JoSTrans
The Journal of Specialised Translation

www.jostrans.org · ISSN: 1740-367X

Dore, M. (2018). Speaking in Subtitles. Revaluing Screen Translation (2017). *The Journal of Specialised Translation, 29*, 260-262. https://doi.org/10.26034/cm.jostrans.2018.223

This article is publish under a *Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International* (CC BY): https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0

© Margherita Dore, 2018

Dwyer, Tessa (2017), *Speaking in Subtitles. Revaluing Screen Translation*. Edinburgh (UK): Edinburgh University Press, pp. 240, £75.00. ISBN: 9781474410946.

Tessa Dwyer's *Speaking in Subtitles. Revaluing Screen Translation* concentrates on error and failure (or "mistranslation" and "errancy," in her terminology) in Audiovisual Translation (AVT) by placing particular emphasis on subtitling, although dubbing and other modes of AVT are also discussed.

The monograph comprises an introduction and two main sections, each containing three chapters. Part I, includes three complex and, in part, highly theoretical chapters, which show Dwyer's in-depth understanding of the theories developed within both Translation and Screen Studies. In Chapter 1, Dwyer provides an overview of the ongoing debate regarding users' preference of subtitling or dubbing, and concludes that the sub/dub split or "war" is merely unproductive (37). Having decided to scrutinise mainly subtitled text, she also considers the issues deriving from the technical constraints often leading to a certain degree of *technical manipulation* (Díaz-Cintas 2012: 284). She remarks that "no matter how skilled the subtitler, a degree of selection, condensation and thus reinterpretation will always be necessary" (30). This is certainly true, but I would argue that being able to decide what is to be selected and condensed is *de facto* a subtitler's skill.

In Chapter 2, Dwyer discusses an interesting experiment that started in New York in 1970. The Anthology Film Archives launched the "Invisible Cinema". In the intentions of its proponent, Invisible Cinema aimed to reject any manipulation of the "original" art films they projected, including translation. Translation was however inescapable and the audience were given paper versions of the synopses translated in English. To be consistent with the overall objectives of the project, these translations retained the pattern of the original language (e.g. Russian) to continuously remind the audience they were reading a translated text, thus creating a foreignizing effect (Venuti 1995). The most interesting point here is that by rejecting translation, the proponents of Invisible Cinema reaffirmed its necessity. Unsurprisingly, this experiment came to an end four years later in 1974.

In Chapter 3, Dwyer analyses *Can Dialects Break Bricks?* (René Viénet 1973) as a case in point to discuss parodist dubbing as means of self-reflective mistranslation, which leads to a revaluation of the main tenets of translation theory. In this light, she eruditely debates fundamental notions in TS (Derrida's violent fidelity vs. Venuti's abusive fidelity) in relation to Nornes' (2007) provocative call for "abusive subtitling". As Dwyer rightly remarks, translation in general, and AVT in particular, is a place for power struggle as it can effectively expose "how some languages speak for and above others" (88).

From an AVT point of view, Part II is definitely more engaging. Chapter 4 deals with censorship in screen translation and media piracy. On the one hand, Dwyer debates censorship in terms of *ideological manipulation* (Díaz-Cintas 2012: 285) and remarks that "censorship impulses can infiltrate even in the most benign and innocuous operations of translation" (111), be they intralingual and interlingual. On the other hand, censorship is dealt with in terms of restrictions and copyrighting, which result in the production of pirate versions of (mainly) Hollywood movies, which circulate mostly in Asia and make little use of emerging technology such as online streaming. The analysis of the subtitles of some striking examples show that these profit-driven products have little or nothing to do with amateur translation such fansubbing, which is debated in Chapter 5. After a brief overview of the origins of fansubbing (and fandubbing), Dwyer explains that one of the starting driving reasons of this amateur form of AVT is to educate its receivers regarding cultural and linguistic diversity. Many fans across the world have joined fansubbing groups to provide information that mainstream broadcasting could often leave out. Hence, their work has partly been legitimised, despite generally operating outside legality. Although imbued with mistranslation and errancy, funsubbing has the merit to be voluntary and, in principle, non-profit. It therefore helps to expose and subvert the profit-driven and capitalist side of the AVT industry.

That said, Dwyer devotes Chapter 6 to examining and discussing at length Viki Global TV. This example of amateur translation is based on crowdsourcing, community and collaborative translation (a.k.a. CT3). It could be therefore subsumed under the fansubbing category as it boasts the voluntary and (mostly) free access to its contents. Yet, it has evolved to become a profit-driven venture that, unlike cheap bootlegging, exploits the full potentiality of online streaming to spread worldwide. Viki is flexible and interactive and its contents can be edited and commented upon by any viewer. Dwyer's discussion on Viki demonstrates that after the Cultural Turn, it may be time to start talking about a Social Turn in AVT and TS at large.

In general, this volume is very engaging for both Screen Studies and Translation Studies scholars. It certainly contributes to ongoing discussions in AVT ranging from concepts such as fidelity, quality to authorship, originality and so forth. Although Dwyer provides ample discussion of the notions underlying her theoretical stance, a good amount of prior knowledge in all the research fields debated upon is certainly needed to fully comprehend the issues at hand. As a final and minor note, a better signposting of acronyms in the first part of book could be advantageous.

References

- **Díaz-Cintas, J.** (2012). "Clearing the Smoke to See the Screen: Ideological Manipulation in Audiovisual Translation". *Meta* 57(2), 279-293.

- **Nornes, A. M.** (2007). *Cinema Babel: Translating Global Cinema*, Minnapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press.

- **Venuti, L.** (1995). *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*. London: Routledge.

Margherita Dore
Università di Roma "La Sapienza"
E-mail: margherita.dore@uniroma1.it