Teaching Audiovisual Translation: Theory and Practice in the Twenty-first Century

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ABSTRACT It could be claimed that audiovisual translation is now one of the most common forms of translation encountered in people’s everyday lives. Living in an era of globalized mass media and communication, most European countries, in particular the countries of central Europe, absorb a huge number of audiovisual products from abroad. Therefore, a need for proper translation, as it will be consumed by a large number of viewers, arises. Following the increase in the importation of audiovisual works to this region in the last few decades and the development of technologies and prevalence of electronic media, the professional requirements of the people involved in the process of audiovisual translation have increased markedly. The presented article therefore provides an overview of some significant findings related to the translation of audiovisual texts and proposes future areas of academic interest, focusing mainly on the challenges of educating and training translation studies trainees interested in translation for audiovisual media.

KEYWORDS audiovisual text, dubbing, subtitling, professional requirements, teaching audiovisual translation

INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, teaching audiovisual translation has become an increasingly attractive area of research and practice in the academic environment across the globe. This should come as no surprise – audiovisual translation itself could be considered one of the most common forms of translation encountered in people’s everyday lives, not only via television but also via internet and new forms of advertising. Living in an era of globalized mass media and communication a huge number of audiovisual products are

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being circulated and, especially in the countries of central and eastern Europe, a significant number of audiovisual products from abroad are being absorbed daily.

In order to present a particular example related to television, one of the most common media of entertainment and communication, the results of research cited by Slovak scholar Anna Ostrihonová can be used. The research conducted by UPC in 2005 shows that 82% of Europeans watch TV every day, and in Slovakia in particular 51% of Slovaks watch TV every day for more than two hours. Important fact is that in Slovakia about 80% of broadcast audiovisual works are non-domestic and therefore translated.

The dominant position of foreign audiovisual works in comparison to the volume of domestic works in these countries is therefore strengthening demand for the most common types of audiovisual translation in the region – dubbing, voice-over and subtitling. However, more specific, and until now often neglected, types of audiovisual translation are also attracting attention, not only in Europe but all around the world. These are types of audiovisual translation distinct in terms of the source audiovisual work and translation situation, such as translation and surtitling for opera or theatre, live translation and subtitling during various film festivals, performances or TV broadcasting, or translation and subtitling of assorted teaching and training materials. Also to be considered are types of translation related to the special needs of final recipients, such as bilingual or monolingual subtitling for the deaf and hard-of-hearing or audiodescription for the visually handicapped.

Consequently, the number and qualification requirements of persons involved in the process of audiovisual translation have increased and both the academic and professional environments are trying to respond to the demands of the translation market. One question still stands: how to meet these demands within translation studies trainees’ preparation and which translation competences are crucial for the would-be translator for audiovisual media?

TEACHING AUDIOVISUAL TRANSLATION: BASIS AND DIMENSIONS

When pondering upon the possibilities and ways of preparation of translation studies trainees for the field of audiovisual translation, it is important to specify what the requirements for a translator of audiovisual texts are and subsequently to define the translation competences needed to be developed. Simply researching online advertising, it seems that the most common market requirements in the central European context are:

1. Anna Ostrihoňová, Nitra, Preklad v Dabingu PhD dissertation (Constantine the Philosopher University, 2008), p.79.
experience, flexibility and commitment. These requirements are, of course, understandable. However, they do not reflect any significant or specialized approaches to translation of audiovisual texts or specific types of this kind of translation.

Unfortunately, no complex research on the market requirements in this region has been completed. However, some useful partial conclusions might be found in the works by world-famous researchers engaging mainly the area of subtitling, such as Henrik Gottlieb, Mary Carroll, John D. Sanderson, Jorge Díaz Cintas and Aline Remael. The works of these audiovisual-translation thinkers, researchers and educators have for a long time served as a valuable foundation for audiovisual translation not only in Slovakia but all over Europe. Furthermore, they have also provided useful outlines for specialized audiovisual-translation training.

Nonetheless, noteworthy standpoints have been presented even in the Slovak environment. Especially in the second half of the 20th century, translation studies in the former Czechoslovakia in general operated mainly with the framework of Lev’s and Popović’s translation theories, which approached translation as an act of “(secondary) communication, as social interaction with an aim anchored in a particular time and place, thus with a prominent focus on socio-historically embedded translators and receivers, translation functions and external conditions.” In a simplified way, this basis led to a long tradition of encompassing the process of translation as a complex dialogue, not only in terms of language communication between the source and target text, or author and translator, but also between their contexts – i.e. their cultures. Therefore, from the 1970s up to the present day, this tradition has usually been presented in every reflection upon translation of either literary or non-literary texts, audiovisual translation likewise. According to Slovak translation studies researcher Edita Gromová, “the theory of translation elaborated in its beginnings in Slovakia in the 1970s and 1980s kept pace with the research abroad without any difficulties,” mainly thanks to its developers such as


Katarína Bednárová, Ján Ferencík and Braňo Hochel. Arising from the expansion of audiovisual media in the early 1980s, all the aforementioned Slovak research works did not neglect the specific area of audiovisual translation and at least partially contributed to the domestic reflection on this type of translation, understanding it as - in text, form and transfer channel - a specific type of translation communication.

It was Ján Ferencík who, in 1982, initially anticipated the inevitable need in Slovak translation studies for a change in the approach towards the translation of drama and texts for audiovisual media, which were by then understood as a branch of literary translation. His ideas were later developed by Katarína Bednárová in the famous Popovič (ed.) publication *Original/Translation: Interpretational Terminology*, published in 1983, in separate entries dedicated to the translation of film dialogues and the translation of commentaries in documentary films. Regarding the translation of film dialogues, Bednárová describes two principal procedures – the translation of dialogues and the adjustment of dialogues for dubbing. She also emphasizes the need for correspondence with the visual aspect of semantic information as well as other paralinguial elements of information, the social and individual specifics of the languages involved and the socio-cultural factors influencing the process of translation (this was the first time this had been mentioned in the domestic context). These are important principles applicable also to subtitling, following its first phase – the translation of dialogues.

Considering the fact that Slovakia is a country where dubbing is predominant (compared to subtitling), a paradoxical situation can be observed: Bednárová’s contribution to the theory of dubbing was not only the first but for a long time also one of a very few reflections upon translation for dubbing. However, in 1990 Bednárová’s and Ferencík’s findings were developed by Slovak translation studies researcher Braňo Hochel in his work *Translation as Communication*, in which three main layers of audiovisual text are described: speech, sound and motion. Hochel points out that even though a translator can only operate with one of them – the layer of speech - other layers cannot be omitted in the process of translation. The layer of sound and the visual layer are constant but still influence a translator in the choice of solution, although they cannot be modified. Hochel


therefore contemplates whether it is possible to consider audiovisual translation as a form of literary translation, a question which is later also explored by respected theoretician and critic of translation Mária Kusá, who considers film translation as a specific type of adapted literary translation which has both an informative and expressive function. Later on, she also explores the approach towards the relationship between the translation of audiovisual text and drama. Although both types have common textual features in the form of a screenplay, she accentuates that the situation is much more complicated and defines at least three interpreting-translation activities related to the translation of audiovisual texts: simultaneous translation of films, subtitling and dubbing.

This overview of the most significant approaches to audiovisual translation in Slovakia shows that there had been a good foundation for the elaboration of more complex aggregates. However, in the times when other European countries (e.g. Spain, Germany, UK) started to turn their attention towards translation for audiovisual media, Slovak translation theory in this field lost its pace. Up until now, no more complex publication or monograph regarding audiovisual translation has been published and a complex and integrated approach has been lacking. Therefore, when considering and initiating a specialized preparation of translation studies trainees in the field of audiovisual translation, experience from other European countries has to be partially applied. These are, for instance, countries with a strong tradition in terms of audiovisual translation: Spain and Germany. Both these countries currently provide specialized preparation in the field of translation – not only for translation studies trainees (e.g. Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona; Universitat Rovira i Virgili; Ruhr University Bochum; Universität Hildesheim; etc.) but also for professionals who are interested in audiovisual translation and media or who want to broaden or improve their qualification skills (e.g. courses provided by the Summer School of the Universidad Francisco de Vitoria, Madrid; Sprachen und Dolmetscher Institut, München; Titelbild Subtitling Agency, Berlin; etc.). Paradoxically, besides countries like Germany and Spain, audiovisual translation has in the last decade become one of the main areas of interest in Anglophone countries as well. Although

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10. Mária Kusá, “*Preklad Filmových Textov v Kontexte Doby.*” These Theoretical Approaches are Also Described in More Detail in the Upcoming Gromová, E. – Janecová, E.: *Audiovisual Translation - Dubbing and Subtitling in the Slovak Context.* Krakow: Unesco Chair for Translation Studies and Intercultural Communication.
these could be classified as countries of which the official language is one of the most widespread languages of the modern world and where the volume of domestic audiovisual production versus foreign is incomparable, the extent of the systematic and specialized preparation in the field of audiovisual translation has increased enormously. This can be evidenced not only by the significant amount of academic research activities but also the expansion of specialized MA programmes in audiovisual translation (e.g. in the UK: Imperial College, University of Surrey, Roehampton University, University of Sheffield, University of Manchester, etc.) and also courses for public or professionals (e.g. Imperial College, UK; Centre for Language Studies, City University, London, UK; Voicetrax Studio Voice-over course, USA; Dan Balestrero’s online Voice-over course, USA; etc.). It is important to mention that the audiovisual translation preparation in these countries has lately become even more specialized – and focuses distinctively on translation for the deaf and hard-of-hearing (e.g. University of Surrey, UK; University of Leeds, UK; etc.) or audiovisual translation in cases when the source work contains more than one language cultural code (as in the case of some audiovisual works in the USA, UK and Republic of South Africa). It is interesting to observe how these countries approach the current issues encountered in audiovisual translation and to compare their strategies with the more traditional Slovak context. This can eventually lead to enhancement not only of research but also training methods and strategies in this field.

PROSPECTS FOR TRAINING: THEORY AND PRACTICE

Discussions on the relationship between translation theory and practice indubitably have a long tradition. In the ideal scenario, as Mildred L. Larson states: “Good theory is based on information gained from practice. Good practice is based on carefully worked-out theory”, which indicates that despite the manifold disputes, it is believed that both theory and practice do reciprocally supplement each other and one conditions the legitimate functioning of the other. Therefore, when considering audiovisual translation training,

the need for elaboration and use of theoretical but also critical background might provide a solid foundation and ensure the more complex profile of a participant of such training. In the 1980s and 1990s the academic encompassing of audiovisual translation was provided predominantly in a theoretical, descriptive way; but a decade later, works by Chaume, Gottlieb and Díaz Cintas shifted attention to particular issues encountered within translation for audiovisual media. These, and also subsequent, works can be used as a theoretical basis while audiovisual translation training.

Other suitable proposals for both theoretical and practical preparation can be found in Jorge Díaz Cintas’s (ed.) publication *The Didactics of Audiovisual Translation* in which contributions by key personalities of the European academic, research, training and practice world of audiovisual translation are provided. These are divided into four thematic areas that Cintas considers essential for complex and specialized audiovisual translation training: theory of audiovisual translation, practical training, audiovisual translation for special needs, and use of audiovisual translation as a tool (e.g. in foreign-language teaching). A suitable basis is provided for the most common types of audiovisual translation: subtitling, dubbing (screenplay translation and lip-synchronization), voice-over, video games translation, translating for the deaf and hard-of-hearing, audiodescription for the blind and partially sighted, and translation for a live audience. Since the publication conveys these types of translation from both a diachronic and synchronic perspective from theoretical and practical point of view, it might serve as a guide for the elaboration and initiation of audiovisual translation preparation not only in the academic environment but also for professional practice.

Another important standpoint that needs to be mentioned in relation to audiovisual translation training is the importance of the contact and cooperation with the translation and media industry. Regarding university education, Cintas emphasizes that in the ideal scenario “high quality training requires students to have the opportunity of familiarising themselves with the right equipment that they will later encounter in their professional careers,” even though he admits that acquiring such equipment might be rather costly for universities and recruiting competent trainers in this area might not be easy either.

In this respect, another trend in translation studies training in general must be mentioned – since the latest recommendation for translation studies programmes is to pursue col-
laboration with professional organizations and model real practice situations in order to provide the trainee with the first contact with their future occupation (see e.g. Optimising Professional Translator Training in a Multilingual Europe, OPTIMALE). An ideal example might be seen for instance in Germany, where specialized training is often provided by professional organizations and agencies themselves (e.g. Titelbild Subtitling Agency) or in the UK and Spain where university courses provide a certain number of practical exercises with highly expert professionals (e.g. Imperial College or Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona).

Naturally, not all universities providing translation studies programmes will have such possibilities. For instance, the situation in central Europe, where the specialized preparation of future audiovisual translators has long been neglected and the number of expert translators in this field has decreased, providing model practice training is a challenge that must be met in a particularly practicable way. Therefore, the following section of our article suggests some alternatives based on our experience while establishing a specialized audiovisual translation training course in Slovakia.

STARTING OUT: THE SLOVAK EXPERIENCE

Following examples from the abovementioned European countries, the Department of Translation Studies of the Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia, as the very first translation studies department in the country, initiated a systematic specialized training of students in the field of audiovisual translation in the academic year 2011/2012. A similar course had already been operating in the Institute of Translation Studies in the Charles University in Prague, which has become a conducive partner for further cooperation. While the specialized course in Prague, led by audiovisual translation researcher and practitioner Miroslav Posta, is aimed especially at subtitling, the audiovisual translation course in Nitra attempts to provide a more complex foundation in relation to the translation of dialogues, their adjustments and editing for dubbing or subtitling and the technical processing of subtitles. Other types of audiovisual translation have so far been omitted, as the course only focuses on the dominant types encountered in the Slovak context.

Regarding the translation competences developed during this training, a basis elaborated by domestic researcher Gregor Makarian was used at first. Although Makarian, as an in-practice sound engineer, focused mainly on the realization of Slovak
versions of foreign audiovisual works, his monograph *Dubbing: Theory, Realization, Sound Mastery* was one of the first domestic publications to provide at least a partial practical insight into audiovisual translation. In a separate chapter on the translation phase, Makarian points out the importance of differentiating between the translation of audiovisual texts and the translation of literary texts, since the translation of an audiovisual text is not a final product but a foundation phase for further processing. Consequently, he specifically defines the principal requirements for the translator in connection to dubbing. These are:

- ability to provide an adequate interpretation
- ability to identify the specific language means used to make a desired impression (humour, irony)
- ability to identify and interpret characters, relations between them, environment of the story and the author’s intention
- capability to transfer the qualities of the original into the translated text
- capability to be objective and suppress personal interpretations and opinion on the original
- capability to rephrase the original and all specifics of its style
- to have a good sense of the Slovak language (meaning the target language) - both in written and spoken form
- to avoid complicated, unclear sentences and artificial expressions
- to follow the natural rhythm and cadence of the dialogues in the source texts

For the role of the dialogue editor he later supplements the importance of extensive vocabulary, a sense of language and the rhythm of speech, an ability to perceive and interpret the audiovisual work as an artistic complex, an ability to empathize with the mental processes of the character and at least a working knowledge of the language of the source text.

In addition, other criteria might be mentioned in relation to subtitling. These are connected mainly to the need for text condensation and specific technical skills which are described in more detail in Pošta’s publication on subtitling. As Pošta emphasizes, translation in this case consists of two phases: translation itself and then the segmentation

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and timing of subtitles (spotting). Contrary to traditional approaches he argues that technical mastering is currently one of the essential tasks of the translator, since the market has lately preferred translators to provide more complex services. On the other hand, he also points out that the technical parameters of subtitles are closely related to the process of translation. Otherwise the translator “does not know how much time is needed for a certain subtitle and thus how many signs can the utterance consist of” and lacks the knowledge “whether the particular subtitles should be divided, joined or shortened, or alternatively if there is sufficient space and the translated text does not need to be adjusted at all.” To conclude, he specifies that a modern translator should in this case be able “to elaborate the translation, segment it into subtitles, handle the spotting and adjustments needed, save it and submit the final file with subtitles to the client.” This also reflects the increased requirements of the present-day translator.

Concluding the standpoints presented by Makarian and Pošta but also the preliminary results of research conducted on Slovak market requirements, four main competence areas might be distinguished. These are:

- professional competence (basic theoretical knowledge related to the field of audiovisual translation, orientation in audiovisual translation practice, knowledge on specifics of audiovisual translation)
- language competence (good knowledge of both source and target language, operation with language within translations, special language adjustments or editing)
- cultural competence (specific interpretation skills and cultural-communication competence)
- technical competence (super-translation operations, e.g. segmentation of dialogues, segmentation of subtitles, spotting, etc.)

These are also the main principles to which trainees in the abovementioned universities and institutes are trained when they are interested in the translation of audiovisual media.

In order to develop all competence areas sufficiently and eventually fulfil professional and market requirements, contact and cooperation with translation and media practice must be provided. This was in our context established on various levels of cooperation via several seminars and workshops with expert professionals from practice (e.g. events organized

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by the department and professional institutions: *Translation and Film*, 2011 or *Atelier of Audiovisual Translation*, 2012); training internships in domestic culture and media institutions (e.g. subtitling project with the Nation’s Memory Institute of the Slovak Republic, 2012); and cooperation with domestic and foreign film festivals and competitions (e.g. One World Festival, 2012). Especially conducive was cooperation with domestic associations of translators for audiovisual media: The Slovak Society of Translators of Literary Texts, The Slovak Society of Translators of Scientific and Technical Literature and the Slovak Coalition for Cultural Diversity.

Having acquainted the students with an overview of the main issues of audiovisual translation, specialized training within a separate course included in the translation studies programme study plan took place. Besides covering the crucial topics in audiovisual translation theory, its main objective was to provide contact with the profession via modelling the working environment specifics and conditions from practice. This was easily accomplished by the initiation of collaboration with future film-makers from the Film and Television Faculty from the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava. During the training, several audiovisual works by the future film-makers were sent for translation of the screenplay, dialogues or subtitles. The students of the Department of Translation Studies thus had direct contact with their “clients” and could agree not only on translation-related specifics, but also on professional conditions – such as the source and input form of the “order,” deadlines and rights, outcomes and profits of the cooperation: e.g. condition of agreement of cooperation, copyright or stating the name of translator in the final credits (which in the Slovak environment is not always a fulfilled condition). Naturally, this cooperation was not conditioned by any financial benefits on either side, but ensured valuable results in the form of: practical experience on both sides; reciprocal education in the cooperation of future translators and future film-makers; supervised translations, materials and subtitles for films designated to be broadcast at domestic and foreign festivals and competitions; promotion of the name of the translator and the establishment of professional contacts during studies. An important phase in this type of training is also review, evaluation and feedback of the elaborated tasks. These were provided in the form of proofreading and reviewing of the translation, retrogressive evaluation by other translators and film-makers, or – in the case of more extended projects – detailed analysis and critique of the translations elaborated within the assigned topics of the BA and MA thesis aimed at audiovisual translation.
CONCLUSION

According to results gathered so far, the responses of participants and the increased interest of students at the department we believe this might be one of the ways to meet the challenges of educating and training translation studies students interested in translation for audiovisual media. By following the existing theory on translation of audiovisual texts, gaining and training the skills needed and verifying the knowledge acquired in practice, it is hoped that the presented methods and strategies will contribute to the education of a new generation of translators who might increase the quality of the translation process in future audiovisual works.

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