

New Challenges in Audiovisual Translation

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Abstract & Keywords

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At the turn of the 21st century, the booming of new communication technologies and the transformations that occurred as regards the fruition of traditional media (television, telephone, cinema, etc.) have triggered what has been labeled as the “digital revolution”. Not only have new media and their augmented potentiality for interactive consumption significantly influenced the social, economic, and political frameworks of both Western and emerging countries, but they have also brought about changes in cross-cultural interactions, which are increasingly fast and far-reaching. Boundaries between a ‘centre’ and a ‘periphery’ in the dissemination of audiovisual texts have become gradually more blurred: hegemonies are being challenged, with local, small-scale industries becoming more and more visible at a global level, while productions reaching the global circuit are often born as supranational projects.

Studies on audiovisual translation[1] today can rightfully claim a central role in the process of understanding and clarifying many of the challenges and opportunities that the digital revolution has brought about. Although widely seen as a sub-discipline of Translation Studies, studies on audiovisual translation are truly interdisciplinary in themselves, bringing together knowledge of more or less traditional media, IT, audience reception, cognitivism and, of course, languages and cultures.

Audiences beyond screens are becoming increasingly heterogeneous, but also progressively more specialized and demanding. Furthermore, translation modes are no longer monolithic: modalities are merged, techniques and practices are constantly updated, re-shaped and reconfigured. Today increasing attention is given to media accessibility and the making of audiovisual products *for all*, with the result that *all* has irreversibly challenged the very notion of majority and minority.

The result of this revolution in the field of audiovisual translation seems to be that its study and practice are reaching beyond themselves: across disciplinary boundaries when it comes to research; over production and fruition modes when it comes to distribution and reception; beyond national, cultural and social boundaries when it comes to origins, identities, and representations.

Reaching across disciplines and spaces, can we say there is still such a thing as audiovisual translation? Can we still identify a source and a target text? Is it possible to divide audiences into source and target receivers of a text that is produced across, and reaches beyond, cultural boundaries?

This collection aims to contribute to the debate on audiovisual (screen) translation as laid out above. The contributions in this special issue explore the changes and movements that animate the production, distribution and translation of “texts” for screens. While providing multidisciplinary approaches and pointing to innovative research paths, the following chapters, on the whole, portray the state-of-the art in audiovisual translation research.

The 11 contributions are arranged into two main sections revolving around two key aspects of the audiovisual paradigm, namely texts and audiences. The first group of articles tackles specifically the shaping of meanings in audiovisual texts and focuses on how these are conveyed, through the process and practice of translation, beyond their context of origin. The second part of the volume handles the issue of how texts are received and perceived by target audiences, once they are globally

disseminated.

The first section opens with an article by Katherine Russo (University of Naples “L’Orientale”, Italy) which focuses on the interlingual translation of Baz Luhrmann’s global movie *Australia* (USA, 2008), as well as on the intralingual “translation” of the film from Australian English into global English. In her conclusions, the author argues that the materiality of globalization may shape translocal social knowledge and create translocal audiences.

The second article, by Veronica Bonsignori and Silvia Bruti (University of Pisa, Italy) also investigates the representations of a post-colonial variety of English in film dialogues, namely Indian English. The authors approach the subject from the perspective of globally distributed Western film productions set in India. The essay examines the treatment of the cultural identity of Indian English-speaking communities, both in the original and in the dubbed Italian version. It also hints at the possibility that representations of cultural identity are seen as translations in their own right.

The third contribution, by Pierre Alexis Mével (University of Nottingham, UK), also deals with linguistic varieties in audiovisual translation. The author explores the use of *verlan*, i.e. a specific variety of French, in subtitling African American vernacular English. Looking at a corpus of films from the 1990s that predominantly portray African American characters, Mével’s article analyzes the ways in which the dialogues have been subtitled combining “standard” French and *verlan* – the use of which challenges boundaries when superimposed onto images of African Americans.

The distribution in Flanders of the Italian film *La Meglio Gioventù* by Marco Tullio Giordana (2003), is the focus of the contribution by Manuela Caniato (Ghent University, Belgium). Applying a theoretical framework that reaches beyond linguistics and translation studies, the author portrays films as cultural objects and investigates the processes of resistance and negotiation of meaning and how they take place in cross-cultural dimensions.

Turning to the evolution of specific audiovisual text genres, the article by Monika Wozniak (University of Rome “La Sapienza”, Italy) deals with the translation of science fiction films and TV series. The article focuses on the translational issues pertaining to this genre, such as the rendering of neologisms for fictional scientific terminology (which the author refers to as technobabble).

Still in the realm of new audiovisual text types, the article by Gianna Tarquini (University of Bologna, Italy) provides a thorough overview of the challenges and perspectives opened up in screen translation by the booming market of videogame localization.

Moving onto intersemiotic translation, Rita Wilson (Monash University, Melbourne, Australia) reports on the transitioning from a printed novel to a web-based, hypertext. The article points to potential developments and challenges for audiovisual translation in connection to the web, fostering intercultural dialogue and redefining the role of the writer and/as translator.

The second part of the volume is devoted to the exploration of new audiences for audiovisual translations. The manifold issues at stake are approached from different angles and analyzed from theoretical as well as empirical perspectives.

Building on the concept of viewership 2.0, the contribution by Alice Casarini (University of Bologna, Italy) sets out to explore growing phenomena such as fan-subbing and fan-dubbing in connection with cult TV series, testifying audience evolution in terms of a strongly intensified pro-activity.

Two articles, one by Elena Di Giovanni (University of Macerata, Italy) and one by Agnese Morettini (University of Macerata, Italy) investigate audiences for accessible audiovisual texts. While Di Giovanni engages with an empirical study on the perception and enjoyment of audio introduction in conjunction with audio-description by blind and visually impaired audiences, Morettini deals with the European and Italian legislative framework on accessibility to the audiovisual media, shedding light on the requirements and standards (or lack thereof) in subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing.

The final essay, by Linda Rossato (University of Bologna, Italy), reports on an exploratory study conducted among a demographically mixed sample of Italian TV viewers, including satellite and pay TV subscribers. By adopting an empirical approach, this article investigates if and how the audience consumption of a niche TV genre such as televised cookery has changed since the introduction in Italy of terrestrial digital television and the multiplication of factual channels in 2011.

Overall this collection offers a variety of viewpoints from scholars and practitioners coming from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, on a topic – audiovisual translation – that needs to be constantly revisited.

Notes

[1] In this collection of essays, authors have chosen to use either audiovisual translation or screen translation as a definition for the area of research and activity revolving around the audiovisual media. Screen translation, i.e. the definition used by the Forlì School of Translation for 20 years, is perhaps more limited in scope (excluding translations for live events) but as appropriate as audiovisual translation (AVT) to refer to the vibrant field of activity that is the subject of this volume.

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