Translating Culture: The Case of Re-Affirming Identity in the Translation of Films

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Abstract. This paper presents the translation norms that have been reconstructed from an analysis of the shifts in the Philippine translation of audiovisual materials. Shifts, which are a common occurrence in translations, are the deviations from the original text that are treated as results of the constraints imposed or the allowances afforded by both the text and the recipient culture. The shifts reveal the regular choices made in the translation and in turn, reveal the norms which have been in operation during the translation process. Norms are translation trends that are reflective of the recipient culture's own norms and general values, which are, in this case, Filipino. The paper sheds light on the treatment of voiced-over, subtitled and dubbed audiovisual materials in the Philippine context, and provides insights on the relationship between translation norms and the recipient culture. The norms presented in this paper were identified in a study done on three audiovisual materials, representative of the three modes of audiovisual translation. These norms reveal the recipient culture's imposition on its reception of non-native audiovisual materials, and vice versa; thus, re-affirming culture and therefore, identity.

Keywords: translation norms, audiovisual translation, translation shift analysis

1. Introduction

The inter-disciplinary nature of translation could not be understated. Its practice does not only encompass linguistics and ethnology (Hymes, 1964) but also communication studies and philosophy (Munday, 2001), and even film and art studies. The term text is no longer synonymous with written material, but has broadened to include in its definition, audiovisual (AV) material—both bigscreen and smallscreen productions, cybermedia productions and stage productions.

This paper presents one of the findings of a longer study that included a Shift Analysis, which examined the processes that each pair of transemes (units of translation) has undergone. Shifts are the deviations from the original text that are observed to reveal recurring patterns and regular behaviors which are reflective of the target language's own behaviors and general values. These norms, as they are called, are reconstructed from this analysis, and their identification provides insights not only on the target language (TL) culture's reception of the translation, but also on the TL culture's imposition of itself in the translation.

There are several factors that motivate the shifts in the AV text. One of these is the mode of an AV translation, which refers to any of the three manners by which a film is translated: subtitling, dubbing and voice-over. Mode influences the options that are available for the translator and the decisions regarding these options. For voice-over, for example, which is the least constrained of the three AV translation modes, the options for the translator are more than those available for subtitling and dubbing. Since the only visual synchrony requirement is that of the image and the background voice, the translation is therefore freer. Subtitling, on the other hand, is the most constrained of the three modes because it observes space and time restrictions. The most space a subtitle occupies is two lines, with the lower line having thirty-five characters at the most and the upper line having less. The longest time it can stay onscreen is seven seconds. These

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constraints affect the translation, since more restrictions, rather than options, are available for the translator.

The three films yielded a total of 2, 140 transeme pairs. The reconstruction of the norms in operation during the production of the TL segments yielded the following analysis:

2. The Audiovisual Translation Norms

The AV translation norms may be optional or obligatory. Obligatory norms are seen to perform a prescriptive function; they are the first considerations that influence a translation. Universal translation requirements, such as naturalness, and primary sociocultural considerations are the concerns of these norms. In this study, two obligatory norms are identified: naturalization and filtering.

Naturalization. A good translation is one that is both faithful to the message and natural-sounding to the TL (target language) receptors. Syntactic shifts—those that involve a change in the grammatical structure of the TL segment— occur because of the need to tailor the message to the TL linguistic system. The result is a TL-like utterance. The following pairs illustrate the shift that occurs in the observance of this norm:

I screwed up earlier. ***(S-V-Adv)***	⇨	*Sumabit ako kanina* ***(V-S-Adv)***
I need a twenty on Tony Almeda. ***(S-TV-O-PP)***	⇨	*Kailangan ko ng twenty ni Tony Almeda* ***(V-S-O-PP)***
Shut up! ***(S-V)***	⇨	*Tumahimik ka!* ***(V-S)***

The English segments on the right are in the subject-predicate structure, which is the usual English sentence structure. The Filipino segments on the left show that a change has been imposed by the TL, where the usual sentence structure is predicate-subject. Alongside these linguistic considerations, in an AV text, the need for naturalness is also imposed on the synchrony of the visuals and sounds. In dubbing, for example, naturalness is observed when the dubbed voice corresponds to or reinforces the visuals onscreen. In close-up shots, lip synchrony becomes an added constraint. Lexical and/or syntactic shifts are inevitable in the search of the TL utterance that would achieve this synchrony requirement.

Filtering. As an ethical norm operating in the sociocultural system of the TL, filtering requires shifts when the source language (SL) transeme is unacceptable in the TL system. The following examples are taken from the Shift Analysis done in the study:

Dammit!	⇨	*Malas!* ***(trans. 'How unfortunate!)***
You're a son of a bitch, Tony.	⇨	*Hayop ka, Tony.* ***(trans. You're an animal, Tony.)***
Shit! *Exit security!*	⇨	*Si Tony. Exit security!* ***(zero-translation)***

Filtering is also seen in non-linguistic renderings of certain scenes, where a shift in the vocal tone of the speaker/dubber is employed in order to create a dissimilar effect. Such is the case in the translation of the documentary "March of the Penguins". In this case, filtering is employed to produce an acceptable translation for children.

There are also optional AV translation norms. These are those that are motivated by either the constraints of or the options afforded by the AV translation mode. The following are the optional norms found in the translations:

Modification. The translation of modifiers (phrases or words that specify or describe) in the AV texts examined is a usual occurrence. Modification is a norm observed in the translation, where modifiers are added to the TL utterance.

You committed treason. You facilitated the escape of the man who's responsible for the death of Ryan Chapel and also of thousand of civilians		*Treason ang ginawa mo. Tinulungan mo'ng makatakas ang isang taong responsable sa pagkamatay sa kasamahan nating si Ryan Chapel at ilan pang libong sibilyan*
you committed treason.	23	treason ang ginawa mo
you facilitated the escape	24	tinulungan mo'ng makatakas
of the man	25	ang isang taong
responsible for the death	26	responsible sa pagkamatay
	27	sa kasamahan natin

of Ryan Chapel	28	si Ryan Chapel
and also of thousands of civilians	29	at ilang libo pang sibilyan

The example above shows how the translation hosted an additional concept, 'sa kasamahan natin', which translates to 'our colleague'. The function of the inserted phrase is adjectival.

Specification. This norm operates in instances where the SL utterance is made more explicit in the TL rendition, especially in the translation of metaphors and idioms. This norm accounts for abstract or general concepts in the SL being rendered in the TL using concepts that are concrete and specific.

The example below illustrates the operation of this norm, when the translation of the SL transeme 'occasionally' is the specific 'kung may libreng oras' (trans. 'if there is free time').

And occasionally the new family can actually spend some time together.		*At parang tayo rin ha. Kung may libreng oras, aba nag-gugoodtime din ang bagong buong pamilya.*
	1031	at parang tayo rin ha
occasionally	1032	kung may libreng oras
the new family	1033	ang bagong [buong] pamilya
	1034	buong
can actually	1035	
spend some time together	1036	nag-gugoodtime din

Adaptation. This norm operates in the translation of concepts that are non-existent in the TL system and culture. These concepts are usually geographic referents (including flora and fauna), field jargon and culture-specific elements, such as metaphors and other figurative language. In the following example, the ST transeme 'the large ice walls' is rendered in the TL as 'mga nakapaligid na bundok', which literally translates to 'the surrounding mountains'. Snow-related concepts are absent in the TL system; as a result, the translation required an adaptation, which still retains the sense of the original.

And the large ice walls will offer some protection from the harshest winds.		*OK na rin ang temperature dito dahil sa mga nakapaligid na bundok na humaharang sa malamig na hangin.*
	209	OK na rin
and	210	
the large ice walls	211	mga nakapaligid na bundok
offer some protection	212	humaharang
from the [harshest] winds	213	sa [malamig] na hangin
harshest	214	malamig

Style Variation. There are instances when the translation is influenced by constraints imposed by the AV translation mode. In these cases, discernible shifts from the original are observed. Such is the case of the example below, where the non-translation of the final utterance "…ang sinasabi mo" (trans. '…are you talking about'), yielded a shift in style and tone, from the informal and colloquial to the formal and impersonal. Style variation may also be the result of the shift in the translation's purpose and audience.

Ano 'ka mo? Ano ba'ng trabaho ang sinasabi mo?		*What did you say? What kind of work?*
ano 'ka mo?	52	what did you say?
ano ba'ng trabaho	53	what kind of work
ang sinasabi mo	54	
52. Stylistic Shift (through Equivalence)		
53. Stylistic Shift (through Equivalence)		
54. Zero Transeme Shift (through Omission) (*trans. 'are you talking about'*)		

Amplification. This norm is observed in some transemes when the sense in the original is amplified, or exaggerated to some degree in the translation. This norm is the least observed in the corpora of this study. In the example below, the TL transeme 'gutom na gutom na' does not translate only to 'hungry' but to 'famished', illustrating a shift from the original.

But this chick is hungry. He needs the food in his mother's belly.		*Pero gutom na gutom na ang mga baby penguin. Kailangan nila ng pagkain na dala sana ng mga nanay.*
but	723	pero
this chick	724	ang baby penguin
is hungry	725	gutom na gutom na
he	726	nila
needs	727	kailangan
the food	728	ng pagkain
in his mother's belly	729	na dala sana ng mga nanay

Reduction. There are also shifts that are results of constraints in space (subtitling) and synchrony (dubbing). In these cases, a noticeable change in utterance length is observed. When reduction is structural, the norm in operation is economy; when it is conceptual, the norm in operation is understatement.

*Every time na **matunugan** nila na magkakaroon ng military operations, kami ang una nilang itinatakas.*		*Whenever they hear of a military operation, they lead us to safety.*
every time	269	whenever
na matunugan nila	270	they hear
na magkakaroon ng military operations	271	of a military operation
kami	272	us
ang [una] [nilang] itinatakas	273	they lead [us] to safety

Retention. This is the norm in operation in non-shift-yielding processes such as Borrowing and Literal Translation. In cases where this norm is in operation, shifts do not occur. Non-culture-specific elements are always literally translated, and jargon, especially, is always borrowed.

We need Saunders to make an ID. I want you to move Saunders to Chloe's station. We're setting up a live feed. We should have it in a few minutes.		*Kailangan si Saunders mismo ang mag-ID. Gusto kong dalhin mo siya sa station ni Chloe. Magsi-set up kami ng live feed sa loob ng isang minuto.*
we need Saunders	80	kailangan si Saunders
	81	mismo
to make an ID	82	ang mag-ID
I want you to move Saunders	83	dalhin mo siya
to Chloe' station	84	sa station ni Chloe
we're setting up a live feed	85	magsi-set up kami ng live feed
we should have it in a few minutes	86	sa loob ng isang minuto

3. Summary and Conclusion

The three audiovisual translations analyzed in this study reveal several things about the Filipino people as a community. The borrowings that are made in the translations and the affixation of borrowed words with Filipino affixes, imply that the Filipino community is comfortable with translations. The adaptations of non-existing concepts and the care that is observed in the employment of equivalent effect imply that adequate message transfer is always prioritized. On the other hand, the adaptation—the filtering—of tabooed concepts and expletives imply that the Filipino culture places supreme importance on social values even when these expressions are uttered by non-Filipinos in a non-Filipino context.

Like other translations, audiovisual translations reveal the things that are deemed important in a culture. The things that are prioritized, or allowed, or restricted in a translation allude to the predisposition of a receiving culture. How does the receiving culture perceive translations? Do linguistic rules restrict literal translation, or do they allow it? Does geographical location account for "unfaithful" translations? Do social values admonish "faithful" translations of specific concepts? These questions arise in the process of translating and they are given importance in the decisions concerning the translation. The translated audiovisual text, therefore, aside from conveying its own creative purpose, also conveys the sociocultural identity of the recipient culture that shapes its translation.

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5.2. Filmography

[1] Dekada '70

[2] March of the Penguins

[3] Penguin, Penguin, Paano ka Ginawa?

[4] 24, Season 3, Episode 22

[5] 24, Season 3, Episode 23