic consideration. However, many AVT studies have overplayed the role of linguistics in AV translation, and my work shall be seen as an attempt to counterbalance the current situation. Linguistic elements will therefore be incorporated, where appropriate, with the acoustic/oral and visual analysis. My emphasis is on non-linguistic codes of film, or what Chaume calls the 'signifying codes of cinematographic language' (2004b: 16), i.e. elements of non-verbal communication and how these elements interact to create characterization. Although these features have been explored in studies of characterization in the area of Film and Television Studies (e.g. Branigan 1984, Dyer 1979/1998, and Klevan 2005), it is fair to say that this is a topic which remains under-researched.

This monograph thus presents a comparative study which aims to pinpoint significant differences between the original and translated texts by comparing the original with its dubbed version(s). I will conduct two case studies focusing on the way the protagonists come across in the original and dubbed versions, first by looking at scenes from the original deemed representative of the characters' personas and then comparing these to the dubbed French version. My ultimate goal is to add to the existing research in Audiovisual Translation by highlighting further the complexity of the translation process for AV texts, with a specific focus on dubbing.

## Outline

In the first three chapters, I shall present and define what is meant by performance and characterization in audiovisual material. I will review works from various fields, including Film Studies, Performance Studies

and Audiovisual Translation Studies, in order to contextualize my model for analysing audiovisual material in translation. In Chapter 1, the notion of *mise-en-scène* and its various elements will be examined. In Chapter 2, characterization will be defined further and linked to performance. In Chapter 3, my emphasis will be on voice and identity specifically, since in dubbing the actors' original voices are replaced by new ones. This chapter ends with a discussion of the effect dubbing can be said to have on viewers. It is in this section that I introduce Sigmund Freud's concept of the uncanny (1919) and apply it to dubbing, thereby contextualising further my method for analysing original and dubbed products.

In Chapter 4, I will introduce my multimodal model. When looking at characterization and performance, I primarily consider the universe presented in the audiovisual text and how this is conveyed in translation. The model is composed of non-linguistic codes of film and focuses on how these elements interact to create characterization and performance. These elements manifest themselves in aspects of performance such as speech delivery, voice characteristics, kinesics (facial expressions and gestures), proxemics and paralinguistics, as well as camera angles, lighting and soundtrack, all of which have a direct effect on how characters are portrayed. As words have been over-emphasized in previous AVT studies, it is the audio and visual elements that will be given prominence; however, linguistic elements will still be integrated into the acoustic presentation. Since visual elements such as facial expressions and gestures remain intact in translation, it is all the more important to consider how these dimensions interact with verbal dialogues given that we are dealing with an audio *and* visual product; a polysemiotic whole in which the image cannot be dissociated from the dialogue. Specific constraints attached to dubbing will be incorporated into the analysis, along with institutional constraints, cultural traditions and policies regarding audiovisual translation.

Chapter 5 introduces the material chosen for the case studies. My innovative multimodal approach will be used to analyse a corpus composed of selected scenes from the popular culture series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Joss Whedon 1997–2003) and its dubbed French version. As we shall see, *Buffy* has been praised for, among other things, its construction of believable characters and its creative language, 'Buffyspeak', characterized

by neologisms, humour and slang. Another aspect of 'Buffyspeak' worthy of investigation in translation is the recurrent use of British English as opposed to American English, as the show features two British characters whose characterization is primarily based on accent, vocabulary and cultural differences. The dubbing of *Buffy* into French provides interesting material for researching characterization, given that accents, voice and vocabulary tend to undergo changes in translation. Three characters from the series have been chosen for investigation: Buffy, Spike and Giles. The corpus will be analysed to highlight 'the factors contributing to the many-faceted meaning-making whole, as the various semiotic modalities are seen to operate in unison' (Taylor 2003: 195). Specific features of performance will be identified, including voice characteristics and vocabulary choices related to (for instance) Britishness, as well as non-verbal behaviour such as facial expressions. My qualitative analytical method will aim to uncover how these elements have been treated in translation, e.g. whether they are removed, reflected or reinforced, thereby leading to a change in characterization.

The final chapter, Chapter 6, presents the model in practice. The comparative study sets out to discover differences in characterization through performance between the original and dubbed versions. When analysing the corpus, the focus will be on the way the protagonists come across in the original and dubbed versions by comparing scenes from the original with those from the French version. These examples will be analysed with an emphasis on the interaction between the visual and oral channels. In my analysis of the scenes, I will comment on the visual image, kinesic action and soundtrack, emphasizing the interplay of paralinguistic features, kinesics, voice and linguistic elements used to create and portray characters. Voice quality, paralinguistic features, facial expressions, gestures and vocabulary will be analysed to show how these dimensions interact and create meaning. The first case study considers an excerpt from *Buffy*'s musical episode, with the emphasis on the function of songs as an important part of the series' narrative. The second case study shall investigate performance in normal or 'pure' film dialogues, with a particular focus on Britishness and accents as well as paralinguistic features (e.g. tone of voice) and visual elements (e.g. gestures and facial expressions).

Before exploring the theoretical material on which my understanding of translation, characterization and performance is based, I would like to emphasize the transdisciplinary aspect of my work. In order to conceptualise dubbing and performance and create a method to analyse characterization in originals and dubbed AV texts, I have relied on works from various fields, including Film Studies, Theatre Studies, Television Studies, Audiovisual Translation Studies, and Sound Studies. This has made the research process a rich and complex one, and I hope that researchers and readers in all of these areas will find my work intellectually stimulating.