

Film Translation: Subtitling vs. Dubbing

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الخلاصة

يعد البحث الحالي محاولة للبحث والمقارنة بين الاسلوبين المتبعين في ترجمة الافلام من لغة الى اخرى وهما: الترجمة المرئية والدبلجة في حقل يعرف بحقل الترجمة السمعية المرئية. ويناقش البحث خصائص كلا الطريقتين في ضوء ايجابياتهما وسلبياتهما، بالاضافة الى تسليط الضوء على العوامل المختلفة التي تتحكم باختيار ترجمة فيلم معين او دبلجته في مجتمع ما مع ذكر امثلة متنوعة.

Abstract

The present paper is an attempt to investigate and compare two methods involved in translating films from one language to another: subtitling & dubbing in a field known as audiovisual translation (AVT). The characteristics of both methods are examined in terms of their advantages and disadvantages. Furthermore, different factors that control the choice of whether to subtitle a certain film or to dub it in a certain society are also highlighted with various examples.

1. The Field of Audiovisual Translation

1.1 What 'audiovisual' means

Audiovisual translation can be defined as "a discipline that is much more than mere transfer as pictures, music, sounds and other non-verbal elements are also involved in the process, making it a kind of multi-semiotic transfer."(L.Au, 2001:1)

In addition to the technicalities of the production (such as the use of time-code for subtitling) and the language transfer, socio-cultural factors have to be highlighted since the value systems and the life style of the people are reflected in TV programs and films. (Ibid)

Audiovisual texts are normally built in accordance with the convention of a very complex language having its own rules and conventions and overcoming linguistic communication. This language is called film language (Chaume, 2004:2).

1.2 Types of Audiovisual Translation

The discipline of audiovisual translation (AVT) can be classified into the following types (Serban, 2004:4)

1. Inter-lingual Translation.

This type includes the following:

A. subtitling

B. dubbing

C. voice-over

2. Intra-lingual (monolingual) subtitling for the hard-of-hearing and the deaf.
3. Audio description for the blind.
4. Live subtitling (e.g. news broadcasts)
5. Subtitling for the opera and the theatre.

Since the present paper is mainly concerned with cinema translation, only interlingual translation represented in subtitling and dubbing is discussed. Voice-over and the other types are concerned with television translation or with theatre translation.

1.3 Subtitling VS. Dubbing

Subtitling and dubbing represent the two methods for transferring language in the translation process of mass audio-visual communication such as film and television.(Jorda o Coelh,2003:2).The two methods have different characteristics and have not received enough attention from the discipline of Translation Studies(Ibid).

On the one hand, subtitling involves the process of "supplying a translation of the spoken source language dialogue into the target language in the form of synchronized captions, usually at the bottom of the screen. It is the form that alters the source text to the least possible

extent and enables the target audience to express the foreign and be aware of its 'foreignness' at all times" (Szarkowska, 2005:2).

Dubbing, on the other hand, is the method in which "the foreign dialogue is adjusted to the mouth and movements of the actor in the film" (Dries 1995, cited in Shuttleworth and Cowie 1997:45).

As Szarkowska(2005:2) claims, the main aim of dubbing is to make the audience feel as if they were watching a movie whose actors actually speak the target language.

As previously mentioned, subtitling and dubbing have different characteristics; however, both interfere to a large extent with the source text.

1.4 The main characteristics of subtitling and dubbing

The main characteristics of subtitling and dubbing serve as advantages sometimes and as disadvantages on other times.

The main advantages of subtitling can be put in the following points:

- 1 Subtitling is considered the most neutral ,minimally mediated method that involves the least interference with the original Szarkowska(2005:10).For this reason, it can be argued that subtitling makes the audience experience the flavor of the foreign

language as well as the sense of a different 'other' culture. This is due to the fact that the original soundtrack is preserved.

- 2 Subtitling may have a role in language learning (Serban 2004:6) and in a better understanding of the narrative network of a film. As Mera (1998:75) mentions, "hearing the real voices of the characters not only facilitates understanding in terms of the specific dialogue or plot structure, but gives vital clues to status, class and relationship".
- 3 It is not expensive. In other words, subtitling is cheaper to meet the needs of film markets since it provides subtitles that are more economical and easier to produce (Szarkowska 2005:10).
- 4 It is better for "the hard –of-hearing and the deaf and for immigrants and tourists"(Serban 2004:6).

In spite of the above advantages, subtitling is characterized by having some disadvantages which are listed below:

1. Having an intrinsic nature, subtitling involves significant cuts in the length of the dialogue (Ibid). Consider the following example from the movie Alvin and the Chipmunks (2009):
 - I agree 99%+1, you do the math.
 - Well, Simon I know this is a lot to ask but we're looking for a take charge guide of take charge for this very rewarding position. What do you say?

- انا موافق بنسبة ٩٩%

- اعلم ان هذا كثير، ولكننا نبحث عن من يتولى الامور، ما رأيك؟

2. There is greater loss of information because of compression. "(Serban 2004:6)
3. The attention of the audience is split between soundtrack, image and subtitles (Ibid).
4. It spoils the image (Ibid). However; this can be a relative issue that depends on a film reception in a certain country. In other words, wherever people are accustomed to watch a subtitled film instead of a dubbed one, a subtitle is not spoiling the image for them. Whereas, in case of people who are accustomed to watch a dubbed film instead of a subtitled one, the case is just the opposite. A point that will be investigated in detail later in this paper.

Dubbing, on other hand, has its own advantages and disadvantages which are examined below.

The advantages of dubbing are as follows:

1. It does not distract attention from the image (Serban 2004:7).
2. It represents the 'ideal' form of film translation in terms of 'faithfulness', "on the assumption that strictly linguistic considerations should not determine the overall value of a

translation "(Szarkowska 2005:9).In dubbing, faithfulness is not only considered in terms of the theatrical sense but also in terms of phonological synchronization (Pienkos,1993:131 cited in Szarkowska 2005;9)

Synchronism can be defined as "a coincidence in a point of time"(Paquin 1998:2). Phonological synchronism can be achieved when there is a perfect match between the lips of screen actor and the sounds produced by the studio actor. This includes words, breathing, screams, grunts, ect. (Ibid).

In his study *Translator, Adaptar, Screenwriter*, Robert Paquin (1998) mentions that the change in word order can be set as an example of phonological synchronism. Consider the following example taken from a scene from the movie King Arthur (2005):

-What are they?

-Blue demons that eat Christians alive.

-من هم يا ترى؟

-ياكلون المسيح احياء، شياطين.

3. It is considered better for children who have not yet learnt to read and for people with poor reading skills (Serban 2004:7).

Dubbing disadvantages are the following:

1. It is much more expensive than subtitling and it takes more time (Serban 2004:8).
2. It may involve loss of the original soundtrack (Ibid).
3. The voices of dubbing actors can be repetitive after sometime. As (Szarkowska 2005:8) mentions, "the unity of the soundtrack inevitably undergoes reprocessing and it is more difficult for the viewer to believe and trust the new voices of-often very famous-actors". She then gives an interesting example of one dubbing country, Italy, where certain dubbing actors always perform the voice of the original actor. A situation that can cause insuperable problems, as was the case of one Italian dubbing actor who dubbed the voices of both Robert De Niro and Al Pacino for many years until the two actors faced each other in the movie Heat (1995).Therefore, another Italian dubbing actor was needed to take the place of one of the two stars. This, in turn, dissatisfied the Italian audience because they felt that incredibility was lost when Pacino's voice was not the voice they were used to hearing (Ibid).
4. Another disadvantage can be noticed when a dubbed film contains some scenes in which the actors speak two languages, particularly,

if one of these two languages is said to be the TL of the dubbed film. An example is a scene from the movie Kingdom of Heaven (2005) that has recently been dubbed into Arabic. In the scene, three characters meet: the first speaks English, the second speaks Arabic and the third is a translator who translates for these two persons. However, in the Arabic dubbed version, all of these three characters speak standard Arabic, which of course does not make any sense. Moreover, the role of the translator cannot be sensed by the viewer:

-انا حكيم ايبلىن

-يقول انه حكيم ايبلىن

-حكيم ايبلىن مسنا، لقد قابلته في دمشق.

-انه يقول حكيم ايبلىن مسنا لقد قابله في دمشق.

Having discussed the advantages and disadvantages of the two methods of film translation, a question begs an answer: what determines the choice of either of these two methods, and which one is better than the other? In fact, there is a number of factors that affect this choice and they are examined below.

1.5 Factors determining the choice of subtitling and dubbing

As studies and researches show, some countries of the world prefer foreign films to be subtitled, whereas other countries actually prefer these films to be dubbed. This is due to the effect of economy, history, culture, ideology, In addition to other factors.

1.5.1 The Economic Factor

The most common justification for the divide between subtitling and dubbing countries is related to cost: subtitling, the cheaper translation mode, is adopted by the smaller countries, dubbing by the larger wealthier countries that usually speak single language." It can cost up to 15 times more to dub a film than to add subtitles" (Zatlin, 2005:126). However, cost is not the only reason or factor that dictates national choice: "small central European countries such as Bulgaria, the Czech republic, Hungary, and Slovakia prefer dubbing, despite its high cost". Historical, ideological and political developments, along with tradition, are equally significant factors.

1.5.2 The Historical Factor

An account of the historical factors that had an influence over the choice of the film translation mode in some European countries was given by Martin Danan in his study "Dubbing as an Expression of Nationalism"(1991).He gives an example of France which adopted dubbing foreign films. The adoption of dubbing in France derives from

the nation's cultural mission to preserve and protect the French language in the face of foreign (especially American) influence, and the prevalence of French as the lingua franca for a population accustomed to the French language in its own films (Danan ,1991:610).

1.5.3 The Ideological Factor

Ideology can be defined as "ideas which help to legitimate a dominant political power"(Eagleton, 1991:1).Eagleton also mentions that ideology can be regarded as an "identity thinking"(ibid: 2).In the light of Eagleton's definition of ideology, we can examine its effect on the choice whether to subtitle or dub a foreign film.

Italy, Germany and Spain which all faced cultural boycotts in the mid-1930s and were ruled by fascist governments ,did not allow subtitled versions of foreign films and preferred dubbing instead(Danan,1991:610).

...The three fascist countries realized the appeal and impact films with sound could have on the masses...In an effort to build strong nationalistic states and spread fascist ideology, these countries nationalized and reorganized their respective film industries and created infrastructures that are still central to their film industries today (ibid:611).

1.5.4 The Cultural Factor

It is now agreed that the act of translation "does not take place between words but rather between cultures"(Szarkowska 2005:4).The text is perceived not as "an isolated specimen of language" but as an integral part of the world (Snell-Hornby, 1998:43).As a result, the process of translation is considered as ' cross-cultural transfer' (Szarkowska 2005:8).

It is worth mentioning here that at the turn of the 20th century, the United States started establishing a powerful position among the super powers of this world. Not imitating the traditional pattern of other empires that gained their power by acquiring lands for colonies, the United States became the world's greatest power by focusing on economic and cultural hegemony (Ibid).As Robinson (1997:17) states, "the United States has pursued massively exploitative neo-colonial policies, running local economies through multinational corporations without actually possessing the countries as colonies".

This power has given the United States the ability to affect other cultures by spreading its own values across the whole world and films have been nothing but a significant tool to achieve this aim and to establish standard, ideal or universal values (Szarkowska 2005:8).These values have continued to spread all over the world especially that we are now in the era of globalization in which there is a dominance of the English language and Anglo-American culture over other languages and

cultures (Cronin,1996:197)."Globally, this is the age of mass communications, of multimedia experiences and a world where audiences demand the right to share the latest text, be it a film, song, or a book simultaneously across cultures". (Bassnett cited in Szarkowska 2005:4).For this reason, there is a huge demand for American productions in particular and as a result, world markets are flooded with them (Ibid). Stating these facts, we can argue that the choice of what foreign films to be imported and their translating strategy (subtitling or dubbing) "largely depends on the attitude of the target culture vis-à-vis the source culture", and it is common that it is the cultural factors that determine the chosen mode.(Szarkowaska 2005:7).

The Arab world presents an interesting example. Although in Arab countries, people resist adopting the habits and norms of the American society, Arab cinemas, televisions and markets are flooded with American productions of films, TV series and programs (Ibid).Moreover, the chosen mode of translating them has been subtitling. This can be due to two important reasons. The first one is concerned with the American cultural and economic hegemony that tends to culturally affect societies with significant cultural background and yet with weak cultural infrastructures at the same time in order to change such societies through imposing its own values. (William James cited in Saeed 2009:3).Films are nothing but one tool to achieve the above aim. The second reason is

related to the economic factor. As stated earlier, subtitling is less expensive and demands less time and effort. However, the Arab world is now witnessing a significant turning point in the choice of movies and in the mode adapted to translating them. There is now a tendency to dub foreign films. Furthermore, being anti-American in the Middle East works in favor of Bollywood's films as Szarkowska(2005:7) mentions. Turkish TV series and films represent another example. There is a tendency to dub those films as well. However, in spite of the importance of such an experience in terms of enhancing the position of the Arab culture (Saeed 2009:3), not all the Arab audiences are quite satisfied. Of course; this is related to the fact that they have been accustomed to watch subtitled foreign films. In fact, there are some drawbacks to this experience as well such as the quality of the dubbed sounds and the choice of the dialect. As Sadiq(2009:1) mentions ,the standard Arabic language is a demand that works in favor of enhancing the Arabic language. He even adds that we should not dub Hollywood movies only in order not to increase its hegemony. The movie *The God Father*(1972), one of the most influential movies in the history of US cinemas, has been dubbed into the Syrian accent, the matter which resulted in a very poor version of the film that was not convincing at all.

It's worth mentioning here that the new technology has now opened new horizons since the audiences can now choose between whether to watch a subtitled movie or a dubbed one simultaneously.

We can conclude that it is now obvious that the translation of films is not only a linguistic problem but rather a cultural activity that is

"conditioned to a large extent by the functional needs of the receiving culture and not, or not just, by the demands made by the source films"(Delabastita 1990:99, cited in Szarkowska 2005:8).

In addition to the three major factors previously mentioned, there are other equally important factors.

1.5.5 Other Factors

Karamitroglou(1999:2) presents a key work in the field of film translation. He proposes several factors determining the choice of subtitling or dubbing and analyzes each factor in detail: the human agents in AVT (i.e. producers, addressers), the products or translated target texts (messages) viewed not only linguistically but from a semiotic perspective as well, the recipients(addresses, consumers) ,the audiovisual mode(i.e. repertoire mode) that makes audiovisual texts differ from other modes (interpretation, written translation,ect.), the institution (context) or critics, film distributors, film majors, TV channels,ect.,the market, video

clubs and finally the whole network of consumers Who" intervene at the post-production stage by placing a pre-consumption filter" (Ibid).

Conclusions

Throughout the process of writing this paper, a number of findings can be concluded. The most important of which can be summed up in the following points:

1. Since films are now considered as significant and influential tools in conveying the values, traditions and beliefs of certain culture to another, it becomes vital to carefully choose what film to be translated and the mode of translating it.
2. Both modes of translating films from one language to another, i.e, subtitling and dubbing have certain advantages and disadvantages and both are put under the influence of certain factors that determine their choice. As a result, one cannot claim that one mode is better than the other.
3. Subtitling can be said to be a foreignizing translation strategy since it interferes the least with the original. Dubbing, on the other hand, can be said to be a domesticating translation strategy since it transfers the original film into a new target version spoken in the target language.
4. The way certain foreign films are translated into some Arabic accents need to be reconsidered in order to preserve the identity of the Arabic language.

5. If audiences are not satisfied with the way a certain foreign film is transformed into the target language, they can benefit from the new technology that allows the choice between watching a subtitled version of a foreign film or a dubbed one.

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