

Audio-description with audio-subtitling: Making multilingual Dutch films accessible

Aline Remael
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Wilfried Laurier University & University of Waterloo
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1. Combining audio-description with audio-subtitling



1.1 Definitions

Audio description (AD) is a precise and succinct **aural translation** of the visual aspects of a live or filmed performance, exhibition or sporting event for the benefit of visually impaired and blind people. The description is **interwoven** into the **silent intervals** between dialogue, **sound effect** or commentary.
Hyks (2005: 6)

Audio-subtitling (AST) is the **spoken rendering of the written** (projected) subtitles or surtitles with a filmed or live performance. The subtitles can be read by a **computerized voice** or by a 'voice talent' or 'voice actor'.

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1. Combining audio-description with audio-subtitling



1.2 Research focus

- **study the practical feasibility, difficulties involved and solutions on offer to actually produce a user-friendly "accessible" text**
- study the ideological/social functioning of multilingualism in the texts, and the impact of audiovisual translation/accessibility
- combine both: what works and how it impacts the product & its reception

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2. Translating multilingual films



2.1 Multilingualism in films on the rise (e.g. Díaz Cintas 2011)

Multilingual in films & AVT: increasing research interest
Multilingualism: a way of communicating also in film:

- realism
- diaspora, ethnic issues (postcolonialism)
- alienation among film characters
- sociological issues (class issues)
- financial backing (EU)
- minority language
- knowledge of foreign languages (audience & characters)
- increase international visibility
- Flanders: socio-historic connections with French
- ...

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2. Translating multilingual films



2.2 The challenges of AD with AST: Starting point (s)

Film is entirely in a foreign language

Film is truly multilingual throughout

Film is mostly in language A with = present corpus

- passages in language B sometimes
- passages in language C +

AD is **written** in language A + AST is a **translation** of dialogues in B and C **into** language A

Today practice or 'HOW' = largely intuitive

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2. Translating multilingual films



2.2 The challenges of AD with AST: Specific (1)

(Braun & Orero 2010)

The AD/AST script

AST usually use the **written subtitles** supplied with the film

- Often reduced text & AD script relies on info from dialogues
- Take on some of the features of writing, but must now be spoken

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2. Translating multilingual films



2.2 The challenges of AD with AST: specific (2)

(Braun & Orero 2010; Remael fc.)

The recording

- Sound mixing and volume adjustment
- Number of voice talents, their age and gender & talent
- Availability of actors as voice talents
- Question whether the foreign language dialogue should be audible/comprehensible
- Type of delivery of AD and AST
- Effect of length of AST on the recording
- Effect of the (re)written subtitles on the delivery
- ...

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3. The research project and corpus



3.1 The research project: two stages

1) Analysis of Dutch films with AD & AST combinations

- How is the AST inserted and how does it interact with the films' foreign language dialogue exchanges?
- Does the conscious use of intonation contribute to the coherence of the text?
- Are the written subtitles adapted for the spoken version?

2) Reception research (planned)

- Identify & select potentially problematic scenes for reception research
- Make alternative recordings (text & recording)
- Test different versions on target audience

Researchers: Aline Remael (academic input; www.alineremael.be), Susanne Verberk (subtitled and AD scriptwriter; www.nevero.be), Mereijn van der Heijden (manager SoundFocus & sound technician; www.soundfocus.nl)

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3. The research project and corpus (2)



3.2 The entire corpus:

The Ban Advocates. From Victims to Champions (documentary) (Anderson 2009)

Multilingual source text (interviewees) & English narrator

Target text: Dutch AD and AST, ltd. number of voice actors & voice-over technique

Bride Flight (drama) (Sombogaart 2008)

Dutch & English source text

Target text: Dutch AD and AST, ltd number of voice actors & voice-over technique

Oorlogswinter (drama) (Koolhoven 2008)

Dutch, English & German source text

Target text: Dutch AD and AST, actors + voice actors & voice over technique

Tirza (drama) (van den Berg 2010)

Dutch & English source text

Target text: Dutch AD & AST, actors + voice actors & dubbing technique

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4. Examples from Oorlogswinter & Tirza



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4. Examples from Oorlogswinter & Tirza (2)



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4. Examples from *Oorlogswinter* (OW) & *Tirza* (T) (3)



Research questions

- 1) How is the **AST inserted** and how does it **interact** with the films' **foreign language dialogue** exchanges? OW & T
- 2) Does the conscious use of **intonation** contribute to the **coherence** of the text? OW & T
- 3) Are the **written subtitles** adapted for the **spoken version**? T

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4.1 *Oorlogswinter*



- Dutch = 'natural environment' of the film: German soldiers are invaders & Jack, the English soldier, is also on foreign territory
- *Oorlogswinter* combines AD with AST when German or English is spoken
- English/German spoken by a Dutch character is also translated in the Dutch subtitles/AST
- The voices of the major Dutch actors were used + voice actors

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4.1 *Oorlogswinter* (2)



- 1) How is the **AST inserted** and how does it **interact** with the films' **foreign language dialogue** exchanges?
 - 2) Does the conscious use of **intonation** contribute to the **coherence** of the text?
 - No cohesion breakdowns: AD places AST
 - The recording method used in *Oorlogswinter* is similar to that of voice-over
 - The German and English remain audible before, underneath and after the AST, to varying degrees: 'echo'
 - The AD consistently announces who is present in a given scene, who moves about a given space or room while speaking, or who enters/leaves a room
 - **The film does not simply try to "cover" up the film dialogue, but makes limited use of it, partly out of necessity**
 - **AD intonation = narration**
 - **AST intonation usually matches dialogues (often same actors)**
- Example 1: Scene at the city hall (handout & clip)

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4.2 *Tirza*



- Two parts in the film: the Netherlands & Namibia
- In Namibia, protagonist, Jörgen, is the only Dutch speaker
- *Tirza* combines AD with AST whenever English is spoken.
- English spoken by Jörgen is also translated in the Dutch subtitles/AST
- The voice of the Dutch actor playing the protagonist was used + voice actors

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4.2 *Tirza* (2)



1) How is the **AST inserted** and how does it **interact** with the films' **foreign language dialogue** exchanges?

- No cohesion breakdowns: AD places AST
- Dubbing technique (English in 'English' environment)
- **Dubbing not consistent: AST covers up dialogue entirely in short, formalized exchanges, not in longer (emotional) ones + English 'echo'**

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4.2 *Tirza* (3)



Examples 2 & 3: (handout)

When Dutch subtitles are shorter than the underlying dialogues, parts of English sentences can be heard, mostly after or in between the Dutch AST, sometimes even before.

Three types of utterances can be distinguished:

- short conversational markers
- **sentences or expressions that are close to Dutch & partially covered by the Dutch version**
- **complete Dutch sentences or phrases that repeat the English or are repeated by it.**

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4.2 Tirza (4)



Example 4 (handout): Kaisa

The mixture of languages or voices that is most specific to the present film is that for which Jörgen is responsible.

In some Namibian scenes he **code switches** from English to Dutch and back, voicing memories, mixing reality & delusion. **The scenes become uniform Dutch in AST, sometimes mixed with English spoken by the same actor.**

In **example 4** only the 'echo' underneath the AST indicates which snippets of text originally in English (*italics in handout*) Kaisa understands in the original version.

Jörgen only addresses her when he needs practical information, not when he is voicing his anxieties: **this is lost**

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4.2 Tirza (5)



2) Does the **conscious use of intonation** contribute to the **coherence** of the text?

- AD intonation = quite varied, follows mood scenes & music
- AST intonation = dialogue/acting = esp. protagonist (same voice)

3) Are the **written subtitles adapted** for the spoken version?

- In standardized exchanges, the subtitles are transferred literally, but
 - in *Tirza* regularly adaptations back to the dialogue
 - such changes mostly made during recording
 - most of the manipulations of the AST in emotional scenes with Jörgen (acting/ change+intonation linked)

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4.2 Tirza (6)



Example 5: Bar scene (handout & clip)

- Jörgen again **mixes English and Dutch** even in the film dialogues (cf. 'conversations' with Kaisa)
- English version remains audible in between the AST in some places.
- The **AST regularly deviates from the subtitles**: emotional outbursts
- Unlikely that the English was kept audible on purpose here: the voice speaking the two texts is the same & does not have to be identified on the basis of the English dialogue.
- The best solution in such cases may be to radically rewrite the AST
- On the other hand: both ST and TT mix languages – if differently

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5. Concluding thoughts



- Combining audio description with audio subtitling is challenging, but a challenge that will become an integral part of the media accessibility scene
- The target audience is in favour of AD & AST, not of all the strategies used
- One core issue in the replies to all our research questions is that any AD/AST problem must be considered in context: **TEST?**
 - the context of the film (genre): where/when is the story taking place
 - the scene in which a conversation takes place (e.g. n° of characters)
 - the linguistic make-up of the film (e.g. its use of code-switching)
 - the impact of intonation & interaction with the text as written/spoken
 - the number and type of voices to be used for AD and AST

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5. Concluding thoughts (2)



- The use of the actors' original voices = an asset, but mixing dialogue and AST can remain confusing (due to the length of the dialogue exchanges). **TEST?**
- Adaptation appears to have its limits: a complete rewrite of the subtitles for the AST could increase textual cohesion. **TEST?**
- How about dubbing 'pure and simple'? **TEST?**

Some alternatives will be tested on audiences shortly
More fundamental further research

- Study of ideological implications of the rewriting, use of voices and recording techniques on the **narrative functioning** of multilingualism rather than accessibility only

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THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION !

ANY QUESTIONS?

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