
Towards a Methodology for the Investigation of Norms in Audiovisual Translation, by Fotios Karamitroglou. Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 2000, 300 pp.

Towards a Methodology for the Investigation of Norms in Audiovisual Translation, by Fotios Karamitroglou, is a study of the patterns found in the field of

audiovisual translation, and how these patterns affect the decision as to which type of audiovisual translation should be used: subtitling or revoicing. The book is arranged in three main sections including “A Theoretical Approach to Norms”, “Towards a Systematic Investigation of Norms in Audiovisual Translation”, and finally “Case Study: The Choice between Subtitling and Revoicing in Greece”. Karamitroglou not only looks at the field of

audiovisual translation alone, but also audiovisual translation as it fits into the broader field of (literary) translation as a whole. Along with an introduction, the three sections serve to explore the idea that norms can be found in every part of life. They can be found in the field of (literary) translation and, even more importantly, in the sub-field of audiovisual translation. According to Karamitroglou, “audiovisual translation seems to be particularly dominated by a strong sense of norms as a result of the impact of mass-media on the broader public and the fact that ‘viewers are creatures of habit’”. Therefore, the decision between subtitling and revoicing should be in accordance with what the intended viewers are “used to”.

Because many people are not familiar with the history, issues, or specific language used in the field of audiovisual translation, the introduction is a very important part of this book. Karamitroglou begins by defining the terms that are most important in understanding the issues, then goes on to explain the history of subtitling and revoicing. From there, he introduces the general theoretical issues, including how audiovisual translation fits into general

translation theory. Karamitroglou declares “it is a well-known fact that audiovisual translation has always been considered inferior to (written) literary translation, most probably because of the lack of cultural prestige in audiovisual mass-media, compared to canonized literature”. However, according to Karamitroglou, there are a number of reasons why audiovisual translation can be considered a valid sub-field of translation studies and therefore must deal with the same critical issues raised by literary translation. One of his more important points is that audiovisual translation, like literary translation, was derived from the need to cross language barriers.

The first section of the book deals with the idea of norms and how they are defined. For Karamitroglou, they are “patterned social phenomena” that guide the behavior of a group of people. One norm then connects with another and so on, to form an entire system of norms for people of a particular group to follow. Each system varies in different cultures, which means that translators cannot simply follow the rules of cognition in translating a text. Instead, they need to take into

account the target system, or the norms of the target audience. In translation, as Karamitroglou sees it, it is not important what norms were followed to produce the source text, but rather what norms should be followed to produce the target text. This is a dominant theme throughout the entire book and comes up many times as Karamitroglou goes on to discuss a methodological framework for audiovisual translation.

In the second section, Karamitroglou begins his discussion of a framework for audiovisual translation. In this model, there are four factors that are interdependent, which include human agents, products, recipients, and audio-visual mode. "Human agents" are the people who try to conform to the norms. According to Karamitroglou, these people "play a vital role, since it is their ideas that will eventually support the perpetuation or trigger the modification of the already existing normative patterns". "Products" are the outcome of any activity, in this case translation. They can include the actual texts or even writers of the texts because writers follow translational behavior. "Recipients" are simply the part

of the public that makes up the specific audience of a text. Karamitroglou states that because the expectations of the recipients may not match the expectations of the human agents producing a given text, it is important to observe expectations from both points of view. Finally, the "audiovisual mode" is a set of all rules, both linguistic and sociocultural, that are followed in order to produce an audiovisual text.

These four factors in Karamitroglou's model depend on one another as equals, but may be seen operating at different levels. Karamitroglou uses three levels to describe this idea: lower, middle, and upper. At the lower level, only one piece of audiovisual translation is taken into account. At the middle level, the focus is on audiovisual translation as a field in itself, and at the upper level the whole field of translation is observed. The remainder of the second section is dedicated to previous approaches to norms including the theories of Toury, Lambert and van Gorp, Nord, Puurtinen, Du-Nour, and Delabastita. Karamitroglou also discusses some techniques for data analysis in order to prepare the reader for his third section, the case study.

The entire third section of the book deals with a case study researching the choice between subtitling and revoicing in Greece in 1995 and 1996. This is a formal study, and Karamitroglou goes into great detail in explaining his process of data collection and analysis. He reviews the data at all three levels of his model and comes up with a summary of his findings. The main conclusion from this study is that audiovisual translation can be studied within the broader realm of translation studies. Both follow the idea that norms overlap with one another to form systems, and in translation, the “deviation from or conformity to” these norms depends on what the target system will accept.

This book is most probably intended for readers who are well studied in the field of translation, and who have a strong sense of the issues involved in this field. The written language may be difficult to understand for undergraduate students with a limited background in translation, and, more specifically, audiovisual translation. Karamitroglou’s

specialized study deals with a very small but important part of a larger field of study. Though translation may have started with the written word, our contemporary society is becoming increasingly more visual. Therefore, an examination of audiovisual translation serves as an important part of translation studies as a whole. Working through Karamitroglou’s difficult language may be worthwhile in order to understand the role of audiovisual translation in our society. A thorough reading of this book will serve as useful only if the reader is willing to work to understand the language.

Audiovisual translation does in fact fit into the broad category of translation, and very well may be studied and interpreted using the same theory one would use for literary translation. Indeed, Karamitroglou studies audiovisual translation as if it were literary translation, recognizing the fact that neither sub-category is inferior to another, but rather that both are equal.

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