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STANDARDIZATION OF AUDIOVISUAL TRANSLATION

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Abstract: The audiovisual translation industries across the European Union appear to be similarly organized. This paper refers to the standardization of the audiovisual translation as there are only a small number of translators working on a large number of projects which means that the translational choices visible in the target texts are of idiosyncratic nature and may fail to reflect generic translation strategies and techniques. So, it is necessary to ensure that translations reflect certain general patterns rather than merely the choices of a small group of individuals.

Keywords: standardization, translation, audiovisual, research, choice, patterns

There has been a development and redefinition of the translation studies in the 21st century and the category of audiovisual translation is a clear example of all these positive changes. Academic recognition has been achieved only in the past decades[1] and has gained constant and dynamic development.

New concepts such as automatic translation and computer technology have led to the appearance of many computer-assisted translation tools to help the translators gain time and cover a larger amount of work.

The Starting point of this paper is that translation is no longer defined as an operation on texts in the traditional way:"a text is not a vessel into which meanings are poured for transmission to others, but a structure by which meanings are produced within a cultural context".[2] Texts have become digitized, evolving to hypertext if we refer to form. Filmic messages are referred to as texts, audiovisual ones.[3]

If the purpose of literary translations is to provide access for the readership to the language of the original, then the aim of the audiovisual translation is to permit general access to the art of the movies. Its role in mass communication is even more important.

The changes of interest within this new emerged inter-discipline have been called turns.[4] There has been a pragmatic one in linguistics and translation in the 1970s, then a cultural one in the 1980s, a gender-based one and then the "technological turn", the "iconic" one where verbal signs interact with pictorial icons, the "empirical" turn focusing on the practice of translating and finally the "audiovisual" turn in translation studies.[5]

[1] L. Venuti (ed) – *The Translation Studies Reader*, London, 2000
[2] I. Bertrand and P. Hughes – Media Research Methods. Audiences, Institutions, Texts., Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, pg. 173
[3] Z. Pettit – *The Audio-visual text: subtitling and dubbing different genres*, Meta, vol. 49, no. 1, 2004, pg. 25-38
[4] M. Snell-Hornby - *The Turns of Translation Studies*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, John Benjamins Publishing House, 2006
[5] Id ibidem

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The number of publications related to audiovisual translation is numerous. Whitman-Linsen' opinion is that "as far as the impact is concerned, there is no question that the exposure of dubbed films to the public far outstrips that of the translated material".[6] As audiovisual translation studies appeared as a discipline, adequate methodological tools are needed. The link between this discipline and technology, global economy and industry is clear: "the very concept of 'mass' media is changing; technology is now allowing masses to be broken down into smaller groups and products are tailor-made to the expectations and the needs of defined sub-groups."[7]

The audiovisual translation industries across the European Union appear to be similarly organized: about 60% of the audiovisual translators have a degree in languages, 10% of them have some form of translation education and only 5% have been trained in this profession. 90% are based in the capitals, while the remaining 10% work in other towns. Half of the respondents were trained by their employer, and almost half (42%) received no training at all. The survey presents a market focusing around the Romanian capital, made up of talented people who learnt the tricks by just doing it.[8]

A small number of translators working on a large number of projects means that the choices they have to make in the target texts might reflect generic translation strategies and techniques. That is why it is important to ensure that translations should reflect certain general patterns rather than the choices of a small group of individuals. That is why researchers are trying to come up with regularities and numerous projects have been devoted to standards in professional audiovisual translation, in particular subtitling. One to be mentioned is that of Arnaiz Uzquiza (2010) named SUBSORDIG the objective of which is to establish a set of standards for subtitling for the deaf on digital television.[9]

Some studies refer to standards or, in fact, their total lack, in amateur subtitling. The reason why the audiovisual material is the target of the amateur translators is firstly the dissatisfaction of the viewers with the official translations[10] and also the fact that the official foreign versions may be later released and fans are eager to be the first to produce a translation. The fact that the material is easily found led to a growing number of amateur translations. With respect to the process rather than the product, the main distinction between amateur and professional subtitling is that the former tends to be produced on the basis of what the translator can hear rather than the actual transcript. There are also ethical and legal issues linked to amateur subtitling (the discussion of copyright and its interpretation). The main defense lies in the issue of accessibility and the fact that amateur subtitles are produced as a form of hobby rather than a profiting business. The role of technology in audiovisual transfer has allowed all this activity. It is a domain where academia meets industry and the gap between translation theory and practice is filled. There is professional subtitle software like Swift Create, EZTitles, Spot, Titlevision, Isis or Subtitle Workshop whose functionality includes compatibility with multiple file formats, video synchronization, adjusting the

[6] C. Whitman – Linsen – *Through the Dubbing Glass. The synchronization of American Motion Pictures into German, French and Spanish,* Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang Publishing House, 1992, pg. 10
[7] J. Neves – Interlingual subtitling for the deaf and hard-of-hearing, In: Diaz-Cintas and Anderman (eds.), *Audio-Visual Translation: Language Transfer on Screen,* Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan Publishing House, 2009, pg. 151-169
[8] Source: presentation at Seminars in Anglophone Studies, Oradea, 17th May, 2015
[9] Matamala et al. – *Listening to Subtitles: Subtitles for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing,* Bern, Peter Lang, 2010, pg.12
[10] A. M. Nornes – *For an Abusive Subtitling,* Film Quarterly no. 52 (3), 1999, pg 17

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subtitles to the number of frames per second etc. Genuine subtitling software makes it possible to deliver consistent, complete products and the subtitler does not have to use several different tools for subtitling, spotting, burning etc.

Besides the use of technology, there are a few other aspects to consider for a form of standardization of the audiovisual translation:

1. **Intertextuality** – due to the massive expansion of computer technology and the Internet, text production, dissemination and access is easier than ever and so, intertextual references are many in all types of texts, genres, including the audiovisual material. Therefore, a translator of an audiovisual text where the line is used or adapted, has to deploy the fixed equivalent technique. Intertextuality is also used in advertising where associations play a significant role in communicating with the target audience and that is why the message is often untranslated, only implied.
2. **Cultural barriers** – Cultural untranslability is possible in any kind of translation, including the one hereby discussed upon. The notion of extralinguistic culture-bound reference that is "attempted by means of any culture-bound linguistic expression which refers to an extralinguistic entity or process, and which is assumed to have a discourse referent that is identifiable to a relevant audience as this referent is within the encyclopedic knowledge of this audience"[11], definition which refers to realia, cultural items that are not part of the language. To render these, Pedersen proposes a taxonomy of procedures[12]: retention, official equivalent, direct translation, omission, specification, generalization and substitution. Such procedures would function in any type of translation. In the case of the audiovisual translation, the intersemiotic redundancy is different. In the case of information overlap among the four possibilities, a subtitler may deem it unnecessary to resort to specification by way of explanation, as the intended meaning might be transparent to the audience. The preferred technique for the rendition of culture-specific items depends to a large extent on the overall strategy chosen for the translation of audiovisual material, on the mode of translation and the norms binding in the particular socio-cultural environment.
3. **Audiovisual transfer of humour –** To translate humour may become a problem and it is somewhat necessarily limited[13]. Attardo concentrates on the linguistic dimension of verbal humour, devoting little attention to other aspects, labeling humour as "competence" which is indicative of his priorities. The cognitive dimension of humour makes it difficult to translate, as cognitive structures are internalized by the speaker and provide information on how the world is organized and how to act in it.[14] The principle of equivalent effect[15] has been the cornerstone of translation quality assessment practically since the beginning of contemporary translation studies. The intended humorous effect of a filmic message is

[11] J. Pedersen – *How is Culture rendered in Subtitles?* In: MuTra 2005 – Challenges of Multidimensional Translation: Conference Proceedings, online: http://www.euroconferences.info/proceedings/2005_Proceedings/2005_Pedersen_Jan.pdf
[12] Id ibidem
[13] S. Attardo – Linguistic Theories of Humor, Berlin, de Gruyter, 1994
[14] Id ibidem
[15] E. A. Nida – *Towards a Science of Translating: With Special Reference to Principles and Procedures Involved in Bible Translating*, Leiden, E.J. Brill Publishing House, 1964

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proportionally very small in comparison to the effect of the entire polysemiotic audiovisual material on the audience. Of course, wherever a successful translation is impossible due to culture-specificity etc., the technique of compensation may be used. Nevertheless, many translators try their best to render humour, disrespecting the rules of good practice. Situational comedies (sitcoms) are an interesting case, as the humour is guided by the use of the laugh track which is supposed to encourage enjoyment and the translator is challenged to achieve an equally humorous effect in translation which in some cases may be impossible.

These are only a few of the many possible problems to consider and deal with when it comes to getting to a sort of form of standardization. The overtness of subtitling and the covertness of dubbing are both dictated by the mode of delivery; dubbing replaces the original dialogue, while subtitling supplements it. The translation strategy, however, may to a certain extent be dictated by the mode of translation, but ultimately remains at the audiovisual translator's discretion.

The proposed set of Karamitroglou's pan-European subtitling standards[16] has received considerable attention among theoreticians and is a good starting point, but its practical application varies from one film studio in one country to another and the criteria influencing the standards (expectations of the target audience and their processing capabilities, technical possibilities and local conventions) have continuously changed since the introduction of the model, as trends in the field are subject to change; researchers come into the discipline from a variety of backgrounds, no longer only linguistics; technological advances produce sophisticated equipment; institutions obtain funding to investigate previously unexplored areas. However, it is clear that audiovisual translation research follows the footsteps of translation research, at the same time probing new avenues.

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