

MULTIDISCIPLINARITY IN AUDIOVISUAL TRANSLATION

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The practice of boundary-crossing in research, although regarded with suspicion up until a few decades ago, is now widely accepted and increasingly more common in many domains. In an era dominated by globalized, instant communication, nothing can be seen as monolithic anymore, and this new situation demands a multifarious outlook on the part of the researcher. In the wake of this new trend, as Willy Østregren puts it (2010: 95), scientific disciplines are nowadays subject to vertical as well as horizontal restructuring:

The traditional monodisciplinary organization of research is gradually fading away, and a new structure, based on two distinct pillars is emerging. The first pillar is the fragmentation and hybridization resulting in units of topical specialization and sub-disciplines, and the second is extended monodisciplinary, where research is moved by “imperialistic expansion” into the territory of other disciplines, either by breaking or bridging across boundaries.

The two pillars around which the breaking up of monodisciplinary is reorganized, in Østregren’s words, can be said to apply to, and portray, the evolution of Translation Studies (TS) and Audiovisual Translation Studies (AVTS).

The hybridization and fragmentation of the “parent discipline” (TS), as a consequence of its very expansion and contamination, has in turn resulted in the emergence of sub-disciplines. AVTS, as a derivative research field, has soon achieved the “status” of a full-fledged discipline, attracting numerous researchers and leading to the organization of countless conferences, seminars, university courses and publications.

Subsequently, the coming of age of AVTS in the last decade or so has coincided with a more decisive move into the territory of other disciplines, without any imperialistic ambition but rather in search of more solid instruments for the analysis of ever-changing scenarios, techniques and activities. Looking at the plethora of publications and conferences devoted to AVT and its study over the past two or three years, one cannot but notice a major thrust towards multidisciplinary: even though it was probably never *mono-*, by asserting its own identity as a truly *multi-*disciplinary research field, AVTS has signed its own evolution.

But is multidisciplinary really the way forward in research, especially AVT research? In the introduction to *Conceptual Foundations for Multidisciplinary Thinking*, Stephen J. Kline (1995: 3-4) sums up three basic reasons why multidisciplinary is a necessity today. First of all, there is an increased awareness of the impossibility of perceiving human knowledge as a whole, as a single meaningful pattern: hyper-specialization in professional practices and in research makes it very difficult to comprehend increasingly complex, multisemiotic entities and phenomena, if it is not from a multidisciplinary perspective. Hyper-specialized domains themselves are very often characterized by sub-units which are not equally known to their experts. In audiovisual translation studies, for instance, specialists of the more traditional interlingual practices like subtitling often have very little knowledge of what is known as media accessibility (audio description, respeaking, etc.).

Secondly, in Kline’s terms, every such complex entity or phenomenon displays what he calls “emergent properties” (*ibid.*), which stem out of the interaction of different parts or sub-systems. In audiovisual translation, new or “merging modalities”¹ frequently arise out of established practices. See, for instance, the surge of audiosubtitling as a mixture of voice over and subtitling and as a complement to audio description.

Finally, in Kline’s words, there is a pragmatic reason why multidisciplinary is indeed a winning approach: the joining of specialized competences and

1. “Merging modalities” was the title of one of the main panels at the 2011 *Advanced Research Seminar on Audio Description* held in Barcelona in March, 2011.

the acknowledgement of emergent properties is (and *has to be*) supported by a true will to work interdependently, to make such interdependence work. As Kline puts it, “It is not enough to assemble a multidisciplinary group: the individual people must themselves be multidisciplinary or willing to become so” (*ibid.*)

Collaboration among AVT scholars has always been the norm, within what has developed as a friendly research environment from its very onset. Due, in all likelihood, to the vibrant nature of audiovisual translation itself, the research community which has gathered around it has enhanced the development of a solid but also extremely dynamic domain. In the wake of the discipline’s internal drift, AVT scholars have always looked across and beyond: multidisciplinarity has been sought at various degrees, and this has led to innovative research paths, viewpoints and practices.

But is multidisciplinarity the best possible way forward for AVTS? And most importantly, does it really have to be *multi-* rather than *inter-*, or perhaps *transdisciplinary* (Brown *et al.* 2010)? Although often used interchangeably, multidisciplinarity and interdisciplinarity have been distinguished by a number of scholars, in terms of the degree of integration among disciplines and methods. In other words, it seems that multidisciplinarity implies the parallel recourse to different approaches, whereas interdisciplinarity stands for their true blending. This attitude has often led to a negative connotation being attached to *multi-* as opposed to *inter-*; as Lattuca reports (2011: 11), for instance,

Rossini and Porter (1984) likened interdisciplinary work to a seamless woven garment that stands in contrast to the patchwork quilt of multidisciplinary work – in true interdisciplinary projects, a concatenation of disciplinary perspectives is replaced by integration of those perspectives.

On the other hand, supporters of transdisciplinarity generally unite *multi-* and *inter-* approaches under the umbrella of the coming-together-of-disciplines, in contrast to a seemingly more fruitful “overarching synthesis that transcends disciplinary worldviews [and should be] the ultimate goal of disciplinary cooperation” (*ibid.*). On yet another different note, Lawrence and Després (2004) compare interdisciplinary approaches to a mixing of disciplines, while transdisciplinarity would have more to do with a fusion of those disciplines (thus attaching to *trans-* and *inter-* the distinction more frequently made between *multi-* and *inter-*). Many scholars have then moved forward in the elaboration of concepts and terms related to the coming close or coming together of research approaches: interdisciplinarity has been further distinguished as auxiliary, linear or methodological, or as instrumental and conceptual (cf. Lattuca 2001: 11).

All of these distinctions have been briefly reported to show that even the definition of the coming together of research approaches is, in itself, dynamic and open to question, just like the disciplines themselves.

With reference to AVTS, in virtue of its being a young and undoubtedly multifarious domain, the editors of this volume have deliberately opted for a *multidisciplinary* perspective, with a view to stressing precisely that multifarious nature, where different elements, viewpoints, techniques and practices can be observed together. Moreover, the choice of *multi-* over *inter-* advocates for the integration of approaches but not their systematic or perpetual fusion: integration rather than fusion can lead to discoveries, redefinition and recombination in a never-ending, always-growing process.

This volume bears witness to the multidisciplinary essence of today's audiovisual translation studies and to the prolific nature of this discipline, which are reflected in the ever-growing number of monographs and collections that have appeared in the past few years (see below the selected bibliography of books since the year 2000). Monographs have so far largely focused on one AVT technique, thus filling a bibliographical and theoretical void, and the collections of essays have been, and still are, a privileged ground for highlighting the growing multidisciplinary attitude of AVTS scholars and professionals. The volume here presented is perhaps the first to spell out the multidisciplinary nature of this domain, in an attempt to highlight and further enhance this attitude.

Looking back at the first article on bibliometrics in AVT (Franco & Orero 2005: 83), the prediction seems to have materialized: "While it is still early to draw any solid conclusions about the beginning of the 21st century, it seems clear that there is a rising tendency and dynamism in the field of AVT which should consolidate it in a non-distant future". Franco & Orero analysed publications by decades, but finished in 2000. Writing at the end of 2011 offers us the opportunity to update the trends of the last decade, and also forecast the future.

Regarding research topics, this first decade of the new millennium continues mainly with descriptive studies. Articles focusing on a particular film director or film seem to still capture academic interest. Not much progress has been made in building a general theoretical background for this discipline, and perhaps given the multidisciplinary and multisectorial nature of the field, with the many (and still growing) approaches to research methodology, it is a chimera to think that a theory encompassing all disciplines will ever be achieved.

Regarding translation modalities, previous research had been bipolar, in the sense that dubbing or subtitling were the two translation modalities under the microscope –subtitling enjoying the lion's share. This hegemony continued in the new decade with monographs such as Lorenzo & Pereira 2001, Díaz Cintas 2001 & 2003, Bogucki 2004, Sanderson 2005, Díaz Cintas & Remael 2007, Downey 2008, Bannon 2009, McLoughlin, Biscio & Mhainnín 2011, and Pedersen 2011. Dubbing has also been gathering attention (Chaves 2000, Lorenzo & Pereira 2000, O'Connell 2003, Paolinelli & Di Fortunato 2005, Perego 2005, Pavesi 2006) or both these mainstream techniques (Petillo 2008, Ranzato 2011). Interestingly the field has recently opened up to other practices, such as voice-over (Franco, Matamala & Orero 2010), respoking (Romero Fresco 2011), and audio description (Perego 2012). A look at the immediate future tells us that more monographs are to come, the aim being to expand the knowledge of mainstream AVT techniques and most of all to explore ever-growing activities and areas of interest. By the end of 2012, several volumes on audio description and video game translation will have been published (O'Hagan & Mangiron forthcoming), thus also bearing witness to the latest trends and the avenues that are being developed within AVT research. The controversy of where AVT ends as a field is a hobbyhorse for those who still believe in self-contained areas of knowledge. We could have also listed volumes on the translation of theatre, opera, music, comics, songs, web localisation, etc. and the present volume is a witness of the permeability of the studies, which will no longer be widespread when technology and imagination in new communication formats ceases to be the context of today society.

A quick look at some collections of essays which have been published to date tells us that the juxtaposition of viewpoints, practices and research attitudes has always been common within AVTS. In 2001, Henrik Gottlieb and Yves Gambier edited a volume for John Benjamins whose very title was revealing of the *multi-* essence of AVT: *(Multi)Media Translation: Concepts, Practices, and Research* spelled out the complex and extremely dynamic nature of the practice and study of AVT and paved the way for a host of other volumes. In 1999, one of the first international conferences on AVT was held at the Universitat Jaume I (Spain). As a result, Agost & Chaume (2001) edited a volume devoted to a wide range of subjects from a theoretical and professional standpoint: different modalities, languages, and methodologies. In their introduction, the editors point out the importance of the new avenues and trends on AVT research, particularly as this was, at that time, new academic aspects of Audiovisual Translation:

Es innecesario insistir en el papel que ha adquirido la comunicación audiovisual en estos últimos años. Las plataformas digitales, las televisiones vía satélite, la televisión por cable, el auge del cine, del vídeo y de la televisión, la irrupción de los productos multimedia en los hogares, el futuro, ya inmediato, de las nuevas tecnologías aplicadas a los medios audiovisuales, como el DVD, la elección de la lengua en el visionado de un filme, la subtitulación para sordos, la narración para ciegos [sic], entre otras, se disponen a inaugurar un milenio caracterizado por la comunicación audiovisual. (Chaume & Agost 2001: 9-10)

Pilar Orero's *Topics in Audiovisual Translation* (2004), also published by John Benjamins, highlighted the main issues at stake in the study of AVT at the beginning of the new millennium, as well as introducing new topics and research attitudes. A few years later, the titles of collective volumes started to bring to the fore newly emerged areas of investigation (Catalina Jiménez's 2007 volume *Traducción y accesibilidad. Subtitulación para Sordos y audiodescripción para ciegos: nuevas modalidades de Traducción Audiovisual* and the first volume of *Media for All published in the same year by Díaz Cintas, Orero & Remael on Subtitling for the Deaf, Audio Description and Sign Language*), in addition to the very need to explore AVT from broader perspectives (Neves & Remael's 2007 volume *A Tool for Social Integration? Audiovisual Translation from Different Angles*). A year later, a collection of essays proposed the first systematic reflection on the training of audiovisual translators for such diverse and dynamic practices (Díaz Cintas's 2008 volume *The Didactics of Audiovisual Translation*). On the whole, that same year seems to have marked the acknowledgement of the unexpected expansion of AVTS, with scholars looking for order (cf. Chiaro, Heiss & Bucaria) and once again spelling out the need for a complex, pluridisciplinary approach to the study of certain activities (Lavour & Serban's 2008 volume *Le sous-titrage des films – approches pluridisciplinaires*). Dozens of other collective volumes have been published within the past three years, highlighting to varying degrees the growing interest in AVT practices and research, their ever-changing faces and, more or less overtly, the need for truly multidisciplinary reflections.

Most articles within AVTS are still signed by one or two authors who are very often from the same university. This trend may be due to the fact that in the Humanities more than two authors still appears to be a crowd and publication impact is diminished when used for benchmarking. Be it as it may, one important change in the field will be the acceptance from evaluating bodies of a larger number of authors for one article, thus breaking the alphabetical signing order (Rovira-Esteva & Orero 2011, and forthcoming).

Looking at the present and the immediate future, AVTS continues with the trend of publication in either collective works (see the bibliography below) or special issues of journals. Not many articles are published outside of these two formats, and paper still holds the weight of quality, though it is hoped that online publications soon come of age and are rated by their content, and not merely their format. The shift from paper to online is not only a long-term demand, but a prerequisite when studying multimedia. Long paragraph describing examples studied in an article could easily be replaced with excerpts from films or other multimedia texts, although this obviously raises questions regarding copyright. Away from the dilemma of the most natural format for audiovisual publications, we find the current trend of students relying almost exclusively on bibliography which can be found instantly online. Perhaps the battle against paper will come to an end soon, when publication impact indexes reveal the unrelenting trend towards quoting and referring to online resources rather than traditional publications. However, considering the extremely vibrant nature of AVTS as well as the practices and texts it is concerned with, it is difficult to make any sound forecasts.

It is, however, possible to envisage some of the major trends which are currently animating AVTS by taking a closer look at the papers which appear in this volume. The following essays reveal a multidisciplinary approach. Drawing from pragmatics and cognitive studies, relying on the principles of acoustic or eye-tracking research, these essays are representative of a wide range of new trends on audiovisual translation research.

The multilingual cinema analysis is considered with regard to the cultural and linguistic variety, richness and nuances of the filmic texts and the target audience receptiveness. Aspects that are not well covered until now, for example the importance of luminance and their relevance to the translation process and reception, are included in this volume. From the standpoint of modalities, this monograph deals with subtitling, dubbing, video game localization and accessibility (subtitling for deaf and heard-of-hearing, audio description, interpreting, audio guides, etc.). This situation reflects the desire to offer a panoramic vision about all the ways the target audience receives the audiovisual products today.

According to the methodologies used, descriptive analysis of dubbing and subtitling, or audio description analysis carried out from a narratological point of view, coexist with more empirical analysis. Experiments with eye-tracking technology or reception studies based on sociological inquiries are the crux of the presented works.

Regarding the codes used, we have articles focused on light, sound in general, and music in particular. With regards to image, there are works that deal with the visual features that should be transferred to the audiodescription.

To finish, the editors of this volume would insist on the continuation of the work dedicated to push barriers that still exist in the field of Audio Visual Translation Studies. We need researchers working in different fields; applied research taking account of two or more disciplines; and, finally, we need an identification of problems that are not centred on one specific subject. We must continue our efforts to connect individual and collective interests.

Ilya Prigogine, Nobel Prizewinner of Chemistry, says that there is nothing so complex that cannot be organized. If that statement is true for Physics, then we believe it can be applied to translation. It is our hope that we can continue to better organize AVT in the new context. We suggest there are three domains we should consider: the democratisation of the knowledge on the internet, the transparent ethics with a wider circulation of the new methodologies, and finally, the construction of relationships within the society. The future of the audiovisual translation research should be for all, or it will not be.

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BIONOTES / NOTAS BIOGRÁFICAS

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Elena Di Giovanni es profesora de traducción en la Universidad de Macerata (Italia), donde también ostenta el cargo de directora del Centro de Lenguas. Es licenciada en traducción especializada y doctora en anglística y traducción audiovisual. Ha enseñado teoría y práctica de traducción audiovisual en el máster en traducción audiovisual de la Universidad de Bolonia y de la Universidad de Parma (Italia). Desde hace tres años también imparte clases de traducción audiovisual en la Universidad de Roehampton (Londres). En septiembre de 2011, organizó el primer curso italiano de audiodescripción, que se celebró en la Universidad de Macerata.

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