

Preface

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Between Text and Image: Updating research in screen translation

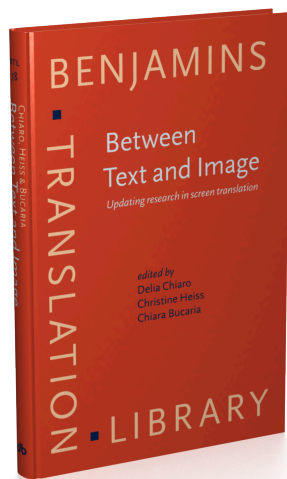
Edited by Delia Chiaro, Christine Heiss and Chiara Bucaria

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Preface

The University of Bologna's *Scuola Superiore di Lingue Moderne per Interpreti e Traduttori* in Forlì is very proud of being the first academic institution in Italy to seriously carry out research in screen translation. In fact, in 1993, inspired by a love of cinema coupled with a concern in translation, a group of researchers led by Rosa Maria Bollettieri Bosinelli began merging these two interests by investigating the area of screen translation. Initially, research mostly consisted of a series of contrastive case studies on films (see Baccolini *et al* 1994, Heiss and Bollettieri Bosinelli 1996, Bollettieri Bosinelli *et al.* 2000) which clearly tended to reflect the interests of individual researchers. However, as time went by, and especially with the birth and growth of the research department of Interdisciplinary Studies in Languages, Translation and Cultures (SITLeC) in Forlì, individualistic research soon developed into two strong research groups which were soon to produce what can now be defined as cutting edge research in the field. In fact, the audiovisual database set up by Christine Heiss, Marcello Soffritti, Cristina Valentini and their collaborators is unique in its type not only because it is possible to retrieve elements which are beyond the verbal code (e.g. mimicry, facial expression, etc.) but also because of the possibility of being able to align two visual codes and two languages in real time on a single screen. The power of such a tool for research purposes is self evident. Equally innovative is the work carried out in the same department by Delia Chiaro, Rachele Antonini, Chiara Bucaria and associates in the field of perception (see Chiaro 2004, Antonini and Chiaro 2005, Antonini 2007, Chiaro 2007, Bucaria and Chiaro 2007) in which empirical research designs and methods commonly used in social sciences, such as psychology, sociology and marketing are applied to the area of end-user perception of multimedia products.

The rationale behind the conference which took place in Forlì in the autumn of 2005 was first and foremost to see what others were doing elsewhere in terms of originality and newness, hence the title of Updating Research. Surely, we thought, there were other people out there doing things which were also forward-looking. Our initial call for papers resulted in over forty proposals of which under half were selected for presentation. As for written contributions, the essays included in this volume are each the result of blind refereeing by two external arbitrators. Thus, the papers are all the result of rigorous selection.

The book opens with Jorge Diaz Cintas' fresh outlook on screen translation in which he reminds us that "Not surprisingly, we speak about the 'viewer' rather than the 'reader' or 'hearer' of films..." (p. 2) making the point that the verbal message plays very much second fiddle to the visuals for the consumer of audio-visual products. In effect, while the 'audio' part of the term 'audiovisual' precedes the 'visual' part, it only does so morphologically because the words 'film', 'television' and 'programme' are lexically primed to concord with the verb 'watch' – and of course *voir*, *vedere*, *sehen*, etc. Despite this, as Gambier points out, most research limits itself to the verbal code (p. 13, 16). However, the essays by Heiss and Sofritt, Valentini and Chiaro all address the visual elements in their studies and applications, thus treading on new ground in attempts to bridge the gap between what audiences see and what they hear while privy to audiovisual translations.

Yves Gambier's essay leaves no audiovisual stone unturned as he presents a wide and thorough overview of the state of the art in research in screen translation from its birth in 1995 to the present day. And as mentioned previously, like Diaz Cintas, Gambier also refers to studies "... restricted to an examination of language content...". Furthermore he adds that language is "... (inevitably seen as problematic), in isolation from its audio and visual context..." (p. 13). With many screen translation researchers wearing the additional hat of linguist, this emphasis on verbal language is hardly surprising, as semiotically 'broader' approaches are left to the field of film studies. Again, an essay such as Elena Di Giovanni's, in which the photographic metaphor of lightness and dark refers to the submerged practice of subtitling in the traditionally dubbing country of Italy, certainly plays ample tribute to visuals. Chiaro, too, in her suggestion of applying Kano's model of quality to screen translation, sees the attributes connected to visuals as a significant part of the whole product presented to audiences, arguing that the perception of translational quality is only one of many characteristics of a screen product and that in judging quality the non-verbal also needs to be considered.

Gambier's comprehensive overview sets the tone for the diverse contributions which follow, each of which has been attributed to one of the two broad sections: the first containing a collection of studies based upon corpora and data bases specifically constructed for the study of audiovisual translation, and the second on studies based upon psycho-socio-economic issues.

The authors who contribute to the first section, Electronic Databases and Corpora, have all produced data-driven research which is either the result of more traditional, hand written corpora (Pavesi, Pedersen and Vald  on) or else based upon the yield of highly elaborate electronic corpora and multimedia data bases (Heiss, Sofritt and Valentini & Matamala and Lorente). More than just well organized collections of audiovisual data, the latter corpora are characterised by interfaces which allow for indicization and interrogation of corpus content, together

with advanced systems of data extraction. These features have the advantage of allowing the researcher to examine all the semiotically relevant components of materials at the same time and thus arrive at richer and more ample studies than those of the past.

Having argued in favour of high technology, we must admit that a simple corpus consisting of transcriptions of spoken language in films may, with the right insight, already represent a significant step forward in terms of research tools. For example, Maria Pavesi adopts a data-driven approach to investigate the translation of syntactic structures in film, an area that has received little or no attention. Her corpus, while being low-tech, does nevertheless permit her to quantify and compare her data with accuracy. So, too, do the essays by Roberto Vald  n and Jan Pedersen who both work from a corpus of transcriptions for their respective analyses of inserts in Spanish dubbing and quality assessment in subtitling in Sweden. Naturally, corpora and data bases specifically conceived for this purpose, such as the one proposed by Matalama and Lorente and Heiss *et al.* represent a new boundary of research in multimedia translation. While these systems may still be in need of fine tuning in terms of relative options pertaining to IT management, and presumably researchers in this field are still awaiting the possibility of major automaticity, (the manual labour involved in the indexing of data is lengthy and complex and must be entrusted to specialists purposely trained for it), the use of such resources for research purposes is surely endless. The essays in this volume are simply a starting point of suggestions for research. Furthermore, databases that are indexed to retrieve words connected with gesture, movement etc. respond to D  az-Cintas and Gambier's underscoring of the prominence that screen translation scholars have given to the word rather than the ocular; however, as we have said, this is perhaps only to be expected of those who are occupied with languages, thus the "visual" morph of the "audio" is not to be neglected.

The studies presented by Rachele Antonini, Chiara Bucaria and Flavia Cavaliere derive from a rigorous empirical methodological foundation. Working from the assumption that viewers are consumers, they borrow and adapt methods of research design commonly adopted in the area of marketing research to investigate different aspects of end-user perceptions of audiovisual products. Largely ignored by mainstream research, the results of studies in end-user awareness can provide enormous input for operators in screen translation. Adopting more conventional methodology, Elisa Perego focuses on a different aspect of perception, namely the difficulties that film subtitle readers may encounter as a result of arbitrary line-breaks. The results of this and the previous studies provide insight into what viewers do and do not distinguish from a translation and, used judiciously, could bring about significant improvements to such an important service. Another traditional standpoint on perception is employed by Diana Bianchi who, in

a lively essay on “Buffyspeak” shows us how subtly censorship employed in the series’ Italian dub tones down the sexuality of the popular teenage TV vampire killer. Ideally, such in-depth investigations of products could go hand in hand with more empirically based end-user studies to provide further input for operators. None of these studies treat AVT “as if it were merely a question of dealing with dialogues and commentaries in a vacuum” (Gambier p. 13) but all tackle the real life social existence of these translations, their consumers, and all the operators involved in their fabrication.

All such investigations are directly linked to the controversial issue of quality, discussed in depth by Delia Chiaro who proposes a model of quality already adopted for many goods and services, but as she argues, screen translation presents a *Catch 22* situation in commercial terms which renders it unlike other services. Also linked to the economics of screen translation, Elena Di Giovanni proposes to bring more obscure films to light to wider mainstream audiences.

Nearly all the contributions in this volume either explore filmic or televised products. Only Cristina Valdés tackles a different area of AVT by investigating the practice of promotional hypertexts in commercial websites. Exploring virgin ground, her overview provides a springboard for further investigations into the exciting world of the computer screen. More research is called for in the area of translations which we see on our computer screens, our play stations, our mobile phones, as well as the myriad of other screens in our homes and workplaces, on public transport, in libraries, bars, restaurants and museums, to mention just a few habitats of the ubiquitous talking monitor.

Delia Chiaro
Christine Heiss
Chiara Bucaria