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Introduction –

Audiovisual translation: The challenge of walking the way

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The aim of this book is to bring together research on several forms of audiovisual translation from a variety of perspectives, ranging from discourse analysis and pragmatics to cognitive science, second language acquisition, actor-network theory and speech recognition, to mention only a few.

In recent years, the number of publications on audiovisual translation has been increasing, in English as well as in several other languages, Spanish being a noteworthy example in this respect. Research questions, theoretical frameworks and the methodology for carrying out small or larger scale studies of process or product have often been imported from the more established discipline of translation studies, mainly its descriptive branch. Researchers, sometimes coming from a professional background, have investigated a variety of types of audiovisual translation, subtitling and dubbing, in particular. There have been numerous case studies involving a wide range of languages, but also a smaller number of corpus-based projects which have enabled certain generalizations to be made. Less has been written to date on the subject of voice-over;

in exchange, there is significant interest at this point in media accessibility for members of the audience suffering from hearing or visual impairments, and the forms of translation suitable for them: subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing and audio description for the blind and partially sighted. Translation for the performing arts, surtitling for the opera and the theatre for instance, non-conventional translation such as fansubbing, and the use of modern technology in, for example, respeaking, have all started to make the object of more or less systematic exploration. The trend is likely to continue.

In this evolving context, offering the reader a book on audiovisual translation is a challenging enterprise that we have not taken lightly. Undeniably, the fact that audiovisual translation is intimately linked to technology which is in constant evolution thereby giving rise to new tools, work environments, types of multimedia material to be translated, forms of translation, and challenges, is in itself an argument for the never-ending need for new publications to keep up to date with recent developments in the field. At the same time, the new volume had to represent a meaningful contribution to audiovisual translation in both its theoretical and practical dimensions, beyond the argument that there is always more you can write, perhaps focusing on different contexts and pairs of languages, or introducing slight variations to the methodology which is used. It is our sincere wish that the reader will find this book useful and interesting both as a stepping stone between what has been done so far and what is to follow – we are of course rapidly moving into the future, at a speed it is sometimes difficult to keep up with – but also in its own right, and for the implications of the research presented here for the wider discipline of translation studies as well as for other subject areas concerned with languages and the media, including film and television studies, information processing, reception, language teaching and language technologies.

About the content of this book

The volume is organized in five sections. The first of them, *Audiovisual translation and discourse analysis*, is an exploration of audiovisual translation, subtitling and dubbing in particular, from the perspective of discourse analysis, text linguistics and pragmatics – approaches which have now had a long history in translation research but continue to

yield interesting new findings. A central concern in all the contributions grouped under this theme has been the awareness of the multimodal nature and complex semiotic tissue of the texts under investigation, as well as the fact that the audiovisual text may have – and usually does – a background which is important to understand in order for meaningful, contextualized analyses to be carried out.

How much space are conversational routines granted in film dialogue and its translation? Could greetings and leave-takings be keys to orality in dubbed Italian? **Veronica Bonsignori**, **Silvia Bruti** and **Silvia Masi**'s contribution to this volume, "Formulae across languages: English greetings, leave-takings and good wishes in dubbed Italian", mainly explores such issues by focusing on a corpus of nine recent American and British films, as well as on three original Italian films. The analysis demonstrates that these expressions are granted significant space in both English film language and dubbed Italian, hence the importance of a congruent mapping. It also shows that such formulae are indeed keys to orality in dubbing. Relevant issues in translating trends concern in particular the asymmetry of so-called *good forms*, the coherence of register across turns and between characters, along with peculiar choices pertaining to idiolect and connoted slang varieties.

Annjo K. Greenall's paper "The non-translation of swearing in subtitling: Loss of social implicature?" presents a comparison between the Norwegian translation of the novel *The Commitments* by the Irish novelist Roddy Doyle, and the Norwegian subtitles of the film based on the book. The fact that virtually all the swearwords in the book have been translated, while relatively few swearwords from the film's audio track appear in the subtitles, invites the question whether this means there is a difference in the attention-getting effect and the social implicature generated by the translated and the subtitled versions, respectively. Greenall concludes that there is a rather big difference – if one presumes that the audience of the translated film has no knowledge of English. The loss in the subtitled version will in fact be relative to the actual command of the source language of individual members of the target audience.

According to **Adriana Tortoriello**, an audiovisual text is characterized by a degree of cohesion that is not merely semantic but, rather, semiotic – the result of the interplay of verbal and non-verbal codes which interact and complement each other in the formation

of the global meaning of the audiovisual text itself. Reduction through condensation or elimination is considered quintessential in subtitling; however, in order to guarantee a good level of semiotic cohesion, and given the invariant of the visual and of the soundtrack, other strategies might need to be activated. In her paper “Semiotic cohesion in subtitling: The case of explicitation”, she investigates whether, and to what extent, explicitation of information that is conveyed in the original by non-verbal codes is activated at a verbal level in the target language, in the written subtitles.

The audiovisual text comprises a complex network of signs which combine and relate in various ways. To what extent do the translations take account of the visual and auditory signs of the original, and does a comparison of the translations reveal a similar vision? **Zoë Pettit** sets out to compare the English subtitled version of the South African film *Tsotsi* (2005) with the French subtitled and dubbed versions. The original language of the film is Tsotsi-taal, a mixture of Afrikaans, English and various local African languages. Pettit’s case study, “Translating *Tsotsi* for the screen”, investigates the salient features of the translations and the strategies used.

The second section of the volume, entitled *Audiovisual translation and language learning*, discusses the role of subtitling in second language (L2) learning via two studies which focus on syntax acquisition and, respectively, cognitive issues involved in encoding and decoding foreign language in a multimedia learning situation. Interest in translation in general, and in audiovisual translation, as tools for language learning is not new. In fact, one of the prejudices translation scholars had to challenge in order to make their discipline accepted as an academic subject area in its own right was precisely that translation is a means to an end (e.g. in a university or school curriculum, a method to teach vocabulary or grammatical structures), and could never be an end in itself. In a way, we now have to reverse the trend and remind ourselves at times that translation is, indeed, a wonderful means of teaching and learning foreign languages, and that the easy availability of multimedia material can make the experience simultaneously useful and enjoyable – an ideal educators strive for and cannot always achieve. Moreover, watching translated audiovisual programmes is an activity language learners are likely to already be involved in, outside classes.

In the first chapter of this section, “The acquisition of L2 syntax through audiovisual translation”, **Elisa Ghia** reports the results of an experimental study investigating the extent of L2 syntax acquisition occurring after exposure to audiovisual material in the foreign language enhanced with interlingual subtitles in the first language (L1). The study was carried out on a group of Italian intermediate-level English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners exposed to fifteen British and American films with Italian subtitles over a three-month period. Findings reveal a significant effect of exposure in terms of syntax learning and proficiency development, and suggest a possible relationship between the translation strategies used to convey specific structures and the degree of noticing on the part of viewers.

Annamaria Caimi’s contribution entitled “Cognitive insights into the role of subtitling in L2 learning” describes how to set up and develop a teaching unit based on the function of subtitled motion pictures used as English learning tools. Subtitling is analyzed here within the framework of several parameters posited by cognitive linguistics, in particular the notion of *construal*, according to which the different ways of encoding a situation constitute different conceptualizations. The notions of *perspective*, *foregrounding* and *frame* are also central to Caimi’s research, as they are factors involved in alternative *construals* and are logically consistent with the cognitive approach. These notions are applied to the double process of encoding and decoding foreign language in a multimedia learning situation, and have implications which can generate useful guidelines to improve the process of subtitling and that of language learning.

The next series of papers, grouped under the theme of *Quality in audiovisual translation*, presents research from Brazil, Canada and Finland, dealing, respectively, with measuring expertise in subtitling, the evaluation of the quality and quantity of closed captioning, and the challenges of ensuring quality in a production network. The implications are manifold, and concern all the stages of creating and broadcasting translated multimedia programmes for a wide variety of viewers, including people with hearing disabilities. Some of the findings outlined here are relevant to translation training.

Adriana Pagano, Fabio Alves and **Vera Lúcia Santiago Araújo**'s study "Approaching expertise in subtitling: A pilot experiment" reports on a pilot experiment carried out within an ongoing project, EXPERT@ (*Expert knowledge in translation: modeling peak performance*), developed at LETRA (Laboratory for Experimentation in Translation), Federal University of Minas Gerais, Brazil. The aim of EXPERT@ is to examine expert knowledge in translation through experimental studies with different profiles of task performers, including translators, interpreters and subtitlers. The pilot experiment outlined here involved a small number of professional subtitlers and translation students who were required to carry out a subtitling task and fill in a pre- and post-task questionnaire. The answers given by professional translators and students were then compared along several parameters, and the subtitles were analyzed mainly along the dimension of register.

In 1998, the US Federal Communications Commission issued a number of revisions to the Telecommunication Acts which required nearly 100% captioning of television programmes by 2006. Other countries have proposed or are proposing the same kind of regulation. American hard of hearing and deaf persons have noted that the increase in the quantity of closed-captioned television programmes has not resulted in an improvement in the quality (intelligibility) of the caption. But how do we measure the quality of closed captioning? In "Measures for quality of closed captioning", **Pierre Dumouchel, Gilles Boulianne** and **Julie Brousseau** propose metrics to evaluate the quality and quantity of closed captioning. These metrics are based on NIST (National Institute of Standards and Technology) evaluation metrics for speech recognition and language translation measures.

Kristiina Abdallah's paper "Quality problems in AVT production networks: Reconstructing an actor-network in the subtitling industry" reconstructs a production network that consists of a multinational pay-TV provider as the client, a Scandinavian translation company as the service provider, and a group of students in Finland as subcontractors to the translation company. Abdallah uses the actor-network theoretical approach developed by Latour, Callon and Law to analyze how the collective was formed, and how and why the actors experienced quality-related difficulties in the production network. She then discusses some of the ways in which actor-network

theory can help researchers to detect the dynamics of production networks, and suggests possible solutions to quality challenges arising in such networks.

The papers we have included in the fourth part of this book examine the *Reception* of subtitled audiovisual programmes, through a qualitative study of viewers' reception strategies followed by a quantitative analysis of film comprehension from the perspective of cognitive psychology. The methodology for carrying out systematic investigations of how the audience processes translated audiovisual texts, with implications for language acquisition and, possibly, translator training, is also outlined here. After all, the best trained and most experienced translators can fail if the translation strategies they use have not been tested against the reality of audience reception.

In “Accidental reading? Some observations on the reception of subtitled films”, **Tiina Tuominen** describes her findings on viewers' subtitle reception strategies, based on a qualitative study on the reception of subtitled films. The data suggests that the most typical reception strategy is to follow both the spoken English text and the Finnish subtitles, with one or the other being the primary source of information. Viewers typically cannot avoid reading subtitles, even if they mostly rely on the spoken text. Subtitles are, however, usually read quite superficially, as they are often only used as support for understanding. Thus, subtitles seem to be most successful when they do not interfere with the viewing experience by drawing too much attention to themselves.

Dominique Bairstow's chapter “Audiovisual processing while watching subtitled films: A cognitive approach” sets out to describe a cognitive approach to subtitled film comprehension. The author first outlines the main stages leading up to an experimental study of reception, starting with a detailed analysis of the important audiovisual data conveyed by a film (visual information, dialogue-based information and situation-related data) and the characteristics of the population used as participants. She then presents a typical cognitive psychology study and the types of results it can reveal. Finally, the findings are discussed in the light of new developments linking this particular field of research with other domains.

The series of four chapters which conclude the present volume is dedicated to *Audio description in close-up*, the fascinating area of translating images into words for people who are blind or partially sighted, and also for other categories of users including language learners who stand to gain a great deal by being exposed to creative use of language by professional audio describers. Some of the issues the contributors, who come from different, even contradictory, theoretical backgrounds, have chosen to focus on in this section, are: the audio description of emotions and gestures, the challenge of audio describing complex communicative situations involving a variety of ways of using language, implementing pioneering audio description strategies for live theatre from the perspective of the describer and, finally, the early years of audio description in an East European country.

Although audio description is a relatively recent field within translation studies, a significant number of guidelines for good practice exist already, possibly due to the amount of interest this form of intersemiotic transfer has attracted from practitioners and researchers alike. Still, one of the biggest challenges appears when emotions and gestures have to be described while avoiding any personal interpretation on the part of the describer. Non-verbal communication has the ability to express a wide range of thoughts, feelings and emotions associated to certain gestures, and in her contribution “The audio description of emotions and gestures in Spanish-spoken films”, **Paula Igareda** analyzes a corpus of Spanish language films in an attempt to determine guidelines for objectively audio describing gestures.

In “The audio description of spoken, tactile and written language in *Be with Me*”, **Pilar Orero** takes Eric Khoo’s film *Be with Me* (2005) as a case study through which she explores instances of human communication pushed to the limit. Two languages are spoken in this film, Chinese and English, with their own writing systems, but there are also mobile phone text messages with their associated SMS language, as well as internet chats with their language and iconography. Moreover, the main character uses tactile hand-sign language because she is both deaf and blind. This incredibly rich variety of ways of communication presents a challenge to audio description, which Orero explains in detail and illustrates with examples. A comparison is also established between the film with and without subtitles.

Little published or publicly available research exists on audio description within the context of live theatre. Even scarcer are papers which discuss or investigate audio description from the perspective of the describer. Through a thematic analysis of comments made by each describer during separate post-production interviews, **John-Patrick Udo** and **Deborah Fels** present the describer's perspective as a lens through which to document the creation and execution of two unique audio description strategies developed or overseen by the production's director. Four main themes anchor their discussion, "From the describer's mouth: Reflections on creating unconventional audio description for live theatre". These are: the describer's motivation for participation and their background, their understanding of audio description, self assessment (writing and performing) and working with other people.

Audio description is currently being introduced in a number of European countries and around the world, and has been developing in Poland only since 2006. So far, around ten films and five television series have been made accessible to the blind and partially sighted in Poland. In the last chapter in this section and in the book, "Overcoming barriers – The pioneering years of audio description in Poland", **Agnieszka Chmiel** and **Iwona Mazur** have selected seven productions and analyzed them in terms of features such as: setting the scene, presentation of characters, description of logos, use of colours and verbal tenses, and announcing flashbacks. The analysis of audio description strategies used by describers is preceded by a discussion of the state of the art of audio description in Poland, as well as insights from broadcasters and audio describers. Finally, the authors present *AD-Verba*, a research project aimed at achieving a greater degree of professionalism in Polish audio description.

To conclude, we would like to say that the volume covers several representative areas of the rapidly evolving discipline of audiovisual translation. Subtitling and audio description are the two forms of translation best represented in this book, although some of the contributions discuss dubbing also. We would have liked to include research on voice-over and surtitling for the opera and the theatre but, for reasons beyond our control, this has not been possible on this occasion. We expect that other, complementary, publications will soon fill the gap. Indeed, as we write, we are aware of ongoing projects in these areas, including a collective volume in French which two of

the editors of the present volume are working on at the moment and in which it was possible to have a series of chapters on the topic of surtitling.

Media accessibility remains a major area of interest in several of the papers in the present volume, along with linguistic, cultural and technical considerations involved in translating multimodal texts. The contributors address, from a variety of perspectives, issues of methodology for the creation of translations, as well as the reception of translated audiovisual programmes by an audience which can best be described as heterogeneous, in terms of their characteristics, needs, and what they expect from the translator.

We hope that the reader will find this book thought-provoking and informative, and a stimulating influence for their own research or practice of audiovisual translation. At the same time, we hope that a broader audience interested in languages and the media will be attracted to the volume.