

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF TRANSLATION
VOL. 23, NO. 2, JUL-DEC 2011

Audiovisual Translation: A Complex and Unstable Field of Research at the Service of All

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1. INTRODUCTION

During the last two decades, especially, Audiovisual Translation (AVT) has shown itself to be a complex, unstable field of research that is rich in linguistic, cultural and ideological associations. In addition, the analytical and research horizons are being expanded by a wealth of disciplines, including pragmatics, cultural studies, sociolinguistics, sociology, neuropsychology and descriptive translation studies, amongst many others. As a result of this richness of perspectives, the intersection between the audiovisual text and translation has grown exponentially and this has given rise to a variety of lines of research that were inconceivable just a few years ago, when both 'audiovisual' and 'translation' were no more than marginal categories in the field of Translation Studies.

We have come a long way since those terse prologues in which we, as authors and editors of articles and monographs, complained about the permanent discrimination suffered by the different modalities of Audiovisual Translation in universities.

On the subject of the boundaries of Audiovisual Translation, Mayoral (2005: 6) stated that:

Audiovisual Translation is not an immutable and predefined object of study but rather an object of study that is destined to change and innovation. (Translation mine)

Regarding the future of AVT, Mayoral also warned of the danger of refusing to accept the new modalities arising from technological innovation. We would also draw attention to the perils of failing to recognise the social responsibility both governments and enterprises have towards all kinds of final users.

Realities that are candidates to be included within the same category (whatever we wish to call it) as film, television or video translation, such as

multimedia products, videogames, subtitling for the deaf, subtitling in the teaching of foreign languages or the translation of websites, will be ignored by university scholars if the definitions are used dogmatically. (our translation)

But the truth is that universities have echoed this new outlook and what appeared to be barren land in the research scene has been replaced by an abundance of works wholly given over to this area of study. And this research is beginning to provide answers for one of the translating activities with the greatest presence and most impact on an increasingly global society. Audiences of all ages and from all cultures and levels of society have made the screen one of their favourite channels of communication through which it is possible to access knowledge, establish social relationships, work and have fun.

On a more general note, it must be borne in mind that until the 1990s the specialised literature on translation was very scarce, consisting of only a few articles and the odd monograph on the subject. As examples of the latter and due to their importance as groundbreaking works in their respective fields, we would like to highlight the studies by Pommier (1960) on dubbing or Fodor (1976) on subtitling. In the 1990s, the first international congresses on Audiovisual Translation started to be held, a few subjects were introduced into university curricula, the first doctor's degree courses began and an important number of doctoral theses were defended. A substantial number of articles were also published in journals on translation together with about twenty monographs, some of the most important of which were the works carried out at the European Institute for the Media (Luyken et al. 1991; Dries 1995), some dealing specifically with dubbing (Whitman 1992; Agost 1999), others with subtitling (Ivarsson 1991; Gottlieb 1977) and a number of studies conducted by different authors and on a variety of topics coordinated by prominent researchers, such as those by Baccolini, Bosinelli & Gavioli (1994) or Gambier (1994, 1998). At the turn of the new century, interest in AVT finally mushroomed. Proof of this lies in the number of publications that have seen the light in the last five years: around 15 monographs, including the special issues of *Linguistica Antverpiensia* (Remael & Neves 2007) or *Perspectives* (Kruger & Orero 2010); the works resulting from the international congresses organised by the *Media for All* research group (Díaz Cintas, Remael & Orero 2007); and works on AVT of a generalist nature (Lavour & Şerban 2008; Chiaro, Heiss & Bucaria 2008) or focused on a more specific point (Neves 2007). Finally, the work edited by Şerban, Matamala & Lavour has been published in 2011 and we are aware of three other volumes that are currently being prepared for publication.

From this brief review, it becomes clear that we have now gone on to another stage. It is time to plunge headlong into new lines of research,

explore new modalities and offer projects that show what we do from different points around the world, because there are many languages and cultures involved.

It is time to offer views that are truly more global, which is one of the aims of the monograph being presented here. This volume is an attempt to open up a space where the latest research horizons on Audiovisual Translation can be exchanged by focusing on the results of a wide range of research projects. This is the reason why it is being launched through a non-European publishing house, Bahri Publications (New Delhi), which welcomed us right from the outset and has done everything it can with the intention of uniting readers from a wide range of places.

Over ten years ago, we published a book about translation for dubbing which included “*palabras, voces and imágenes*” (words, voices and images) in its title. The idea behind using those words was to sum up what we considered to be the fundamental elements of Audiovisual Translation (Agost 1999). Today, these three words can again be used to present this monograph.

Popular wisdom sometimes offers us sentences like “a picture is worth a thousand words.” Yet, those of us who have worked, taught or researched on accessibility or those of us who suffer the consequences of impaired sight, either personally or in those around us, are perfectly aware that there is a part of the world’s population with sight problems for whom “a word is worth a thousand pictures.” Likewise, when reference is made over and over again to the power of words, of course we are not thinking of the whole group of people with hearing difficulties for whom “voices” are a code to which, initially, they do not have access. In these last years, AVT has accommodated many texts where those words, voices and images are combined in different ways so that their products can truly reach everybody. That notion of Universal Design (or Design for All) is part of the very basis of translation, and of communication, because translation is essentially all about accessibility. Thus, this volume includes studies on dubbing, subtitling, theatre audio description, subtitling for the deaf and audio description for the blind.

In an attempt to offer a holistic view of AVT, the works presented here involve a number of different language combinations (Polish-Spanish, Arabic-English, Italian-Spanish, English-Spanish and Dutch-English-Spanish) and cover a wide range of linguistic and cultural diversity. By using these combinations, our intention is to offer research works on both majority and minority cultures and languages from a wide range of traditions.

Since translation is both a process and a product, some studies focus more on analysing translations, following the line of descriptive studies.

But we will also find others that centre their attention on studying the process or on analysing how the products are received, these being based on more empirical assumptions. The reader can therefore appreciate the efforts we have made to integrate a variety of methodologies.

We have also tried to vary the genres that have been analysed and the different studies dealing with advertising, documentaries, films and plays are clear proof of this intention. With regard to the topics addressed herein, the volume offers a sample of possible lines of research, since together with the importance of considering paratextual aspects it also deals with the reception of the translation, the subject of the quality of translations, linguistic variety or the directionality of translations.

Finally, one point that we also want to stress is the fact that most of the authors who have contributed to this monograph base their research on a thorough knowledge of the profession of audiovisual translator because they combine (to varying degrees) their activities at university with work in audiovisual translation companies and studios (dubbing, subtitling, accessibility, theatre, etc.). The academic world and the professional world have come together in an attempt to show that theory and practice, rather than being two opposite poles, are in fact two sides of the same coin that create synergies and provide each other with feedback.

2. ABOUT THE CONTENT OF THIS VOLUME

This volume begins with three works on one of the most recent areas of study to be incorporated into the field of AVT: accessibility. The study of the different codes involved in the audiovisual text and the strategies that translators use to get the information from each code across to all the final users is a common denominator linking the works by Serrat (Universitat Jaume I, Spain), Matamala and Orero (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain) and Udo, Copeland and Fels (Ryerson University, Canada). Serrat's study first offers us a general introduction to the Design for All philosophy and then goes on to focus on the accessibility issues that can arise in relation to audiovisual texts on the web. The author defends the view that these contents must be translated by audiovisual translators in order to ensure that communication is transferred correctly. The work offers a case study on several emblematic European Union websites. The research conducted by Matamala and Orero focuses on the analysis of the function and the audio description of the opening credits in a corpus of twenty films. The authors analyse the priorities of communication, the restrictions imposed by the demand for synchrony and the translation strategies that can be applied to the problem posed by the coexistence of different codes in the same space and time. Finally, the work by Udo,

Copeland and Fels takes us into the world of accessibility in the theatre. By means of a systematic study and with the aid of information from semi-structured interviews, the authors obtain data that allow them to analyse final users' needs and to work in cooperative environments that ensure higher quality audio descriptions for the theatre.

Another line of research is that of the work carried out by Santamaría Guinot (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain), which addresses the way documentaries are received. Methodologically, the author bases her research on studies from the sociology of translation and analyses some key elements that cause problems when it comes to translating popular science programmes. The analysis of the scientific information is followed by a study of the cognitive processes that are involved. Finally, the author describes how polyphony contributes to popularise science through television. From this perspective, the audiovisual translator is seen as an essential mediator.

From documentaries, we now move on to advertising, which is the genre of audiovisual translation dealt with by Valdés (University of Oviedo, Spain). In her work, she attempts to show the semiotic complexity of what are undoubtedly complex texts and which are the object of study in a range of disciplines. The author conducts an empirical analysis of the reception of advertisements from a variety of modalities that have been translated using different strategies. To do so, she analyses advertising strategies, cultural aspects, linguistic policies and translation norms. Surveys are used to obtain information about the final users' preferences, the implications of the consumption of advertising in various modalities, the relationship between languages, and stereotypes. With these data, she aims to demonstrate the importance of taking into account the aspects related with the reception of translations, especially in texts that are to be used on television.

The next work uses a new genre – cartoons – to study dubbing in a country with a long history and experience in this kind of translation. Ariza (University of Macerata, Italy) presents an analysis of the translation strategies used to dub material in this genre. The author examines the different techniques that are used to enhance creativity and to offer the final users a translation that fits their tastes and cultural preferences. Underlying this study, we find the concepts of manipulation and culture.

Finally, after having dealt with several different modalities and genres, emphasis is now placed on the most important modality from the quantitative point of view, namely subtitling. For a variety of reasons, this modality is the one that predominates in most countries. Examples of the research being carried out in this area are the works by Vermeulen (University College Ghent, Belgium), Santamaría Ciordia (University of Valladolid, Spain) and Thawabteh (Al-Quds Open University, Palestine).

Three countries, three cultures and three different language combinations (Dutch-English-Spanish, Spanish-Polish and Arabic-English) are presented as a sample of three lines of research that complement each other perfectly. Vermeulen focuses on the problem of the directionality of translations and the use of intermediate versions in audiovisual translation, which is a common practice in multilingual societies in which one of the languages is dominant from a cultural or political point of view. The author presents an analysis of the techniques used in this type of translation. The analysis of the different phases of the translation process and the diversity of intertexts included in the final outcome enhance the reliability and consistency of the examples presented to illustrate the points highlighted by the author. Still in Europe, but moving eastwards, we come to the research conducted by Santamaría Ciordia, who is a specialist in the reception of the works of Almodóvar in Poland. On this occasion, the author conducts a comprehensive quantitative and qualitative analysis of all the films directed by Almodóvar that have been translated into Polish. She then uses the results of that analysis to show that, despite the existence of certain cultural patterns, some established authors manage to free themselves from the translation norms of a particular society and make their own particular style one of the priorities of the translation.

Our last stop on this overview is the study by Thawabteh on the importance of the semiotic aspects of audiovisual translation. Specifically, the author focuses on the translator's job of translating the kinesic elements performed by the characters that appear on screen from the visual code into the linguistic code. In this way, certain key aspects of Arab culture can be transmitted without any difficulty to English-speaking final users from very different cultures. Unless translated in the right way, the message will not arrive intact, although the transfer of these elements can undoubtedly favour intercultural communication. In our opinion, this is a line of research with a promising future and a great deal to offer Translation Studies and, more particularly, Audiovisual Translation.

To sum up, we believe that this volume offers a representative sample of the paths that research into AVT is currently moving along and we hope that the work presented here can be of use as a model for future research. Audiovisual Translation aims to make communication accessible to everybody; our commitment as researchers is to put the results of our work at the service of all.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As a guest editor of this volume, I would like to thank *International Journal of Translation* for inviting me to edit the present issue and also all

the authors for kindly giving me the opportunity to present this monograph of selected papers.

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