Introduction

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Abstract & Keywords

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The present volume contains eight diverse approaches, by eight scholars from various European countries, to the analysis of a single audiovisual text entitled *In Excelsis Deo*. The text is in fact Episode Ten of the highly successful American television series *The West Wing* and while it contains inevitable intertextual connections with preceding and subsequent episodes (the chief of staff's drug problems, Christmas preparations at the White House, the tragic murder of a gay schoolboy, some barely hatched love stories), it also features a self-contained story of a Korean War veteran who is given an unofficial military funeral through the machinations of a member of the White House staff. The analysis of this text, which is particularly rich in the kind of linguistic, semantic, pragmatic, cultural and technical challenges found in audiovisual translation (AVT), will also embrace the important area of audiovisual access for the sensorially disabled, namely the deaf and hard of hearing and the blind and sight-impaired. Through a process of careful re-examination and coordinated analysis, it is hoped that the similar or diverse methodologies, priorities or perceptions that emerge from the various contributions will provide stimuli for anyone working in the AVT sector, especially those in the media industry and in higher education.

The editor's idea of subjecting a single text to examination on several related fronts first arose after reading Mann & Thompson's 1992 book 'Discourse Description: diverse linguistic analyses of a fund-raising text', in which the authors invited a dozen or so renowned linguists to analyse the same text (*Zero Population Growth* – a letter seeking donations for a cause) in their own different ways. The result was 409 pages of analysis of a text running one and a half pages.

The idea of doing the same thing with a multimodal film text, by inviting a number of noted experts in the field to contribute, marks a new departure in the area of audiovisual texts and translation. The analyses should be even more exhaustive than those collated in the Mann-Thompson volume as attempts are made to find a way through the web of semiotic resources that reflect the thoughts and ideas of the audiovisual text's creator and how meaning is made through the various semiotic modes represented.

Thus the main objective is to investigate to what extent different approaches to the analysis of the text, whether for translation purposes, didactic considerations, linguistic description, and so on, reveal similar or diverse methodologies, priorities or perceptions.

In other words it will be interesting to see, for example, how the eye-tracker looks at the text, or at least how someone looks at the text when wearing their eye-tracking hat, or how the linguist looks at the text, how the translator looks at the text, how the subtitler or dubber looks at the text, how the audiodescriber looks at the text, and so on.

Those familiar with the 'Pear Tree' project (Mazur and Kruger, 2012) will have seen, for example, how cultural perspectives can affect the perception of a film, and it will be interesting to see how the preparation of translations into different languages may require different approaches and techniques, and how the hierarchy of superordinate and subordinate elements may change.

Whatever the purpose of the analysis, examining such variables as patterns, complexity, register, rhetorical structures, cohesive devices, functions, and so on, has provided us with a great deal of material to compare and confront. Conclusions have been drawn and we are now in a position to at least offer guidelines to others embarking on the various tasks that are the subject of the separate

chapters.

Thus the main cohesive structure of the volume revolves around the idea of the single text, as a search is made for a common thread, or threads, running through the various analyses. Is there substantial agreement as to what constitute the key elements in the multimodal whole, whatever the purpose of the inquiry, or is it the case that for a particular purpose certain semantic resources are prioritised? What general principles are discernible in a single text token?

The present-day reliance on rapid communication and the preponderance of multimodal and multimedia products over all other forms of communication in this 'iconic age', all fueled by the digital revolution, has led to a vastly increased need to mediate between countries, media, languages and cultures. This phenomenon is particularly relevant in Europe with its mix of languages and cultures and its massive use of audiovisual material of all kinds. The sheer size of this phenomenon imposes a huge burden on the translation industry, both quantitatively and qualitatively, in the attempt to provide access to AVT products for all European citizens by breaking down the linguistic and cultural barriers.

This question of accessibility has gained further relevance more recently where attention has turned to subjects such as subtitling for the deaf and hard-of-hearing (SDH) and audiodescription for the blind and sight-impaired. Most European governments have pledged to provide audiovisual access to these groups but progress is often slow and in many countries the process is still in its infancy. This aspect will be addressed both in terms of same-language intralingual transposition and interlingual translation through, for example, audiosubtitles for the blind.

Until recently many practitioners of AVT were self-taught and either had talent or not. Accordingly they became either well-reputed professionals or perpetrators of the often very poor translations that have even been the object of ridicule in, for example, web-site exchanges. Finally, in more recent times, practitioners are beginning to be recruited from among newly-emerging university graduates with AVT experience, those who have followed courses based on local and/or internationally published material and who have benefitted from the expertise of a still fairly restricted number of qualified teachers. Given the enormous interest now shown in the field, and the predicted boom in the number of AVT courses being offered in higher education, it is time to produce some scientifically based reasoning and some proposals that will provide the basis for a coherent body of reference to be used in undergraduate as well as post-graduate university courses.

This body of research is designed to give some more impetus to the current rise in interest regarding AVT and first and foremost, to shed light on the processes involved in translating a television series. It is also hoped, however, that the fallout from this work may be useful directly or indirectly to all end-users of audiovisual translation, whether they be television viewers, cinema audiences, deaf and blind subjects, web navigators, and so on. The material is also aimed more generally at the media companies and service providers, and to teachers and students in higher education.

The partners in this initiative, all established experts in the field of audiovisual translation, many of whom have also worked in the industry as screen translators, subtitlers or audiodescribers, hope to fill a gap that is currently missing in the audiovisual sector. They wish to achieve a comprehensive understanding of what lies at the core of successful audiovisual translation, whether it be for dubbing, subtitling or voice-over, and what is really required of subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing (SDH) and audiodescription for the blind. The objectives therefore, as explained above, are to analyse a single text from a variety of linguistic, cultural and practical viewpoints with a view to achieving a greater understanding of what constitutes audiovisual translation and transposition and secondly to create an illustrated methodology for students and practitioners of AVT. The contents of the work should impact on the current audiovisual scenario across Europe by promoting high standards, quality assurance and standardized procedures to ensure best practices in all countries.

The contributions

As the 'West Wing' text has been analysed by eight audiovisual translation (AVT) experts from universities throughout Europe and from various disciplines (linguistics, translation, psychology, IT, media studies) it has involved seven different language/culture combinations, each concentrating on a particular aspect of AVT. From the language point of view, the work consists of considered analyses and reasoned proposals for translation into Spanish, Italian, Catalan, Swedish, Polish and Croatian. Grafted onto these language combinations the following aspects are analysed: dubbing strategies and techniques, subtitling strategies and techniques, including the involvement of professionals, voiceover, the didactic ramifications of AVT, the use of eye-tracking technology in

subtitle production, audiodescription for the blind and partially sighted, audiosubtitling, subtitling for the deaf and hard-of-hearing, multimodal text analysis, dialogue analysis, the examination of intercultural issues, the question of 're-speaking' as an AVT mode, and a consideration of the feasibility of creating a film referencing system that traces and categorises visual elements in the same way as verbal elements.

The major innovation to be found in this volume is that such a large number of experts from different countries have never before carried out an analysis of a single multimodal text. The text in question has been chosen carefully because of the array of features it contains that challenge the audiovisual translator. It contains high speed dialogue, culture-bound references, witticisms, well-rounded characters, all the conventional ingredients of the television series as a genre, the meta-language of the voiceovers, a host of important and effective visual references, pathos and continuity.

The countries represented by the contributors to the volume have been chosen taking into consideration the different translation traditions in Europe: dubbing, subtitling, voice-over, which is key to the development of respective accessibility strategies.

Pilar Orero approaches the question of accessibility for the sensorially disabled, more specifically audiodescription for the blind and sight-impaired population. She makes the important point that certain television series, of which 'The West Wing' is a recognized example, have now received considerable critical acclaim as well as enormous commercial success. It is therefore important that access be provided for the sensorially disabled to these products, though this is still often lacking. In particular Orero looks at three aspects of the episode *In Excelsis Deo*, namely character, location and plot. For the blind audience the identification of the main characters, the clarifying of the various settings and then the following of the plot, both the 'stand-alone' story of the Korean War veteran and the other stories which are carried over from previous episodes, are fundamental reference points. For example, the key character in this episode, Toby Ziegler, is introduced in the opening scene and his position in the White House hierarchy needs to be quickly established. Other main characters are also present at the beginning of the episode. The locations are all in Washington D.C. and the connection between the institutional settings (The White House, the Korean War Memorial, Arlington Cemetery) and other places (a call girl's flat, a makeshift camp for derelicts, a bookshop) needs to be made clear. The dialogue list/screenplay of the episode, while by no means an exact substitute for an AD, can provide useful information of this type and a careful study of its contents, and also the director's indications, can lead to identifying the most important features to include in the description.

As is typical of such series every episode begins with a resumé of what has gone before. Orero suggests that this time, along with the succeeding scrolling of the credits, is an opportune moment for an introductory element to precede the audiodescription (AD). Even if this inevitably means a certain amount of overlap with the spoken words, this kind of 'invasion' is justified in these circumstances. Intertitles giving information on times and places, should be read aloud in accordance with all current guidelines. Treading the controversial waters of how much subjectivity or personal interpretation to include in the AD, Orero suggests that Toby Ziegler's feelings towards the dead veteran should be made explicit, as this is the leitmotif of the whole mini-story.

Frederic Chaume takes a look at the Spanish dubbed version of *In Excelsis Deo* and begins by explaining that the translated version of *The West Wing* 'has been acknowledged as one of the best dubbings of a drama series in that country'. This reflects, as he points out, the excellent technical work and excellent acting of the original. He dissects the translation, the dubbing and the final Spanish performance, going through all the elements that a translator for dubbing should know about. It is, as he says, a stereotypical text for teaching. The main basis for the analysis is the concept of norms that dubbers follow and that audiences expect and recognize. Although 'no empirical evidence has shown what a good dubbing is', those who work in the industry or in the AVT teaching profession point to certain yardsticks such as lip synchrony, isochrony, natural dialogue production, ideational and interpersonal meaning, iconographic equivalence, fidelity, and so on. and these are all covered by Chaume in relation to *The West Wing*.

The 'tricks of the trade' are illustrated in terms, for example, of bilabial substitution – at a certain point the word 'padre' is introduced, because it is phonetically equivalent, regardless of the fact that there is no mention of a 'father' in the original script - and this replacement is justified. Chaume is essentially very complimentary towards the whole dubbing performance in *In Excelsis Deo*, though he also points out examples of errors, mismatching and calquing. These, however, are explained in terms of the inevitable traps of 'dubbese'. He also indicates the importance of the

'walk and talk' strategy used in the original in every episode and which is picked up by other authors in this volume (Orero, Perego).

Kristijan Nikolić takes a critical look at the subtitled version of *In Excelsis Dio* in Croatian. He begins by interviewing the actual subtitler, who worked on almost the whole series of *The West Wing* for the Croatian national broadcaster. The interviewee confirmed that subtitling a fast-paced, culture-bound TV series with some similarities to documentary formats, posed considerable challenges to the translator/subtitler. The first crucial point to emerge from the subtitler's point of view is that the very first episode is the most difficult, in that it is necessary to ease into the series in order to understand how to shape things as the series progresses. It is then important to make decisions as to how to deal with the many cultural references, that is to leave them in English, find a Croatian equivalent, translate the terms literally or eliminate them entirely.

Nikolić, who then takes up the analysis, refers to Pedersen's categories of cultural expressions (see this volume) namely ECRS (extra-linguistic cultural references) and to Diaz-Cintas and Remael's distinction between total and partial reduction when time constraints compel the subtitler to find space in the densely packed dialogue. He asks the crucial question of how the subtitler can decide? In agreement with the interviewed professional, he emphasises the importance of having or finding knowledge of the source text culture as it applies to the series in question. In this case it is important to know, for example, that Medical School is not *medicinska škola* (nursing school) and that the Secretary of Labour in America is equivalent to a minister in the Croatian political system.

Another question to arise is that of the use of acronyms and abbreviations such as the NSA (National Security Agency). Bodies of this kind rarely have an exact equivalent in other cultures and political systems and the subtitler may be tempted to leave it out or paraphrase it. Yet, as in this case, if the term, both in its abbreviated and full form, is referred to repeatedly, it will then be necessary to go back and make sure the reference is clear. Examples such as those outlined above, and an interesting instance of how to translate *gay* in a language that has no equivalent register, form part of a rounded analysis of the difficulties involved in subtitling *In Excelsis Deo* in Croatian.

Delia Chiaro, while discussing the Italian dubbed version of *In Excelsis Deo*, points out that the series was not a huge success in Italy, perhaps due to unfortunate timing and the fact that the subject matter might not have attracted a large audience. Nonetheless the series was translated by several television companies and Chiaro takes a critical look at a number of the translation solutions attempted. She identifies examples of dubbese such as the now standard translation of the English language wedding vow "I do" with 'Lo voglio". The choice is based on lip synchronization but is simply not said at Italian wedding services.

Chiaro correctly devotes considerable attention to the question of terms of address and the perennial problem of pronoun use when translating from English into languages that make a register distinction depending on who the interlocutors are. She examines this usage with reference to a number of one-to-one relationships that are a constant feature of the series and in need of careful handling.

In discussing the handling of culture-bound terms, she introduces the concept of chunking up, or down, or sideways (Katan, 2004) and her own concept of "lingua-cultural drops in translational voltage". These terms refer to the choices translators make to either use a hyperonym to deal with a specific term e.g., 'medaglia/medal' for 'purple heart' or vice versa when 'Christmas services' is substituted with a more specific 'messa di natale/Christmas Mass', or use a target language equivalent or leave the term untranslated as is the case with real names.

Finally, while generally applauding the work of the Italian 'dialoghista', who Chiaro interviewed for this chapter, she makes some specific criticisms. For example, there is a flattening effect in some stretches of discourse, there is censorship in the translation of the term 'hooker', and the voice chosen for the child who addresses the President is much more 'childlike' than in the original. But what emerges from this chapter is an accurate picture of what goes on in the mind of the translator and what happens in the dubbing studio.

Iwona Mazur and Agnieszka Chmiel tackle the question of voice-over, a translation mode used in their native Poland, and in other countries particularly in eastern Europe, for TV fiction as well as for documentaries, news features and so on. They rightly lament the fact that voice-over had long been considered a poor relation in the audiovisual translation world, but point out that it has now gained its rightful place alongside subtitling and dubbing as a translation mode worthy of study. Nevertheless, they also point out how certain voice-over practices are criticized in the West, such as the use of a single male voice to cover all characters in a film, a usage that caused an American

critic to wonder why Marilyn Monroe flirted breathily in a thick baritone voice.

The authors explain how the usual voice-over practice was to allow the original speaker to begin talking and then come in several seconds later with the translation and to end the voice-over a couple of seconds before the speaker completed his or her talk. In the meantime the volume would be turned down to allow the translated version to be heard. This is still largely the case everywhere that voice-over is used, but Mazur and Chmiel report that in Poland the volume is now being kept quite high throughout the voice-over. They also quote Woźniak's use of the term voice-in-between referring to the practice of inserting the voice-over between gaps in the discourse, as an alternative approach.

The authors then turn their attention to the voiced over Polish version of *In Excelis Deo*. Intriguingly the Polish title for *The West Wing* translates as *Presidential Poker*. They discuss the particular problems that voice-over translators have to face, some of which are common to all types of audiovisual translation, while others are specific to this genre. They discover that the Polish version is 31% shorter in terms of the numbers of characters. This is due to the usual need to omit, to reduce, to create isochrony and to remain within strict time limits, but the idea of measuring this discrepancy in terms of characters is interesting. Polish lexical items are longer than English words and a simple word count might have skewed the results.

They also note that the type-token ratio is higher in Polish, which at first sight may seem surprising but, as they explain, this can be put down to the inflected nature of Polish and the counting of lemmas. The authors then concentrate on the problem of culture-bound terms, metaphor, irony and other 'critical points' and discuss the strategies adopted ranging from normalization to foreignisation, the former being the most used, pointing out the strengths and weaknesses of this particular example of voice-over. Mazur and Chmiel also talked to a professional audiovisual translator about this text, which provided a useful perspective on the topic.

Jan Pedersen begins his chapter by discussing the ever fewer differences remaining between subtitling norms in the Scandinavian countries, such as the preponderance of one-liners in Denmark as opposed to the preference for two-liners in Sweden. However, he analyzes the text *In Excelis Deo* according to the current Swedish specifications, focusing in particular on cultural questions.

As an academic researcher in Stockholm, as well as being a professional subtitler, Pedersen has developed his own method of dealing with culture-bound translation problems, the bain of all translators, and which he refers to as extralinguistic cultural references (ECRs). His 'toolkit' for dealing with ECRs is based on a taxonomy of seven basic strategies which, he claims, can enable a competent subtitler to solve any cultural conundrum or 'crisis point' (cf. Gottlieb's ten strategies for all subtitling problems). These strategies range from the more straightforward approaches of retention, direct translation and the use of 'official' equivalents, to the trickier options of generalization, specification and substitution. Omission is also considered a valid option in certain circumstances, mostly dictated by time and space constraints. Examples are provided of all these strategies as well as a consideration of what Pedersen calls 'influencing parameters'. The latter explain why culture-bound terms need to be rendered in one particular way instead of another. Again examples are provided in terms of transculturality (how familiar are the ECRs in both source and target cultures), centrality (how salient is the ECR at macro or micro level), polysemiotics (the interplay between image and dialogue in the identification of an ECR) and paralinguistic factors such as audience type, time of viewing, national translation norms, etc.). Pedersen ends his chapter with a number of particularly thorny examples, especially concerning one case where there is an evident error in the original script.

Elisa Perego also discusses the walk-and-talk phenomenon in her chapter but starts from a consideration of script writing. After extolling the merits of Aaron Sorkin as a screenplay writer, a view shared by audiences and critics alike, she points out how it is here that *The West Wing* gains its specificity. She uses the expression 'strong urgency' to describe the spoken dialogues that run through the whole series. While no attempt is made by Sorkin to reproduce natural dialogue, the characters are rendered believable by skilful scriptwriting. These are high-powered government officials and they are provided with the fast-paced, at times witty, repartee that marks them out as important, intelligent and efficient operatives. As Perego says, 'they treat every single word as a precious component, making them count' and adhering faithfully to the Gricean maxims of brevity, truth, relevance and clarity.

Her linguistic analysis of the walk-and-talk process highlights how the frequent use of substitutions and ellipsis in particular scenes follows from the fact that the script has been so carefully prepared that everything that is said is built on what a previous speaker has said, and this within a shared

physical context and with shared background knowledge. Clear examples are provided to support these and other findings.

Finally Perego turns her attention to the problems this kind of language use poses for audiovisual translators and for audio describers for a blind audience. For dubbing, the fast-moving dialogue can be tailored in the studio and actors can be couched in fast delivery. But for subtitlers the time constraints and rapid switching of characters creates difficulties, and important decisions have to be made regarding elements that can be sacrificed while maintaining the 'strong urgency' effect. Audio description relies on gaps in the dialogue in order to be able to verbalise important visual elements. These gaps are often non-existent, so how can it be done? With these problems in mind Perego ends her chapter with the thought that observing how different audiovisual translators face these difficulties may help us determine whether audiovisual translation strategies are homogeneous or depend on the language combination in question. Food for thought.

Anthony Baldry, following on from his ground-breaking work on multimodal transcriptions and his MCA relational database, turns his attention to *The West Wing* episode *In Excelsis Deo* to introduce some new ideas on semiotic referencing systems. He begins by posing the question "Why is it that film analysts and their readers do not use a referencing system which indexes the visual components of a film systematically on a par with the referencing found in a film script or transcript?" He discusses the interplay of screenplays, storyboards and transcriptions of films, perhaps written by amateur enthusiasts, in terms of their providing a single integrated multimodal transcript. His basic aim is to provide a tool for multimodal text analysts to be able to locate where a specific effect occurs and to identify recurrent patterns in multimodal texts. There are many scenes and extracts in the episode in question that rely exclusively, or largely, on visual input, particularly the poignant final scene where the camera switches between a White House carol service and an official Arlington Cemetery burial. The salient reference points are purely visual but descriptions of such scenes remain verbal. Baldry suggests that we as viewers think in both linguistic and visual terms when watching a film or television series, yet although a film is a 'visual story' the screenplay is still incontrovertibly a written artefact. It may contain written instructions as to what can be seen (it is a dark night and Mary is feeling the cold as she watches the train enter the station), but it is still locked in the confines of a page, be it paper or electronic. However, Baldry points out that the use of storyboards and animatics mark a beginning in providing visual instructions to a film director and bring him or her closer to a dual approach to the story.

This conundrum of how to describe/analyse/translate multimodal texts by using only the linguistic medium has been bothering scholars for some time. Anthony Baldry has been at the forefront of studies to obviate the verbal bias for many years and this chapter represents one of his latest forays into the field. With each new approach, as he gets nearer to perfecting the 'multisemiotic transcriptions as film referencing systems', which is also the title of this chapter, we all get nearer to being able to make more complete sense of multimodal texts.

References

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