

Audiovisual Translation – Dubbing and Subtitling in Slovakia

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ABSTRACT

Focused on dubbing and subtitling, the aim of the proposed article is to cover relevant matters of audiovisual translation theory and practice in 21st century Slovakia and to discuss the reality of the professional milieu and its broader sociocultural consequences in Slovakia. This might support an increase in the quality of translated products and emphasise the importance of further academic research within the field. Proposing ideas for further approaches within the Slovak academic milieu, the paper outlines the widening borders of audiovisual translation. It also underlines the importance of the preparation phase of translation studies trainees at Slovak universities and maps and outlines the possibilities for their specialised education in future.

INTRODUCTION

It could be claimed that audiovisual translation is nowadays one of the most common forms of translation encountered in people's everyday lives. Living in an era of media and mass communication in a globalised world, 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, which is to be consumed by large numbers of viewers, has arisen.

Since the majority of audiovisual works in Slovakia come from abroad and therefore have to be dubbed or subtitled, a demand for proper audiovisual translation has emerged and questions surrounding quality and the criteria of assessing quality have arisen. However, although audiovisual translation has long been an attractive and challenging area in the Western milieu, the Slovak academic world has almost neglected it until now. Therefore a systematic theoretical approach has been largely missing and expert conclusions have only been sporadic. These days, when the increasing power of mass media communication has led to a wider spread of foreign audiovisual products into the country than ever before, the need for an integrated approach to its exploration is evident. Furthermore, 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. These are indubitably shifting the borders of what is usually understood as translation – not only because of the variety of translation transfers but also because their assorted relation to aural, visual, cultural and language specifics. In this diverse group of types of transfer of audiovisual works, collectively called “audiovisual translation”, one must admit the peculiarities of each of the types and consider the uniqueness, specifications and borders of each of them. The aim of our article is therefore to introduce our crucial findings on audiovisual translation both home and abroad as well as ponder upon the distinctiveness of the traditional and newest forms and branches of this specific area of translation in Slovakia. This might be important not only for further academic research but also more detailed assessment of the quality of translation as well as the prospects for specialised training in this field.

REFLECTION ON THE THEORY OF AUDIOVISUAL TRANSLATION IN SLOVAKIA

In terms of the theory of translation, the last few decades have mostly been devoted to the translation of audiovisual texts. Emerging from the worldwide expansion and accessibility of audiovisual works of various origins, as well as the development of media, communication and presently mainly with digitalisation and digital video broadcasting, new challenges in this area have arisen and new methods and solutions need to be found. However, the absence of approaching audiovisual translation as a complex study has unfortunately enlarged the gaps between theory and practice in this field. Even though there have always been erudite researchers focused on the translation of audiovisual media, a specified, continuous, more complex study has for too long not been carried out and the translation of audiovisual texts has been encompassed mainly through the lens of the translation of literary texts or translation of drama. However, the results obtained might serve as a reflection of the development, perception, interpretation and elaboration of the theory of audiovisual translation in the Slovak academic milieu and might lead to consideration of new approaches and methods already present abroad.

According to Gromová’s study *Preklad pre audiovizuálne médiá* (“*Translation for Audiovisual Media*”; 2008, p. 140), “the theory of audiovisual translation elaborated in its beginnings in Slovakia in the 1970s and 1980s kept pace with the research abroad without any difficulties. The approach of researchers such as Katarína Bednárová, Ján Ferencík or Braňo Hochel was based on the semiotic communication approach to translation which was later also applied by numerous theoreticians of translation abroad (e.g. Susan Bassnett)”,¹ and the ideological and theoretical basis of Ferencík’s understanding of audiovisual translation inspired many domestic and foreign scholars. Arising from the expansion of audiovisual media in the early 1980s, it was he who in 1982 anticipated the inevitable need for change in the approach to-

wards the translation of drama and texts for audiovisual media, which were by then understood as a branch of literary translation.

Ferenčík's ideas and suggestions were later developed by Katarína Bednárová in the famous Popovič publication *Originál/Preklad: Interpretáčná teória* ("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 (1983, p. 243), two principal procedures are differentiated – the translation of dialogues and the adjustment of dialogues for dubbing. A significant contribution of Bednárová's analysis emphasises the need for correspondence with the visual aspect of semantic information as well as other paralingual elements of information, the social and individual specifics of the languages involved and sociocultural factors influencing the process of translation. These are important principles applicable also to subtitling, following the first phase – the translation of dialogues. Another important element mentioned is the psychological aspect of perception and the intention to create an illusion of the original version. Regarding the translation of documentary commentaries (1983, p. 245) Bednárová defines a documentary commentary as a specific type of text, where the semantic language information is in supplementary relationship with the semantic visual information. She points out the various levels of designation of the texts in connection to the related specifics of speech, sound and image.

Bednárová's and Ferenčík's findings are later developed in Braňo Hochel's work *Preklad ako komunikácia* ("Translation as Communication"; 1990), in which the three main layers of an audiovisual text are described. Even though a translator can operate only with one of them – the layer of speech – other layers cannot be omitted in the process of translation. The layer of sound, understood as music and sound effects, 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 an audiovisual translation as a form of literary translation and what possibility a translator has to elaborate an adequate equivalent of the text in a target language.

This issue is also explored by respected theoretician and critic of translation Mária Kusá, who, according to the study by Ivana Vaseva – Kadynkova *Specifika prevodu filmov* ("Specifics of Film Translation"; 1986), considers a film translation as a specific type of adapted literary translation which has both an informative and expressive function. In order to preserve these functions Mária Kusá (2005, p. 134) describes five main adaptation procedures which do not diminish the expressive function of the text. These are "omitting repetition and paraphrases, omitting redundant elements, omitting elements not carrying any specific information, omitting details of the text that can be read from the film visuals, transformation of the expression maintaining the meaning."²² (2005, p. 134) Similarly to Hochel she thus emphasises the need for the correlation of all the layers of audiovisual texts. Later on, Kusá also explores the approach towards the relation with the translation of audiovisual text and drama (2005, p. 131). Although both types have common textual features in the form of screenplay, she points out that the situation is much more complicated. Therefore,

she accentuates the presence of at least three interpreting-translation activities related to the translation of audiovisual texts, which are the simultaneous translation of films, subtitling and dubbing. These were considered and analysed in numerous works by Czech and Slovak scholars (Čejchan, 1996, 1999; Lesňák, 2003; Makarová, 2004; Hochel, 1990; Bednářová, 1977, 1979, 1980, 1983; Stadtrucker, 1981; Ferencík, 1982).

Domestic research in the area of audiovisual translation at the beginning of the 21st century has been reflected upon and evaluated in works by Edita Gromová in which she focuses on work on dubbing and subtitling in Slovakia (2008), observes the connections among translation practice and theory (2012) or foreshadows future perspectives of audiovisual translation in an academic environment. Also making a contribution are works aimed at particular practical aspects of audiovisual translation such as the publication by dubbing expert Gregor Makarian on the realisation of dubbing as a complex process (2005), which provides interesting views on the phases of dubbing production, or the more comprehensive study by translator and editor of dialogues Lenka Hrušková dealing with artistic and commercial processes related to TV dubbing (2011). Particular types of audiovisual translation are described by Mária Smetanová in her study on the transfer of foreign-language audiovisual works (2011). Newer domestic academic works focus mainly on connecting and further elaboration of the relevant findings of foreign research (Želonka), connections between audiovisual theory and practice (Janecová, Kozáková, Reichwalderová) and new trends and perspectives in audiovisual translation training (Janecová, Želonka).

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, at a time when other European countries (e.g. Spain, Germany, the UK) started to turn their attention towards translation for audiovisual media, Slovak translation theory in this field lost pace. Up until now, no more complex publications or monographs regarding audiovisual translation have been published and a complex and integrated approach is still needed, since it might be important not only for domestic theoreticians and practitioners of audiovisual translation but also for translation studies trainees, scholars and critics of translation of audiovisual texts.

PROSPECTS FOR TRAINING IN AUDIOVISUAL TRANSLATION IN SLOVAKIA: PRACTICE-ORIENTED MODELS

Following the expansion of the number of audiovisual works in Slovakia in the last few decades, the development of technologies and the prevalence of electronic media, the professional requirements of the persons included in the process of audiovisual translation have increased markedly. Consequently, this has recently shifted the borders of academic interest in the area of audiovisual translation also towards training and teaching and didactics of audiovisual translation has thus become an increasingly attractive area of research and practice in the academic environment across the globe. When pondering upon the possibilities and ways of preparation of translation studies trainees in 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 – this means practical and commercial aspects of audiovisual translation cannot be omitted. As we pointed out in our former article on teaching audiovisual translation (2012), by simply researching online advertising, it seems that the most common market requirements for audiovisual translation in the central European context are: experience, flexibility and commitment. These requirements are, of course, understandable. However, they do not reflect any significant or specialised 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 (1997), John D. Sanderson (2005), Jorge Díaz Cintas and Aline Remael (2007). 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 specialised audiovisual-translation training.

Another useful basis for specialised training in audiovisual translation can be seen in various publications on audiovisual translation teaching. In the last decade, these have usually emphasised the need for interconnecting the teaching process with translation practice and trying to specify the market needs and requirements. Also, the very famous publication *The Didactics of Audiovisual Translation* (2008) edited by Jorge Díaz Cintas reserves a special chapter for the training and practice world of audiovisual translation. A relation to translation practice in translation training can be also seen in the latest recommendation for translation studies programmes which pursue collaboration with professional organisations 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*). Naturally, not all universities – definitely not Slovak universities – have the opportunity to ensure trainers come from a practical environment for various economical, organisational as well as administrative reasons. In the following chapter of the article we will outline the alternative of securing practice-oriented audiovisual university training.

A specialised course on audiovisual translation at the Department of Translation Studies of the Faculty of Arts, Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia, was established in the academic year 2011/2012. The aim of this course is to introduce significant aspects of audiovisual translation as a specific type of translation and then to provide a more complex foundation in relation to the translation of dialogues, their adjustment and editing for dubbing or subtitling, and the technical processing of subtitles. The course is oriented practically and after the theoretical introduction tries to develop the specific skills and competences of an audiovisual translator-to-be. These are not always clearly defined (due to the diversity of all that can be labelled “audiovisual translation”), however, numerous impulses can be found in both foreign and domestic sources.

Regarding the competences needed for a dubbing translator, a certain basis might be found in Gregor Makarian's publication *Dabing: teória, realizácia a zvukové majstrovstvo* ("Dubbing: Theory, Realization, Sound Mastery"; 2005). There Makarian points out the importance of differentiating between the translation of audiovisual texts from the translation of literary texts, since the translation of the audiovisual text is not a final product but a foundation phase for further processing. Therefore he describes the principal requirements for the translator defined in connection to dubbing (2005, p. 50). These emphasize mainly the ability to provide an adequate interpretation, identify specific language means used in order to make a desired impression (humour, irony) and identify and interpret the characters, relations between them, environment of the story and the author's intention. Important is as well capability to transfer the qualities of the original into the translated text, to be objective and suppress personal interpretations and opinion on the original and to rephrase the original and all specifics of its style. Makarian particularly points out need to have a good sense of the Slovak language (both in written and spoken form), to avoid complicated, unclear sentences and artificial expressions and follow the natural rhythm and cadence of the dialogues in the original 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, ability to empathise with the mental processes of the character and at least a working knowledge of the language of the original (2005, p. 54).

Makarian's thesis related to the interpretation and elaboration of a translation text might be as well applied in the case of subtitling. Another point of view is, for instance, presented in Marleu's (1982) and Delabastita's (1989) classification of crucial aspects of subtitling, which are introduced by Jorge Díaz Cintas (2009) in relation to possible communication strategies in subtitling. These can be introduced in relation to five main aspects, including:

- linguistic aspect (communication possibilities at the linguistic level)
- psychological aspect (influencing translator's choice of what is transferred into target environment, how and why)
 - artistic-aesthetic aspect (aesthetic function)
 - technological aspect (which defines mainly the constraints and limits of transferred meaning)
 - semiotic and cultural-communication aspect (defining the translator's decision on what is transferred into the target environment, and how and why in order to provide desired culture-communication expression value).³

These aspects reflect the main areas on which translation competences should be developed in the case of subtitling training. Furthermore, other specifications must be added – those would refer mainly to text compression and segmentation. What can also not be omitted are particular computer skills, since – contrary to traditional approaches – technical mastering of subtitles is currently very often one of the essential tasks of the translator, since the market has lately preferred translators to provide more complex services. Miroslav Pošta, Czech theoretician and subtitling practitioner also argues that the technical parameters of subtitles are closely related to the proc-

ess 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” (Pošta, 2011, p. 11). A translator thus 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” (ibid). This, however makes one think about the parameters of the translation task, which are obviously widening and 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 (Janecová 2012), 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.)

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. We focus on this aspect also in our former research on teaching audiovisual translation.⁴ This was in our case established on various levels of cooperation via several seminars and workshops with expert professionals from practice (e.g. events organised 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. a 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 helpful 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, specialised training within a separate course included in the translation studies programme study plan took place. Besides covering 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 future film-makers were sent for translation of the screenplay, dialogues and 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. Such cooperation ensured valuable results in the form of:

- practical experience on both sides
- reciprocal education in the cooperation of future translators and future filmmakers
- 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.

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 it will contribute to the education of a new generation of translators who might increase the quality of the translation process in future audiovisual works.

CONCLUSION

In spite of the fact that the number of audiovisual products of foreign origin released in Slovakia is incomparably higher than the amount of domestic production, it could be claimed that the academic milieu has neglected this area of study for quite a long time. Although the approach of the Slovak school of translation is demonstrated in partial works or by knowledgeable theoreticians and practitioners of translation, a complex work of monographic character regarding this specific area is still lacking. The presented article therefore provides an overview on the most significant findings related to the translation of audiovisual texts home and abroad and proposes future areas of academic interest. It outlines and ponders upon borders of audiovisual translation which have lately shifted in the area of academic research, translation practice and consequently in the area of training and education. With respect to this, the article focuses mainly on the challenges of educating and training translation studies trainees interested in translation for audiovisual media.

NOTES

¹ Translated by the authors.

² Translated by the authors.

³ First four aspects were introduced in MARLEAU, Lucien. Les sous-titres: un mal nécessaire. In: META. ISSN 0026-0452, 1982, roč. 27, č. 3, . 271–285, the fifth semiotic and culture-communication aspect was added in DELABASTITA, Dirk. Translation and Mass Communication: Film and TV Translation as Evidence of Cultural Dynamics. In: Babel. ISSN 0521-9744, 1989, roč. 35, č. 4, s. 193–218.

⁴ See also: Janecová 2012; Janecová – Želonka 2012.

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AUDIOVIZUÁLNY PREKLAD – DABING A TITULKOVANIE NA SLOVENSKU

Audiovisual text. Dubbing. Subtitling. Communication Theory. Borders of Audiovisual Translation. History of Audiovisual Translation in Slovakia and its Present State. Didactics of Audiovisual Translation.

Audiovizuálny text. Dabing. Titulkovanie. Komunikačná teória. Hranice audiovizuálneho prekladu. Didaktika audiovizuálneho prekladu.

V príspevku sa zamýšľame nad vymedzením audiovizuálneho prekladu ako špecifického typu prekladu a snažíme sa zmapovať existujúce východiská domácej teoretickej bázy súvisiacej s prekladom audiovizuálnych textov. Zároveň predstavujeme i novšie prístupy v oblasti teórie, kritiky a didaktiky audiovizuálneho prekladu na Slovensku. V príspevku taktiež prezentujeme vlastné skúsenosti z prípravy budúcich prekladateľov v danej oblasti a zamýšľame sa nad jej ďalšími perspektívami vzhľadom na osobitosti domáceho akademického i prekladateľského prostredia.

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