

## Subtitling as Translation: An Introduction

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### Introduction

As an ever-growing field of research, translation from the 1980's onwards showed interest in developing a new discipline called the 'Audiovisual translation' by transmitting information and ideas from a source language (SL) to target language (TL) in the form of visual. Though audiovisual translation is said to be a late entry in the field of research, it has grabbed the interest of many scholars and researchers instantly. The main reason for the emergence of this new discipline in the field of translation is because of the moved interest of the people from print to visual, to learn new reflections of the society and also other languages in particular and their culture. It all started by the propagation and distribution of the audiovisual materials in the society. The environment we live in is surrounded by all media like television, cinema, theatre, DVD's and CD's, internet, computers, mobile phones, online Series which embark us to watch everything visually and literally makes use of it not only for entertainment, but also to comprehend and learn other language, culture, ideology etc.

Dizas Cintas (2010), professor and researcher of audiovisual translation, defines, Audiovisual translation as "it refers to the translation of products in which the verbal dimension is supplemented by elements in other media" (7). In other terms it is also called as 'screen translation' or 'multimedia translation', as it involves two codes image and sound as major functions in it. The main aim of the audiovisual translation is to reach the audience who are in need of understanding the visual content of the source language with clear meaning in the target language. Scholars like Gambier (1994) and Dias Cintaz (1999) defined more than ten different ways of translating audiovisual programmes, in which only three main categories are taken into consideration as frequently in use and they are subtitling, dubbing and voice-over.

### Subtitling and Its Categorisation

Subtitling as translation is considered as the most preferable option on screen translation than dubbing and voice-over. It is defined as written text that displays under the screen for the ongoing dialogue spoken by a person/actor/anchors/news reader etc., on the screen. It has three main components: the spoken word, the image and the subtitles, in which the viewers are able to

acquire the synchronisation of all the three completely, determines the basic characteristics of subtitling. Initially subtitling is developed for the benefit of the hard of hearing people who are in need of understanding the oral content spoken on the screen in the form of written but later on it was developed for the learners who are eager to learn new language and culture.

Subtitling is mainly followed under the parameters of linguistic and technical in which they are categorized into: intralingual subtitling, interlingual subtitling, bilingual subtitling, open and closed subtitling.

***Intralingual subtitling:*** this type of subtitling mainly deals with the same language transfer of meaning from the audio to written especially for the hard-of hearing, hearing impaired people and for the same language learners for the better understanding of the dialects. It is also formulated with the paralinguistic information's associated with the plot in which the deaf cannot access to the soundtracks like telephone ringing, door opening and closing, vehicle horn or an engine sound, knock at the door etc.,. It not only concentrates on the oral transformation but also other physical actions that are relevant to the background understanding of the content. Apart from this, in recent times this type of subtitling is also used in *karaoke* in which the songs or movie musicals appear on the screen along with it for the benefit of the viewers.

***Interlingual subtitling:*** it deals with the transfer of meaning from one language to another language. This type was a way forward to the other type as this follows the traditional form of translating from one language to another. But the emergence of interlingual subtitling is because of discovery of DVD's which first globalised subtitling from one language movie to another language movie. Like intralingual subtitling, this type is also mainly devised for the benefit of the hard of hearing people and also for the benefit of the foreign language learners.

***Bilingual subtitling:*** This type is mostly produced in geographical areas where two languages are spoken. It is devised for the benefit of the people speaking the two different languages, in which the subtitles are given in the screen in both the languages. As subtitles are done up to two lines, each line is dedicated to each language in such cases. For example, in country like Belgium two communities like Walloon and Flemish live and for their benefit, subtitles of both the languages are given on the screen. Another situation where bilingual subtitles are used is in international film festivals. In order to attract the wider audience many of the countries are screened with two sets of subtitles, one set in common language to all i.e. in English to satisfy the need of the audience, directors, producers, distributors and viewers who come from all over the world and the another set of subtitles in the language of the country where the film festival takes place.

While the above three types were considered as major types of subtitling, the other types like open and closed subtitling are used in the case of technical parameters in which the open subtitles are projected onto the image and there is no option to turn off them from the screen and their presents will be there throughout the movie. In the case of closed subtitling, there will be an option for the viewers whether to appear or hide of the subtitles on the screen.

### **Subtitling: The Constrained Mode of Translation**

Subtitling as a screen translation differs a lot from text translation. For example, to explain a word or a meaning of a sentence it is added in the explanatory part or given in the footnotes in a text. But in the case of subtitling there is no room for footnotes as spatial and temporal limitations plays a major constraint. The procedure of doing subtitles for a movie or a documentary has its own specifications, rules and criteria to follow in which the time, space, font, omission of lexical items from original, linguistic differences and cultural reference are the challenges to be solved in the process. Thus, Jan Ivarsson and Mary Carroll (1998) the famous researchers of screen translation enumerated a directory of procedures that can be followed in the process of subtitling. The following are some of the Procedures and codes used in the process of subtitling which were consider as an obstruction to the Subtitler that need to be strictly followed when compared to text translation where no such rules are not to be strictly followed by the translator.

1. The number of lines should not exceed two lines, as the space for the subtitles is only left at the bottom of the screen. The lines should be either left intended or centred at the bottom of the screen.
2. The font size of the text should appear small and not too large as it may be a distraction for the viewers.
3. The maximum time the subtitles can appear on the screen is limited to no longer than six seconds and the number of characters for an image is more or less thirty seven characters.
4. Subtitles of the target language should synchronize along with the source language dialogues appropriately or else it would create perplexity to the viewers. Synchronization between the image and sound is the major formula to be abided in the subtitling process.
5. The start and end point of the dialogue and the subtitle should be done methodically; if it varies the viewers may miss the flow and the understanding of dialogues that is spoken on the screen.
6. If the subtitles of the target language (TL) goes more than two lines, the sentence should be cut down to two sentences, but the meaning and syntax should not vary and should be conveyed as exactly to the audience.
7. The subtitles for the dialogues of two persons should be presented with hyphen in front of each dialogue and names of the person are not needed to be mentioned. Repetition of names and phrases are not needed to be subtitled.

8. In terms of consecutive subtitles, at least a ¼ second gap should be left between them.
9. While cutting the subtitles into two lines it should not interrupt any phrase and it should also be coherent and grammatically correct as it is a model for literacy too.
10. Apart from the textual content of the subtitle, other conventional expressions and punctuations also should be added in it for the better understanding of the emotions of the source language.

While the codes play the major part in devising the process of subtitling, the major constraints it holds were the linguistic and cultural references. In the case of text translation translating a word or the concept from SL to TL can be done through reference in footnotes and the translator is aware of not to miss any original information of the source text (ST) as it is in the target text (TT). But in the case of subtitling, due to the spatial restriction the source language (SL) information's are often omitted or sometimes totally reduced in order to deliver the oral to written in the stipulated space of two lines. Thus, this way of omission creates a great loss in the transfer of information from SL to TL which leads to many linguistic and cultural problems.

### **Subtitling Vs. Dubbing**

Next to subtitling, the most preferable mode of audiovisual translation used worldwide is dubbing. In terms of geography countries like France, Germany, Italy and Spain prefer dubbing and countries like Greece, Portugal, The Netherland prefers subtitling. But there is a historical reason of adopting any one kind of mode. The countries with high level of illiteracy rate prefer dubbing as people feel difficult in reading the subtitles, and the other major reason for opting subtitling over dubbing by many countries is because the dubbing is some ten times more expensive than subtitling. When compared to subtitling, dubbing demands more cost and also time in its process. While subtitling can be done by an individual at any place and at any time, dubbing involves a whole lot of people for each character's voice-over in the film. It also takes much time in recording and re-recording and at the same time it also faces many semantic and syntax problems in its process.

### **Conclusion**

Though subtitling came into existence only in the twenties, the establishment it made among the global audience is enormous. This new advancement in the field of translation has created a great impact among the people to impart knowledge of various languages and to know their way of living, food, culture, ideology, habits and exchanging of expressions and thinking from one language to another. It paved way to the globalization of media and its importance among the people. Though countries like United kingdom, Spain, Germany, Italy, United States greatly involves in designing codes and ethics in the process of subtitling, countries like India, China, Pakistan are yet in the process to satisfy the need for the development of the audiovisual translation.

Though subtitling is a recent trend in this field, it will undergo further changes in the coming years and lots of researches are being done for its development. Diaz Cintaz in her article titled *Audiovisual Translation in the third Millennium* has mentioned about the future of the audiovisual translation that “The uses of audiovisual translation are still unknown to many people’s but this mode will be the future in all field like education, professional, research and social” (206).

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