

# Introduction

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With the rapid internationalization of distribution of films and TV programmes, people in different countries are able to watch audiovisual products in different languages and cultures. The proliferation of new forms of entertainment such as DVD and pay-per-view TV also creates a huge demand for the professional service of dubbing and subtitling, which are indispensable tools to help viewers with little knowledge in the foreign language to overcome the language barriers.

Dubbing and subtitling can be subsumed under the broader discipline of audiovisual translation (AVT), which is much more than mere interlingual transfer as pictures, music, sounds and other non-verbal elements are also involved in the process, making it a kind of multi-semiotic transfer. In addition to the language transfer and the technicalities of the production (such as the use of time-code for subtitling), socio-cultural factors should not be overlooked as the lifestyle and value systems of the people are reflected in the films and TV programmes.

Every day, professional translators all over the world have been working hard and have accumulated substantial experience after countless hours of subtitling and dubbing practice. On the other hand, more and more translation scholars have conducted academic studies on the subject matter and produced fruitful results (Luyken 1991; Dollerup and Lindegaard 1993; Gottlieb 1997; Ivarsson and Carroll 1998; Karamitroglou 2000; Gambier and Gottlieb 2001; Orero 2004; just to name a few). It is time for academics and professionals in the industry to have a dialogue to share their insights and experience.

The present volume is mostly a collection of selected papers presented at the International Conference on Dubbing and Subtitling in a World Context organized by the Department of Translation of the Chinese University of Hong Kong in mid October 2001, the first major conference on subtitling and dubbing in Asia. During the three-day conference, scholars and professionals from China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Italy, Belgium, Finland, Sweden, Australia, and Hong Kong shared their views on and insights in subtitling and dubbing. Subtitling equipment suppliers, film distributors, managers from translation agencies and other professionals of the field were invited to speak at a sharing session at Sai Wan Ho Amenities Centre in Hong Kong, followed by a round-table discussion by professionals and stakeholders with frank exchanges on the various facets of the industry.

The papers collected in this book are categorized into three sections in the book: (1) history of the profession; (2) theory; and (3) practice. The first four papers in the first section are about the history of subtitling and dubbing in Europe and East Asia. In “The History of Subtitles in Europe,” **Jan Ivarsson** traces the development of subtitles in Europe, from intertitles in 1903 to the subtitles used today. The second part of the paper is devoted to a detailed description of the evolution of the various techniques in the production of subtitles for films and TV programmes: the mechanical and thermal processes, the chemical process, use of laser burning, caption generators, time-code readers and personal computer.

**Qian Shaochang**’s “Screen Translation in Mainland China” outlines the three major stages of subtitling in China: before 1949, between 1949 to 1978, and after 1978. Political and socio-cultural factors have been playing an important role in the choice of imported films and TV programmes for translation. Qian also notes that the “inconceivable sensation” of imported television programmes in China in the 1980s died down after the mid 1990s due to certain political and socio-cultural factors.

In “Subtitling in Japan,” **Karima Fumitoshi** gives a brief history of subtitling in Japan. The livelihood of Japanese movie narrators (who were called *benshi*) was threatened with the arrival of subtitled movies. He also points out that “the chief function of the subtitler is to make the dialogue correspond to the intention of the director.”

**Lee Young Koo's** "The History of Subtitling in Korea" first outlines the history of Korean filmmaking industry from the difficult days in the 1950s to the prosperous growth in recent years. The second half of his paper discusses some practical problems in translating some film titles and subtitles into Korean.

The papers in Section Two cover some theoretical issues of subtitling and dubbing. In his paper "The Two Worlds of Subtitling: The Case of Vulgarisms and Sexually-oriented Language," **Gilbert C. F. Fong** addresses the intrinsic dualism of subtitling: the audience "is experiencing double—he is seeing a movie and reading about it at the same time." So the subtitle translator has to negotiate the differences between the two worlds, and make a decision among the three approaches in cultural transfer, namely, foreignisation, naturalization and neutralization. There is some insightful discussion on the choice of these approaches, illustrated with interesting examples of the sexually-oriented language subtitled in the local dialect of Hong Kong, Cantonese.

Also included in this section is **Fong's** other paper "Let the Words Do the Talking: The Nature and Art of Subtitling," which explores the basic issues of the spatial and temporal constraints of the art, and elaborates on the linguistic and stylistic features of the cross-media transference with interesting examples of translating puns and song lyrics. It also firmly asserts the applicability of *skopos* theory to subtitling because subtitles have a clearly defined *skopos*: "to serve the needs of the audience who are the end-users."

In "A Functional Gap between Dubbing and Subtitling," **He Yuanjian** investigates the representational disparity between the two forms of audiovisual translation. While there is over-representation of source language features in film subtitling, target-language-specific features are more commonly found in dubbing scripts. He accounts for the contrast by incorporating Sari Eskola's (2001) stimuli theory into the textual processing model of James S. Holmes (1978).

**Chuang Ying-ting's** "Subtitling as a Multi-modal Translation" studies the concept of multi-modality in the process of subtitle translation, and concludes that the equivalence relationships range from one-to-one to many-to-many, in terms of the concept of semiotic mode. She points out that different semiotic modes contribute different kinds of meaning to the text of film. The translator should

distribute or integrate the meanings to the various modes so as to create equivalent wholeness between the source and target texts. The translation of multi-modal texts, such as subtitling, requires not only a one-way decoding and encoding process, but multiple ways of translating.

In “A Critical Evaluation of a Chinese Subtitled Version of Hitchcock’s *Spellbound*,” **Chapman Chen** makes a detailed analysis on the subtitled film and concludes that a good subtitler should pay attention to the four constraints of subtitling proposed by Paola Gardini, namely, technical, textual, intralinguistic and extralinguistic.

Section Three of this volume is devoted to papers covering the different aspects of the practice of dubbing in various countries. In “I Translate, You Adapt, They Dub,” **Sergio Patou-Patucchi** discusses the problems found in dubbing and subtitling activities in Italy, including the incompetence of some poorly trained translators. He observes that “dubbing becomes a medium of political control and censorship.” He calls for collaboration with the Academy to develop a “cross-disciplinary consciousness.”

**Zhang Chunbai** notes the constraints of translating film dialogue for dubbing in his paper “The Translation of Film Dialogues for Dubbing,” namely, the irreversibility of utterances, and the matching of lip movements, gestures and movements with the dubbed sound. Therefore the translator should aim at producing a dubbed film version with immediate comprehensibility and pragmatic equivalence.

Loss of meaning seems to be the necessary evil in many translations. **Lu Danjun** in “Loss of Meaning in Dubbing” addresses a subtle difficulty in dubbing, namely, the inability of expressing foreign accents and local dialects. Interesting linguistic contrasts between characters evident in the original film will be totally lost when dubbed in another language.

Veteran subtitle expert in Hong Kong, **Rupert Chan** shares his substantial experience in adapting, dubbing and surtitling/subtitling for theatre performance, TV programmes and movies in his paper “Dubbing and Subtitling—Art or Craft?” Interesting examples are cited to illustrate the subtlety involved in Chinese-English subtitling and dubbing practice.

In “Translation Imperative: Synchronise Discipline and

Technique,” **Janet Tauro** highlights some areas for improvement in the production and consumption of Filipino audiovisual translation and calls for “the synchronization between the academic community and television industry.” The paper also showcases the imbalance in resource allocation of the Filipino media: they prefer to spend more on programme promotion than on improving the quality of subtitles.

**Kari Jokelainen’s** “Translating Understanding and Non-understanding through Subtitling” is an interesting case study of subtitling across several languages and cultures. The film in question is a comedy with situations where the characters speak Polish, French, Hungarian, Icelandic, and English. The translator has to make sensible decisions (using italics, for example) in the subtitling process so as to suit the needs of the situations.

Hong Kong filmmaker and distributor **Shu Kei** gives an interesting account of how he joined the subtitling profession in “Translating Subtitles for the Hong Kong Audience: Limitations and Difficulties.” He also traces the three-phase development of subtitling production: the burning method, laser-subtitling and the more expensive optical method. The challenges posed by Cantonese, the local dialect in Hong Kong and the issue of censorship are also discussed.

In “Surtitling for *Xiqu* (Chinese Opera) in the Theatre,” **Jessica W. Y. Yeung** describes the technicalities of surtitling in the performance of the culture-specific theatrical form. She then makes a detour to phenomenology to illustrate the importance of surtitles to the overall theatrical experience.

A good training programme for subtitlers is a pre-requisite for subtitling quality. In “The Pedagogy of Subtitling,” **Corinne Imhauser** introduces the post-graduate subtitling course at ISTI (*Institut Supérieur de Traducteurs et Interprètes*), Belgium, which helps students develop both technical skills and linguistic skills. Some practical drills are suggested for a subtitling class by using affordable ordinary equipment.

The conference is but a starting point of sharing among professionals and academics. We believe that international cooperation and constant interaction among stakeholders will be helpful to the development of audiovisual translation, in terms of professional insights and academic excellence.

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