The textual complexity of audio-description with audio-subtitling

Making multilingual films accessible for the blind and partially sighted

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- Multilingualism in film
- The AD & AST combination
- The corpus of three films (clips)
- Project research questions/hypotheses
- Analysis of three scenes
- Concluding thoughts & questions

Multilingualism in film

- Today's society is multilingual.
- This is reflected in today's cultural products, including film.

- Films opt for multilingualism for various reasons:
  - realism
  - narratological/ideological issues
  - financial backing and/or international appeal

(see also Diaz Cintas 2011)

The AD & AST combination (1)

Accessibility:

- **Multilingual films are a challenge**

- **Audio-description (AD) & Audio-subtitling (AST)**

(see also: Braun & Orero,2011;Remael, 2012)

The corpus of three films

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

- *Tirza* (van den Berg, 2010)

- *Süskind* (van den Berg, 2011)

Accessible productions: collaboration Susanne Verberk (www.nevero.be), Mereijn van der Heijden (www.soundfocus.nl), partners in the present research project (see also Remael 2012).

Project research questions/hypotheses

1.
- Film dialogues or interviews function in a narratological context. They determine and are determined by the filmic narrative (Remael 2003).

OR

- Narrative movement and story are (co-)determined by dialogic interaction of different speakers and their (fictional) agenda.

- Complexity of this dialogic interaction has an influence on strategy that works best to achieve accessibility.

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Project research questions/hypotheses

2.

- **Multilingualism** has a specific narrative function.

- Modifying multilingualism **modifies dialogic interaction and the film story**

- AD and AST **decreases** and **adds to the complexity** of a scene/film

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Project research questions/hypotheses

3.

- Making films accessible is an added cost.

- **Synthetic voices** for **AD** and **AST** may be only solution

- T**he "voice" of the industry** makes itself heard in the film

- Relate **decisions for/against synthetic voices** to variables?

Project research questions/hypotheses

4.
Further research

- Film dialogues work on **two levels** (Remael 2003)

- How do the **translational shifts affect communication?**

- Does the target audience feel these **shifts matter?**

- Which **solutions** work best?

Three clips

I. Complexity of the dialogic interaction

The Ban Advocates: interviews

- Textual **complexity** of dialogic interaction **limited**:
    - → narration
    - → interviews

- Interaction is **genre-bound**

- However, interviewees have **a voice of their own:**
  English, Dari, Vietnamese, Tigrinya and Serbian, ….

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2. AD & AST impact on (voices in) the story

The Ban Advocates

- Voices read by **one male AD/AST & one female AST**
- AD **identifies the speakers**.
- Subtitles are **read as written**
- AST resembles the **voice of "authority"**
- AST is **narration**, similar to the AD
- However, even original interviews are **structured speech**

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3. Synthetic voices - filmic variables

The Ban advocates:

- **Content** outweighs formulation & intonation

- **Interaction** is limited and regulated

- The 'natural' AST voices sound **much like AD narration**

- Synthetic (quality) voices are **unproblematic**

I. The complexity of the dialogic interaction

Tirza: acting and voice-over

- **Complex** emotional scene even though only one speaker

- Conveys a **psychological state** as much as/more than content

- Irregular speech **rhythms, hesitations** and **code-switching**

2. AD & AST impact on (voices in) the story

Tirza:
- AD the usual narrative tone ↔ AST
- Original dialogue, heard in between the 'acted' AST
- Both retain rhythm, emotionality and code switching
- Character does not lose his voice

HOWEVER:
- Complexity is added to complexity
- Does this remain comprehensible?

3. Synthetic voices - filmic variables

Tirza
- **How** Jörgen speaks is as important as what he says
- Dialogue and AST **mix** well
- In other scenes **interaction** is added
- **Contrast** narrative AD ↔ AST/dialogue mix is marked

ALTERNATIVELY
- What would the mix of dialogue and more neutral synthetic AST yield?
- AD and AST still distinguishable? Can technology handle this?
- Synthetic simplification preferable to natural complexity?

Same three questions – different solution (1)

Süskind: acting and dubbing

- Film: **German** and **Dutch/German**
- Accessible film: All **perfect Dutch**
  - → Unusual for a "subtitling country"
  - → Simplification that may add complexity

- Rewritten Dutch **AST functions like film dialogue**
- **Difference** AST narrative AD obvious.
- **No complexity** of "added" voices, multilingualism lost

Same three questions – different solution (2)

Issues

- Ideological, realistic and narrative **function of German lost**
- **Character identification** through acting/intonation only
- Added **cost** of rewriting subtitles
- Are **synthetic voices** better at **"clean" voices**?

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Concluding thoughts

- Voice of AD = a "narrative voice" in all films
  = **synthetic voices OK**

- Interviews *The Ban Advocates* = little emotionality, constant
  rhythms, hardlz any interaction
  = **synthetic voices OK**

- Analysis on the basis of our hypotheses/research questions
  = **identification of scenes and issues for testing**

Concluding questions: summary (1)

Starting point: the ideological, narrative and realistic
functioning of multilingualism in film is important

- Which type of recording is preferable for AD & AST:
  voice-over/dubbing, for audience/for industry?

- Can synthetic voices manage acting, emotions,
  differing rhythms, intonation, interpersonal interaction ?

- Is the complexity of "acted" AST added to/mixed
  with film dialogue complexity a good thing?

Concluding questions: summary (2)

- Do synthetic and neutral "narrative" AST voices work
  in complex scenes?

- Is such simplification better for comprehension?

- Do synthetic voices function better in dubbed alternative ?

- Combination text to speech for AD + actors for AST?

Further research

Next stage = testing with target audiences

HOWEVER

- Will audience preferences be affordable?

- Would developers of Dutch text to speech software
  care to join the project?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

QUESTIONS?

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