DEEP FOCUS

audiovisual

A division of the American Translators Association

NINTH ISSUE

AVD NEWSLETTER

What Does "Plot-pertinent" Mean in Audiovisual Translation?

To close this year, I wanted to examine a term that aims to be specific but often ends up being ambiguous.

This term is thrown around in our industry when dealing with several things, like sound effects, songs, and on-screen text. I want to talk about the latter.

It's known by many names: narratives, forced narratives, inserts, visuals, opticals, supers, etc. Let's look at the types of on-screen text (OST):

1. **OST Captured During Production**

· **Photographed Text:** images captured by the camera, like street signs, names of businesses, building names, name tags, text in a book, etc.

2. **OST Created During Post-production**

· **Non-dialogue Burned-in Text:** location identifiers (Mexico City, Mexico), date identifiers (August 20, 1996), speaker identifiers (John Smith, CEO of WhoKnowsWhat), newscast banners, explanations and dedications in prologues and epilogues, etc.
· **Dialogue Burned-in Text:** subtitles translating or transliterating a language different from the original version language (subtitles for French audio in an English audio movie, subtitles for sign language, etc.).
· **Graphics:** OST in animated content, opening and closing credits, production credits, main title, episode title, production logos, etc.

At first glance, when deciding what should be translated (or transliterated), the rule appears to be very clear: if the OST is plot-pertinent and not redundant, translate it.

So, what's the problem? The term "plot-pertinent" is used to mean something broader than what it denotes. It's more complex and always subject to opinion.

Diving deeper, beyond its apparent clarity, we find that it's not so simple. In fact, whether or not something is plot-pertinent can be determined by several tests. The first test is to check if it's pertinent, of course.

Plot-pertinent photographed text is any filmed text that is there to give context to the viewer. We can determine whether something is "pertinent" by asking ourselves: if you replaced the text with anything else, would it still make sense? If not, it's pertinent.

For example, in *Second Act,* a policeman is directing traffic at the beginning of the movie with a vest that reads NYPD (New York Police Department). It's indeed plot-pertinent text, because it's an establishing shot: our story takes place in New York. If you changed it to KCPD (Kansas City Police Department), it wouldn't make sense.

Photographed text that is not plot-pertinent is what the camera captures incidentally when filming in situ, for example, sheets of paper glued to a wall during a panoramic shot of an urban setting.

The second test is the distribution type. Traditionally, most photographed text is not translated in theatrical releases, even if it's plot-pertinent. When theatrical files are used as source files for DVD and Blu-ray distribution, all those forced narratives have to be translated and added, because this type of distribution tends to translate more OST than theatrical.

The third layer is territory. Some territories, like Latin America, prefer all photographed text translated. For others, like the Netherlands, less is more.

Non-photographed text, since it's being added during post-production and is not incidental, is usually considered plot-pertinent without ambiguity. For example, animation does not have incidental OST, therefore, non-redundant on-screen text in animation (except the credits) should be translated or transliterated (within the time and space constraints of subtitling, of course). Even so, not all text added during post-production is essential, like news tickers, for example.

And that is why the industry needs to start using a more precise term to decide what OST should be included and what shouldn't.

Due to the complexity of the issue, I think a good place to start would be to use "essential plot-pertinent on-screen text" for those instances that must be translated to not confuse the viewer, for example, a sign that reads "Smile, you're on camera" right before the police takes a burglar away.

But, if given a choice, I would rather have all OST translated, even if it's not essential. I think this would level the playing field for viewers in different countries and allow them the chance to have a very similar viewing experience. Personally, when watching Korean or Japanese content, for example, if I see any on-screen text flash by without a subtitle, the suspension of disbelief is broken, and I am left wishing I could read the language.

I wish all of you and your loved ones a very happy and healthy 2021.

Deborah Wexler
AVD Administrator

Dear friends,

Firstly, I'd like to acknowledge how much of a battle 2020 has proven to be on every level for a groundbreaking majority of the world due to the COVID-19 pandemic creeping up on us all. For some, it has literally been a battle against an unforgiving virus for their lives or the lives of their loved ones; some lives were won and, unfortunately, many others were lost. For too many, a fierce battle has been fought for their livelihoods, for subsistence. Finally, the unexpected and disruptive reality of cohabitation has made emotions and tensions surface, in many cases resulting in hurtful micro-battles. Be as it may, the world is left to deal with personal loss, grief, and the emotional aftermath.

Yet somehow, we are blessed to practice a profession that was not only less impacted than most but also was reportedly even more in demand during these difficult times. Whether due to a greater need for dissemination of accurate public health information, an increased need for advertising, or for home entertainment. Translators never stop and our field of translation has become a staple commodity for mental health.

Fortunately, our industry is getting back to normal, has kept us busy most of this time and continues to develop and pose challenges for us. Therefore, we need to rise to the occasion. With that in mind, we give you food for thought to delve into with an ATA61 recap of noteworthy audiovisual translation presentations that touch on *Parasite,* video games, and dubbing adaptation. Secondly, two members of our leadership council suggest attainable New Year's resolutions and how our social media efforts could very well take the Audiovisual Division to the influencers' arena. And last but not least, we have a surprise in store for you as four top-tier colleagues share thought-provoking, field-specific articles on video game localization, efficiency with shortcuts and macros, the recent style guides reshaping by the industry leading company, and brand new captioning standards for the hearing impaired.

We at the ATA's Audiovisual Division wish all our division members, contributors, readers, and extended translation community a 2021 full of reunion, solace, peace, and love.

Stay safe and happy New Year!

Ana Gabriela González Meade
Deep Focus Editor
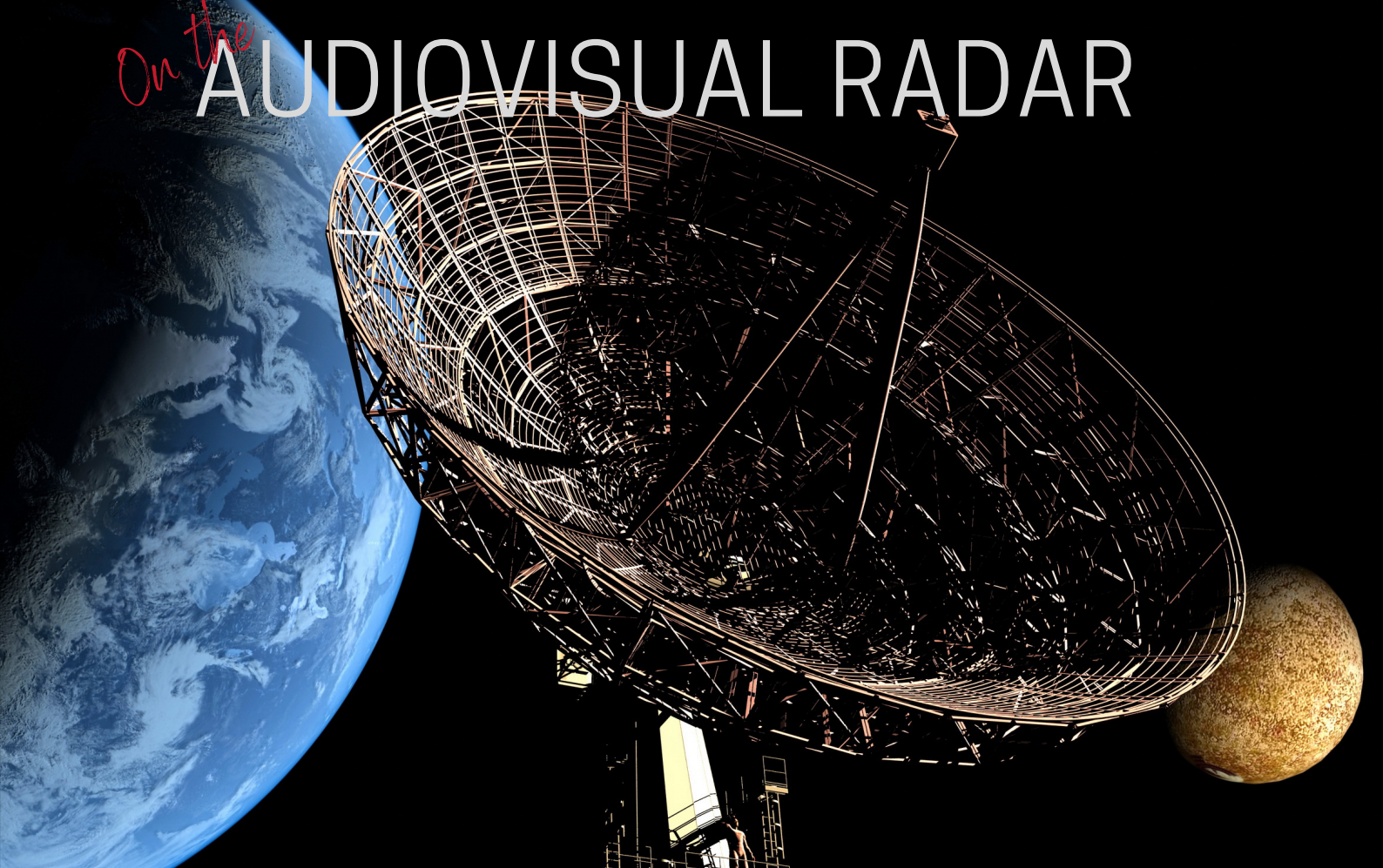
RESCHEDULING ANNOUNCEMENTS

1) 13TH LANGUAGES & THE MEDIA CONFERENCE AND EXHIBITION

When: Sep 20 - 22, 2021
Where: Radisson Blu Hotel Berlin, Germany
Description: Throughout its 25-year long history, Languages & the Media, the Biennial International Conference on Audiovisual Language Transfer in the Media, has established itself as Europe's leading conference in the AVT industry and is a vibrant hub for exchange, learning and discussion.
https://www.languages-media.com/

2) MEDIA FOR ALL 9 INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
UNIVERSITÀT DE BARCELONA

When: Jan 27 - 29, 2021
Where: 100% Online
Description: Media for All 9 will provide findings, developments, ideas and experiences from the multi-faceted world of audiovisual translation and media accessibility exploring for collaborative approaches that will transform the panorama of media accessibility and translation.
https://jornades.uab.cat/media4all9/

3) 11th Annual Glendon Graduate Student Conference in Translation Studies: Facing the Future –Translation and Technology
School of Translation - Glendon College, York University

When: March 26 - 28, 2021
Where: York University, Toronto, Canada
Description: Into the second decade of the 21st century, technology continues to play an increasing role in translation processes and translator environments. What is translatable or not translatable through the mediation of machines is a central question heading into the era of neural translation and artificial intelligence. Conference attendees will be invited to consider whether the interaction of human and machine in present and future translation ecologies is a harbinger of an enlightened post-humanism or a problematic process that favours disembodied networks, algorithmic decision-making and unsustainable growth in a time of runaway climate change and environmental degradation.
https://yfile.news.yorku.ca/2020/03/09/facing-the-future-of-technology-at-translation-studies-conference/?fbclid=IwAR0Xrj-1knNklrnYxEPr_XY0jl521DYd1sj4JinAobtkpFqM11YkFTfwmxU
(last update: March 2020)

4) APTRAD INTERNATIONAL AUDIOVISUAL TRANSLATION CONFERENCE

When: September 10 - 11, 2021
Where: ISCAP, the Porto Accounting and Business School, Porto, Portugal
Description: Let us together explore the old and new paths and prepare for the future of audiovisual translation to the fullest extent, without fearing the unknown. Join us in Porto, Portugal, to break new ground in audiovisual translation, in what will be an historic event for AVT and its professionals!
https://aptrad.pt/1stAVTIntConf/

5) CITA 6 (INTERNATIONAL AUDIOVISUAL TRANSLATION CONFERENCE AND 7TH AUDIOVISUAL TRANSLATION SYMPOSIUM) - VI CONFERENCIA INTERNACIONAL DE TRADUCCIÓN AUDIOVISUAL Y VII JORNADA DE LA TRADUCCIÓN AUDIOVISUAL

When: February 18 - 21, 2021
Where: 100 % Online
Description: The CITA Conference's aim is to encourage networking among audiovisual industry professionals in order to keep boosting our trade.
https://cita.atrae.org/

AVD'S
ONLINE EVENTS

OUR NOVEMBER HAPPY HOUR: NOV 28
OUR DECEMBER HAPPY HOUR: DEC 26

The AVD has been bringing audiovisual translators together with happy hour meetups via Zoom, and we will continue moving forward. Unwind with friends and meet new people. Join us for our coming happy hour meetups for a relaxed chat among colleagues from all over the world, where we talk shop (or not!) and share our passion for audiovisual translation in a private Zoom meeting room, and then split up into smaller groups. **Follow us on social media to catch us every month!**

AUDIOVISUAL DIVISION NEWS

What we're up to

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* Newsletter
* Resources
* Events
* Publications
* Division activities

Website

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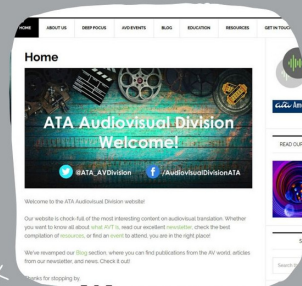
Mentoring Program

Forum

How to join

a.   Send an email to avdforummoderator@gmail.com

b.   Mention your full name and your ATA member number

For more information about the ATA Audiovisual Division, visit our website:
https://www.ata-divisions.org/AVD/

ATA61 Session Recaps
1. Translating Into Hollywood: A Case Study of the Oscar-Winning Film Parasite

BY ELENA CHANG

Several months after my 2019 ATA conference presentation, Translating Hollywood: The Limits of Localization, *Parasite* won the Best Picture Academy Award. This work by Korean writer/director Bong Joon-ho secured a place in history as the first non-English-language film to win the award. As a movie buff as well as a professional translator/interpreter, it was also exciting to see *Parasite* win the Palme d'Or—another first for a Korean film—at the Cannes Film Festival in May of 2019.

Linguistically and culturally, English and Korean share very little common ground. Yet this "very Korean film", as Bong (Bong is a surname) describes it, has strongly resonated with global audiences, as demonstrated by record-breaking worldwide box office revenues ($264.4 million as of September 2020). To be sure, the film is a universal saga of rich versus poor, but what made Parasite unique?

In October of 2019, I was contracted by *Parasite*'s U.S. distributor Neonrated to interpret for lead actor Song Kang-ho during a Los Angeles press tour. In preparation for this role, I viewed the film and understood at once what made it uniquely successful when other Korean films had failed.

A crucial element of its popularity is the exceptional quality of its English subtitles that enable the audience to overcome the dreaded "one-inch-tall barrier"—Sharon Choi's apt interpretation of Bong's wry observation—and appreciate the work on its own merits.

I was inspired, so I proposed analyzing the film's subtitles and discussing potential improvements in an ATA conference session. While session slots are highly sought after, I had two advantages. First, having previously explored English to Korean subtitling issues at ATA60, a companion piece concerning translation in the other direction was attractive to conference organizers. Second, I thought I might ride the coattails, so to speak, of *Parasite*'s huge success.

A Brief History of Korean Cinema

Cinema was introduced to the Korean public shortly before the peninsula was forcibly annexed by Japan in 1910, an occupation that continued until August 15, 1945. In the early days, films were imported, but soon a domestic film industry took root, and the first Korean film Loyal Revenge (Korean: 의리적 구투, pronounced Uirijeok Gutu) was produced in 1919. Though its offerings were often outperformed by imported movies, mainly from Hollywood, the Korean film industry never looked back, enduring boom and bust cycles over the years. However, by 2005 South Koreans watched more domestic films than imported ones thanks to both its protective screen quota system and maturing entertainment industry. Around the same time, Korean cinema began reaching non-Korean-speaking audiences beyond the minority connoisseurs of international films. This expansion was largely made possible through the contribution of highly skilled Korean to English subtitle translators.

The Subtitler

Among them, Darcy Paquet stands out. Mr. Paquet fell in love with Korean films when he arrived in Korea to teach English in 1997.

Soon after, he cancelled plans to move to Eastern Europe. Instead, he became the biggest non-native proponent of Korean films by writing about them on his English-language website.
Soon, Korean filmmakers reached out, asking him to provide English subtitles for their films. Bong Joon-ho was among them, thus beginning a long collaboration culminating in *Parasite*.
Of seven feature films directed by Bong, Paquet has provided English subtitles for all except Okja (2017). In interviews, Paquet reveals how he and Bong worked closely—incorporating input from the film's marketing and creative staff—to optimize the film's subtitles. Bong's notoriously detail-oriented work habits earned him his nickname 'Bong-tail' (a portmanteau of Bong and detail). Paquet welcomed the director's careful attention which complemented his own meticulous approach.

Subtitling *Parasite*

As an experienced subtitle translator, Paquet fully understood the key elements of success: succinctness of speech and familiarity of context.

Korean names and products that are not internationally familiar were modified. For example:

1. "Seoul National University" became "Oxford"—According to Paquet, "Harvard", was rejected because it was too familiar. Another reason cited was Bong's fondness of all things British, which shows, again, close communication between filmmaker and subtitler, which is all too rare in this business.
2. "KaTalk" (the abbreviation of "KakaoTalk", the ubiquitous Korean instant messaging/VoIP app) became "WhatsApp". One might imagine that for a Chinese audience, the name would be changed to the popular "WeChat".
3. "Chapaguri", a dish made by combining two different packaged noodles, needs no explanation for contemporary Koreans. However, even this translator, who lived her first 32 years in Korea, did not understand the label before seeing

the Chapagetti and Neoguri packets laid side by side. Koreans simply love portmanteaus! It must have been daunting for Paquet to find a workable substitute that would be immediately understood by a global audience. He created Ram-don (a portmanteau of Ramen and Udon, two better known noodle dishes, both originally Japanese). In addition, he had "Ramen/Udon" appear on screen along with the two packages (a screenshot of the scene provided).
4. Secondary but plot-critical character names are effectively shortened to aid audience memorization. For example, "Min" was used instead of "Min-hyeok" and "Namgoong" instead of "Namgoong Hyun-ja". The former appears only in the beginning of the film in one sequence and the latter never appears in person, only in photographs. However, both characters are critical to the plot and to understanding the main characters' motivations. Thus, the non-Korean-speaking audience needed to recall their names easily and quickly.

These examples are but a few of Darcy Paquet's thoughtful solutions to the "one-inch-barrier" evidenced throughout the film. This author's task is, however, to identify places where modifications could move the work toward perfection. With that goal in mind, here are some observations:

1. He made some puzzling choices, such as translating "downstairs, upstairs, living room and study" as "the annex, the study, every room". The "annex" should have been "guest house" since no residential dwellings—even those of the super-rich—are likely to have an "annex".
2. There was a clear mistake arising from unfamiliarity with Korea's educational system. In the U.S., one completes 2 years of junior high and four years of high school whereas in Korea the period consists of three years of middle school and three years of high school. Thus, a second-year high school student in Korea would be a junior in an American high school, not a sophomore (as Da-hye, the rich family's teenage girl is described).

3. Draw/drawing was consistently mistranslated as paint/painting, which I suppose has to do with the Korean word "그림(Keu-rim)" that applies to either painting or drawing. Since Paquet has lived in Korea for decades, perhaps he, like native speakers, fails to distinguish between the two. Thus, having "gone native", Paquet translates "drawing" as "painting". There is a scene in a cafeteria where the poor Kim family celebrates the hiring of their daughter by the rich Park family. The eatery was translated as a "driver's cafeteria", a literal translation of "기사 식당(ki-sa shik-dahng)", which is unfortunate. The meaning is more correctly translated as "hired driver cafeteria", referring to taxi drivers.
4. There are thousands of small restaurants catering to taxi drivers in urban areas all over Korea. The "cabby's cafeteria" is an inexpensive eatery popular among the working class. (By the way, those who drive their own vehicles are called "자가운전자(自家運轉者, "owner drivers")".

Many more examples of Darcy Paquet's skill along with suggested improvements can be found in my session slides.

For more information, contact me at: info@hollywoodinterpreter.com.

Los Angeles-based Korean linguist **Elena Chang** provides translation, interpreting, voiceover, copywriting, and directing services. Elena specializes in entertainment industry needs such as dialect coaching/consulting script translation, lip-sync dubbing and subtitling. Her recent credits include: *Adopt a Highway, Clemency, UglyDolls, The Magnificent Seven, Little Women, Jumanji: The Next Level, 21 Bridges, Dark Waters, Black and Blue, How to Train Your Dragon: The Hidden World, MIB: International, West Side Story, Olympus Has Fallen,* and *Life in a Day*.

Website: https://www.hollywoodinterpreter.com/

2. Translation Adaptation for Dubbing

BY GABRIELA LEMOINE

How do you translate a script that is going to be used for dubbing? What is adaptation for synchronization? In this overview of my presentation at ATA61, I will summarize answers to these questions, drawing on examples from many real movies and TV shows dubbed in Spanish. These clips were generously provided by Sebastián Arias, who has 15 years of experience as a dubbing director. If you attended the conference, you can always watch the recording!

There has been an increasing demand for translation for voice-over and dubbing over recent years, as more and more audiovisual content is being produced. In general, voice-over is used for documentaries or narration, while dubbing, which requires lip synchronization, is used for films and series, especially those for children.

Dubbing Translation: Two Potential Pitfalls

Usually, the most noticeable problem when we're watching a movie is lack of timing synchronization, which happens when the voices are not heard at the same time as the faces speaking on the screen. Another very visible issue is when the shape of the mouth does not match the sounds in that particular line. This is a lack of lip synchronization. For example, if the actor says "dog" in the film using a big, long "o" sound, the straightforward translation *perro* does not match the lips very well, and perhaps a word like *can* would fit better.

Although timing problems could just be a post-production issue, other factors affecting speech translated for dubbing need to be taken into account to avoid unintended results.

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It all starts with the original language script. Scripts can vary, but all have a few common elements:

- A heading with information about the film or series
- Timecodes, showing the times when an utterance starts and ends
- Characters or, if applicable, a narrator
- The actual dialogue

There could also be additional information such as noises or other utterances, transitions from one scene to the next, the number of scenes, and more scene description that affects the tone –all helpful information for the dubbing director.

Understanding scripts is important because they give you cues that will help you create a translation the director will not have to change much when the dubbing process starts.

When translating, a script may need to be adapted, which is sometimes called adjustment, so the two most visible elements of speech are preserved: timing and lip sync.

Timing

There are three main elements to dialogue timing:

- The duration of an utterance, including the time it starts and ends. This is normally measured in seconds and frames.
- How many syllables an utterance has and where the actor places emphasis. This emphasis is called an "impulse".
- Any pauses, including hesitation.

For example, "Just go unnoticed." could be translated as "Simplemente pasar desapercibida."

Although this translation is very accurate, it is too long for the original utterance, which was said very fast, in about three impulses (just-go-unNOticed). An adjusted translation could be "Y que nadie me note," which can also be said in two or three impulses (yqueNAdie-meNOte).

On the other hand, a translation could also be too short. The original sentence "I am nervous," said with emphasis and slowly (I-AM-NER-vous), was originally translated as "Lo estoy," which would have to be adjusted to "Sí, estoy nerviosa."

Lip Sync

When considering lip sync, the most visible sounds are:
- A, O, and E vowel sounds: we'd need to pay attention to the shape of the mouth
- Labial consonants (M, B, V) sounds: place of articulation with the lips closed
- Fricative consonants (F and V) sounds: place of articulation with the upper teeth touching the bottom lip

These sounds are the most visible, but they aren't the only sounds we should focus on. The truth is it depends on how the actor has spoken: fast, slowly, enunciating a lot or barely moving their lips, yelling, laughing, whispering, crying, or maybe the actor's mouth or face are not even visible in a particular scene.

The camera shot is also a factor. The director may have done a very big close up of the face and the mouth, or shot the person sideways, at a distance, or while walking or running. The more visible the mouth is, the more adjusted the translation will have to be for a good viewer experience.

In addition to the specific examples reviewed here, other strategies were outlined in the presentation, including: shortening or adding speech when there is a change of scene or silence in the original film; reproducing chopped speech, hesitation and false starts which are typical of non-scripted shows; assimilating sounds to a closed or open mouth ("we shall see"

vs. Ahora te diré); plays on words in both the source and target language; reproducing humor and punch lines; reproducing or substituting accents; adapting idioms; substituting or avoiding regionalisms; using or avoiding profanity according to specific country ratings; converting measurement units in keeping with what's on the screen; reflecting the character's personal traits; and shifting word order to improve lip sync.

Other useful Spanish translation solutions for common phrases:
- Nice: Así
- Oh my god: Ay, por Dios – No lo puedo creer
- You're killing me: En serio me frustras
- Please: ¿Podría…?
- OK: ¿Oíste?
- Go! Go!: ¡Corran!
- Run! Run!: ¡Salgan!
- How?: ¿Qué hacen?
- Bitch: Fantoche
- China: Vajilla
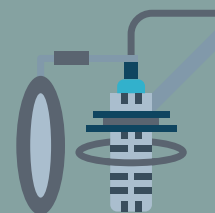
To conclude, a perfectly accurate translation of a script may be useless for dubbing. At the same time, when adjusting a translation for dubbing, we can use strategies like adding or omitting text that are not acceptable for other uses. To maintain timing and lip synchronization, anything is possible, and there is probably more than one solution. Take your creativity "to infinity and beyond"!

Gabriela Lemoine is CEO of Glocalization Network. She is an ATA-certified translator and holds an MBA. She is very active in local and international trade associations and regularly presents both in her home country and abroad on business and technical topics appealing to linguists and company owners. She also volunteers at several entrepreneurship and empowerment non-profit organizations.

3) Localizing Video Games: The Ins and Outs

BY CARME MANGIRON

Over four decades, the video game industry has become a world-wide phenomenon which generated 152.1 billion dollars in 2019 and is expected to continue growing (Newzoo, 2019). In fact, the video game industry has even thrived during the global crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (The Washington Post, 2020), as people around the globe were in lockdown and games became an excellent option to pass the time and have contact with others when playing online. To a large extent, the global success of the video game industry is due to game localization, as 50% of revenues come from international markets (Chandler and Deming, 2012). The main skopos or purpose of game localization is to produce a target market version with the same functionality as the original that also provides a similar gameplay experience (O'Hagan & Mangiron, 2013). It involves complex technical, linguistic, cultural, legal and marketing processes and is considered a hybrid type of translation, as it shares features in common with audiovisual translation and software localization, and, to a lesser extent technical translation and literary translation.

Most games are developed in English or Japanese, as Japan has always been one of the main players in the video game industry. However, many Japanese games are translated into English first and then into other languages using English as a pivot language. Localization demand has been growing over the last decade, as has the number of the target languages. While in the early days games were usually translated into French, Italian, German and Spanish (FIGS), nowadays they are also being translated into Korean, Chinese, Russian, Polish, Brazilian Portuguese, Turkish and Thai.

Translation volume is also increasing, as many games have expansions, downloadable content (DCL), patches and regular updates. Often game translators are also responsible for associated materials, such as websites, marketing texts, strategy guides, health and safety, and legal texts.

When localizing a game, it is important to use easy-to-understand, and idiomatic language as players are multitasking and to enjoy the game they need to easily understand what they must do in order to progress. In addition, in games that are set in fantasy worlds there is a tendency towards adaptation of cultural references and humor, which requires translators to be creative. In the case of games set in historical periods or based on events or literary or audiovisual works, translators have less creative freedom and will have to use their documentation skills to ensure that their translation is consistent with historical facts or established translations.

There are also several constraints a game translator faces, such as lack of context or limitations of space. Nowadays, most games are being localized in an agile localization process following the simultaneous-shipment (sim-ship) model—they are being translated as they are being developed—, so translators have to work with a source text that is constantly changing and without access to the game's visual context. Translating games, which are multimedia, multimodal and audiovisual texts, without access to the visual content is known in the industry as blind translation (Dietz, 2006) and is one of the main hurdles game localizers must overcome. The fact that video games are non-linear texts, because they unfold depending on the decisions and actions taken by the player, also poses challenges to the translator. Sometimes they may even translate all the dialogue by a certain character without knowing who the character is talking to or their responses. Also, original text may be populated by tags and variables. Tags or control codes are instructions to the game engine and if they are translated or modified the game code will be broken.

Additionally, there are different levels of localization, such as box and docs, partial localization and full localization (Chandler and O'Malley Deming, 2012). The term box and docs refers to the translation of the box and supporting materials, such as the manual and associated texts. Partial localization refers to the translation of all text-only assets into the target language, such as the user interface, system messages, tutorials, narrative and descriptive passages and dialogues without audio. Audio and cinematic assets are kept in the original language and subtitled in the target language. Full localization is used when all textual, audio and cinematic assets are translated or dubbed into the target language.

Variables are placeholders that will be replaced by different information depending on the progress of the player. Translators must figure out how to replace the variable and formulate the sentence in which they appear in a way that will be correct in all cases. This is particularly challenging when localizing from Japanese or English into Romance languages because in those languages adjectives must agree in gender and number with the nouns they modify. For example, when translating a string like "You obtained a <color> <object>." into Spanish, the variable <color> must be moved to after <object> to reproduce the most common syntactic order, which is noun + adjective. Also, the fact that nouns can be feminine or masculine and the article and the adjective must agree with them poses a problem, as we could end up with a sentence such as: "Obtuviste un espada antiguo", which is grammatically incorrect. In this case, a possible solution is to translate the sentence as "Obtuviste: <object> de color <color>, so there would be no issues with the indeterminate article "un/una" or with the adjective. Another major constraint in game localization is space limitations, especially in the user interface and in subtitles, which means that translators have to think of creative ways to produce a translation that appeals to players and fits in the available space.

To localize a game, there are generally three stages: a) pre-localization, b) localization, and c) post-localization. Pre-localization includes all the work carried out before the translation starts. For translators, this consists of familiarizing themselves with the game, by playing it, if it happens to be available, or examining all the available information, such as walkthroughs and screenshots, if it's not. If more than one translator is involved, they also create glossaries and style guides in order to ensure consistency. This is followed by the localization process, which includes translating, reviewing and editing the text. If the game is fully localized, once the translation is finished the script is recorded in a studio with a dubbing director and dubbing actors. After the localization process is finished, post-localization consists of game implementation, carried out by a localization engineer, and followed by quality assurance (QA), also known as testing or debugging. Because game localizers often work without access to the visual context, the QA process is of paramount importance. It is the first time that the translated text can be seen in context so errors due to the lack of context, as well as any other errors, known as bugs, such as functionality, linguistic, textual, cosmetic and translation errors, to name but a few, are amended at this stage.

The most common tools used in game localization are word processing and spreadsheet software and computer-assisted translation tools (CAT tools). In fact, Excel is the favored file format for developers because it makes importing and exporting text into the code very easy. However, Excel is not a tool developed for translation purposes, so often localization vendors import Excel files into CAT tools in order to optimize the translation process and provide consistency across translators. Customers often indicate their required tools, but memoq and Memsource are widely used in the game localization industry. Other tools that are used are SDL Trados, Smartling, XTM, POEditor, Transifex, and Wordbee. Alternatively, developers may use a proprietary tool that incorporates content management functionality as well as CAT tools, and provides contextual information, such as who is talking, who they are talking to, their age and gender, etc. They may even provide dialogue trees, in which a full conversation can be viewed, with all possible replies, which makes it easier to understand and translate properly.

Additionally, a number of game companies that develop triple A games—blockbusters in the game industry—have started to use artificial intelligence for dubbing games. The software manipulates graphics so that facial muscles move in sync with target text phonetic content. Another emerging technology in the game localization landscape is machine translation (MT), which some companies, such as Electronic Arts, have started to use in combination with postediting for some content, such as tutorials, user guides and websites. However, mistranslations, terminology inconsistencies, problems translating tags and variables and style and spacing issues have been detected in postedited machine translation (Anselmi and Rubio, 2020).

This means that more research is needed before MT can be applied to some game content and it seems unlikely that it will be used for text requiring creativity or idiomatic language.

Undoubtedly, game localization is a challenging type of audiovisual translation. Game translators deal with different text types, often work without access to the original game and encounter challenges such as tags, variables and space restrictions. However, when compared with different types of translation, game translators are granted more freedom and have a more authorial role, leaving their imprint on the target text. As demand for game localization is growing, it is undoubtedly an interesting option for audiovisual translators wishing to embark on new ventures.

Carme Mangiron, PhD, is a lecturer, researcher and the director of the MA in Audiovisual Translation at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. She has extensive experience as a translator, specializing in software and game localization. Her research interests include game localization, audiovisual translation and video game and media accessibility. She has presented at numerous conferences, published extensively in international journals and participated in several research projects. She is co-author of Game Localization: Translating for the Global Digital Entertainment Industry (O'Hagan and Mangiron, 2013), the first academic monograph on this topic. She is also one of the principal investigators of the Researching Audio Description: Translation, Delivery and New Scenarios project (PGC2018-096566-B-I00, MCIU/AEI/FEDER, UE), which has game accessibility for blind users as one of its main objectives.

Three (Keepable) New Year's Resolutions for the Audiovisual Translator

BY ANGELA BUSTOS

The tidal wave that was 2020 hit each of us differently; however, it summoned all of us to turn off autopilot and reexamine our priorities. Paradoxically, amidst the unprecedented circumstances are opportunities for immense growth. Now is a great time to deepen our professional development. Yet, this year's one-thing-after-the-next intensity can make it difficult to know where to start. So just in time for 2021, here are three new year's resolutions you can make (and keep!) to thrive as an audiovisual translator in the coming year.

Add pandemic-induced mandatory isolation, and your urban home office can start to feel like the deserted island in Cast Away. Thankfully, you don't have to suffer alone like Tom Hanks—break translation isolation by joining the AVD Mentorship Program! This is a great way for novice and experienced audiovisual translators to connect: mentees set goals based on their needs and interests, and mentors get to impart their hard-earned wisdom to the next generation of audiovisual translators.

Get a Mentor/Be a Mentor

I don't have to tell you that audiovisual translation is an awesome profession. I also don't have to tell you that this profession can feel isolating.

Mentorship pairs are hand-picked and supported throughout the process. Any ATA member in good standing is welcome to join. Ready to broaden your professional network through mentorship? Email our Mentoring Coordinator at mentoringavd@gmail.com!

Volunteer

Wait, volunteer? Now?! Wasn't 2020 the year of lost profits? Sure, volunteering may not directly increase your income, but it has enormous power to positively shape your career trajectory. Let's say you volunteer to help with a virtual conference on audiovisual translation. You now have the opportunity to show off your skills—translating marketing content, hosting presentations, managing event registration—and

perhaps most importantly, you're now connected with colleagues beyond the surface-level networking event. Still not convinced? Check out this free ATA webinar in which Jamie Hartz, CT presents the benefits of volunteering and how to make it worth your time.

Get Published
Publication used to be reserved for academic elites and professional writers. Yet our era's great equalizer—the internet—has turned this paradigm on its head. Do you have specialized knowledge to share? I bet you do, and I'll bet double there's a newsletter, blog, or other online resource looking for your perspective. Not sure which publication that may be? How about the one you're reading right now! Deep Focus always welcomes submissions from our Division members. If you'd like to share your expertise with your fellow audiovisual translators, check out our Submission Guidelines, or simply write to submissionsavd@gmail.com. We'd love to hear from you! As we bid adieu to a wild 2020, it's tempting to think that 2021 will be better by default. However, positive changes don't happen just because we flip the page on the calendar. They happen when we take small, consistent steps toward our professional goals—forging ahead despite the global circumstances.

Angela Bustos
is the AVD Social Media Coordinator. Based in Portland, Oregon, she is a Spanish/Catalan >English translator specializing in documentary subtitling and website localization. Angela holds an MA in Translation and Interpreting Studies from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Linguistic Influencers? The Audiovisual Division's Instagram Lives

BY DANIELA COSTA

A couple of months ago, the Audiovisual Division launched a series of Instagram Lives where we chat with talented audiovisual translators.

September: The Founding of the ATA AVD with Deborah Wexler, Ana Lis Salotti, Ana Gabriela Gonzalez Meade, and Mara Campbell

We kicked-off on September 26 with an interview with the founders of the ATA Audiovisual Division. We talked about a little bit of everything and walked down memory lane, recalling funny stories and how far we've come in terms of technology and productivity. But we all agreed, myself included, that this experience made us who we are today and paved the way for new generations of subtitlers and dubbers.

One of the highlights of these interviews was learning how the Audiovisual Division was founded. The need for a division was in the air, and these ladies took the initiative and made it happen. As Deborah said, "We were very lucky that the ATA thought it merited creating a division like this one." Enough said.

October: Videogame Localization with Carme Mangiron

The second IG Live was on videogame localization and we had a blast. Carme Mangiron, the Audiovisual Division's Distinguished Speaker at the 61st ATA Conference, shared her knowledge with us and we got immersed in the fascinating world of videogames.

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We covered many different topics, such as whether you need to be a gamer to translate videogames, the various stages of the videogame localization process, and how to deal with fans and social media.

Carme mentioned something that bewildered me and made me think twice before taking on a videogame localization assignment. Videogame localization begins at the development stage— before the game is finished— so you may not have access to sound and image, which, as all of us know, is crucial to deliver high-quality audiovisual translation. This is why the QA process takes longer than the translation itself. Carme explains, "It's about risk management. Which option is not the best, but which one is more likely to work."

Nonetheless, it is quite a rewarding experience. There are many people involved, several different stages and processes, and it may take from nine months to a year to complete a videogame localization project.

We also discussed what happens with titles and character names, gender-neutral characters, and the differences between Japanese, English, and Spanish.

When I asked Carme whether you had to be a gamer to be a videogame translator, she replied:

"That's the million-dollar question! That's a hot topic in videogame localization. I always give a very controversial reply to this. I don't think so. You don't have to be a gamer, but it is definitely easier [if you are]. But I always tell my students [that] I wasn't a gamer, [that] I don't know anybody who started in the earlier wave [that was a gamer], [of] the older people who started in the late 1990s and early 2000s, not one of them was a gamer, and we did quite well." So that gives us hope if we want to delve into the exciting world of videogames.

November: Audio Description with Joel Snyder

For our third Instagram Live, we had the pleasure to talk to Joel Snyder, a pioneer in audio description.

He has been working in the field since the 1980s and has gone the extra mile to make audiovisual material accessible for blind or visually impaired persons. In audio description, Joel said words are used to make the visual verbal and aural. And that is why audio describers must have a specific set of skills to perform their task. You have to be able to see, but you have to learn how to see.

We discussed the fundamentals of audio description: developing observational skills or becoming an active seer, editing or identifying key visual elements, and getting to the essence of an image. As Joel said, "The key to any good artist, any good translator, is getting at this essence in order to convey a significant belief or truth." To describe images vividly, we must have a rich vocabulary, imagination, and intonation.

One striking fact about audio description is the objectivity required. Joel gave a great example by having us do an exercise. He described me crying, and showed us how inferring something subjectively may lead to a wrong interpretation. He said, "We don't see things as they are, we see things as we are because all of us are individual subjective beings." But as an audio describer, you have to leave your subjective interpretations aside and objectively describe what you see, without making any assumptions.

This has been a summary of what we've discussed so far, and there are more to come, that's for sure.

I am honored to host these interviews and have the chance to talk to such remarkable and influential figures in the AVT world. I hope you enjoy these Instagram Lives as much as I do.

To see the full version of these interviews, follow the Division's Instagram account, @ata_avdivision, and watch them on IGTV.
See you next time!

Daniela Costa is an Argentine English<>Spanish translator and attorney at law. She has been working as a freelance subtitle translator for major subtitle localization companies since 2000 and has translated and proofread blockbuster films and series for theatrical release, dvds, Blu-ray and streaming. She is currently taking a masters in audiovisual translation at the University of Cadiz. She is also the Live Events Coordinator of the ATA Audiovisual Division.

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Customizing Aegisub with AutoHotkey

BY NORA DÍAZ

As translators, we know that time is one of our most valuable assets. Finding ways to use our time more efficiently is essential to being productive.

When working with software, this includes familiarizing ourselves with time-saving shortcuts that will lead to a greater output-per-time-unit ratio. But every program has its limitations, and sometimes we find ourselves wishing we could add a special shortcut or sequence of actions to make our lives easier. Luckily, there is a solution to help us achieve just that: AutoHotkey.

AutoHotkey is a free program that can be used to create and run scripts, macros and text expansions that can range from very simple to very complex.

A few hours invested in learning how to use AutoHotkey can result in significant benefits for translators. In this article, I will talk about how AutoHotkey can be used to add custom shortcuts to Aegisub.

Getting and Running an Existing Script

If all you want to do is add a little functionality to Aegisub without having to learn how to use AutoHotkey or how to write scripts, you can simply use the script file I'm sharing with you here. Just follow the steps below.

1. If you don't have AutoHotkey yet, download it from autohotkey.com and install it.

2. Download my custom Aegisub script file here: bit.ly/2WbymUm. The file is called Aegisub.ahk. Save the file in a folder where you can find it easily.

3. Activate the scripts by double-clicking the Aegisub.ahk file (remember, AutoHotkey must be installed on your computer first). After you do this, you will see a green icon with a white H in the taskbar. This means your script file is running and the macros and shortcuts included in it can be used.

Once you have enabled the script file, you will have the following new actions available to you in Aegisub.

Shortcut	Action
Alt+i	Apply italics starting at the current cursor location
Ctrl+i	Apply italics to selection
Ctrl+Up	Move current subtitle to the top of the screen
Ctrl+j	Join current and next line (keeping the contents of the first line)
F4	Change focus from the waveform to the subtitle editing box
Up/Down arrows	Navigate subtitles without losing focus* in the subtitle editing box
F1	Play current line audio while cursor is in the subtitle editing box without losing focus
Alt+c	Add lead-in time to the current waveform selection without moving the cursor away from the subtitle editing box
Alt+v	Add lead-out time to the current waveform selection without moving the cursor away from the subtitle editing box

*The subtitle editing box has focus when the cursor is active in it. Usually, clicking any other part of the program, such as the subtitle panel or the waveform, will cause the subtitling editing box to lose focus, meaning that the user has to click inside the editing box for the cursor to become active again.

Table 1. Aegisub actions enabled by the AutoHotkey script file

Understanding the Script and Adding Your Own Shortcuts and Macros

If you're curious about the contents of the script file and how you can add to it, keep reading! While this is not intended to be a full AutoHotkey manual, I hope it will serve as a quick guide to get you started on the journey to create your own scripts.

To help you understand how the script file is created, let's inspect its various elements. AutoHotkey scripts are plain text files, so to look inside the file −and edit it−, you just open it with a plain text editor, such as Notepad++. However, using a dedicated editor such as AHK Studio will help visualize and understand the script better.

Figure 1. A look inside the script file

In Figure 1, we see the beginning of the script file. When a file is created, every AutoHotkey script includes the first four lines. We don't need to worry about this, just leave those lines as they are.

In line 8, you will see a note I added to the script. A semicolon is used at the beginning of the line to comment, meaning that anything that comes after a semicolon on any given line will be ignored.

Line 10 is a directive to tell AutoHotkey that this script file and the shortcuts (called hotkeys in AutoHotkey) in it will only run if a window called aegisub32.exe (Aegisub) is active.

This means that pressing the hotkeys in another program will not cause the actions in this script to be executed, making the script program-specific.

Now it's time to start looking at the actual hotkeys and the actions they trigger. Before we do that, let's have a look at the key list below.

Here we can see that keys are represented by specific characters or have specific names that must be used to tell the script to press those keys.

Figure 2: AutoHotkey's Key List

When troubleshooting a script that is not running as expected, one of the first steps is to increase delay times to see the script play out in slow motion and identify the problem.

Line 16 is also a command to press keys, but the fact that we're using Sendraw instead of Send means that the keys that come after the command will be interpreted literally, so, in this case, the curly brackets will be sent literally, instead of being understood to mean that they are enclosing the name of a key. The text that is sent in line 16 is Aegisub's italics tag: {\i1}.

Line 17 is another delay, as explained above.

Line 18 is a command to press the End key, which will move the cursor to the end of the line.

Line 19 is a command that designates the end of a script: Return. This means that when the hotkey is pressed, the script will execute all the actions in the lines that follow the hotkey until it encounters a line with the word Return in it, when it will stop.

Now that we have broken down the first script, we can understand what the scripts in lines 21-42 do.

The scripts in lines 46-89 combine the principles we have seen so far with another command: ControlClick, which, as the name suggests, clicks on a specific control (a section of the program, such as the waveform or the subtitle editing box).

Now that we've had a look at the key list, let's inspect lines 13 to 19, which make up our first script. Note that the entire *.ahk file is actually a collection of several scripts.

Figure 2: A script

Line 13 is the hotkey, or shortcut. The key combination that makes up the hotkey is followed by two colons. This is the syntax that tells AutoHotkey that this is the hotkey. For this example, if we look at the key list, we see that the exclamation mark is the Alt key, so the hotkey that will trigger this action is Alt + i.

Line 14 is a command to press the Home key. Key names must always be placed inside curly brackets. Placing "Home" inside curly brackets tells AutoHotkey that we want to press the key called Home and not the keys that make up the word Home.

Line 15 is a 200-millisecond delay. This is not mandatory, but it is recommended to give the computer a bit of time between key presses.

Figure 4. A sample script that clicks on a control

Line 46 is a comment stating what the script does.

Line 47 is the hotkey that triggers the action in the script: F4.

Line 48 contains the command ControlClick and the name of the control that will be clicked when F4 is pressed. To determine the name of a control, right-click on the script icon in the taskbar and select Window Spy. This will open a window that will capture the active window's information. Then, click on a control in Aegisub to get information about it. In the screenshot below, clicking on the subtitle editing box shows that the control's ClassNN (or name) is wxWindowNR11, which is what should be written after the ControlClick command if we want to trigger the action of clicking inside the subtitle editing box (see Figure 4).

If you're using AHK Studio to edit your scripts, select Run in the Tools menu to reload the newly edited script.

I hope these examples will serve as inspiration to get you started with creating your own shortcuts and macros, to save you time and get you working more efficiently.

To learn more about AutoHotkey, visit www.autohotkey.com/docs.
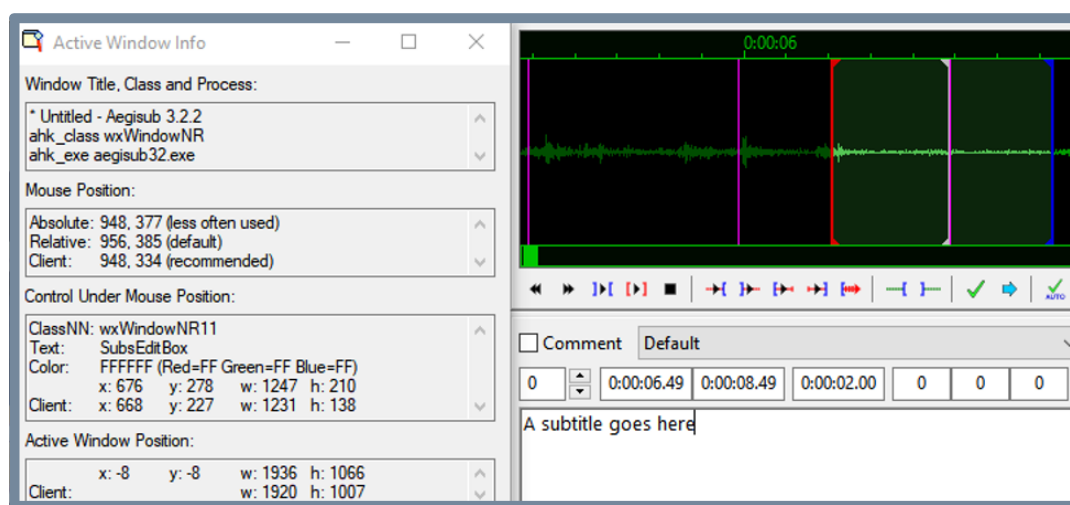
Figure 5. AutoHotkey's Window Spy

Lastly, line 49 is the Return command to end the script.

The rest of the scripts in the file use a combination of these commands to accomplish various action sequences, as listed in Table 1.

Customizing the Script File

To add a new script to the file, think of the hotkey you want to use and the sequence of actions you want to trigger. Then, write out your hotkey and commands, and add them to the file. Save the file and reload it, either by double-clicking on the file name in Windows Explorer or by right-clicking on the green icon with the white H in the taskbar and selecting Reload This Script.

Nora Díaz completed a B.A. in Linguistics and Translation in 1990. Since then, she has worked as an English-to-Spanish translator and interpreter in a variety of fields, specializing in scientific and technical translation. As a technology enthusiast interested in enhancing productivity, Nora enjoys exploring tools that facilitate the work of translators and sharing her findings with others through her blog, Nora Díaz on Translation, Teaching and Other Stuff, and in webinars and training sessions.

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Your Inventory as a Video Game Localizer

BY MARINA ILARI

As a video game localizer, you face many challenges – lack of context probably being the "ultimate boss" you have to fight. In order to overcome the challenges and be able to provide an appropriate translation, you can make use of the project assets, your inventory, which are essential materials to advance in your quest.

Below I will outline some of the most common translation assets the video game localizer might work with.

The Hylian Cipher: TranslatableFile (design by the author)

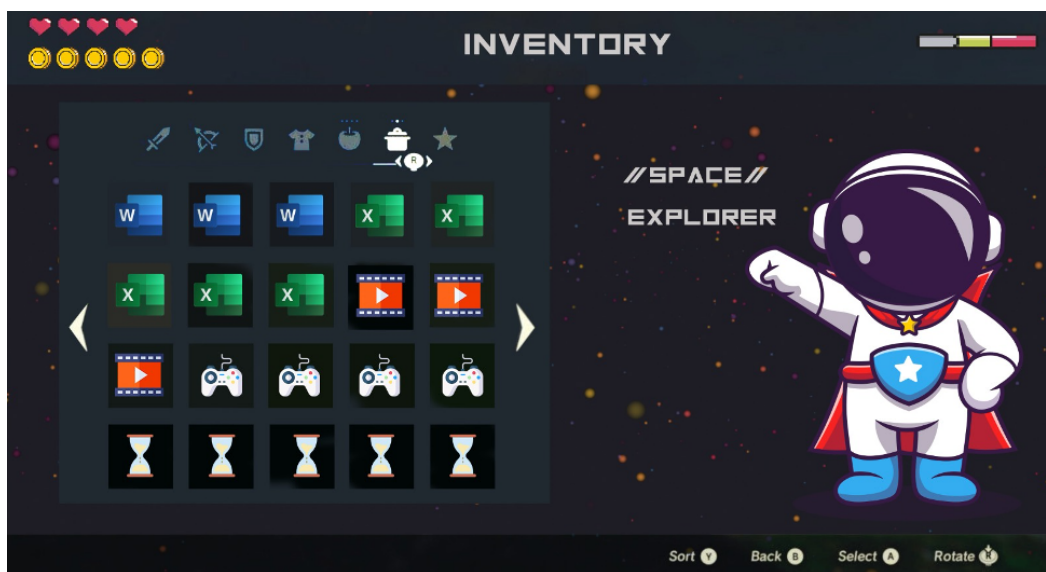The file to be translated might vary in format, but whether or not you are working with a translation software, the most universally used format in the gaming industry tends to be Excel. Usually, the file includes several columns with important information. You will typically have a source column, where the original text is, and a target column, where the translation should be placed. Additionally, it could include other columns such as if there are character limits (indicating the maximum number of characters that a line or segment can have), the string ID

(which is used by developers and could tell you where the segment is in the game), the context (which can give you more information about where that text is used, for example, if a character says it and which character is saying it, etc.). The additional columns can provide essential information about the context and should be closely followed by the localizer.

The Map: **Game Design Documents**

A game design document (GDD) is a software design document that serves as a blueprint for the video game. It helps define the scope of the game and sets the general direction for the project. For example, this document might include information such as the game concept, the genre, the target audience, the game's mechanics, etc. If you are fortunate enough to receive this document, make sure you study it closely.

It will help tremendously to keep it top of mind when translating the game.

The Shield: **Style Guide**

A style guide is a document that describes the stylistic specifications of the game or franchise and includes information about the audience and target markets. It also provides the localization team with references, samples, rules, and stylistic preferences that should be taken into consideration for the project.

A style guide typically includes information about the target audience, tone and voice, punctuation and capitalization considerations, how numbers should be treated in the translation, and specific instructions for each language.

To summarize, the style guide protects the game's branding across all languages, and it protects you from making decisions that do not align with what the developers or publishers want.

The Master Sword: **Glossary**

Glossaries will become one of the greatest assets in your arsenal. The glossary will usually include terminology specific to the different video game platforms, as well as other key terms of the game. It is important to note that all platforms have very specific and distinctive terminology, for example, the term "joystick" might be translated differently if you are doing it for PlayStation, Xbox, or Nintendo Switch.

The most important thing to keep in mind is that the glossary rules. The use of the glossary is mandatory and always takes precedence over the translation memory or other assets. Its use is so important because it helps maintain consistency in terminology throughout the game – which is essential for players to understand the gameplay and enjoy it. If you come across any errors or inconsistencies in the glossary those must be notified to the project manager or producer.

The Edge of Duality: **Translation Memory**

This might be a somewhat controversial opinion, but I believe the translation memory (TM) can be a double edge sword. Even though it does help you in many ways, including with consistency, it can also drag errors throughout time. My advice is to always be very careful with the translation memory; don't trust it blindly. Unless you know exactly where it comes from and who it was approved by, you cannot be certain of its accuracy.

Always check and keep an eye open for previous mistranslations or inconsistencies from the TM. If you find anything, make sure you report it!

The Adventure Log: **Query Sheet**

In most projects, you will have questions, especially when dealing with segments with not enough content. Generally, these queries are managed in a query sheet. A query sheet is usually a document that centralizes all questions from the linguistic teams with answers from the client. In the sheet, you will be able to insert questions and also see the questions that perhaps other colleagues have already asked and will serve as a source of reference for you.

While it is important to keep communication open, it is always advisable to do your research before you jump in the sheet to ask questions. First and foremost, you should check that the question has not been asked/answered in previous entries of the sheet or is not included in the style guide and other reference materials.

Additionally, make sure you research online for the answer you are looking for before asking your client. As video game localizers we have to know where to look and one of the most important sources we have are the players themselves. If the game has already been published or there were previous versions, there will almost definitely be information in discussion forums. Use these resources before you jump in the query sheet to ask a question to the client.

The Scroll: **Reference Material**

The reference material can include visual elements as well as descriptions. It's common to receive a list of images and depictions of the different characters, weapons, food, armor, and other items relevant to the game. Oftentimes you might receive videos showing certain aspects of the gameplay. All these reference materials provide essential context to the text you will translate – seeing a visual reference can make all the difference when you are trying to localize a term or phrase.

One of the important aspects we have to keep in mind in video game localization is that we are translating audiovisual content. The text we're translating, even if we are using a CAT tool and it seems out of context, can never be dissociated from what the players see and hear on the screen. We have to constantly check up on this. We cannot transcreate something that seems better fit with the target culture if the person is seeing something completely different on the screen. So, familiarizing yourself with the reference materials will help you immerse yourself in the aesthetics and characteristics of the game. If you are missing any key components to be able to deliver an appropriate translation, ask for the visual reference or context.

The Actual Game

Depending on where in the production line localization fits in with the client or project, you might be fortunate enough to have access to the actual game. It can be the published version in the source language or a demo version of a yet to be published game. This occurred numerous times throughout my career as a game localizer. Without a doubt, playing the game is the best way to familiarize yourself with the mechanics of the game and the game's universe. By being in the gamers' shoes you can truly connect with that experience and provide spot-on localizations for the target audience. Keep in mind that the main focus in video game localization is to entertain the users. Regardless of linguistic and cultural nuances and adaptations, the gamer should always come first.

With your complete inventory, as a video game localizer, you will have the right tools to provide an excellent localization. However, it should be mentioned that time tends to be a limited resource when it comes to video game localization; you will have to be efficient with the time you have. There will be times when you have to rush to deliver on time and others when you won't have as much time as you would like to investigate the issues in depth.

Whatever the situation, when you deliver your finished work, it is important to always leave everything resolved at least with a tentative translation. For example, if you are waiting for the answer to a question and do not receive the answer and it is time to deliver, make the delivery with the segment resolved in the best way possible and send a note with the delivery advising how you decided to resolve the segment and that you are waiting for a response. This way you help your teammates involved in the project.

In video game localization you are going to come across heaps of resources that will help you in your career as a specialist in video games, but also for many other specializations. It's a fast-moving industry and there will always be processes that are being optimized. It is important to remain open to continuous learning, to stay up to date and at the forefront of the video game industry, but also with technology and localization processes. I hope that you can make good use of everything in your inventory and be able to bring your A-game to any localization project you work on.

Marina Ilari, CT is an ATA certified English>Spanish translator with over 15 years of experience in the translation industry. She has worked as a translator, editor, and quality assurance specialist for many companies around the world with a special focus on creative translations and video game localization. She is the chief executive officer of Terra Translations and co-host of the translation podcast, En Pantuflas.

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Back to the Future: The Power of Netflix

BY MARA CAMPBELL

It is an undeniable fact that Netflix has changed the lives of a huge percent of this planet's inhabitants. In the case of large-scale localization, this isn't an exception.

The company came to be at a time in audiovisual history when the market was inundated with mediocre captioning companies that had seen a money-making opportunity in the 2006 Federal Communications Commission ruling that forced broadcasters to caption 100% of their programming.[1] Quality was the least of broadcasters' concerns; it was all about reaching the quota, and the cheapest bidder won every time. Netflix was wise enough to realize that this was a disservice to the D/deaf and Hard-of-hearing community and to the 60% of closed captioning users who do not have a hearing impairment.[2] This awareness eventually trickled down to localization, evidenced by their strive for quality and the different meanings that took throughout the years.

Netflix was a pioneer in making their style guides available publicly and in attempting to ensure that different players in the supply chain abided by them. This included organizing Tech Away Days, vendor training events, and linguist meetups. They even "hit their suppliers' pockets" and imposed a very low rejection rate, which threatened their continuity in the vendor program. They set the bar high, and, little by little, the rest of the industry is following their lead.

But nobody calls Netflix "chicken", considering their MO seems to be trying new things constantly, and they even have the humility (and financial resources) to go back to the drawing board when something doesn't work (Hi, Hermes, long time no see...) While the road they've taken towards quality accessibility and localization is a meandering one, paved with twists and U-turns, it always has good intentions.

"**Roads? Where we're going, we don't need roads**"

Fast forward to 2020, a year to remember and to forget. Even though this was a tough year for many reasons, we are lucky to be part of a small niche in this industry that mostly stayed active and even grew, thanks to streaming services booming with new users and subscriptions. And, with circumstances forcing us to adapt to so many new things, it was almost poetic that Netflix published a new Timed Text Style Guide (TTSG) in July (and updated it in October) introducing significant changes concerning timing that mostly broke completely from previous versions.

The company has departed from previous time-to-audio rules and moved to a hybrid "timing to shot and audio" system to "contribute to the ease at which subtitles are consumed by members", thus "creating an effortless viewing experience which is easy on the eye," and ensuring "timings are even" and not "flashy".[3] Although it can feel daunting to have to scratch, once again, all we had learned about timing subtitles in the past, the bottom line is that our lives as subtitlers just became easier, as the new timing rules have been simplified enormously.

Gone are the days spent counting frames, figuring out whether the audio starts six or seven frames before the shot change or finishes twelve or thirteen after it, whether that particular subtitle should be timed to audio or match the shot change, and navigating the countless situations that were either not contemplated in the style guide or render more than one possible solution (and, as Murphy's law dictates, we always pick the one the QCer doesn't like).

Objectiveness is key to uniformity, particularly in an operation the size of Netflix's, and when a guideline says "seven or eight" it seems like a case of 'potato/potahto'. Yet, these imprecise directives can have a huge effect on a linguist's metrics and thus their access to (quite well) paid work.

For starters, even the use of slashes is confusing. But, most importantly, the rest of the guide stubbornly repeats "12 frames" every single time it mentions threshold from shot change (specifically, 14 times in the whole guide) when it could have been much easier to state "half a second" and avoid any confusion.
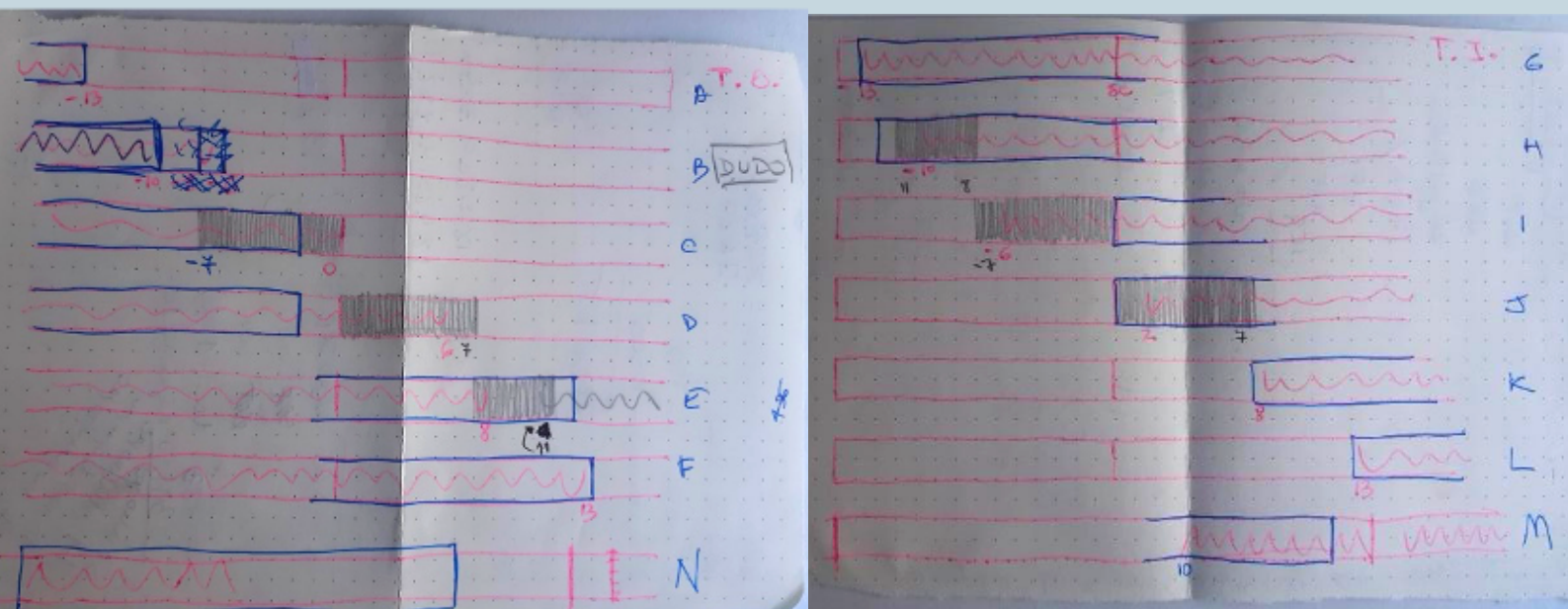
Cheat sheets with different audio-to-shot-change scenarios and their solutions, according to Netflix's previous guidelines

"1.21 Gigawatts?!"

Even though the new guide removes subjectivity from most decisions, the Subtitle Timing Guidelines still urge us to apply or exercise "good judgement" four different times,[3] which leaves an alarming amount of room for interpretation, considering they can be understood in two very different and conflicting ways.

The introduction presents issues generally before they are defined in later paragraphs. It reads: "For any content not in 24 fps, these rules still apply but please apply different parameters where applicable, i.e. If you are working on 60 fps content, follow this guide and change any rules which stipulate 12 frames/half a second to 30 frames/half a second as needed".[3]

So it isn't surprising that some subtitlers understand the threshold to be half a second (12 frames in 24 and 23,978 fps videos; 15 frames in 29,97 and 30 fps videos; and 30 frames in 60 fps videos; and who knows how many frames in 25 fps…) and others believe that it is always 12 frames regardless of the video's framerate.

Nevertheless, those of us who have been in this business for more years than Netflix has, will remember that that was the way we timed subtitles and captions for decades. A half a second threshold was the standard set by academics for decades, because it was thought "subtitles displayed over shot changes induce[d] re-reading of subtitles, so they had to be extended by a significant amount of frames to give brains time to process the information".[4]

Yet, a 2013 study by Krejtz, Szarkowska, and Krejtz debunked that claim with empirical evidence.[4] So both assertions— the 12-frame and the half a second— could be true and the jury is still out. Hopefully, the TTSG will be updated soon with clarifying wording. In the meantime, there will be subtitler vs QCer carnage all over the place.

Other "new" changes include acknowledging gaps between subtitles and requiring subtitlers to close gaps of fewer than 12 frames (or do they mean half a second?),[7] [8] urging "avoiding revealing punchlines or major plot-points early" (which for some weird reason is located in the general "Timing rules" section of the guidelines),[9] permitting "crossing shot changes [with a subtitle] when the dialogue they represent also crosses the shot change",[10] and suggesting merging subtitles "to borrow time".[3]

Additional innovations needlessly complicate the art of subtitling, such as the new rule that "[t]ext in each line in a dual speaker subtitle must be a contained sentence and should not carry into the preceding or subsequent subtitle". This is sometimes quite difficult to achieve, particularly in unscripted or rapid dialogue material, and "[c]reating shorter sentences and timing appropriately", as is recommended in the guide, is not usually possible.[3]

"**I guess you guys aren't ready for that yet, but your kids are gonna love it**"

As Netflix is a beacon of sorts in the industry (it is a well-known fact that most competing streaming services do not have their own style guides and blatantly instruct their vendors to use Netflix's style for their subtitles), these shifts have had a ripple effect throughout the industry.

For example, subtitling software companies have had to change the code in parts of their systems and release updates to comply with the new requirements (something they had already done a few years ago when Netflix parted ways with the time-to-shot-change style in favor of time-to-audio), dedicating time and resources to this endeavor.

For example, EZTitles introduced a special option in their "Snap to shot changes" fix that has "pre-defined parameters compliant to the latest Netflix specifications".[5] [6] [i]
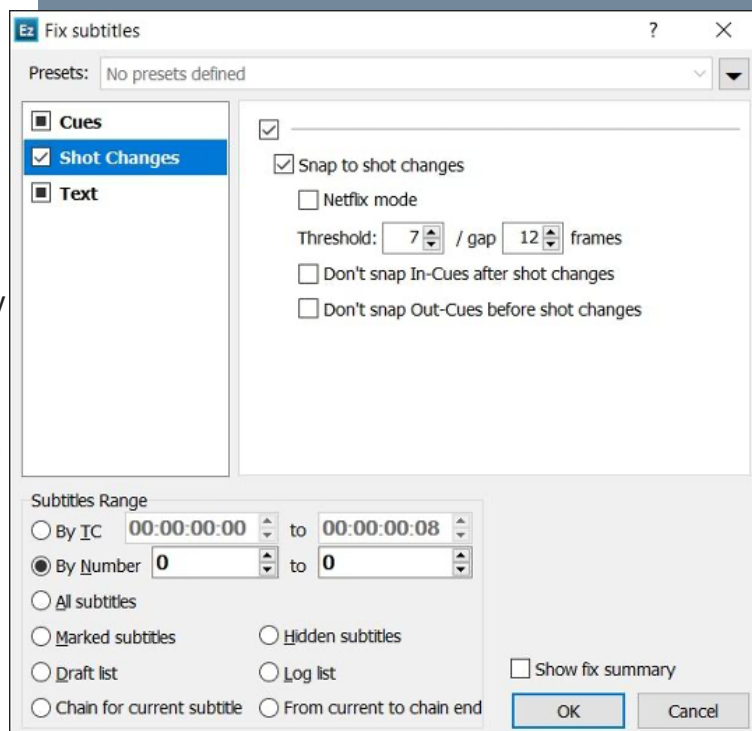
And any self-respecting vendor— big or small— probably dedicated time and effort into putting together training sessions and/or written materials, in addition to answering questions posed by their linguists and maybe even re-checking files to make sure the new style was applied correctly.

But again, with the unclear threshold issue and some conflicting and even contradictory language in the new TTSG,[ii] [iii] we will undoubtedly have new software patches and more updating meetups in the near future.

"**Wait a minute, Doc**"

The new guidelines brought with them some highly anticipated and necessary companion style guides that tackle pivot language dialogue lists (PLDL) and subtitle templates,[7] [8] as well as the customary updates to the general requirements and language-specific style guides.

Both the Subtitle Templates and PLDL guides are paramount, considering that templates are the behind-the-scenes process that precedes most localized content.

The sections that describe template coverage and the very detailed list of annotations expected in a template "to provide additional context to translators" are particularly useful.[8]

As far as English templates are concerned, there has been quite a controversial modification to the style guide regarding the reading speed, which was reduced from 20 cps to 17 cps. Admittedly, reading speeds have been progressively increasing, and this was not in the best interest of the audience (or the translator). "Can somebody think of the Nordic languages?!" Jan Pedersen jokingly pleaded at the Media For All conference in Stockholm last year, referencing the difficulties translators working into wordier languages have when forced to shoehorn their translations into restrictive templates. With lower reading speeds, template creators now have to simplify their texts (albeit with absolutely no paraphrasing) and merge subtitles left and right to produce files free of warnings or errors, an impossible task on its own.
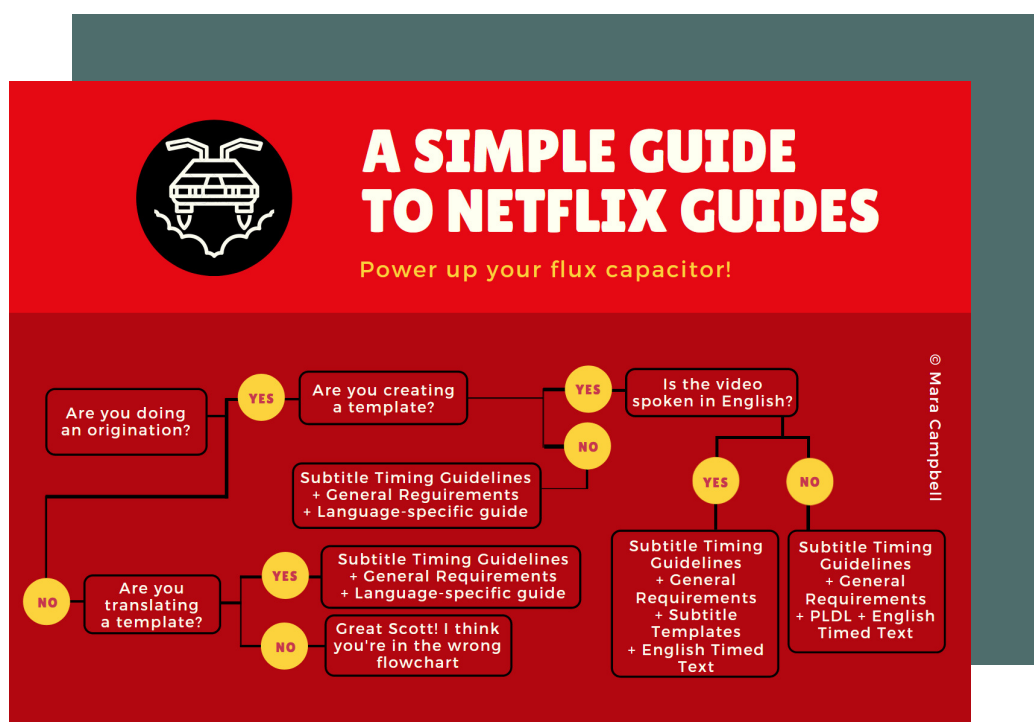
This also fires up the neverending debate among audiovisual translators: is it better to have a simplified (even watered-down) template that boasts pristine reading speed compliance or a near-verbatim one that mostly disregards reading speeds while bestowing upon the translator

(who has a professional-level understanding of the English spoken in the video) the choice of what to leave out, what to simplify and where to work their magic to find a brilliant solution that is faithful to the source material and the audience at once (ah, those lovely little victories we achieve now and then)?

At the same time, the reading speeds in many language-specific guides have not been changed or were increased, for example, 18 for Spanish and even 20 for English. [9] [10] Other languages have the same 17 cps reading speed, which disregards the fact that many languages require more words than English to say the same thing, thus forcing the translator to condense the already simplified text further to avoid requiring the audience to read at 88 miles per hour.

"**This is heavy!**"

We greatly celebrate that Netflix split their previous TTSG into several. But since we humans are impossible to please, we also complain about the amount of guides we have to consult every time we need to move a subtitle by one frame or add a comma to our text. And it's not entirely our fault. To end this article on a helpful note and strike your clock tower with lightning, we present the "Simple Guide to Guides" for when you find yourself short of plutonium:

© Mara Campbell

A SIMPLE GUIDE TO NETFLIX GUIDES

Power up your flux capacitor!

Are you doing an origination?
— YES → Are you creating a template?
— YES → Is the video spoken in English?
— YES → Subtitle Timing Guidelines + General Requirements + Subtitle Templates + English Timed Text
— NO → Subtitle Timing Guidelines + General Requirements + PLDL + English Timed Text
— NO → Subtitle Timing Guidelines + General Requirements + Language-specific guide

— NO → Are you translating a template?
— YES → Subtitle Timing Guidelines + General Requirements + Language-specific guide
— NO → Great Scott! I think you're in the wrong flowchart

In any case, as far as we are concerned, there are no apparent contradictions among the different guides, so everything should go as smoothly as driving a DeLorean.

Many thanks to my colleagues Daiana Poti, Eileen Yun, and Karli Webster; as well as Alex Joffe from Ooona Toolkit; Metodi Chachov, Svetlin Garbatov and the EZTitles team; and
Justin Loya from Visual Data. They contributed research for this article and shared brilliant, thought-provoking insights.

Did you find all the *Back to the Future* references, apart from the quotes in the subtitles?[11] If you missed any, here is a list of all the Easter eggs:[12]
"The Power of Netflix" (Huey Lewis and the News' *The Power of Love)*
"Nobody calls Netflix 'chicken'"
"To avoid requiring the audience to read at 88 miles per hour"
"Strike your clock tower with lightning"
"For when you find yourself short of plutonium"
"Power up your flux capacitors"
"As smoothly as driving a DeLorean"

Notes:

[i]These settings are based on interpreting the TTSG to mean that the threshold to the shot change is a fixed 12 frame value. If Netflix happens to clarify this and indicates that it should be half a second, this value should be changed manually according to the video's framerate.

[ii]Section 2, "Timing to shot change," of the Subtitle Timing Guidelines[3] state (emphasis added by the author): "If an out-time is within 12 frames **of the last frame before the shot change,** extend the out-time to the shot change, respecting the two-frame gap from the shot change." This would mean the out-time would be 13 frames from the shot change, contradicting the 12-frame threshold permeating the style guide and the sentence that follows (emphasis added by the author): "That is to say, in-times and out-times may be brought forward or extended to be in sync with **shot changes within the 12-frame parameter."** Once again, this is if the threshold to the shot change is a fixed 12 frames and not half a second.

[iii]In section 3, "Dialog that crosses shot changes," of the Subtitle Timing Guidelines[3], we are instructed (emphasis added by the author): "If dialogue starts fewer than 12 frames before the shot change, **the in-time should be on the shot change."** And immediately after, "If dialogue starts fewer than 12 frames before the shot change **the in-time should either be brought forward to 12 frames before the shot change** (e.g. when the dialogue starts 9, 10 or 11 frames before the shot change), **or moved up to the first frame of the new shot."** And, again, the "9, 10 or 11 frames" leaves room for a lot of ambiguity and frame-counting that will polarize subtitlers and QCers alike, not to mention we would not know what the figures are if we are supposed to consider half a second and not a fixed 12 frames.

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ASTM F43.06 Captioning: A New Standard for Our Industry

BY DANIELLE FILIP

Can you hear me now?

The era of COVID-19 has changed the way we communicate with each other, in all facets of our lives. For those who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing the increased use in remote communication platforms, while connecting us, has highlighted new needs for access to communication and for the standardization of the mechanisms for providing that access.

Consider a situation you are likely familiar with: having a meeting with your team, whom you formerly met with in-person in a small room around a round table where you could see each other's faces and share context using the room's white board. Enter March, and COVID-19, and you're now utilizing an online platform where one person's laptop is unmuted and their dog is barking in the background, another team member is using a headset but does not turn their camera on, and your child who should be doing school work is distracting you at your feet. Not hard to imagine, right?! Now imagine you are one of the 48 million Americans with hearing loss who depend on visual information to supplement your hearing.[1] You rely on lip-reading that precious 30-35% of English which is visible on the lips when a person is speaking at a typical pace coupled with a quiet environment to fully understand the message.[2] Insert captioning, your lifeline to keeping up with the auditory information.

What does this mean for our workforce?

Since March, professional captioners have seen a steep increase in demand, with some firms noting a growth of 400% in recent months. CART (communication access real-time translation), ASR (automatic speech recognition), voice writing, open captioning, closed captioning and subtitles are all mechanisms for making spoken words visible on screen. However, as stated in a recent white paper by 3PlayMedia, "Currently, there are no governing bodies for live captioning… [while] certain states do have standards in place for the quality of live captioning in instances like court reports or sporting events."[3] Given the impact that low quality captioning has on information acquisition by the Deaf or Hard of Hearing, the executive committee of ASTM F43 Language Services and Products –the body that issues U.S. standards on language services – voted unanimously at their November meeting to create a subcommittee to help standardize captioning services and products. Through the work of this committee, customers, consumers, and providers alike will have a better foundation for the contracts they put in place, for the services they receive and for the work they do.

Did I hear you say "real-time translation"?

The simultaneous tasks of listening to English in the United States and reproducing the message with all of its intent in another language is second nature for interpreters. The work of listening to a message and then producing a written variation could be carried out simultaneously or consecutively. Moreover, the act of producing a written variation even if that variation is in the same language of the spoken speech is also an act of translation, in that a spoken idiolect, or an individual's personalized manner of speaking, is transcribed and istandardized as it is converted to written form. This act of transcription has very real consequences for those whose message is being transcribed.

Spoken slang that is standardized in written speech, for instance, will give the audience a different perception of a speaker than slang that is maintained. Add to this the use of captions as the source text to produce translations in other languages through the use of MT engines which are known to show the same biases as human beings, and the need for standardization becomes strikingly evident.

That being said, is CART more akin to interpreting or translation? Executive Committee members of ASTM F43.90 feel that this question is one of many that necessitates standards. Additionally, requirements that the terminologies and dictionaries used by CART providers be robust and include content specific jargon is another area where a standard could help guide customers to more qualified providers.

Aren't there programs that do captioning work automatically?

Yes, in fact there are. While the ASTM F43.06 captioning standard will make mention of live automatic captioning, the objective is not to standardize how machines produce this work. With an average accuracy rate of 60-70% for automatically generated captions,[4] these at present may not meet the quality needs of most users. That being the case, F43.06 standards will instead focus on the human captioning efforts that exist in the marketplace today, which have higher accuracy expectations and ratings.

Providers of these services (with the exception of ASR, which is mechanized and depends on artificial intelligence engines) have varied backgrounds, training, and certifications, making it difficult for customers to make informed buying decisions. Educational programs for captioning can be found throughout the US and vary in their rigor, duration, and areas of focus. There aren't licensure or registration mandates for captioners in every state either, so the folks providing the service run the gamut and must be vetted based on their work.

Professional captioners must be highly skilled at listening and multitasking and be able to transcribe simultaneously. They must have a wide vocabulary, keen attention to detail, and proficiency with technology.

More than just for meetings and live events!

Since captioning is mandated and demand has risen so quickly, it is understandable why the landscape is a bit unwieldy. The F43.06 committee seeks to provide clarity to the market. The American's with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires access be provided to individuals with disabilities and mentions captioning as a means of communication access for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, especially during live events. Also, the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 exist to ensure web content is accessible to these populations. Businesses who are now turning to the internet to engage their customers must consider the accessibility of their videos and will be seeking high quality captioning to reach their audiences. As language professionals, it is important that we act now to standardize captioning, just as we have interpreting and translation to ensure quality for the future.

Get involved!

The subcommittee will begin work drafting a standard guide on captioning in early 2021 and will be seeking comments from industry experts. If you know someone who works in this area or are interested in participating, please contact Danielle Filip ASTM F43.06 subcommittee chairperson at slipoperations@gmail.com.

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