

BOOK REVIEW

AVT STUDIES THROUGH THE (CAMERA) LENS OF GENDER

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‘Gender in audiovisual translation studies. Advocating for gender awareness’, *The Routledge Handbook of Audiovisual Translation*, Luis Pérez-González, London, Routledge, 2018, 570pp, £190.00 (hardback) ISBN 978-1-13885-952-4 £29.99 (e-book) ISBN 978-1-31571-716-6

The *Routledge Handbook of Audiovisual Translation* edited by Luis Pérez-González represents perhaps the most in-depth exploration of the rapidly evolving area of audiovisual translation (AVT) studies. Published in 2018, the handbook presents a comprehensive overview of the existing and emerging modalities of audiovisual translation alongside a critical examination of the various theoretical approaches to understand them. The contents of the handbook’s 570 pages are divided into 32 chapters, organized across four parts preceded by an introduction by the book’s editor. The first part is the longest in terms of page count and provides a solid introduction to the history and primary modalities of audiovisual translation. The second part contextualizes the practical applications of audiovisual translation within the broader theoretical framework of the discipline, encompassing areas as diverse as the concept of mediality, socio- and psycholinguistics, spoken discourse and – as is the focus of this critical review – gender studies. Although the shortest of the handbook’s four parts, the third section affords an exhaustive survey of the various research methods employed in the discipline of AVT studies, broaching topics such as corpus-based approaches, eye tracking and ethnographic research. The handbook’s fourth and final part focuses on the roles and impacts of audiovisual translation in society and includes a diverse range of topics such as minority language, popular music, fandoms and filmmaking, among several others.

The breadth and scope of the topics discussed in the handbook serve as a reflection of the fundamentally diverse and multifaceted nature of audiovisual translation as both a practice and an area of research. Despite its impressive overall length, the book’s division of its contents across its four sections provides a natural guide for readers to first acquaint themselves with the fundamentals of audiovisual translation before delving further into its manifold theoretical foundations, research methods and manifestations in society.

As the nineteenth chapter of the handbook, ‘Gender in audiovisual translation studies. Advocating for gender awareness’ by Luise von Flotow and Daniel E. Josephy-Hernández is geared towards students and scholars interested in the intersection of gender

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studies and audiovisual translation. Offering an overview of the major academic contributions to an otherwise under-researched area of translation studies, the chapter highlights the importance of applying feminist, gender-focused and queer theory to different modes of audiovisual translation, placing particular emphasis on the work of academics adopting an advocacy-centered approach. In a time marred by increasingly divisive political rhetoric but also marked by historic advancements in the rights and freedoms of women, members of the LGBTQ+ community and gender non-conforming individuals, the chapter is particularly relevant for students and educators of translation studies, both of whom occupy important roles as agents of social progress. Despite affording a thought-provoking exploration of the current status of feminist and gender-focused thought in audiovisual translation, the chapter raises nearly as many questions as it attempts to answer, prompting further reading and ultimately encouraging more research the field.

The chapter is divided into three sections, which are then subdivided into more in-depth examinations of the contributions of two types of authors, the first of which specifically addresses feminist and gender theory in their work and the second which, accidentally or otherwise, provides gender-focused critiques in work that doesn't have an emphasis on advocacy. Before diving into the chapter's first section, the authors note the problematic nature of the definition of gender, which has more recently been used to describe the plurality of identities unique to the human experience but has historically been used to reinforce a heteronormative binary, leading to the assertion that "...gender in any translation situation will always be complicated by cultural politics" (p. 298). As such, and in order to contextualize the arguments made later on in the chapter, gender is defined as the notion that biological differences exist and are culturally managed and represented in many audiovisual products. Operating under this definition, the subsequent sections explore how scholarly work interprets gender and sexual orientation and how they are portrayed linguistically, rather than visually, in audiovisual products.

In the first of the chapter's main sections, von Flotow and Josephy-Hernández provide an overview of the work of three major voices in the realm of feminist film studies, all of which serve as examples of early gender-conscious critiques of audiovisual products and which laid the groundwork for later developments. Specifically, the work of Laura Mulvey (1975,1999), Kaja Silverman (1998) and Teresa de Lauretis (1987) is discussed, with the first of these proposing the now ubiquitous theory of scopophilia, which can be understood as the dual aspect of the active, voyeuristic male gaze and the passive, eroticized "being-looked-at-ness" expected of women. In her work *The Acoustic Mirror*, Silverman asserts that normative representations of the female body result in the women depicted in audiovisual products often becoming audiovisual products themselves, depriving them of authoritative voice within the narrative. Finally, the pioneering work of de Lauretis on lesbian desire and its representation in film is discussed, emphasizing the importance of her recognition of gender indeterminacy in contrast to the rigidity of binarism, and leading to her coining the term 'queer theory'. In addition to setting the foundation for the critical

examination of gender in AVT studies later in the chapter, this section highlights that very little attention has been paid to issues of gender specifically in the *language* of audiovisual products, which is of course at the core of translation as both a practice and a theory.

The chapter's second section is dedicated to the different approaches to studying gender in audiovisual translation, and starts by presenting some of the major examples of feminist materials in Anglo-American audiovisual products and their translation into Romance languages. Providing examples of the work of Anne-Lise Feral (2011b), Diana Bianchi (2008) and Marcella and Alessandra De Marco (2012; 2013) on translation of audiovisual products from English into French, Italian and Spanish, respectively, von Flotow and Josephy-Hernández synthesize these arguments and note the different effects that subtitling and dubbing have on gender representation. Further, translations are provided of script excerpts from popular US 'chick-flicks' and films with gender non-conforming main characters, helping to elucidate the various ways in which audiovisual translation, either via dubbing or subtitling, subverts or reinforces prevailing heteronormative social attitudes. The chapter's final two sections review contributions of authors who adopt a less advocacy-driven approach to gender-aware criticism of audiovisual translation, focusing specifically on the into-English translations of originally Greek and Japanese films and anime series. The authors note the importance of these series for bringing to light the often ignored linguistic and culture-bound intricacies inherent to these languages' conceptions of gender. These sections are important for reaffirming that gender is a sensitive and very culturally-informed topic in all of its manifestations, and that future research is desperately needed in order to enrich our current understanding of gender-focused critiques of audiovisual translation.

The chapter affords a valuable lens through which to view the current landscape of gender and queer theory as applied to audiovisual translation studies, and excels at both featuring the existing contributions in the field and highlighting the dearth of similar studies from which to form more profound analyses. However, in its effort to succinctly summarize a wide array of theories and critiques, the chapter also raises many questions that either go entirely unanswered or are presumably too complex to address within the constraints of the handbook itself. As perhaps the most notable example of this, the authors only occasionally allude to the influence of political forces as primary drivers of the expression or suppression of gender and feminist issues in audiovisual translation products. This contrasts sharply with Álvarez and Vidal's (1999) assertion that:

The study and practice of translation is inevitably an exploration of power relationships within textual practice that reflect power structures within the wider cultural context (p.1).

As such, more exploration is needed into how the wider political relationships between the countries or linguistic communities where these audiovisual products are being produced and how these relationships necessarily impact representations of gender and sexuality in audiovisual translation. The chapter does, however, address the ways in which issues of class and access to education lead to the reinforcement of gender stereotypes and

heteronormative character depictions, particularly in countries where dubbing is the preferred mode of AVT for mass distribution and where subtitling is the preference of the educated elite. In these scenarios, the authors assert that the audiovisual products that are dubbed for mainstream audiences are traditionally more conservative in their treatment of gender and sexuality, but do not touch on whether the same trend is observed for countries where subtitling is the preferred or historically more prevalent mode. In this sense, the question of whether the same tendency can be identified in countries like Portugal and Brazil, which share a language and a legacy of subtitling but which have different levels of education, class stratification and cultural representations of gender and sexuality remains to be explored.

In the same vein of examining how political and national interests often coalesce to affect issues of gender in audiovisual translation, the chapter briefly overviews some of the ways in which media networks and distributors also exert considerable influence over these issues. In one case described by Changnon (2016), the efforts to maximize viewership of the French dubbing of *Queer as Folk* for francophone audiences in Quebec resulted in the deliberate emphasizing of the gay features of the script, effectively creating exaggerated gay stereotypes for the sole purpose of attracting more viewers. Although this represents a departure from the trend of erasure of gay aspects of the script as identified by Ranzato (2012), Changnon points to the importance of increasing sales as a force driving this trend, an interesting assertion that, unfortunately, isn't addressed further in the chapter. Consequently, the reader is left to question how any potential increases in viewership due to exaggerated gay stereotypes could lead to perpetuation of this practice and, as a result, the commodification of the gay identity in media. Similarly, questions about mainstream society's perceptions of the LGBTQ+ community following consumption of programs featuring commodified gay characters and the effects of these perceptions on the community are left to the research endeavors of other scholars. Another area related to the issues surrounding gay dialogue in dubbed audiovisual products that the chapter teases but does not expand upon is what is referred to by Ranzato (2012) as the translation of 'gayspeak'. Defined as a "fictional scripted language of fictional homosexuals portrayed...in usually stereotypical ways, often through the use of 'camp'" (*ibid.*, p. 371), Ranzato posits that 'gayspeak' in English scripts poses a particular challenge to audiovisual translation, citing what she believes to be a lack of richness in the Italian gay lexicon as the source of the difficulty. However, this perception of a lack of native linguistic resources for the translation of gay dialogue in Italian is surprising, considering that languages like Brazilian Portuguese and European Spanish as noted by Rei (2014) and Ortega (2007) have very broad and developed sociolects used by their respective gay communities that reveal rich intersectional and cultural foundations. Accordingly, this topic merits an equally rich and rigorous investigation to better understand the linguistic and cultural challenges underlying translation of 'gayspeak' into Italian and what other factors might influence its appearance in audiovisual products.

As a topic only very briefly discussed in the chapter, censorship in AVT, particularly as it pertains to issues of gender equality and queer representation, is another area whose observations prompted questions that remained unanswered. One such example of this is the tendency of French dubbers to eliminate or strongly edit textual elements that “pose[d] the greatest threat to patriarchal notions of female sexuality” in translations of *Sex and the City*. This, as Feral (2011a) notes, reveals a clear effort by linguists and likely also by broadcast networks to censor expressions of empowered and sexually liberated female characters. However, another example overviewed by Nicole Baumgarten (2005) wherein German linguists are more likely to ‘tone down’ or greatly modify scripts with gratuitous instances of sexist and misogynist language is *not* regarded as its own form of censorship, but rather as a technique to remove items that are unwelcome in the target culture. In this sense, the chapter does not draw a clear distinction between the erasure of the strong female lead in dialogue and the omission of overtly sexist language as separate but comparable acts of censorship in two similar translation scenarios, leaving the reader to question if censorship in this context is defined objectively or more along the lines of historically heteronormative systems of oppression.

In summary, the observations and analyses presented by Luise von Flotow and Daniel E. Josephy-Hernández in ‘Gender in audiovisual translation studies: Advocating for gender awareness’ represent an important contribution to what is still a relatively young area of research. Through their detailed introduction to the major academic thought underlying the intersection of feminist and gender-focused theory and AVT, the authors highlight the essential connection between language and its capacity for advocacy and provide a firm foundation upon which further study can take root.

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