

Audio-visual Translation and Culture

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Abstract:

This paper will primarily tackle the impact of audio-visual translation on culture in its wider sense, and audio-visual translation in the Arab world, more particularly in Algeria, and within this respect language will be primarily judged as the main medium of communicating cultures. This paper uses as instances Spanish and Portuguese serials translated to Standard Arabic.

Key words: Audio-visual; Translation; Culture; Multiculturalism; Media; Sociolinguistic.

Introduction:

Generally, when we hear or talk about translation, we pay attention to its linguistic aspects, but in the case of audio-visual translation we extend our attention to the semiotic dimension of cinematic language.

According to Marcella De Marco (2000, 1): 'audio-visual translation is the cultural process by which the meanings and values contained in both words and images of television and cinematographic programs are made intelligible to different audiences'.

This kind of translation is a recent practice of translating compared to that of literary, scientific, or legal translation, and because the audio-visual field reaches a far greater number of citizens, this translation has been essential for the representation of some social, political, and economic concepts.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, this paper is mainly an attempt to tackle the role of language (the target language) in audio-visual translation. The aim is to examine how cultural features are portrayed in foreign cinema, and to show how translation for dubbing may contribute to transmitting clichés and assumptions about social groups from one culture to another.

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This paper uses as instances Spanish and Portuguese serials translated to Standard Arabic.

I. Global Culture and Multiculturalism in Audio-visual Translation:

We talk about global culture in this context, to mean the most dominant foreign culture that is gaining

ground over some if not many Arab countries at different levels including physical behaviours, communicative accents, ways of dresses, etc.

In dealing with global culture in the context of audio-visual translation there are a number of scenarios to ponder, including the following: Complete acceptance of global culture, total rejection of global culture, selective adaptation, and cultural dualism and pluralism.

1- Complete Acceptance of Global Culture:

Generally, this may apply to young people receptive to change, ready to embrace new lifestyle, and fascinated by consumption, in short, susceptible to its demonstration of higher life standards psychologically coupled with the irresistible will to imitate foreign characters that they want to identify themselves with.

Being perfectly performed by foreign characters, and perfectly translated to Standard Arabic, foreign ideas are analysed by the receiver, he organizes them in accordance to logical facts. And he will respectively rely on the logic of facts to show agreement with a given linguistic and corresponding non-linguistic situation.

Hence, there is an overpowering drive by young people for emancipation from traditional repressive cultures, and a constant need to deconstruct and reconstruct their identity.

Generally, in developing countries, audio-visual translations exert an enormous influence on the behaviour of individuals, and in consequence on the behaviour of the society.

2- Total Rejection of Global Culture:

In this sense, there is a lack of adaptation .Some people may be resistant to accept foreign cultures or to change theirs, especially old persons. By and large, and as a matter of identity, these persons, for instance in the case of Algeria, are sometimes hostile towards the western culture, being religiously convinced and strongly attached to Islamic values.

3- Selective Adaptation:

People may partially accept and partially reject foreign cultures. They are attached to their culture, its values, norms, and institutions, but willingly embrace the outward forms of foreign cultures (dress, music, language, etc.), and Huntington (1996) seems to be right when he argues that a Chinese or Iraqi eating a Big Mac pizza does not cease to be Chinese or Iraqi .i.e. The impact of global culture here is only of a modifying, not transforming nature.

4- Cultural Dualism and Pluralism:

People within the orbit of global culture may not be deprived of participation in national, ethnic, or local

cultures .They may on the one hand be expert in decoding the symbols of global culture and, on the other hand remain rooted in their own values and symbols. This might be a positive dualism where individuals especially educated persons will consider positive cultural points that might be advantageous to the Arab-Islamic culture, in using both cultures in complementary distribution.

II. Audio-visual Translation and Media Role in the Exploitation of Socio-psychological Needs:

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Sometimes, and in respect to the Algerian context, individuals are readily and willingly influenced by the message that some foreign translated serials aim to convey, because the practice of some cultural and social facts fit well within their socio-psychological needs such as the need for companionship, the need to express one's interest, romantic feelings or the need to have a sense of

belongness, etc. Socio-psychological need here is used as an explanatory concept that was applied to explain why a person decides to follow an idea, behaviour, or a practice.

Translated foreign serials that have been diffused on Algerian TV channels exploit to a certain extent socio-psychological needs of Algerians and help to create a demand by bringing changes in attitude and behaviour throughout the need of individuals to express emotion, the need to find individual space to satisfy the inner socio-psychological needs, the need of basic human interaction and expression, because in a traditional society like Algeria, individuals have been generally trained to suppress their emotions and their tendencies and not to show them in public. Moreover, socio-economic, and educational problems have also been major resources for motivations towards cultural contacts. Illiterate persons would be thankful to Arabic which now is opening for them a door over the world, especially if this group of persons is in need of fashionable and attractful lifestyles, they just would like to feel satisfied, for one hour or two in dreaming of an outside world.

And among the various needs of many individuals, especially the younger ones, the sense of modernity is underlined. Audiovisual translation helps them understand that they may connect and adapt to a modern culture or a modern society.

Thus, audio-visual translations of foreign serials reach people of different social strata and disseminate information on modern values on a broad scale.

These translated serials sometimes create a global consciousness in the individual which leads to a “fear” of being left behind especially for women staying at home.

III. Audio-visual Translation, and the Understanding of Foreign Cultures:

Culture may be described as a group of practices – linguistic, stylistic, religious, etc. which constitute a way of being for a given social community. In the context of audio-visual translation, we shall understand culture as the language through which we learn to read the world. The degree to which culture exerts effects upon the way in which we interpret the world is made apparent when we compare the different ways in which a language can present “reality” to a linguistic community.

In spite of the cultural and geographical proximities, two cultures or more may come into contact, and cultural difference can still make translation a challenging task both at the linguistic level, and the non-linguistic level, as to use Arabic with the appropriate foreign ideas with corresponding facial expressions, customs of behaviours and tone. In fact, because cultural

assumptions in Algeria are so familiar that they seem obvious and natural, and the obviousness of the assumptions can frequently lead individuals to misinterpret the meaning of cultural difference and alternative interpretations of lived reality. However, language in this respect has got a primordial importance ;it is has a facilitative function in communicating cultures ,hence ,individuals from the target community(Algeria) will linguistically understand foreign ideas, beliefs, and norms, and will psychologically perceive that Standard Arabic has not only a religious aspect to be confined to Islamic, educative, and respectful subjects, and that foreign things expressed in this language do no more constitute a taboo in the Algerian society or in Arab societies in general.

Thus, culturally specific assumptions, contained within a diverse range of interrelated practices (such as, language, religion, sexuality, etc.), mean that a person's identity can always be multi-dimensional.

In fact, cultural diversity in this respect opens up gaps and discontinuities between the way in which Arab or Algerian communities might perceive themselves and the way they are perceived by others(physical characteristics, styles of dress ,and behaviour) language here acts as symbolic triggers in practices of cultural interpretation that attribute collective characteristics to the members of a particular community in a way that

locates them within relationships of gender, ethnicity, group, etc.

IV. Some Generated Features of Audio-visual Translation and Culture in Algeria and the Arab World:

Before being translated, programs consist of original characters, a source language, a restricted audience, and the idea is always the same as for the translated versions.

The translation of these serials takes place in Arabic Centres for Translation, which for the purpose of generalization over the Arab world uses Standard Arabic (SA) (rather than Arabic varieties) as a target language. The overall aim is to widen audiences, since in one way or another, even SA is not commonly spoken and used in some Arab nations like Algeria in which the use of this language has been confined to formal contexts and settings, this language can be understood to some extent- in the context of audiovisual programs- even by uneducated or illiterate persons.

This has been one of the aims of using SA as the target language. However, through this language foreign cultures may be transmitted, and may have an influence on Arab-Islamic Cultures.

To grasp this question, it is worthy mentioning how target communities will interpret foreign behaviours through the use of Standard Arabic as an intermediary tool for communication, and to approach this problematic different elements deserve consideration for they may have implications on the filmic characterization of social stereotypes that may result from cultural contacts between source and target communities. These elements are persuasive means that cinema uses, for instance attractive visual representation of characters (their behaviours, their ways of thinking, their ways of dressing, and the roles that they are expected to fulfil), in addition to the acoustic dimension of films or serials.

In cooperation with these elements, verbal language is the place where social stereotypes are more easily reflected, in the sense where foreign ideas, beliefs, and norms are interpreted through Arabic, a language mostly dominating Muslim countries.

Islam in these countries is the origin of many cultural, educational, and traditional traits on which Arab countries and societies have been built up and organized.

In fact, the implication of Islamic features in this paper comes to identify the extent to which both cultures may be different, on one way, and the function(s) of language (SA) in facilitating cultural contacts, in another way.

From a stereotypic point of view, it is because SA is the intermediary means for communication that Arab or Algerian communities will recognize foreign features and may assist to some filmic actions like love behaviours, and love communications with romantic registers which consist of the use of some words and expressions formerly not naturally used in conversations among the members of many families. Even if these behaviours may exist outside homes between people, sometimes implicitly and some other times explicitly, many homes would have remained the place of respect between family members.

However, throughout the use of our language, audio-visual translation is making explicit some religiously and traditionally unaccepted features even inside homes.

Now, we can for instance attend some situations where children of different ages assist to translated love stories together with mother and father, everybody listens to conversation, and everybody understands even sometimes not so fluently.

Language in this respect is normalizing cultural facts, and making admissible foreign behaviours and beliefs in our society.

Moreover, Standard Arabic in this context is not only transmitting cultures, but it is shaping societies. Translated serials may sometimes give a false image about the Arab world; it shows that some behaviours are permissible in our societies, that's why they can be diffused throughout our channels in our proper language. However, this may only be true if we ignore the important number of individuals who still keep rejecting behaviours that do not match our traditions and values.

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, we can say that language is a component of culture along with other entities like values, beliefs, and norms, and it is a main tool for the internalisation of these entities by the individual.

In audio-visual translation, language will help individuals from the target community identify themselves with the character that they prefer mainly according to gender stereotypic motivations. Then, it is through language that the individual will show a certain kind of membership or social categorization. He can recognize that characters on TV channels have common characteristics among themselves and between them and him.

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