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Cornu, Jean-François (2014). *Le Doublage et le sous-titrage. Histoire et esthétique*. Rennes: PUR, pp. 440, €23, ISBN: 978-2-7535-3386-8.

Jean-François Cornu's *Le Doublage et le sous-titrage* is an ambitious study which aims to look at the over eighty-year-old practices of dubbing *and* subtitling from a historical, technical and aesthetic viewpoint. An exciting, yet demanding endeavour, attempted previously by only a handful of film and translation scholars (most recently by Nornes (2008) and O'Sullivan (2011)). With many years of experience in the French subtitling and publishing industry and in academia, Cornu has what it takes to produce an influential work where research scholarship and the insider's technical know-how play in perfect synchrony. No disappointing surprises will await the curious reader, but a zealous search into the introduction, technological advancements and aesthetics of film translation practices in France.

The study embraces a wide chronological time frame, starting from the late 1920s-early 1930s - the crucial phase which sees the diffusion of the talking film in France and in other countries worldwide (Part I, Chapters 1, 2, 3) - and arriving at current practice. It is a long journey that brings us from modernity to digital culture (and from inflammable nitrate film to the Digital Cinema Package) where Hollywood steals most of the show, even if throughout the book Cornu accounts for the presence and translation of other non-English-language films in France.

Balanced attention is given to the simultaneous diffusion and establishment of dubbing and subtitling in the national theatrical circuit. Unlike the three other major dubbing countries in Europe (Germany, Italy and Spain), which, until recently, have endorsed almost exclusively dubbing, in France, both dubbed and subtitled pictures were allowed distribution to mainstream cinemas, even though some governmental restrictions were put as to the number of theatres in which subtitles films could be shown. Cornu describes first the steady evolution and establishment of dubbing as the main translation mode (Part II) and then focuses on the continuous technological innovations affecting subtitling (Part III). These two solutions are analysed with copious translation examples (for example, extracts taken from films such as *Mädchen in Uniform*, *Citizen Kane*, *The Pillow Book* and many others) while avoiding sterile comparative value judgement.

The readers interested in the historic point of view will be captivated by the short account of the state of the AVT industry in occupied and post-World War II France (in Chapters 6 and 8), a critical phase for this cultural industry in France and elsewhere in Europe. Translation students and practitioners can treasure a wealth of examples on the composite and dynamic nature of a film's aural atmosphere and its verbal treatment. Film aesthetes may find satisfaction in Cornu's bipartisan analysis of the formal interplay between

dubbing or subtitling, the moving image and the human voice (Part IV, Chapters 9 and 10).

Cornu makes extensive use of specialised film press, in particular *La Cinématographique française* and *Variety*, published between the end of the 1920s and the 1940s. The industry's contemporary point of view is also presented, thanks to the interviews that the author conducted personally between the 1980s and the 2000s with adapters, subtitlers and directors of French dubbing and subtitling companies (e.g., Nina Kagansky and her *Titra Film*). The bibliography is organised by subtopics and is a useful point of reference for students and scholars in both Film and Translation Studies. It features major French and American studies on film history, the diffusion of sound, the voice in cinema, film case studies and the few existing historical and aesthetic analyses on dubbing and subtitling.

The archive-worm in me was fascinated to learn of the technological evolution of subtitling techniques (e.g., optical, chemical, laser, digital) and to understand better how different superimposition methods can significantly affect the quantity and quality of the written text that goes on to the screen, and, as a consequence, the readability of the subtitles and the impact on a film's overall reception. It is a shame that only few stills were included in the publication to accompany these detailed physical descriptions; in my opinion, additional visual references would have enriched enormously the author's ground-breaking research into the field. I also felt that the fansubbing phenomenon could have been acknowledged more in the part dedicated to subtitling, at least for its creative, non-canonical contribution to present-day practice. But perhaps, the phenomenon does not have the same aesthetic, cultural and political significance for the French public that it has had in other countries dominated by dubbing.

Although French in language and subject, Cornu's long-awaited work has an impact that reaches beyond national and linguistic boundaries. It is a comprehensive study that does not just make do with existing film and translation historiography, but one that, instead, leads the way to 'new' avenues of research in audiovisual translation (namely, AVT History). Finally, in revealing the 'archaeological' challenges that the film translation historian face when working with damaged, untraceable if not irremediably lost, dubbed or subtitled film footage, Cornu's research underscores a preservation and conservation issue that needs to be confronted urgently.

References

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