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Experiencing Translated Media

Why Audience Research Needs Translation Studies

Abstract

Audience research has a long tradition in media studies. Many audience studies focus on translated materials, particularly television programmes broadcast in different countries. The research is thus often conducted on viewers whose experiences have been shaped by a translation. However, questions of translation often play only a marginal role. Some studies do not mention translation at all, while others dismiss it as a transparent rewording of the original. From the perspective of translation studies, this is problematic, because the translation is never a simple word-for-word rendering of the source text. Translations inevitably change the media text and become an integral factor in shaping the audience's experience. In recent years, reception research has gained increased attention within translation studies, particularly in audiovisual translation. Such studies offer insights that could be useful for media studies. This article will discuss the potential for an outward turn in reception research within translation studies. Focusing on audiovisual translation, it will present research conducted within media studies and translation studies to see how the two disciplines can complement each other and, particularly, how translation research can inform media studies and encourage more critical, conscious approaches towards translated materials.

Keywords: audiovisual translation, subtitling, media studies, audience research, reception

1 Introduction

Audience research is a well-established part of media studies. It investigates how audiences relate to cultural products such as popular literature, television programmes, news or, more recently, online content and social media (Das 2017, 1258–1260). One prominent topic in audience research has been the international reach of popular culture, and how audiences in different cultural contexts receive cultural products (for recent examples, see Stehling et al. 2016). In other words, a noticeable part of audience research in media studies, including some well-known classics (e.g. Ang 1985; Liebes and Katz 1993), focus on materials that have been translated or that include a translation, such as subtitles in a television programme. Thus, a great deal of audience research has been conducted on viewers whose viewing experiences have been shaped by a translation.

Questions of translation often play only a marginal role in international and transnational audience studies. Some studies do not mention translation at all, while others dismiss it as a transparent rewording of the original. Furthermore, the fact that there are several methods of audiovisual translation is not addressed. The two most prominent methods of audiovisual translation, subtitling and dubbing, result in an obviously different audiovisual product: when watching a subtitled programme, the viewer receives the translated content in written format and has access to the original spoken dialogue as well, while dubbing replaces the source-language dialogue with a spoken translation that mimics the original through synchronisation. In addition, a third audiovisual translation technique, voice-over, provides a spoken translation but acknowledges the presence of the source language by leaving it faintly audible in the background (for more discussion on categories of audiovisual translation, see Pérez-González

2014, 15–23). Each of these methods requires different translation strategies, which result in different verbal content, in addition to the different audiovisual effect generated by the different formats. Therefore, the experience of the audience is different depending on the translation method they encounter.

The lack of attention to translations in media studies has been noted by Giseline Kuipers (2015, 987), who points out that despite widespread interest in transnational flows of media texts, ‘this vast literature all but ignores the fact that cultural products are often translated and adapted to reach international audiences.’ From the perspective of translation studies, this invisibility of translation leaves a noticeable gap in audience research. Translation shapes what the audience sees, hears and interprets, and the translator’s creative decisions are consequential in terms of the resulting media text. As Kuipers (2015, 1010) remarks, ‘translations are inevitably filtered through the values and standards of the translator,’ and translators act as ‘national mediators in a global field.’ Translation is not a neutral activity, and translation studies makes us aware of the need to address translation when discussing reception.

In this article, I will discuss the potential for an outward turn in reception research within translation studies. Focusing on audiovisual translation, I will compare the research conducted within media studies and translation studies to see how the two disciplines could complement each other and, particularly, how translation research could inform media studies and encourage more critical, conscious approaches towards translations. Most of the studies quoted below relate to subtitled materials, but many of the fundamental points about the significance of translation are equally relevant to other methods of audiovisual translation. I will begin by introducing examples of audience research within media studies. Then, I will discuss reception research in translation studies and explore the similarities and differences between the approaches taken in media studies and translation studies. Finally, I will suggest some ways for translation studies to complement media studies research by making it more aware of the translated texts it is exploring.

2 Audience Research in Media Studies: International Audiences and Cultural Contexts

Media studies is interested in how cultural products cross national and cultural boundaries and how audiences interact with cultural products that originate in cultures that are not their own. However, when this boundary crossing takes place, another boundary that is typically crossed is a linguistic one, but that is more rarely addressed in these studies. It appears that in much of audience research, the focus is on culture as an overall concept that is kept separate from language. John Denton (2007, 27–28) has noted this scarcity of critical attention to language and translation within media studies. He proposes that translation studies needs more empirical reception research on audiovisual translations, and adds that ‘one would expect there to be countless opportunities for inter-disciplinary cross-fertilization.’ In the decade since the publication of Denton’s article, there has, indeed, been a surge of reception research on audiovisual translations, providing a wealth of information on the audiences of translated audiovisual products (see Di Giovanni and Gambier [eds] 2018). Could this emerging translation studies perspective on reception uncover something that prevailing approaches in

audience research have not been able to address? How relevant is translation for audience research, and is there a need for the kind of cross-fertilization suggested by Denton? In the following, I will discuss examples of audience studies, both established classics and more recent examples, where translation is either not present at all or is briefly mentioned but not integrated into the analysis. My objective is to explore whether attention towards translation may have contributed something useful to media studies research contexts.

2.1 Invisible Translations

There are examples of the invisibility of translations both in the most iconic audience studies and in recent research. One example is a classic of audience research, Ien Ang's (1985) *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination*. The data of the study consists of letters Ang solicited from viewers of *Dallas* through a Dutch women's magazine. Ang states that she received forty-two letters, but she does not mention their language, or whether they are from viewers of a translated version of *Dallas* (Ang 1985, 10). Because the letter was published in a Dutch magazine, it is plausible that the letters were from Dutch viewers who had viewed the programme in translation, most likely with subtitles, but that fact does not enter into Ang's analysis. In fact, Ang's analysis occasionally comes across as if *Dallas* is equally available to viewers around the world without any intermediaries (see, e.g., Ang 1985, 19–20). Ang's (1985: 10) overall objective is to analyse 'what it can mean to watch *Dallas*.' Thus, she does not claim to study readings of the *Dallas* text, but even in studying how viewers experience *Dallas*, the translation must play a role, and a viewer's emotional engagement can certainly be influenced by it.

A more recent example of the invisibility of translation can be found in Flora Tsapovsky and Paul Frosh's (2015) study on the experience of nostalgia through the television show *Mad Men* in Israel. The purpose of the study is to investigate how an American media text can evoke the feeling of nostalgia in an Israeli audience. Tsapovsky and Frosh (2015, 785) conceptualise nostalgia as viewers' 'response to media texts.' While this sense of nostalgia can be evoked by visual and auditive stimuli, it is also tied to the verbal text, and therefore influenced by the translation. For example, if we think of nostalgia as a longing for a past time and for a distant location, relying on 'global distribution of national lexicons of nostalgic motifs and signs' (Tsapovsky and Frosh 2015, 786), the nostalgic motifs and signs are, in part, based on verbal expressions, such as locally and temporally specific language, or cultural references evoking a specific time and place. It is therefore relevant how these linguistic expressions of nostalgia are translated. If nostalgic language is translated into contemporary Hebrew, can it evoke the same kind of nostalgia in Israeli viewers as the English dialogue does in American viewers? Or, if the viewers watched the programme with subtitles, would the presence of an added textual element have affected their ability to feel nostalgia? Tsapovsky and Frosh do not mention translation, and thus do not account for the possibility of the translation having an effect on the viewers' experience. They mention that the study participants were 'excellent English speakers' (Tsapovsky and Frosh 2015, 789), but it is not clear whether this is assumed to have an effect on their viewing experience, such as meaning that they would have followed the English

dialogue rather than subtitles. They do mention that one study participant talked about having watched one season of the show in New York, presumably without a translation (Tsapovsky and Frosh 2015, 792). They remark that the location had an effect on how this individual experienced the show, but the lack of translation is overlooked as a potential explanatory factor. Like Ang, Tsapovsky and Frosh thus appear to assume that the target audience consumes exactly the same media text as audiences in the source-language context. Both studies discuss the audience's emotional connection to the programme, and it is easy to imagine how translation may affect that connection by playing a role in how effortless the viewing experience is, how authentic and engaging the language is, and how well the different components of the programme blend together.

2.2 Visible but Transparent Translations

Some audience studies acknowledge the presence of translation, even if it is not thoroughly discussed in the analysis. This is the case with Jostein Gripsrud's (1995) study on the reception of *Dynasty* in Norway. Gripsrud (1995, 133) remarks that subtitles have no effect on the programme and its reception, as they are only 'a minimal divergence from the original.' Gripsrud (1995, 133) describes both subtitling and dubbing as 'so precise and so "natural" for the audiences, that they can hardly be thought of as making, for instance, *Dynasty* something other than *Dynasty*.' In addition, Gripsrud (1995, 133) remarks that 'the programme-text will remain the same in the two settings [USA and Norway],' giving an impression of translation as a copy of the original, not even a new text. Gripsrud does not acknowledge that the translation may present the story differently from the source text, such as condensing the dialogue and thus suppressing some elements while foregrounding others. Subtitling research has frequently pointed out that these kinds of shifts take place. Aline Remael (2003, 244), for example, has discovered in her analysis of the Dutch subtitles of the film *Secrets & Lies* that the structure of the dialogue has been modified in the subtitles, potentially affecting both the plot of the film and the way characters come across, and slang and idiosyncratic language have been normalised. The modifications are not necessarily substantial enough to result in a noticeable 'divergence' that Gripsrud would have seen as significant, but even subtle shifts may lead to changing the audience's impressions, such as causing a different understanding of the personalities of the characters, or of the humour or dramatic tension in the programme. Gripsrud also assumes that because viewers are used to watching translated programmes, the presence of the translation has no effect. While it is plausible that viewers become used to translations, the translation is still either an additional element in the case of subtitles, or a replacement of the original dialogue in the case of dubbing, and it may reorient the viewers' attention. Furthermore, even if viewers are used to one method of audiovisual translation, other methods may be less familiar to them and change the viewing situation even more. Therefore, while *Dynasty* may continue to be *Dynasty* for the Norwegian audience, it is not the same *Dynasty* as it is for the American audience.

Interestingly, Gripsrud elsewhere implies that translation is not as transparent as the above quotations suggest. When explaining the relationship between theory and data, Gripsrud (1995, 110–111) remarks: 'A possible analogy could be that of translation between languages, which as we know always has an element of "treason" to it.' This comment is in striking contradiction

with the view of translation as a transparent non-entity. What is different between the two statements is that one is a general remark, while the other is related to a particular programme and its translation. Thus, while it may be easy to call translation a distortion on a general level, it may not be equally easy to point out the shifts in a specific translation. It is understandable that a researcher who does not specialise in translation may not analyse translation strategies in detail, but it would be useful to acknowledge the potential of a translation to affect the media text. This example demonstrates that translation-specific analysis could complement media research to disprove the assumption of transparency, but also to add nuance to the truism of translation as treason.

Another audience study where translation is mentioned is *The Export of Meaning* by Tamar Liebes and Elihu Katz (1993), a frequently cited ‘classic’ of reception research (Madianou 2011, 444). Liebes and Katz explore how *Dallas* has been received among various ethnic groups in Israel and in Japan, and they acknowledge the presence of translation on several occasions. For example, they begin their study by questioning whether foreign audiences could understand *Dallas* at all, ‘especially after dubbing or with subtitles’ (Liebes and Katz 1993, 3). Liebes and Katz (1993, 25) also acknowledge the existence of different modes of audiovisual translation by noting that the Israeli participants in the study saw the programme with Hebrew and Arabic subtitles, while the Japanese viewers saw a dubbed version. Liebes and Katz (1993, 25–26) discuss dubbing and subtitling as a ‘methodological problem’ which makes it more difficult to compare findings between languages, especially between those viewing the programme in English and those using translations. They mention the possibility of finding ‘overseas viewers less learned in the nuances of the story’ and speculate on the possibility that the translator may have missed something and thus distorted the text. In addition, they suggest that the intermediary nature of audiovisual translations may hinder the ‘immediacy of the viewing experience,’ as ‘surely, dissonance must be created between the familiarity of the speech and the unfamiliarity of the pictures’ (Liebes and Katz 1993, 26).

The above quotations show that Liebes and Katz recognise the potential of the translation to affect the programme and its viewing. However, they then state that these scenarios are not realised in their data, as a previous study on the ‘reliability’ of Israeli subtitles suggests that ‘both story and dialogue are faithfully transmitted’ in them. However, the study they quote (Nir 1984) does not provide explicit confirmation for their view. In fact, the article describes linguistic and other challenges related to subtitling, and it repeatedly argues that subtitles unavoidably change some aspects of the original message. For example, it states that ‘even the most gifted translator cannot prevent certain distortions in the content of a message due to the transfer from the spoken to the written medium’ (Nir 1984, 84). Therefore, although Liebes and Katz use this translation-specific source to support their decision not to discuss the translations, the same source could perhaps even more convincingly be used to question the unproblematised transparency of the translations. Nevertheless, Liebes and Katz (1993, 26) take the participants’ fluent understanding of the story as a signal that the translations have been successful and that they will not cause differences between different groups of respondents. While this is logical, it does not cover all possible ways in which the translation may influence reception. For example, the Hebrew and Arabic subtitles may have omitted and foregrounded different

elements in the dialogue, and the Japanese dubbing may have needed to make different kinds of changes in order to achieve synchronicity. These changes may not have affected the viewers' ability to follow the story, but they may have influenced their readings of some elements of it. Furthermore, the fact that subtitles and dubbing focus attention differently and that subtitles provide access to the source text put the Japanese group in a different situation compared to the groups viewing a subtitled programme.

Despite arguing that subtitles do not play a role in reception, Liebes and Katz (1993, 83–84) point out one specific effect subtitles have on some viewers: they mention that some study participants occasionally helped those who were not able to follow the story, often due to 'the speed or difficulty of the subtitles' which was a problem for viewers who had trouble understanding or reading Hebrew. They thus show that subtitles indeed affect the viewing experience, and because subtitles push some viewers to explain the story to others, they even influence the dynamics of the social viewing situation. A similar observation was made by Kim (2018, 302) in a study about the audiences of Korean television dramas in Ghana. Kim mentions that one factor limiting the audience is the fact that many Ghanaians are illiterate or semi-illiterate and therefore unable to read subtitles, or they do not understand enough English to follow programmes dubbed or subtitled in English. Therefore, it is typical that someone in a communal viewing situation explains the events, and there are even television programmes which explain the events in the local language. Kim does not discuss translations any further, but from a translation studies perspective, this social dynamic around translated programmes could be a fascinating topic of research and another point of convergence between translation and media studies. It certainly demonstrates that the presence and nature of translations is significant in the audience's interaction with a cultural product.

Liebes and Katz (1993, 37) provide one further example from their group discussions that concerns subtitles: the interviewer asks whether the group members understood the speech or read subtitles, and the participants express that they depended on the subtitles. One participant mentions that she enjoyed the programme more in French, presumably as a dubbed version. This could mean that the participant preferred dubbing to subtitles, or that the French translation was better than the Hebrew and Arabic subtitles, but this exchange is not discussed any further. From a translation studies perspective, it is a missed opportunity, and it again shows that translations may have effects that are worth investigating. Liebes and Katz largely dismiss the potential of translations to influence the viewing process. In fact, reminiscent of Gripsrud's views, they suggest on a general level that translations may have a distorting effect, but do not offer any specific examples from their own data.

2.3 The Hobbit Project and Language as a Consequential Factor

The World Hobbit Project is an unusually extensive study of audiences in a large number of countries. It investigates the global reception of the Hobbit film trilogy, seeking answers to the following question: 'How do films which originate as an English children's story acquire meaning and value for different audiences across the world?' (Barker and Mathijs 2016, 160). The study consisted of a questionnaire charting viewers' opinions and experiences. It was executed in 46 countries, and it received 36,109 responses (Barker and Mathijs 2016, 159). This

study was a massive undertaking with a genuinely global reach. However, again, the aspects of language and translation receive little attention in the description of the study, even though translation is relevant in two ways: the survey respondents would have viewed the film in one of dozens of languages, representing different modes of audiovisual translation, and the questionnaire had to be translated into the languages which the respondents represented. Thus, translation was present both in the study design and in the respondents' experiences. In their introduction to the project and its findings, Barker and Mathijs (2016, 164) point out that language is a potential variable worth analysing in the data, but they do not expand on this suggestion any further.

Another publication on the Hobbit Project, Veenstra et al. (2016), does address the question of language in more detail. Veenstra et al. (2016, 498) explore 'differences and similarities in understandings of the trilogy in Belgium, France, and the Netherlands,' comparing nationalities and languages. They mention that different linguistic groups may respond to the same media text differently, which implicitly acknowledges the potential role of translation in generating these differences. In fact, Veenstra et al. (2016, 497) mention the significance of translation explicitly, stating that 'film translation, in the form of subtitling, dubbing, or voiceovers, always leads to a culturally specific representation of the original,' and point out that translations follow local 'policies and (perceived) audience expectations and are therefore not neutral,' and that translations 'are always a modified representation of an original.' Veenstra et al. consequently conclude that cultural products that are thought of as global and homogeneous are not identical across languages. This view exhibits the kind of awareness of the role of translation that is absent in many audience research examples introduced above. Furthermore, Veenstra et al. discover in their analysis that there are differences in interpretations between languages, and that language may be a cause of more significant differences than nationality. Their analysis does not discuss the translations of the Hobbit films and only focuses on the linguistic background of the respondents, but one of their suggestions for further research is to pay more attention to different modes of translation and how they might 'distort' media texts (Veenstra et al. 2016: 513). Veenstra et al. thus offer a media studies analysis which acknowledges translation as a factor, and take a step towards an interdisciplinary understanding of translated media texts and their audiences.

The above examples suggest that questions connected to translation rarely arise in audience studies, and even if translation is mentioned, it is seldom discussed in detail or treated as a potential factor influencing the audience's experience. One reason for this may be the fact that the approach taken by audience studies often focuses on macro-level questions of culture, identity and the nature of popular culture. However, even in a macro-level study, it seems problematic to overlook language and the presence of a translation, because it is a significant building block of the media text. David Morley (2006, 112) proposes a potentially useful 'bifocal' approach, which would provide 'both close up/micro perspectives and long-sighted/macro ones, for different purposes, and at different moments.' A complementary translation studies perspective would fit well into this model. Translation studies could bolster the micro-level focus with an examination of the ways in which the act of translation has a bearing on the audience's interaction with the media text, whether as a linguistic presence or as

a new audiovisual element. Translation studies could also benefit the macro level by exploring the broader social and cultural consequences of the presence of the translation, such as in the case of Kim's (2018) study of Ghanaian audiences. In the following section, I will introduce some translation studies approaches that may provide useful perspectives for media studies and audience research.

3 Exploring the Significance of Translation for the Audience

In recent years, reception research has gained increased attention in audiovisual translation studies (see Di Giovanni and Gambier 2018). These studies can offer insights that could be useful for media studies. To begin with, it is worth seeking answers to fundamental questions about how audiovisual translations are processed. In the case of subtitling, this includes studies which explore whether viewers really read subtitles, and how the presence of subtitles affects the way in which their attention is distributed. This kind of research can provide a useful contrast to audience studies. For example, the study by Tsapovsky and Frosh (2015), which was discussed above, explores the sense of nostalgia evoked by *Mad Men* without mentioning translation, suggesting that Tsapovsky and Frosh did not see translation as a factor in reception. In fact, their remark that the study participants spoke excellent English may suggest that they expected the participants to follow the source language rather than translation. However, if subtitles were present on screen, we know from eyetracking studies (e.g. d'Ydewalle et al. 1991, 652) that looking at them is unavoidable, and therefore, it is likely that some of the verbal information would have been received through subtitles. Research also suggests that, for those who understand the source language, subtitles may act as a distraction and draw attention away from other aspects of the programme (Bairstow 2011, 216–217). Could this have an effect on how thoroughly Israeli viewers are immersed in the nostalgia of *Mad Men*?

Eyetracking can also reveal how subtitle quality affects viewing. In a study by Juha Lång et al. (2013, 83–84), eyetracking was used to study the viewing of a subtitled programme where the subtitles were poorly synchronised with the dialogue. The data suggests that problems in synchronisation may draw viewers' attention to the subtitles more than usual and thus disturb the viewing process, even if viewers are not consciously aware of these problems. Although these findings are not conclusive, they serve as a reminder that subtitle quality consists of more elements than simply the translation. Even if the audience researcher has determined that the translation represents the contents of the programme accurately, if the synchronisation is not optimal, the presence of subtitles may influence reception. Similarly, poor segmentation may influence viewing adversely even if the translation itself appears accurate (Di Giovanni 2016, 75).

Some studies which investigate the audience's understanding of certain challenging aspects of a translated programme may also be relevant to media studies. Most significantly, these challenging aspects include humour and source culture-specific references and concepts. Many studies suggest that humour is challenging to reproduce in audiovisual translations, and when the reproduction is unsuccessful, the audience responds accordingly, by finding less humour in the translated programme (e.g. Chiaro 2007; Fuentes 2003; Schauffler 2012). This could be an

important factor when exploring audience reactions to comedy, as translation-related challenges may offer an explanation for reactions that differ from those of the source text audience. If the translation does not transmit humour effectively, or if the style of humour changes in translation, differing reactions do not necessarily indicate cultural differences in sense of humour, but simply differing reactions to a different media text. It is worth noting that these findings are similar to conclusions drawn in some media studies research. For example, Daniel Biltereyst (1991) has conducted a comparative study on the reception of a Belgian comedy show and a similar American show in Belgium. His findings suggest that viewers felt more strongly about the American show in every other category except comedic value (Biltereyst 1991, 482–483). This single example indicates that translation and media studies could work together in a productive way to explain and elaborate on each other's findings.

Similarly, culture-specific concepts present a translation challenge and can be difficult for the audience to interpret. Viewers may state that they have understood a cultural reference even though closer scrutiny reveals that this is not the case. Even those who understand the source language may have a poor understanding of its cultural references (Antonini 2007, 165). However, viewers can assume an active role and interpret references to fit their own context, and manage to follow the programme even if some of their interpretations diverge from what the programme was intended to convey (Desilla 2014, 209–211). In other words, translation studies research has discovered similar indications of an active audience as have been discussed in media studies. However, what the findings of translation studies could mean in terms of media studies audience research is an open question. If viewers of translated programmes may interpret them in ways that do not adhere to the originally intended meaning, and if the viewers cannot quite explain what they have understood and how, how can we explore their behaviour as an audience that is comparable to the audience of the original programme? How do we account for both their individual readings of the translation and their overall, perhaps culturally determined, interaction with the media text? It appears likely that the translation plays some role in the audience's interpretations and cannot be ignored as a possible explanation for differences between audiences. Therefore, a combined effort of media and translation studies could help us understand how both cultural differences and the presence of a translation influence reception.

Finally, macro-level studies investigating viewers' awareness of and attitudes towards translation can also be valuable for media studies, because these studies may offer evidence of the uses of audiovisual translations and of their sociocultural role. For example, studies that have discovered viewers to have a positive attitude towards subtitles and to trust subtitles as a source of information (e.g. Alves Veiga 2006; Tuominen 2012; Widler 2004) suggest that viewers rely on subtitles and accept them as an accurate representation of the programme. It could therefore be problematic to dismiss the possibility of subtitles influencing viewers' interpretations, even in cases where the viewers understand the source language. These macro-level studies can also reveal something of viewers' emotional engagement with translated programmes, and the role of translation in this engagement. For example, negative and suspicious attitudes towards the translation may reflect in attitudes towards the entire

programme, while a positive, immersive experience with the translation may facilitate immersion in the programme as a whole.

The above examples demonstrate that, much like media studies, reception research within translation studies engages with questions of cross-cultural comparisons and viewers' engagement with media texts. However, it is also evident that translation studies research often focuses more on the specifics of interpreting and processing the translation than on the audience's relationship with the entire media text and related questions of identity and culture. Tuominen (2012, 83–85) presents a comparison of some media and translation studies research on Disney's media texts and concludes that while media studies views translations as neutral and unmarked, a translation studies analysis of similar materials uncovers many culture-specific aspects in the language used in these media texts. Translation studies therefore explores how translations address these cultural specificities embedded below the surface in language, and produce a new text which will be meaningful in a new cultural context, whereas media studies appears to conclude more easily that texts are culturally unmarked. Consequently, media studies and translation studies seem to view culture and its embeddedness in language differently. The approaches of the two disciplines could be complementary, if translation studies provided media studies with a more critical look at language and translation, and media studies encouraged translation studies to contextualise its findings more broadly.

4 Conclusion: Does Media Studies need Translation Studies?

The preceding discussion has demonstrated how media studies and translation studies, on the one hand, diverge in their approaches but, on the other hand, share many fundamental objectives in their research on audiences and reception. Both disciplines strive to understand how audiences view, interpret and experience media texts. Media studies tends to look at a wide perspective of media consumption, and view it as a social and societal phenomenon, where the verbal text is only one small component. Therefore, detailed investigations of the way viewers interpret and process the translation are less prominent than in translation studies, where the translation itself is naturally the core target of interest. Nevertheless, the translation is an undeniable part of the viewing experience, and overlooking it means that the research is overlooking a central element of the media text.

Scholars in media studies often rely on the idea that the translation is a transparent reproduction of the original and therefore does not alter or add anything to the media text. However, as translation studies research demonstrates, this is not the case. Alternatively, media studies may see the translation as a negative distortion, or treason, which cannot accurately communicate the original message. This view, too, has been problematised by translation studies, as the relationship of the translation to its source text and the surrounding context may take many shapes. Therefore, translation studies could contribute to audience research by initiating a deeper understanding of the text which audiences confront, and by facilitating discussion of the role that the translation may play in reception. Admittedly, it can be an uncomfortable complication to add the translation as a potentially influencing factor to audience research, but

when the objective is to gain a realistic understanding of the audience, the translation deserves to be considered.

Of course, it is not always possible to include both a media studies and translation studies perspective in a single study. Nevertheless, even if the focus is on one approach, it would be valuable to not overlook the other. While translation studies would often benefit from a consideration of the context in which reception takes place, it would be relevant for media studies to acknowledge that the verbal text changes when the media text is being consumed in another language, and that this change has broader consequences for the entire audiovisual message. This acknowledgement would allow for a fuller accounting of the situation in which the audience operates, and could help build a more realistic picture of audience and reception. This could also arguably help mitigate an essentialistic attitude towards culture (Madianou 2011, 446–447), as differences between audiences would not automatically be attributed to their cultural background, because some differences between audiences could be explained by the presence of the translation. In addition, a more nuanced accounting of the translation may help rebuild the image of translation, so that the sense of distortion or loss could be rearticulated as a recognition that translation always involves change, but that change is not necessarily inherently negative. With a more constructive view of translation, it might be easier for media studies to accept translations as an influencing factor in reception.

Some voices both within translation studies (Denton 2007) and elsewhere (Kuipers 2015; Veenstra et al. 2016), have already called for closer collaboration between the two disciplines and for a more prominent presence of translations in media studies. It is easy to join those calls and emphasise the critical depth that translation studies could offer for audience research by accounting for the translation as a crucial element in the audience's interaction with a cultural product.

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