

DEEP FOCUS



TRENDING TOPICS

Templates and quality in the field

Timed master templates:
pros and cons

Pre-digital 80's French dubbing

T&I perspective on AV translation

THIRD EDITION

ABOUT OUR NEWSLETTER

Deep Focus is a quarterly publication of the American Translators Association's AVD Audiovisual Division officially established on August 29, 2018, a non-profit organization committed to raising awareness of the audiovisual translation profession. Submissions become the property of Deep Focus and are subject to editing. Opinions expressed in this publication are solely those of the authors.





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Working with pivot language templates has been our reality for quite some time, but this does not mean there is no room for improvement. Actually, it is high time we reviewed their role and function in the contemporary subtitling industry. So, what are the real advantages and disadvantages of working with pivot language templates? Is this the direction we want our profession to take?

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LETTER FROM OUR ADMINISTRATOR

DEBORAH WEXLER



According to Merriam-Webster, “Homeostasis is a relatively stable state of equilibrium or a tendency toward such a state between the different but interdependent elements or groups of elements of an organism, population, or group.”

In our field, the goal of translation agencies should be to grow and achieve maturity through homeostasis.

Let me explain. Any translation agency or language service provider— defined as an intermediary between clients and linguists— should want to reach maturity: to be able to have a long-lasting and stable relationship with both human components with a minimum amount of chaos.

Imagine an agency with a cohesive group of seasoned translators who work well as a team within a peer-review system, with almost no linguist turnover, and deliver top-quality files on time with minimal management intervention. That should resonate with everybody, right? But how can this be achieved?

I think this homeostasis can be achieved by using an open-feedback loop that fosters collaboration and growth. Let’s analyze our feedback options first.

Feedback systems

In double-blind systems— where the translator doesn’t know the reviewer’s name and vice versa— the translator is isolated within a closed cell, stuck with receiving and passing questions or comments through the manager’s hands, which end up being a trickle instead of a flow. On the other side, the reviewer constantly feels frustrated by the translation’s lack of evolution— not by an individual’s lack of improvement, but by the group as a mass, since the reviewer has no way of knowing whose work he or she is reviewing every day and which translator is learning from the feedback. And the situation only gets worse. The reviewer thinks, “this agency has terrible translators. They never learn. I keep writing the same comments month after month. Management doesn’t care. They don’t give translators feedback. This is a nightmare. I’ve got to find better clients.”

In single-blind systems— where the reviewer knows the translator’s name but not the other way around— for the translator, things are the same as in the double-blind system: even when they absorb some of the feedback, there is no chance to collaborate with the reviewer, create a relationship with him or her, start feeling part of a team, or even ask frank follow-up questions (who wants a manager to be the go between them and a reviewer?). For the reviewer, the frustration is much higher because it’s targeted, and implicit bias is triggered. The reviewer thinks, “I know this translator. He produces drivel. He doesn’t listen. I keep writing the same notes for him month after month. The agency probably doesn’t give him my feedback. Writing comments to him is such a waste of time. I’ll request not to be paired with him ever again. They keep pairing me with the garbage translator. I’ve got to find better clients.”



In open systems, which do not mask the identities of the linguists, there can be a collaborative effort between translator and reviewer, and a relationship starts to form. The opportunity for mutual learning is present, and the situation only gets better. The reviewer thinks, chronologically, “this translator produces garbage. Wow, I wrote 10 notes for her last week and she learned all of the rules. It’s rewarding to review this translator’s work because she listens and learns. There were no mistakes in this file; therefore, I will spend a bit of time trying to polish the style so this translation truly shines for my partner. I hope they keep pairing me with her. Working with this company is a dream.”

The open-feedback system

Yes, I know it’s difficult to manage an open system due to conflicts and differences of opinion between linguists, but in my experience, the pros outweigh the cons.

In a perfect world, the reviewer would not have to send much feedback to the translator, but that’s not what happens. Often, the reviewer is dealing with inexperienced linguists, or linguists who are new to the end-client’s preferences, etc., and a certain amount of education needs to be passed along to them.

The main problem is the negative perception of feedback:

1. The translators feel stressed with notes and feedback. They think the manager will think badly of them. They feel compelled to fight every note, every suggestion.
2. The reviewers also feel stressed, and more so when the notes they send are called out as incorrect by the translator.
3. Both spend most of their time defending their decisions— and ego—instead of collaborating to create a better product.

A way to counteract that negative effect is to clearly define objectives and responsibilities and get everybody on board with the concept of the open feedback loop:

1. The reviewer is responsible for writing notes in a respectful, formal, unemotional and structured way. The organized feedback has additional weight because it can become reference material.
2. The translator is responsible for reading the feedback, responding to it, maintaining it in one location, and referencing it before starting a new project.
3. The manager is responsible for tracking the learning curve of the translator and fostering a work environment geared towards learning. The manager can make a huge difference in helping the translator understand that feedback is a normal part of the process, and not always related to lack of quality or inexperience.



If these three objectives are achieved, the team will grow and stabilize not only thanks to the relationship created by the open loop between translator and reviewer, but because the mistakes will start to disappear and the rough edges will start to soften. When this happens, the reviewer won't be spending half the reviewing time writing notes and will focus on polishing the text. When you only need to suggest style changes in the collaborative product created by the reviewer-translator partnership, the resulting translations are impeccable.

One quality that must be present is humility. The translators must accept all feedback with their heads and not their guts. No visceral reaction needs to occur when reading the feedback, which will not have been written viscerally. It is not the same experience to receive this comment, "your translation is garbage," as opposed to simply stating, "the phrase 'spill tea' means 'gossip.'" Ego should be secondary to learning.

If there was ever a place where the phrase, "you catch more flies with honey than vinegar" was more applicable, it's in the translation feedback loop.

Summing up, these are some of the rules that will allow the open feedback loop to succeed:

1. Review should be objective.
2. Notes should not contain judgment or opinions, just clear statements.
3. Communications should be respectful.
4. Disagreement should be confined to the facts of the issue.
5. Notes should be kept and reread until they are learned and retained.
6. Openness and willingness to learn should be part of the work environment.
7. Tools should be implemented to help the retention of feedback, whenever possible.

Maturity through homeostasis is a great goal to pursue. It fosters an environment where linguists want to be better for their team. You should try it. It works. It has worked for me.



EDITORIAL

ANA G. GONZÁLEZ MEADE

Dear Audiovisual Division members:

Summer and our third edition launched simultaneously! For this issue we gathered an array of material authored by key practicing professionals, articles that aim to keep our readers updated on the latest developments in the audiovisual translation field.

We gave our newsletter a bit of a makeover and it now includes a trending topics section as well as our seasonal *On the Audiovisual Radar* blurb, which this time around covers highlights of the coming *Media for All 8* conference.

On continuity, and because we are aware of how critical software is for any audiovisual translator to be able to work and make a living in this trade, we are reintroducing our Software Series in a new format that is friendlier, easier to grasp and more digestible. You can expect a new installment in every edition.

This issue covers highly relevant topics such as AV translators' remuneration, timed master templates: pros and cons, pre-digital French dubbing in the 80's, a T&I perspective on AV translation, and the second part of the *Speech Recognition Software* article.

Lastly, you will find an introduction to our most recent initiative: The Professional Development Program of the Audiovisual Division, which is for translators who wish to advance their careers by getting trained in the different subgenres of audiovisual translation and acquire professional skills in any of these areas.

My hope is you enjoy this newsletter as much as we enjoy making it and disseminating our AV culture.

Happy summer!

Ana Gabriela González Meade
Deep Focus Editor



Looking forward to *Media for All 8!*

By Mara Campbell

In just a few days, Stockholm will be swarming with audiovisual professionals from all areas who will be attending the **Media for All 8** conference at the Institute for Interpreting and Translation Studies at the Department of Swedish Language and Multilingualism at the main campus of **Stockholm University**. The **Media for All** conference is a biannual event organized by the **Transmedia Research Group**, and it changes venues in every installment.

Under the motto “**Complex understandings,**” this year's conference “is about creating and mediating understanding in an increasingly complex mediascape. Understanding not only of audiovisual content, but also understanding of and between producers, consumers and prosumers, understanding for the technical and cognitive processes involved, understanding for consumers’ needs and desires, and understanding of and for working conditions.”

This year's Keynote Speakers will be **Agnieszka Szarkowska**, Associate Professor at the Institute of Applied Linguistics, University of Warsaw, and **Jan-Louis Kruger**, Head of the Department of Linguistics at Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia. They will be accompanied by academics and professionals from all areas, who will tackle many topics concerning subtitling, dubbing, audiodescription, SDH, accessibility, sign language, and surtitling.

On June 17th, several workshops will take place, with trainers such as Pilar Orero, Anna Matamala, Pablo Romero-Fresco, and Joel Snyder teaching about subtitling and audiodescription in immersive environments, quantitative research, accessible filmmaking and much more. On June 18th and 19th, the University will transform into a full-fledged conference venue with four different rooms that will welcome speakers from all over the globe touching on topics such as sociology, multilingualism, respeaking, language learning, censorship, sign language interpreting, live subtitling, linguistics & semiotics, technology & business, and reception.

We hope to see you in Stockholm very soon, and you will surely hear a lot about this superb conference in our next issue of **Deep Focus!**

ON SUBTITLING, OR IGNORE THE PLANE AND TRUCK AND WE'LL ALL BE FINE

BY ALEXANDER C TOTZ

By this point in time, the entire T&I field can be epitomized by the iconic, climactic scene from Alfred Hitchcock's *North by Northwest*. In this scene, Cary Grant is hunted down in broad daylight in a field by an airplane and nearly dies.

And then the truck, but I'm getting ahead of myself.

This is my setup to discuss subtitling, and my experiences thus far with it, with an inkling of how I intend to pursue it in the future, hopefully to be discussed in a future article. There is something distinctly exciting from a T&I perspective about this aspect of our profession, given its relationship with cinema, and how this communicative art and medium essentially arose and flourished during the twentieth century. What was a uniquely modern and global artform has now been commodified, pulverized, and marginalized as simply another form of what's become known almost degradingly as "content."



“
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”

This, alas, is where we fit in. I began subtitling not long after starting to translate full time after the 2008 financial collapse. I had kind of a lucky break with a renowned subtitling unit, where in very short order I was able to learn the basics of the trade and even get paid to do some very simple and rudimentary work.

The most essential thing for anybody looking to break into this kind of work is that unlike actual translation, subtitling is extremely interpretive and highly subjective and influenced most strongly by the needs and demands of the particular project you happened to be involved in. It's also worth mentioning at this point the term "spotting," which refers to where in the frame the

subtitle text will go, but more importantly the number of frames in the film (at this point most certainly the digital video) in which text will appear. Because spotting relates to subtitling the way a solid story structure provides a sturdy foundation for what actually unfolds dramaturgically within it. Spotting must unfold in such a way that viewers can quickly and fully absorb the information in the subtitles. And accordingly, the work that we do filling those spaces must function smoothly within the timing and physical space provided.

I have heard of mostly foreign directors who work very closely and repeatedly with certain translators for their subtitles.

And I have seen many foreign films, especially in my language pair, where what the actors actually say on screen has only a glancing relationship with the words that appear beneath them. Hence the interpretive aspect, which even to any casual film student should be entirely logical. Of course original motion pictures were silent, and in so many aspects, the purest and truest expression of this medium, as everything had to be communicated simply through pictures. For anyone starting out in this work, that's a useful thing to keep in mind. Especially if you're doing this on your own or even for a large company.

So how do you condense human speech, generally free-flowing and abundant, which is constricted solely if it all by the director and editor's various cuts and in some fashion by the writer's words? My next subtitling experience which went on for a number of months was strongly informed by certain guidelines that the post house for whom I was working provided me. Those guidelines primarily concerned the spotting parameters, but also the style of the text. My two strongest takeaways from that experience which spanned a couple of seasons, are the primordial importance of any translators to be extremely well regimented with their time, and to have enough wherewithal about themselves and their profession to have no tolerance for disrespect.



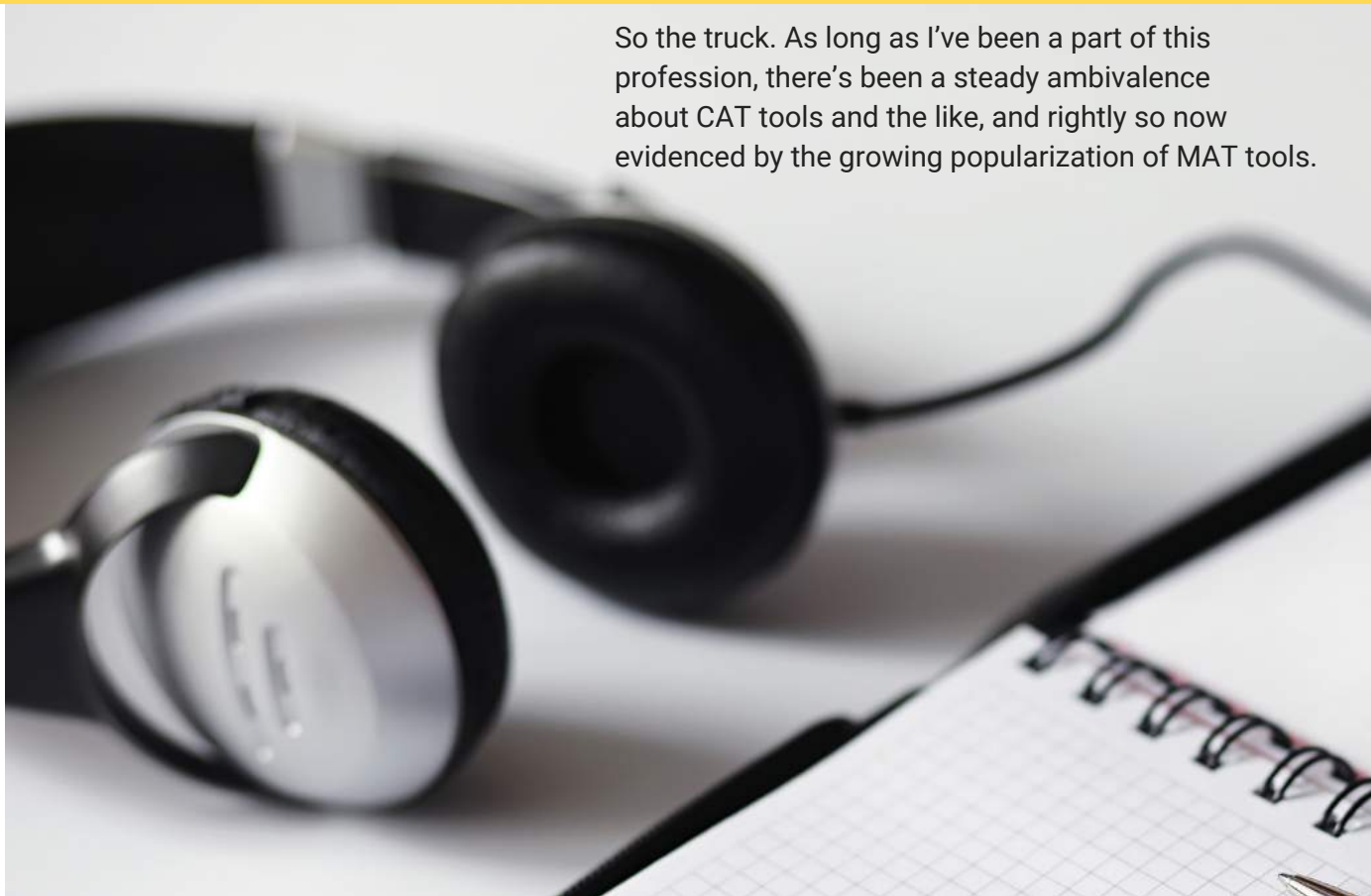
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So the truck. As long as I've been a part of this profession, there's been a steady ambivalence about CAT tools and the like, and rightly so now evidenced by the growing popularization of MAT tools.

Over those five months, I worked crazy hours and extremely hard on dozens of television programs of all varieties, and several full-length films. I developed a certain pride in my work and appreciated and felt enlightened by a certain amount of the content I was working on. Very quickly though, it became obvious that my client did not display nearly as much professional integrity and respect toward me. To the point that I briefly discontinued working for them awaiting past due payment.

Ultimately, I resumed work for them and received all the payment that was outstanding. In short order we mutually parted ways, and I soon learned that the company was being sued by numerous other translators who hadn't been paid at all.

As I've stated previously in other articles, it's extremely important to come into this kind of translation as soberly as possible regarding the strictly and purely interpretive aspect of it. All of that said, like Cary Grant, we T&I professionals fortunately are human, something essential that we have in common with any and all audiences for any content now and in the future.

With the proliferation of post-editing work, what seemed a help can clearly be construed as a potential hindrance. But wait; I ultimately believe and hope that as long as film and TV are creative mediums, human beings will be a fundamental, necessary component from start to finish. Unless machines somehow "decide" in their downtime to become Netflix subscribers...

Alexander C Totz has been an audiovisual translator for over a decade. Clients have included France Télévisions, Sony Pictures Television, Blumhouse TV; filmmakers Euzhan Palcy, Guillermo del Toro and Jacques Perrin; and producers Jake Eberts and Mark Morgan.

Graduated from NYU SCPS with a Professional Certificate in French>English Translation, Alexander is completing their first film, a short personal documentary about the long-term effects of bullying.

They can be reached via www.cinoche.biz



READ MY LIPS DUBBING IN THE 1980s—A LOST ART?

BY CORINNE SIMON-DUNEAU

Have you ever seen one of those cheap Kung Fu movies dubbed in English where the actor has closed his mouth and the dialogue continues or his lips are still moving and you hear nothing? During all the years I was working at what they grandly but justifiably called “dialogue adaptation,” we all strove to never let that happen. Of course you couldn’t translate literally, otherwise the French version of the film would emulate that Kung Fu movie. Not doing one’s job properly could have some dire side effects, one of which was “lip flap.”

Lip flap is the sin of all sins, committed for the sake of lip-synching. It grates on discerning ears like fingernails on a chalkboard. The sentence drags on, the words become elastic, they are pulled and compressed and pulled again, with grunts, gasps, throat scratching, thoughtful hesitations and added interjections, none of which existed in the original text. Lip flap is just lazy filling. Then the elastic snaps and it all suddenly accelerates with no warning, pinning you to your seat.

This makes the characters sound either moronic or manic, and highly unnatural. This, unfortunately, is the destiny of most dubbed movies and TV series. It might sound like this: “Weeeell, hmhm, err, my, ahemm, deeeaaaar Julie, why don’t we haaave... aha, yes, hum, adrinkortwoatthehotelbar... Yyyyes hm?”

This is one reason people dislike dubbed movies and prefer subtitles. In Europe, tastes are divided. About half the European countries, mostly those of romance languages (except Portuguese), prefer to have their films dubbed rather than subtitled.

We shouldn’t complain though: In Eastern Europe (the Baltic states, Poland, Russia...) films are

entirely dubbed by one single man who provides all the characters’ voices—men, women, children. Worse, he merely reads the script and the sound of his voice just follows behind that of the original version’s actor, slightly overlapping it. In Poland, he’s called the “lektor.”

So how do you solve the problem of writing synchronized dialogue when sounds, and therefore the use of the mouth, the vocal cords, the tongue, and even the glottis, differ widely from one language to another?

You painstakingly solve these problems, by spending as much as one hour per minute of film to get the dialogue right, making sure it sounds natural, and that it flows and conveys the original concept and mood. The most challenging part is being faithful to its humor while converting it into the humor of your own language, and country. If you’re seasoned and practiced, you know when the image is going too fast for the eye to see that your vowel jumped over closed lips or your consonant over a gaping mouth, skipping the breath mid sentence; and when you get the rhythm right, the voice actor will glide seamlessly over your text like a champion snowboarder over a bumpy slope. It can be exhilarating to watch. That’s when you know you’ve triumphed; you’re the quintessential illusionist.

This was “the old way”, at least when I lived and worked in Paris. I think I was only defeated once, and had to resort to the infamous lip-flap, hoping none of my colleagues would ever find out. Horrified, I watched a close-up of the actress, her luscious lips parting around a large pink tongue that stuck out half-way to her chin, clutched between shiny white teeth, staying put all through a heart-felt and lingering “Thank you!” You couldn’t miss that tongue, it was impossible to ignore, it didn’t budge, and the “Thhhhh” of “Thank” lasted forever.

Then the large lips puckered in a coy “Yooooo.”

So how did I handle that one?

There’s no “Th” sound in French where you stick your tongue out; and “Thank you,” seen on a face

that is filling a 65 by 30 feet screen would certainly look nothing like "Merci." In a last, desperate attempt, it became "Ça alors!" the French equivalent of "Good heavens," but said by someone who has a lisp. Then I inserted her insistent gratitude into the next sentence. That was a serious bending of the rules, but what's an adapter to do? I didn't go to the studio when the actors recorded it, so I don't know if it flew. I think I called in sick that day.

So what was "the old way?"

My first experience with dubbing was when I met my friend Henry at work before going out to lunch. When I got to the studio, I was directed to a tiny room. There he was, bent over a massive, noisy, machine-like table, in the dark. He was writing on what looked like a milky, transparent band sitting on a strip of light. He pushed a lever, the transparent tape moved, and so did the image on the screen. He stopped it, wrote again, the dim light under the band reflecting on his mouth and nose. Then he put his pencil down and greeted me.

We went to a restaurant nearby and although Henry was his usual entertaining self, I couldn't stop thinking of that machine and how it worked. I was already a translator and a journalist at the time, so I'd been using PCs for at least a couple of years, starting with the IBM PC in 1981. But I'd never seen anything like this enormous contraption that looked like it weighed half a ton, complete with science-fiction gears, cogs, wheels and buttons. I found the process fascinating and I kept asking questions. So much so that after lunch, he invited me to go back to the studio and to sit next to him as he worked.

He showed me how the band was fed from a reel under the table on his left, stretched across the whole length of the table, then disappeared down a slot to wind around another reel.

The band was called a "rhythmo band," or "mother band" and the original text in English had been hand-written on it, with a pencil, exactly as the character said it. The written dialogue was

moving in synch with the video, along with all the screams, the oohs the aahs and the yeehas. So "Noooooooo!" would be an "n" and one "o" stretched over several inches of the band, like a piece of dough in the hands of the pizza maker. "Hmmm" was an H and one long "m."

That day, Henry was working on a Warner Brothers Looney Tunes cartoon, with Wile E. Coyote and Road Runner. He popped in the cassette and listened to a couple of scenes, then paused it. He started writing his French dialogue above the English, using it as a template. He wrote, erased, rewound the video, rewrote, erased again, on and on. I said nothing, not wanting to disturb him.

After about twenty minutes, he smiled and looked at me. "Check this out," he said. He turned off the sound and read his text. It was as if the characters were lip-synching him! I nearly fell off my stool I was laughing so hard, and what he had written had nothing to do with the English original version. But if he had just translated it, no one in France would have been amused. He was a master at this, I came to find out later. Moreover, the clients and the audience loved what he did, because he was really, genuinely funny.

Today I'm not sure this would be acceptable. But back then, with most cartoons and TV series at least, the adaptor was God. He could change what the original actors said if it was incomprehensible, or too repetitive, or if the jokes didn't translate. Feature films were another thing: you stuck to the script as much as possible.

Much later, I got to work on *MASH* with a team. We had a moral dilemma: we all fell in love with the series, but sadly, we often had to change the text; if we had translated it as it was, the French audience wouldn't have gotten the humor of it, let alone understood what it referred to. Since we were working on different episodes, we had to compare our work, if only for consistency. But more importantly, we decided to check each other's dialogues. If the others didn't laugh out loud, you had to rewrite; they were a tough audience. We tried to be as true to the original as

possible—after all, this was a legendary show, and maybe we could educate the French about it. We sometimes disagreed on how to do this, but mostly we had fits of belly-aching, uncontrollable giggles. I wonder sometimes if our version still exists, somewhere in the French television archives.

But back to when I began: Weary of endlessly boring technical translation, I ended up joining the studio Henry worked at. My first taste of dialogue adaptation was with, of all series, *The Dukes of Hazard*. (Just as a side note, that the car's name was General Lee and the presence of the confederate flag on its roof totally escaped me at the time.)

I was assigned one of the oldest machines on the lot, with a 16 mm reel to reel system; I guess it was their version of boot camp. The first day, I stood next to the machine, trying to figure it out, and I touched what happened to be a live wire underneath the table. My brain shook in my skull like a ball in a rattle, and I was ejected half-way across the room. A little dazed, I sat down to what would prove to be snail-paced work. I endlessly poured over dictionaries and thesauruses, muttering the lines, opening and closing my lips like a koi fish gasping for air, in search of the perfect synchronization; I turned those pebbles in my mouth until they smoothed out, devoid of tongue-trippers. At least, I told myself, my brief stint as a theater actress hadn't been completely in vain.

It took several weeks of grueling, brain-racking practice to get to a point where I relaxed enough to make progress. I stopped being a slave to syllables. All I had to do was hear the beat, sound French, have fun and to hell with perfect lip-synch. Finally, I could work without sweating blood. I even came to enjoy working on *Family Ties*, *Growing Pains* or *The Young and the Restless*—much to the disgust of my loved ones, who pursued more intellectually rich and challenging occupations.

Six months and a fair amount of completed jobs later, I graduated. I was called in for a session at the recording studio, in the industrial suburbs

north of Paris. It was in an old, rather decrepit building, dating back to the early 1900s. You could sense the ghosts of the early days of cinema roaming in the crumbling hallways and behind moldy drapes. The recording room was a former movie stage—a large, warehouse-like space with metal beams lost in the darkness above and a gigantic screen up front; no padded walls, no sound-proofing. The actors were already there, standing in front of a bunch of microphones, chatting, and smoking (yes, this was Paris in the 80s). They all looked at me as I arrived. I waved, nervous, and sat on a side bench. Then the director arrived. We waited for a truck to go by, the sound engineers got going and suddenly, the film started and the strip with my hand-written dialogue appeared on the bottom of the screen.

My heart beat a hundred miles an hour, I was shaking. How would “my work” be received? Would they realize the pain and suffering it took to come up with those two ground-breaking puns?



Would they reject the miracles I pulled off to solve impossible challenges? The main actor started reading the text as it rolled, like a man wolfing down a meal lovingly prepared for him, not paying attention to what he was gobbling down. One after the other, they all sounded like burned-out workers on the assembly-line. I was stunned. Why was the director not directing? Then I saw he was as bored as the rest of them. Granted, this was a sappy '60s romantic comedy. Still, I was mortified.

Later on, I would look back at that first session with nostalgia. As I got to know the actors, the recording sessions grew more turbulent. They would roast me, and scream at me, “I can’t say that crap, for Pete’s sake!” “You like to make me stumble?” So I had to produce replacement dialogue on the spot, praying for inspiration. I always made it though; I had to.

When writing the dialogues, alone in the dark, we’d poured our hearts into our characters, acted their roles aloud, laughed, cried and snapped with them; yes, even with mustachioed Victor or the everlasting Katherine Chancellor. So when our work was slaughtered on that recording stage, we felt betrayed; we knew the parts so well, we were certain we could outperform those hams.



There were two kinds of actors: The well-known ones were the voices of famous foreign actors in prestigious feature films, and the others worked on old Westerns, B movies and lesser TV series. The latter were, for the most part, older actors who’d never made it and had lost their spark. They just clocked in, showed up for work and didn’t put much soul into their part. They’d been doing this for too long and had bad habits—lip flaps galore, and that recognizable voice-over tone, where you distinctly heard them working the abs to get it out before running out of air. The synchronization, on the other hand, was near perfect; thanks to our rhythm bands of course.

Except that once in front of the microphone, I doubt we would have done a better job; because it took some really good actors to pull it off. Patrick Floersheim was one of them, a genius in his own right, the finest voice actor I’ve ever heard. He was the voice of Jeff Bridges, Michael Douglas and Ed Harris. And he will be remembered forever for his absolutely dazzling rendition of Robin Williams in *Good Morning Vietnam*, one of the most difficult challenges in dubbing history. But let’s not forget the other genius in this story: The person who wrote the brilliant text adapted for the role in French. He remains unknown to this day.

've been working mainly on subtitles since I moved to the US in 1991, but I remember those days fondly. I miss the big old machines and the rhythmo band, the art of it. The technique was indeed primitive, but when well done, it produced great results.

Dubbing is still more expensive to produce than subtitles, and with the growing demand for content localization with TV, videos, digital channels and Internet streaming, talent is becoming scarce and budgets are tightening. So the "old way" may be definitely gone, for good.

Links:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RDH4Y-M4-eA>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dubbing_\(filmmaking\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dubbing_(filmmaking))

<https://www.languagetrainers.co.uk/blog/2014/11/11/subs-or-dubs-why-some-countries-watch-films-dubbed-e-g-france-spain-italy-while-others-watch-with-subtitles/>

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She majored in History of Art and Archeology in the Sorbonne in Paris. She worked as a journalist in France, but her main interest and line of work have always been with translation in the areas of art, literature and film.

She has worked on the dubbing and subtitling of thousands of feature films, documentaries, videos and television shows. She's a published author (Computers for Adults: For Those Who Feel Left Behind, with Carol Publishing,) and educator (she teaches French at the Alliance Française of Pasadena).

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PIVOT LANGUAGE TEMPLATES IN AUDIOVISUAL TRANSLATION (AVT): FRIENDS OR FOES?

BY VANESA ÁLVAREZ ORTIZ

In these globalized and competitive times, some big players in the AVT industry rely heavily upon pivot language templates to make English the source language of all translation, eliminating less common combinations. The use of these timed master subtitles has as many advantages as disadvantages both for subtitle vendors and translators.

As far as advantages go, subtitle vendors see their recruiting needs lessened as fewer language combinations are required, and their existing pool of professionals may be able to undertake subtitle translation tasks after just a brief training, even if they are not experienced in the technical dimension of subtitling. Also, the production of subtitles becomes significantly cheaper and faster, and it's easier for project managers to track and check multiple files in various languages.

Supposedly, translators also benefit from the use of templates since, as there is no need for spotting or cueing, they can work more efficiently, provided that the template is correct, and thus take on more work. On the other hand, rates for translation from a master template are not the same as those for spotting and translation, in a field where rates are already a constant struggle for language professionals.

Among the disadvantages, we may criticize the matricial criteria used in the creation of the template, since the creator must pay special attention to the segmentation of the linguistic

material to make sure that every other language could be rendered in those segments without heavy alterations on the spotting and cueing of the file. This goes hand in hand with other country-specific issues, like use of italics, and direction of writing (left to right, right to left, and even vertical) that will also have to be considered by the template maker.

If the template is made by a native of the source language, then their translation into English may be inadequate, introducing errors that will later be reproduced in every other language, and influencing the condensation and editing of the original text. My extensive experience working with English pivot templates for both Western and Eastern languages, in all kinds of genres,



BUT WHAT ABOUT QUALITY?

MAKING SUBTITLE TRANSLATION

‘A TRANSLATION OF A TRANSLATION’ COMES WITH OTHER PITFALLS. IF THE TEMPLATE IS TO BE MADE BY AN ENGLISH NATIVE, THEY MIGHT HAVE TROUBLE UNDERSTANDING COLLOQUIAL EXPRESSIONS, REGIONALISMS OR CULTURALLY CHARGED TERMS OF THE SOURCE LANGUAGE.

allows me to conclude that this isn't much of a problem with Western languages, but wreaks havoc when the source is an Eastern language.

Translating without being able to rely on the audio for clarification becomes a Herculean task, and final products are subpar, at least to a translator, who is aware of the multiple intermediary steps that clouded the author's original intention.

In conclusion, quality problems arise from using pivot language templates because many companies and translators aren't aware that the creation of templates is a much more complicated endeavor than the creation of any other subtitle file. So, if we are to strive for the highest quality, these pivot language templates,

in my opinion, should be considered a last resort rather than standard workflow.

We should advocate for a decentralization, or a disentanglement of current workflow that results in the creation of source language templates, and in the use of specific translators for specific language combinations, instead of 'leveling the field' with a pivot language in detriment of both the original content and final product.

Working with pivot language templates has been our reality for quite some time, but this does not mean there is no room for improvement. Actually, it is high time we reviewed their role and function in the contemporary subtitling industry. There will come a time in which translation will stop being taken for granted and will be given the importance it deserves for what it is: a post-production process that can make or break an audiovisual product.

We know that films with substandard subtitles are not well received by audiences, and we have seen glimpses of this new attitude toward translation with the various scandals that arose from the subtitling of the movie *Roma*, and its director's critical attitude.

So, we should push for a better way of working, and believe that once the streaming services race winds down, the focus will shift away from quantity and we will live a 'revival' of the translation profession in which quality will be the driving factor of the industry.

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Vanesa Álvarez Ortiz is a translator from Buenos Aires, Argentina, with 10 years of professional experience. She has specialized in localization and audiovisual translation, and is the founder of a boutique translation studio, VAO Traducciones, which provides linguistic solutions to film directors, production companies, videogame developers and others. She delivers seminars on current issues within the translation industry, and volunteers to provide intercultural communication support for feminist causes.



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AUTOMATIC SPEECH RECOGNITION SOFTWARE: WILL THEY REPLACE AUDIOVISUAL TRANSLATORS IN THE NEAR FUTURE? PART 2

BY MARA CAMPBELL

Since writing the first part of my article, I have been busy testing new automatic speech recognition (ASR) tools and comparing results.



I have to admit that some tools are quite impressive and could be considered very helpful for subtitlers and captioners.

Again, my test clip was from the comedy show *Brooklyn Nine Nine*, because it presents interesting challenges for a subtitler, since it is a fast-paced sitcom full of staccato dialogues, jokes and punchlines, rapid (and many times interrupted) conversations, slang, and some background noise and music. All things with which automatic speech recognition software struggles. My intention was to put the tools through a tough test, because if they can perform acceptably under these conditions, they can be useful not only in scenarios similar to this one, but with other types of material, such as documentaries, dramas, shows, newscasts, etc.

I tested four new tools: one was Swiss, one from the US, one was Belgian, and the last was an automatic captioning tool provided by a big mainstream video platform.

This time I will not bore you comparing outputs of the different tools. My approach was to test how long it took me to conform the subtitles created by these tools to the usual standards clients require. Of the seven tools I tested, only five produced a timed and transcribed file, so I worked with those; the two other tools do not yet have a user interface with which to interact, but they are being developed.

Time savings

I started by subtitling the file from scratch, with no script, using a professional subtitling software which I've been using for the past decade to ensure familiarity, and I timed the process. Then I opened the other files in the same software and conformed them. The conforming included correcting mishears; re-timing subtitles whenever necessary; changing line and subtitle breaks; adding punctuation, capital letters, and italics; adding hyphens to dual speaker subtitles; and whatever was necessary to bring the files up to the Netflix style guide standard. Some tools have an excellent grasp of punctuation, some lack it altogether; most of them have an impressive handling of line and subtitle breaks, and all of them have flawless timing, so each file required focusing on different aspects.

All of the tools allow text and timing to be adjusted without having to export a file and then import it onto another desktop software, but I thought putting myself through the learning curve



of five different softwares would be too time consuming and that the conditions would not be equal, with some platforms being more user-friendly, and others having more editing functionalities, etc.

These are my results, working on the 10-minute clip:

	Time required	Time saved
Origination (no script)	122 minutes	
Dutch software	117 minutes	6.5%
Swiss software	103 minutes	16.0%
Automatic captions by video platform	90 minutes	26.0%
Belgian software	86 minutes	29.0%
US software	76 minutes	38.0%

As you can see, even the worst performing tool still saved some time, and the best one saved an impressive 46 minutes. Why, even the automatic captions that we generally turn off when we watch online videos save over 30 minutes of work!

Cyber-security

Of course there are many other considerations, because today's world does not revolve around productivity, but mainly around security. Most of these tools offer very secure environments and guarantee that videos and files are deleted immediately when a user deletes them, but audiovisual translators these days are bound by airtight NDAs and/or do not have access to the videos as they once did: it is very common now to work on client videos within their cloud-based environment, without the possibility of downloading and feeding them into our tool of choice. So this narrows down the volume of work we can process through an ASR software.

Pricing

This also impacts pricing, which seems to fall under two models: the pre-paid and the per-minute systems. In the pre-paid system you buy a

bundle of credits or minutes, which are consumed as you process videos through the system. Some companies charge a monthly fee and others a daily fee, so you can process as many minutes as you want within that timeframe. The per-minute system charges you per minute of video you feed the ASR software. Of course each user's volume will determine which system suits them better, but some companies offer very competitive pricing, perfectly affordable even for freelancers with small volumes of "ASR-processable" material.

Other features

Many tools offer transcription in several languages, one of them supporting up to an impressive 28, and all of them state they are working fast on adding more languages. The few clips I tested in Latin American Spanish and Brazilian Portuguese yielded very acceptable results, too. And a few of these companies also add machine translation features, with some surprisingly acceptable results and very interesting approaches.

Conclusions

It is probably a matter of using these technologies with the right material: the videos we have access to (and can process through ASRs without breaching any NDA) and their theme or topic. Documentaries, interviews, sermons, some scripted materials, etc., make perfect candidates for these tools. Un-scripted programs, reality shows, game shows, talk shows, informal interviews, some sitcoms, mockumentaries, etc., might not be good matches.

So maybe I am asking the wrong question in the title. It might not be a matter of ASRs replacing audiovisual translators, but of aiding us in our work. I recently came across a clip that shows how theatrical subtitles were made 40 years ago

It was definitively a labor of love, re-typing each subtitle, creating copper printing blocks similar to the ones used with a letterpress printer, and then embossing them by heat and pressure on the



actual film. I suspect that when more sophisticated yet user-friendly and cost-effective tools began to appear, those subtitlers must have felt like they would be taken over by machines.

But nowadays, none of us would make a living were it not for the wonderful tools that aid us and make our work actually possible.

Perhaps we should start thinking about reinventing our role. This change is going to happen, so what can we, as experienced audiovisual translators, bring to the table? In all AI matters, there is one thing that computers can't do and will never ever be able to do: provide context. The system can transcribe and time a joke perfectly, but only a human can understand where the laughs are intended to happen, i.e., where to split the subtitle, leaving the punchline on its own, thereby improving its impact on the audience.

Only a human knows where to add a subtitle break to create suspense before revealing the name of the winner of a singing competition.

We will always be needed. Our years of experience are not lost. It's just a matter of finding new pastures where our expertise will be better capitalized. I personally find it a very exciting challenge. After all, who wants to do the exact same thing forever? Reinvention is the name of the game.

Links mentioned in the article:

First part of the article:

<https://www.ata-divisions.org/AVD/newsletter/deep-focus-issue-2/automatic-speech-recognition-software-will-they-replace-audiovisual-translators-in-the-near-future-part-1/>

Clip referenced towards the end of the article:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GEuv9qS_0Gs

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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM: PREVIEW AND TRAILERS

BY FERNANDA BRANDAO-GALEA

The Professional Development Program of the Audiovisual Division is a career-building opportunity for translators who want to know more about this branch of translation. If you want to build the skills required to enter the audiovisual field, this program might be for you. We plan to help audiovisual translators broaden their knowledge in the area, discover new career opportunities to pursue, and improve their network. All of this may uncover new job opportunities and set you on a new professional course.

In an industry that is ever-changing, we must grow and evolve to be successful and stay on top. For this reason, we intend to guide translators in understanding and incorporating best practices into their day-to-day work.

After our first Annual Meeting during the ATA59 Conference in New Orleans, we identified that most of the Audiovisual Division members were new to the field, and that their most urgent need was to know more about this area of expertise. Consequently, we decided to offer a series of six educational videos to kick off the learning journey.

We will post on our website one video per month. We intend to give an overview of the most relevant topics such as:

1. What is audiovisual or multimedia translation?

This one-hour long webinar will provide a bird's-eye view of Audiovisual Translation (AVT) as a distinctive, constantly changing field in translation. It will introduce, compare and show the most essential characteristics of AVT modalities, such as subtitling, dubbing (voice-over and lip sync), subtitles for the deaf and hard-of-hearing (SDH), and audio description for the blind and partially sighted. It's an introductory webinar specially designed to those who are interested or just beginning to work in audiovisual translation as a new professional specialization.

2. How to start subtitling

The Train Yourself in Subtitling introductory video covers basic concepts like format rules, space and time constraints, free subtitling software you can use and tricks of the trade.

3. What is close Captioning and SDH?

Closed captioning and SDH are subtitles specially created to help deaf and hard-of-hearing people enjoy audiovisual material. They include the transcription of all spoken dialog, as well as the written indication of sound effects and voice inflections, amongst other audible information. But, technically, CCs and SDH are only similar and they involve different skillsets from the audiovisual translator. In this webinar, we will view examples of both techniques to understand their differences and similarities, and we will discuss the technical aspects and requirements for an AV Translator who wants to delve in these processes.

4. An overview of translation / adaptation for dubbing

This introductory video of Dubbing will cover key notions like lip-sync, adaptation of subtitle files, what happens in a dubbing booth, dubbing scripts, best practices and workflows, and terms used in the field.

5. Game Translation and Localization

During this webinar we will dive into the world of video game translation and we will discuss challenges and specifics that translators and localization specialists will come across. For example, what kinds of challenges do different languages and/or cultures have to be put into account when localizing game content? What to do with variables? Is there a tool for that? How is content kept consistent when game companies are working with different vendors? How to find the right people for the job? And why QA is so important in game localization.



We're even open to guest speakers and presenters if you are more seasoned and have something to share with other members.

6. What is Audio Description?

The Audio Description introductory video will cover key concepts like the definition of AD, and the What, Where, Who and When of this supplemental narration. It will also review technical concepts, like how to describe on-screen text and subtitles, and the tense, pronouns, reading speed and vocabulary that should be used when creating or translating an AD file. Finally, it will cover what not to do and some special circumstances that are taken into consideration in scripts for the recording of audio description.

Regardless of where you're at—whether you're a senior translator or an entry-level industry member—you can continue to grow and advance your career and professional goals. We are here to help you take this step. Stay tuned to learn more about this program, and if you want to be part of this, or if you have any suggestions, please get in contact with audiovisualprodev@gmail.com.

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SEATTLE MEETUP

AVD'S AUDIOVISUAL TRANSLATORS WORLDWIDE MEETUPS

Our worldwide meetups are gaining momentum, come join us!
Big shout-out to hosts and attendants everywhere.

Check coming locations @ATA_AVDivision (Twitter) and @AudiovisualDivisionATA (Facebook), see you there!

SEATTLE MEETUP ON MAY 15, 2019

10 people showed up (+host) representing 10 languages
(Portuguese, Russian, Chinese, Swedish, Spanish, Japanese, ASL, Greek, Finnish and French)!



BUENOS AIRES MEETUP ON MARCH 29, 2019

We had a nice turnout of 9 people and had a great time.



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