

Basic Concepts in the Theory of Audiovisual Translation*

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I. Introduction

The field of audiovisual translation has recently attracted the interest of numerous language professionals and scholars of translation, both for its widespread use in the world of mass communication and for the multi-dimensional, polisemiomatic nature of the text itself. Many scholars focused on the fact that the process of audiovisual translation is a complex activity, influenced by multiple factors. Academic interest in this field has grown proportionately with the proliferation of this text type as a means of communication and with the expansion of their crucial role in the dissemination of popular culture (O'Connell 2007).

It needs to be pointed out that there was still some confusion in terminology within this field until recently and terms like "film translation" (Snell-Hornby 1988), "film and TV translation" (Delabastita 1989),

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"screen translation" (Mason 1989; O'Connell 2007) and "multimedia translation" (Gambier and Gottlieb 2001) were still in use until a few years ago. One of the most eminent scholars in this field, Henrik Gottlieb, labeled this process "screen translation" and defined it as "the translation of transient polysemiotic texts presented on screen to mass audiences" (45) and this term was in use for a few years. These overlapping terms generally cover "the interlingual transfer of verbal language when it is transmitted and accessed both visually and acoustically, usually but not necessarily, through some kind of electronic device" (Chiaro 141). However, with the publication of various scholarly works with "Audiovisual Translation" in their titles (Orero 2004; Diaz Cintas 2008; Diaz Cintas and Anderson 2009), "Audiovisual Translation" (abbreviated as AVT) has now become the most accepted form to designate this field of study.

As Gambier stated, "until the mid-nineties, television and films were analyzed from a variety of perspectives— but the majority of researchers seem to have regarded the language dimension as a hurdle to shy away from" (12–13) and it cannot be denied that research in audiovisual translation was previously neglected by scholars in the fields of both film and translation studies in the past. Even though translation studies itself has reached the status of a fully-fledged academic discipline and there has been an prolific increase in the publications and research carried out in the field of audiovisual translation, it still remains a discipline where theory is not widely known or regarded as central or integral, especially to researchers outside of this domain. This paper aims to introduce some of the basic concepts involved in audiovisual translation theory and show that audiovisual translation (AVT) has every potential to transcend the boundaries of translation studies to become not just a subdiscipline of translation but an academic discipline with its own research areas and issues.

II. The History of Audiovisual Translation Theory

In 1991, Luyken et al. stated that there exists only very limited theoretical and scholarly knowledge about the specific linguistic implications of language transfer process in the audiovisual media (165). Fawcett explained there has been little research in the field of film translation due to material difficulties such as lack of multi-disciplinary knowledge, corpus-related problems, and non-availability of dialogue lists. He also mentioned the "atheoretical nature of film translation studies" (69) and explained that practitioners thought subtitling and dubbing were not translating and therefore, by implication, could not be dealt with by translation theory. However, with the rapid growth of translation studies as an academic discipline, Chaume (2002) stressed the importance of highlighting research in audiovisual translation.

Audiovisual translation is one concrete example of an area of research that has to find its rightful place in Translation Studies. It is the responsibility of teachers and researchers to draw our attention precisely to those aspects which mark it out as different from other modalities, whilst the effort is made to ensure that the global theoretical framework of our discipline can include the peculiarities of this modality. (1)

Chaume argued that it is imperative for researchers in audiovisual translation (AVT) to progress further from such concepts as equivalence or fidelity. He also urges translation teachers to include AVT in their syllabus because AVT reflects the "extraordinary transparency with respect to understanding the function of a translation and the reason behind its being carried out" (2).

A few years later, as translation studies began to gain firm roots in the

field of academia, Diaz-Cintas declared that in order for research in AVT to be given due consideration it deserves, more analysis are needed with "a more theoretical and less anecdotal approach" and offers Descriptive Translation Theory as "an ideal platform from which to launch this approach" (In search of a framework, 165).

In the Introduction section to the special volume on audiovisual translation of *The Translator*, Gambier talked about issues worth investigating in future research projects such as the relationship between language and identity in audiovisual media, issues relating to the handling of language in production and distribution, issues relating to the handling of language in production and distribution and so on. He examined the implications of research done on this field and stated that research in AVT needs to include a variety of concepts and methodologies that includes "polysystems theory, psycholinguistics, cultural studies, critical discourse analysis, relevance theory, as well as functional approaches to translation" (183).

These scholars have contributed greatly to the growing interest in AVT research in the last two decades and audiovisual translation studies have definitely "come of age", to use the words of Diaz-Cintas (The Didactics 1) and now has become one of the most prolific sub-discipline of translation studies. Moreover, the sheer volume of research in this field is expected to even increase in the future. The globalization and digitalization of multimedia texts have significantly boosted the production and distribution of audiovisual production. Advanced internet technologies are bringing closer a rapid transition into a new digital era, farther and farther away from old ways of exchanging information. The concept of "text" itself is changing rapidly. With the increase in the sheer volume of audiovisual texts as conduits of information and entertainment, the need for more comprehensive research in AVT has grown.

III. Basic Concepts in Audiovisual Translation

The following parts of this study will discuss some of the evolving conceptual theories in AVT and examine the basic concepts that underline the specific aspect of the audiovisual text. Research in audiovisual translation has to take into consideration the basic translation issues driving the theorization of this field. Some methodological approaches to the study of audiovisual translation will also be surveyed.

1) The concept of constrained translation

The early articles about audiovisual texts from a translation studies perspective focused on the specific aspects of these texts that differentiate them from other types of texts. They centered on the "constraints" that the translators face when trying to render the components of an audiovisual text into another language. Titford was the first researcher that introduced the concept of "constrained translation" (113). He was predominantly concerned with captioning and reading subtitles. Mayoral, Kelly and Gallardo analyzed the concept of "constrained translation" (356), not limiting their research into audiovisual translation but including all types of translation in which more than one channel of communication intervenes: advertisements, comics, songs, subtitles, dubbing and so forth. It is suggested that when the text is made up of multimedia components in addition to the verbal or linguistic one, the translation should always maintain "content synchrony with the other message components, whether these may be image, music or any other" (356). They stress that different parts of the translated text should not contradict one another in meaning. There is the additional constraint of having to synchronize the words of the translation with the picture (and,

presumably, the original sound effects), i.e. having to place the string of words alongside the parallel movement of the picture (Zabalbeascoa 23).

Chaume takes up the notion of constrained translation and notes that the following ideas are fundamental in the study of AVT.

a) the consideration that the linguistics of the day showed itself to be insufficient in explaining the process of translation of verbo–iconic texts; b) the description and explanation of the process of communication; c) the inclusion and the role played by ‘noise’ in this type of textual transfer, understood in communicative terms; d) the significance of communication systems other than the verbal one, and, therefore, the synchrony of contents, using their terminology, or coherence that has to exist between the translation of the verbal text and other components of the message, such as image, music, etc.; and e) the classification of the different degrees of constraints to be found in each one of the varieties of translation where the mode of discourse is complex. (6)

Zabalbeascoa’s 1993 model adds another dimension to this concept and contributes the idea of translation priorities (from a functional perspective), presenting a position that balances the position based on constraints (Chaume 2004).

From the above, we can assume that, at the time of establishing priorities and assessing the restrictions of the translation work, translators should not limit themselves to the linguistic level. As Mayoral et al. highlight, both in the messages of the source culture and in those of the target culture, music, noise and image reveal themselves unequivocally as belonging to the source text and the translator must not only translate linguistic phrases (the text or speech), but also attempt to manipulate the other media in the source text into the translated target text. The authors

also examines the concept of "noise" that occur due to the bicultural nature of the message (359). In this regard, the authors add that "the noise produced in the act of communicating by means of translation proceeds not only from the use of two different languages but also from the cultural differences existing between the source and the receptor" (361). Thus, the authors regard the cultural components as essential factors in producing a clear and legible target text and states if there is too much "noise" produced in the process of translation, there will be a "failure in the communication act or, at the very least, additional difficulties in the act of decoding" (363).

Bartrina and Espasa defines constrained translation as "[...]situations in which the text to be translated is part of a more complex communicative event which attempts to convey a message by various means, such as pictures, drawings, music, etc." (2005:83) and states the following:

The specificity of audiovisual translation consists in its mode of transmission, rather than in the topics it covers. In audiovisual texts there is semiotic interaction between the simultaneous emission of image and text and its repercussions for the translation process. One characteristic of audiovisual texts is its redundancy: oral and written messages are conveyed with sound and image. (2005: 85)

It is this "redundancy" that makes translation of audiovisual texts difficult. The translator has to consider not only the meaning in the verbal language, but take into consideration the medium concerned.

2) The concept of various audiovisual codes in AVT

Delabastita's "Translation and Mass-communication: Film and TV

Translation as Evidence of Cultural Dynamic" is one of the first serious academic studies on audiovisual translation. He highlights the the specific characteristic of AVT characteristics, and stresses that "film [is] a multi-channel and multi-code type of communication." (196). He focuses on the two channels in film communication; the visual and the acoustic.

According to Delabastita, film is a complex meaningful sign consisting of a multitude of codes. The codes are the verbal (including various dialects, sociolects); literary and theatrical (storyline, dialog); proxemic and kinetic (i.e., referring to non-verbal performance); and cinematic (techniques, genres) (196-197).

In his 1990 article, Delabastita points out the four basic elements that define the audiovisual text and establish a basis for its semiotic texture:

- a) The acoustic-verbal: dialogue, monologue, songs, voice-off.
- b) The acoustic-nonverbal: musical score, sound effects, noises.
- c) The visual-nonverbal: image, photography, gestures.
- d) The visual-verbal: inserts, banners, letters, messages on computer screens, newspaper headlines. (Diaz Cintas 2008: 3)

Delabastita wonders what type of text is a film and replies that it represents a form of communication using multiple channels and codes, citing the channel as the medium through which the message reaches the audience and pointing out that it must not be confused with the codes used to create the real meaning of the film (196). The author adds that the signs of the different codes may be combined in many ways to make up the macro-sign of the film as a whole and that, in this regard, cinema and theatre are similar. However, Delabastita states, there is an important difference between communication in cinema and theatre, which is related

to the translation potential of a film compared to that of dramatic or theatrical texts. One of the greatest semiotic differences is that cinema presents a complex sign determined beforehand, which is always reproducible in an exact manner, while theatre presents a sign that materializes simultaneously to interpretation, which is a single event. This reproducibility of cinema is precisely what makes it a mass communication phenomenon (197). That is, the theater production is embodied slightly different on each different performance whereas film, for example, remains unaltered each time it is shown to a certain audience at a certain time. Thus, the audio and the visual channels of film are interdependent with the verbal component of the text and this leads to the constraints that govern the translation of film.

Sokoli recapitulates the features of the audiovisual codes that distinguish the audiovisual text: as follows:

- Reception through two channels: acoustic and visual.
- Significant presence of nonverbal elements.
- Synchronisation between verbal and nonverbal elements.
- Appearance on screen – reproducible material.
- Predetermined succession of moving images – recorded material. (38)

Sokoli stresses that "these features condition the translation of the audiovisual text, and, as a result, their consideration is fundamental for its study" (38).

3) The concept of multimodality

Much of the audiovisual text that are being translated or interpreted today are "multimodal" in essence, that is, they make use of "multiple

semiotic resources such as language, sound and image" (Hirvonen and Tiittula 1). O'Halloran and Smith states that multimodal analysis is particularly concerned with "texts which contain the interaction and integration of two or more semiotic resources – or 'modes' of communication – in order to achieve the communicative functions of the text" (2). With the expansion of information technology, the concept of multimodality in translation has become more and more important. The interplay between verbal and multimodal modes, i.e., the semiotic, visual, acoustic, and kinetic elements needs to be examine to define the specific character of audiovisual translation.

However, Gambier talks about the "strong paradox" in audiovisual translation. The interrelations between the verbal and the visual, between language and non-verbal are already acknowledged in translation studies but according to Gambier, but "the dominant research perspective in AVT remains largely linguistic" (7). He talks about the two factors that explain this paradox: the background of most research of AVT are in linguistic and literary studies and the difficulty and collecting data and annotations in AVT texts is difficult and time-consuming. He also cites the recent lack of a relevant methodology to deal with the concept of multimodality. In Gambier's view, the multimodal discourse analysis will contribute in developing the "awareness and analysis of the integration of semiotic resources in AV, such as films, and multimedia products, such as web pages" (7).

Taylor suggests an effective methodological tool that can provide a detailed analysis of an audiovisual text. This method of "multimodal transcription" (Thibault 2000) involves breaking down a film into single frames/shots/phases, and analyzing all the semiotic modalities operating in each frame/shot/phase. According to Taylor, this methodology can be adopted (and adapted) to formulate strategies for subtitling and can

provide insights into how meaning is 'made' (in the Hallidayan sense of the expression) via the combination of various semiotic modalities, and thus how the verbal message in the form of subtitles interacts with other sources of meaning. Various types of audiovisual texts including feature films, advertisements, news programmes, soap operas have been analyzed using this tool offering the possibility of comparing those genres in terms of subtitling strategies.

4) The concept of prefabricated orality

Audiovisual texts, especially narrative texts like feature films and tv dramas, have their own rules and conventions concerning the reproduction of orality (Chaume 2004). These texts which are characterised by "a strange kind of oral discourse, an orality which may seem spontaneous and natural, but which is actually planned or, as Chaume terms it, 'prefabricated'" (Baños–Piñero and Chaume 1). Although the orality of these audiovisual texts may seem spontaneous and natural, they are actually 'written' to be 'spoken as if not written' and this "prefabricated orality" is a characteristic common to most audiovisual fictional texts regardless of their origins.¹⁾

From the point of view of the source text, we refer to the oral linguistic code. However, its linguistic characteristics are not entirely the same as those of spontaneous oral language as, in reality, the oral speech of the characters on the screens is nothing but a recital of previous written speech. However, it must seem oral as recited. The pretended orality of the filmic text is actually a fictitious and contrived illusion, given that dialogues usually originate from a script that has been previously written.

1) In audiovisual translation, the concept of "prefabricated orality" is usually discussed within the translational mode of dubbing.

It is inevitable that there would be a certain distance between natural language on the street and the film dialogue that seeks to create just an impression of naturalness and spontaneity.

In his 2007 essay on quality standards in dubbing, Chaume mentions the directions that Televisió de Catalunya, the public broadcasting network of Catalonia, gives on the definition of the language that characterizes this type of texts which are useful to the translator. The author says that the proposals from this television corporation follow the maxim of making the translated dialogues that appear plausible and that also of abiding by the conventions of the oral registry of the target language. In its summary of their linguistic criteria, Televisió de Catalunya acknowledges that dubbing requires a specific modality of language, that is the non-spontaneous language that has been written to be said while faking spontaneity. Similarly, it is specified that, in dubbing, it is necessary to situate oneself in the specificity of oral language, with its grammatical structure different from that of written language, but also taking into account that it is not spontaneous oral language, that it has not been created in Catalan and that it has to participate in the references of different cultures. Chaume summarizes the recommendations made by Televisió de Catalunya and specifies that these are mainly focused on dubbing, even though they may be applied to subtitling.

Language in narrative audiovisual texts can be said to be halfway between spontaneous oral speech and the pre-manufactured written speech. This prefabricated oral speech is created and written according to certain filmic conventions. The difference between a text written to be spoken (as though it was not written) and spontaneous speech is that the first one is planned and the second one is not.

Translators working with dubbed texts must not forget about the linguistic diversity of the original pieces, to which the principle of

adaptation must be applied, meaning, adapting the registers of characters and narrators. The speaking style of each character is different and determined by the historical and social context, the character's personality and the emotional situations he or she experiences, which is compatible with a normative consideration (Televisió de Catalunya 1997). However, as this quote by Whitman–Linsen points out, when the prefabricated oral language of the source audiovisual text is rendered into a dubbed target text, the result can be quite artificial and stilted.

Artificiality is one of the main faults pilloried in denouncements of dubbed versions; the audience can hear that it is not an original. Dubbed language simply does not correspond to the way normal people talk. Herbst conducted an experiment in which he presented students with original and dubbed texts. The revealing findings indicated that the latter were clearly recognizable as such. No wonder the dubbing actors themselves take the brunt of criticism. (118)

The nature of prefabricated orality in audiovisual texts puts translators in a double bind. The speech of the source and the target text is situated in a continuum between spontaneous and planned discourse, displaying features of both extremes. Dubbing must attempt to sound spontaneous and natural, as if it were spoken speech, whilst actually being planned. There is no doubt that translators involved in the dubbing process face overwhelming challenges.

IV. Conclusion

The concepts of constrained translation, the various audiovisual codes in

AVT, multimodality and prefabricated orality are some of the basic issues that underlie the concept of audiovisual texts and thus greatly influences their translation. Researchers and translators working with audiovisual texts should keep in mind the the significance of communication systems other than the verbal one within audiovisual texts. There are degrees of constraints to be found the varieties of audiovisual translation where the mode of discourse is complex. As Mayoral et al., states, "when translation is required not only of written texts alone, but of texts in association with other communication media (image, music, oral sources, etc.), the translator's task is complicated and at the same time constrained by the latter" (356). Audiovisual text is a type of text that transmits information through two channels or media (acoustic and visual), coded through different systems of meaning or codes. Moreover, a key feature of audiovisual texts is their pretended orality or, in other words, their prefabricated orality. Audiovisual text is halfway between a restricted code (the one used in spontaneous oral speech) and an elaborated one (written speech).

Even though translation studies itself has received a lot of critical attention, theories and basic concepts of audiovisual translation has yet to be widely known or regarded as integral to its analysis, especially to researchers outside of this domain. Some researcher still consider only the verbal component when analyzing audiovisual texts even though the meaning of the text is derived from multiple channels and modes. Some of the basic concepts of the audiovisual text that is integral to the analysis of audiovisual translation were reviewed in this study.

Audiovisual translation is unique in the sense that its complexity and restrictions greatly surpass those of most other texts. The audiovisual translator feels constrained by the medium of communication and are subject to textual, multimedial and multimodal restrictions that limit the

rendering of the source text into the target text. A thorough examination and analysis of the basic concepts in audiovisual translation theory will not only assist the researcher and the translator in the process of translation but also provide a basis for better understanding of the developing theories in audiovisual translation.

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Abstract

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This study briefly talks about the history of audiovisual translation and discusses some of the evolving conceptual theories in AVT and examine the basic concepts that underline the specific aspect of the audiovisual text. The concepts of constrained translation, the various audiovisual codes in AVT, multimodality and prefabricated orality are some of the basic issues that underlie the concept of audiovisual texts and thus greatly influences their translation. Research in audiovisual translation has to take into consideration the basic translation issues driving the theorization of this field.

Key Words: audiovisual translation, multimedia translation, multimodality, prefabricated orality, audiovisual text

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