Film, whether produced for the big screen or television, is a global business. Any film that is not made on a small budget exclusively for a regional or national audience will have an international dimension—either through co-production or co-financing with producers from other countries, filming in foreign locations, or international distribution designed to recoup the often large production costs. Language services may be needed at every stage in the production process, but the amount of work will vary significantly.

During film development, for example, translators may be asked to translate synopses of the film story, film treatments, step outlines, or any underlying material (e.g., translating the book or play upon which the film is based). They may also have to translate marketing information during the financing process, as well as budgets, schedules, correspondence, and other documentation. During production, translators may be needed to translate such material as amendments to the screenplay and possibly contracts. Interpreters may also be required on the set.

The largest volume of translation work is generated just before or during the distribution stage, when the completed film or television program is subtitled or dubbed into different languages before its release in theaters or on DVD. Over a period of months and years, the producers of the film recoup their investment through a combination of theater ticket sales, pay-television sales, terrestrial and satellite television broadcasts, DVD and Blu-ray sales, Internet downloads, and merchandising. As a result, a film is likely to be translated more than once, and possibly several times into the same language, for different purposes. Often, theater distributors, broadcasters, and DVD subtitling companies each create their own subtitled versions of a film, and films may be released both in subtitled and dubbed versions to maximize revenue. In addition, DVD bonus material and video games make up a significant portion of audiovisual translation assignments.

**DVD Revolution: Different Forms of Subtitling**

Over the past 15 years, the amount of work available in the audiovisual translation industry has risen steadily. The first major impetus for growth was the DVD revolution during the 1990s. Whereas VHS tapes had usually provided a single-language version of a film, DVD technology now enabled as many as 32 different subtitle files or eight different voice tracks to be stored alongside each other on one DVD. For the first time, consumers could select different language versions from a menu.

The new technology led to the centralization of the DVD industry and the standardization of the translation process. Given that a number of different languages were now combined on a single disc, separate translations were no longer commissioned via film distributors in individual countries, as the entire process could be handled under one roof. A number of subtitling companies emerged, with London and Los Angeles becoming the two main centers for DVD subtitling. (London is a particularly suitable location for this industry, given the availability of linguists in a city where over 300 languages are spoken.) These developments led to other innovations in the field, leading to further growth.

**Software**

The standardization of the subtitling process became possible through the use of specialized PC-based subtitling software and the introduction of translation templates. In terms of software, some of the most common packages used by subtitling companies nowadays include SWIFT, WinCAPS, and Spot. These are all based on the same principle and tend to have three main parts: 1) a window showing a digital video clip of the film to be subtitled; 2) a second window displaying the subtitles that

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**Beyond Subtitling: Audiovisual Translation in the 21st Century**

By Christine Kretschmer
are being generated; and 3) a third window displaying the time code that links the subtitles to the relevant part of the film. Each subtitle is shown for a particular duration, which is determined through the IN- and OUT-points set during the timing, or spotting, process. Ideally, the IN-point should coincide with the beginning of the relevant part of the dialogue, and the OUT-point with its end. However, the translator needs to work around shot changes to ensure that the subtitles work with the rhythm of the film and not against it. The translator must also be aware of the reading speed of the audience. Most subtitling companies in Britain work to an assumed reading speed of 180 words per minute. However, the speech rate of many films and television programs is considerably higher (220-240 words per minute in some interview and discussion programs). This means that editing is an important part of subtitling. Most subtitling software packages help translators locate shot changes in the original film and monitor the reading speed of subtitles as they are being created.

Templates
The increased use of translation templates is another contributing factor that has allowed the DVD subtitling process to become fully standardized. When first introduced in the 1990s, templates enabled companies to use freelance translators who did not need to know the software, which was beneficial at a time when technical knowledge was at a premium. A translation template is essentially a fully timed, or spotted, master file in the original language of the film on which all translations are based. Produced by a native-speaking linguist in the source language, templates ensure accuracy, increased efficiency, comparability across language versions, and cost-effectiveness. Along with the template, translators receive so-called “Checker’s Notes” and “Translators’ Notes.” These notes ensure that all translators use the correct spelling for names and places, and provide additional explanations of concepts in the source language where needed.

Audiovisual Translation
Apart from the centralization of the industry and the standardization of the translation process, DVD technology has also contributed to the growth of audiovisual translation. There are two main reasons for this. First, the additional storage capacity of the disc enables it to carry a range of bonus material, such as documentaries, interviews, and additional scenes, all of which need to be translated. Second, both celluloid, and particularly videotape, degrade over time, whereas digital formats do not. As a result, entire archives, including film classics, have been digitized and re-released on DVD. In the early years of the industry, as households bought DVD players and built up their own film libraries, increased DVD sales led to substantial growth in the subtitling industry.

Hollywood films continue to dominate the DVD subtitling market and audiovisual translation as a whole. Research conducted by Olivier Debande and Guy Chetrit in 2000 estimated that the market share of American films in terms of theater admissions in the European Union was around 74%. Their study also indicated that the share of American programs accounted for 70% of the volume of imported fiction shown on television.

There are several reasons Hollywood studios have been so successful. Having a large domestic market enables them to invest more heavily in the film development process. Studios spend time tailoring projects to the international market and are able to develop a larger number of projects per film made than their European colleagues. In addition, film marketing becomes easier when a film project offers known talent and high production values—both of which are more easily attained within the budget level of a Hollywood studio. There is also the fact that a Hollywood studio tends to have more money to commit to prints and advertising for each film. As a consequence, much of the translation work available, particularly DVD subtitling work, is from English into other languages, with key countries being Germany, France, Italy, and Spain. However, many DVDs also contain subtitle files for the deaf and hard of hearing and audio description tracks for the blind and visually impaired, both of which provide work for native English-speaking translators and interpreters.

Satellite and Terrestrial Television
Aside from the DVD, other developments have led to an upsurge in audiovisual translation. For example, since 2000, the number of satellite and terrestrial television chan-
Switching to Digital: Increasing Accessibility

Over the coming years, much of Europe will face the next part of the digital revolution: the switch to digital television. This could bring some exciting possibilities, particularly in the area of accessibility. The main function of accessibility is to make audiovisual works available to particular audience groups such as the blind and visually impaired, the deaf and hard of hearing, and language learners. While much of the increase in audiovisual translation within the area of language transfer has been driven by export and commercial necessity, any increase in accessibility tends to be driven by legislation. A report published by the Media Consulting Group in 2008 found that the overall volume of programs available to hearing- or visually-impaired viewers in Europe is very low. Another survey conducted by the European Federation of Hard of Hearing People in 2009 showed that the percentage of programs broadcast with subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing varies widely among European countries, ranging from less than 1% in Hungary to well over 90% on average in the U.K. The fact that the U.K. is among the countries with the highest percentage of subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing within Europe is at least partially due to legislation that required 90% of ITV and Channel 4 programs to be subtitled by the end of 2010. The BBC is committed to subtitling all programs, which it announced on its website in 2008. This is delivered either live or as pre-edited subtitles.

Subtitling for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing differs from foreign language subtitling in that it includes descriptions of sound effects and music on a film’s soundtrack. This type of subtitling work can be quite challenging for the translator, but equally rewarding. When working with films in which the soundtrack conveys a large part of the narrative, the translator has to find ways of representing this information in visual form. In addition, it is necessary to indicate which character is speaking. Some broadcasters place the subtitles under the relevant character on screen while others use a coding system in which the subtitle for each character is assigned a different color.

Live subtitling is offered by the main broadcasters in the U.K., including the BBC and Channel 4, particularly for news and other live programs. This form of subtitling is often referred to as re-speaking. The subtitler listens to the live dialogue through headphones and re-speaks it, often in slightly edited form, while inserting any necessary punctuation. The re-spoken dialogue is then fed into voice recognition software, which produces the live subtitles. This work is very challenging and requires almost as much concentration as simultaneous interpreting. Live subtitlers have to take regular breaks, and the process is not entirely flawless. The software occasionally misinterprets unusual words or names, and the viewer might find it difficult to read the subtitles because they tend to appear on the television screen word by word, rather than as a whole subtitle. This means that the viewer’s attention is being drawn back repeatedly to the changing subtitle instead of being allowed to focus on the image and take in the information provided. This shortcoming was demonstrated by Pablo Romero Fresco, who carried out a reception study on re-spoken subtitles. Nevertheless, live subtitling has made a big contribution to accessibility for viewers who are deaf or hard of hearing.

It should also be mentioned that many broadcasters nowadays allow viewers to watch programs via their websites. A portion of recordings are available with subtitles, but these are often re-edited and presented in a different format from those offered on terrestrial television. Also, subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing are not always produced as intralingual subtitles. In some cases, translators are asked to create foreign language subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing, for example, working out of English into French or Italian.

Translation for Dubbing and Voice-over

Regardless of the growth of subtitling in recent years, dubbing remains the main form of language transfer within audiovisual translation in several countries. For example, Germany,
France, Italy, and Spain are large markets and can bear the higher costs associated with dubbing, whereas countries with smaller populations, such as the Scandinavian countries, Belgium, and Portugal, tend to subtitle their programs. Dubbing and voice-over are also favored generally for cartoons and news programs. Translators do not necessarily need specialist software when preparing dubbing scripts, although they need to have a mechanism with which they can assess with accuracy the duration of each section of dialogue to be translated. For example, translators have used frame-accurate DVD players or Windows Movie Maker to time their scripts, but ultimately the recording of the dubbing or voice-over track takes place in a professional recording studio using either Pro-Tools, Avid, or Final Cut Pro, none of which the translator will be required to master. The recording is made by a team comprised of at least one voice-over artist, a sound engineer, and usually a dubbing director. Having said this, there are some software packages available that allow the translator and/or dialogue adaptor to prepare dubbing scripts for recording, such as VoiceQ DUB.

To clarify, a voice-over is a voice track that is laid over the original soundtrack while the latter usually remains barely audible in the background. The term “dubbing” (used in the context of audiovisual translation) refers to the replacement of the original dialogue with the foreign language version that is made to look as if it is spoken by the character on the screen. From the translator’s point of view, translating a voice-over script involves fewer constraints. Constraints in voice-over translation are mainly related to timing and to any visual references contained in the film that relate to a particular point in the voice-over narration. In news interviews, for instance, the voice-over tends to come in a few seconds after the beginning of the dialogue.

In contrast to voice-over, translation for dubbing has the additional requirement that the translated dialogue must be able to be synchronized as much as possible with the original lip movements of the actor in order to achieve a natural look. This is particularly important if the actor is shown in mid-shot or close-up. Frederic Chaume has outlined translation strategies and techniques for translators trying to achieve the best possible lip synch in a chapter he authored in the book *The Didactics of Audiovisual Translation.*

Given the above-mentioned constraints, and also due to the high cost of recording and mixing the tracks into the original film, dubbing is significantly more expensive than subtitling, which is why many smaller productions choose subtitling as a cost-effective alternative to dubbing, even in countries where dubbing is traditionally used.

But using subtitles can also have other benefits, for example, in the area of language learning. In 2009, the European Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency announced it would be conducting a study on the use of subtitling to investigate the potential of subtitling as a means to encourage foreign language learning and improve the mastery of foreign languages. The findings should be available sometime this year. It will be interesting to see whether new legislation might emerge regarding the provision of additional subtitling services for digital television broadcasts.

**Audio Description**

Another area of accessibility that has enjoyed growth in recent years is audio description. Designed to make films accessible to blind and partially sighted viewers, audio description involves the insertion of a narrator’s commentary alongside the film’s soundtrack to describe what is happening on the screen. The narration tends to occur during the natural pauses in the audio and may require volume adjustments on the original soundtrack. Audio description is increasingly available in many European countries. A report by the European Blind Union (EBU) found that, in 2005, audio description was available in theaters in seven European countries—Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden, and the U.K.—while six countries offered audio description on television (Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal, and the U.K.). In recent years, other countries, including Greece and Spain, have introduced audio description. The EBU report focused on access to television and did not include...
any data on audio description for DVDs. However, it has been estimated that there are now almost 500 DVDs available with audio description in the U.K., either for sale or rent. This has been achieved through lobbying and support by organizations like the Royal National Institute of Blind People and the (now disbanded) U.K. Film Council.

In recent years, audio description has also attracted interest from academics, whose work focuses on a range of issues, including text cohesion and the application of official guidelines for audio description. One such example is the Calling the Shots Project at London’s City University that is tracking a new approach to audio description called cinematic audio description. Cinematic audio description aims to convey the full cinematic experience, giving access to such information as camera shots, editing techniques, and lighting, which are such an important part of the language of film. This practice is contrary to guidelines issued by Ofcom, the independent regulator and competition authority for communications industries in the U.K., which suggest that narrators convey the intellectual argument of the narrative and the main visual images but leave out references to specific filmic terms such as camera angles. As part of the project, City University has conducted test screenings of David Lean’s 1945 film Brief Encounter that incorporates this new type of audio description, written and recorded by BBC presenter and audio description narrator Louise Fryer. The screenings have received positive feedback from blind audience members, although further research is needed to establish whether blind and partially sighted audiences generally prefer this type of description.

Among the software packages used to generate audio description is ADEPT, which is used by several London companies. Produced by the same manufacturer as the subtitling software SWIFT, it also works on the same principle: linking the film to be described via time code to the corresponding sections of script. The difference is that the IN-point of the relevant part of the description coincides with the end of the dialogue, and the OUT-point with the beginning of the next part of the dialogue. Narrators work in two stages: they prepare the script and then record the description using the same software. Not all narrators record their own descriptions; some companies use professional voice-over artists for the recordings.

In addition to audio description, some countries offer audio subtitling that makes subtitled foreign language programs accessible to blind and partially sighted viewers. The subtitles are spoken and broadcast separately from the general sound track. This service is available in The Netherlands and Sweden, and can be selected on a menu.

**Sign Language Interpreting**

Another important area of accessibility is the provision of sign language interpreting. In the U.K., the BBC broadcasts a number of programs with British Sign Language interpreting every day, including programs for children. At present, analogue television broadcasting requires that the sign language interpreter be vision-mixed into the main image before the program can be broadcast. Rather than showing this version to all audiences, broadcasters tend to repeat programs, often showing the vision-mixed versions during the night. However, the Internet and the switch to digital television may, at least theoretically, open up ways of providing additional sign language interpreting during the day. This is because the digital transmission allows the image of the sign language interpreter to be broadcast as a separate signal that can be selected on a menu, so that the image of the interpreter no longer has be vision-mixed into the original image.

**The Internet and Industry Challenges**

One of the positive aspects of the availability of broadband Internet has been the ability of many audiovisual translators to work from home on a freelancer basis rather than having to work in-house at a company. While 10 or 15 years ago, many translators had to watch videos of the programs to be translated at the offices of the company for which they worked, they are now able to download low-resolution clips from FTP sites.

Overall, the Internet has brought growth to the audiovisual translation market, particularly in the corporate sector. Currently, many websites include a number of videos to advertise a company’s services, often in several languages. Here, in contrast to the Hollywood-dominated DVD market, language combinations may vary.

Subtitling 30 to 40 minutes of source material per day is seen by many in the industry as the norm.
widely, as the source texts are generated in different countries. However, a significant portion of the work is into English, the lingua franca of commerce. Translation work of this kind is often handled by professional subtitling companies, but this is not always the case. Corporate video producers tend to be small and independent, and sometimes prefer to take care of their own subtitling into English, particularly if they only commission one translation. Thus, for translators, it is useful to be visible to potential direct clients; for example, by being listed in the media section of professional translators organizations or translation agencies. There are also a number of film industry publications in which translators can advertise their services directly to producers, such as directories like Kemps (www.kftv.com) and The Knowledge (www.theknowledgeonline.com).

While the Internet has brought many positive developments to audiovisual translation, it has also introduced a number of challenges. Piracy is now a serious threat to the viability of the film industry. Amateur subtitles provided online by enthusiasts can be beneficial to the viewer, but at their worst, they can also be used to support piracy. Even though the quality of these subtitles tends to lag behind those produced professionally, they still have the capacity to damage sales. In order to reduce the risk of piracy, many studios hand over their completed films for subtitling and dubbing as close to the release date as possible in order to minimize the risk of illegal recordings appearing on the Internet before the release date. However, for the translator this means short turnaround times, which is not always conducive to quality. In relation to changing viewing habits, DVD sales have also dropped dramatically. An article in the Los Angeles Times in May 2009 estimated that DVD sales had shrunk between 15% and 18% over the past year due to a combination of the closure of DVD sales outlets and consumer behavior attributed to the recession. Viewers are now more likely to watch a film in the theater or as an Internet download and are less likely to buy it as a DVD.16 Plunging DVD sales have affected the viability of the studios and the film industry as a whole. Early in 2010, for example, MGM announced that it was halting production on its new James Bond movie due to financial difficulties. By November, the studio was up for sale.

London subtitling companies are also reporting a drop in DVD work. While corporate clients have shifted their marketing and publicity videos to the Internet, broadcasters who used to distribute many of their programs on DVD are now more selective about what they choose to put out. Some subtitling companies have cited a drop in DVD translation volumes of up to 25%. Yet at the same time, much of this volume has shifted to alternative distribution platforms such as the Internet. The key difference, however, is that pay television, Internet downloads, and other distribution platforms are not as profitable for producers as DVDs. With overall profitability affected, and the continuing pressure on budgets, pay rates for audiovisual translation services have been affected as well.

Regardless of the growth of subtitling in recent years, in several countries dubbing remains the main form of language transfer within audiovisual translation.

Strategies and Skills for Translators Working in the Field

The industry continues to undergo fundamental changes, so translators wishing to work in this area must adapt with it to succeed. The following are some key strategies to help achieve this end.

Be Willing to Learn New Technology

As mentioned earlier, each area within audiovisual translation uses its own software. Professional subtitling software such as SWIFT or WinCAPS allows translators to monitor reading speed, characters per line, and various aspects of their work, and to check the finished product. Many translators now own “light” versions of the software, or receive these on loan from the companies for which they work. One of the key skills in using professional software is the ability to time, or to prepare a “spotting list” (essentially defining the “IN” and “OUT” points for each subtitle within the timeline). This takes practice to learn and perfect. However, many freelance translators still work from templates generated within a company. They receive fully-timed files and can translate these within a Word or similar file document format before the translation is imported back into the software. Some companies used to ask freelancers to revise their translations in-house once they were completed, but nowadays proofreaders and project managers can take on...
Beyond Subtitling: Audiovisual Translation in the 21st Century

Continued

this role to save time.

Audio description narrators use professional audio description software like ADEPT, on which they prepare the written script and then record it. Again, timing plays a key role in creating the narration, as it must be inserted into the natural gaps between the dialogue, music, and sound effects. Apart from knowing the software, audio narrators also require training in recording facilities, as they are expected to be able to use a professional recording booth to record their narrations.

In addition to the aforementioned software skills, project managers need to be aware of a wide range of technical issues. These include familiarity with the formats of audiovisual material supplied by the client, such as Betacam, Digibeta, or any digital file formats such as MPEG. They need to know the working principles of digital editing and mastering, including the different file sizes (those for Blu-ray, for example, differ substantially from those used for DVDs). This knowledge is necessary to be able to brief technicians or communicate effectively with authoring houses that create the subtitled DVDs. At times, in the absence of a technician, project managers may need to take on the role of the digital film editor in order to produce a subtitled or dubbed version of an audiovisual product that is destined for the Internet. In such cases, knowledge of such programs as Final Cut Pro or other evolving Internet technologies that may offer cheaper ways of preparing clips for publication might provide an advantage. Project managers also need to consider the environment in which the client will ultimately use the material. For those seeking training in this area, some companies offer positions that, while offering limited remuneration initially, provide an excellent way of learning about the entire management process and the complex technical aspects.

Be Fast

Ten years ago, professional subtitlers used to subtitle a feature film in about three days. Nowadays, turnaround times are so short that colleagues who can complete the same job in one and a half days are more likely to get the work. Being fast and efficient—whilst being accurate and still finding creative solutions to translation problems—is key to being successful in this industry. Subtitling 30 to 40 minutes of source material per day is seen by many in the industry as the norm.

Be a Team Player

It is not uncommon for a subtitling company to receive the English version of a film five days before its release in the theater or on DVD and to be asked to prepare subtitles into dozens of foreign languages. In some cases, a film may arrive in individual reels that are delivered non-consecutively. The only way in which companies can continue to provide a professional set of services is through the use of translation templates, and of course, through teamwork. In this respect, the relationship between project managers and their team of translators and proofreaders is crucial, particularly given the time pressures.

Be Adaptable

Audiovisual translation is constrained translation. In subtitling, for example, there are restrictions in terms of the number of lines or characters that may be used, or the reading speed which must not be exceeded. These stipulations are not generally made by the subtitling company for which the subtitler works, but by the client; that is, the broadcaster, film distributor, or film production company. Many broadcasters use two line subtitles with a maximum of 39 characters or more, while others, such as the BBC, stipulate that up to three lines may be used for their subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing, with a maximum of 34 characters per line. The difference in line length alone means that subtitlers need to use different strategies for creating good line breaks in order to make their subtitles more readable for the viewer. Other stipulations include rules for punctuation, positioning, and the coloring of subtitles. In the case of subtitles for the hard of hearing, there are rules regarding labels (e.g., whether to describe the type and mood of music used, or to simply indicate that there is music). Getting used to a client’s specifications may take some time, but subtitling companies often have established links with particular clients. As a result, subtitlers tend to work for the same series or project for weeks, months, or even years.

In addition to client specifications, subtitlers also have to bear in mind their company’s in-house guidelines. These may stipulate whether English-language translation templates are pre-edited or not, how they are timed, and how to deal with shot changes.

Be a Good Translator

Ultimately, the best audiovisual translators are also good translators. Most companies will ask freelancers to take a test in order to determine their suitability.

Challenges

Digital technologies have led to an expansion of the audiovisual transla-
Sources for Researching Film Industry Terminology

There is a wealth of information on the Internet, but not all sources are reliable. It is usually best to focus on the following types of websites from Europe and the U.S. to ensure accurate results:

**Film Ratings**
- Motion Picture Association of America Ratings
  - www.mpaa.org/ratings
- Motion Picture Production Code
- U.S. Classification and Rating Administration
  - www.filmratings.com

**Filmmakers’ Networks**
- FilmerForum
  - www.filmerforum.de
- Independent Filmmaking
  - www.shootingpeople.org

**Laboratories and Digital Post Production Facilities**
- Bucks Laboratories
  - www.bucks.co.uk/Bucks.html

**Legislation, Certification, Funding, Training**
- British Department of Culture, Media, and Sport
  - www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/creative_industries/5060.aspx
- British Film Institute Screenonline
  - www.screenonline.org.uk/film/indaud.html
  (Guide to British film and television history)
- Filmförderungsanstalt (in German and English)
  - www.ffa.de
- Film London
  - www.filmlondon.org.uk
- Filmstiftung NRW
  - www.filmlondon.org.uk

**Subtitling and Translation Information**
- TransEdit
  - www.transedit.se/index.htm

**Training Organizations**
- Film Sound Design
  - www.filmsound.org
- Movie College
  - www.movie-college.de
- Skillset Film
  - www.skillset.org/film

**Unions**
- Equity
  - www.equity.org.uk
- Interessenvertretung von Medienschaffenden
  - www.connexx-av.de
tion market, particularly in areas like subtitling and audio description. This trend will no doubt continue. At the same time, the film industry is facing a number of challenges that have affected its profitability, including piracy and reduced DVD sales. These and other challenges have put pressure on the audiovisual translation industry and have, unfortunately, resulted in lower fees and a demand for faster turnaround. However, despite these challenges, the work of the audiovisual translator continues to be varied, enjoyable, and creative.

Notes


4. Growth of the Number of Television Channels and Multi-Channel Platforms in Europe Continues Despite the Crisis (European Audiovisual Observatory, 2009), www.obs.coe.int/about/oea/pr/mavise_end2009.html.


8. “BBC Vision Celebrates 100% Subtitling” (BBC, 2008), www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2008/05_may/07/subtitling.shtml.


15. Video-mixing is accomplished via a vision mixer (also called video switcher or production switcher), a device used to composite (mix) multiple video sources into one or more master outputs. The technique is often used to add special effects to a video.