

DOCTORAL THESIS

The Emergence of Accessibility Studies in Translation Studies and beyond From Methodology to Pedagogy

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**The Emergence of Accessibility Studies in Translation Studies and beyond:
From Methodology to Pedagogy**

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of PhD

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Abstract

Over the past few decades, the question of access and accessibility has been the epicentre of a wide and lively revolution in the most diverse venues of human knowledge, from scholarly research to social debate to regulatory and legislative contexts. Moving from the idea that access and accessibility are intimately connected to our ways of being in the world, living in society, and interacting with others, the publications collected in this thesis investigate the possibility of devising a framework able to maintain cohesion among the different views on access and accessibility, without dissolving them into a single unified position. Rather, it seeks to create and highlight the theoretical underpinnings whereby different fields, contexts, meanings and methods invested in and by access and accessibility can be uncovered so as to fruitfully interact and address some of the most pressing issues of our time. Over the course of the investigation, this framework has been formulated in terms of the emergence of an interdisciplinary field called accessibility studies. While analysing the distinctive traits of this field, the implications at both a methodological and pedagogical level are debated. Translation studies, and in particular, audiovisual translation and media accessibility, were chosen as the privileged contexts for the investigation of this process. In particular, media accessibility is here interpreted as one of the most mature areas in which the formation of accessibility studies has taken place, as well as the area that could lead it towards its full maturity.

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Introduction *

1. An account of the genesis of the publications

Access is not a recent concept. The key role of (the deprivation of) access in Grotius's *Mare Liberum* (Grotius, 1609/1609/2004) is but a case in its long history. However, over the past few decades the question of access (and accessibility) has substantially increased its presence in the most diverse venues of human knowledge, from academic research to social debate. This process of intensifying prominence has boomed in the past two decades. A few cases may help illustrate the vastity and variety of this growth. First case: the idea of a Global Accessibility Awareness Day started in 2011, with just two posts on personal social media accounts. Since then, it has become a global event celebrated on the third Thursday of May that, on its tenth anniversary, counted more than 200 activities all over the world. Second case: while access and accessibility have been present in national and international legislation for years, they have recently been at the heart of a massive regulatory process. This *accessibility turn* in policy development is especially evident in the case of the European Union, where it has been one of the major elements that led to the revision of previous regulations – as in the update of the European Audiovisual Media Services Directive – as well as spurred ad-hoc regulations, such as the European Web Accessibility Directive and, most

* As per the Regulations of the University of Roehampton, in the case of a doctoral degree by published works, this introduction includes an account of the genesis of the works, the research and research methodology informing them, a discussion of the contribution which the works have made to the field of study, and the case for the publications to be considered as a coherent body of scholarly work.

prominently, the European Accessibility Act (Greco, 2019b). It is even more patent in the considerable attention this issue has been given by national and international standardisation bodies (Matamala & Orero, 2018; Oncins & Orero, 2021). Third case: the investigation on processes and phenomena related to access and accessibility has become a major line of enquiry in a plethora of fields. What once was a minor or fringe issue has become a thriving topic, with well-established conferences – such as *Media for All* and *Universal Access in Human-Computer Interaction*, respectively launched in 2005 and 2001 – and journals, e.g. *Universal Access in the Information Society*, first published in 2001.

The ones above are three examples of a wide and lively revolution that has access and accessibility at its epicentre. Their rise on the world's stage seems related to a novel awareness that “anything said about access can be read for how it reflects a host of questions: Who has access? Access to where? Access to what? When? Every single instance of life can be regarded as tied to access – that is, to do anything is to have some form of access” (Titchkosky, 2011, p. 13). That is, the *access stance* is a foundational lens that allows for radical and critical readings of history, thought and society as well as radical and critical proposals (Greco, 2013, 2022). Given such an entrenched connection with our very ways of living, one would expect the question of access to also be at the epicentre of a wide and lively theoretical endeavour. A closer look however shows that this is not the case: “despite this, [access] has received little theoretical attention [...] Like inclusion, access has become part of the fabric of our talk about education and community, pervasive and unquestioned [...] The term ‘access’ has not been on this scope of journey and it has acquired less baggage along its way; nonetheless it is used almost

complacently at every turn” (Seale & Nind, 2010, p. 4). The journey they refer to is (the absence of) a deep, broad and, most importantly, a polyphonic reflection on the term access. As discussed in Greco (2021c, 2022), access (and thus accessibility) is a polysemic term. As such, it is prone to be used in a myriad of contexts, through a plethora of practices. However, its semantic wealth has suffered from a vast reduction down to a handful of perspectives, even perhaps a single one. As such, a collective theoretical effort that could expose its semantic complexity and further enrich its theoretical and social baggage is greatly needed.

The scant attempts to investigate the theoretical dimension of access come from the field of disability studies (e.g. Guffey, 2020a, 2020b; Titchkosky, 2011; Williamson, 2019). This means that the way they look at the issue of access is filtered through an important yet specific perspective. If access is such a compelling part of our lives, as stated by Titchkosky, the problem becomes whether a broader approach to access is possible. An approach that could constitute a framework able to maintain cohesion among the different views on access, without dissolving them into a unified position, but where they could fruitfully interact. Is it possible to devise such a framework where the numerous fields, contexts, meanings and methods invested in and by access can be uncovered so as to fruitfully interact? A framework within which questions could be posed from a foundational perspective, such as: What are the reasons behind the recent escalation of access and accessibility? Are access and accessibility merely a momentary trend or is their rising status rooted in deep, solid ground? If the latter is indeed the case, what are those roots and what is the ground they are anchored to? What are the reasons behind their flourishing? These questions became the first nucleus around which

the research programme was formed. A programme that began at a theoretical dimension, but then expanded so as to investigate the implications at a methodological and a pedagogical level.

The fact that the very few works that explore the issue of access come from disabilities studies is of great importance. Disability and access have a long relationship. They share a common history, which started to intensify around the time it became necessary to address the needs of the huge population of veterans with disabilities created by the two World Wars, laying down the groundwork for the development of barrier-free design (Story et al., 1998). Over the years, disabled people's organisations were pivotal in putting the spotlight on access and accessibility, through demanding national regulations that guaranteed and protected the civil rights of persons with disabilities as well as lobbying for a specific international treaty and actively participating in its writing process (Heyer, 2015). The approval of the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* by the UN in December 2006 became a major booster to the central status of access and accessibility, not only in the social and political arenas, but also in academia. In Art. 3, the Convention lists accessibility as a principle and then moves on to discuss specific aspects in Art. 9, expressly entitled *Accessibility*. Such an explicit presence in the Convention was instrumental in mainstreaming the terms 'access' and 'accessibility'. However, its reception was also a source of confusion.

Soon after the approval of the Convention, the claims that 'accessibility is a human right' and 'accessibility is a human right for persons with disabilities' started to appear. The oldest source of those claims that is retrievable through a web search is Onley's inaugural speech as the 28th Lieutenant Governor of Ontario. It was

delivered on 5 September 2007, less than a year after the approval of the Convention (Onley, 2007). From then onwards, those claims started to make an appearance in social and political debates. They also started to appear, though scantily, in scholarly research in many fields, such as transportation studies (Lewis et al., 2010), human-computer interaction (Gulliksen, 2014), education (Crichton & Kinash, 2013), and tourism (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2015). All those claims are made in contexts where (a) they are talking about persons with disabilities and (b) they refer implicitly or often explicitly to the Convention as the source for their justification. Those claims are formulated in such a way that the general one that ‘accessibility is a human right’ often seems a merely shortened version of the full claim that ‘accessibility is a human right for persons with disabilities’. A few months after the approval of the treaty, the UN released a *Handbook for Parliamentarians* in order to assist in the comprehension of the mechanisms of the Convention. The Handbook states that the Convention “does not recognize any new human rights of persons with disabilities, but rather, clarifies the obligations and legal duties of States to respect and ensure the equal enjoyment of all human rights by all persons with disabilities” (UN-DESA et al., 2007, p. 5). This gives rise to a multi-layered conundrum. Addressing this conundrum is of the utmost importance because it bears substantial consequences on the ways in which access and accessibility are used in the development of theories and solutions. Ultimately, investigating this problem enriched the initial nucleus of the research enquiry with new questions: Is accessibility a human right? If so, is it a human right for all or only for persons with disabilities? If it is not a human right, what is the role of access and accessibility within the human rights context? Addressing the conundrum of access and accessibility within the human

rights framework is of the utmost importance at least for one more reason. Scholars have justified the existence and value of research areas focused on accessibility precisely on the claim that accessibility is a human right, as in the case of media accessibility (e.g. Díaz-Cintas et al., 2007; Luyckx et al., 2010). However, human rights theories are moral theories. The very idea of human rights is a contested one, with some scholars highlighting its limits and biases (e.g. Fassbender & Traisbach, 2019) while others even debate its very reason to be (e.g. Nelson, 1990). Grounding the justification of some research area on the claim that accessibility is a human right would make such a justification – and the whole research area – prone to the same controversies of human rights theories.

The rise of accessibility has become connected to the development of a vast range of methodologies. Given that “accessibility requires changes to ways of thinking and acting in society” (Moreno, 2014), new ways of designing society are needed. At a methodological level, the question of access and accessibility then becomes a question of epistemic agency, epistemic access, and epistemic value on the one hand, and poietic agency, poietic access and poietic value on the other. (Greco, 2013, 2021c; Greco & Ruggieri, 2013; Greco et al., forthcoming). A case in point is that of the many design approaches that are now commonly adopted in many fields such as participatory design, inclusive design, universal design, and co-design. A major trait of those approaches is that they change and challenge the equilibria of epistemic (and poietic) agency among the different actors (Greco, 2019c, 2020). Accessibility allows to highlight a condition similar to Von Hippel’s (2005) “information asymmetry between manufacturers and users” (p. 8). It is a key player in a movement that has been challenging assumptions about knowledge

value and pushing for agency distribution. Speaking of architects, Hill (1998) says how they deride “incursions from ‘outside’ as ignorant or mistaken, implying there is a truthful and correct interpretation of a fixed body of knowledge, to which they alone have access” (p. 3). The theoretical, social and cultural revolution of accessibility has contributed to show how maker’s knowledge is incomplete without user’s knowledge. It has also shown a spotlight on their poietic agency. Herein lies another facet of accessibility: the involvement of the users through participatory processes signifies providing them access to the means of production of social artefacts. Access and accessibility have become part of a democratising process of social equilibria redesign. While the process of agency redistribution and the many design approaches have been subject to extensive scrutiny, general attempts to understand these changes from the specific perspective of access have been scarce. Deepening those aspects added more questions to the research project, such as: Is it possible to identify common traits and differences in those approaches and their use in various fields? What are those common traits? Is it possible to devise a model, or more than one, able to describe (and/or prescribe) the shifts brought about by accessibility?

If “accessibility requires changes to ways of thinking and acting in society” then education and training become decisive terrain. Accessibility has been demanding skilled experts on the topic, therefore it has gradually entered many education and training courses, and has now become a standard subject. In many fields, there is a lively debate about how to include accessibility within their specific curricula, with dozens of pilot projects being tested and evaluated. However, a general reflection on the very requirements of a pedagogy of accessibility is mostly

lacking. What are the challenges posed by teaching accessibility? How should we teach it? What are the problems brought on by the introduction of accessibility in a training course within a well-established specialty? Those are but just a handful of the questions regarding the pedagogy of access and accessibility that were added to the research project.

Quite soon into the research, two aspects became clear. First, the search for a framework for the investigation of access and accessibility could be framed in terms of the emergence of a new research field, called *access studies* or *accessibility studies* (AS). In the course of this investigation, both labels have been used: ‘studies’ mostly in the first decade of research, and ‘accessibility studies’ in the second one. Explaining the preference for the latter, Greco (2013) discusses how, from the formal perspective of knowledge organisation, ‘access studies’ should refer to the macro-field, and ‘accessibility studies’ to one of its subfields. However, the name ‘access studies’ places too much focus on the theoretical dimension: whilst this is crucial in establishing the distinctiveness of the field, it may risk leaving the urgency of the social dimension on the back burner. Therefore, over the course of this investigation, the name ‘Accessibility Studies’ has increasingly been the preferred label because it places more emphasis on the social relevance of the field and the proactive search for real life solutions. Seeing as all the publications included in this thesis were published within the past five years, they adopt the label ‘Accessibility Studies’.

Second, it became evident that translation studies (TS) was a privileged ground for the research programme, for a number of reasons. Firstly, translation, like access, is a polysemic term, and translation processes and phenomena, as access

processes and phenomena, are pervasive, multi-layered, and ubiquitous (Blumczynski, 2016). Secondly, translation, like access, has suffered from reductionist interpretations that limited its semantic richness. A newfound attention to its richness has become a major point on the agenda to promote the flourishing of TS. Actually, further semantic enrichment is seen by many as a strategic way of enlarging the boundaries of the field as well as strengthening its epistemological status (e.g. Tymoczko, 2007). Thirdly, access has long been adopted as an interpretative category in the field (e.g. Hall, 2009; Taylor, 2015). As Reifler (1955) remarked, “the primary aim of all translation is access to the meaning of a foreign text” (p. 4). Fourthly, the pervasive effects of ICTs have been intensifying the entanglement between translation and accessibility, making the former “important to access more of the world through the information revolution” (Bassnett, 2014, p. 2). In a globalised and globalising world, translation is often a ‘material precondition’ (Bielsa & Bassnett, 2009) for accessibility in many contexts, as especially evident in the many forms of specialised translation and interpreting (Cronin, 2006). Fifthly, audiovisual translation (AVT) and media accessibility (MA) are two areas at the forefront of the promotion of accessibility. They have been leading research, education and training, industry and technological development, policies and standardisation, and social awareness on accessibility. All the publications that constitute the chapters of this thesis have two common features: on the one hand, the investigation of the specific traits of access and accessibility, framed in terms of investigation of the emergence of AS; on the other hand, the focus on MA and AVT as major sources of insights and privileged ground

for testing ideas. The already copious nucleus of questions at the heart of the project became enriched with questions (re)focused on AVT and MA.

2. The research and research methodology informing them

The investigation has followed a set blueprint, albeit an atypical one. A blueprint *in fieri*, only sketched out and not complete, drawn with a pencil and not a pen. A blueprint where walls and even entire rooms were continuously deleted or redrawn. The linear development of the research presented in this section is but a narrative expedient. In the course of the investigation, lines have been drawn all over the sheet. The research behind one publication was not a stand-alone activity. It was not conducted in isolation, but in close connection with the research that led to the other publications, including those that do not form part of this thesis. A case in point is the work on accessibility and human rights. Even though it was published before the article in which the case for AS is presented, a good portion of the research for the latter was completed before devoting full attention to the former. What follows is once more a narrative (over)simplification, which will present the research chronologically, organised per publication date.

2.1. A note on methodology

The research project has followed a theoretical-epistemological approach characterised by an interdisciplinary vocation aimed at a critical reconsideration of several thematic nodes: mainly access, accessibility, and translation. Here, *critical* has a threefold connotation. Firstly, it refers to the clarification of the conditions of

possibility (in a Kantian sense) of a general framework for the analysis of access and accessibility, that is, AS. Secondly, it refers to the aim of bringing to the fore the limits of current approaches about access and accessibility, e.g. because they are based on fallacies or regional visions. Thirdly, it refers to the consideration of their transformative character in relation to the ontological-social reality under investigation. The latter two perspectives are clearly indebted to Critical Theory (e.g. Habermas, 1970/1988; Horkheimer, 1968/1972). Against the positivist assumption that research is neutral, critical theorists have contended that it may contain and foster forms of discrimination and oppression. Researchers and practitioners are social subjects. As such, their activities and theories are permeated by their values, views, and biases. My investigation adopted this critical attitude as a core methodological tool “to scrutinize and debunk theoretical, political, and social constructs, and, in doing so, to unveil controversial issues, biases, ambiguities, and conflicts” (Greco, 2019c, p. 29) in the ways access and accessibility have been conceived. In order to embrace it in full, the critical attitude was also applied to this very investigation, making self-reflexivity a methodological trait of the research endeavour. This methodological backbone was then enriched with theories, methods and models from various fields, such as the sociology of knowledge, philosophy, and education.

Integrating the critical attitude with theories and models from other areas was the methodological approach of the entire research project, as exemplified by the following two cases. In the study on the pedagogy of accessibility (Greco, 2019c, 2021a, 2021b), the critical attitude was combined with theories and models from the field of education, such as threshold concepts theory (Meyer & Land,

2006). Even more patent, the case of enquiry into the very idea of AS. Here, the critical attitude became the basis for a two-stage strategy. The first stage explored the theories and models from the sociology of knowledge, the sociology of science, and knowledge organisation about the process formation of a new area. While there is not a single theory accepted across the board, scholars tend to agree on the joint concurrence of some mechanisms (Salatino et al., 2017), particularly: the uniqueness of some central idea as well as its force of attraction and explanation (Belth, 1965); the interaction between centrifugal and centripetal forces (Keuchenius et al., 2021); the constitution of invisible colleges (Crane, 1972; Wagner, 2008) and networks (W. W. Powell et al., 2005; Sun et al., 2013); and the role of interdisciplinarity (Klein, 1990, 2009). The investigation then attempted to see whether it was possible to identify those processes in the case of access and accessibility. Given the positive outcome of the first stage, the second one was devoted to the examination of publications that discuss the emergence of some new research area, from cognitive science to synthetic biology to the classic debate on education as a discipline. The arguments used – as well as their limitations and strengths – were analysed so as to devise the best argument to support the case of AS. Incidentally, all the publications that were probed discussed the mechanisms identified in the first stage: the unique feature of the idea, the adoption of interdisciplinary methods and the rise of an interdisciplinary community.

2.2. An overview of the research

The main focus of Greco (2016) is the analysis of access and accessibility within the human rights framework. The text undertakes the task of investigating the justification of the claims ‘accessibility is a human right’ and ‘accessibility is a human right for persons with disabilities’. It is a strategic point of departure because it relates to what has been (and in some ways still is) the dominant paradigm of accessibility, which frames it consistently in relation to persons with disabilities. The problem is also of great relevance for MA and AVT. Whilst those two statements can be found in various fields, AVT and MA are the ones where they are the most common (e.g. Díaz-Cintas et al., 2007; Díaz-Cintas et al., 2010; Eardley-Weaver, 2015; Luyckx et al., 2010; Matamala & Orero, 2007; Matamala & Ortiz-Boix, 2016; Remael, 2012).

The first step was the creation of a corpus of texts in English about human rights. The corpus included a vast range of texts, released from 1940 onwards: from scholarly works to legal documents to texts published by institutions, organisations, or social activists. Hence the inclusion of texts like Onley’s (2007) speech and Wells (1940). The starting year was selected so as to include the social and legal debate that led to the formulation of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, such as the preparatory documents of the various commissions and committees of the United Nations. The initial analysis allowed to divide the texts into two groups: one group with documents that included either of the two claims, and another group with documents that explicitly or implicitly framed access and/or accessibility as having some sort of instrumental connection with human rights but that never referred to either as being a human right per se. All the texts with either of the two

claims were dated after 2006. While the study was conducted on the entire corpus, the article discusses only a selection of texts from both groups, that are used as examples, all dated after 2006 in order to satisfy a chronological coherence in the comparative study. The two groups were framed as representing the two sides of a problem the publication refers to as the *Accessibility as a Human Right Divide*. The second step was an analysis of the two claims ‘accessibility is a human rights’ and ‘accessibility is a human right for persons with disabilities’, which showed that, assuming the current basic tenets of human rights theory, those claims would either be untenable or lead to very controversial effects, including discriminatory stances. For example, the claim that accessibility is a human right for persons with disabilities could unintentionally lead to a ghetto effect (Greco, 2016b). The only way to keep those claims would be to revise the basic tenets of human rights theory, that is, the tenets adopted as initial assumptions in the arguments in support of accessibility being a human right. Hence the inherent contradiction.

An argument in support of the second group and the development of an alternative view was then provided, according to which *access is a necessary requirement* for the enjoyment of human rights for all, not only for persons with disabilities, and *accessibility is a proactive principle for the fulfilment of human rights for all*. The text then proceeds to exemplify this novel interpretation in the case of MA, in the context of several issues related to multilingualism in South Africa as a case in point. In order to carry out the analysis, a new notion of MA is introduced. MA has been mostly defined as a sub-area of AVT focused exclusively on persons with (sensorial) disabilities and limited to a few specific modalities. For instance: “media accessibility is here understood as various tools providing access

to audiovisual media content for people with sensorial disabilities: in the form of subtitles for those who are deaf or hard of hearing and in the form of audio description (AD) for those who are blind or partially sighted” (Szarkowska et al., 2013). Such a definition contrasts with the argument carried out so far, i.e. that access and accessibility concern all and not only persons with disabilities. Therefore, a new notion is introduced, one that is in line with the conclusions reached in the previous part, i.e. it does not characterise MA by referring to any specific group (e.g. persons with disabilities) nor in terms of group-specific modalities (i.e. AD and SDH). This notion, which Greco (2018) labels the ‘universalist account of MA’, underwent further refinement in the course of the overall investigation (Greco, 2018, 2019a, 2019c). Through an extensive review of documents from South Africa on (a) multilingualism and human rights and (b) MA services, the text shows that the conception of accessibility as concerning exclusively (the human rights of) persons with disabilities had reinforced discriminatory stances in connection to the human rights of the vast majority of South Africa’s linguistic communities.

Building on the results of the previous publication, Greco (2018) delineates the general trait of the framework mentioned in the first section and presents it in the form of a case for the emergence of AS. Using the aforementioned theories and models from the sociology of knowledge, the sociology of science, and knowledge organisation about the mechanisms at play in the process formation of a new field, the investigation attempts to disclose the devices behind the newfound role of access and accessibility. Two main factors that have contributed and are still contributing to the current standing of access and accessibility are identified in the

human rights discourse and the information revolution. Elaborating on Greco (2016a), the article starts out with a reflection on the contribution that the human rights debate has had in shedding light on the centrality of access and accessibility. This does not mean that the idea of AS – or even AS as a field per se – is grounded upon or justified by human rights. Otherwise, AS would face the same problems mentioned in the previous section. It means that the debate on human rights has played – and still does – a significant role in drawing attention to the theoretical and social uniqueness of the general question of access and accessibility, well beyond the borders of human rights. Greco (2019a) and Greco and Jankowska (2020) clarify this point further, for instance, by referring to Lakoff’s analysis of the metaphor of freedom as motion. As Lakoff (2006) remarks: “*Access is a crucial idea in human thought. [...] Freedom requires not just the absence of impediments to motion but also the presence of access. Inhibiting freedom is, metaphorically, not just throwing up roadblocks, holding one back, taking away power, imposing burdens or threats or harm, but also failing to provide access.* Freedom may thus require creating access, which may involve building. The metaphor of freedom as freedom of motion thus has two important parts: freedom from and freedom to. Freedom from concerns those things that can keep you from moving. *Freedom to concerns making sure there is access*” (p. 30, emphasis added). Beyond proposals about the legitimacy of some vague human right to access or whether the UN *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* has introduced accessibility as a human right (for some group or for all), the debate on human rights has significantly contributed to bringing the question of access (and accessibility) to the fore as *a crucial idea in human thought*. A cruciality that it is neither grounded upon

nor justified by human rights. It captures more fundamental dimensions of human thought and human living.

A second factor identified by Greco (2018) is that of the information revolution. As acknowledged by many scholars, most famously Dutton (2004), information and communication technologies (ICTs) have been substantially reshaping not only the world and society, but even more crucially, the ways in which we access them. The most distinctive effect of the information revolution is the *reconfiguration of access*. Through this process, ICTs have been strengthening old disparities and creating new ones (Greco & Floridi, 2004). These disparities are usually discussed under the umbrella term of *digital divide*. At a general level, the label refers to the gap between the so-called *haves* and *have nots*, those who have access to ICTs and those who do not (Ragnedda & Muschert, 2013). The discussion usually focuses on the disparities between developed and developing countries. At a more granular level, it refers to disparities related to factors mostly connected to human and social diversity, such as age, gender, and language (Norris, 2001). The information revolution is creating a whole series of digital divides, making the question of access the most cogent ground for theoretical, political and social debate.

Using a series of practical examples, the article then shows how, through the effect of those forces, the question of access and accessibility entered a vast range of fields and in doing so produced several theoretical, epistemological and methodological changes. These changes are common to all those fields and are defined in terms of shifts: a shift from particularist accounts to a universalist account of access, a shift from maker-centred and expert-centred to user-centred

approaches, and a shift from reactive to proactive approaches. Having established the underlying mechanisms, the focus then shifted to the very process of formation

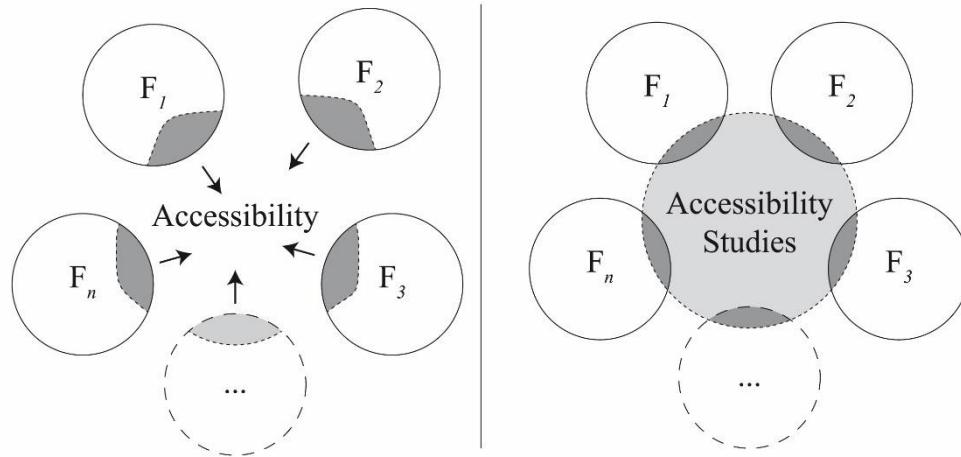


Figure 1. The formation process of accessibility studies. Source: Greco (2019a).

of AS. This series of mechanisms has led accessibility take root in the most diverse of fields, creating new areas within those fields. Areas that have been steadily moving away from their original fields while mutually converging, giving rise to a field of their own, namely, *accessibility studies*.

AS is defined as the research field concerned with the critical investigation of access and accessibility problems, processes and phenomena, as well as the design, implementation and evaluation of accessibility-based and accessibility-oriented methodologies (Greco, 2018). While the article makes use of cases from many fields in order to show the breadth of AS, the core of the argument is carried out through a discussion of multiple cases in AVT and MA. Based on this plethora of cases, it is argued that MA has been playing a leading role in the process of formation of AS. A portion of the research was also devoted to the exploration of

the historical roots of AS, which were founded in the work of Otto and Marie Neurath.

In Greco (2019c), attention is turned to the area of MA education, and through education, to MA practices as well. Adopting and extending the perspective of AS, the research investigates current models of MA education and training. First, it is shown how they have been heavily influenced by a restrictive type of particularist account of MA. It is then discussed how this account is biased by the medical model of disability and how such a bias impacts the categorisation and definition of media access services, framing them as instruments for normalisation and medicalisation. It is argued that this poses a risk of students acquiring a biased mindset, which may in turn bias their future professional practices. A possible solution is then suggested: the (re)design of education and training programmes in MA and AVT using the critical apparatus of AS. This would entail, for example, the adoption of the universalist account of MA and the human variation paradigm as the basis of the whole curriculum. At a more operational level, education and training courses should be built around ‘critical learning spaces’, spaces within the various modules where students can acquire and practice the critical attitude and the tools required to successfully address the social and theoretical dimensions of access and accessibility. The publication also briefly elaborates on a proposal advanced in previous works, namely the *social model of accessibility* (Greco, 2013b, 2017, 2019a). Building upon previous experience in the design and implementation of the training course on ‘Expert on accessibility, health and safety of live events and venues’, the research for this article included a series of practical activities. Most notably, it highlights the testing of ideas within two European projects: Easy

Access for Social Inclusion Training (EASIT) and Interlingual Live Subtitling for Access (ILSA).

In recent years, the issue of quality has gained a central role in MA and AVT (Pedersen, 2017). So far, the issue has been addressed from a translation-oriented or translation-based perspective (e.g. Doherty & Kruger, 2018; Robert & Remael, 2016; Romero-Fresco & Pérez, 2015). In Greco and Jankowska (2019), the issue is examined through the lens of AS. The article identifies four problems in the way quality has been addressed so far and suggests eight actions to tackle them. The problems and solutions discussed in the text stem from the results of an in-depth analysis of the literature on quality in MA and AVT carried out over a two-year period, even though the text's style makes it a position paper. That is, the article does not refer to or discuss the analysis of the literature nor does it report on its data. The analysis was conducted adopting two interconnected methods – systematic review and critical appraisal – which brought to light some limitations of the current approaches to quality. For example, quality models specifically developed for AVT and MA either ignore or minimise the nontranslation-based dimensions of quality, such as reproduction (e.g. sound mix) in the case of AD and voice-over. Another problem identified during the research is related to the *synecdochal fallacy* (Greco & Moores, 2021): a widespread problem whereby publications (i.e. investigations) concentrate on some dimension (e.g. accuracy) of the quality of an MA service (e.g. live subtitling) but then draw general conclusions on the overall quality of that service.

The aim of Greco and Jankowska (2020) was to provide a unified overview of the position acquired over time by MA in relation to AVT and TS. The article

does so through a novel narrative used to transform the various tiles previously introduced in other publications, not only those included in this thesis, into a single mosaic. The text broadens the line of thought used in the other works by expanding on the newfound position of MA and proposing a novel classification of MA services into translation-based and nontranslation-based groupings. Elaborating on an argument more extensively developed in Greco (2019a), the text also clarifies the position and mutual relationship between AS and TS. The idea of (the emergence of) AS should not be confused with a proposal to abandon TS in favour of AS, nor with the idea that AS is a mere extension of TS. Although interconnected, the two fields look at the world through different lenses. Their relationship should be seen as one of collaboration and synergy, not as mutually exclusive nor as competitors.

A major aspect of MA research, especially with regards to subtitling and AD, is the adoption of empirical and experimental approaches to investigate the cognitive, linguistic, multimodal and other similar traits of MA processes and phenomena. In accordance with Dewey (1903), here “the term ‘empirical’ refers to origin and development of scientific statements out of concrete experiences; the term ‘experimental’ refers to the testing and checking of the so-called laws and universals by reference to their application in further concrete experience” (p. 119); that is, the former includes the latter. A reading of empirical and experimental research on MA through the lens of AS is addressed only indirectly in some of the publications included here (mainly Greco & Jankowska, 2019, 2020), marginally touched upon in other works (e.g. Greco, 2019a, 2020, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c; Greco & Moores, 2021; Greco et al., forthcoming), and, will hopefully be the subject of

future ones. It is however, one of the topics where an AS perspective could prove to be fruitful and will need to be specifically addressed so as to further the qualities of AS. If framed within the framework of AS, empirical and experimental research becomes a significant source for understanding the multiple facets of access and accessibility processes and phenomena as well as the role that agency plays within them. For instance, it can help shed light on the role of users as both epistemic and poietic agents, i.e. as active knowers and not just passive repositories of data; active creators of their own experiences and not merely passive receptors of social forces. At the same time, AS can unveil problems and warn about risks. For instance, a major risk of experimental research in MA is that of focussing on common traits among groups of users, thus fostering biases of homogenisation, to the detriment of listening to individual voices. An AS perspective can help provide a balance thanks to its core traits and highlight how each experience counts (Greco et al., forthcoming).

2.3. A note on the use of ‘universalist’ and ‘particularist’

Some clarifications are in order regarding the first shift and its terminology, mostly because readers may misinterpret the labels ‘universalist’ and ‘particularist’ as they have been used in the overall research project, including the publications which form part of this thesis. Human beings have long been searching for universals in the most diverse aspects of life, whether moved by some sort of theoretical horror vacui or by the need to exercise control over ourselves, the others and the world, or by some other reason. The ‘universalism vs particularism’ dichotomy, together with

the connected ‘objectivism vs subjectivism’ dichotomy,¹ has been one of the most crowded and challenging arenas in human thought, at least since Plato’s problem of ‘the one and the many.’ These conundrums encapsulate questions that are foundational in scope and genuinely open. While the openness of the questions makes tentative answers subject to revisions (Castell, 1965), the very process of attempting to answer them has been fertile and has enriched human thought. For instance, the need to clarify the terms of the problem led Plato to invent the neologism *poiōtēs* (*Theaetetus* 182a), which Cicero calqued by creating the neologism *qualitas* (*Academica* I.24). Instantiations of the ‘universalism vs particularism’ debate span from ethics (O’Neill, 1998; Richardson & Williams, 2008) and aesthetics (Bender, 1995; van Damme, 1996) to linguistics (Everett, 2013; Pinxten, 1976) and psychology (Pepitone & Triandis, 1987; Tooby & Cosmides, 1989).

The meaning of ‘universalism’ and ‘particularism’ varies from area to area. For example, in moral theory, universalism refers to the idea that there are moral values common to all cultures, while particularism refers to the idea that moral values are culturally bound. A frequent criticism to the former argues that a universalist paradigm “erases difference and produces self-reinforcing spirals of exclusion” (Costanza-Chock, 2020, p. 56); it is a way of imposing a dominant view as the standard rule or implementing forms of homogenisation. Supporters of (forms of) universalism, on the contrary, underline how it does not negate nor delete

¹ The two dilemmas are also formulated as ‘universalism vs relativism’ and ‘objectivism vs relativism.’ Though a distinction could be made between ‘particularism’ and ‘relativism’ as well as ‘subjectivism’ and ‘relativism,’ they are oftentimes treated synonymously in the literature. Since those distinctions are not necessary for the scope of this text, they will not be introduced.

certain concepts; rather, it is grounded upon and fosters the pluralism of cultures and the diversity of human beings (e.g. Benhabib, 1992, 1994). At a normative level, for instance, they see universalism as “a view that there are principles of justice that require that each person, whoever and wherever they are, is treated fairly and equally” (Assiter, 2016, p. 37). Consider the case of feminist political theories. The very idea of a feminist political theory is oftentimes seen as contradictory to a universalist view of human beings and principles (Assiter, 2003, 2016). Proponents of feminist political theories that include forms of universalism, like Butler and Nussbaum, have been claiming that the contradiction is only apparent. According to Nussbaum (2000): “Feminist philosophy has frequently been skeptical of universal normative approaches. [However] it is possible to describe a framework for such a feminist practice of philosophy that is strongly universalist, committed to cross-cultural norms of justice, equality, and rights, and at the same time sensitive to local particularity, and to the many ways in which circumstances shape not only options but also beliefs and preferences. [A] universalist feminism need not be insensitive to difference or imperialistic, and that a particular type of universalism, framed in terms of general human powers and their development, offers us in fact the best framework within which to locate our thoughts about difference” (p. 7). Framed as such, universalism is “open-ended and humble; it can always be contested and remade” (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 77). A similar position in favour of universalism is Butler’s (1995), who calls for an interpretation within which universality is “permanently open, permanently contested, permanently contingent” (p. 41). The use of the adjective ‘universalist’ - and thus ‘particularist’ - in the context of my research should not be assumed to bear the same meaning it has

within that debate. As clearly explained in the publications included in this thesis, particularly Greco (2018) and Greco (2019c), within my research the term ‘universalist’ is used exclusively to signify that *access and accessibility concern all individuals*. Claiming that “access and accessibility concern all individuals” *does not entail* that access problems are the same for all individuals nor that the same access solutions can or should be applied to all individuals. Therefore, *universalist* should not be confused with *universal*. In other words, the *universalist* account of access and accessibility, as developed in my works, is not a *universal* account of access and accessibility. Similarly, the *universalist* account of MA is not a *universal* account of MA. As explained in Greco (2019c), the universalist account of access and accessibility – and therefore of MA – first presented in Greco (2016a) is grounded upon the *human diversity paradigm* which sees diversity as an inherent part of nature, society and culture. In my research, such a universalist approach is used to contrast the long-held dominant view in AVT and MA that access and accessibility concern only some particular groups, and to unveil the discriminatory and homogenising traps hidden within particularist accounts as well as universal accounts of accessibility and MA. Actually, the universalist account cautions against the risks of universalism. If access and accessibility concern all individuals because of the inherent nature of diversity, then we should beware of universal positions that risk to ignore or eliminate those very differences. Consequently, criticisms against universalism – for instance those within the human rights debate mentioned in the previous pages or those against universal design (e.g. Imrie, 2011) – do not apply to the concept of ‘universalist’ as used in my research, nor to the universalist account presented in the publications. If one wishes to frame my

universalist account of access and accessibility within the general debate on universalism, then it should be read along the lines of positions like Assiter's, Benhabib's, Butler's, and Nussbaum's. Similarly to the so-called targeted universalism, the universalist approach promoted in my research is "an approach that supports the needs of the particular while reminding us that we are all part of the same social fabric" (J. A. Powell et al., 2019, p. 4).

3. The contribution made to the field of study

Just a decade ago, scholars claimed that "although a relative newcomer within the field of Translation Studies (TS), [AVT] has moved from the field's periphery to its centre" (Remael, 2010, p. 13) and that MA is "one of today's most thriving translation areas" (Díaz-Cintas et al., 2010, p. 17). Since then, AVT and MA have grown significantly and they are now well-accepted within TS. However, as recently noted by Gambier and Ramos Pinto (2018), "this exponential growth [...] does not negate the fact that it is still a very young domain of research currently exploring an incredible number of different lines of inquiry without methodological and theoretical framework" (p. 1). Their characterisation of AVT may be somewhat ungenerous. Some scholars had already attempted to suggest possible paths for theoretical enquiry (e.g. Mayoral et al., 1988; Zabalbeascoa, 1993, 2008). However, these were only a few, and they mainly focused on AVT and adopted a translation-based perspective. A theoretical and methodological reflection on MA and on accessibility has been mostly lacking, because so far "studies on accessibility focus mostly on investigating how (and whether) information disseminated through

audiovisual products is accessible to everyone” (Gambier & Ramos Pinto, 2018, p. 3). Although the works included in this thesis were published only in the last five years, in the next paragraphs a few examples will show how they have already contributed to the definition of a ‘methodological and theoretical framework’ for MA.

Proposals and cases for integrating access concerns since the ex-ante stage of production of an artefact have a long history within MA and AVT, at least since Udo and Fels’s early works (Fels et al., 2006; Udo & Fels, 2009, 2010a, 2010b). Similarly, calls for more attention to be paid to users, e.g. through reception studies, or for their active involvement in the production of access services had been proposed for quite some time (e.g. Gambier, 2003; ITU-T FG AVA, 2014; Orero & Matamala, 2016; Utray et al., 2009). However, the attempt to devise a model for describing and understanding those processes had not been undertaken. Following the publication of Greco (2018), the model of the three shifts has started to be used as a tool to analyse current processes in AVT and MA (e.g. Moores, 2020; Romero-Fresco, 2020; Szarkowska, 2019; Szarkowska et al., 2020; Szarkowska, 2021; Tor-Carroggio & Rovira-Esteva, 2020). Furthermore, Romero-Fresco (2019) extensively endorses and makes use of some of the original contributions of this research project, such as the ghetto effect, the universalist account of MA, and the maker-expert-user gap. For instance, the first chapter presents an argument in support of the universalist account, while the maker-expert-user gap expressly constitutes the red line along which the whole book develops.

Another sign of the contribution made by the works can be seen in that the very idea of AS has entered the debate in AVT and MA (e.g. Arrufat Pérez de Zafra

& Álvarez de Morales Mercado, 2019; Bogucki & Díaz-Cintas, 2020; Deckert, 2020; Jankowska, 2020; Matamala & Orero, 2016; Neves, 2020), as also testified by the fact that the fourth edition of Robinson's *Becoming a Translator* (2020) includes a section entitled *Audiovisual translation, media accessibility, and accessibility studies (rules and theories)*, which extensively discusses Greco (2018). The increasing number of doctoral theses where the entire research is explicitly framed from an AS perspective is yet another sign (e.g. Arrufat Pérez de Zafra, 2020; Dawson, 2020; Tor-Carroggio, 2020).

An analysis of both accessibility and MA in relation to human rights had been mostly lacking. Following the publication of Greco (2016a), many scholars have started to question or frame their research on accessibility and MA in relation to the wider issue of human rights (e.g. Di Giovanni, 2021; Fidyka & Matamala, 2021; Fryer, 2020; Reviere & Remael, 2018; Rizzo, 2020; Tor-Carroggio & Orero, 2019). The universalist account of MA is being increasingly used as either a preferred definition of MA or as a point of discussion for further reflection on the development of the area (e.g. Ávila-Cabrera, 2021; Barbosa Pinheiro, 2020; Dawson & Romero-Fresco, 2021; Fresno, 2021; Hamaoui & Stavrou, 2019; Hermosa-Ramírez, 2020; Jiménez-Andrés, 2021; Jiménez-Andrés & Alemam, 2021; Koponen et al., 2020; Martínez-Lorenzo, 2020; Nascimento, 2020; Szarkowska, 2019). It has also been used as the basis in two recent calls for papers of special issues published by leading journals in TS, namely the 2019 issue of *Linguistica Antverpiensia* on 'Media Accessibility Training' and the 2020 issue of *MonTI* on 'Translation and Media Accessibility: from Theory to Practice'.

The publications have also provided a practical contribution in the context of education in AVT and MA. Greco's (2019c) proposal about the design of education and training courses was adopted within two European projects – ILSA and EASIT – and used to devise the curricula of four courses, respectively for: the interlingual respeaker; and the experts in easy-to-understand subtitles, easy-to-understand audio description, and easy-to-understand audiovisual journalism. Furthermore, some of the novel contributions advanced in the publications are the subject of specific lessons in said training courses: the ILSA Unit 4.9 *Access services* (Robert, 2020) is entirely dedicated to Greco and Jankowska's (2020) classification of MA services; the EASIT Unit 1.2.1. *Accessibility* (Matamala, 2021a) discusses Greco's (2016a) universalist account of accessibility; and the EASIT Unit 1.4.2. *What is media accessibility?* (Matamala, 2021b) presents Greco's (2018, 2019a) three accounts of MA, as well as the very idea of AS.

The impact of the publications extends beyond TS. The reflections on accessibility and human rights advanced in Greco (2016a), for instance, have become the main point of reference for the discussion on the topic among legal scholars (e.g. Drabarz, 2020; Roszewska, 2021).

4. The case for the publications to be considered as a coherent body of scholarly work

As mentioned above, the research has followed a singular blueprint. Each publication, including those not part of this thesis, builds upon the previous one(s) and then becomes the basis upon which other works are placed. The condition of

interconnectedness, mutual reinforcement and expansion is most evident in the texts here included. Greco (2016a) clears up the ambiguity regarding the position of access and accessibility within the human rights framework. It then formulates the universalist account of MA and discusses how it can be fruitful in the context of multilingualism and language rights. Greco (2018) connects the centrality of access within human rights with the pivotal role access has acquired on a wider stage thanks to the information revolution. The analysis is then used to introduce the accessibility revolution, especially in terms of how the question of access has increasingly become a driving force in the most diverse of fields. This then lays the groundwork for presenting a general case for AS. In doing so, it adds a slew of additional building blocks, always using AVT and MA as core examples, such as: the analysis of the position of MA within AVT and the distinction between particularist accounts and the universalist account of MA; the shifts from maker-centred to user-centred and from reactive to proactive approaches; and the role of access for epistemic agency. It also addresses the leading role AVT and MA have been playing in the emergence of AS, and it concludes calling for an even stronger and more conscious leadership. Moving forward from the conclusions of previous publications, Greco (2019c) expands the analysis to the pedagogical problems of accessibility. Using postgraduate and vocational education in AVT and MA as a case study, it discusses some problems with how accessibility is taught in those courses and then suggests several solutions: chiefly, the re-design of curricula around critical learning spaces. In the course of the discussion, the text shows that the ways MA services have been defined so far, even though having originated from the perspective of the social model of disability, ultimately reinforce the medical

model of disability, i.e., they embody discriminatory stances. Extending the discussion from epistemic agency to poietic agency, the work concludes by tracing the general lines of a poietically-driven approach, whose promotion could become the aim of educational curricula. Greco and Jankowska (2019) adopts an AS-based and AS-oriented view to analyse the issue of quality in MA. Most notably, the article argues that the quality of MA services is jointly defined by translation- and nontranslation-related factors. It discusses how research has so far focused on the former while minimising or ignoring the latter. Finally, Greco and Jankowska (2020) adopts a novel narration to tie together the different blocks laid down so far. It then broadens the current research by presenting an initial classification of MA services into translation-based and nontranslation-based groups.

5. List of publications included in the thesis

- Chapter 1: Greco, G. M. (2016a). On accessibility as a human right, with an application to media accessibility. In A. Matamala & P. Orero (Eds.), *Researching audio description. New approaches* (pp. 11–33). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-56917-2_2
- Chapter 2: Greco, G. M. (2018). The nature of accessibility studies. *Journal of Audiovisual Translation*, 1(1), 205–232. <https://doi.org/10.47476/jat.v1i1.51>
- Chapter 3: Greco, G. M. (2019c). Towards a pedagogy of accessibility. The need for critical learning spaces in media accessibility education and training. *Linguistica Antverpiensia, New Series: Themes in Translation Studies*, 18, 23–46. <https://doi.org/10.52034/lanstts.v18i0.518>
- Chapter 4: Greco, G. M., & Jankowska, A. (2019). Framing media accessibility quality. *Journal of Audiovisual Translation*, 2(2), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-42105-2_4
- Chapter 5: Greco, G. M., & Jankowska, A. (2020). Media accessibility within and beyond audiovisual translation. In Ł. Bogucki & M. Deckert (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of audiovisual translation and media accessibility* (pp. 57–81). Cham: Springer International Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.47476/jat.v2i2.114>

6. Statements of co-authorship

Statement of co-authorship

Antwerp, 30/05/2021

In relation to the publication G. M. Greco and A. Jankowska (2020), *Media Accessibility within and beyond Audiovisual Translation*, in Ł. Bogucki and M. Deckert (eds), *Handbook of Audiovisual Translation and Media Accessibility*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 57-81

I the undersigned Anna Jankowska declare that, though said publication was the result of mutual debate, Gian Maria Greco is the first author of the text, the author of section 1-4 and 6-7 and the co-author of section 5. I authorise the use of said text for Gian Maria Greco's thesis for a PhD by Published Works at the University of Roehampton and I will not use it for similar purposes myself.



Statement of co-authorship

Antwerp, 30/05/2021

In relation to the publication G. M. Greco and A. Jankowska (2019), *Framing Media Accessibility Quality*, *Journal of Audiovisual Translation*, 2(2), 1–10

I the undersigned Anna Jankowska declare that, though said publication was the result of mutual debate, Gian Maria Greco is the first author of the text as well as the author of the full draft of the article. I authorise the use of said text for Gian Maria Greco's thesis for a PhD by Published Works at the University of Roehampton and I will not use it for similar purposes myself.



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