

Gender in audiovisual translation studies

Advocating for gender awareness

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Feminist theorization and activism are the precursors to gender studies. This chapter on gender and audiovisual translation (AVT) therefore begins with an overview of those feminist ideas that entered translation studies from the 1980s onward, and helped develop this new interdiscipline. While feminist theory and criticism first addressed the study of literary translations, a focus that continues to drive research in the field, the application of gender-focused theories to AVT studies has been developing only since the early 2000s. Progress has been slow—particularly if compared with developments in the domains of media and communications studies, which have been producing feminist and/or gender-aware ideas for decades (Carter 2012).

Questions connecting feminism and media studies were first raised in the 1960s and 1970s, and focused on the skewed representation of women's lives in the media. Friedan (1963, cited in Gallagher 2013: 24), for example, noted that media tended to show a glamorized version of how women's lives should be lived. In an essay published in 1978, Gaye Tuchman rehearsed a similar argument, contending that the mass media largely ignore women or portray them in stereotypical roles of victim and/or consumer, thereby symbolically annihilating them. Laura Mulvey ([1975] 1999: 62), for her part, pointed out the sexualization and intrinsic 'to-be-looked-at-ness' of the female body on the screen, presented by and for a 'determining male gaze that [in narrative film] projects its phantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly', i.e. to meet and respond to these fantasies. Other critics noted the media's systematic resistance to—even backlash against—the women's movement from the 1960s onward, and their tendency to discredit, isolate and undercut women, cultivating images that fit 'the established structure of social relations' (Gerbner 1978: 46–48). Margaret Gallagher (2003) aptly summarizes the implications of these views, noting that 'early analyses found the media to be deeply implicated in the patterns of discrimination operating against women in society'. This stance would later be endorsed by critical media studies documenting the construction, dissemination and popularization of various other gender stereotypes through film and advertising, pointing to the construction of clichés of masculinity and heteronormativity (Gallagher 2003: 24). In the early 2000s, critical studies of the representations of Muslim women in the Western media drew attention

to how political ideologies focus on women as ‘a site on which wider, public meanings are inscribed’ (Gallagher 2003: 25, also Macdonald 2006). Anglo-American scholars and other media critics noted the proliferation of images of Muslim women clothed in chadors, burqas and veils, a phenomenon that conveniently served politicians as an emotional justification for the illegal US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq (Stabile and Kumar 2005). While the use of sexualized or veiled female bodies for commercial or political purposes has not necessarily declined, some public awareness of the gendered nature of contemporary audiovisual products has doubtless been raised as a result of critical media studies.

One noteworthy invention in regard to the reception of audiovisual products is the so-called Bechdel test. It sharply reveals the impact of feminist awareness and criticism and shows how reasoned ideological criticism can work to popular effect, well beyond the academic sphere. The Bechdel test is named after American cartoonist Alison Bechdel, in whose comic strip *Dykes to Watch Out For* it first appeared in 1985. Two women debate which film to go see that evening. The more radical black woman says she will only see a film that fulfils three basic requirements:

- 1 The movie has to have at least two women in it,
- 2 who talk to each other,
- 3 about something besides a man.

No such film is available that evening, and so the two friends spend the evening at home.

This cartoon and the feminist socio-cultural and political requirements it delineates have been widely applied by film critics and viewers alike. It is used to both assess audiovisual products from a feminist perspective and explain the failure of certain products from that same point of view. Dean Spade and Craig Willse’s entry on ‘Norms and Normalization’ in the *Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory* (2016: 551–572), for example, notes that the test is ‘a popular critical tool and commentary on how media representations enforce harmful gender norms’, since it shows how conventional fiction and media represent women only in their relationships to men. Interestingly, certain commercial film and media outlets have recognized the value of the Bechdel test, with the Scandinavian cable television channel Viasat Film incorporating it into some of their ratings in 2013, and the European cinema fund Eurimages following suit in 2014, making it part of its submission mechanism in an effort to collect information about gender equality in its projects. It now requires ‘a Bechdel analysis of the script to be supplied by the script readers’ (EWA Network, n.d.). Finally, a Bechdel ‘movie list’ now exists on the Internet (Bechdel Test Movie List, n.d.) that features hundreds of films with a Bechdel rating, provides a historical account of the development of this instrument, and invites viewers to add a film, criticize a rating, and include articles and explanations. The extensive references to the Bechdel test that can be found today through a very simple Internet search corroborate the fact that Bechdel has become a ‘household name’ for informed audiences, providing them with a simple but concrete frame of reference to assess, criticize and potentially boycott the ‘way the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form’ (Mulvey [1975] 1999: 833).

In what follows, the development of the more academic *feminist critique of film* will be reviewed briefly with reference to three important names: Mulvey, Silverman and De Lauretis. Their work provides separate but related examples of early gender-conscious criticisms of the audiovisual products that continue to drive cultural and socio-political representations of gender, where gender is considered as the socio-cultural behaviour that

performs or demonstrates a certain sexual identity; it is behaviour that is learnt through repetitive practice, training, and mechanisms of social control. In a second segment, existing research that brings questions of gender into the study of translated audiovisual products will be reviewed, and a third section will briefly explore single initiatives in the field, and suggest further areas of academic research.

First, however, it is wise to consider the problematic meaning of the term ‘gender’. Joan Scott (von Flotow and Scott 2016) has shown that in English—and in other languages that translate from or refer to English—the meaning of the term can vary substantially. For example, in a world that does not necessarily welcome feminist ideology, the term gender is often used by academics, journalists and cultural theorists to disguise the fact that their focus is, in fact, feminist and centred on women (Schwartz 2017). In mainstream journalistic publications, the term gender often refers only to women’s demands for equality and justice, leaving other gender identities aside. In documents produced by institutions such as the United Nations, gender terminology—such as gender-mainstreaming—also refers largely to women, though that is changing as discussions around heteronormative language and attitudes begin to take hold. Even English-language dictionaries note the uncertainties around the word and cite examples where gender is simply equated with ‘sexual difference’, rather than referring to the contextual, cultural and behavioural differences that come with sexual difference, which is what the original feminist use of the term meant (Scott 1999). In other words, since its inception in the 1970s the term has been put to many different uses, in popular culture, international organizations such as the United Nations or the World Health Organization, in NGOs, in policy-making, news reporting, cultural politics and academic theorizing. Von Flotow and Scott (2016: 358) shows how diverse its meanings have become in the following terms:

Adapted—not without controversy—by English and American feminists from the writings of American medical doctors, it [the term gender] resonated around the globe—again, not without controversy—in the wake of Second Wave feminism. Often used (whether by scholars or policy analysts) simply to indicate attention to the situation of women (the discrimination they face, the inequalities they experience), it soon acquired the status of theory for its advocates and critics alike. Recently it has received a great deal of publicity as a result of its denunciation by religiously-inspired opponents of gay marriage.

Scott argues that academics who regularly use the term may work with ‘gender studies’, ‘theories of gender’, ‘social constructions of sex’, or seek to analyze ‘relations of domination based on sex’. And what about ‘queer’, writes Scott, ‘is this a version of gender theory or is it antithetical to it?’ (*ibid.*: 355). It seems difficult to pin down a stable meaning for the term, and since the management and representation of sexual difference always raise sensitive questions, gender in any translation situation will always be complicated by cultural politics.

Given the difficulties in defining ‘gender’, this chapter will use the term to refer first and foremost to the fact that biological sexual differences exist and are culturally managed and represented in many audiovisual products. Secondly, in recognition of the important questions raised by ‘gender trouble’ (Butler 1990) in academia, the term will also be used in regard to differences in sexual orientation, and their representation and translation in audiovisual products. However, since the focus of this chapter is on *translation*, we deliver a critique of scholarly work that explores how these sexual differences and gendered orientations are represented through the *language* of audiovisual products, and not through their visuals.

Gender in feminist film studies

Gender criticism entered film studies in the 1970s through feminist analyses of mainstream narrative film. The work of Laura Mulvey ([1975]/1999), Kaja Silverman (1988) and Teresa de Lauretis (1987) will be discussed briefly as examples.

In her article ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, first published in 1975, Mulvey mobilizes a political use of psychoanalysis to explore and explain how the dual aspect of scopophilia—a term used and developed by Freud, which refers to the ‘voyeuristic’ pleasure in looking and the ‘narcissistic’ pleasure in being looked at—has played out for women in conventional narrative film. It has coded ‘the erotic into the language of the dominant patriarchal order’ (*ibid.*: 835), Mulvey asserts, with sexual imbalance in the world maintained through active/male and passive/female ‘pleasure in looking’ (*ibid.*: 837). In Mulvey’s analysis, narrative film is structured to respond to and further fuel the dominant order, reinforcing ‘pre-existing patterns of fascination already at work within the individual subject and the social formations that have moulded him’ (*ibid.*: 833). Her use of the pronoun ‘him’ in the preceding sentence makes it clear that this human subject addressed by mainstream narrative film, is primarily male—and that the ‘male gaze’ rules such film, thus maintaining and re-asserting the *status quo* of male power over the female, where male producers and audiences of film can revel in the pleasures of voyeurism and vicarious power, reducing the female film figures to passive body parts, and where female audiences are expected and trained to learn the joys of ‘being-looked-at-ness’ through an eroticized focus on these body parts.

In *The Acoustic Mirror* (1988), Kaja Silverman centres her work on women’s voices and speech in conventional narrative film, asserting that the *sound* of conventional cinema plays an important role in assigning behavioural traits to sexual difference, where ‘the female voice is as relentlessly held to normative representations and functions as is the female body’ (1988: viii). These normative functions underscore the spectacle that women become in these audiovisual products, a spectacle that is reinforced by women’s voices, presented as “‘thick with body’”—for example, crying, panting, or screaming . . . but with little or no authoritative voice in the narrative’ ([1984]1990, cited by Chaudhuri 2006: 45). In fact, Silverman characterizes women’s speech in such film as ‘unreliable, thwarted, or acquiescent’, noting that it is always synchronized with the spectacle that the female body is reduced to. Women’s healthy, sane, authoritative voices are almost never present, and certainly not used in voice-over, where the disembodied male ‘voice-of-God’, which connotes trustworthiness and authority to the general public, prevails. Silverman’s interest in voice is of particular interest to AVT, where both script and *sound* are adapted to the new culture, while the image is seldom touched. The question so far hardly addressed in AVT research is how gendered voices are made to sound in translation.

Teresa de Lauretis (1987) moves away from the male/female binary of earlier feminist analyses to develop work on lesbian desire and its representation in film; she explores the differences and tensions between actual, real women, and questions the viability of any universally valid ‘image of Woman’ that conventional cultural productions might claim to disseminate. Instead, she posits an eccentric female subject that does not locate itself within the institution of heterosexuality, and she seeks to articulate the specificity of representing lesbian sexuality in film. Her coining of the expression ‘queer theory’ in 1990 leads to its use as an umbrella term for a wide range of non-binary gendered behaviours, identities and cultures, all of which have since been reflected in film and in film studies (Hanson 1999). As Jane Gaines (1997) puts it in a review of *Deviant Eyes, Deviant Bodies* (Staayer 1996),

the ‘queering’ of feminist film and film theory has meant recognizing sexual variegation and gender indeterminacy, and has set an ‘infinite continuum of sexes’ against the straitjacket of binarism: work by film directors such as Patricia Rozema and Léa Pool, who are interested in lesbian women’s lives and language, is exemplary in this regard.

While these theorists paved the way for a plethora of studies on different gender questions in film, relatively little attention has been paid to questions of gender in the *language* of audiovisual products, which is, after all, what is translated, and what translation studies research needs to focus on. Does this language corroborate the stereotypes that film critics such as Mulvey, Silverman and De Lauretis identify? And if so, how? And how are neologisms and cultural references deployed in audiovisual products to evoke or imply gendered identities and behaviours, and then translated?

Gender as a topic in audiovisual translation studies

Currently, there seem to be three main approaches to studying questions of gender in audiovisual products. All three derive from the critical feminist thinking of the 1970s and display a certain advocacy: the first focuses on feminist materials in Anglo-American audiovisual products and their translation into Romance languages; the second studies the differences between subtitled and dubbed versions of Anglo-American source texts; and the third looks at gay and queer source text materials and their treatment in translation. These three tendencies are discussed below.

The first, and most developed, approach examines translated audiovisual materials for the accuracy with which they reflect feminist content and nuance. The source films under discussion are exclusively English films or TV series, many of them referred to as ‘chick flicks’, such as the US American *Sex and the City* (1998–2004), *Ally McBeal* (1997–2002), or *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003), and the British *Bridget Jones’s Diary* (2001). The language in the source films tends to emphasize the assertive, sexualized, and supposedly feminist language of relatively strident young heroines, whose stories are marketed as ‘socially realistic and relevant’ (Feral 2011a: 183), and whose non-traditional female sexuality not only represents a liberatory feminist achievement but is also a selling point. Academic studies that reflect this focus include Delia Chiaro (2007), Diana Bianchi (2008), Anne-Lise Feral (2011a, 2011b), Marcella De Marco (2006, 2012) and Alessandra De Marco (2013); they work from English originals to French, Italian or Spanish translations.

Feral’s work elaborates on French dubbers’ tendencies to eliminate or strongly modify and undermine ‘textual elements that pose[d] the greatest threat to patriarchal notions of female sexuality’ (2011a: 197) and instead, impose the ‘dominant popular ideology and culture of France where socially constructed knowledge of femininity and sexuality are inseparable from images of the courtesan and the prostitute’ (*ibid.*). Feral systematically extracts and comments on examples from these dubbed ‘chick text’ products that bolster her argument, which she then parallels with contemporary sociological studies of gender perceptions in France. One telling example is extracted from a *Sex and the City* (1998–2004) episode entitled ‘The Power of Female Sex’ (season 1, episode 5), where a group of educated young women is discussing the politics of power:

Example 1

Samantha: Women have the right to use every means at their disposal to achieve power.

Miranda: Short of sleeping their way to the top.

In French, the dubbed version (*comme coucher avec des mecs pour arriver au sommet*) expresses the exact opposite ('such as sleeping with guys to get to the top') of what Miranda says in English—thus proposing that having sex with one's employer/manager is a viable way to gain promotion. In Feral's view, this coincides with ongoing French ideas about '*promotion canapé*' (literally 'promotion via the sofa') (*ibid.*: 187) and, more generally, with the view that women need to be sexually appealing in order to succeed. She concludes that this social ambience may account for the French translations of chick texts that 'so obviously create "courtesans" where there are none in English' (*ibid.*: 188).

Diana Bianchi's study of the Italian dubbing of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003), a US American TV series whose heroine Buffy has been seen as a symbol of 'female agency' because she escapes the traditional portrait of women as victims and passive receivers of male help and protection, and because she also 'often saves "males in distress"' (2008: 184) describes similar findings. The sexually active, creative, and enterprising young woman Buffy is dubbed down into stereotypical notions around Italian female sexuality, where women are either sexually passive and proper, or consumed by a wild irrational passion. Her deliberate exploitation of men, her sexual stamina and energy are 'tamed and normalized' (*ibid.*: 191 ff). Bianchi suggests that this censorship serves to clean up the text and in so doing meets the requirements of network producers. Network demands and profits are also mentioned in an earlier study by Chiaro, who suggests that if risqué audiovisual products are not censored through the efforts of dubbers, they are limited to late night viewing, with smaller audiences, and therefore smaller profit margins. Prime time screening is compromised by language considered to be too aggressive, vulgar or rude (2007: 257). Of course, the definition of taboo language—or taboo ideas—is always relative, and contingent on cultural norms, audience expectations, profit margins, and practical, on-the-spot decisions made by dubbing actors and directors as much as by translators.

The second, related, line of research addresses the differences between the subtitled and dubbed versions of these same, or similar, audiovisual products. This research compares the subtitled and dubbed versions of the same English source text, and draws conclusions about how these products have been prepared for different target audiences.

Feral's comparative study (2011b) of the French subtitling and dubbing of *Sex and the City* explores how AVT conforms to distributors' assumptions about the intended audience's gender beliefs and values. Positioning France as a country where 90 per cent of all foreign audiovisual products are dubbed—with the intention of serving mass audiences rather than the intellectual minority that prefers subtitles—Feral shows how dubbing adapts the audiovisual text to these audiences, filtering and selecting the elements that will reach viewers and naturalizing them according to what they are deemed to understand or want. Feral's findings reveal that the subtitled versions maintain most of the US feminist references and attitudes, while the dubbed products not only weaken or completely eliminate the feminist content of the US productions, but also make important changes in the text itself. For example, references to women in public positions of authority are downplayed, a woman's post-graduate university degree is reduced to a French *baccalaureat* ('high school diploma'), and women characters' ambitions, interests and achievements are consistently undermined. The question raised here is the following: why is the majority of French viewers expected to prefer 'humbler female voices to those of the high-flying career women [in the source materials] who flaunt their academic and professional excellence and ambition?' (2011b: 399). Yet again, Feral draws a parallel between this situation and the history, status, and representation of feminism in France more generally, arguing that these dubbing practices reveal to what extent feminism in France has been marginalized in mainstream audiovisual practices and even turned into a weapon against women.

A third approach to the study of gender issues in AVT (Lewis 2010, Ranzato 2012, Chagnon 2016) examines non-binary sexual orientations and their linguistic representation in/through translation. Again, the source texts tend to be mainly English, which is described as having developed an abundant and colourful vocabulary for queer sexualities. Both Lewis and Ranzato find that the terminology available in Italian or Spanish for 'queer' ways of being and expressing oneself is either non-existent or weak, and often simply erased and replaced with more conventional language. Another problem revolves around the ambiguity of English and, more specifically, its capacity to play with the neutral grammatical gender of words such as 'friend', 'lover', or 'partner.' The Romance languages that these academics study have grammatical gender, and translators must decide whether the 'lover' or 'friend' is male or female: *un amante* or *une amante* in French, *un amigo* or *una amiga* in Spanish. The danger is that queer or non-binary implications are lost, or worse, rendered heteronormative. There seem to be fewer options for a translated text to 'queer' a script (Lewis 2010), and not only for reasons of grammar or terminology. Both Lewis and Ranzato speculate on the possibility that some translators may not even recognize queer references or moments of sexual ambiguity. They may not be aware of the censorship they are inflicting when they neglect or erase gay or camp references.

Lewis, for instance, explains that just like people in everyday life, characters in film are assumed to be heterosexual until they are proven queer (2010: 3). This assumption must impinge upon translators', publishers' or producers' capacities to perceive, recognize, valorize, and render queer content. They automatically privilege heteronormative elements, easily translating scripts into a conventional binary form. Lewis' case for 'queer translation' contests this 'heteronormative hegemony in order to give queer people a voice and greater visibility' (*ibid.*: 11). Her case study of the subtitled versions of *Gia* (1998), a film based on the life of a queer model, focuses on one small segment where Gia introduces her female love interest to her mother, who does not know or chooses not to know that Gia is a lesbian. Here, the focus is on the terms 'girlfriend', meaning lesbian lover, and 'boyfriend', a straight, binary boyfriend. Gia's attempt to let her mother know that she has a 'girlfriend' and her mother's willingness to overhear this is the crux of the matter (Example 2), and Lewis discusses to what extent the subtitled versions render this subtlety:

Example 2

English: This is my, uh, girlfriend, Linda.

Spanish: Esta es mi amiga, Linda.

French: Voici ma copine: Linda.

Italian: Questa è la mia amica, Linda.

Portuguese: Esta é minha amiga, Linda.

In Lewis' assessment the Spanish, Italian and Portuguese versions occult the possibility of a 'queer reading' of this exchange through the use of the term 'amiga/amica' which does not imply any romantic interest; the French (*Voici ma copine* rather than *Voici une copine*) does, and so demonstrates that a translation sensitive to the ambiguity of the text is indeed possible. Lewis concludes that many translations avoid recognizing this type of sexual ambiguity, and simply translate into heteronormative directions. She argues for and demonstrates

the possibility of more nuanced approaches and suggests various solutions to the ongoing problem of audiovisual translators not recognizing gender difference.

On the question of dubbing English ‘gayspeak’ into Italian, Irene Ranzato (2012) cites Keith Harvey (2000) to underline the notion of gay speech communities as an important element in the creation of what she considers the ‘fictional scripted language of fictional homosexuals portrayed . . . in usually stereotypical ways, often through the use of “camp”’ (*ibid.*: 371). Her study identifies a number of problems facing Italian dubbers of gay film/gay-speak. First, the gay lexicon in English is far richer and broader than in Italian, which has often just borrowed, or calqued English words. Secondly, the campy references that gay Anglo-American characters might make to film heroines such as Marlene Dietrich, Judy Garland or other long-dead film divas who are supposedly fetishized by a sector of the gay community are simply unavailable or meaningless for Italian audiences: a problem of cultural references, which always defy easy translation. Faced with these challenges, and doubtless also for cultural reasons, Italian dubbing often cuts the references to such figures from popular culture, generalizes queer terms (removing the differences between ‘butch’ and ‘dyke’, for instance), and turns homosexual terms into heterosexual ones. As an example, Ranzato opens her article with a reference to the first Hollywood use of the word ‘gay’ to mean homosexual, in the comedy classic *Bringing Up Baby* (1938), where Cary Grant—wearing a frilly woman’s bathrobe at a chaotic moment in the film—reputedly responds to the question about why he is dressed in this outfit: ‘Because I just went gay all of a sudden!’. The Italian dubbed version, entitled *Susanna*, provides the translation *Perché sono diventato pazzo, ecco perché!* (‘Because I’ve gone mad, that’s why!’) (*ibid.*: 370). Ranzato presents this as an early example of a general tendency in Italian dubbing to render homosexual content with references to madness or illness (*ibid.*: 380), a tendency that in her estimation has not diminished. In Italian dubbing, homosexuality is apparently erased, or attenuated, changed by translations that remove allusions as well as precise terms and replace homoerotic references with terms that render homosexuality as some kind of illness.

In Canada, on the other hand, where US American audiovisual products are often dubbed into French for Quebec, certain translations would appear to deliberately enhance or emphasize gay aspects of a product. A study of the TV shows *Queer as Folk* (2000–2005) and *The L Word* reveals (2004–2009) that the dubbed versions have systematically emphasized the show’s gay phrases and vocabulary (Chagnon 2016). The language of these shows is ‘gayed’ and focused on the homosexual aspects of the script, which results in exaggerated stereotypes of gays and lesbians being created for the sole purpose of obtaining a larger viewership. Unlike Ranzato’s (2012) work, which points to the erasure of gay in Italian dubbed products, Chagnon’s points to the sales factor as an important element driving the tendency she observes.

Less advocacy-driven work

Other individual articles focus on more disparate topics in the area of gender-aware criticism of AVT. They include three contemporary studies that discuss translation *into English*: Asimakoulas (2012) describes the language of transsexual identity, and its translation in the Greek film *Strella* (2009); Hiramoto (2013) studies scripted gender stereotyping in the Japanese *anime* series *Cowboy Bebop* (1998–2003) and its US versioning; and Daniel E. Josephy-Hernández (2017) researches the portrayal of gender in the subtitled and dubbed versions of Kon Satoshi’s film *Perfect Blue* (1997). Two other studies, by Nicole Baumgarten (2005) on the German dubbing of James Bond movies and Charlotte Bosseaux (2008) on the

meaningfulness of voice quality point in the direction of broader gender questions in AVT studies. They are addressed below.

The three studies of audiovisual products translated into English are descriptive rather than advocative, acknowledging the challenges translations face in dealing with the gender focus of their respective source texts. Asimakoulas, for example, presents queer and ‘trans’ aspects of *Strella*, a Greek film about a man who, having just been released from prison after 15 years, begins searching for his long-lost son—only to end up falling for a young transsexual girl who turns out to be his son. Drawing on Butler (1990), Asimakoulas focuses his analysis on the language of ‘non-normal subject positions where ambiguity prevails’, and where queer characters take subversive and playful stances toward established ideas. He casts his discussion of the film and its English subtitles in terms of four types of language subversion that Harvey (2000) theorized in relation to ‘gayspeak’—i.e. the variety of language used by gay men to identify themselves to each other. These uses of language, which Asimakoulas sees as undermining the dominant order, include a playful, disruptive attitude to language, a reversal of the expected order of language/dialogue, the use of paradox through the juxtaposition of contradictory ideas, and parody of other cultural manifestations. By classifying instances of gay/queer language found in the film according to these categories, Asimakoulas shows how diverse, locally situated, and culturally bound this film language is; likewise, he draws attention to the challenges that are bound to hinder any attempt to render such linguistic features into anything vaguely equivalent in English. His work does not set out, however, to attack or criticize the work of the English subtitlers; instead, it explores and charts an area that has been so far untouched in translation studies—the language of transgender. In so doing, Asimakoulas elaborates on issues of ambiguity that have a significant impact on ‘translation proper’.

Hiramoto, similarly, recognizes the difficulties faced by the English dubbing world when confronted with the forms of the Japanese language that are used to reinforce ‘hegemonic masculinity’ in an *anime* series aimed at young adult males. The ‘hero and babe characters’ in the series entitled *Cowboy Bebop* (1998–2003) not only have exaggerated physical characteristics to mark their binary genders, but also make use of exaggerated language that connotes very male or very female traits (Hiramoto 2013: 53). Gender markers in Japanese are specific, but also ubiquitous. They are found in first and second person pronouns, in sentence final particles, and throughout one form of the language referred to as JW (Japanese Women’s Language)—a hyper-feminine form of speech used exclusively in constructed fictional dialogue (*ibid.*: 74), i.e. in scripts (see also Inoue 2003, Furukawa 2017). The English dubbing has much to contend with since English does not mark first and second person pronouns for gender or add gender indications at the end of sentences; nor does a specific form of women’s speech exist in English. It can, therefore, not meet the extremes of the Japanese forms, and can only maintain the ‘simplistic models of gendered language’ in English, which fosters what Hiramoto calls a ‘black-and-white interpretation of male and female characters’ identities’ (*ibid.*: 74). An example that seems to contradict his conclusion, however, concerns the characterization of the main ‘babe’, Faye, whose profoundly feminine use of language in Japanese would appear to clash with her robust personality. In the English dubbed version, this feminine aspect is diluted and her toughness is accentuated through the use of ‘unladylike expletives and challenging tag questions’ (*ibid.*: 71)—which could arguably cause her to come across as tomboyish. In other words, English viewers’ perceptions of this character as asexual or simply rough are predicated on translations that cannot recreate the deeply feminine aspect that the Japanese script assigns to her.

Josephy-Hernández's work (2017), on the other hand, uncovers the unexpected effects of a relatively literal set of US American subtitles of Kon Satoshi's *anime* film *Perfect Blue* (1997), which maintain and even enhance the strong, forceful language used by Mima—a female idol and the film's main character—throughout the film. The literalism of the subtitling underlines her less-than-feminine language, a phenomenon Josephy-Hernández views as a perhaps unwitting emphasis of the film's critique of the female idol in Japanese popular culture. Here, the adoption of a literal rather than an adaptive approach to translation reflects some of the strongly gendered aspects of Japanese in the English version, thereby also serving to reinforce the underlying message.

These three studies raise an interesting issue that engages with the 'advocacy' studies critiqued in the previous section: they undermine claims about English being *the* language of flexible, inventive, adaptable and neologistic gender-bender possibilities. In fact, they show that many other languages are just as innovative in this area of sexual representation, and can prove equally challenging to render in translation. The fact that English does no better as a translating language confirms what researchers working on questions of gender are likely to find in their work: gender is a sensitive, culturally specific topic—in *all* its manifestations. And since AVT never occurs in a gender vacuum, the outcome of the translation process will be affected by (i) the attitudes of the translators working with audiovisual texts in their perceived or assumed roles as moral gate-keepers; (ii) the translators' experiences of and exposure to 'gender' as a discursive socio-cultural element affecting any language; and (iii) the agendas of specific broadcasting networks, involving assumptions about audience expectations—that will determine how much time and money is invested in translations.

The work by Nicole Baumgarten (2005) and Charlotte Bosseaux (2008) points to other gender-aware directions in AVT studies. While Baumgarten's study is perhaps of particular interest to audiovisual translators interested in downplaying or eliminating gratuitous sexist language in audiovisual products, Bosseaux's will resonate with those who are more concerned with the meaningfulness of voice and sound as part of the translation. Her contention that voice is an integral part of characterization, and that voice actors must recreate characters to avoid a disconnect between their visual and aural representations on-screen gels with Silverman's focus on voice, and is a topic that warrants further development in AVT.

Baumgarten (2005) eschews the current academic climate of advocacy in regard to gender representation and describes what seem to have been accidental findings. Having set out to discover how the translation of various types of texts from English to German have affected contemporary German language use, Baumgarten describes turning to an analysis of James Bond movies in order to examine 'linguistic features of "spoken" text production' (2005: 56). She hypothesizes that the affect of personal closeness may make the German language more vulnerable to taking on and exhibiting influences from English (*ibid.*) What she finds is that the German dubbing of *From Russia with Love* (1963) actually *removes* gratuitous sexist/misogynist references in the English script and uses the space that is freed up to reinforce plot development. Her work explores what she cautiously terms 'shifts in communicative preferences' (*ibid.*: 54) as the German dubbing tones down derogatory commentary on women. She proposes several explanations for these shifts in preferences: first, a 'normalizing' tendency that any translation might show to remove items that are 'unwelcome in the target culture'; second, a greater focus in German on the event structure, i.e. the content of a text, rather than on gratuitous asides that express subjective attitudes about women. This study of a dubbing approach that effectively counters the blatant sexism of the source material provides a certain relief from the more predictable work focused on advocacy and brings to mind an earlier text by Antje Ascheid (1997), which also argued that German dubbing shows strong creative tendencies.

Bosseaux's (2008) article centres on voice quality in the dubbing of film songs. She is one of the very few to explore what Pérez-González (2014: 199–200) has termed the 'semi-otic potential of the para-verbal', involving the deployment of intonation, accent/phonetics of linguistic variation, voice quality, rhythm, speed and pausing. The 'aural' aspects of dubbing and the meaning conveyed by the sound of a voice could/should be of great interest in regard to the effects of dubbing: how are male/female/other voices made to sound not only in the scripted dialogues of the source cultures, but in the dubbed versions? Does the sound of a voice change across languages? And if so, what does this mean or indicate? For example, how is what Silverman describes as the 'prattle, bitchiness, sweet murmurings, maternal admonitions' ([1984]1990: 309, cited in Chaudhuri 2006) that is typical of the mainstream US female film subjects made to *sound*, first in English, and then in other languages? And to what effect? Bosseaux studies the question in regard to a dubbed song in one episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003), the very successful and much-translated US chick-flick TV series. She compares the nasal, monotonous voice of the English-language protagonist to the French dubbed version, where Buffy has a more 'mature voice, with more depth and variation' (2008: 56). The voice in the source text ostensibly reflects Buffy's condition of boredom and depression at that point while the French voice implies sophistication and a certain ease in life. According to Bosseaux, this difference interferes with and disengages from the character's personality and emotions, causing confusion among viewers. While Bosseaux's analysis is not outright gender-conscious, it points the way toward studies that take into account questions of authority and power. Since voice provides important information about a character's age, social standing, authority, self-awareness, confidence, and sexual orientation, more research on this topic could lead to valuable insights into how gender is represented through sound.

Future areas of development

A substantial amount of research ground remains to be charted at the interface between gender studies and AVT. Descriptive, historical analyses that focus on gender issues are virtually non-existent in this area of scholarly enquiry. How are the divas, heroes or villains (Italian, German, US and others) of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s presented in translation? And how is that handled in Russian, Chinese, Indian, Middle-Eastern or African cinema? While contemporary work proceeds largely from a position of advocacy in its study of almost exclusively mainstream US films or TV series, more historical research might descriptively trace how earlier work has laid the groundwork for today's practices.

The question of voice—pitch, tone, timbre—is emerging as another potentially fruitful research area. If questions of authority and power are indeed tied to voice, as Bosseaux asserts, then feminist, queer and gender-aware approaches to AVT would do well to explore this.

Similarly, the potential differences that reportedly exist between dubbing for mainstream (and therefore more conservative) audiences versus subtitling for the (educated and liberal) elite could do with further examination in regard to gender questions. After all, the so-called elite of many a society include the business interests that drive film-making, and therefore the representation of gender: they are involved. Does the conventional view of dubbing as a 'dumbing down' of cinema, a way of catering to and manipulating the masses, also pertain in regard to gender awareness? And if so, does this apply beyond the bounds of Hollywood productions?

The media as a force involved in creating and implanting gender-based neologisms (such as gayspeak, or more recently 'trans-language') in a culture would appear to constitute

another pertinent research topic. In light of the last 40 years of activism on feminist and other gender fronts, research into the question of gender-related neologism and its translation—which is touched on in some of the studies critiqued earlier in this chapter—could provide strong evidence of media influence as well as media backlash. The treatment of these currents and counter-currents in translation would provide interesting avenues of comparative cultural studies in reception.

Finally, recurring hints about the conservatism of dubbing and also subtitling when compared to indigenous/local productions are intriguing: are local productions, created in the local language with its specific regionalisms, accents and levels of sound and meaning more likely to be gender-aware and innovative than translated materials? Are manifestations of gender representation more extreme or daring when they are local? Is translation of any kind always more likely to be proper and conservative—in other words ‘orthonymic’—and to clean up a foreign work for local audiences?

The different approaches to gender awareness in the industrial and commercial aspects of dubbing, subtitling and broadcasting of translated audiovisual products also deserve more attention: How far are distributors, networks and other business interests involved in recognizing or even caring about questions of gender in translation? Clues (in Chiaro 2007) that Italian broadcasters can be more liberal in their translations if they broadcast at night, and references to blacklisted terms would seem to raise interesting questions for research in this regard. Do these restrictions apply elsewhere (other languages, cultures and/or socio-political moments)? And finally, what is the ‘gender awareness’ quality and effect of the many forms of fansubbing and fandubbing that circulate on the Internet? Here, translation beyond institutional control could provide a foil for the more official versions of gender in AVT. Since fansubbing is not constrained by the rules and regulations of the industry, is there such a thing, or should there be something like ‘feminist’ or ‘queer’ fansubbing?

Finally, to date, little or no work seems to be available on gender issues in localization of any sort. This is a promising area for future development, as the globalization of audiovisual products expands worldwide, often accompanied by marketing materials that tend to mobilize strongly gendered content. One translation example in this field comes from the videogame *Fire Emblem*, where the Japanese-to-English translation of specific types of warriors has elided the binary gender. Instead of having a class of ‘swordsmen’ or ‘swordswomen’, both obviously gendered terms, for the Japanese 剣士 (*Bureido*, ‘blade’), the translation creatively uses the term ‘myrmidon’, borrowed from Greek mythology, for both male and female sword users. Questions one might ask here include whether this English translation ‘queers’ the text by avoiding the categorization by binary biological sex, or whether it neutralizes it, or whether it simply saves space. There is such a dearth of work on gender and language in videogame localization that such questions and many others remain purely speculative.

Conclusion

Scholarly work on gender issues in AVT dates back only to the early years of the twenty-first century. Yet the underlying questions around the use of language in audiovisual products for the purposes of gender stereotyping, and collaterally, as a sales technique have been present for decades—first and foremost through feminist critiques of media that date from the 1970s. The application and expansion of feminist ideas into the study of audiovisual products with a focus on gender awareness in the *language* of the translations has taken some time to develop, perhaps due to the power and distractive qualities of the images in

audiovisual content. In any case, the most productive work in the field is currently being done in regard to Romance languages where scholars study how these products largely fail to take on the Anglo-American genderlects, which are constructed for, produced, and disseminated through film and television. This approach criticizes the refusal or inability of French, Spanish or Italian dubbing industries to match the neologisms and the blatantly queer references of the source materials, and advocates for attitudes and work methods that are gender-aware.

A less developed, but still promising, research strand addresses the English translations of audiovisual products from Greece and Japan, and shows how English translations also struggle and fail to render genderlects and neologisms from these languages. They thereby undermine the implied view that English is more liberal, or open-minded as far as gender terminology is concerned.

In fact, what we see over and over again is that the language for sexual difference and derivative gendered behaviours is always sensitive and often political, in every culture and at every social level. As this chapter has shown, in AVT this is borne out in each of the analyzed texts.

Further reading

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Related topics

- 3 Subtitling on the cusp of its futures
- 4 Investigating dubbing: learning from the past, looking to the future
- 10 Game localization: a critical overview and implications for audiovisual translation
- 23 Audiovisual translation and audience reception
- 24 Ethnography in audiovisual translation studies
- 27 Audiovisual translation and fandom

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