Voice over

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Introduction

If you have ever watched a documentary or an interview made in a foreign language, you probably noticed that it was translated in a special way: the voices of the original speakers were still audible, but their volume was lowered, and another soundtrack with superimposed translation read by a voice talent was heard on top of the original voices. This type of AVT is known as voice-over (sometimes also spelled "voiceover", or VO).

Definition of Voice Over (VO)

Voice- over in AVT is a type of voiced translation superimposed over the original soundtrack, which is typically still audible but whose volume is low. Franco et al. (2013, p. 24) state that voice- over as a translation mode means "a voice no longer narrated over images, but translation over original speech". In AVT, voice- over is often classified under the umbrella of revoicing, which also includes dubbing (Franco et al., 2013; Luyken, 1991).

Definition of Voice Over (VO)

voice- over may also be defined as "narration or commentary by an unseen speaker in a film or television broadcast"

or "spoken narration accompanying film or video images in which the person speaking is not depicted" (Chandler & Munday, 2020).

Types of VO

Let us take a closer look at genres. In theory, voice- over could be used in both fiction (e.g. feature films and TV series) and non- fiction genres (e.g. documentaries, current affairs programmes, TV commercials, chat shows, interviews, and political debates). In practice, however, voice- over translation has been restricted to non- fiction in most parts of the globe.

Types of VO

Have you seen *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Money Heist*, *The Sixth Sense*, or *Inglourious Basterds*? These films and TV shows have skillfully used voice- over narration as a stylistic device.

VO in non-fiction works

As explained by Franco et al. (2013), "voice-over is generally the preferred mode of transfer for the non- fiction genres (…) because **its defining features contribute to the appeals of reality, truth and authenticity that factual programmes count on**". These features refer to the way voice- over is delivered and perceived: overtly as a translation (unlike dubbing). In other words, voice- over does not "pretend" to be the original, but it is upfront and "honest" about being a translation of the original voice heard underneath.

Types of VO

1- **The direct VO**: the standard practice is to use first- person VO, meaning that the translation uses the same pronoun as the speakers in the original programme. For instance, if the speaker says 'I think . . .', the translation will keep the first person in the target language, making the translator more invisible.

Types of VO

2– **The Reported VO**: the role of the mediator is more visible as the words of the speaker are reported in the third person. Examples of third-person voice-over have been provided by Franco (2000: 238), who examines German versions of Brazilian documentaries in which the interviewees' answers are frequently converted into indirect speech.

Synchrony in VO

It is worth mentioning that VO involves the observance of various types of synchronies. Inspired by existing classifications in dubbing (Chaume 2004), Orero (2006) and Franco et al. (2010) differentiate four types of synchronies:

1. VO isochrony

VO isochrony designates the constraining effect that the length of the original speech has on that of the translated text—given that the translation usually begins some words after the original utterance and finishes some words before the latter ends. **This allows the original words at the onset and at the end of each VO utterance to be heard, in an attempt to arguably enhance authenticity and make the target language audience feel that the content they listen to is credible.**

Essential features of VO

According to (Sepielak, 2016), there are different types of isochronies:

A- **Full isochrony** : when at least one word is heard at the beginning and at the end of the utterance.

B. **Initial isochrony**: where at least one word is audible only at the beginning.

C. **Final isochrony**: where at least one word is heard only at the end of the utterance.

2. Literal synchrony

Literal synchrony refers to the voice- over practice where "a literal translation must be rendered in those seconds in which the original can be heard". Because of the fact that the first and last few words will be heard by the audience – and will be understood by some members of the audience – the translator "will also have to give a much more exact translation of the two to four words at the beginning and the end"

3. Kinetic synchrony

Kinetic synchrony – similarly to dubbing – is about the congruence between the body movements shown on screen and the translation. To use a well- known example, it would not be a good idea for the translator to use the word "yes" when a character is shaking their head.

4. Action synchrony

Like any other form of AVT, voice- over translation needs to be synchronised with the on- screen action. This is known as action synchrony. Matamala (2020, p. 135) explains that:

diverging language structures may force translators to alter the order of the sentences, rephrase the original content or delete some elements. When this happens, translators are advised to pay special attention to the interaction between the visuals and the translation so that action synchrony is reached and there are no inconsistencies between what is shown on screen and what is said in the translation.

Translation strategies in voice- over

A crucial feature of voice- over translation in non-fiction genres is **faithfulness**. According to Luyken (1991, p. 80), voice- over "is characterised by the faithful translation of original speech". Franco et al. (2013, p. 26) confirm this view held by many scholars and note that voice- over is perceived as a "faithful, literal, authentic and complete version of the original audio". This approach may be rooted in the specificity of the genres typically associated with voice- over:

documentaries, interviews, corporate videos, etc. All these genres require translation to be faithful and exact.

Translation strategies in voice- over

However, given the time constraints, voice- over – similarly to subtitling – requires a high degree of text condensation and reduction. This is also confirmed in Netflix style guides:

"Due to timing limitations, some of the dialogue may be condensed/ truncated as long as it retains all essential elements of the plot" (Netflix, 2019, 2022).

If we want viewers to hear the beginning and end of the original speech and the voice talent to be able to read out the target text, we simply need to reduce the text of the translation.

What are the linguistic elements that undergo reduction and condensation in VO?

According to Luyken (1991), **"fluffs, hesitations, grammatical errors made during the interview must be ignored; and the same applies probably to expletives"** (p. 141). Matamala (2020) argues that the translation in voice- over is often **"edited and paraphrased" and notes that orality features such as "hesitations, syntactic anomalies or repetitions are deleted" (p. 134)**. Franco et al. (2013) explain that **unlike in dubbing, where the features of orality are retained "to recreate the illusion of true dialogues", in voice- over in non- fiction products, elements of spoken language "are sacrificed, unless they are especially meaningful, in order to achieve voice- over isochrony"** (p. 74).

THANK YOU