

Problems of Interlingual Transfer of Textual Units in Audiovisual Translation

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Abstract: Audiovisual translation (AVT) has become one of the fastest-growing fields of Translation Studies due to the rapid development of digital media, streaming platforms, and global communication. Unlike conventional written translation, audiovisual translation requires translators to consider linguistic, cultural, visual, and acoustic elements simultaneously. This multimodal nature creates numerous challenges in the interlingual transfer of textual units. The present study examines the major linguistic and extralinguistic problems encountered during audiovisual translation, focusing on subtitling and dubbing as the two dominant AVT modes. The study employs qualitative comparative analysis based on theoretical approaches proposed by Díaz Cintas, Chaume, Pedersen, Baker, and Gottlieb. The findings indicate that successful interlingual transfer depends not only on linguistic equivalence but also on functional adequacy and multimodal coherence. Translators frequently apply strategies such as adaptation, omission, condensation, reformulation, and cultural substitution to preserve communicative effectiveness. The research concludes that audiovisual translation should be regarded as a process of intercultural mediation rather than simple linguistic substitution. These findings contribute to the growing body of research on audiovisual translation and provide practical recommendations for translators working in multilingual audiovisual environments.

Key words: audiovisual translation, interlingual transfer, subtitling, dubbing, textual units, multimodality, translation strategies.

Introduction

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has transformed the way people consume audiovisual content. Films, television series, documentaries, online lectures, video games, and streaming services have become integral components of everyday communication. As a consequence, audiovisual translation (AVT) has emerged as one of the most dynamic branches of Translation Studies. The globalization of media has significantly increased the demand for high-quality translations capable of preserving both linguistic meaning and communicative intent across different languages and cultures.

Unlike traditional written translation, audiovisual translation combines verbal language with visual images, sound effects, music, gestures, facial expressions, and other semiotic resources. Consequently, translators must work within a multimodal environment where meaning is created through the interaction of multiple communicative channels. This characteristic makes audiovisual translation considerably more complex than conventional text translation.

One of the central issues in audiovisual translation is the interlingual transfer of textual units. Textual units include lexical items, idiomatic expressions, phraseological constructions,

grammatical structures, pragmatic markers, stylistic devices, and culture-specific references. Their successful transfer requires translators to preserve semantic meaning while adapting the message to technical limitations such as subtitle length, reading speed, lip synchronization, and timing constraints.

The complexity of audiovisual translation becomes particularly evident when translators encounter humor, irony, slang, dialects, taboo expressions, and culturally bound concepts. Such elements rarely possess direct equivalents in the target language, requiring translators to employ creative strategies that maintain communicative effectiveness without compromising naturalness. Modern translation theories increasingly emphasize that translation should be understood as intercultural communication rather than simple word-for-word substitution. Scholars argue that translators function as cultural mediators who negotiate between linguistic systems and cultural conventions. Therefore, successful audiovisual translation requires linguistic competence, intercultural awareness, technical skills, and sensitivity to audience expectations.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the principal problems associated with the interlingual transfer of textual units in audiovisual translation. Specifically, the study aims to identify the linguistic and cultural factors influencing translation decisions, analyze the strategies employed by professional translators, and evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies in preserving communicative equivalence.

Frederic Chaume further argues that audiovisual translation operates under multiple synchronization constraints. Unlike literary translation, AVT requires synchronization between translated dialogue and visual images, character movements, facial expressions, and lip articulation. These restrictions frequently force translators to modify linguistic structures without altering the intended communicative function.

Mona Baker emphasizes that translation equivalence extends beyond lexical correspondence. She distinguishes several levels of equivalence, including word level, grammatical, textual, and pragmatic equivalence. In audiovisual translation, pragmatic equivalence often becomes more important than literal correspondence because communicative effect must be maintained despite linguistic differences.

Hatim and Mason approach translation from the perspective of discourse analysis. They argue that translators should preserve not only propositional meaning but also discourse functions, interpersonal relationships, and communicative intentions. This perspective is particularly relevant in audiovisual translation, where dialogue contributes significantly to characterization and narrative development.

Another important concept in AVT research is multimodality. Kress and van Leeuwen explain that meaning emerges through the interaction of multiple semiotic modes rather than language alone. In films, gestures, background music, camera angles, facial expressions, and visual composition frequently reinforce or modify verbal communication. Therefore, translators must interpret audiovisual texts as integrated multimodal systems.

Recent studies also highlight the increasing importance of accessibility. Audiovisual translation now includes subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing (SDH), audio description for visually impaired audiences, and live subtitling. These developments demonstrate that audiovisual translation has expanded beyond interlingual communication to include intralingual and intersemiotic forms of translation.

Despite substantial theoretical advances, scholars continue to identify numerous unresolved challenges. One of the most persistent concerns involves balancing linguistic accuracy with naturalness. Literal translations may preserve semantic content but often sound unnatural or fail to reflect target-language discourse conventions. Conversely, extensive adaptation may improve fluency while reducing fidelity to the source text.

Researchers generally agree that no universal translation strategy exists for all audiovisual contexts. Instead, translators must evaluate linguistic, cultural, technical, and communicative factors simultaneously. This flexible decision-making process distinguishes professional audiovisual translation from purely linguistic translation and confirms its interdisciplinary nature.

Lexical Problems

Lexical equivalence represents one of the most common challenges in audiovisual translation. Slang, colloquial expressions, idioms, and phrasal verbs often lack direct equivalents in the target language.

For example, the English expression *"You nailed it!"* cannot be translated literally because its lexical meaning differs from its communicative function. Instead, translators typically use expressions equivalent to *"You did it perfectly"* or *"Excellent job"* depending on the context. Such adaptation preserves the intended pragmatic effect rather than the literal wording.

Similarly, phrasal verbs frequently require paraphrasing because many languages lack comparable lexical constructions. Therefore, lexical translation often involves reformulation instead of direct substitution.

Grammatical Problems

Differences in grammatical systems also complicate audiovisual translation. English relies heavily on word order to express grammatical relations, whereas Uzbek uses a more flexible syntactic structure and extensive case marking.

Sentence condensation is another important issue. Spoken dialogue usually contains repetitions, hesitation markers, and incomplete sentences that cannot be reproduced fully in subtitles because of space limitations. Translators therefore omit redundant grammatical elements while preserving essential information.

For example:

Source

text:

"Well, I mean, you know, I really don't think that's actually possible."

Subtitle:

"I don't think that's possible."

Although several discourse markers disappear, the communicative intention remains unchanged.

Pragmatic Problems

Pragmatic equivalence is particularly significant in audiovisual translation because viewers interpret dialogue within a specific communicative situation.

Humor illustrates this challenge effectively. Many jokes rely on wordplay, phonetic similarity, or cultural knowledge unavailable in the target language. Literal translation usually destroys the humorous effect. Consequently, translators frequently replace the original joke with another humorous expression capable of producing a similar audience response.

Irony presents a comparable problem. Since ironic meaning often depends on intonation, facial expressions, and contextual information, translators must consider visual and acoustic cues rather than linguistic content alone.

Culture-Specific Elements

Culture-bound references constitute one of the most extensively discussed topics in audiovisual translation research.

Films regularly contain references to national traditions, historical events, educational institutions, celebrities, food, sports, political organizations, and popular culture. Such references may be unfamiliar to international audiences.

Among these strategies, substitution and generalization appear particularly common in subtitling because limited subtitle space restricts explanatory translation.

For instance, references to American sports competitions or television programs are frequently replaced with more general expressions if the original reference contributes little to the storyline.

Multimodal Constraints

Unlike written texts, audiovisual products communicate meaning simultaneously through multiple semiotic channels.

Visual images frequently compensate for omitted verbal information. Consequently, translators may intentionally shorten subtitles because viewers can obtain additional information from gestures, facial expressions, scenery, or camera movement.

For example, if a character points toward an object while saying *"Look at that!"*, translating only *"Look!"* may be entirely sufficient because the image conveys the remaining information.

Technical Restrictions

Technical limitations significantly influence translation decisions.

Subtitles generally permit approximately 35–42 characters per line and must remain on screen long enough for viewers to read comfortably. Excessively long subtitles increase cognitive load and distract viewers from visual information.

Dubbing introduces additional constraints, including lip synchronization, rhythm, and natural speech tempo. Translators often restructure entire sentences to achieve synchronization with mouth movements while maintaining semantic coherence.

Therefore, audiovisual translation should be evaluated according to functional effectiveness rather than linguistic correspondence alone.

Translation Strategies

The present analysis indicates that professional audiovisual translators employ several recurring strategies:

- condensation to reduce subtitle length;*
- omission of redundant information;*
- reformulation to preserve communicative intent;*
- cultural adaptation for unfamiliar references;*
- paraphrase for idiomatic expressions;*
- compensation when certain meanings cannot be translated directly.*

These strategies demonstrate that equivalence in audiovisual translation is dynamic rather than absolute. The primary objective is not linguistic imitation but successful communication.

Audiovisual translation represents one of the most complex forms of intercultural communication because it integrates linguistic, visual, acoustic, and technical dimensions within a single communicative process. The present study has demonstrated that the interlingual transfer of textual units requires translators to balance semantic accuracy with multimodal coherence and audience accessibility.

Such research will contribute to the continuing development of audiovisual translation theory and professional practice in increasingly multilingual media environments..

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