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Introduction

Audiovisual translation in context

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1. Mapping the field

Against the backdrop of what is known as “the fourth industrial revolution” (Schwab 2017) and the revolutionary switchover from analogue to digital technology at the end of the last century, the audiovisual industry has fast developed new ways of distributing audiovisual materials across language and cultural communities. As part of this global drive, translations play a pivotal role, making the most of the potentialities offered by social media and the digital universe, wherein new mediascapes are being construed and negotiated.

The term “mediascape”, coined by Arjun Appadurai, is frequently used to refer to:

both the distribution of electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (newspapers, magazines, television stations and film production studios) which are now available to a growing number of private and public interests throughout the world, and to the images of the world created by these media.

(1990/2001, 590)

Appadurai’s five “scapes” propose a model of globalisation driven by the interconnectedness and flow of five distinct layers which influence one another, and where cultures intersect and overlap globally, namely, “ethnoscapes”, “ideoscapes”, “financescapes”, “technoscapes”, and “mediascapes” (589). The last two are particularly important in the case of audiovisual productions, as the “mediascapes” refer to the power exerted by international media to produce and disseminate information across the globe at a rapid rate, while the “technoscapes” refer to the global configurations, “both high and low, both mechanical and informational” (589), that now move “at high speeds across various kinds of previously impervious boundaries” (1990/2001, 588). Audiovisual content can be articulated within these

two scapes in a manner that helps explain its fluid circulation across borders, reaching a seemingly illimited number of end users around the world, thanks to the affordances of audiovisual translation (AVT).

In their recent special issue entitled “Sketching Tomorrow’s Mediascape – And Beyond”, Mary Carroll and Aline Remael (2022) describe the mediascape as a space in continuous transformation, configured by a spirit of collaboration, partnership and mutual understanding. These integral attributes are conceived as the key to successful communication in a society where translational activity has chiefly turned into a fundamentally semiotic procedure, whereby composite meanings go beyond words and are therefore transferred into “other signs, whether they be linguistic, aural, visual, olfactory or haptic” (2). Against this backdrop, the mainstream media localisation industry finds itself processing an ever-growing volume of variegated content that needs to be translated into a myriad of languages for different purposes, different communicative contexts, and different platforms. The vast array and volume of audiovisual productions that need translation (i.e., TV series, feature films, talk shows, animation, stand-up comedies, reality shows, educational videos, documentaries...), together with the pressing deadlines imposed in the industry to carry out their localisation into other languages, are some of the primary factors why the mediascape is rapidly embracing state-of-the-art technologies and integrating automation in new agile work environments. The threat presented by novel dissemination approaches, such as fansubbing and fandubbing, that compete with traditional, commercial models is also responsible for some of the developments taking root in the industry.

The upsurge of these digital ecosystems has led to what is known as the platformisation of our society, understood as:

the penetration of infrastructures, economic processes and governmental frameworks of digital platforms in different economic sectors and spheres of life, as well as the reorganisation of cultural practices and imaginations around these platforms. (Poell *et al.* 2019, 1)

In these new virtual environments, we have seen the proliferation of languages, cultures, and codes that had been traditionally marginalised by the power of the English language and the USA culture in the audiovisual sector, and that are now made available internationally through practices such as intralinguistic, interlinguistic and intersemiotic translation. Watching productions in the comfort of our living room from “exotic” countries such as Korea, Italy, Japan, Spain or France, to name but a few, has never been so easy, thanks to the likes of Netflix, Amazon Prime, Disney Plus or Apple TV. In this respect, the practice of audiovisual translation has experienced an exponential growth in recent decades, both in terms of

volume as well as linguistic variety, due to the unstoppable shift from “the printed page to the more dynamic, digital screen” (Díaz Cintas 2019, 178).

The age of “technification”, “digitisation” and “internetisation” (178) in which we live has accelerated the spread of information, and exchanges across languages and cultures have become very fast and immediate:

VHS tapes have long gone, the DVD and VCD came and went in what felt like a blink of an eye, Blu-rays never quite made it as a household phenomenon, 3D seems to have stalled and, in the age of the cloud, we have become consumers of streaming, where the possession of actual physical items is a thing of the past. (178)

From an academic perspective, as stated by Jorge Díaz Cintas:

AVT has existed as a professional practice since the invention of cinema, though it was not until the mid-1990s, with the advent of digitisation, that it began to gain in scholarly prominence and in number of acolytes. (177)

Academic endeavours since those pioneering studies at the turn of the millennium have multiplied by leaps and bounds. Research in AVT and media accessibility (MA) has gradually evolved from analyses focused on work processes and the description of the various translational practices to studies in which cognition and reception have taken central stage (Di Giovanni and Gambier 2018; Díaz Cintas and Szarkowska 2020). As part of this cognitive turn, attention has been shifted to empirical studies, whose findings have subsequently led, on the one hand, to the standardisation of certain criteria and parameters, and, on the other, to the highlighting of alternative solutions to the ones commonly applied in commercial AVT and MA practices.

In these new ecosystems, forms of participation, collaboration and transformation, facilitated by the democratisation of technology in the digital age, have steadily gained momentum and visibility. As already discussed, the expansion of streaming platforms, particularly over the past two decades, has had a tremendous impact in the way in which people consume and relate to audiovisual contents. As viewers and consumers with different interests and agendas, individuals have been given the opportunity to become active stakeholders in today’s mediascapes, thus having an unprecedented say in the way in which language and visual imagery are impacting the world. Such imagery – whether an integral part of books, magazines, films, TV series or commercials – has the power to influence how people see and relate to the outside world, thanks to its increasingly pervasive presence and persuasive techniques.

Another effect of this digital revolution can be seen in the migration of the act of watching audiovisual productions from large public spaces such as cinemas, or

smaller domestic ones like the living room at home, to private spaces epitomised in the form of the personal computer or mobile phone that promote individualistic consumption and facilitate closer interaction between user and object.

It is in this context of change and transformation that the contributions of this special issue offer valuable insights, mostly grounded on experimental research, that help to map out the changes taking place in the audiovisual sector and, by extension, in our society, where AVT practices have triggered an enormous increase in the number of people who consume audiovisual content, have expanded the contexts where these contents are consumed, and have also diversified the type of programmes that get translated, whether in professional or amateur circles.

2. Contributions to this special issue

The articles included in this dedicated collection are one of the outcomes of the 5th International Symposium on Translation, held in October 2021 at the University of Palermo in collaboration with University College London and the University of Bergamo. The event, entitled *Audiovisual Translation and Computer-Mediated Communication: Fostering Access to Digital Mediascapes*, was a great success, open to students, academics, teachers, and professionals interested in the role and potential of access services, of which interlingual and intralingual translation is a fundamental component in the promotion and propagation of digital discourses and visuals. The conference, organised in hybrid mode in a historical moment still affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, presented itself as an international arena where the links between new forms of translation and the language of the multiple digital discourse types inhabiting the cyberspace were discussed. Ultimately, one of this gathering's objectives was to encourage knowledge dissemination by dissecting current practices while at the same time challenging conventional conceptions tied up to traditional media processes.

The seven contributions contained in this special issue offer empirical research, state-of-the-art frameworks and descriptive investigations focused on the various AVT and MA practices, and covering areas such as interlingual subtitling, subtitling for people who are deaf or hard of hearing (SDH), audio description (AD) in the media (i.e., streaming platforms, TV broadcasting, amateur platforms) as well as in the arts (i.e., opera, museums, film festivals), SDH for pedagogical purposes, and subtitling in amateur online settings. They are all testament to the important role that stakeholders such as translators, audio describers and adapters in the fields of AVT and MA play in the act of international communication, as experts who actively contribute to the dissemination of audiovi-

sual information and products across platforms, media outlets, websites, and art venues such as theatres, and opera houses.

One of the major digital revolutions taking place in the subtitling sector can be seen in the exponential growth of web-based, crowd-based, and cloud-based subtitling platforms. As demonstrated in the cutting-edge experimental investigation carried out by **Massidda** and **Sandrelli** in the opening paper of this collection, the digital revolution “has led to a progressive automation of AVT practices”, which has, in turn, given way to the creation of “brand new roles for language professionals”, thus encouraging the need for further training and learning for practising subtitlers, according to the different types of subtitles required by the industry. Massidda and Sandrelli’s paper, “¡Sub! Localisation workflows (th)at work”, offers valuable insights into the subtitling of documentaries by comparing the workflows followed and the outputs obtained in three different scenarios: when working with traditional, semi-automated and fully automated subtitles. Based on experiments conducted with students from University of the International Studies of Rome (UNINT) and Roehampton University, London, with varying levels of expertise in AVT, the results confirm the need to combine human participation and technology as crucial to the design of agile workflows that work efficiently in the media localisation industry.

In the next two research papers attention is shifted to subtitling in the context of SDH, the second most well-known and frequently employed mode of accessibility. This access service is here examined from two challenging perspectives: (a) SDH in the context of didactic AVT, and (b) the promotion of inclusive subtitles in the media and the arts.

The development of intercultural competence is one of the most important aspects when learning a second language and one of the ways of honing this skill in virtual environments is through:

the use of Didactic Audiovisual Translation (DAT), which encourages motivation in learners while they develop integrated L2 skills in general and intercultural competence in particular through a combination of intrinsic and explicit cultural components presented in different lesson plans. (Rodríguez-Arancón 2023, 1)

In line with this leaning premise, **Antonio Jesús Tinedo Rodríguez** and **Anca Daniela Frumuselu**’s contribution, “SDH as a pedagogical tool: L2, interculturality and EDI”, is the result of an experiment conducted during the piloting phase of the TRADILEX project (<https://plataformavirtual.tradilex.es>). The aim of this initiative, which stands for *La traducción audiovisual como recurso didáctico en el aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras* [Audiovisual Translation as a Didactic Resource in Foreign Language Education], is to investigate the pedagogical potential offered by the various audiovisual translation practices when learning foreign

languages. In this particular contribution, the focus is placed on the exploration of SDH as a didactic resource in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. By means of SDH-based lesson plans in which students were asked to produce their own SDH, and subsequent specific tests aimed at evaluating different competences, the results demonstrate that the practice of SDH in virtual environments not only boosts access to audiovisual material for the deaf and the hard of hearing communities, but it also improves the participants' language and technical skills, in terms of foreign language acquisition and subtitling know-how. Additionally, with the right choice of material, it also helps to promote awareness on the subject of equity, diversity, and inclusion.

The object of study of **Gabriele Uzzo's** paper, "Introducing inclusive subtitles", is the creation of subtitles for the media and the arts intended for a broad spectrum of viewers, who may or may not have a hearing disability, or who may benefit from the use of subtitles for pedagogical purposes. The results demonstrate that inclusive subtitles can stimulate immersive and enjoyable experiences that can be potentially shared by all. Inclusive subtitles are defined as the textual elements that appear on screen and which, under the shape of intralingual or interlingual subtitles, open or closed captions, can be applied not only in the context of film festivals, but also in other highly technological and digitalised sectors of the economy and creative industries such as tourism, theatre, opera houses, museums, and the like. By introducing the notion of inclusive subtitling and proposing guidelines and applications within the context of accessible film festivals (i.e., *Sicilia Queer Film Fest*), Uzzo's empirical study proves that inclusive subtitles have the potential to cater to audiences with varied needs and can be displayed in a myriad of settings such as film festivals, theatres, museums, galleries, and similar cultural venues.

Subtitling as a transformative manipulative practice of transcreation is the focus of **Lisi Liang's** research entitled "The Chinese *Oliver Twist*. Transcreation in digital subtitling practices". In this article, light is shed upon a contrastive analysis entailing the two officially sanctioned versions of *Oliver Twist* (i.e., the musical and the film) and the non-professional versions released and transcreated by amateurs on the popular Chinese video-sharing platform Bilibili.com. The latter amateur activities testify to an increasing participation of contemporary viewers in the translation of audiovisual productions as opposed to more traditional, passive viewing experiences. In this context, transcreation is understood as a fan-driven practice that gives visibility to non-professional subtitling in a creative and enriched way, thanks to the presence of *danmu*, which display users' real-time, right-to-left comments directly on the video. In addition to highlighting how these practices contribute to building a sense of community, reinforced by the different online interactive shared experiences, Liang's investigation also offers new per-

spectives on the way a European masterpiece can be explored in relation to its various translations. In this case, the focus is placed on subtitling practices that shift from conventionally subtitled theatre and film versions to technologically innovative practices in which the subtitles are released on social media platforms and make transcreation the core of translation.

Moving away from subtitling, light is shed upon dubbing practices and their different levels of creative manipulation in the fifth contribution, entitled “Carry on Caesar: Creative manipulations on the cinematographic Roman Emperor”, and authored by **Irene Ranzato**. By focusing on some significant examples of “filmic Caesars” representations, the study provides a detailed analysis of the linguistic portrayal of Caesar as a “stock character”, also from a stereotyping perspective. It centres on the recreation of the character according to a set of visual and linguistic formulaic features, which build on issues relating to identity construction and social position. The various manipulation instances encountered in the Italian dubbing are characterised by their creativity, where dialogue exchanges are truffled with added puns, culture-specific references, as well as allusions to Shakespeare’s style absent in the original versions, thus providing a type of rewriting in Italian that is rich in localised cultural elements and underlines the authorial role of translators-adapters in the media localisation industry.




The last two contributions belong to the field of MA and investigate how AD is carried out in two different contexts, namely, operatic works and TV series streamed on digital platforms.

“Accessibility and reception studies at the Macerata Opera Festival”, the contribution by **Francesca Raffi**, puts forward empirical evidence of how accessibility quality can be probed with the help of digital tools with which the blind and partially sighted persons can be provided. This is the case of the online survey tool LimeSurvey, which integrates additional accessibility features to make the software as inclusive as possible, including a text-to-speech application that converts online written content into audio and is downloadable as an mp3 file. An insightful *a posteriori* investigation of the live experience of blind and partially sighted audiences, after having taken part in AD and tactile tours in the context of the Macerata Opera Festival, is carried out adopting a qualitative analytical approach based on reception studies. Results reveal that the blind and partially sighted audiences enjoy audio descriptions and tactile tours as a means of increasing their psychological immersion. In their opinion, these services do not incur any cognitive overload and present the added value of enhancing engagement and empowerment in live and recorded settings since, for instance, the audio introductions are recorded as mp3 files and then uploaded to the Sferisterio website from where they can be downloaded and played at any time convenient to the user.


The closing contribution of this special issue investigates the rendering of culture-specific references (CSRs) in the English and Italian ADs of the popular and highly discussed series, *Squid Game*, originally produced in Korean and first streamed on Netflix in 2021. The study, entitled “Authorial (audio) description: Creativity in the transfer of CSRs in *Squid Game*”, and carried out by **Alessandra Rizzo** and **Cinzia Giacinta Spinzi**, is rooted in the unsettled debate that confronts standard and alternative approaches, objective and subjective approaches, when it comes to the rendition of visual content in AD scripts drafted for blind and partially sighted audiences. As a case in point, the scholars zoom in on the challenging task of making culture specific references found in a Korean production accessible to audiences who speak Italian and English. After investigating whether and how creativity is deployed in the audio description of the numerous CSRs that appear in *Squid Game*, the authors conclude that creativity in the English AD script acts as a means of cross-cultural mediation and communication, as well as a multidimensional tool, that ultimately provides the end-users with engaging forms of access. Conversely, the Italian (audio) describer does not seem to act as a cultural mediator as no evidence of their authorial voice can be traced in the AD script. Indeed, the solutions encountered are neutral and objective, but at the same time they are also deprived of signs of imagination and transcultural knowledge.


There is no doubt that AVT and MA are increasingly becoming essential features of the mediascape, thus offering audiences across the globe the opportunity to navigate “image-centred” and “narrative-based accounts of strips of reality” (Appadurai 1990/2001, 591) produced in different corners of the world. With this collection of articles, we hope to offer readers valuable insights into how these “strips of reality” travel across linguistic and sensory barriers with the help of practices such as AVT and MA.

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