



Multilingualism and Audiovisual Translation: New Grounds for Research on Ideology

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ABSTRACT

The rise of intercultural and multilingual cinema poses special difficulties for the localization of films through dubbing, subtitling and other translation solutions. Apart from the necessary examination of translation problems and the description of current solutions, linguistic plurality, in its relationship with intercultural dynamics and power relations, provides a fertile ground for discussion on the way audiovisual translation interacts with questions of identity construction, race and gender issues, and, ultimately, on the way it builds, endorses or perhaps contests a particular view of difference that is never neutral, innocent or without consequences. This paper proposes two ideas that can serve as a framework for critical analysis in this area: the ubiquity of translation and its role as a negotiator of difference.

KEYWORDS : Audiovisual translation; multilingualism; ideology; identity; cultural difference

Introduction

The last two decades have witnessed a growing decentralization of cultural production in general and of the global film industry in particular. In terms of scholarly discussion, the context of a globalized world has brought about the theoretical exploration of such concepts as transnational, intercultural and polyglot cinema (Marks, 2000; Naficy, 2001; Shohat & Stam, 2003; Wahl, 2005), which call into question many of the principles that have traditionally governed mainstream cinema: a strong tendency towards cultural uniformity and a corresponding preference for linguistic homogeneity.

The use of multilingualism in film, not only as an accessory instrument for characterization but as an integral part of the thematic content of audiovisual productions, has long been considered a narrative technique associated with experimental cinema or countercultural aesthetic movements. However, linguistic plurality has made its way into some of the most influential films of recent years: the acclaimed *Babel* (2006), the Oscar-winning *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) or one of the last productions of Quentin Tarantino, *Inglorious Basterds* (2009), are just some examples from a long list of titles. Similarly, the space given to languages other than English in U.S. popular television series has begun to gain breadth at a dizzying pace, thereby contributing to reflect in a more nuanced way the North-American social spectrum and the global multicultural scenario of our times.

As far as Translation Studies are concerned, the ongoing proliferation of filmic representations of linguistic and cultural diversity poses questions as to how all these new phenomena are affecting current practice in dubbing, subtitling and other forms of screen translation. Is the traditional translation paradigm, based on the conceptualization of a linguistic transposition between two virtually uniform cultures/languages still valid? Can dubbing render multilingualism? Is subtitling a better choice? Are these two translation modes mutually exclusive? Both the young field of audiovisual translation theory and the more established area of translation practice within the film industry, which until recently seemed to have assigned a marginal place to the problem of multilingualism, have begun to adapt to a situation that can hardly be considered a mere deviation from the norm.

As time goes by, it becomes clearer that "talk of multilingualism no longer raises eyebrows but is seen, quite matter-of-factly, as a sign of the times" (Delabastita & Grutman, 2005: 11). The growing intensity of research in this respect, as suggested by a series of recent studies devoted entirely to the analysis of the translation of multilingual and intercultural films (Heiss, 2004; Corrius & Zabalbeascoa, 2011; Diaz Cintas, 2011; Higes Andino, 2014; Sanz Ortega, 2015) is a testament to this, as are the new trends and methods increasingly used in the field of professional practice, and more specifically dubbing, which show a partial abandonment of conventional linguistic homogeneity and standardization in favour of more innovative strategies such as the intralingual translation of foreign languages, the recreation of accents and dialects or the inclusion of other solutions such as subtitling for the translation of certain languages, characters or scenes. All these procedures reflect an attempt to represent diversity in a more com-

plex manner and invite researchers to dig deeper into the dynamics of cultural representation in AVT. Apart from raising the issue of fairly technical difficulties and their plausible solutions, the upswing of linguistic plurality in film and television provides a fertile ground for discussion on the way translation and multilingualism interact with questions of identity construction, race and gender intersectionality, and, ultimately, on the way they build, endorse or perhaps contest a particular view of *difference* that is never neutral, innocent or without consequences. In our opinion, there are two basic premises that can help pave the way for conducting critical analysis in this area: the ubiquity of translation and its role as a negotiator of difference.

Translation is already there

Cinema has proved to be a powerful medium for articulating discursive constructions of identity, and on many occasions it has done so by means of translation mechanisms. O'Sullivan provides plenty of evidence to demonstrate that "translation enters the picture even before a film is subtitled, dubbed or voiced-over" (2011, p. 11). To name just one additional example, the film *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada* (2005), which originated from a bilingual, retranslated screenplay, clearly shows the interdependence between cinematic narrative and translation, especially in the case of multilingual films, as his director's words suggest:

Guillermo wrote the screenplay in Spanish and had it translated by somebody he often works with. I hatched a plan to hire two other translators so I would have three English translations before I began to put together my own (Jones, 2006, para. 4).

Language variation, accomplished through various (non-)translation strategies, plays a paramount role in the transnational scenario of the film and is central to its revision of power relations at the Mexico-United States border. However, without prejudice to the relevance of translation in multilingual manifestations such as Jones' film, it is also important to note that translation pervades even monolingualism, i.e. conventional English-only filmmaking. In fact, we can resort to translation as an explanatory factor of what Shohat & Stam (1985, p. 36) highlighted:

In Hollywood, the Greeks of *The Odyssey*, the Romans of *Ben Hur*, Cleopatra of Egypt, Madame Bovary of France, Count Vronsky of Russia, Helen of Troy and Jesus of Nazareth all had as their *lingua franca* the English of Southern California.

In this regard, several authors have illustrated some of the strategies most commonly used in Hollywood to justify the fact that foreign characters express themselves in English, appealing to the so-called 'suspension of disbelief' on part of the audience. Kozloff (2000, p. 81) mentions a kind of "self-dubbing" or "magical translation" that may be tacitly present since the beginning of the film or otherwise be introduced after an audio fade; Bleichenbacher (2008, pp. 55-90) refers to these mechanisms as "replacement strategies", which he classifies under a number of categories including the complete elimination of the foreign language, its evocation or its partial presence; and O'Sullivan

(2011, p. 36) shows, through several examples, the recurring 'device of the English learner' as a convenient tool for allowing foreign characters into the plot.

Acknowledging the importance of translation within the original version, be it monolingual or multilingual, and its role in processes of identity construction or hegemonic legitimization is crucial for a thorough understanding of the way linguistic diversity operates both in the source and target texts.

Negotiating difference

The above considerations on the intervention of more or less explicit translation processes in cinema lead to the relativization of the integrity of the source text and of its regard as an unabridged production. In overtly multilingual films, the implications of the fragmentation of the original version are particularly straightforward. 'Accented cinema', as Naficy puts it, is made "in the interstices and astride several cultures and languages" (2001, p. 23), which means translators of such films will find it especially difficult to locate a single landmark from which to start their journey towards the designated target culture. Instead, they will encounter an unfinished multilateral conversation inserted in a web of intercultural dynamics and power relations that are being reinforced or challenged through language choices, among other filmic devices. In other words, the role of the translator is no longer that of a "mediator between two different poles, but her and his activities are inscribed in cultural overlappings which imply interactive and refractive difference" (Wolf, 2008, p. 15).

In the process of (re-)translating this kaleidoscopic scenario, the translator and other decision-makers involved in the process of film localization will make choices that will inevitably alter to some extent the network of interacting identities that are being represented. As long as these decisions always have political and ethical consequences, analyzing the translation of multilingual films goes hand in hand with examining the ideological implications of the variety of strategies involved. After scrutinizing the way multilingualism affects cultural representation in the original version, the question of how audiovisual translation further intervenes in identity construction calls for an extensive interdisciplinary research effort.

Conclusions

On the basis that fictional audiovisual narratives are imbued with translation, particularly in the case of multilingual films, and that translation stands as a complex and sensitive act of negotiating difference, the exploration and problematization of the decisions made in the localization of polyglot productions can lead to a deeper understanding of the agency of multimodal translation in the conceptualization of interculturalism. A multidisciplinary approach is an indispensable tool for this purpose: cultural theory and its exploration of difference and identity (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1990), translation theory within the framework of the cultural turn, or film studies in its Bakhtinian approach to language difference (Stam, 1992) are some of the possibilities at hand.

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