BOOK REVIEW

Audio Description – New perspectives illustrated, edited by Anna Maszerowska, Anna Matamala and Pilar Orero, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2014, pp. 216, ISBN 978 90 272 5852 6

Bringing together a coherent and cohesive set of studies, this collection, edited by Anna Maszerowska, Anna Matamala and Pilar Orero, offers a rich and multifaceted exploration of audio description through the lens of a single film, Quentin Tarantino's *Inglorious Basterds* (2009), a minefield of languages, film codes and genres.

The project at the basis of this book is ADLAB (Audio Description: Lifelong Access for the Blind), set up by Christopher Taylor and Elisa Perego (Università di Trieste, Italy), in cooperation with industrial partners and service providers, in order to define effective and reliable guidelines for the practice of audio description in Europe, by pooling existing competences and working towards standardised sets of criteria. Going beyond the report of a joint endeavour, this volume analyses in detail the many issues that impact on audio description, offering guidelines and strategies based on the analysis of Tarantino's film which acts as a powerful trait d'union among the various contributions. This book thus adopts a bottom-up methodology and a prescriptive approach, both quite original, considering the majority of studies in audiovisual translation and in translation studies in general.

After a first contribution by Louise Fryer and Pablo Romero-Fresco on audiointroductions, the first compelling chapter of the book is Christopher Taylor's on intertextuality. What is interesting in this particular chapter is its underlining the question of authorial intent, going directly to the heart of the matter: if, as Taylor argues, "a film-maker such as Tarantino does not merely make a reference to another text but creates associations for the viewer, associations which will be understood or not, or understood as intended or in a different way" (p. 35), is it legitimate, is it recommended for audio describers to explicitate connections and activate intertextual links? In *Inglorious Basterds*, the presence of both verbal and non-verbal intertextualities is important and essential to the understanding and enjoyment of the film. Thus, the author suggests that a way to deal with at least a part of these associations is to include them in audiointroductions, as described in the preceding chapter, while others can be discreetly inserted in the description itself.

In the following chapter on text cohesion, a fundamental constituent of discourse analysis and text linguistics, the same author tackles another important issue, namely the usefulness of screenplays for audio description. If, one could argue, the question of which screenplay to be considered is never sufficiently explicitated in the book (original screenplay, shooting script, editing screenplay, published screenplay? All quite different texts with different purposes), the significant differences and similarities between the screenplay and the audio description text are worth examining, especially with the aim of tracing the verbal and visual cohesive elements interspersed in the audiovisual text.

After an exploration of the importance of clearly defining the spatio-temporal setting for the target audience, in a contribution by Gert Vercauteren and Aline Remael, the central chapter of the book is Elisa Perego's on film language and tools: by taking the text as a narrative whole not consisting only of characters, actions, dialogues and settings, it describes what is perhaps the hardest task for the audio describer, that of conveying the aesthetic, atmospheric and emotional import of the film to the audience. It does so by analysing, in different sections, a selection of the syntactic devices used by Tarantino: aesthetic breaks, split screen, sharp scene cuts, parallel shots, close-ups, camera pedding

and slow motion, which are described in the context of the film and then commented in order to find possible AD options. The chapter tackles effectively the challenges audio describers have to face in order to deliver these and the many other vivid cinema techniques used by sophisticated directors such as Tarantino, showing us how, more than objects and actions, these elements determine the style of certain films. In spite of this, as Perego states, most guidelines have so far agreed that terms referred to filmaking and cinema-related techniques should be avoided or used sparingly, although generally no specific reason for this stance is given. As Perego effectively illustrates, this view clashes with film theory, with empirical research on the responses of blind and partially sighted people, and with corpus-based and case-study data on actual audio descriptions. Finally, it does not consider "the acknowledged ability of congenitally totally blind people to do as well as the sighted on many imagery tasks" (p.90).

After Anna Matamala's chapter on the strategies which can be used to describe various types of text on screen, the following contribution by Agnieszka Szarkowska and Pilar Orero deals with the importance of sound for audio description, as excessive focus on the image can make audio describers neglect the fact that their description needs to blend in harmonically with film dialogue and sounds, bearing in mind that, quoting Remael (2012: 261), film soundscape today is constructed at the post-production stage and is thus mostly produced artificially.

Bernd Benecke, in his chapter on character fixation and character description, focuses essentially on the problem of how and when to name characters and on when to give longer descriptions of a person's appearance, while Anna Maszerowska and Carme Mangiron, in the following chapter, propose strategies for handling cultural references in audio description, concluding, however, that reception studies with the target audience are needed in order to validate their proposals.

Iwona Mazur's analysis on gestures and facial expressions in audio description is preceded by an overview of the literature on the subject, before tackling the fundamental issue of subjectivity versus objectivity: while most guidelines agree that audio descriptions should be as objective as possible, practice suggests that sometimes shorter, interpretative descriptions may be preferred to ease the processing load of the blind reviewer.

The book concludes with an insightful chapter by Pilar Orero and Anna Vilaró on secondary elements in audio description: props, objects and details which may help build up character traits, context and plot. An experimental analysis by means of an eye-tracking display was carried out by the authors to ascertain whether people consistently recollected a unique incident in Tarantino's film. Results from the experiment helped the authors to devise strategies to convey information on secondary elements in audio descriptions.

Throughout its 216 pages, this collection succeeds in giving a vivid, multi-faceted but highly coherent account of the main challenges inherent to the narrative technique of audio description, one of the younger siblings of Audiovisual Translation. In this collaborative effort, international scholars review the many issues that surfaced in the process of analyising a single popular film, using a refreshingly practical bottom-up approach.

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