Workshop 2: Audiovisual translation research methods: an overview

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Topics

Dubbing vs. subtitling
History
Norms
Censorship
Reception
Corpus-building
Applied research
Creativity
Some advantages of dubbing:

- Less textual reduction
- Does not require high level of literacy from viewers
- Viewer doesn’t have to divide attention
To Dub or To Subtitle?

Some disadvantages of dubbing:

- Cost – dubbing is c. 15 times more expensive than subtitling
- Time factor
- Perceived loss of authenticity
- Discordance between visual and verbal
- Constraint of lip-synchronization
One advantage of subtitling?

- ‘the standard of English as a foreign language is [...] much higher in subtitling countries such as the Netherlands or Scandinavian countries than in Germany, for instance’
  - (Herbst 1995)

- An assumption awaiting empirical research?
Factors influencing choice

- Cost
- Availability of relevant technology
- Standard of literacy
- Interest in foreign languages
- Degree of cultural openness
- Strength of local film industry
- Audience habits (see also Danan 1991: 607)
  - (Baker and Hochel 1998)
c.1903 Intertitles are first used. Intertitles are texts, drawn or printed on paper, filmed and placed between sequences of the film. In translation, intertitles could be removed, translated, filmed and re-inserted:
In deference to Nanook, the great hunter, the trader entertains and attempts to explain the principle of the gramophone — how the white man "cans" his voice.
Le gardien Nibet allait prendre son service de nuit à la prison de la Santé, au quartier des condamnés à mort où se trouvait Fantômas.

Nibet, the guard, was about to take up his night duty on death row,
c.1927 Invention of sound film. The audience can hear the actors for the first time. ‘The first attested showing of a sound film with subtitles is *The Jazz Singer* (originally released in the US in October 1927) in Paris, on January 26, 1929, with subtitles in French.’

(Gottlieb n.d.)

No subtitles in English until late 1931/early 1932 (US and UK)
At the beginning, I was very cautious and superimposed hardly more than 25 or 30 titles to a ten-minute reel... . . .Then I'd [...] watch the audiences' faces [...]. I'd wondered if they were going to drop their heads slightly to read the titles at the bottom of the screen and then raise them again after they read the titles [...] but I needn't have worried [...] ; they didn't drop their heads, they merely dropped their eyes [...]. This emboldened me to insert more titles [...] and bit by bit more and more of the original dialogue got translated until at the end of my work in this field I was putting in anywhere from 100 to 150 titles a reel . . . tho', I must repeat, only when the dialogue was good enough to warrant it.
Technologies: dubbing

- Early experiments with actors in the cinema, or concealed on set
- Later: looping
Agents: dubbing

Dubbing requires script translators and dialogue writers, as well as a large technical infrastructure (casting, dubbing director, sound recording and mixing)
Agents: subtitling

Subtitling used to be divided between technicians who did the technical side (spotting etc.) and translators who translated the dialogue; now integrated.
Workflows

- Dubbing: translation of text, then adaptation of translation to constraints of the medium

- Subtitling: Watching the programme against the script; spotting and writing subtitles. Spotting can be done prior to subtitle writing (e.g. via a template file) or simultaneously. Then editing/checking and sometimes ‘simulation’

Fansubbing, crowdsourced subtitles

- Developed in response to audiovisual policies of anime distributors in the 1980s (see OtaKing77077 5-part documentary on anime fansubbing on Youtube)
- Continued through frustration with distributors’ schedules for live action television programmes
- Volunteer subtitlers now widely used e.g. by TED, Amara
- Netflix caught using fansubs in Finland in October 2012
Norms

E.g. suspension dots; treatment of dialect; treatment of swearing; treatment of pragmatic elements
One could use the Karamitroglou or Ivarsson/Carroll best practice guides for headings

Use of television channel guidelines e.g. Channel 4

Different for fansubbers!
Censorship

Common area of research, particularly for dubbing. Danan hypothesis – seems to suggest that dubbing is associated with totalitarian regimes, but subtitles can also censor.

Dubbing as part of the censorship process; may also include editing the film print
What do audiences think of subtitles?

What do audiences find challenging about watching subtitles?

Would certain changes in the way that subtitles are presented make them easier to process?

Primary sources: Interviews; questionnaires; experiments
Secondary material: distributors’ catalogues; reviews
Experiments

Participants were seated in a comfortable chair with eyes at a distance of approximately 60 cm from the screen and they were exposed to the 15-minute subtitled video excerpt. Headphones were used to minimize external noise and distraction. As previously explained, eye movements were collected for a randomly selected subset of participants. These participants watched the subtitled video after a short calibration procedure lasting less than half a minute (see below). No other change was applied to the basic procedure. (Perego et al. 2010: 255)
Eye tracking (Romero Fresco 2012)
Eye-tracking

Eye tracking
Corpus building in AVT

Danger of over-emphasis on the verbal (Pedersen article)

Multimodal transcription (Taylor)
Historical research. Also happens in film studies.

How did AVT develop technologically?
How have norms in AVT changed?
How might AVT have affected the circulation of audiovisual products?

Relationship of AVT to other historical events (see e.g. Amman film archive [http://afilmarchive.net/about](http://afilmarchive.net/about))
Resubtitling, redubbing

Re-surtitling of opera

Resubtitling of films (e.g. festivals, TV, DVD, prestige distributors such as Criterion Collection, etc.)

Re-dubbing feature films
Applied research

Accessibility

Creative subtitling

Comprehension of image/text relations
Relationship to wider TS research

- Function-oriented approaches
- Multimodal awareness
- Interdisciplinary research
- Non-professional translation
Challenges: what film are we watching?

**Metadata!**

Questions to ask:

If a DVD or VHS, what distributor/publisher? What date released? What other information, e.g. 2-disc special edition, director’s cut, DVD extras (e.g. alternate endings), etc.?

If a television broadcast, what television channel and date? If a DVD of TV, give date of original first broadcast of any episodes/programmes mentioned.
Challenges: instability of the film text

What textual features modified?
N.B. film can be cut/edited; digitally altered; altered by analogue means, as in the following example from Hitchcock’s *Suspicion* (1941) and its French dubbed version *Soupçons*, later released on VHS with the in-vision text largely reshot in French:
Challenges: ephemerality of sources

(important to preserve and record URLs)
Copies of unknown provenance

- If a download, from where? When? Ethical issues?
- If on Youtube, uploaded by who, on date?
- Pirate DVDs/VHS – metadata often missing – needs to be reconstructed or hypothesised.
- Difficulty of working with copies of unknown provenance.
- Problems with archival records
Questions to ask

Which classificatory system has been imposed (e.g. BBFC [British Board of Film Censorship] or MPAA? What is the film’s certificate? Is there evidence of cuts or other editing?
BRITISH BOARD OF FILM CENSORS

133, OXFORD STREET, W.I.
SECRETARY: A. T. L. WATKINS

This is to Certify that "Berlin Airlift" has been Passed for UNIVERSAL EXHIBITION.

Examiners: 
President: W. HARRIS
Subtitler may be credited (sometimes only the company/lab doing the subtitling). Dubbing actors may also be identified (important for establishing which dubbed version).
Version française réalisée par

S. P. S.,
SOCIETE PARISIENNE DE SONORISATION

Adaptation française : Anne et Georges DUTTER
Direction artistique : Jacqueline POREL

Avec les voix de:
  – Jean-Claude MICHEL
  – Monique THIERRY
  – Martine MESSAGER
  – François NOCHER
  – Daniel GALL
  – Jean TOPART
  – Jacques DESCHAMPS
  – Jean BARNAY
  – Roger CROUZET
  – Henri DJANIK
Some guidelines

- Always cite films in the bibliography in the same way that you would cite books.
- Always cite the edition consulted and date of production as well as the original date of release of the film and the region.
- Always cite the subtitler's name, where given, or subtitling lab (commonly provided).
- Always cite details of the cut used, if known, e.g. with a given ending, director's cut or similar (e.g. exact length of film)
Some guidelines

- If using a copy of unknown provenance, give all known details. Attempt to contact any poster, seller, Youtube account etc. linked to the copy to establish provenance. Check subtitles against other subtitle sets for that film. Hedge all statements made in article. Material may not be usable.
Further reading

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- Spoletti, F. 2006. Interview at http://www.jostrans.org/issue06/int_spoletti.php
Dubbing vs. Subtitling bibliography