

Jorge Díaz Cintas (2003). *Teoría y práctica de la subtitulación: Inglés-Español*, Barcelona: Ariel, pp. 412, € 36<sup>1</sup>

This recently published monograph on the theory and practice of subtitling from English to Spanish is a landmark: not only in content, as a major contribution to the understanding of subtitling, but also in form, since it comes complete with a DVD containing a wide selection of scenes discussed in the book as well as tasks for learning and practising the skills involved.

As the title suggests, this is a book written for the Spanish market. The author, Jorge Díaz Cintas, holds a doctorate in audio-visual translation from the University of Valencia and lectures at the University of Surrey Roehampton. He has published widely on audio-visual translation and his knowledge of the field comes through clearly in the scope and detail of the volume.

Audio-visual translation as a whole is a rapid growth area professionally, thanks in great part to the increased translation demands of DVD, and is gaining in importance in research terms. The aim of the book is to give an overview of the field, specifically of interlingual subtitling, and to highlight the characteristics which distinguish it as a self-standing activity (p. 20). The book is divided into four parts: (1) Society and Profession, (2) Theory, (3) Research and (4) Practice, together with a glossary and appendices that provide a host of useful websites and addresses.

Part 1 sets a definition of subtitling as “a linguistic practice which consists in offering, generally in the lower portion of the screen, a written text which sets out to recount the actors’ dialogues and the discursive elements that form part of the image (letters, graffiti, captions, hoardings, etc.) or the sound track (songs, off-screen voices, etc.)” (p. 32) [FN1]. Díaz Cintas describes subtitling as a case of “vulnerable translation” (pp. 43-4) since not only is it subject to the strict restrictions of the medium regarding the space and time that a subtitle can occupy on the screen, but there is also the added factor that the co-existence of subtitle and original sound track allows a comparison between the ST and TT that may often give rise to criticism of the translation from a more or less bilingual audience. A very large number of elements are covered in this first Part, ranging from a description of the history and comparison of the pros and cons of subtitling and dubbing to a detailed description of the working practices and training of a subtitler.

The ‘Theory’ Part 2, which comprises 150 pages, examines the professional and technical dimensions of the profession and sets out

guidelines for a code of practice to regulate and ensure high quality and to overcome the present lack of harmonization. There are many good examples of how problems specific to subtitling can be solved, as in the following, which deals with the need for text and image to correspond:

"An example would be the case of an actress who replies to a question by shaking her head. Here the subtitler will need to find a solution which does not contradict the image. Thus, if the question is "*Do you mind if I sit down?*" and the reply is a blunt "*No*", emphasized with a shake of the head, the Spanish formulation should not be "*¿Puedo sentarme?*" -- "May I sit down?" -- which triggers the affirmative "*Yes*", but rather "*¿Le molesta si me siento?*" -- "Does it disturb you if I sit down?" -- which forces a "*No*", coherent with the image on the screen." (p. 194)

Other examples of important translation issues that have a different slant in subtitling are the redundancy of explicitation in the subtitles if something can be gleaned from the image (p. 195); that word order tends to be more closely followed in subtitling because of the expectation amongst bilingual viewers that ST and TT should correspond (p. 199); that reduction and omission of up to 44% is an inherent part of subtitling practice (p. 203); and that there is a preference for 'short' words such as *usar* rather than synonyms *utilizar* and *emplear* due to the limitation of the number of characters that can appear on the screen (p. 205).

Part 3 presents a very useful overview of research in subtitling nationally (within Spain, where due prominence is given to Roberto Mayoral, who contributes the prologue to this volume) and internationally. Díaz Cintas maintains that much of translation theory is not transferable to audio-visual translation (p. 290). Nevertheless, he acknowledges the usefulness of pragmatics and discourse analysis, sees the potential for politeness theory in audio-visual translation research and welcomes closer ties with film studies. A list of areas where research is needed is proposed (pp. 309-10) and a model for descriptive studies is set out (pp. 322-4), based primarily on Lambert and van Gorp (1985) and Toury (1995). This detailed model, which is not trialled in the book, is divided into (1) preliminary information, such as the marketing and presentation of the film, type of translation and general translation strategy; (2) macrostructure (prologue, scenes, music, dialogue, monologue, subtitling conventions observed on-screen, etc.); (3) microstructure of linguistic features such as coherence, omission, cultural referents); and (4) systemic context, which includes intertextual references and comparison with other films. It is curious that,

though the author welcomes closer ties with film studies and emphasizes the special characteristics of this medium, many of the categories are in fact based on the analysis of conventional written texts. The theory of visual semiotics is noticeably lacking in this model.

Part 4 presents some example tasks for the reader to do with the accompanying DVD. This contains *subtitul@m*, a subtitling program designed primarily for teaching purposes by the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. The exercises range from the general (e.g. identifying time codes and examining dialogue lists) to the advanced (e.g. production and entering of subtitles of a scene from an English film without the help of a dialogue list). Despite the limitations imposed by the difficulty of obtaining copyright permission to use the most appropriate scenes and films (p. 343), this is still an excellent and innovative teaching tool that provides a real hands-on dimension to the book.

As is the reviewer's custom, I have a few quibbles. If anything, I feel the book attempts too much. It does provide an overview of a fascinating topic, but it thereby loses some focus: it gives an insight to the profession, functions as a kind of handbook and learning tool for the apprentice subtitler and discusses research in the area, at the same time proposing a detailed model for the descriptive analysis of subtitles. It also sometimes reads like a manifesto of the European Association for Studies in Screen Translation (ESIST), of which Jorge Díaz Cintas is the president, particularly in the prescriptive statements designed to promote harmonization of practices nationally and internationally and to raise the profile of the profession. Such issues have always existed in written translation and localization and yet the practice and research goes on (for instance, each organization or company will have different requirements for the presentation of their translations; translation memory tools such as *Trados* and *Déjà Vu* are incompatible but each has particular strengths and functions perfectly well). Perhaps it is best for readers simply to focus on the section that is of most interest and to use the wealth of examples and ideas as best fits their purpose, whether that be research, practice or teaching.

The book deliberately limits itself to subtitling from English into Spanish. For this reason, certain sections, such as those on the use of punctuation and diacritics ( *í, ñ, ú* and so on) are only of real interest to those working with that language combination. Despite these being two major world languages, this inevitably restricts the potential readership of the volume. However, there is no reason why a version of this book should not appear in English translation, in the same way that Vinay and Darbelnet's classic *Stylistique*

*comparée du français et de l'anglais* appeared in an English translation in 1995. Since this is a very sensitive area, I should emphasize by this that, as a translation scholar working primarily with English and Spanish, I am not advocating further linguistic imperialism, but merely suggesting this course as a means of achieving the wider audience this book and its author deserve.

To conclude, *Teoría y práctica de la subtitulación* has much to recommend it. It is a mine of information and examples on an increasingly prominent area of Translation Studies. This prominence can only increase with the 'In So Many Words' conference organized by the Federal University of Surrey to be held in London in February 2004 and by the growth in Masters degrees in audio-visual translation such as the one to be offered by Surrey from 2004-5. With such developments, there is every chance therefore that audio-visual translation "might become *the* translation subdiscipline of the new millennium" (294).

## References

- Lambert, J. and H. Van Gorp (1985) "On Describing Translations", in T. Hermans (ed.) *The Manipulation of Literature*, New York: St Martin's Press, pp. 42-53.
- Toury, G. (1995) *Descriptive Translation Studies – and beyond*, Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Vinay, J-P. and J. Darbelnet (1958) (1995). *Stylistique comparée du français et de l'anglais. Méthode de traduction*, Paris: Didier, trans. and ed. by J. C. Sager and M.-J. Hamel (1995) as *Comparative Stylistics of French and English: A methodology for translation*, Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

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<sup>i</sup> All translations are the reviewer's own from the Spanish original