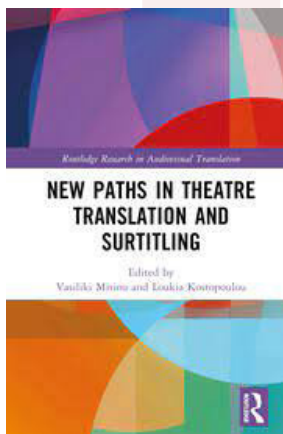


Theories and Practices of Audiovisual Translation in the Theatre

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New Paths in Theatre Translation and Surtitling

New York: Routledge, 2023. 264 pages. eBook ISBN 9781003267874, DOI <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003267874>

Research into theatre translation has gathered steam recently to such an extent that it might be possible to speak of a “translation turn” in theatre studies, just as Susan Bassnett (1998) identified one a few years ago in cultural studies. Within translation studies, theatre has also moved into the spotlight after a period of comparative neglect thanks to high profile publications by Marinetti (2013) and Brodie (2017), among others. Moreover, audiovisual translation (AVT) has emerged as a particularly hot topic with many articles, special issues and edited volumes regularly published in leading journals in the field. A publication that could capitalize on this interest while advancing theoretical understanding of audiovisual translation practices in the theatre was therefore much needed. *New Paths in Theatre Translation and Surtitling* edited by Vasiliki Misiou and Loukia Kostopoulou assembles 11 contributions from academics and academic-practitioners that address this particular gap in the literature.

ARTICLE INFO:

Volume: 09

Issue: 01

Summer 2023

ISSN: 2459-2943

DOI: 10.18680/hss.2023.0013

Pages: 211-216

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The volume is divided into three parts. A brief glimpse at the titles of the different sections suggests that the first is the most theoretically grounded; the second considers case studies, while the third reflects on issues relating to audience reception. In actual fact, the divisions are not so clear cut: there are contributions in parts two and three which engage as much if not more with theory than those in the first. The topics and approaches are diverse, allowing for much ground to be covered, though the link with the central concern of surtitling is at times tenuous.

The articles are all well-researched, starting by the introduction, which sets out the areas of enquiry, highlighting the different aspects under investigation. Surtitling is a type of AVT that bears similarities to film subtitling. Initially developed for operas, it is now used in all manner of theatre productions. Devised primarily as a manner of accessing content, surtitles can provide interlingual or intralingual translation. Most often conceived as not forming part and parcel of the work performed on stage, captioning and surtitling are nevertheless sometimes weaved into the design of the show to create a holistic artistic experience.

Questions of hierarchy between languages and forms of translation run through the volume, beginning with the opening chapter written by Lucile Desblache, which notes how for younger audiences, the use of subtitled (and surtitled) media is not only readily accepted but also expected, belying preconceived ideas of such practices speaking only to audiences with specific needs. This highlights a trend towards greater inclusivity, but also the fact that as a result of the pandemic, there has been a rise in sub/surtitled performances. Such a rise has been accompanied by an increase in visibility, as subtitles have moved from being an unobtrusive feature to a prominent aspect of certain productions, though experimentation is not always well-received (see p. 23). Towards the end, the contribution veers away from theatre and loses focus somewhat to discuss the need for transcriptions to avoid misunderstandings of lyrics in music, however creative “mondegreens” (as they are known) may be.

The second chapter by Sarah Maitland begins with a reminder that there are multiple levels in a surtitled text. The author uses the example of Los Colochos’s production of *Mendoza*, an adaptation of *Macbeth* set during the Mexican war of independence, staged in Spanish as part of the CASA Latin American Festival with subtitles based on an English translation that she had produced. She underscores how in this instance, as is often the case, the source text was not the performance, despite the co-existence of the subtitles and this “putative original”. Specifically, Maitland dissects the difficulty of translating back into the language of the canonical “Urtext” by Shakespeare, as she did not wish to end up with a pastiche of *Macbeth* that would devalue the Spanish-language play she was actually translating. The insights into the translation process make for the most interesting feature of the chapter.

The third contribution heads in a completely different direction. Angela Tiziana Tarantini adopts a Practice as research angle to consider whether the translation of a written text has an effect on performance. The chapter outlines a workshop led with two groups of actors: one anglophone, the other of Italian heritage. Both groups worked on *Convincing Ground and The Gully* by David Mence, in English and in their Italian translation by Tarantini respectively. In the experiment described in the chapter, a scene from the former play was acted out, in which a character narrates the massacre committed at Convincing Ground. Different configurations were explored with the scene being trialed as a monologue, and with a second character listening on stage. The researcher endeavors to find out whether similar gestures are performed by actors working on the translated text to those acting the original, but the number of variables appear too consequential to be able to formulate much of an opinion, despite the assurances of the researcher. The conclusion that an array of gestures can be predicted by a translator does not seem particularly new, and the justification for moving away from AVT to comment on gesture is insufficiently clear.

The final contribution to the first section by Titika Dimitroulia returns to AVT through the lens of Medea Electronique's production of *Echo and Narcissus*, the libretto of which is a code poem. Dimitroulia draws on Elleström's (2010) conception of media to investigate the coding of the technotext which expresses algorithms. Of all the contributions in the volume, this chapter is the one which does the most to engage with wider issues in theatre and translation studies, delving into definitions of intermediality, and thinking through untranslatability. Indeed, in the digital artwork investigated, the code is produced live using a python that only supports English, meaning that the text is untranslated in the subtitles, which is problematic when performed to non-native English-speaking audiences. Dimitroulia discusses various possibilities of getting round the monolingualism of such pythons, but also ponders how lack of translation might engender a sense of elitism in art.

The second part comprises three contributions, starting with Marta Mateo's chapter on stage and film musicals. Here, Mateo considers how translation differs in this genre in relation to opera, mainly in the fact that dubbing is more common. In the case of filmed musicals, there are various constraints such as the need to hire different actors for the spoken and sung parts that are dubbed, though it is also noted that many films choose to subtitle the sung parts in order to be able to sell the original soundtrack. The main focus of the article is on *Chicago* and its various Spanish versions. In particular, two translations of the musical numbers "All that Jazz" and "Nowadays" produced for Spanish and Argentine audiences respectively are studied, with issues relating to register, as well as rhythm and rhyme analyzed in detail. While making for an interesting read, the question of surtitling goes out of the window, which is somewhat surprising given the section's title.

It does come back into focus in the other articles of the section. Eva Espasa takes us into the public theatres in Catalonia, where surtitling is predominantly intralingual, though interlingual translations exist also. The chapter touches on a number of prominent issues including the visibility of the surtitles and their acceptability by producers. Her contribution is most useful in that she exchanges with surtitle-makers, charting their workflows and approaches. In addition, she picks up on differences in terms of what information is included in interlingual surtitles and those for the D/deaf and hard of hearing. One key aspect is the degree of precision in appellations and terminology, which varies depending on the relative importance that these issues take on within the overall economy of the plays translated. Similarly, in multilingual productions, languages can be translated or not depending on whether characters are expected to understand them. More generally, the article sheds light on aspects rarely considered at length, making its inclusion highly valuable.

Marisa Trubiano then describes the process of creating English surtitles of Stefano Massini's *The Lehman Trilogy* for its production at the Piccolo Theatre in 2015. She recounts the steps she went through with her co-translator in the two-months they were allocated to prepare the translation. She highlights the need to domesticate references in order to make them intelligible to the audience, but also reflects on the fact that her translation was produced with a global English audience in mind. Certain terms would have changed to reflect greater conscience of Black experience in the United States. Such considerations lead Trubiano to muse about the non-recyclable nature of surtitles, which are created for a specific production. She also comments on the fact that surtitles constitute the most undervalued form of translation before calling for the recognition of the importance of training opportunities offered to students in higher education institutions.

The first contribution of the final section by Louise Ladouceur and Milane Pridmore-Franz considers the politics of translation in Canada, where the co-existence of French and English in subtitled productions of French-speaking minority theatre is subject to discussion. While surtitling increases accessibility, this increase can itself be resisted by those who believe that the best way to defend the francophone minority is to produce shows only in French. Looking at the surtitles provided for L'UniThéâtre in Alberta, the chapter explores the complexities of political divergences in bilingual contexts. It notes how the strategy of translating literally was adopted in order to provide fewer distractions for audiences with knowledge of both languages. The article then discusses models for the reception of surtitles, suggesting a binary that contrasts those with little or no proficiency in the language of the stage performance with those that do boast proficiency. In any case, it is argued that the experience of reading surtitles is usually positively received, political oppositions to the practice excepted.

Estella Oncins's article deals with how technology makes content more accessible. In particular, it outlines how theatres stream more of their events, particularly as a result of the pandemic. Digital access is granted through platforms that are more or less user-friendly, and which present features enabling interaction to a greater or lesser extent. The article briefly exposes the functionalities of Co-Creation Space a H2020-funded project that allows communities and individuals to connect making for multiple co-located stages and experiences. It concludes by highlighting the affordances of technology in contemporary theatre.

The next piece by Pierre-Alexis Mével, Joanna Robinson and Paul Tennent is arguably the most illuminating of the book. The authors describe how Red Earth Theatre Company provides inclusive shows for D/deaf and hard of hearing audiences, using in-show signing and captioning. The authors outline the difficulties of using smart glasses, since they are reportedly uncomfortable to wear and they have limited battery lives. The essay then moves on to discuss the experience of researching and designing an integrated captioning system. Highlighting material and other constraints, the essay follows the development of technology and highlights effective ways in which university researchers and artists can collaborate.

The final contribution is by Antonia Mele Scorcia. It begins by explaining that most surtitling literature deals with its functional aspects. The author then mentions that surtitles can be integrated to be part of the performance, though they are commonly conceived as an additive: they function as an add-on to the performance and cannot exist by themselves. The author then looks at the TV show *Buona La Prima*, which was broadcast live on Italian TV. The show is based on improvisation and makes innovative use of surtitles as a means of pre-empting the action. Unfortunately, the article does not add much to the others, and despite claims that TV and theatre should not be seen in opposition, there is little about theatre here.

To conclude, the book's grand merit is in delivering the first substantial study of surtitling in the theatre. While some contributions veer off-course, the volume remains an essential toolkit for students and researchers wanting to get to grips with an increasingly prevalent and constantly changing practice of translation.

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