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Language and Translation in Film: dubbing and subtitling

Rocío Baños and Jorge Díaz-Cintas

Abstract

From the very beginning, films and other audiovisual products have crossed borders and

travelled across countries in their attempt to reach global audiences, overcoming cultural and

linguistic differences thanks to the role of translation. This chapter starts by offering a brief

definition of the various professional practices that are usually considered to be part of

audiovisual translation (AVT), including accessibility to the media for audiences with

sensory disabilities. After a brief historical overview, it focus on the main characteristics that

define the field of AVT, in particular the semiotic nature of the source text and the various

technical constraints that condition the potential translation solutions that can be adopted in

subtitling and dubbing. Special attention is paid to the prefabricated nature of the dialogue

found in audiovisual texts as well as to the asymmetrical transition that takes place from the

oral to written mode in the case of subtitling.

Interdisciplinarity is one of the distinctive trademarks of AVT and the main research

methods that have traditionally inspired scholars investigating this area are also discussed,

with emphasis on the Descriptive Translation Studies paradigm and the use of corpora to

systematically identify the features and patterns of translated films. The chapter then moves

on to explore some of the current debates shaping the discipline. Of particular note is the

interest of contemporary AVT scholars to test the validity of their theories experimentally, to

explore the cognitive effort involved in the translational process, and to measure human

behaviour by means of physiological instruments such as eye trackers, which the ultimate aim of better understanding their target audience.

The final section of the chapter focuses on three of the more promising developments taking place nowadays and that will no doubt continue to dominate the audiovisual landscape in the years to come, namely, the automation of subtitling through the application of statistical machine translation technology, the potential of AVT for foreign language teaching and learning, and the proliferation of amateur practices like fansubbing and fandubbing on the net.

Introduction

Ever since the advent of cinema at the end of the 19th century, audiovisual productions have been not only a major source of entertainment for audiences all over the world but they have also been used as an innovative way to communicate ideas, to sell products, to promote artistic material and to transmit all sorts of information. From the very beginning, films and other audiovisual products (television series, documentaries, videogames, and the like) have crossed borders and travelled across countries to reach global audiences, thus overcoming cultural and linguistic differences. Given that not all viewers can enjoy the audiovisual material as originally envisaged by its director or creator, successful communication in this regard has only been possible thanks to translation.

Although a wide range of terms has been used in the past to refer to the translation of audiovisual productions (screen translation, film translation and multimedia translation, among others), audiovisual translation (AVT) seems to be the term most widely used nowadays both in the industry and in academia, and will also be used throughout this chapter.

In line with current research in this field, AVT is here understood as an umbrella term referring to a wide range of practices related to the translation of audiovisual content. On occasions, such practices might entail making audiovisual programmes accessible to viewers who do not speak the language of the original text, therefore requiring interlingual translation in the form of dubbing or subtitling, for example. However, they might also involve providing audiences with sensory (e.g. hearing/visual) impairment access to audiovisual material, often requiring intralingual or intersemiotic translation. In this respect, AVT also encompasses practices such as sign language interpreting (SLI), subtitling for the deaf and the hard-of-hearing (SDH), and audio description (AD) for the blind and the partially sighted. As the title makes clear, the focus of this chapter is on dubbing and subtitling, the two most widespread AVT interlingual modes used for the translation of films. Nonetheless, an overview of the different AVT modes will be provided below and the reader can investigate the literature cited further. References to other modes will also be made throughout the chapter as necessary.

As far as language transfer of audiovisual material is concerned, Díaz-Cintas and Orero (2010: 41) distinguish between two fundamental approaches: revoicing and subtitling. In the former, oral output is transferred aurally in the target language by inserting a new soundtrack; in the latter, there is a change from spoken to written mode, and dialogue and other verbal elements are transferred as written text on screen. Within these two umbrella approaches, further classifications of AVT techniques or modes can be established. Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2007: 8) define subtitling as a transfer mode which:

consists of presenting a written text, generally on the lower part of the screen, that

endeavours to recount the original dialogue of the speakers, as well as the discursive

elements that appear in the image (letters, inserts, graffiti, inscriptions, placards and the

like), and the information that is contained on the soundtrack.

Within subtitling, it is common to distinguish between interlingual and intralingual modes,

the latter including subtitling in the same language as the original dialogue for foreign

language learning and SDH. When subtitling live programmes, SDH can be produced

through respeaking, a technique in which speech recognition software is used to convert the

original dialogue – which is respoken by a respeaker – into subtitles (Romero Fresco 2011).

In addition to these, classifications of subtitling modes also include surtitling, whereby

subtitles for opera and theatre performances are projected above the stage, and fansubbing,

which is subtitling done by fans for fans and normally distributed for free over the internet.

As far as revoicing is concerned, dubbing and voiceover are the two most widely-used

interlingual modes. Chaume (2012: 1) defines dubbing as a type of AVT which "consists of

replacing the original track of a film's (or any audiovisual text) source language dialogues

with another track on which translated dialogues have been recorded in the target language."

Dubbing is often associated with lip synchronisation, emphasising the need to synchronise

the translated dialogue with the lip movements of the characters on screen. However, not all

cases of dubbing require lip synch, as when a character (e.g. a narrator) is off-screen. As a

result, a distinction is often made between off-screen dubbing and lip synch dubbing. Unlike

dubbing, in voiceover there is no replacement of audio tracks, but an overlapping: the original

and the translated tracks of dialogue are presented simultaneously to the target viewer, with

the volume of the former lowered, though still audible, to avoid confusion. In this AVT

mode, which is often associated with non-fictional programmes such as documentaries but

also used to translate fictional material in certain East European countries, the translated

dialogue track usually starts and finishes a few seconds after and before the original dialogue

(Franco et al. 2010: 43).

Chaume (2013: 107-111) also includes the following AVT modes in the revoicing category:

simultaneous interpreting (often restricted to film festivals and film clubs), free commentary

(a rather free revoicing, closer to journalism than to translation, frequently used in sport

programmes or for comic purposes), fandubbing (home-made dubbings of audiovisual texts

that have not yet been released in the target language country) and audio description, which,

in Díaz-Cintas's (2008: 7) words, involves "transforming visual images into words, which are

then spoken during the silent intervals in audiovisual programmes or live performances." In

this special case of revoicing, the source text is not the original dialogue, but images and

sounds, which are translated into words for the blind and the partially sighted.

The classification provided above illustrates the variety and complexity of AVT, and yet, it is

by no means exhaustive. Indeed, the different forms of audiovisual translation have

multiplied over time, and although their main function remains the same, i.e. to allow

audiovisual programmes to travel across linguistic communities, their impact on viewers is

increasingly more far reaching. AVT has recently found synergies with multimedia

translation (video games, online newspapers, fansubs, fandubs) and especially with

accessibility (SDH, AD), thus opening up new horizons and possibilities for certain groups of

audience, and creating unforeseen potential in the field of audiovisual communication in general.

Historical perspectives

At the time of the invention of cinema, many thought that silent films would become a sort of Esperanto thanks to the 'unequivocal' universality of the image. And yet, the language issue has always been present in the film industry as most silent productions made systematic use of intertitles that needed to be translated when the film was distributed abroad (Díaz-Cintas and Remael 2007). These dreams of unrestrictive communication would soon be shattered by the arrival of sound and the talking movies in the 1920s. The spoken word thus became an inseparable ally of the image and new translational practices had to be developed if distribution companies were to conquer new audiences around the world. Multilingual versions, subtitling and dubbing were the methods initially explored as a way to overcome the language barrier, and whereas the first was short-lived and died out towards the mid-1930s, the remaining two have survived and continue to be part of the contemporary AVT landscape.

From its very beginnings, AVT has been closely linked to technological developments. First cinema and then, after World War II, TV sets started to become commonplace in homes to such an extent that by the 1950s television was already the main source of entertainment and the primary medium for influencing public opinion. Since then, analogue technology has become digital and, by the mid-1990s, the Video Home System (VHS) tape had given way to the then revolutionary Digital Versatile/Video Disc (DVD), which, in turn, is being phased out and overtaken by movie streaming services on the web, known in some countries as

'internet cinemas'. The way in which we consume audiovisual productions has also been

altered significantly, from the early large public spaces represented by cinemas, to the family

experience of watching the television in the relative privacy of the living room, to the more

individualistic approach of watching our favourite programmes in front of our personal

computer, tablet or smartphone. Today's viewers tend to be more independent and impatient

when it comes to their watching habits and expectations and want to be able to enjoy their

preferred programmes whenever they choose and on any of the devices they possess. Video-

on-demand services are a commercial response to meet the needs of this new breed of

viewers by allowing them to watch what they want, when they want and in the quantities that

they want. This evolution has brought along a shift from the printed paper to the digital

screen, foregrounding the audiovisualisation of communication in our society and triggering a

similar boom in the practice of audiovisual translation that can only continue to expand and

flourish in the foreseeable future.

Despite being a well-established professional practice, AVT has been a relatively unknown

field of research until recently. The first studies written on the topic were brief and published

in a wide range of outlets, from cinema magazines and newspapers to translation journals,

which has the adverse effect of making any attempt at dipping into the historiography of

AVT a rather complex venture. Laks's (1957) *Le sous-titrage de films* can be considered a

pioneering work for its comprehensive overview of this professional practice. The 1960s and

1970s were characterised by a lethargic approach to subtitling, though some works appeared

on the topic of dubbing, with the journal *Babel* publishing a special issue on cinema

translation in 1960, the monograph by Hesse-Quack (1969) on the process of dubbing, and

the book authored by Fodor (1976) on the phonetic, semiotic, aesthetic and psychological

aspects of dubbing.

In 1987, the first ever *Conference on Dubbing and Subtitling* was organised in Stockholm,

under the auspices of the European Broadcasting Union, triggering an unprecedented interest

in AVT that materialised in the publication of new articles and books in the field, among

which the ones by Pommier (1988), Luyken et al. (1991), Ivarsson (1992) and Ivarsson and

Carroll (1998) are perhaps the most important. Coinciding with digitalisation, the golden age

of AVT can be traced to the 1990s, when the field became the object of more systematic

research from a translational perspective and saw the publication of collective volumes,

monographs and doctoral theses, along with the organisation of domain-specific international

conferences and the development of university curricula specialising in AVT. Since then, we

have witnessed an exponential increase in the number of contributions and scholarly activities

on AVT, signalling a move from the margins to the centre of academic debates and

highlighting the fact that the field has gained social significance and visibility, has finally

come of age academically and has a most promising and inspiring future.

Core Issues and Topics

When investigating AVT, it is essential to first reflect on the specificity of audiovisual texts,

which is determined by the way in which information is communicated. In films, meaning is

conveyed not only through the dialogue exchanges between characters, but also through

images, gestures, camera movements, music, special effects, etc. Information is thus

transmitted simultaneously through the acoustic and the visual channels, and conveyed

through a wide range of signifying codes, articulated according to specific filmic rules and conventions. As such, Chaume (2012: 100) defines the audiovisual text as "a semiotic construct woven by a series of signifying codes that operate simultaneously to produce meaning," which can be transmitted through the acoustic (linguistic, paralinguistic, musical, special effects and sound position codes) and the visual channels (iconographic, photographic, shot, mobility, graphic and montage/editing codes).

Many of the challenges faced by audiovisual translators result from the interaction of the various codes and from the fact that, in most cases, the only code they can work with is the linguistic one in the form of dialogue or background conversations. For instance, when an audiovisual translator decides to substitute a cultural reference in the film with another reference, more familiar to the target culture, it is imperative to consider the rest of the codes at play before making a decision and ascertain that no visual references to the culture-specific item being substituted can be seen on screen. These challenges have prompted authors like Titford (1982) to coin the term 'constrained translation'. Further developed by Mayoral et al. (1988), this concept highlights the complexity of AVT and foregrounds that the translator's task is constrained by the interaction of a wide range of communication elements (images, music, dialogue, etc.). Constraints in AVT can be of a different nature depending on the audiovisual genre being translated and the AVT mode being used. In both dubbing and subtitling particular attention is often paid to technical constraints, imposed by the need to synchronise the translation with the original text.

Technical constraints in subtitling

The two main constraints that impinge on the delivery of subtitles are spatial (governed by the amount of space available on screen for the text) and temporal (dictated by the time that a given subtitle remains on screen). Although there is no universal agreement on the way in which the subtitles should appear on screen, a number of trends can be discerned. The situation is one of change within a generally accepted practice, mainly triggered by the untapped potential released by digital technology and the uncontested prevalence of subtitling as the preferred AVT transfer on the internet to cater for all sorts of programmes, be they political, educational, fictional or commercial.

To guarantee that the text stays within the screen safety area and that it does not spill over the edges, and depending on the type and size of the font chosen (Arial, point 30, is frequently used), subtitles on screen tend to consist of a maximum of two lines of text, and each of the lines to contain a maximum of between 35 and 42 characters in the case of Latin-based alphabets, Arabic and Cyrillic languages. When it comes to Far Eastern languages like Chinese, Japanese and Korean, the maximum number of characters per line is set at around 14 to 16. In theatrical releases, the subtitles tend to be white, like the screen onto which they are projected, as they are usually laser-burnt onto the celluloid. In terms of positioning, the subtitles are usually displayed centred at the bottom of the screen, unless some important diegetic information occurs there, in which case they are usually displaced to the top of the screen.

One of the golden rules, from a temporal perspective, is that subtitles must appear in synchrony with the dialogue and the image. The synchronisation process, also known as spotting, cueing, timing or originating, consists of deciding the exact moment when a subtitle

should appear on screen (in-time) and when it should disappear (out-time), while keeping

temporal synchrony with the original utterances. The spotting has to mirror the rhythm of the

film and the performance of the actors, and be mindful of any prosodic features such as

interruptions and pauses. This process is undertaken with the help of bespoke subtitling

programs and may be carried out by the translators themselves or by specialists who know

the intricacies of the software.

The amount of time that a subtitle stays on screen depends on the delivery of the original

exchanges and it is generally agreed that a subtitle of two full lines, containing around 37

characters in each line (i.e. a total of 74 characters), can be comfortably read in six seconds,

which is known in the industry as the "6 second rule" (Díaz-Cintas and Remael 2007: 96-99).

For shorter periods of time, proportional values are automatically calculated by the subtitling

software, and under no circumstances should a subtitle stay on screen for less than one second

(or ⅚ of a second) to guarantee that the viewer can register its presence. Finally, the amount of

text that can be projected on screen in a given period of time between one and six seconds is

calculated according to the viewers' assumed reading speed, which will of course vary

depending on literacy levels and age of viewers. In this respect, being able to read 160 words per

minute (wpm) or 15 characters per second (cps) is considered to be standard whilst a reading

speed of 180 wpm or 17 cps is considered fast.

Although these parameters still enjoy some currency in the industry, viewers' increased

familiarity with reading text on screen and expedited technical developments witnessed in recent

decades have brought along considerable changes. The sacred rule of having a maximum of two

lines in a subtitle to minimise their impact on the photography is being broken daily by the

emergence of three, four and even five-liners, notably in the subtitling being done on the internet; and the traditional positioning of the subtitles at the bottom of the screen is also being challenged as they begin to be displayed on different parts of the screen.

Likewise, restricting the number of characters per line to 35, 39 or even 42 is not an important factor anymore. Most subtitling programs now make the most of proportional lettering, which means that within the safety area subtitlers can write more text, depending on the font size being used and the actual letters that make up the message (e.g. an 'i' takes less space than an 'm'). It is therefore not uncommon to find subtitles that contain up to 70 characters in just one line. In addition to the aesthetic implications that so much text can have on the film, the issue remains as to whether viewers are given sufficient time to read such long subtitles.

Professional practice is rapidly evolving with the entrenchment of digital technology, the mushrooming of screens around us, and the proliferation of audiovisual productions, with some of the most apparent changes materialising in the increase of the number of lines, the lengthening of lines, shorter exposure times and faster reading speeds, which, of course, have had a significant impact on the way the actual language transfer is carried out.

Technical constraints in dubbing

In film dubbing, when replacing the original dialogue track with the translated one, the accurate synchronisation between the new track and the rest of the components (original images, existing music and sound effects track, shot changes) is of paramount importance. Whereas translators should always be alert to the composite nature of the audiovisual

production, they might not be responsible for the actual lip synchronisation as the dubbing process is characterised by the many professionals who take part in it.

Once the dialogue exchanges have been translated, they are adapted and synchronised by the dialogue writer or adapter. In some countries, it is common for translators to also act as dialogue writers, though this is not always the case. This is why, as pointed out by Whitman-Linsen (1992: 105), the work done by the translator is often referred to as a "rough translation," which undergoes many changes during the adaptation process. Dialogue writers adapt this draft translation to fit the articulatory movements of the onscreen characters, ensuring that the translation respects the open vowels as well as the bilabial and labiodental consonants uttered on screen (Chaume 2012: 73). Known as "phonetic synchrony," this process is only relevant in shots where the character's face and mouth are clearly visible (*op. cit.*). Another type of synchrony that needs to be observed in dubbing is isochrony, which refers to the fact that the duration of the translation should be identical to that of on-screen characters' utterances: if the translation is too long or too short, the illusion could be broken, and the audience might realise or be reminded that the actors on screen are not pronouncing the translated lines and are in fact speaking a different language. Chaume (*op. cit.*: 70) also refers to a third type of synchrony, "kinesic synchrony," whereby the translation needs to be synchronised with the actors' body movements. Once they are synchronised, translated dialogue exchanges are interpreted by dubbing actors or voice talents, under the supervision of the dubbing director, and then mixed and recorded by sound engineers in a dubbing or recording studio.

Assumptions about the critical importance that synchrony has in the dubbing process have not been substantiated by systematic research. Furthermore, the specificities of dubbed texts and the dubbing process do not solely rely on synchronisation. For instance, when considering which dubbing aspect has the greatest impact upon the audience and should thus take precedence over the others, Whitman-Linsen (1992: 54) highlights that "researchers and professional dubbers alike lend the greatest priority to a believable, convincing dialogue," which directly relates to the translational challenge of having to deal with prefabricated orality.

Further challenges in AVT: prefabricated orality

The concept of prefabricated orality is determined by the specificities of the discourse found in audiovisual texts: spoken and seemingly spontaneous, yet planned and elaborated. Dialogue originates in a script that has been carefully planned and written by a scriptwriter to be interpreted later by actors as if it were spontaneous and had not been written in advance. Film dialogue differs notably from spontaneous conversation and does not feature so many dysfluencies (hesitations, false starts, repeats, and reformulations, which would distract and even annoy viewers) nor does it rely so heavily on phonetic and prosodic features and contextual information. Nevertheless, scriptwriters and actors use certain linguistic features that are typical of naturally-occurring conversation in order to achieve realistic dialogues so that audiences can identify what they are watching with spontaneous speech and thus immerse themselves in the cinematic illusion. Done in a careful and purposeful manner, this is one of the reasons why the orality of films and other audiovisual texts is considered to be prefabricated (Chaume 2012) and its spontaneity is deemed to be pretended (Baños 2014a).

The orality of film dialogue should be dealt with equally carefully and purposefully in AVT, considering that translated films are governed by different conventions and influenced by a wide range of factors and constraints: the involvement of many agents and stakeholders in the translation process, the heterogeneous make-up of the target audience, professional issues, the constraints imposed by the source text, and the above mentioned space and temporal constraints. As highlighted by Whitman-Linsen (1992), mirroring spontaneous conversation is of paramount importance in dubbing, where the translator/dialogue writer takes the role of the scriptwriter and is expected to master the linguistic features available in the target language to produce convincing dialogue. Such an imitation is nevertheless a matter of compromise since, whereas the verisimilitude of dialogues is one of the criteria used to ascertain whether a dubbed production meets quality standards (Chaume 2012: 15), research has shown that the language of dubbing is very normative and not as spontaneous as we might think (Pavesi 2008; Baños 2014b).

In the case of subtitling, as a result of the change of medium from speech to writing, many of the typical features of spontaneous oral conversation tend to be the first to disappear in the subtitles. Omission and standardisation of orality markers are more prominent in subtitling than in dubbing due to the need to comply with writing conventions and to the difficulty of reflecting some features of spoken speech in writing. Yet, this is not the only reason why these features are lost in subtitles and, as Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2007: 63) contend, "quite a few can be salvaged in writing, but rendering them all would lead to illegible and exceedingly long subtitles." Subtitling priorities and constraints make it difficult for spoken

features to be reflected in subtitles. Whereas this has an impact on the orality of the subtitles, it cannot be forgotten that subtitles are a supplement to the original production and that some orality markers which might be recognisable by the target audience (e.g. prosodic features, repetitions, hesitations) are still present in the original soundtrack and can be picked up by (some of) the viewers.

Main Research Methods

Given AVT's heterogeneous and interdisciplinary nature, scholars working in the field have looked for inspiration in related disciplines in their search for theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches that can also be exploited to account for AVT practices and processes (Bogucki 2013; Pérez-González 2014).

When it comes to investigating the different professional practices, the trend has been to study them together under the umbrella term of audiovisual translation, even though their study would gain in depth and substance if approached individually. Although they share some commonalities, the differences that separate them justify more targeted analyses. For instance, the shift from oral to written does not occur in dubbing; the strategies of condensation and deletion are pivotal to subtitling but not so much to dubbing; the transfer of discourse markers, exclamations and interjections is not a challenge in subtitling, but it is critical in dubbing; the representation of linguistic variation is virtually impossible to achieve in written subtitles; and the presence of the source language as well as its cohabitation with the target language in the subtitled version straightjackets the potential solutions in a way that does not happen in dubbing.

Early scholarly debates on the topic tended to consist of value-laden comparisons contrasting dubbing and subtitling, to focus exclusively on the linguistic code to the detriment of the remaining signifying audio and visual codes, and to describe the role of the various professionals involved as well as the actual translation processes. Although it is understandable in an emerging discipline that so much attention was paid to these particular themes, and although the results certainly contributed to the advancement of the discipline, the concern was that this type of research failed to embrace the communicative richness of audiovisual texts in their entirety. To correct this imbalance, scholars have advocated the use of "autochthonous models" (Pérez-González 2014: 96) for the study of AVT built on interdisciplinary and integrative methodological and theoretical foundations.

The work of Mayoral et al. (1988: 356) was pioneering in this regard, promoting a paradigm that went beyond the unilateral linguistic focus typical of previous approaches to translation and which took into account "those aspects which are characteristic of translation as a communication process and also those which depend on the relation of the linguistic message to other messages conveyed by non-linguistic systems." Another early attempt to provide an integrative and more complex framework for the study of audiovisual texts is that proposed by Delabastita (1989), who presents an organised inventory of questions and hypotheses to guide AVT research, inspired by Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) principles. Delabastita's work (*op. cit.*) suggests ways to unravel the nature of the relationships that get established between original and translated films, highlighting the need to analyse films as complex signs and organised wholes, whose various components enter into intricate relations.

Along with Toury (1995), he further posits that the translation of films constitutes a typical scenario where norms or patterns of behaviour can be expected to guide the work of audiovisual translators, and suggests ways to study such patterns.

Delabastita (1989) was one of the first scholars to embrace the descriptivist paradigm for the study of AVT, but many academics have subsequently highlighted the benefits of following DTS premises in AVT research. Díaz-Cintas (2004: 31) conceives of DTS as "a heuristic tool that opens up new avenues for study, strengthens the theoretical component and allows the researcher to come up with substantial analyses." In a similar vein, Chaume (2012: 161) posits that DTS offer "a powerful interdisciplinary framework for translation analysis" and proposes a two level, descriptive and semiotic model for the analysis of dubbed texts, which can easily be extrapolated to the study of other AVT modes. The first level is related to the extratextual factors having a bearing on the translation brief, including historical factors (such as year or period of the source and target texts, the translation mode used, or the existence of previous versions), professional aspects (deadlines, material available, rates of payment, copyright and royalties, dubbing conventions), communicative factors (client, audience, communicative context, genre, broadcaster) and reception factors (e.g. synchrony requirements, dubbing performance) (*op. cit.*: 161-177). The second level includes both the translational challenges that are shared by other types of translation and those issues that are specific to AVT, articulated through the above-mentioned signifying codes.

Increased awareness of the cultural embeddedness of translation has led to the widening in scope of the topics considered susceptible of being researched. By exploiting case studies

centred on a specific audiovisual text or set of texts, AVT scholars have explored the translation of culture-specific references (Pedersen 2011; Ranzato 2016), humour (Zabalbeascoa 1996; Asimakoulas 2004; Martínez Sierra 2005; Chiaro 2006; De Rosa et al. 2014), linguistic variation (Ellender 2015), sexual taboo (Yuan 2016), gender stereotypes (De Marco 2012), politeness (Yuan 2012), forms of address (Szarkowska 2013), censorship (Mereu Keating 2016), ideology and manipulation (Díaz-Cintas 2012; Díaz-Cintas et al. 2016), and multilingualism (Corrius and Zabalbeascoa 2011; De Higes-Andino et al. 2013), to name but a few.

Given the inherent limitations of case studies, especially as far as the scope of the research and the generalisation of findings are concerned, scholars have tested other approaches for the study of AVT taking inspiration from other disciplines such as corpus linguistics. Corpora and corpus-analysis tools have been successfully used in AVT to identify the distinctive features and patterns of translated films systematically, relying on large amounts of data (Freddi and Pavesi 2009; Baños et al. 2013). When adopting this approach, scholars have been confronted with many challenges associated with the implementation and compilation of audiovisual corpora. One of the key challenges lies yet again in the complexity and multimodality of audiovisual texts, because any study which analyses audiovisual dialogue on its own, without considering the visual and the acoustic nonverbal components is necessarily incomplete. This is probably one of the reasons why many corpus-based AVT studies draw on relatively small corpora, since having a more manageable amount of data allows for a qualitative analysis which incorporates not only information transmitted through codes other than the linguistic one, but which also allows the researcher to consider the many

other factors that might influence specific linguistic choices (e.g. synchrony, spatio-temporal constraints, semiotic cohesion, etc.). Nonetheless, some academics have devoted substantial energy and resources to compiling fully audiovisual corpora for the study of film translation, such as the Pavia Corpus of Film Dialogue (http://studiumanistici.unipv.it/?pagina=p&titolo=pcfd), a parallel and comparable corpus made up of original Italian films and original English films together with their dubbed Italian translations, or the TRACCE corpus (Jiménez Hurtado and Soler Gallego 2013), containing 300 films audio described in Spanish.

The heuristic potential offered by other conceptual paradigms has also been explored by authors such as Bogucki (2004), who concentrates on relevance theory, and Desilla (2009), who tries to reconcile pragmatics and multimodal analysis in her investigation of subtitled films.

Current Debates and Future Directions

Despite its relative youth, AVT has come of age academically and can be considered a consolidated field of research within the broader area of Translation Studies. The development of AVT as a discipline has been accompanied by an evolution in key topics and debates and, if early studies on the topic can be said to have focused on the distinctiveness and autonomy of AVT, interdisciplinarity and cross-fertilisation are certainly the way forward. The traditional focus of the pioneering scholarly studies conducted in the field of AVT tended to be biased towards the analysis of the role played by language, the challenges encountered when carrying out the linguistic transfer and the translational strategies activated

by the translators to overcome them. With the passing of the years, the scope of the research

has widened considerably to encompass many other aspects that directly impinge on the

transfer that takes place during AVT.

Studies on more traditional practices such as subtitling and dubbing coexist these days with

investigations on media accessibility, and show a shift of focus from the textual

idiosyncrasies of the original to the effects that the ensuing translation has on viewers. In this

regard, AVT scholars have proved increasingly willing to rely on technology and statistical

analysis to interrogate the data under scrutiny, and the study of reception and process has

become pivotal in recent academic exchanges, with the viewer becoming the focal point of

the investigation. Experimental research based on empirical enquiry has thus become one of

the relatively recent developments in AVT as academics are no longer content with

describing a given state of affairs or taking for granted certain inherited premises that have

been passed on unchallenged in the literature. Rather, contemporary AVT scholars are eager

to test the validity of their theories experimentally, to explore the cognitive effort involved in

the translational process, or to describe the effects that AVT practices have on the various

heterogeneous groups that make up the audience, on translators-to-be and on professionals

working in the field and, in these pursuits, they exploit biometric methodologies, new

technologies and statistical data analysis tools. Of particular note in this attempt to measure

human behaviour is the application of physiological instruments such as eye trackers,

frequently used in fields like advertising and social sciences, to the experimental

investigation of AVT (Perego 2012). These devices, which offer metrics about visual

information by measuring eye positions and eye movement, have helped scholars interested

in AVT to move away from speculation to observation of subjects and data-based research. In

this new research ecosystem, eye tracking is widely used in experimental research in AVT to gauge the attention paid by viewers to the various parts of the screen, in an attempt to gain a better understanding of their cognitive processes whilst watching (and reading the subtitles of) the audiovisual programme.

In addition to instruments like eye trackers, and more traditional ones such as questionnaires and interviews, a wide array of other biometric tools are also being used to conduct examinations centred on audience reception, such as galvanic skin response devices to measure participants' levels of arousal, and webcams to record and conduct facial expression analysis to inform researchers about respondents' basic emotions (anger, surprise, joy…), to monitor their engagement, and to assess if they are expressing their attitude in observable behaviour. Electroencephalography (EEG) and electrocardiograms (ECG) are also being tested. EEG is a neuroimaging technique that helps to assess brain activity associated with perception, cognitive behaviour, and emotional processes by foregrounding the parts of the brain that are active while participants perform a task or are exposed to certain stimulus material. ECG, on the other hand, monitors heart activity in an attempt to track respondents' physical state, their anxiety and stress levels, which in turn can provide helpful insights into cognitive-affective processes.

All in all, there seems to exist a growing consensus that reception studies are important for the sustainability of the discipline and that it is important to buttress links between the industry and academia. The latter cooperation holds considerable promise for the development and provision of better products for end users. In this collaborative constellation, the media industry is interested in knowing how viewers perceive their

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subtitled, dubbed, voiced-over, respoken or audio described audiovisual productions; technology companies working on the development of state-of-the-art software and cloud-based systems for AVT can also benefit from the results yielded by experimental research with professionals; trainers of future audiovisual translators can learn about the cognitive load of the translation process and improve their curricula; and language service providers specialising in AVT can profit from the insights gained through reception research, which can help them to adapt their practices to new workflows, to update their style guides to cater for new audiences, or to reconsider some of the traditionally accepted spatial and temporal considerations that have influenced the translation and delivery of their audiovisual programmes.

Translation memory tools have had a great impact in other translation specialisations and yet their development has been traditionally curtailed in the case of AVT because of the fictional and literary nature of many audiovisual programmes, which makes them less likely to display the kinds of repetitions of text that translation memory tools generally rely on. However, the fact that increasing numbers of companies and institutions are discovering the virtues of communicating audiovisually, mainly through the internet, is bringing changes to this state of affairs and making it worthwhile for translation companies to employ assisted translation and translation memory tools in the AVT process. The relative ease with which quality subtitle parallel data can be obtained has been the catalyst for the introduction of statistical machine translation (SMT) technology in subtitling (Etchegoyhen et al. 2013). Under the auspices of the European Commission, projects like SUMAT, an online service for SUbtitling by MAchine Translation, have focused on building large corpora of aligned subtitles in order to train SMT engines in various language pairs. Its ultimate objective is to benefit from the

introduction of SMT in the field of subtitling, followed by human post-editing in order to

increase the productivity of subtitle translation procedures, and reduce costs and turnaround

times while keeping a watchful eye on the quality of the translation results (Georgakopoulou

and Bywood 2014). In an attempt to boost accessibility to audiovisual programmes, primarily

for people with hearing impairments, Google and Yahoo announced, in 2009, the launch of

machine-generated automatic captions, in the belief that "captions not only help the deaf and

hearing impaired, but with machine translation, they also enable people around the world to

access video content in any of 51 languages" (Harrenstien 2009: online).

Another area that is experiencing a notable surge in academic interest is the potential of AVT

for foreign language teaching and learning. In this respect, subtitling has been the translation

mode to attract most interest (Talaván and Rodríguez-Arancón 2014; Gambier et al. 2015),

though other practices like dubbing and audio description are also being explored. The EU

funded project ClipFlair (http://clipflair.net) is a practical instantiation of an educational

platform whose ultimate aim is to foster foreign language learning through interactive

revoicing and captioning of clips. Authors have also started to pay closer attention to the

didactics of audiovisual translation itself, analysing some of the curricula available (Cerezo

Merchán 2012), suggesting potential activities and identifying the challenges of teaching not

only dubbing and subtitling, but also of preparing professional translators to be conversant

with a wide range of media and AVT modes that often require markedly different skills

(Díaz-Cintas 2008).

The affordances of digital technology have nurtured, *inter alia*, the proliferation of closely-knit internet communities with shared affinities, and the blossoming of amateur practices like fansubbing and fandubbing. Initially focused on the free translation and distribution of Japanese anime, these netizens movements have grown in number and their interests have sprawled to cover all sorts of audiovisual texts, from films and TV series to edutainment programmes, documentaries and political broadcasts. This shift towards collaborative practices in social media raises numerous questions that have already attracted the attention of scholars like Pérez-González (2014) and Massidda (2015) and will no doubt continue to dominate the audiovisual landscape in the years to come.

Further Reading

Chaume, F. 2012. *Audiovisual Translation: Dubbing*. Manchester: St Jerome.

Chaume provides a detailed overview of dubbing around the world, exploring key historical, professional, technical and methodological aspects of this AVT mode, and delving into general AVT-related issues. This work also contains practical dubbing exercises, outlines the state of the art as far as research in dubbing is concerned, and presents an integrated model for the analysis of audiovisual texts.

Díaz-Cintas, J. and A. Remael. 2007. *Audiovisual Translation: Subtitling*. Manchester: St Jerome.

In this key work on subtitling, the authors introduce readers to this AVT mode, providing a detailed account of its semiotics, linguistic aspects and key translation issues, with examples in a wide range of language combinations. Readers will be able to practice the technical

considerations, guidelines and conventions described in this work through the practical exercises suggested and the demo version of the professional software WinCAPS, which is also provided.

Pérez-González, L. 2014. *Audiovisual Translation: Theories, Methods and Issues*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Pérez González offers an introduction to fundamental methodological and theoretical aspects of AVT in an attempt to chart and critique influential concepts, models and approaches in audiovisual translation studies. In addition to providing a comprehensive overview of these, this work offers very useful tools for the analysis of audiovisual texts and delves into new developments in this field.

Ranzato, I. 2016. *Translating Culture Specific References on Television: The Case of Dubbing*. London: Routledge.

This book provides a model for investigating the problems posed by the translation of culture specific references (CSR) in the case of dubbing. Based on a detailed analysis of three TV series dubbed into Italian, and drawing on a corpus of 95 hours, Ranzato proposes a new taxonomy of strategies for the translation of CSRs and explores the sociocultural, pragmatic and ideological implications of dubbing for the small screen.

Related Topics

Language and translation on the web; Translation, interpreting and new technologies; Corpus linguistics, translation and interpreting; Language, interpreting and translation in the news.

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