

Reassessing Dubbing: Historical approaches and current trends

edited by Irene Ranzato and Serenella Zanotti (2019)

John Benjamins, Amsterdam & Philadelphia, 393 pages, € 95.00

Reviewed by: Giuseppe De Bonis

Reassessing Dubbing: Historical approaches and current trends edited by Irene Ranzato and Serenella Zanotti is a timely volume. As highlighted by the two editors in the introduction (p. 4), dubbing still remains quite an underrepresented area of research within the realm of audiovisual translation (AVT) studies, especially if we consider the overall growth of the discipline in most recent years. The volume thus constitutes a necessary attempt at filling this gap, by exclusively focusing on a specific AVT mode ("the dubbing revolution" to which Ranzato and Zanotti refer in the introduction, p. 1). As its title overtly suggests, the main goal is to reassess dubbing in its entirety, by combining studies on both past practices and current trends. The book is divided into four sections, each of them tackling a certain topic.

Part 1, possibly the most outstanding section of the volume, is devoted to "Historical approaches", a lesser-explored area of research to date. The section opens with a thought-provoking chapter by Tessa Dwyer, in which the author "undoes dubbing" through a detailed analysis of the musical film *Singin' in the Rain* (Stanley Donen & Gene Kelly, 1952) mainly viewed as a dubbing narrative. This film gives Dwyer the opportunity to embrace wider topics such as the importance of language and interlingual translation in the development of film as a medium in the era of transition to sound by examining the advent of Multiple Language Versions (MLVs). The author also examines film culture more in general by showing how sound technologies bring issues of language difference and transfer to the very heart of film production.

Nolwenn Mingant offers a detailed account of the "short-lived dubbing of Hollywood films into Arabic in the 1940s". This contribution is interesting on a two-fold level, because not only it deals with a geographic region that is less familiar to Eurocentric AVT researchers and readers (the dubbing practices into Arabic for the North Africa and Middle East), but also because it links the different strategies of film distribution to the socio-political aspects of the language area involved.

The chapter by Carla Mereu Keating leads readers to Italy, introducing them to "the origins, establishment and fortune of Italy's mainstream AVT practice". The analysis intertwines the commercial, political, cultural and linguistic issues that facilitated the consolidation of dubbing as the mainstream AVT mode in Italy, and is supported by impressive and diversified archival material, including state records, national legislation, industry records, dubbed films, press materials and specialised secondary literature.

Equally well-documented is Serenella Zanotti's chapter on what she terms "auteur dubbing", that is the authorial control and intervention of director Stanley Kubrick in the production of the foreign-language versions for France, Italy German and Spain. Kubrick's active role in the dubbing process encompasses not only the choice of the dubbing director but also the voice casting, thus conferring a unique status upon the director as far as the dubbed versions of his films are concerned. As mentioned before, the rigorous analysis resorts to a variety of different sources (starting with the SK Film Archives based in London), which is something really remarkable.

Part 2 of the volume somehow represents the counterpart of the previous section, as its four chapters move on to explore the "New trends in dubbing research and practice". Frederic Chaume's contribution looks at dubbing in the wider framework of media localisation and digitalisation: the focus is on technological innovations and on the role of the new audiences in the digital era. Chaume's meticulous analysis both offers an accurate overview of the most recent developments of technology and its applicability to dubbing practice and research, and stresses the political and ideological implications that such a new scenario may have on media audiences.

Technology and innovation are also protagonists of the chapter written by Elena Di Giovanni and Pablo Romero-Fresco, which presents the first experiment, conducted in 2016, in which cutting-edge research using eye tracking was applied to dubbing, a novelty considering that all the previous studies in the field had only been devoted to subtitling. The experiment accounts for the gaze behaviour of viewers of the original and Italian dubbed version of the film *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (Wes Anderson, 2014). The

promising results of this pioneering study might encourage further research in this sector, something that is certainly desirable.

Rocio Baños first explores the origins and motivations of fandubbing practices (made “by fans for fans”), to then discuss their current evolution against the backdrop of the contemporary media landscape. At present, fandubbing seems to serve two main functions: parodic as well as serious purposes (i.e. for altruistic and/or political endeavours). The new declination of this practice leads the author to advocate for a new term, cyberdubbing, which seems to better fit its most recent creative uses.

The second section of the volume concludes with Delia Chiaro’s investigation of Woody Allen’s multilingual trilogy set in Europe, namely *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* (2008), *Midnight in Paris* (2011) and *To Rome with Love* (2012). The perspective of the analysis is quite innovative, as it examines the director’s technical recreation of lingua-cultural otherness in his non-American characters by focusing on the post-modern notions of “liquid society” and “translanguaging” that become relevant for the way in which bilingual characters adopt or use English. In particular, the strategies adopted to translate the bilingual characters’ dialogue as well as the actors’ self-dubbing needed for these films both highlight a fascinating intersection between linguistic and technical issues.

The third part of the book copes with the linguistics of dubbing. The chapter by Sofia Sanchez-Mompean discusses an aspect of dubbing that has been little explored thus far, namely prosodic variation (i.e. “more than words can say” as aptly referred in the title). Through a number of examples, the author investigates the importance of four prosodic systems (pitch-direction, pitch-range, loudness, and tempo) and their pragmatic implications for English-Spanish dubbed dialogue. Though encouraging, results are nevertheless based on a quite small sample of audiovisual material. This is a flaw acknowledged by the author herself: we hope that she will continue with her research, so that sounder results can be provided, thus setting the pace for further research in this field.

The contributions by Elisa Ghia and Raffaele Zago are strictly interrelated, as both represent the most up-to-date instances of corpus analysis applied to English-Italian dubbing. Not only do both studies resort to the *Pavia Corpus of Film Dialogue* (PCFD) as their base, but also enrich their analyses by including a comparable sample of original Italian films also contained in the same PCFD. Whereas Ghia studies the representation of orality through question usage in original and translated film dialogue, with the aim of identifying common traits and differences, Zago’s chapter concentrates on the use of mental verbs (like ‘know’ or ‘think’), communication verbs (like ‘say’, ‘tell’, ‘ask’) and activity verbs (i.e. verbs expressing an action) in both English and original Italian films. Besides this comparative analysis, Zago also examines the language of Italian dubbed dialogue in contrast with the language of both source texts and original Italian films.

The fourth and final part of the volume is devoted to “Identity construction in dubbing”. The contribution by Ilaria Parini compares the different representation of Italian American Mafiosi in the DreamWorks animated comedy *Shark Tale* (Vicky Jenson, Bibi Bergeron & Rob Letterman, 2004) and in its Italian dubbed version, by concentrating on the use of accents and language variation. Apart from the linguistic analysis per se, which seems to confirm the author’s previous results on the Italian Americans stigmatisation in film, what is particularly valuable is the attempt at enlarging the perspective by including some elements related to the cultural reception in both source and target country.

The book concludes with Debora Ciampi’s chapter on the way in which the idiolect of a specific speech community, youth language, is depicted in both original and Italian dubbed dialogue of a small corpus of films pertaining to the American genre known as “teen queen movies” (which portray the school life of teenagers). A new tendency that seems to be emerging in Italian dubbing consists of retaining sensitive topics related to sexuality, drug consumption, and violence, as opposed to the more frequent mitigation of these subjects observed in the past.

All in all, the evaluation of this volume is more than positive. If “[t]he aim of this volume is to contribute to AVT research ‘by raising the visibility of dubbing’” (p. 11), as stated by the two editors at the end of the Introduction, the mission has been certainly accomplished. The book gives a detailed account of both past and present trends in dubbing. In particular, the contributions on the historical dimension of dubbing are welcome and may, hopefully, create a new arena for further debate and research in the nearly future.

Notwithstanding these overall positive aspects, a certain imbalance may, however, be observed between the different sections of the book: if the first two parts span across time and space quite considerably, and may therefore have a wider appeal to international readers and researchers, the chapters in the last two sections almost entirely portray the Italian dubbing landscape, and may potentially be of lesser interest to some. This potential flaw is somehow “endemic”, meaning that it has to be ascribed to the current state of the art in the field of AVT studies as a whole: Italy is traditionally a dubbing country, so it should come as no surprise that most of the research carried out thus far on dubbing originates from and refers to that geographic region (as well as Spain). Despite this, *Reassessing Dubbing: Historical approaches and current trends* proves to be a very useful tool to both researchers in the area of AVT and those students who want to have an up-to-date and accurate overview of the research on dubbing today.

©inTRAlinea & Giuseppe De Bonis (2020).

Review of: edited by Irene Ranzato and Serenella Zanotti (2019) "Reassessing Dubbing: Historical approaches and current trends".

Stable URL: <http://www.intralinea.org/reviews/item/2499>

inTRAlinea [ISSN 1827-000X] is the online translation journal of the Department of Interpreting and Translation (DIT) of the University of Bologna, Italy. This printout was generated directly from the online version of this review and can be freely distributed under Creative Commons License **CC BY-NC-ND 4.0**.