

The challenges and opportunities of audiovisual translation.

An interview with Frederic Chaume

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I.R. & S.Z.: Professor Frederic Chaume, it is a real pleasure to welcome you to *Cultus*. The title of this special issue is *Mediating Lingua-Cultural Scenarios in Audiovisual Translation*. As a leading authority in the field, what is your opinion about the power and potentialities of AVT as cross-cultural mediation?

F.C.: We are witnessing a constantly growing repertoire of contemporary film and video delivery systems, like streaming services such as Netflix, HBO, Amazon, etc. which are having a dramatic impact on younger audiences, on top of the traditional ways of consuming film and TV shows, such as cinema, TV, DVD and Blu-Ray. The ease with which audiovisual content can be viewed across national, cultural, and linguistic borders has grown exponentially. In Media Studies, academics are speaking about the notion of ‘global cinema’, understood as the intersection of “large, displaced and globalized populations of both spectators and [film] producers” (Naficy 2010: 11), a cinema that is increasingly multilingual and multicultural from the first phases of its design. Both dubbing and subtitling, as well as all accessible AVT modes, have the potential to transfer culture and mediate between different communities, and neither of them are better or worse in achieving this (Rader, Neuendorf and Skalsky, 2016). Past research did privilege subtitling over dubbing both in terms of enjoyment and recall of audiovisual content and few investigations have seriously considered the viability and potential of dubbed content. These authors found dubbing is not “worse” overall in the production of cognitive and affective outcomes. Audiovisual content is no longer monocultural, audiences are no longer monocultural, and AVT is no longer confined to using one mode, but different modes, combined when necessary, fulfilling different needs. The potential of AVT to overcome cultural barriers in the age of cosmopolitanism is more powerful than ever.

I.R. & S.Z.: In your book *Audiovisual Translation: Dubbing* (2012: 7), you stated that “[t]he distinction between dubbing and subtitling countries has become blurred” and that audiences are becoming used to different AVT modes than those to which they have been accustomed in the past. More recently, you commented (Chaume, forthcoming) on a surge of interest in dubbing in countries that had previously favoured subtitling. Would you like to expand on that?

F.C.: The amazing number of hours of audiovisual content being localized – translated and adapted– every single day, and the speed at which this is occurring, as well as giving audiences a wider and better choice, have led to a growing diversity in audiovisual content consumption and in the use of different translation practices. This decisive role of digital technology is the main reason behind the present state of great activity in new ways of producing and consuming audiovisual products, in optimizing the use of new devices (laptops, tablets, smartphones), and also in new forms of communication (social networks, crowdsourcing). Dubbing is a deeply rooted practice in some countries all over the world, especially in the case of TV and VoD platforms, where it tends to be more popular than in cinema. However, while the market trend towards subtitling may not come as a surprise, perhaps the parallel growing tendency towards dubbing is less expected. For instance, despite the fact that Portugal has an outstanding subtitling tradition, the audience share for dubbed products is on the rise. Other primarily-subtitling countries, such as Denmark, have recently experimented with dubbed films for younger audiences. A further significant trend can be noticed in subtitling countries such as Greece, Morocco, Egypt, Jordan and other North African countries which are now dubbing Latin American and Turkish soap operas. Furthermore, in Iran, there is a trend of reverse dubbing, that is, the industry has started to dub Persian products into English and Arabic. In Japan, films are dubbed on TV, though the same TV stations also broadcast subtitled films at midnight. In Africa, there have also been some instances of dubbing in the Nollywood scene. Videogames are dubbed even in cultures where dubbing was only restricted to cartoons for the younger kids and commercials continue to be dubbed and voiced-over in both dubbing and subtitling countries. This is only to mention some examples, but the list could be much longer.

I.R. & S.Z.: Spain has gone through some crucial historical moments which had a direct influence on AVT practices. Some of these moments were undoubtedly peculiar to its specific socio-cultural situation, some others paralleled and were closely intertwined with what other countries were experiencing more or less at the same time. Can you tell us about present-day audiovisual practices in your country? What is the current situation in terms of audiovisual translation: preferred modes, cinema and TV industry situation, anything you can think of, really. (for example: is there a censorship bureau? are tv programmes still censored in certain occasions?

are professionals organised in unions or similar associations? is there something you regard as a peculiarity of the Spanish scene which you think is not common in other countries, etc.)

F.C.: Global trends affect us in the same way as they affect other countries. Digitalization has luckily overridden the futile debate between dubbing vs subtitling, since everything can be accessed dubbed and subtitled in the main Spanish TV stations and in VoD platforms broadcasting in Spanish. People can now consume their preferred audiovisual content both dubbed and subtitled, or voiced-over and subtitled, or audiodescribed and subtitled for the deaf. Younger generations tend to watch YouTube clips in original version or subtitled, instead of watching TV. VoD platforms have entered our lives and our homes and changed our consumption habits. Still, TV stations and cinemas broadcast all shows and films in their dubbed versions, by default. This means that, if viewers want to consume subtitled versions, they have to either activate the subtitles by means of the remote control or go to particular cinema theatres where the subtitled versions are shown.

There is no censorship bureau. Censorship is performed in other ways, for example, by using broadcast delay, an intentional short delay when broadcasting live material, in order to prevent mistakes or “unacceptable” content from being broadcast, as happens to some events attended by the King of Spain. Other times some images are pixelated in the watershed period, like in the USA. And especially censorship is exerted by distribution companies, like Disney, which provide their translators, dialogue writers and dubbing companies with lists of forbidden words and expressions, which in their opinion may hurt the audience’s feelings. There is also linguistic censorship in some territories, for example in Valencia, where many Catalan words and expressions are not accepted in dubbing and subtitling, or in Galicia, where many Portuguese ones are not accepted either. Linguistic fragmentation is intentionally favoured in the media and it is applied in the form of linguistic censorship.

Actors and actresses are organised in unions and, especially, translators and dialogue writers are now organised in a new association called ATRAE (*Asociación de Traducción y Adaptación Audiovisual de España*), which has turned to be the best piece of news for our profession in Spain in the last few years, together with the advent of VoD platforms.

Maybe one of the peculiarities of Spain is its multilingual nature. Having four official languages in the same country definitely boosts the AVT industry. Also the fact that 25 universities are presently offering a BA in Translation and Interpreting – and almost the same amount of MAs, five of them in AVT – has had a huge impact on the young professionals, who now can offer a variety of AVT modes to their clients. This also means that the newly-trained professionals can do both translation and dialogue writing for dubbing, and some of them can even perform their own translations, or insert and edit their own subtitles in the clips, previously

translated and spotted by themselves. They can also provide their clients with AD and SDH, and some of them even with VGLOC. One can easily and safely say that AVT training in Spain is really at the forefront of the future.

I.R. & S.Z.: In your book you affirmed that “the single option of either dubbing, subtitling or voice-over” should give way to diversified modes of consumption: “The more options we have, the better for the consolidation of a freer, multilingual and diverse audience” (Chaume 2012: 7). Please tell us: how do you really like to watch your films and series? subtitled, dubbed or otherwise? (we won’t tell anyone)

F.C.: Ahahaha... I barely have time to watch TV series, unfortunately for me. I can only watch a few films per year, and I tend to watch them subtitled. However, we, translators, teachers, researchers, translator trainees, belong to a small community that love languages, enjoy foreign cultures, and usually prefer subtitling to dubbing for personal consumption. However, sometimes we also consume dubbing when the original language is not English or a language we command or understand. And, more importantly perhaps, we have to train translators and dialogue writers in dubbing, to fulfil the demands of the industry, to cater for the needs of older audiences or simply of people who don’t like subtitles, to provide dubbed cartoons for children, to dub AAA videogames, to voice-over reality shows, etc. Dubbing is more and more present on all screens and our private and personal tastes should not condition us or hold us against teaching it, doing it professionally, or even enjoying it. Many people prefer dubbing to subtitling for many reasons, not simply out of a reluctance to reading or ignorance of other cultures, and these people also want to consume audiovisual content on a daily basis.

I.R. & S.Z.: Do you watch films and follow TV series regularly? And how?

F.C.: I still think that sitting in a dark theatre staring at a massive white screen has the unique ability to transport you away into the film plot, to another parallel world that suspends you from your real life. One gets pulled into the movements, sound and colour in a different way from when one is sitting on their couches at home. There’s nothing wrong with watching any film on our phones, tablets, laptops, or TV sets. It’s just that watching a film in a theatre is still a unique, worthwhile experience.

I.R. & S.Z.: What is your educational background and how did you become interested in audiovisual translation?

I studied English and German Studies at the Universitat de Valencia. We didn't have translation classes in those days. The only personal experience I had was having translated some of the most famous songs by The Beatles for myself, for fun. One day, in my last year, a teacher told us that his brother was doing translation and dialogue writing for TV. When the class was over, I looked for him in the corridor and asked him to tell me more about what his brother was doing. He kindly provided me with the name of the company his brother was working for. So when I finished my BA, with great optimism, I decided to go there. I remember knocking at the door, and when they opened it I just said "I want to do translation for dubbing for you". They showed me in, asked me about my skills in translation and dialogue writing –which then were non-existent– and asked me to translate an episode of *The Monkeys*, a cartoon series, what we would call today the prequel to Dragon Ball. I did it, they didn't like it and paid me much less than this job was paid in those days, but they kept sending me more commissions. Since they had said they did not like my philological translation full of notes and double alternatives, I asked the dialogue writer of the company to give me the chance to sit beside her and to watch her do it. I learnt dialogue writing looking at her. I'm really grateful to this woman, Elvira Inigo Greus.

I.R. & S.Z.: So you have a professional experience in both dubbing and subtitling. How has this influenced your teaching?

F.C.: As I said, I have a long experience in the industry of audiovisual translation. I started translating for the screen in 1989... long, long time ago. I started translating and dialogue writing for dubbing and was involved into many cartoons, documentaries and TV series projects. Then I moved to films. In the late nineties I had the chance to subtitle many films from many nationalities, especially art films and blockbusters of all times. I haven't been able to do AD and SDH myself, though.

Being a professional translator before I entered academia gave me the tools and the know-how to design a syllabus of AVT oriented to the market and also to teach in my classes what I had learnt as a professional. I was very lucky to start out as a translator before I started teaching at university.

I.R. & S.Z.: The rise of amateurs in audiovisual translation has attracted much scholarly attention in recent times (Massidda 2015, Díaz-Cintas 2018, Dwyer 2018, Orrego Carmona 2018). Do you think fansubbing and fandubbing can have a valuable and longstanding didactic import, or do you think they might be just a passing fad?

F.C.: The conventions of fansubs and fandubs can affect and are really affecting the way commercial subtitling and dubbing is professionally performed. On the one hand, I recommend my students to do fandubs and fansubs (of clips free of copyright) as a portfolio for their prospective clients. On the other hand, younger generations sometimes prefer to consume fansubs and fandubs than to watch the official dubbings and subtitlings of the cartoons and series they like. We cannot ignore these new practices. The use of creative subtitles in the industry now obeys to the influence of funsubbing in commercial subtitling for example. The slow move towards more foreignizing translations too.

I.R. & S.Z.: What do you think are the most promising areas of research in AVT for the future?

F.C.: There are many, luckily for our discipline. One of them is the impact of **technology** on AVT processes. Cloud dubbing and subtitling are an example, especially if we consider how they have changed the way we carry out these processes. Or the manipulation of images to fit the target translation into the original actors' and actresses' mouths in dubbing, as they are already doing in **videogame localization**, another promising and still underexplored field of research. Or machine translation – and translation memories – applied to subtitling and dubbing.

Another one is **accessibility** from a twofold perspective: on the one hand, the useful concept of accessible filmmaking, which has a direct impact on the process of making films taking AVT into account from the very first stages of the filmmaking process (Romero Fresco 2013); and, on the other, reception studies with hard of hearing and visually impaired people involving the use of technology, of physiological instruments and measures, such as eye-trackers, galvanic skin response devices, electroencephalography, levels of cortisol in saliva and heart rate, among others (see Di Giovanni and Gambier 2018). These measures can also be applied to the way we consume subtitled or dubbed audiovisual products from a cognitive perspective.

Another promising field of research is that of **activism** (Díaz-Cintas 2018, Baker 2018) in its manifold manifestations: fandubs and fansubs, fundubs (gag dubbing) and funsubs (parodic subtitling), literal video versions, honest subtitles, etc. AVT for children is another field calling for academic attention: reception studies again would be welcome to see how children consume audiovisual contents dubbed and subtitled by adults.

And finally **censorship**, which is not an issue of the past, as we may tend to think (Ranzato, 2016). Censorship is present even in countries proud of their democratic system and institutions, paradoxically in countries of the so-called first world.

I.R. & S.Z.: Is there an area of research that you would like, that you even plan to explore in the future, which has nothing or not much to do with AVT? A secret longing to explore other directions...?

F.C.: Maybe the world of transmedia projects (Ferrer Simó, 2016). Maybe also the world of transcreation. Maybe the world of media localization, such as adaptations, franchises, remakes understood as forms of translation (Evans, 2014). I haven't thought about moving from AVT to other domains... Starting with a new discipline would require such a great effort now, that I think it is wiser to keep within the boundaries of Translation Studies, which, on the other hand, are constantly expanding and widening.

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