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Mapping the contemporary landscape of TV translation

Chiara Bucaria

Introduction

Usually a mostly invisible part of the distribution of audiovisual products across linguistic and cultural borders, translation has risen to prominence in 2020 due to a series of contingent events, which have hopefully contributed to making audiences more aware of its crucial role as a facilitator for international television and filmic content. One occurrence is the international success of the Korean-language film *Parasite* (Bong Joon-ho 2019). The film, originally distributed with subtitles for the Anglo-American market, went on to make Academy Award history in 2020 as the first non-English film to earn a best picture Oscar, as well as winning, among others, the Palme d'Or at Cannes Film Festival in 2019, and both the BAFTA and Golden Globe for best foreign-language film in 2020. The 'otherness' of *Parasite* as a product that needed linguistic and cultural mediation in order to be enjoyed by non-speakers of Korean took centre-stage at the Golden Globe Awards ceremony, when during his acceptance speech for best foreign-language film director Bong Joon-ho stated through his interpreter that 'Once you overcome the one-inch-tall barrier of subtitles, you will be introduced to so many more amazing films.' This explicit mention of the work needed to overcome language barriers in the circulation of international productions in languages other than English drew attention to the profession of subtitlers, as well as perhaps also being a not-so-veiled criticism of the instinctive aversion of certain audience segments to subtitles. Furthermore, the message concerning the importance of media translation in general was reinforced by the fact that Bong Joon-ho's speech was televised and delivered through his Korean-American interpreter, Sharon Choi, who also accompanied him all throughout the film's promotional campaign in 2019 and in the period leading up to the 2020 award season, with her presence being an integral part of press-conference and talk show interviews, including one on US TV network NBC's *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*. Choi's flawless and poised professional performance, which was praised by many and earned her her own fan base on social media, contributed to increase the visibility of professionals working in the field of media translation and to shine 'a light on interpreting, an overlooked aspect of film's promotional circuit, especially on the arthouse side' (Hoad 2020).

A second occurrence that increased the visibility of audiovisual translation processes in the first few months of 2020 was a temporary change in the offer of dubbed and subtitled TV series[1] on some subscription video on-demand (SVOD) platforms due to the SARS-Covid19 pandemic. Similarly to many other in-person services and businesses, dubbing studios had to suspend their activities during lockdown in order to limit the spread of the disease. As a consequence, episodes from a substantial number of newer, ongoing TV series normally available in Italian on Netflix, Amazon Prime Video and others (e.g. *The Walking Dead*, *Homeland*, *Westworld*, *Better Call Saul*, *This Is Us*, *Bosch*) could not be dubbed and had to be temporarily made available to viewers only in the original version with subtitles in the target language. For the same reason, the Italian free-to-air network Canale 5, chose to postpone the second part of the second season of the popular medical drama *New Amsterdam*, which was aired in its dubbed version at the beginning of June. By way of example, Netflix Italia announced this delay by attaching the following messages to the affected shows:

> Doppiaggio in arrivo. La salute dei doppiatori ha la priorità. / Potrebbe mancare l'audio in alcune lingue. La salute dei doppiatori ha la priorità.
>
> [The dubbed version is on its way. The dubbing actors' health takes precedence. / Audio tracks might be missing in some languages. The dubbing actors' health takes precedence.]

Particularly at a time when a significant percentage of the population found themselves increasingly relying on streaming/on-demand platforms for entertainment, the absence of the Italian audio track for some of the most popular TV series drew attention to the crucial role that the dubbing industry plays in the mediation and distribution of audiovisual products, including the quick turn-around that professionals in all the different phases of the dubbing process have to comply with. Therefore, although perhaps not the momentous watershed in changing attitudes and preferences towards different modes of audiovisual translation that some had initially hypothesized, perhaps the sudden and unexpected standstill of the dubbing industry contributed to increase some audience segments' awareness of the impact that audiovisual translation can have on their own personal viewing habits.

As the two previous examples show, a discussion of TV translation would be incomplete without acknowledging the fluidity and permeability that characterize the field of audiovisual translation and distribution today. Both the *Parasite* and the missing dubbing examples highlight, on the one hand, the porousness in the distribution of different kinds of media content, and, on the other, the ever-changing, ever-present nature of linguistic and cultural mediation in the contemporary media landscape. We immediately encounter a clear example of this permeability when tasked with a description of the state of the art of research and practice in TV translation. In Johnson's words 'it is no wonder that it has become harder and harder to pin down what television as a medium might be' (2019: 16) or, in essence, what are we talking about when we talk about TV translation today?

More generally, how do we define television and how do we limit the scope of our observations, both in terms of medium and content? Whereas content made available on traditional, linear networks seems like an obvious choice, how do we qualify subscription-based streaming and on demand platforms and services? Can we still call their content

'television' even if it is made available through a different kind of technology and often enjoyed by viewers through other screens than the television screen? And, more importantly for the subject at hand, do the ways in which audiovisual content is translated differ depending on whether it appears on linear or non-linear television outlets? Moreover, a parameter based on content alone, i.e. restricting the field only to genres that have traditionally populated linear TV's schedules – including, for example, series and documentaries – is not necessarily satisfactory, because there is so much more content available on digital platforms, not only in terms of original productions but also library content that is temporarily hosted on these services but was previously translated for other outlets. For example, the previously mentioned film *Parasite* has become available in Italy through the SKY on-demand library, NOW TV, and other platforms, which is a completely normal trajectory for films that had an initial theatrical release. Also, one may wonder how fansubbing should factor in in this scenario, considering that this form of amateur subtitling can be applied to TV content but, as a phenomenon, it occurs in different locations, i.e. on dedicated online platforms and subsequently on the viewers' computers or mobile screens. A similar point could be argued for YouTube clips from talk shows that are originally aired on network TV but are later uploaded online – and possibly translated – for a different audience.

Finally, perhaps a further point concerning the complexity of defining the field of TV translation should be made about the possibility to include not only television content but also the apparatuses used to deliver this content in the purview of television translation, particularly when it comes to TV apps and user interfaces (UIs) (Johnson 2020). In the contemporary mediascape, in which internet-distributed television (Lotz 2017) provides a large portion of the available content, the lines appear to have become more blurred between audiovisual translation and localization per se, since said content is embedded in apps and websites that also need full localization, which is in turn completely entangled with the adaptation of audiovisual products and needs to provide continuity with their translated versions. An increasing amount of paratextual information (see Batchelor in this volume) and metadata have therefore been added to the amount of information that needs to be made accessible to users across the world through a process of linguistic and cultural mediation, including episode summaries and highlights, the labels of the algorithm-based recommended categories appearing in individual UIs and the tags or key words describing – often in just one word or short phrase – the tone of a given audiovisual product.

For the purposes of our discussion here, a criterium based on distribution modes seems to be the most accurate in limiting the scope, because it incorporates factors that are unique to the televisual form, for example the quick turn-around with which translations have to be delivered to a commissioner for the simultaneous release of a TV series or documentary or the urgency behind news translation and synchronous modes of audiovisual translation, such as simultaneous, consecutive and sign interpreting, and respeaking for live events. This chapter will therefore be mainly concerned with modes of audiovisual translation and issues concerning them in the context of television content (thus excluding, for example, films originally adapted for a theatrical release) delivered through both linear and non-linear programming, albeit with constant attention to the often-permeable boundaries created by the interaction among genres and by similar delivery mechanisms.

The remainder of this chapter first looks at existing research, debates, and approaches to different modes of TV translation, and subsequently offers a few observations on how

more recent distribution dynamics, technological developments and consumption modes have potentially affected the processes and products of TV content adaptation. Based on the rich and multifaceted landscape of audiovisual translation described in the previous sections, the final portion of this chapter considers possible further avenues for research in the context of the global distribution dynamics of mediated TV content.

Existing research and debates on TV translation

When thinking in practical terms about the ways in which TV content is most often linguistically and culturally mediated, the three main modes that come to mind are dubbing, subtitling, and voice over. By virtue of their inherent characteristics, they have been employed traditionally for different TV genres, although their use also intersects with aspects relating to national preferences and target audiences. In very broad strokes, because of its ability to completely cover the original dialogue ('covert translation' in Gottlieb's (1994) terminology borrowed from Juliane House), dubbing has been privileged in productions and contexts in which the narrative illusion has to be prioritized, such as fictional genres, whereas subtitling is often associated with a higher level of authenticity and transparency by virtue of the fact that viewers are granted simultaneous access to the original soundtrack and its written, summarized translation ('overt translation'). A similar narrative can be seen for voice over, in which the adapted (but not lip synched) dialogue is overdubbed but the original soundtrack is faintly audible in the background and more distinctly perceptible at the beginning and end of turns (soundbites). Because of its increased authenticity and cheaper costs by comparison with dubbing, voice over has been traditionally used for non-fictional genres such as documentaries and news interviews. Simil sync is a more recent evolution of voice over that is often used for reality shows, docu-series, and lifestyle shows (Rossato 2020) and that typically involves a higher level of theatricality in the voice actors' performances. For historical, cultural, and economic reasons (O'Sullivan 2011; Dwyer 2017), countries have in the past tended to cluster around one of these modes, although the scenario has really always been more complex, with exceptions such as programmes for children being dubbed even in traditionally subtitling countries.

The early 1990s are usually considered the starting point for the more consistent body of research that led to audiovisual translation becoming the established academic discipline that we see today. A preliminary problem in trying to disentangle TV translation from other practice contexts is that, especially in earlier research, scholarship tended to either discuss audiovisual translation in general and through taxonomies relevant across the board to subtitling and/or dubbing regardless of their context of application, or to focus more prominently on cinema rather than television. This tendency might have been partly due to the close relationship between early translation studies and literature – which perhaps invited more immediate comparisons with filmic adaptations of literary works or with auteur films – and partly because television has traditionally enjoyed a lower status and perhaps been considered as less 'research worthy' or more commercial and low-brow than films. Subsequent technological advances have in the meantime contributed to making television content more readily available to scholars – first in the form of DVD boxsets and then streaming and on-demand platforms – thus perhaps partially making up for the more ephemeral nature of the television medium and allowing scholars more conveniently to collect samples for their analyses. Even in terms of the perceived quality

gap between filmic and televisual content, the last couple of decades have brought about sea changes, with TV productions often rivalling films for production value and critical acclaim. However, in their introduction to a recent collection of essays on dubbing, Ranzato and Zanotti still note the disproportion in scholarly research devoted to audiovisual translation in the context of cinema as opposed to television, particularly as far as dubbing is concerned (2019: 10).

In line with earlier scholarship on audiovisual translation in general, initial publications on dubbing and subtitling were more prescriptive in nature and were put forward both by scholars and practitioners, who could perhaps more easily bridge the gap between research and practice. Some took the form of manuals on dubbing and subtitling (e.g. Luyken et al. 1991; Ivarsson 1992; Dries 1995), highlighting best practices and trying to move towards the development of protocols in the fragmented landscape of audiovisual translation across different national contexts. Perhaps one of the best-known attempts in this direction is Ivarsson and Carroll's 'Code of Good Subtitling Practice' (1998), in which the authors (both experienced subtitlers) offered a list of general guidelines for the creation of subtitles, ranging from the need for a close correlation between film dialogue and subtitle content to the appropriateness of the register used in subtitles and the need for the spotting to 'reflect the rhythm of the film'. The code presents itself as a set of prescriptions to achieve the best possible results in subtitling, while at the same time offering a loose enough template to accommodate national standards and practices. It is also worth noting that the only audiovisual products mentioned are films ('film dialogue', 'rhythm of the film', 'end of the film'), which, albeit possibly used as an umbrella term for audiovisual texts, suggests that cinema was the default frame of reference used to discuss audiovisual translation at the time.

Over subsequent years, a more descriptive approach was adopted in most publications, thus firmly inscribing audiovisual translation in the tradition of descriptive translation studies (DTS). Searching for norms governing the adaptation of audiovisual content, most initial studies focussed mainly on dubbing and subtitling, with voice over being largely under-researched until more recently (e.g. Orero 2009; Franco et al. 2010). These approaches privileged qualitative, textual analyses in various language combinations, using marked product-oriented methodologies and often implicitly highlighting the idea of loss of meaning and nuances occurring during the translation process, for example, impacting on characterization, and diatopic and diastratic varieties. Perhaps because of its frequent representation of everyday life, from a thematic standpoint TV content has proven particularly prone to analyses of the adaptation of cultural references (Pedersen 2011; Chaume 2016; Ranzato 2016), features of oral speech or 'prefabricated orality' (Chaume 2012: 82), and humour (Zabalbeascoa 1996; Pelsmaeker & Van Besien 2002; Bucaria 2007; Delabastita 2010; Valdeón 2010).

In reflecting on the contribution of purely descriptive studies to audiovisual translation, however, some scholars have periodically noted the limitations of these approaches, with Yves Gambier famously issuing one of the first such warnings by stating that 'it is time to train researchers beyond the traditional "textual" paradigm' (Gambier 2009: 24) and again more recently regretting that the 'small-scale and descriptive nature [of case studies] might seem repetitive and incapable of offering an in-depth analysis' (Gambier & Ramos Pinto 2018: 5), albeit acknowledging the initial value of case study research in mapping the field of audiovisual translation. Similar concerns have been expressed by Dwyer, who notes that research in audiovisual translation mirrors the tendency of

translation studies to 'exhibit "micro"-preoccupations, sometimes examining issues of execution to the exclusion of context' (Dwyer 2017: 27).

Later research hinging on corpora-based studies has helped in collecting more extensive sets of data across different audiovisual products. These attempts have been valuable in their effort to incorporate quantitative analysis tools that aim to go beyond observation by the researcher that might be limited to a relatively small number of occurrences. Whereas earlier publications tended, with few exceptions (e.g. Romero Fresco 2006), to focus on filmic dialogue, more recent research has started to incorporate examples from television products. The possible contribution of corpus linguistics to audiovisual translation is seen in an easier identification of patterns occurring in large amounts of translated audiovisual text with the help of software rather than manual analysis, with the possibility of gaining insight into the translation of a wide array of (socio) linguistic phenomena, ranging from phrasal verbs to terms of address and endearment, intensifiers, and diastratic and diatopic varieties, to name but a few. A recent overview of this approach can be found in Bruti (2020), while specific examples applied to television content in different language combinations and across different modes of audiovisual translation are available, among others, in Balirano (2013), Baños (2013) and Arias-Badia (2020).

From a methodological standpoint, a significant contribution to the investigation of audiovisual translation on a larger contextual framework was offered both by multimodality and reception studies. Multimodal approaches to audiovisual translation (e.g. Taylor 2003) apply the theories originally formulated in visual semiotics by Kress & van Leeuwen (2001) and are critical of previous or alternative approaches to audiovisual translation that appear to be confined only to the verbal/linguistic aspects of the audiovisual text (for instance the written subtitles or the dubbed dialogue). The latter are seen as not paying enough attention to the complex interaction of the other semiotic elements – e.g. visual cues, gestures, sound/music, editing – as additional and equally crucial meaning-making modes. Often incorporating the multimodal transcription tool (Thibault 2000) and sometimes creating multimodal corpora (e.g. Valentini 2006), scholars adopting a systematic multimodal approach engage in frame-by-frame analyses of audiovisual products including detailed descriptions of how different semiotic modes interact with each other in a given on-screen situation and how only careful consideration of all of these interactions can lead to efficient translation.

As far as reception studies in audiovisual translation are concerned, the reader will find a more detailed overview elsewhere in this volume. However, it is worth mentioning that, before the more recent developments in this subfield brought about by eye-tracking technology, Gambier's admonitions about the lack of empirical studies based on audience reception were indeed taken on board and put into practice in a handful of sometimes overlooked, earlier studies carried out in the early 2000s that investigated the reception of dubbed and subtitled fictional TV products (Antonini et al. 2003; Antonini & Chiaro 2005, 2009; Bucaria 2005; Bucaria & Chiaro 2007). In particular, in their study on the audience reception of television programmes dubbed into Italian from multiple source languages, Antonini & Chiaro (2005, 2009) acknowledged the importance of including the perspective of viewers – i.e. the end-users of these translations – into an assessment of the quality of translated audiovisual texts. By collecting almost 200 responses through a web-based questionnaire and processing these responses through statistical methods, the authors contributed to set the stage for the kind of larger-scale, empirical research that

is advocated today. Also notable from an earlier period are Franco & Santiago Araújo's (2003) pilot study on the reception of subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing in Brazil in both fictional and factual TV programmes. Case studies and edited collections on reception studies in translation and audiovisual translation have since then noticeably grown (e.g. Federici & Walker 2018; Di Giovanni & Gambier 2018) to include other TV genres and methodologies – mostly based on eye-tracking technology – but are beyond the scope of this chapter.

As relatively recent developments in audiovisual translation research, both multimodal and reception studies have the merit of having opened up the scope of research to include context-based information in the analysis of audiovisual products – such as the interaction of various semiotic modes within the audiovisual text and the point of view of the end-users of these texts – to the point that today audiovisual translation research that does not take into consideration issues of production, distribution, and reception may come across as ultimately irrelevant. Furthermore, these approaches have fostered increasing interdisciplinarity in the field by borrowing tools and methodologies from other disciplines, such as psychology, psycholinguistics, semiotics, market research and audience studies. However, research hinging on such methodologies still appears to have a tendency to focus mainly on restricted phenomena and micro-preoccupations, rather than the larger picture and the contexts of production, distribution, and reception of translated audiovisual texts, which have, on the other hand, received occasional attention from disciplines such as (global) media studies and sociology (e.g. Barra 2012; Kuipers 2015). No doubt due at least in part to the expensive and time-consuming nature of both multimodal and reception research on a larger scale, these approaches could benefit from more across-the-board projects, perhaps allowing scholars to zoom in on the more practical applications, for example in terms of translator training and work-flow improvement, that some of these studies have already theoretically envisioned.

Newer dynamics in audiovisual distribution and adaptation

The large number of edited collections and special issues on aspects of audiovisual translation published just in the last few years (e.g. Baños-Piñero & Díaz Cintas 2015; Gambier & Ramos Pinto 2018; Di Giovanni & Gambier 2018; Pérez-González 2019; Ranzato & Zanotti 2019; Bogucki & Deckert 2020) could be seen both as an indication of the renewed interest in the adaptation of more recent and topical audiovisual content by academics and as the discipline's constant need to keep current with the new technological developments that inform the production, distribution, and consumption of this audiovisual content in its linguistically and culturally mediated forms. Over the last 15–20 years, the multiplication of platforms and services for the delivery of audiovisual content has gone hand in hand with an exponential increase in the amount of content to be mediated and localized for target audiences and with the use of multiple audiovisual translation modes for the same products. Following a shift that had initially started with DVDs and later with the digital switchover, audiences have now gained easier access to audiovisual content both in source-language and mediated versions, to the point that several scholars have noted that the traditional distinction between subtitling, dubbing, and voice over countries has now become more simplistic and inaccurate than ever (e.g. Dwyer 2017, Chiaro 2019).

From the viewers' standpoint, more and easier access to multiple versions of the same content has meant not only that consumption options have increased, but also that it has become easier to compare source- and target-language versions, so that not only subtitling can now be said to be a 'vulnerable' mode of audiovisual translation (Díaz Cintas 2010: 346) exposed to criticism from viewers in terms of perceived mistakes or inaccuracies in the translation (Dollerup 1974). Because viewers can easily switch from source- to target-language versions, new dynamics have also started to emerge involving a sense of increased agency on the part of viewers with respect to the work of audiovisual translation professionals. While until a relatively short time ago, especially in traditionally dubbing countries, audiences had no simultaneous access to the original and translated versions of a TV series or film and therefore played a more passive role as receivers of mediated content, fans and casual viewers alike have now become more vocal in expressing their dissatisfaction with subtitled or dubbed content that is not up to their standards. This kind of appropriation of agency has been possible in part thanks to the amplification provided by social media, a tool that fans use to critique choices made in the translation and adaptation process of certain audiovisual productions (Bucaria 2019). Similarly to fansubbing, in the recent past this kind of grassroot agency has been effective in establishing viewers as a crucial part of the audiovisual mediation process, with Netflix choosing to provide new Italian versions of some its content (e.g. in 2020 *The Half of It*[2] and *Neon Genesis Evangelion*[3]) as a consequence of fans' complaints. It remains to be seen if this newfound viewer agency will go hand in hand with an increased sense of accountability from audiovisual translation professionals, especially the ones working in the more covert modes such as dubbing.

The increased volume and availability of audiovisual content[4] – especially, but not confined to, TV platforms – paired with the faster pace required for the production of the translated versions, has significantly altered working conditions for the audiovisual translation professionals involved, for example, in the processes of dubbing and subtitling. Even before the worldwide launch of streaming platforms, for example, Sky had started the practice of airing the subtitled and dubbed versions of high-impact TV series at a reduced interval with respect to the date of airing in the country of origin (the next day for the subtitled version and one week later for the dubbed version), with the TV series *Lost* being one of the first instances in Italy in 2010. The more and more stringent time constraints became even more self-evident with the simultaneous global release of content on streaming platforms, with dubbing perhaps being the mode that has been most severely impacted because of its costliness and the length of its production process, from dialogue translation to voice-actor performance and sound mixing. The increasingly larger volume of content that necessitates mediation within very strict deadlines has had an impact on subtitling practices as well, with many subtitlers being provided with pre-timecoded and annotated templates in English (where only the target-language translation needs to be added) or being required to work with proprietary software that uses these features to speed up the process of creating, proofreading and synching subtitles.[5] Furthermore, the piecemeal work model that had gained popularity in subtitling has in some cases become a reality for dubbing as well, with cloud dubbing technology allowing practitioners to work remotely from different locations. In this respect, whether the effects of the 2020 lockdown on remote work in audiovisual translation have been temporary or have contributed only to accelerate already ongoing processes will have to be determined in the near future. What is certain is that more systematic applications of automatic subtitling, deep fake

technology, and AI in general seem just around the corner, begging the question of what the future role of media translators might be and what these possible new developments[6] might mean for audiovisual translation training programmes around the world.

The factors mentioned in the previous paragraph have raised concerns about the quality of the output of audiovisual translation, with Italian dubbing professionals, for example, expressing concerns about the ways in which the lower budgets, tighter deadlines and longer working hours imposed by juggernauts such as Netflix and Amazon have also been affecting the quality of the final products.[7] Factors affecting the quality of audiovisual translation – especially as far as subtitling is concerned – have in the past been addressed through a product-oriented approach, with readability being one of the main concerns, for example, in the form of correct text chunking and line segmentation, text condensation, and display rates (e.g. Díaz Cintas & Remael 2014, 2020). Because of the increasing number of platforms providing mediated audiovisual content, research on quality in different modes of audiovisual translation seems all the more relevant today, particularly in consideration of the fact that a number of global providers tend to centralize the process of content localization (Barra 2020), which is often carried out by local affiliates according to (presumably) unified guidelines. Pedersen (2018), for instance, looks at this aspect through a comparative analysis of guidelines provided by Netflix for interlingual subtitling in different countries/languages, finding that initial prescriptive norms from Netflix become more descriptive as they are adapted to local practices in different locales. Szarkowska et al. (2020) also set out to provide fresh insights into what quality in interlingual subtitling means to different groups of stakeholders – professional subtitlers and viewers. Their conclusions suggest that quality parameters alternately overlap and diverge depending on the different groups, noting for example that condensation tends to be more easily accepted as a quality indicator by professionals rather than viewers.

Another area that has arguably had an impact on more recent developments in audiovisual translation practice and distribution is non-professional subtitling, or fansubbing. In the context of audiovisual translation research, fansubbing has been studied as a phenomenon quite separate from 'official', professional subtitling, abiding by its own rules and sometimes coming into conflict with or even openly flouting the quality requirements and standards of commercial subtitling. Fansubbing has been described as subversive and abusive (Nornes 2007), and as an interventionist form of audiovisual translation (Pérez-González 2014) that fosters agency and displays a co-creational approach (Barra 2009) from viewers and fans, who have now the faculty of becoming active prosumers of media content. However, some of the most interesting repercussions of fansubbing have to do with the viewers' appropriation of the modes and times of audiovisual consumption years before this became commonplace through SVOD platforms. This was achieved both by offering an alternative to sometimes unsatisfactory (and/or manipulated), commercially distributed versions and by allowing for customized viewing times, regardless of the constraints of linear programming. The grassroot push from the fansubbing model also arguably contributed to the decision of some SVOD services to make high-profile TV series available in record time (Massidda 2015), which aimed at partially curbing the potential for piracy and, by extension, for the use of fansubs by viewers to counteract the delay in broadcasting. Finally, from the point of view of audiovisual translation practice, fansubbing has also been seen as shining a light on alternatives to the traditional approach to subtitling, including variations such as the positioning of written text on screen, the use of explicatory glosses for cultural references and humour, and the amount of information

appearing on screen. Pérez-González (2014: 275), for example, reflects on the positioning of titles on screen as fostering subjective spectatorial experiences and affectivity, which seems to have been recently implemented by Netflix – at least for some intralingual subtitles – by positioning text closer to the side of the screen on which the speaker appears. In terms of extra information appearing on screen in addition to subtitles, Ramos Pinto (2020) carried out a reception study on extra-titles intended as glosses on visual elements or other information that is likely to be opaque for viewers, the use of which was favourably received by the film directors and viewers that were part of her sample. Despite her study being focused on filmic rather TV products, the potential seems there for customizable applications to TV platforms as well, with Amazon Prime Video already providing an 'X-Ray' optional feature, which drawing on the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) for each scene allows viewers to access extra information, for example details and trivia on the cast.

Lastly, while an extensive overview of issues pertaining to accessibility in audiovisual translation is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is worth noting how the multiplication of available mediated versions has also included an increasing amount of subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing (SDH) and audiodescription for the blind and partially sighted. Although most streaming platforms still offer only intralingual SDH and audiodescription (with AppleTV+ being a notable exception offering in some cases interlingual audiodescription as well), this area of audiovisual translation is bound to expand even more both in terms of availability from providers of audiovisual material and of academic research (see for example the audio subtitling experiment described in Iturregui-Gallardo & Matamala 2021). Pérez-González posited in 2014 that accessibility was responsible for pushing forward new research in audiovisual translation by introducing new methodologies and approaches, for example as regards the use of eye-tracking technologies for reception studies in specific audience segments. However, it could be said that issues originally put forward in the context of accessibility have also helped in a broader sense, by offering the opportunity to partially re-conceptualize what accessibility means. Gambier and Ramos Pinto, for example, take an even more comprehensive approach to accessibility, a term which, although more frequently used 'to refer to research and practice focused on audiences with specific disabilities', should really be expanded to include 'all types of audiences and the discussion of how accessible AV products are to those audiences' (2018: 3), in other words stressing the importance of making audiovisual texts equally accessible to all viewers outside the source language and culture in which they were originally produced.

As a final consideration inspired by recent events, it should be noted that issues of accessibility on television were also brought back to the international stage as a consequence of the change in administrations in the USA in January 2021. While the US National Association of the Deaf had previously complained about the lack of American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation at Coronavirus briefings during the Trump administration (Campisi 2020), all the events surrounding the inauguration of Joe Biden as the new president of the United States were made accessible with SDH, audiodescription, and sign language interpreting through a companion website.[8] The White House has also announced that all press briefings will now include a sign language interpreter. The anecdote serves as a useful reminder of the fact that accessibility – and undeniably translation in general – constantly and inescapably intersects with issues of politics and policy, and with aspects of representation, power, and ideology that can never be overlooked.

Conclusion and future directions

While the intention was not to provide an exhaustive overview of all the research carried out in the area of audiovisual translation, this chapter has focussed on a selection of issues that seem particularly relevant for the content and modes offered through the television medium. The first part of the chapter contains a description of the progressively more multifaceted approaches used for the study of audiovisual translation, whereas the second part addresses the impact that more recent technological developments and distribution modes have had on the ways in which audiovisual translation is practised and accessed. What jumps out is that attention has been focused in the literature mainly on scripted genres and on the modes that are more commonly used to adapt fictional programmes, i.e. dubbing and subtitling. Considerably less attention continues to be devoted, for example, to voice over in reality shows or documentaries – despite the fact that the offer of these genres has significantly increased on streaming and on-demand platforms – and to news translation (Bielsa & Bassnett 2009; Conway 2010), for example in the form of translations performed on air both by professional (media interpreters) and non-professional figures (news hosts or interviewers). The use of live subtitling through speech recognition software (respeaking) for live events is mostly limited to intralinguistic translation, although research suggests that the potential is there for more extended applications to interlingual settings as well (Romero-Fresco 2011; Szarkowska et al. 2016; Romero-Fresco & Pöchhacker 2017).

Less academic attention has been paid so far to newer iterations, such as the combined use of different forms of audiovisual translation in the same product. Whereas some documentaries seem to have been precursors in the concomitant use of dubbing or voice over for the off-screen narration and subtitles for on screen interviews, Poland has now reportedly introduced TV productions featuring voice over and subtitles for the benefit of deaf and hard of hearing viewers simultaneously (Łabendowicz 2018). Furthermore, the increasing number of multilingual TV productions (see for example Valdeón 2005; Corrius & Zabalbeascoa 2019) which for authenticity purposes make use of a substantial amount of dialogue in languages other than English – *Narcos*, *Giri/Haji*, *Ramy*, *Killing Eve*, to name but some of the most recent cases – should spark renewed interest in the ways in which different forms of audiovisual translation interact on screen, in issues of language policy, and perhaps in the possible role that similar productions, in which the main foreign language is usually dubbed and the secondary one(s) are subtitled, might have in normalizing subtitling even more for viewers who have so far been exposed to it more infrequently.

On a broader level, the ever-increasing customization of the consumption of audiovisual products is bound to keep sparking scholarly interest in the specificities of adapting TV content as opposed to content for other media, for example in terms of audience studies. More custom-made viewing experiences mean that several platforms (Amazon Prime Video, Apple TV+, and Disney+ among others) already offer customizable options for subtitles – including variations in font, size, background, and style – and a Google Chrome plugin (Super Netflix) allows viewers to activate additional functionalities on Netflix (among which the optimization of video quality and speed and the option to visualize subtitles external to the platform), while a separate plugin (Language Learning with Netflix) helps language learners by visualizing on screen two sets of subtitles in different languages for the same product. Similarly to what Díaz Cintas & Remael (2014) had

noted about subtitles for the DVD industry, SVOD services have now normalized even more the viewers' ability to easily stop and 'rewind' the video at any point if necessary for their understanding of culture-specific references (which, if opaque, can be easily looked up on the nearest mobile device) or simply to re-read subtitles that are too fast or too long or both. While certainly not making for the smoothest viewing experience in many circumstances, these affordances are among the many variables that should perhaps be accounted for, in some form or other, in the experimental design of reception studies going forward, as they seem to have become an increasingly more defining part of the audiences' experience when enjoying and engaging with TV content. Finally, from the broader perspective of an investigation of viewers' preferences for certain audiovisual translation modes over others, a study of variables that might impact their choices cannot be limited to personal preferences, device, knowledge of original language, or age, but might also want to include habits such as binge-watching, second screening – which might distract attention from the main screen as viewers engage simultaneously with other devices – and the level of compromise that has to be achieved if watching, either in person or by means of shared remote viewing features, with family members, spouses or friends who do not share the same preferences.

From a workflow/process-oriented perspective, there seems to be room for more systematic ethnographic research aiming, for example, to map the working conditions of audiovisual translation practitioners and to investigate if and how these change depending on the urgency of airing/release deadlines. While streaming services are usually associated with the simultaneous release of their content across international territories and the strain that this model might cause to the audiovisual translation industry (see previous section), several platforms (e.g. Apple TV+ and Disney+) have adopted or reintroduced weekly releases for TV series' episodes or a hybrid model involving the simultaneous release of the first few episodes followed by weekly episodes on the same day of the week. As newer distribution models emerge and begin to coexist with older ones, scholars should take notice of such diversification and integrate these variables in their study of processes and quality standards. Furthermore, in a field in which, similarly to other areas of translation, resources for automatization are improving and becoming more reliable, more research would be welcome on how this might impact the work of audiovisual translation professionals and, unavoidably, the focus of audiovisual translation training programmes. While audiovisual translation professionals and stakeholders[9] are pondering the extent to which automatization and AI will impact the profession, trainers might also legitimately consider the possibility to diversify curricula even to a greater extent than in the past, not only by including training in the use of these new technologies but also by strengthening revision, post-editing and project management skills. In an increasingly globalized scenario in which audiovisual translation appears to be part of more centralized localization strategies and practices, training for the audiovisual translation industry might indeed have to be partially reconsidered to include managerial profiles that could potentially work more upstream in the audiovisual production and mediation process.

Other aspects that have emerged with the presence of new players in the distribution of audiovisual content have to do with issues of translation policy and directionality. For example, increased investments by streaming platforms in original productions from non-English-speaking countries around the world are contributing to the circulation of a possibly unprecedented amount of TV content ready for global distribution in a plurality of different source languages, some of which would probably be considered as minority

languages. Given the traditionally dominant position of English as the main source language in audiovisual translation, this emerging trend is likely to open up opportunities for scholars to expand research into language combinations that have been so far rarely explored – at least on a larger scale and as far as TV content is concerned – particularly with English now becoming the target language in dubbing for a number of international productions. Connected to this, further explorations could also come from looking at audiovisual translation through the lens of translation policy, involving, for instance, which language options and translation modes are available for which content, on which platform and in which territories. What diatopic varieties of English, Spanish or French are chosen to dub or subtitle the Polish *The Woods* or the Islandic in *The Valhalla Murders*? On what factors are these decisions based on a corporate level? Accessibility issues in the broadest sense also fall into the purview of the politics of audiovisual translation and may touch upon the reduced availability of interlingual audiodescription options for certain products or the lack of differentiation between English-language closed captions (CC or SDH) and subtitles for hearing audiences, which can be observed on most platforms. One might wonder if, ultimately, the availability (or lack thereof) of multiple audiovisual translation options could become – if it isn't already – a deciding factor in the streaming wars, with consumers choosing to subscribe only to the services that best cater to their needs and preferences. However, in sharing O'Sullivan's view that 'thinking about translation policy can open up research in audiovisual translation and encourage interdisciplinary research, for instance, with film and media studies' (2018: 83), one has to necessarily acknowledge the complexity of the task at hand, especially in consideration of the notoriously protective attitude of some streaming services with regards to their viewership data.

Lastly, when stopping to acknowledge the incredibly rich and multifaceted landscape of linguistic and cultural mediation in the context of television today, it seems clear that the discipline could benefit from expanding the object of study to the increasingly interconnected area of audiovisual localization, particularly to the adaptation of the paratextual information surrounding TV content. Coming full circle with the introduction to this chapter, considerations on what we mean by TV translation inevitably lead us to include paratexts under this label – for example in the form of marketing campaigns, trailers, teasers, episode summaries and programme descriptions – as fundamental meaning-making elements that have become essential to the viewers' selection and experience of audiovisual products. Although audiovisual paratexts are still unfrequently studied, more systematic research on these elements could represent a further step beyond the strictly textual level, thus potentially deepening our knowledge of the mechanisms behind audiovisual adaptation at large.

Further reading

- Díaz Cintas, J. & Massidda, S. (2020) 'Technological advances in audiovisual translation' in O'Hagan, M. (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Translation and Technology*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 255–270.

This chapter provides a detailed and updated description of the most recent technological developments in the practice of audiovisual translation and includes a wide range of examples.

- Grainge, P. & Johnson, C. (2015) *Promotional Screen Industries*. London and New York: Routledge.

Although not about translation per se, this volume offers detailed information and case studies on the promotional mechanisms behind the circulation of audiovisual products, which provide crucial context for audiovisual scholars as well.

- Iturregui-Gallardo, G. & Matamala, A. (2021) 'Audio subtitling: dubbing and voice-over effects and their impact on user experience', *Perspectives*, 29(1), pp. 64–83.

An empirical perspective on audio subtitling as a lesser known and studied mode for TV localization in the field of interlingual accessibility.

- Li, J. (2020) 'Political TV documentary subtitling in China: a critical discourse analysis perspective', *Perspectives*, 28(4), pp. 554–574.

A much-needed contribution to a deeper understanding of issues relating to power and ideology involved in the production process and products of subtitled political TV documentaries in China.

- Rossato, L. (2020). 'Reality television and unnatural dialogues: trends in the Italian audio-visual translation of factual programming', *The Journal of Popular Television*, 8(3), pp. 277–283.

The article provides an overview and selected examples of the simil-synch technique, a relatively new and under-researched mode of AVT.

Notes

1 For the sake of convenience, the word 'series' will be used throughout this chapter even when the specification 'series and serials' would be more appropriate to indicate a differentiation in genres.
2 'Grosso guaio a Schifohamish. Il doppiaggio Netflix "fatto in casa" di L'altra metà (2020)'. Last accessed 28/01/2021. https://doppiaggiitalioti.com/2020/05/19/grosso-guaio-a-schifohamish-il-doppiaggio-netflix-fatto-in-casa-di-laltra-meta-2020
3 '#Evaflix – Dopo un anno ecco il nuovo adattamento italiano di Evangelion su Netflix'. Last accessed 28/01/2021. http://distopia.altervista.org/2020/07/evaflix-nuovo-adattamento-italiano-2020-evangelion-netflix
4 The European Audiovisual Observatory's 2018–2019 yearbook states that in both the EU and the US 'SVOD is driving the growth of pay-service revenues: it accounted for 75% of 2016–2017 growth in the US, and 58% in Europe, and for an even greater proportion in terms of subscribers growth in both regions'.
5 Netflix's version of this is called the Originator tool.
6 For more on recent developments in audiovisual translation technology see Díaz Cintas & Massidda (2020).
7 'I doppiatori italiani contro Amazon e Netflix: indetto stato di agitazione'. Last accessed 28/01/2021. https://movieplayer.it/news/doppiatori-italiani-contro-amazon-netflix-stato-agitazione_64114

8 https://bideninaugural.org/ accessibility/?fbclid=IwAR0YA6bdSJGHsAQHUJuZC4cCGrVUEt6uZuk7zc6KS2v-C2sRd6COQyJdqZs
9 See, for example, the discussion panel at the 2020 Languages & the Media Virtual Event held on 15 December 2020.

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