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A Comparative Study of the Translation of Cultural References in Subtitling and Dubbing: The 1990s Disney Classics in Arabic

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Abstract

This study is concerned with the translation of cultural references (CRs) in subtitling and dubbing in the context of digitization, intercultural exchange, and globalization. The study breaks new ground as it develops a broader approach to Audiovisual Translation (AVT) than the limited traditional investigation of micro-level linguistic and technical issues in subtitling and dubbing. The thesis compares between subtitling and dubbing in terms of the translation of CRs in the cultural context in which the translation occurs. The aim is to reach macro-level interpretations of translators' decision-making in subtitling and dubbing. To reach this end, the thesis uses a qualitative, comparative methodology, applying Lefevere's (1992) concepts of patronage and poetics to subtitling and dubbing, exploring the impact of these forces on translation, and highlighting the evolution of these concepts in the cultural context of globalization. The corpus selected for the analysis consists of four Disney films belonging to Disney's 1990s Renaissance era; namely, *Aladdin* (1992), *Pocahontas* (1995), *Hercules* (1997), and *Mulan* (1998). The analysis relies on Diaz Cintas and Remael's (2007) classification of CRs and their proposed set of translation strategies. The study proves that new forms of patronage and poetics have emerged due to the forces of globalization and that subtitling has become less observant of local patronage and more aesthetically homogenized than dubbing which considers musicality and the aesthetics of children's literature.

Keywords: digitization, intercultural exchange, globalization, audiovisual translation, subtitling, dubbing, cultural references, patronage, poetics, Disney, children's literature

Table of Contents

Introduction 2
Context of Study 3
Research Significance 4
Research Questions 6
Methodology 8
Thesis Division 9
Chapter One: Theoretical Framework: Rewriting Cultural References in Audiovisual Translation 11
1.1 Descriptive Translation Studies and the Cultural Turn 11
1.2 Manipulation School 12
1.3 Rewriting 14
1.3.1 Patronage 15
1.3.2 Poetics 15
1.3.3 The universe of discourse 17
1.4 Patronage in the Context of Globalization 19
1.5 Audiovisual Poetics 24
1.5.1 Technical and linguistic features of subtitling 26
1.5.2 Technical and linguistic features of dubbing 33
1.6 Cultural References in AVT 39
1.6.1 Definitions 39
1.6.2 Classifications 41
1.6.3 Translation strategies 45
Chapter Two: Case Study 1- Translation of Cultural References in *Aladdin* (1992) 55
2.1 Background 55
2.2 Analysis of the translation of CRs in *Aladdin* (1992) 57
2.2.1 Geographical references 57
2.2.2 Ethnographic references 63
2.2.3 Sociopolitical references 98

2.2.4 Non-verbal cultural references 103
2.3 Conclusions 105
Chapter Three: Case Study 2- Translation of Cultural References in *Pocahontas* (1995) 111
3.1 Background 111
3.2 Analysis of the translation of CRs in *Pocahontas* (1995)..................112
3.2.1 Geographical references...112
3.2.2 Ethnographic references...128
3.2.3 Sociopolitical references 145
3.2.4 Non-verbal cultural references..150
3.3 Conclusions 151
Chapter Four: Case Study 3- Translation of Cultural References in Hercules (1997)..161
4.1 Background 161
4.2 Analysis of the translation of CRs in *Hercules* (1997) 162
4.2.1 Geographical References 162
4.2.2 Ethnographic references...167
4.2.3 Socio-political references..197
4.2.4 Non-verbal cultural references..199
4.3 Conclusions 200
Chapter Five: Case Study 4- Translation of Cultural References in *Mulan* (1998) 205
5.1 Background 205
5.2 Analysis of the translation of CRs in *Mulan* (1998) 206
5.2.1 Geographical references...206
5.2.2 Ethnographic references...214
5.2.3 Socio-political references..237
5.2.4 Non-verbal cultural references..240
5.3 Conclusions 241
Conclusion 247
Overview of the Findings..247

Recommendations for Future Research 258
References 260

List of Tables

Table 1. Strategies used for the translation of CRs in *Aladdin* (1992) 105

Table 2. Strategies used for the translation of CRs in *Pocahontas* (1995) . 152

Table 3. Strategies used for the translation of CRs in *Hercules* (1997) 201

Table 4. Strategies used for the translation of CRs in *Mulan* (1998) 242

Table 5. Strategies used for the translation of CRs in the selected corpus . 248

List of Figures

Figure 1. A screenshot from *Mulan* (1998) showing line segmentation…..31

Figure 2. A screenshot from *Hercules* (1997) showing the use of ending triple dots and dashes in subtitling... 32

Figure 3. Caravan camels roam through barren deserts................................ 65

Figure 4. Ali Baba's forty thieves attacking Aladdin.................................... 71

Figure 5. The narrator introduces an Arabian coffeemaker to the audience. 74

Figure 6. Genie's chicken a 'la king. 86

Figure 7. Pocahontas decides her way around the riverbend...................... 116

Figure 8. A screenshot showing Native Americans sitting around the Sacred Fire in a typical Native American ritual. 137

Figure 9. Wiggins holding two gift baskets... 143

Figure 10. A Screenshot showing how the visual dimension affects the length of the target utterance in dubbing. 208

Figure 11. Mushu holding a bowl of porridge with fried eggs and bacon.. 232

Arabic Transliteration Chart

Arabic Script	Symbol
Consonants	
أ/ الهمزة (ء)	ʾ
ب	b
ت	t
ث	th
ج	g/ j
ح	ḥ
خ	kh
د	d
ذ	dh
ر	r
ز	z
س	s
ش	sh
ص	ṣ
ض	ḍ
ط	ṭ
ظ	ẓ

ع	ʿ
غ	gh
ف	f
ق	q
ك	k
ل	l
م	m
ن	n
هـ	h
و	w
ي	y
Vowels	
ا	ā
ي	ī/ ē
و	ō/ū
◌َ فتحة	a
◌ِ كسرة	i
◌ُ ضمة	u

Introduction

In an age governed by the new realities introduced by globalization, it is important to devote attention to the cultural context in which translation occurs. It is also important to attempt to understand the cultural implications of the current translation practices. The cultural turn in translation studies provides a valid framework upon which the cultural considerations that shape the translation process can be scrutinized. Yet, one of the main challenges facing this study is to apply the postulates made by the cultural turn in translation studies to audiovisual translation (AVT) because the cultural turn focuses on literary translation. According to Jorge Diaz Cintas (2012), the lack of sufficient academic research that focuses on the cultural dimension of AVT is one of the perceived shortcomings in this field, for "audiovisual productions … would seem to lend themselves perfectly to this type of approach, given the wealth of cultural information conveyed by them and the fact that the linguistic fabric is only a part of the whole semiotic composite" (para. 7). Therefore, it is important to foster a relationship between the AVT and the cultural turn in translation studies.

Cultures nowadays import and export audiovisual products which proliferate certain values. Diaz Cintas (2012) believes that audiovisual products are "[a] powerful vehicle for the transmission . . . of assumptions, moral values, commonplaces, and stereotypes; one of the many reasons why they stand out as an object deserving of research" (para. 7). In this context of intercultural transfer, there is an overriding need for Audiovisual Translation (AVT) as one of the groundbreaking and distinct forms of language transfer. The rising exchange of audiovisual material has resulted in a growing need for a specialized type of translation which considers the linguistic, cultural, and aesthetic particularities of audiovisuals.

Context of Study

Thanks to the great digital boom fueled by the introduction of 3-D, DVD, and Blu-ray, AVT is now gaining much interest as an area of academic research. Yet, the attempts to investigate AVT focus on the mechanical characteristics and the technical constraints associated with subtitling, dubbing, and voice-over, with little focus on the cultural factors that are at play in the process of translating audiovisual material. Nowadays, scholars are aware that AVT requires a wider investigation of the cultural contexts in which it is performed.

The central problem of this research is that AVT is a distinct type of translation that needs in-depth research in the context of the present-day cultural changes. As reported by Diaz Cintas (2012), academic contributions to the field of AVT chiefly focus on "micro-level" linguistic issues without bearing in mind the macro-level, socio-cultural context in which these linguistic issues take place (para. 6). He adds that the few studies that touch