
The Semiotics of Subtitling Linde, Zoe de & Kay, Neil. Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 1999, 107 pp.

The Semiotics of Subtitling can be considered the best brief, clear introduction to the study of subtitling and, to my view, it should be set-reading for any introductory course in audiovisual translation (AT). Despite focusing primarily on intralingual subtitling the book

claims to adopt a ‘holistic approach’ which has as its premise the fact that ‘each subtitle is realised within a particular audio-visual context, styled according to the conventions of speech and writing, and edited with an eye on the structure of a film and the reading characteristics of target viewers’ – which allows the study to include interlingual subtitling as well.

The book has nine chapters: (i) “Subtitling and Audio- Visual Language Transfer,” which describes the context of subtitling and

introduces the main elements of the audio-visual environment; (ii) "Intralingual Subtitling," which examines the semiotics of subtitles and film with respect to the reading characteristics and viewing behaviour of deaf and hard-of-hearing viewers; (iii) "Reading Characteristics of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Viewers," which highlights the reading strategies and rates among people who were born deaf and people who acquired hearing loss; (iv) "The Integration of Text and Film" which analyses the text and film elements of subtitling; (v) "Studying the Effect of Subtitles," which explores a number of studies that have investigated viewers' reactions on subtitling and attempted to examine the effectiveness of subtitles; (vi) "Subtitling for Adults," which describes how a cross-section of subtitled television was recorded and analysed so as to examine the characteristics of broadcast subtitles in a range of programme types for adults; (vii) "Subtitling for Children," which shows baseline measurements of children's subtitled programmes; (viii) "Analysing Viewing Behaviour," which describes five studies that list the main and interactive effects of subtitle features on reading behaviour; (ix)

"Conclusions," which points out that the central premise of the book is that the multimedia environment of television and film influences subtitling in numerous ways. Each chapter in its turn offers a summary of the main issues discussed. From Chapter 3 on, all the summaries provide very useful pointers to areas for further research into subtitling.

The book does lack, however, a more precise discussion of its definition of translation. In attempting to make their point, the authors take advantage of Toury's definition (1980) without even mentioning the notion of norms which is central to understand what Toury means by translating. Instead, the authors prefer to hastily comment on the notion of relevance and the vexed concept of translation equivalence, which do not occupy a central position within Toury's model. Moreover, there is no conceptualisation of the term "equivalence". The authors give loose treatment to a concept that, as Fawcett (1997: 53) puts it, has probably cost the lives of more trees than any other in translation studies.

At present, there are not many textbooks available for the study of subtitling. Moreover, the great majority of them concentrate on the technical and commercial constraints

involved in the process. In this sense, *The Semiotics of Subtitling* has certainly set new ground by adopting an approach which not only includes the technical part, but also two very important aspects into the

study of subtitling, namely, linguistic theory and empirical eye-movement analysis.

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