

Audio-visual translation is a specialised branch of translation dedicated to the language versioning techniques used in audio-visual content which can be used either at the production or post-production stage.

Audio-visual translation (AVT) is the term used to refer to the transfer from one language to another of the verbal components contained in audio-visual works and products. Feature films, television programs, theatrical plays, musicals, opera, Web pages, and video games are just some examples of the vast array of audio-visual products available and that require translation. As the word suggests, audio-visuals are made to be both heard (audio) and seen (visual) simultaneously but they are primarily meant to be seen

Subtitling

Subtitles are the text version of what is being said in an audio-visual piece on the screen; these are not an exact transcription, and they tend to appear at the bottom of the screen.

There are various constraints when it comes to the production of subtitles, and length is the main one. Subtitles are usually limited to two or three lines, and a specific amount of characters. This often makes things complicated, as our reading speed varies from person to person, and subtitles have to remain visible on the screen long enough for people to be able to read them, but not too long to overlap with later shots.

There are various types of subtitles, such as:

- Language-based subtitles: these are divided into intralingual subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing, and interlingual subtitles – condensed translations of what is being said on the audio.
- Time-based subtitles: these are divided into live subtitles – used for live events and the news – and pre-recorded subtitles, made after the production stage, with more time for subtitlers to work on them.
- Set-up-based subtitles: these can be open – which means that they are always on the screen – or closed – when the viewer can choose to see them or not.
- Surtitling: this indicates subtitles used in theatres, especially in operas.

Revoicing techniques

Revoicing techniques involve the replacement of the original voice track, and there are different types of revoicing:

- Dubbing: this is the replacement of the original audio track with a translated one which reproduces the timing, phrasing and lip movement as closely as possible. Many people are involved in this process, including translators, adapters, dubbing actors, dubbing directors and sound engineers.
- Voice-over: this is the overlapping of the translated voice track over the original one, where the original voice track is still audible in the background. The four types of voice-over techniques are voice-over itself, narration, free commentary and audio description.

Choosing the right type of audio-visual translation

Various things will influence the type of audio-visual translation you choose, such as your budget or the purpose of the video.

Considering your target audience, as well as on-screen visuals, are also extremely important. For instance, if members of your audience have some disabilities that may impact their ability to read subtitles, you should take this into account when creating them. In the case of children or elderly people, for instance, revoicing techniques might be a better option.

Different industries have different preferences when it comes to types of audio-visual translation, and you should do plenty of research on this. This is also true of countries, where for instance some prefer subtitling, and others dubbing.

Knowing the main purpose of your video will also help you to choose the best type of audiovisual translation, as will considering the type of device or medium which your content will be played on.

Project stages

Remember that the translation of an audio-visual piece of content is complex. You should have the script of your video at hand; once the script gets translated, it gets reviewed and is then sent to the subtitlers who can carry out any revoicing techniques. At this stage, you will be provided with a catalogue of voices to choose from. The video normally undergoes a final QA carried out by the project managers or the linguists.

You should have all the relevant material, such as your script, at the ready when approaching an agency for audio-visual translation, as this will considerably speed up the process.

Some of the typical characteristics that define audiovisual translation are speech and changing registers:

- **Speech.** With this characteristic we refer to the ability to symbolize a previously translated natural and spontaneous dialogue. It might sound easy, but it is not. What is logical to one person in a certain context might seem totally out of place for another person. For that reason, a translator should be able to transfer written language on to the screen without adding strange expressions or demanding an unreasonable, unnatural effort on part of the character who is speaking.
- **Changing registers.** Contrary to the other specialized forms, audiovisual translation is characterized by suffering from changes in registers. Instead of working on a well-defined topic we are confronted with a great variety of possible registers. Among these are children's programs, detective series, horror movies or documentary films on nature. One of audiovisual translation's advantages is that it permits the translator to learn something new about any possible topic every day. That is why it is not surprising that translators often have a wide and pretty broad cultural and general knowledge.

Some of its various modalities:

- **Synchronization and subtitles.** There has always been a debate about which of the two is the more adequate and appropriate form. From my point of view, both have their pros and cons. **Synchronization** is the oral adaptation of an audiovisual document in which you do not have any traces of the original language. On some occasions though we will find cultural collocations that simply do not apply. In which case, it is necessary to blend in some kind of image or representation of the words in order to get the best results.
On the other hand the original language remains present in an audiovisual document that works with **subtitles**. The targeted language also is represented by subtitles underneath the visual sequences. Due to globalization and the wide availability to access movies and series from other countries, there is a cultural opening in which subtitles gain popularity over the more traditional synchronization.
- **Overlaid voices.** It is not unusual today to watch a television program in which you can hear the characters speak in their maternal language whilst you hear an overlaid voice that translates what has already been said. This kind of translation can especially be found in *reality shows* or documentaries, it is said the principal function of an overlaid voice is to introduce the viewer to a different culture and the theme of the programme.
- **Audiodescription and subtitles for deaf people.** This kind of audiovisual translation consists of subtitling for a hearing-impaired audience. That is why elements like the description of sounds – rather than just conversations between people – need to be included as well. This means that, for example, sighs will be indicated in a different manner from the conversational content-related subtitles. In some programs they tend to mix this kind of translation with the interpretation of sign language.
- **Localization.** This is probably the most unknown form of audiovisual translation. It's consists of translating and adapting all elements of websites, video games, software and other audiovisual documents to provide a better consumer approved product in a certain country it is exported to.

The following are few tips to make the Audio-Visual Translator must keep in mind:

- Avoid the overuse of colloquialism;
- Translate cultural references adequately, and thus know the cultures of your working languages well.
- Translate onomatopoeia with equivalent sounds in the target language (if they exist)
- Become acquainted with sources out of the field (known experts in the area to which you are translating) as well as conventional sources. For example, if translating a text on law it would be beneficial to contact any friends or contacts you have in that field to help with any terminology you are not familiar with.

In some cases the audiovisual translator has to synchronize the shown subtitles. However, this is not necessarily an easy task and sometimes there remain some mismatches in translations.

Just like in any other field of translation, there is always more than one possible translation for every text and that should be kept in mind when you are evaluating any translation's quality.