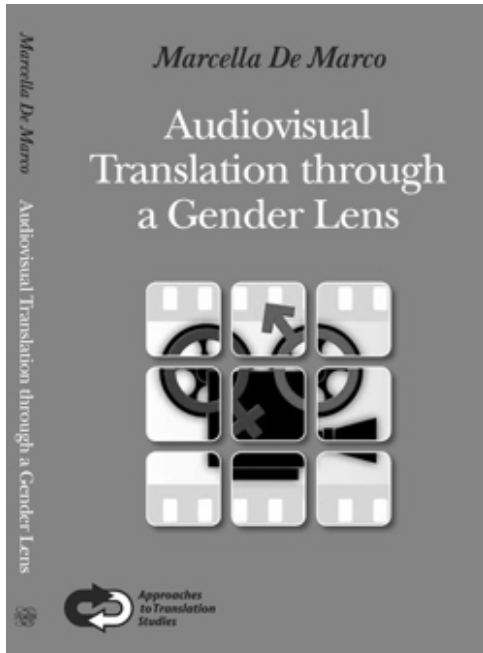# Audiovisual Translation through a Gender Lens
Marcella De Marco
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Review by Cecilia Pigozzi*

As one can easily notice from the literature on the matter (Diaz Cìntas 12; Orero ix), audiovisual translation as a research field is often prone to be merged with other disciplines and allow for always new and relevant conclusions on a number of spoken language and culture related observations. In her volume, Marcella De Marco engages in an analysis of dubbing strategies used on a corpus of ten films (5 British and 5 American ones), being translated from the original English versions to the Italian and Spanish ones. Her focus is on the topic of gender issues: she aims at unveiling how any hint to gender stereotypes and prejudices – both towards women and LGBT subjects – is treated through audiovisual translation.

The author's point, becoming clearer and clearer as the analysis progresses, not only strongly relates with Gender Studies, but in a way starts from it: films and instances have been carefully chosen in order to allow her to point out gender prejudices in society, and highlight if and how they are perpetuated through dubbing. The strong interdisciplinarity between Audiovisual Translation and Gender Studies on which the book is based allows the author to frequently refer to a number of contributes endorsing her claims about genesis and cultural roots of sexist terms or, more generally, derogatory expressions found in film exchanges. De Marco has previously conducted some research on gender issues in audiovisual translation, and the focus of the analysis, and its qualitative nature, make the author's insights of the two target cultures, namely the Italian and the Spanish one, essential to any explanation of the observed dubbing choices.

The volume is divided into four sections, the initial two being theoretical and the final two presenting and discussing elements and exchanges from the observed corpus. A conscious and declared choice of presenting only a rough overview of the state of the art of audiovisual translation studies has been made, thus allowing more space for showing "the sociolinguistic aspects that this translation mode hides rather than the technical aspects that have been extensively explored" (De Marco 22).

Before engaging in the proper content of the research, the author presents as a necessary premise her own viewpoint about sexist language: words and expressions are not sexist themselves – rather, it is how people use them and mean them that occasionally makes them so. As stated in the introduction, the initial research questions are mainly three:

- Can cinematographic language and the ways in which characters speak be branded as sexist?
- Do male and female different speaking modalities in English, Italian and Spanish, contribute to androcentric attitudes?
- Where and in which cases is sexism transferred or not from originals to dubbed versions?

In the first section, entitled *The relevance of the interdisciplinary research*, an overview of the literature both on Gender Studies and on Audiovisual Translation is provided, attempting to highlight the common ground between the two disciplines. Here, it has also been pointed out how in the 1980s and 1990s a cultural turn occurred: meaning stopped to be conceived as unequivocal. Consequently, differences – either cultural or linguistic – should be enhanced and carefully preserved through the translation process. Within this view, it is easy to understand how complex becomes to translate – or dub – an exchange containing a sexist or derogatory reference, whose meaning is strongly tied to its contextual culture. As Chaume claims, "to dub a film meant to turn it into a national product"

(Chaume 2004a in De Marco 2012: 59).

In *Sexism and gender stereotypes*, as the second section is called, the author focuses on what gender stereotypes are, how they are expressed in society and further maintained in film productions. Initially, the difference between sexism and androcentrism in general is clarified: within the former, women are explicitly downgraded through language and gestures; in the latter, people who act like women are invisible and irrelevant to any public or important issue related to human kind. In both cases, stereotypes are forwarded: it is claimed that society clichés are still very present in mainstream cinema and TV, as shown in the corpus of films here analysed. Groups of feminist linguists and scholars struggle and rarely succeed to impose language change reflecting feminist positions (such as for instance introducing neuter pronouns): on the one hand, the author claims at this point that a greater visibility and respect to women should be rather granted through more accessible job opportunities and social achievements; on the other, what she implicitly maintains with her conclusions is that it is possible to avoid contributing to gender stereotypes through the dubbing process.

The second part of the book is committed to the analysis of the corpus: firstly, through paralinguistic elements such as images, covers and roles, presented in *Multiple portrayals of gender in Anglo-American cinema;* followingly, through linguistic exchanges occurring in the films, in *Representation of gender in speech*. It is relevant to highlight and dedicate a specific section to paralinguistic elements for precisely the same reasons differentiating audiovisual translation from literary translation: the semiotic dimension. As a matter of fact semiotic features, although occasionally neglected, characterize any audiovisual medium, and strongly contribute to reiterate any meaning linguistically conveyed by it; therefore, they cannot be ignored in the translation process. An interesting observation resulting from this analysis is a Hollywoodian coherent representation of women, less recognizable in British films: women bodies are often fragmented and thus objectified; women roles are either connected to prostitution or to house and family duties.

After a short overview, the linguistic analysis develops within three main paths: topics dealt with by women and men in talk, lexical forms used to address each other (compliments or insults), and swearwords by both female and male characters. The point of view adopted focuses on the hypothetical perlocutory effect on the audience the original and the translated exchanges could cause. In general, what emerges is that there is not a great difference in the manner in which American, British, Spanish and Italian societies deal with gender issues. However, what can also be inferred from examples is that while English originals show a wider range of offensive terms, in Spanish and Italian dubbed versions a greater number of discriminatory labels occur. The conclusion drawn here from De Marco is that Spanish and Italian languages have a greater sexist vocabulary, and even most importantly, that it is not perceived as such: this is why there are cases in which a generally offensive term has straightforwardly been translated with a sexist one.

In the conclusions, the author considers to which extent the dubbing process affects the target audience's perception of social issues, such as sexism and gender stereotypes, and how to deal with that, finally showing the political implications of her research. Even if traditional translation rules would push towards 'faithfulness' (so that stereotypes from the original should be reproduced), manipulation happens, either for ideological or technical reasons. At this point, De Marco maintains that a careful audiovisual translation – such as not adding subtle sexist meanings or alleviating the original ones – is a way to stand up against sexism, long perpetuated by those holding economic and political power, which have interest in maintaining the status quo. Furthermore, she encourages scholars to involve in further academic debate on the matter, in order for "the asymmetries not to be ignored" (De Marco 223).

Works Cited

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