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Title: *“Audiovisual Translation: Dubbing and Subtitling of “Triple Standard”*

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Languages: English

Introduction

This thesis deals with the issue of audiovisual translation in its two main modes: dubbing and subtitling. The distinguishing feature of this project consists in having both a practical and theoretical part. In fact, the first part of the project saw the concrete realization of the two types of translation for the American short film “Triple Standard” downloaded from YouTube, whereas the second part contains a theoretical analysis carried out on the translations. The most innovative part, however, lies in the attempt to avoid the so-called “dubbese”, namely the unnatural language typical of dubbing. To this purpose, more natural-sounding translation solutions were chosen and then discussed, thus proving that dubbese can sometimes be successfully avoided.

As for the practical part, the original script was translated by the author himself, adapted according to lip-synch constraints, and finally dubbed by professional actors; simultaneously, the film was subtitled by the author himself. As for the practical part, the two translations were analyzed in terms of both similarities and differences between. This study looked into the linguistic (syntactic and lexical) features of the two versions, with particular focus on the translation of swear words and the defining peculiarity of dubbed language, often negatively referred to as “dubbese”. The analysis shows that observations on the two versions align with results from previous contrastive studies of the two translation modes.

The project is divided into five main sections. The first section introduces the notion of AVT, with particular focus on the term “Screen Translation” (MASON 1989), which is considered to be one of its sub-components and in which my project finds its place.

The second section describes the reasons behind the choice of Triple Standard and the intended target audience which guided the author’s translation strategies.

The third section is entirely centered on the dubbing process and provides a thorough description of each step: from the translation of the script to the acting step and “distribution” of the final product through YouTube.

The fourth section describes the subtitling process, which was shorter, because it did not require the presence of collaborators and was not articulated into different steps, as was the case for dubbing. In this section, a first comparison between the subtitling and the dubbing translation strategies follows and focuses especially on swear words.

The fifth section recapitulates the main differences between the two translation modes in terms of the translation solutions adopted and provides numerical data to show how the author's translation strategies align with findings from previous research on dubbing and subtitling. The full transcription of the original dialogue, dubbed version and subtitled version ends the work.

Overview of the dissertation

First section

The first section provides a definition of "Screen Translation" and describes the communicative setting in films, where meaning is the result of a complex interplay between different communication channels. To this end, Gottlieb's taxonomy consisting in auditory and visual verbal channels and auditory and visual non-verbal channels is reported (GOTTLIEB 2005: 245). A thorough description of dubbing and subtitling follows. As for dubbing, I give a clear overview of all the steps necessary for the entire process: the translation step in which the translator adaptor translates the script while taking into account the lip-synch constraints (qualitative and quantitative synchrony and kinesic synchrony), the acting step and the final synchronization step, when the sound technician superimposes the sound track with the dubbing actors' voices on the original video track. The section ends with a list of the figures involved in the dubbing process and a description of their tasks. As for subtitling, the chapter describes the translation mode in its technicalities (number of characters and lines per caption, positioning on the screen, etc.) and tackles the main issues brought about by the diamesic shift of dialogues from oral to written mode. Some of the losses originating from this shift are described, such as the language traits typical of orality: low register, idiolects, ungrammatical constructions, pauses, false starts, self-corrections etc. The two main strategies used by subtitlers are illustrated: simplification and deletion.

Second section

The second section is about me in the role of a film company. I give the reasons behind the choice of Triple Standard and explain how my intended target audience (different for the dubbed and the subtitled version) influenced my translation choices. In fact, the dubbed version would be uploaded on YouTube, a free-access web platform which would expose my film to a large audience, while the subtitled version would be sent to film festivals and so it would be seen by an expert and niche audience.

The choice of Triple Standard was motivated by its topic: homosexuality and homophobia. I wanted to contribute to the representation of homosexuality on screen and encourage reflection on homophobia.

Third section

This section spans from the literal raw translation of the script to the delivery of the final product, which happened when I sent to the film director (Branden Blinn) the dubbed version with title “Quello che sei davvero”.

The processes described are: first raw translation, adaptation to lip-synch, insertion of acting instructions on the script, acting step, sound synchronization, translation of the film captions at the beginning and end of the film, translation of the synopsis, translation of the film title, strategies adopted to avoid dubbese.

The first two processes are the most important, considering that my thesis concentrates on the linguistic aspect of dubbing. For this reason, I provide a painstaking description of all translation strategies and gambits adopted during the adaptation step. My focus is on the different synchronies and key problems encountered when trying to make the translation suit them. Particularly interesting is also the acting step, in which I provide a few examples of linguistic prosody-related problems that I did not notice until I heard my lines read by the actors. I then list the solutions to these problems, decided together with the actors and the sound technician who saw to the perfect match with lip movements. The last point of this section is fundamental in that it describes the main purpose of my thesis: trying to make the translation sound as natural as possible, by avoiding infelicitous calques or borrowings from English, which typify dubbing. I placed special focus on nouns used in the vocative function, since they are one of the best known features of dubbese, ex: “Where are you, **man?**”, often rendered with “Dove sei, **amico/fratello...**?”. As in Italian it is awkward to render vocatives with nouns, alternative solutions are given and each case is discussed.

Fourth section

This section describes the subtitling process and all problems related to deletion and simplification of syntax and lexicon owing to the diamesic shift from oral to written. Examples of caption lay-out and technicalities are also given and translation strategies proper of subtitling are always discussed against the corresponding lines in dubbing, in order to show how the two translation modes affect language differently. Importance is especially given to swear words, since the translation approach taken for them differs from dubbing. Bearing in mind that written words have a greater impact than spoken words, bad words should be deleted or softened in subtitling but not necessarily in dubbing. Examples are provided of when foul language was eliminated altogether or weakened in some way. The only case of bad language intentionally left unchanged in subtitling was that related to homophobic insults. The reasons for this choice are illustrated.

Fifth section

The final section provides a more comprehensive comparison between the dubbed version and the subtitled version. If parallelisms had already been made in the subtitling section, where each example of translation choices was compared with its dubbed counterpart, the last part of my dissertation sums up the main differences between the two translation modes. The comparison relates the translations to the different visual and auditory constraints that dubbing and subtitling impose and ultimately shows in which way the different translation strategies contributed differently to the characterization of the protagonists. In fact, if characters are made to speak differently (see bad words, in particular), they will be perceived differently by views. This section ends with a quantitative analysis of the main differences between dubbing and subtitling and discusses them against the background of the different constraints. Numbers and percentages are given in relation to lexical and syntactic simplification or deletion and include: nouns in the vocative function, discourse fillers, repetitions, hesitations, bad words. The data serves to show how and when the translation strategies which I adopted confirm what previous contrastive studies between dubbing and subtitling have brought to light.

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