Translating Regionalised Voices in Audiovisuals

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The initial support for the *Translating Voices* project given by the School of Modern Languages and Cultures at Durham University allowed the editor to organize a venue for the discussion of these themes in 2007. The subvention from the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Durham University has funded the publication of this volume. The Association for the Studies of Modern and Contemporary France supported the Francophone strand of the conference, while the Society for Italian Studies supported the strand of translation into Italian.

The Italian Institute for Culture in London supported the strand from Italy. Support was also received from the Association for Contemporary Iberian Studies.

The scholarly associations above have allowed us to start the scholarly discussion; this volume continues these discussions with other scholars and would like to open new dialogues with its readers.

FMF, Durham, April 2009
Introduction

New Questions for an Old Debate

Federico M. Federici
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1. Many Questions Needing Answers

What is considered a regionalised voice in the context of audiovisual translation? Is an ethnolet a regional voice? Is a regional voice an idiolect that gives recognizable connotation to narratives and their characters? Does giving regionalised voices to characters or localizing the news become a way to show the marginal voices and identify political and social issues? Is a minority language a regional voice? Can it be said that the voice of a region mirrors the political and cultural background of a recognizable social group in an identifiable socio-geographical setting? Questions touching sociolinguistics as well as cultural studies overlap in the contributors’ work and words. The authors of the following chapters attempt to investigate processes, perceptions and policies behind a series of intellectual and real challenges that affect all translators, but in a particular those who are dealing with audiovisual materials, who are affected in an immediate and visible fashion. In fact, audiovisual materials, by their very nature and their fast-paced development, artistic or time-constraints impose, causing regional, minoritarian or small geopolitical identities to be immediately recognizable for the source culture to be portrayed more faithfully as well as meaningfully. The notion of immediate access to the target audience, who will otherwise desert the ‘audiovisual products’, becomes a central concern. With a deliberate terminological choice, audiovisual renderings, more than many other translations, are first of all products and as such, suffer from the influences of markets even prior to the impact of socio-cultural and sociolinguistic matters.

It would be exceptionally ambitious and incredibly unrealistic to hope that a single volume could collect and propose answers to those ques-
tions. Nonetheless, the contributors to this volume have touched upon many of the above issues confirming that translating regional voices poses questions to traditional perspectives on the means for audiovisual translation and calls for a re–think of translational priorities.

This volume thus proposes a selection of articles concerning themes of dialect translation and regionalised languages in the context of audiovisual translation, disregarding long–held separations between subtitling and dubbing techniques. On one side, the auteurs, the film directors, are sometimes allowed to use their art as a means to offer a ‘privileged’ voice to socio–geographical realities that are recognizable and often want to be identified by their regionalised languages and cultural expressions. This cultural identification becomes an intimate part of the linguistic and multimodal message (cf. Eco 2007 below). Audiovisual messages are a form of art, which, for some directors in times of crisis, can take different formats, from adverts to music, clips, as new means of survival — often referred to as a ‘paying the bills’ production — for artistic authorship. All of these forms of audiovisual materials can work towards achieving their authors’ artistic ideals which more often than not also include social messages expressed behind their art. In this complex context of artistic creativity and down–to–earth necessity of realization and production, we are reminded that a co–existence is possible: ‘considerations of money don’t necessarily make the artist less creative or the project less worthwhile’ (Bordwell & Thompson 2008: 3). In other words, when creating an audiovisual, the marketing implications could be and often are positive driving forces towards realizing palatable, and yet no less artistic, productions. Yet this marketing attention does not find an equally immediate analogous equation in terms of translational investments. In seeking international circulation, one factor of quality, that is, the translation of the message, seems to remain secondary. Therefore, every financial cut on film budget will immediately affect the time or quality of translation (private conversations with Jean–Louis Sarthou and Mario Paolinelli have often delved into this issue).

The (not so) democratic sword of financial cuts leaves out of any equation of traditional debates: adapters for dubbing as much as subtitlers are given less and less time to put forward their rendering of the original work, and fewer resources to provide excellent quality. Should one not say that if the market rules apply to the source text or source product, they should also apply to the target product that remains constrained (if not castrated) by approximate translations? (both Delia Chiara’s and Yves Gambier’s observations on the matter are enlightening). One would like to hope that the scholarly debate, which has focused for
a long time on the aesthetical values of subtitling in contrast to those of
dubbing, could make a note of the powerful image offered by Michael
Cronin on the role and position of the translational act, and proceed
from its implications:

The translation ‘virus’ notoriously uses oral and verbal means of transmission as
it disseminates new ideas, insights, sensations, perspectives across societies and
cultures. Over the centuries political and ecclesiastical authorities have often
been alarmed at the speed with which subjects and believers can become ‘in-
fected’ with new ideas of dissent or revolution reaching them through the me-
dium of translation. (2006: 120)

Whereas the aesthetical values can be still profoundly and effectively
analysed and discussed, could experts not join forces and provide ana-
lysical frameworks to understand why translations often work as oblique
censored messages even in those countries where far more provocative
films are produced in the native tongue? I would refer readers to Jean–
Louis Sarthou’s article in this collection that analyses the situation for
French translators who work with ‘unusual’ constraints that one would
not recognize as part of the filmic tradition established by French auteurs
and familiar to audiences.

2. Some Observations on the Old–New Debate

Is the fear of the ‘virus’ always implicit in our sense of loss in transla-
tion that has corroborated much negative parallel criticism of translators?
Maybe engaging more with the socio–linguistic impact of audiovisual
translations of dialectal or regional varieties might bring forward an un-
expected understanding of the well–oiled mechanism of political control,
or sometimes of moral control through the language.

Having said this, I do not deny that the old debate on dubbing vs
subtitling or subtitling vs dubbing remains more relevant than ever as it
now depends on a more multifaceted market than ever. In fact, ‘given
the many ways in which viewers can access audiovisual material – DVD,
television, cinema, Internet – it is difficult to quantify with precision the
percentage of foreign–language programmes translated and screened in
any given country’ (Díaz Cintas & Anderman 2008: 2). This impossibility
of tracking practices of what were traditionally referred to as the groups
of ‘dubbing countries’ and ‘subtitling countries’ meets with the new chal-
lenges of exchange and access to audiovisuals (legal and illegal peer–to–
peer exchange, new forms of fan subs, but also voiceovers have multi-
plied). In the blog of an Italian daily newspaper, an interesting reflection appeared recently: the new media does not imply that the public is freer or more aware of new potentialities of the media as the same public that is used and manipulated by the old media, can be manipulated by the new media. The proliferation of audiovisual means of expressions then takes on a particular relevance when focused on regionalised, marginal or minoritarian languages and their transmission. Due to the very nature of (once) minoritarian or peripheral voices, those are the voices that want to be heard from the outside and need a new translation.

In organizing the collection, I was influenced by sociolinguistic perspectives on audiovisual translation and on a holistic view of the translational activity as a social and discursive process of intellectual, cultural, and often political compromise. Theories of translation as a semiotic act were also central to structuring the sections, as much as naming them. The metaphor proposed by Ubaldo Stecconi of translation as a wave which carries forward creative and representational energy from the source text, is a figure of speech that can truly influence the way of thinking translation. In the organization of content, I drew more on Ubaldo Stecconi’s notion of translation as a semiotic event (see Arduini & Stecconi 2006; Stecconi 2007) than from that of Umberto Eco (2004; 2007). Although Eco’s semiotic perspective is mainly focused on what is traditionally viewed as ‘literary translation’, it seems to apply to many of the reflections of this volume. Using his words, one could easily consider audiovisuals as part of his grouping of semiotic texts, ‘in quanto prodotti in situazioni complesse, [i testi] sono sempre multimediali, ovvero fatti di parole, gesti ostensivi e deittici, elementi paralinguistici, e magari persino supports ipoiconici’ [inasmuch products of complex situations [texts] are always multimedial, that is, made of words, explanatory and deictic gestures, paralinguistic elements, and even maybe hypoiconic supports] (2007: 509). Yet, Stecconi’s notion of the semiotic wave is more effective: translation choices are almost implicitly assessed against the yardstick of continuing the creative wave. In this view of audiovisual translation as a form of multimodal, semiotic, but also creative, translation, Díaz Cintas & Remael’s chapter entitled ‘The Semiotics of Subtitling’ make one observation that strikes me as particularly pertinent to the case studies discussed: ‘Film dialogue does not render all the hesitations and false starts or requests for confirmation that are typical of conversation or speech in general. It only suggests these conversational features in as far as they have a narrative function’ (2007: 63). When engaging in reflections on subtitling ethnolects and contrasting these elements with their narrative functions and representations, the contributors start from the
assumption of representational force: regionalism is more than ever tied in to notions of linguistic and cultural identity (cf. Cronin 2006). When a regional voice appears in an audiovisual, the choice is automatically born out of identifiable narrative needs.

3. The Aims of this Volume

Discussing approaches and theoretical perspectives in dealing with sociolinguistically–localised language is an exciting and limitless source for inspiration as well as learned disputes. Some of the issues represented in this volume were debated at the 2nd international conference entitled ‘Translating Voices, Translating Regions’ held in Durham, UK in September 2007. Not all of them, because the articles of this collection explore avenues of research which the discussions of that sunny autumn weekend in Durham could not exhaust. The volume neither intends to give all the answers nor to awaken that old Giant, the debate on dubbing and subtitling. All its contributors have proposed readings of translated audiovisuals, including voiceovers and more oral forms of translation (sometimes bordering on the issues of translation more commonly encountered by interpreters than by translators).

This introduction intends to set out a path organized for the reader to enjoy the visible and invisible threads that run through underneath many of the contributions. The contributions have been organized into four sections. Each section is introduced by a chapter drawing attention to general issues, complex research perspectives, and broad questions currently confronted by the researchers. As an opening, which does not intend to become a leading interpretation, the initial chapter is followed by articles that dwell on specific case–studies and provide snapshots of analytical results obtained by different methodological approaches. The view of the differences in analysing Spanish, Arabic, French, Italian, English, US, Taiwanese and other traditions of audiovisual subtitling enriches the volume by presenting intertwining relationships between sociolinguistics, dialects, translations, and socio–cultural, as well as politically–marked, practices as presented by practitioners.

The sections are intended to be organically connected with the complexity of the subject–matter, but also with the aim of proposing not just analyses, but also common practice and professionals reflections on their enthusiastic (often frustrated and restrained) approaches to forms of creative authorship in helping to transmit the artistic vision of the audiovisual source texts. It is undeniable that to bridge the existing gap be-