

Introduction: Audiovisual translation

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Topics in Audiovisual Translation

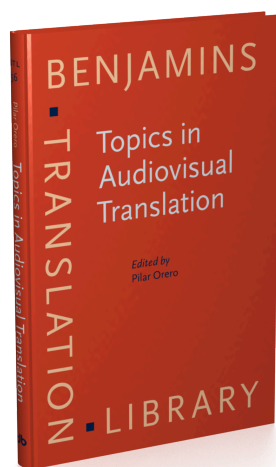
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Audiovisual translation

A new dynamic umbrella

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When I was first editing this book, back in 2001, I was checking the new entries related to Audiovisual Translation (AVT) in the *Bibliography of Translation Studies*. In the entry for Yves Gambier and Henrik Gottlieb's *(Multi) Media Translation* (BTS 2001: 45) it read "that attempts to answer questions such as: Is (multi) media translation a new field of study or an umbrella framework for scholars from various disciplines? Or is it just a buzz word which gives rise to confusion?". This made me realise how little is known and how much is to be done to put Screen Translation, Multimedia Translation or the wider field of Audiovisual Translation on a par with other fields within Translation Studies. A step forward would be to agree on a generic name to define the multiple and different modes of translation when the audio (radio), the audio and the visual (screen), or the written, the audio and the visual (multimedia) channels are the source text. Many might raise an eyebrow to see radio as part of this field, but I have translated voice-over for more than 15 years for the radio, and the process is similar to that of translating voice-over for TV interviews. The unsettled terminology of audiovisual translation is patent from the very denomination of the field, from *Traducción subordinada* or Constrained Translation (Titford 1982: 113, Mayoral 1984: 97 & 1993, Rabadán 1991: 172, Díaz Cintas 1998, Lorenzo & Pereira 2000 & 2001) to Film Translation (Snell-Hornby 1988), Film and TV Translation (Delabastita 1989), Screen Translation (Mason 1989), Media Translation (Eguíluz 1994), Film Communication (Lecuona 1994), *Traducción Fílmica* (Díaz Cintas 1997), Audiovisual Translation (Luyken 1991, Dries 1995, Shuttleworth & Cowie 1997, Baker 1998), or (Multi)Media Translation (Gambier & Gottlieb 2001). The title of the book has clearly opted for Audiovisual Translation since Screen Translation would

leave out for example translations made for theatre or radio, and the term multimedia is widely perceived as related to the field of IT. Audiovisual Translation will encompass all translations — or multisemiotic transfer — for production or postproduction in any media or format, and also the new areas of media accessibility: subtitling for the deaf and the hard or hearing and audiodescription for the blind and the visually impaired.¹

The idea to propose to Benjamins' editor Isja Conen a new collection of essays on Audiovisual Translation came up after listening to some of the contributions given by AVT scholars and practitioners who were invited to read papers in the newly created postgraduate course in Audiovisual Translation at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain. Though much work has been done over the years by scholars such as Yves Gambier and Henrik Gottlieb there is still plenty of scope at both academic levels: teaching and researching. Technological developments which have changed paper oriented society towards media oriented society have also made Audiovisual Translation the most dynamic field of Translation Studies. This is an objective appreciation given the market demand for audiovisual translators and the number of students interested in it — at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. It is also shown by the growing number of essays, PhDs, conferences and publications devoted solely to AVT, as well as the number of academic books.

The creation of a postgraduate course to train translators in the many techniques involved in AVT in Spain presented a few challenges to the organisers. First of all, training translators in this specialized field had to simulate working conditions: the software programmes and original audiovisual materials to translate were needed, along with professional translators to teach. Creating two software programmes to simulate subtitling and dubbing/voice-over (Subtitul@m, REVOice) and upgrading an IT room to state of the art technology solved the first problem. Looking for teachers who were experts in these fields was, and still is, a challenge. Since we wanted to recreate actual working conditions we felt that only active professionals could offer the day to day experience, but they had to be prepared to follow a timetable and the never-ending preparation/correction of tasks. Still, we are in the lucky position of being in Barcelona, one of the busiest cities in the world for film production and postproduction, hence we have been able to contact some professionals, although their availability and coordination is somewhat difficult.

Barcelona's status has been achieved thanks to many factors: Spain consumes an ever-growing number of foreign multimedia material for its many TV channels (terrestrial, digital, and satellite) and also for its cinema and radio

stations (cf. Gambier 2003 and Agost in this volume). Barcelona is the capital city of Catalonia, one of the many Spanish communities which has its own official language spoken by over 6,000,000 speakers, sharing the status of bilingualism along with Spanish. Hence Catalan cinemas offer sometimes dubbed and subtitled versions of the same film in both Catalan and Spanish. TV and radio is also broadcast in both Spanish and Catalan and the same applies to all audiovisual and multimedia material. Because of the bilingual nature of Catalan speakers, it seems to make sense to centralize all the production and postproduction of audiovisual material for both Spanish and Catalan in Barcelona. The birth of new TV channels broadcasting in Catalan — City TV, BTV, Flax, etc — has increased the demand for dubbing, subtitling and voice-over in Catalan, and has also opened the possibility of work to any translator — even to those who are not in possession of a certification issued by the official Catalan TV corporation TV-3 (as explained in Rosa Agost’s contribution in this book). Barcelona offers an excellent location for gathering data for AVT research and also for teaching AVT in the traditional and the new on-line formats (see Amador, Dorado and Orero’s article in this volume). Media accessibility, after the 2003 Athens Declaration on accessibility, will soon mean a thriving field at both academic and professional levels, and Barcelona is also the place where most subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing is broadcast with 56% of the total of hours broadcast in Spain.

The contents of this book reflect not only the “state of the art” research and teaching of AVT, but also the professionals’ experiences. I think — as do many of those who have contributed to this book — that research in AVT should take the many variables surrounding audiovisual translations into account. In this sense AVT is an answer to Gambier and Gottlieb’s comment which I quoted at the beginning of this introduction “to scholars from various disciplines”.

The book is organised in five parts (1) Professional perspectives; (2) AVT Theory; (3) Ideology and AVT; (4) Teaching AVT and (5) AVT Research. The articles in the first part are put forward by professionals from their experience with Xènia Martínez describing the many stages in the process of dubbing in Spain. And although those working in this process form a team, their work tends to be carried out on an individual basis. Diana Sánchez’s contribution brings to our attention the lack of a standardised method or procedure for subtitling. She describes the four strategies used in her company along with the advantages and pitfalls.

The second part of the book is dedicated to theory. Jorge Díaz Cintas analyses the validity and functionality of a series of concepts that have been

articulated within the theoretical framework loosely known as Descriptive Translation Studies and applies them to the field of audiovisual translation setting the framework for future publications. In his article, Frederic Chaume studies synchronisation from all perspectives. It includes a historical account of translation theory approaches, and a translational approach — analysing the characteristics grouped by genres and text types, languages and cultures, professional context, and viewer. It also deals with an educational approach encouraging the inclusion of synchrony when training translators in the field of AVT. Eduard Bartoll presents a comprehensive classification of subtitles taking into account previous studies by Luyken, Ivarsson, Gottlieb and Díaz Cintas. The article establishes new parameters which will encompass the wide range of existing subtitles in today's subtitling industry.

The third part of the book is from distant realities: Rosa Agost gives a general outline of dubbing practice in Spain. She examines the external considerations that condition these translations, the intervening factors, and how, sometimes, models of translation can become models of language. She also considers the diverse positions opted for by translators when facing a particular translation, from the viewpoint of the relevance they attribute to linguistic and cultural aspects of the original language in relation to the target one. Henrik Gottlieb's contribution analyses the political implication of subtitling from both academic and market perspectives concluding with the need to reach a consensus, especially where money is concerned. He presents the vicious circle of TV stations buying U.S., British and Australian productions which are affordable, and cheaper than domestic productions. These remain difficult to export because neighbouring countries keep filling their shelves with anglophone imports. Until this circle is broken, it will be difficult to achieve linguistic and cultural diversity.

The fourth part deals with AVT teaching. Aline Remael's contribution draws attention to the study of film dialogue from the perspective of AVT. She shows how future subtitlers would benefit greatly from spending more time and effort on the analysis of film narrative, and in particular on the study of film dialogue. In her collaboration Josélia Neves describes how students attending subtitling courses gained skills and language awareness that were reflected in their performance in other courses and activities. This is due to the junction of two elements — translation and audiovisuals — that have been accepted as assets to language learning in general; and to the fact that subtitling calls for an enormous variety of skills that can be improved through well staged activities covering the different steps of the subtitling process. Miquel Amador,

Carles Dorado and Pilar Orero present the on-line postgraduate course environment. The new teaching format, against much scepticism, works well and the detailed description of the teaching strategies and functions in this article aims to show its adequacy.

The last part of the book is dedicated to AVT research, Francesca Bartrina analyzes five possible areas of research for Audiovisual Translation which focus on the translated product. These areas have as their starting points, respectively, the study of the screenplay, film adaptation, audience design, pragmatics and Polysystem Theory. Yves Gambier's article describes an area of research which is fascinating; the many shapes and directions which film adaptation can take, and his proposed term: *tradaptation*. From a case study, the many shifts and changes, transformations and adaptations are analyzed. Eva Espasa's article on the documentary is a much needed contribution in the field of Audiovisual Translation. She analyses the documentary as a hybrid protean genre within Film Studies, and works through the article towards a description which can be taken on board when researching in the field of Audiovisual Translation. This description is worked while focusing on two myths popularly associated with documentaries: a documentary is not a film, and a documentary translation is not specifically audiovisual. Its focus on issues such as the fictional/ non-fictional nature of documentaries, or its translation mode as separate from audiovisual, the documentary mode of discourse, field, translation modes, textual functions and audience, makes this article a blueprint on documentary translation for future research. Vera Santiago's article presents a brief description of the closed subtitling system used in Brazil, concluding that some adjustments are required for it to be tailored to the needs of the country's deaf community.

I hope this book will help to settle a few matters and fix some terminology and parameters valid for Audiovisual Translation. I don't think there is any longer a need to justify the inclusion of Audiovisual Translation within the field of Translation Studies on its own merits — the 2004 London Conference amply proves the point. We are now in a fast shifting technical audiovisual society, which started at the end of the nineteenth-century, and Audiovisual Translation Studies should be the academic field which studies the new reality of a society which is media-oriented.

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Pilar Orero, Barcelona, 20th May 2004

Note

1. See Gambier (2003: 171–177) for a detailed classification of audiovisual translation.

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