BOOK REVIEW

I. Ranzato & P. Zabalbeascoa. *The Palgrave Handbook of Multilingualism and Language Varieties on Screen*. XXVI + 645 pp. hardback. £ 199.99

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The Palgrave Handbook of Multilingualism and Language Varieties on Screen (2024) is a much-awaited volume edited by Irene Ranzato and Patrick Zabalbeascoa, two renowned scholars who have an impeccable record of high-quality research at the intersection of sociolinguistics and translation studies (TS). Their latest publication, which comes in the form of a handbook, is an insightful, comprehensive, and well-thought-out exploration of the representation and translation of multilingualism and language varieties in audiovisual media. This book is the result of well-researched and thought-provoking academic work, and it therefore constitutes an invaluable source of inspiration for research in audiovisual translation (AVT).

In today's globalised world, and as pointed out by one of the contributors, "it is quite unusual to come across a completely monolingual film or TV series because multilingualism has become so widespread in present day society" (Chiaro, p. 448). AVT scholars (e.g. O'Sullivan 2007; Beseghi 2017) have thoroughly examined the existence of multiple languages in audiovisual texts through the prism of linguistic variation, and more specifically "third languages" (Corrius Gimbert 2005: 147), which refers to the presence of any language that may exist in any given audiovisual source text and which is not the main language of the said source text. As stated by O'Sullivan (2011: 203), multilingualism "complicates the question of filmic textuality", not least because it inevitably prompts reflection on how interlingual practices such as dubbing and subtitling can be used to address such challenges.

This handbook includes 27 contributions, penned by leading AVT scholars, and is distributed into six parts: *Foreignness and Otherness* (Corrius, Bogucki, Ameri, and de Higes Andino), *Character Portrayal and Stereotypes* (Ranzato & Valleriani, Trotta, Villanueva-Jordán, and Espasa), *Audiences and Prosumers* (Zhang & Vázquez-Calvo, Baños, Bruti, and Mével), *Power Relations and Social Interactions* (Jin et al., Vandaele, and Parini), *Animation, Youth and Comedy* (Zanotti, Dore, Zabalbeascoa, Chiaro, Monti, and Declercq), and *Modes and Alternatives* (Rebane, Tamayo, Talaván & Tinedo-Rodríguez, Solomon, and Hołobut

et al.). Each of these parts addresses different aspects of multilingualism and language varieties on screen by drawing on the AVT literature and proposing novel ways and methodologies to further our understanding in this area of knowledge. The editors have skilfully brought together contributions from leading experts who provide a range of interdisciplinary perspectives on a variety of topics, including the portrayal of regional and social language varieties on the screen, the creative and innovative characterisations of languages by filmmakers (and translators), and the adaptations of these varieties into different languages using localisation.

In the introductory chapter ("The Joy of Multilingualism"), editors Ranzato and Zabalbeascoa set the stage for the volume and put forward the reason why research on multilingualism and linguistic variation is key in AVT scholarship. The chapter highlights the importance of scripted language variation in fictional representation and raises awareness of various specific topics, such as character portrayal, stereotypes, and the use of code-switching, while also reminding readers about the importance of reflecting on what language variations tell about *identity* in the face of globalisation as well as revisiting our very understanding of *translation* in terms of dichotomies, which "has not helped in the development of translation studies, due to an oversimplification of complex issues and presenting them as fallacies of false dichotomy" (Ranzato & Zabalbeascoa, p. 2). After addressing dichotomies, the editors argue that in this volume "diversity is complemented by inclusivity and therefore embraces accessibility as well, each with their own language, or should we say with their own language combinations and variation" (p. 4), thereby showcasing how this volume can be the perfect example of interdisciplinary research, with specific chapters touching on diversity and inclusivity from an array of angles (see Villanueva-Jordán, Espasa, Mével, and Monti). These chapters offer a much-needed introspection into the values of diversity and inclusivity in the study of linguistic variation in descriptive AVT studies, which can sometimes be too Eurocentric, as pointed out by Dore (p. 403).

In Part I (*Foreignness and Otherness*), the chapters call for reflection on the theoretical underpinnings of multilingualism in AVT scholarship. In "Multilingualism as a Marker of Foreignness in Translation: Language Varieties to Help Depict the Out-Group on Screen", Corrius explores how multilingualism is used to mark foreignness in audiovisual programmes. She discusses the use of different language varieties to depict out-groups and the implications of these portrayals for audience perception. Of particular interest, in my opinion, is the table titled "L3 operations that help differentiate the out-group" (Corrius, p. 25), which offers a visual summary of how third languages (L3) are dealt with when it comes to representing *Otherness* in localised audiovisual programmes. I also found Ameri's chapter ("Portraying Middle Easterners in English-Speaking TV Series: From

Stereotypes to Nuanced Portrayals") a very appealing contribution; indeed, he analyses the evolution from stereotypical depictions of Middle Eastern characters to more nuanced and complex portrayals in English-speaking TV series, all by highlighting the role of language in these representations. Other themes that are addressed in this part include theoretical discussions on the concept of *Otherness* (Bogucki) and the representation of migration (de Higes Andino).

Among the contributions of Part II (*Character Portrayal and Stereotypes*), I would like to call the reader's attention to the chapter entitled "Sociolects on the Small Screen: The Case of the British Upper Class", authored by Ranzato and Valleriani, which examines the portrayal of British upper-class sociolects in TV series. It not only carries out a thorough revision of the literature but also includes a long filmography and thought-provoking analyses of the portrayal of Lady Diana Spencer and Boris Johnson. Trotta's filmography is even more extensive. Trotta's chapter provides an analysis of how US language varieties are portrayed in TV series and constitutes a first attempt at quantifying trends, which is an aspect of great interest that is somehow neglected in studies of this nature. I reckon this approach is instrumental in ensuring that scholarly works remain relevant and empirically robust.

In Part III (*Audiences and Prosumers*), emphasis is placed on the proactive role of today's audiences with a focus on fans. As explained by Zhang and Vázquez-Calvo ("Fan Translation and Multilingualism") and Baños ("Cyberdubbing and Language Variation"), translation techniques and strategies used by fan (aka non-professional) translators in online ecosystems are hardly ever aligned with professional conventions. For instance, Baños argues that standardisation ("understood as the elimination of those traits typical of the language vari-eties present in the original audiovisual text, that is, the neutralisation or omission of non-standard features", p. 218), which is common in professional dubbing, is being replaced with dialect or accent substitution in parodies and other types of cyberdubs. Fan practices in the field of cyberdubbing offer "a more complex portrayal of linguistic variation compared to what viewers are accustomed to in mainstream media, cyberdubbing" (Baños, p. 234) and call for further reflection, especially in light of the latest advances in automatic dubbing, which are also currently disrupting mainstream dubbing as we know it (see Slator 2025).

Part IV (*Power Relations and Social Interactions*) offers highly interesting introspections into less-researched areas in AVT, including Chinese cinema. I was surprised, however, that Jin et al. focused on Chinese productions (including dialects and foreign languages therein) and obliterated multilingualism in interlingual practices — commercial and non-professional Chinese translations. With the Chinese film industry progressively embracing the localisation of foreign-language films (notably Hollywood productions), I would have welcomed a discussion on

how multilingualism is portrayed in localised versions while examining foreign film distribution practices in China. By the same token, Vandaele's chapter ("Fascism and Film Translation in and between Italy, Germany, and Spain") constitutes a bolder proposal; indeed, the author critically examines many examples of films that were censored by Fascist governments in Europe in the second half of the twentieth century. Admittedly, this area of research is far from new (e.g. Ávila 1997; Ballester Casado 2001; Cornu 2014), but Vandaele's chapter is thoroughly researched and well documented, making it a highly valuable contribution that also leaves some unanswered questions calling for further reflection (p. 328).

Part V (*Animation, Youth and Comedy*) is the largest one, perhaps reflecting the scholarly interests of the editors. This part includes works by leading scholars in the field of humour in AVT, notably Chiaro, Dore, and Zabalbeascoa. I was particularly interested in the following argument: "Multilingualism is often claimed to be used as a device serving an attempt of authenticity. Such claims must be fact-checked for cases where the evidence does not support such a claim, especially when humour and comedy are important priorities" (Zabalbeascoa, p. 420). In this sense, I would contend that the said (alleged) authenticity can act as a masquerade for the perpetuation of stereotypical, caricatural, racist and discriminatory portrayals and discourses, as is hinted at by Zabalbeascoa on pp. 421–423. One might wonder if said portrayals are indeed humorous, and, perhaps more importantly, for whom.

Lastly, Part VI (*Modes and Alternatives*) opens up with Rebane's chapter on invented languages (aka conlangs), though this concept had already been addressed (albeit in less detail) in previous chapters (e.g. Espasa and Jin et al.). Surprisingly, the connections made by Rebane between literature and cinema seem minimal despite the fact that invented languages in literature have inevitably preceded, and inspired, their appearance in audiovisual programmes. This might indicate there is still a patent disconnect between literary and film studies, as well as between literary translation and AVT scholarship. Other topics addressed in this last part of the book explore multilingualism in the use of Greek and Latin in pop films (Solomon), sign languages (Tamayo), the translation of film titles (Hołobut et al.), and the didactic applications of AVT practices for language learning purposes (Talaván & Tinedo-Rodríguez).

The overall quality of the chapters is exceptional. Even if there is little that can be said for improvement, I would still like to raise four aspects that call for attention. First, it would be useful to methodically, and empirically, test some of the (theoretical) assumptions raised by scholars with audience reception methods such as eye-tracking, satisfaction surveys, and in-class viewing experiments followed by questionnaires. Second, it would be worthwhile to establish closer connections with industry practices by exploring aspects such as guidelines and

quality frameworks and criteria. Third, although there is an attempt to include non-Western authors and materials as well as to showcase smaller language and non-mainstream varieties (e.g. African American English, p. 261; Dutch, p. 479; Greek and Latin, p. 575; and sign languages, p. 533), the approach of the book is still largely Eurocentric (and more specifically Anglocentric). Fourth, the editors have done a remarkable job of curating a diverse range of perspectives and topics, but I have found myself wondering why some of the chapters were placed in different sections while using similar research approaches and addressing similar topics (e.g. Bruti and Parini). Be it as it may, the overall structure of the book is logical and easy to follow, and the editors' selection of contributors is visibly thoughtful. Further, I understand that some of the points I have raised here would easily fall outside the scope of a handbook of this nature and would therefore have a better fit in future research works.

One of the strengths of this book is the editors' ability to balance theoretical discussions with more practical chapters, which come with detailed analyses of specific cases and illustrate the broader concepts and theories therein. The discussion on "linguistic creativity" (Zanotti, p. 374) is particularly compelling and, in my opinion, warrants further scholarly attention. In light of ever-more pervasive language automation technologies such as (neural) machine translation tools, creativity remains a rather appealing object of study (e.g. Guerberof-Arenas & Toral 2020). Against this backdrop, the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools, particularly large language models, is increasingly prevalent in assisting, and often replacing, interlingual AVT practices such as lip-synch dubbing. However, I second Nimdzi's (2025: 78) position on this matter: "Even with the best speech technologies, the results can be sub-par, depending on expectations". Fully automated systems are still relegated today to social media and online streaming by content creators, but AVT scholars would do well to closely monitor developments in this area, particularly given the evident eagerness of some industry stakeholders to implement AI-enabled translation processes.

In conclusion, *The Palgrave Handbook of Multilingualism and Language Varieties on Screen* is an essential addition to the literature on multilingualism and linguistic variation in AVT. Given the interdisciplinary nature of the studies that I have read in this handbook, I would also argue that this is not only a useful resource for AVT and TS scholars and students, but one for anyone with an interest in linguistics, dialectology, and film and media studies. This handbook offers rigorous and insightful studies on multilingualism and linguistic variation in AVT, making it an indispensable reference for researchers in our field.

Funding

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