

The study of dialect as an opportunity to redefine what we mean by multimedia translation studies

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Abstract & Keywords

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The interest shown in the Special Issue on "The Translation of Dialects in Multimedia" which appeared in *inTRAlinea* in 2010, has been such that we have decided to extend the discussion on these themes with a second Special Issue which also deals with issues concerning the translation within a multimedia environment of "dialect elements". By dialect elements we mean those elements that originate from more or less codified minority languages that are not officially recognised, or only partially so, but that bear important literary and cultural traditions and that are increasingly subject to a process of *patoisement* or creolization, such as many Italian and German dialects.

The Call for papers for this issue invited proposals on

a complex, interdisciplinary subject area involving linguistics, communication studies, film studies and translation studies as well as other areas of cultural studies, sociology and other disciplines. The main topics to be covered include dubbing, subtitling films in dialect and linguistic varieties; theatre translation; cultural transfer processes in the characteristics of dialects; archaisms, regionalisms, varieties in the continuum between dialect and standard language; diglossia (national language and regional or local language; 'official' and 'non official' language); the use of new technologies in the translation of dialects.

We have selected those that we felt sought an empirical and theoretical approach, with both sociolinguistic and didactic implications, and that went beyond the mere *case study* which has been the dominant mode in the last 20 years for articles on multimedia, screen or audiovisual translation.

If, on the one hand, the descriptive approach of most translation studies from the 1990s onwards proved to be particularly fruitful, especially in the area commonly known as multimedia or screen translation, leading to a wealth of empirical studies in a wide variety of languages that made it possible to better understand the translation processes in this field and to highlight many of its problems – with, it must be said, a seemingly endless round of papers illustrating the "mistakes" made in the translation/localization of some film or television series; on the other hand, we have to face the uncomfortable fact that this immense collective scientific endeavour seems to have had no discernable impact on the industry, as is proved by the many recent case studies that, incredibly, continue to be produced along exactly the same lines as those of 20 years ago. Despite the efforts made to involve professional representatives in this academic endeavour, such as the associations of dubbing actors and dialogue adaptors for example, the translators, adaptors and subtitlers of the cinema and television industries do not appear to have paid any serious attention to the work that has been carried out and, as they are crushed by the increasing pressures of neo-liberal work methods and business models that place the time-profit equation above all other priorities, the gap between the study of translation and its professional practice has actually got wider, with scholars relegated to their academic observatories and seemingly unable to influence the professional world with the results of their research.

At which point it seems natural to ask whether there is any sense in continuing to produce a certain kind of case study and to suggest that a more fruitful approach, that could enhance the potential for transfer into the profession, might lie in some of the opportunities and stimulus that dialect translation, and other more literary "multimedia" areas such as stage translation, could provide. In these areas, despite the limitations currently being imposed on the cultural industries, there is still room for the observations and suggestions of the translation scholar to find concrete application within professional practice.

In this context it will be necessary to actually redefine what we mean by "multimedia", limiting it to certain fields, before it becomes so completely inflated that it loses all meaning. We need to ask ourselves what kind of research can usefully be included within the remit of this term, taking into account the terminological and substantive competition of neighbouring research areas such as *multimodal* and *multidimensional* translation. It seems fair to say that, as long as languages continue to change and evolve and produce varieties, of whatever degree, there will continue to be studies on the implications of these "dialects" for translation; however, it is more difficult to see multimedia translation studies continuing to prosper if their focus is not adequately circumscribed and if they continue to be so self-referential and detached from, and essentially ignored by, the professional world they address.
