

# Dubbing

## In brief



 SPA [Doblaje](#)

### origins

In 1928 Edwin Hopkins published an article in the *Journal of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers* on dubbing (Đurovičová 2003: 9).

### abstract

This entry is concerned with dubbing as a modality of audiovisual translation. Here, our main objective is to present a thorough analysis of dubbing, taking into account every aspect that influences the entire process, including historical, professional, technical and contextual elements. For this purpose, we start by defining dubbing and delimiting its regular use and standardised processes in the main ‘dubbing countries’, as these nations are commonly known. We then describe the most important characteristics of dubbing with special emphasis on the aspects related to the synchronisation stage, which, in our opinion, is the phase that best characterises this modality and distinguishes it from any other. This phase is based on striking a balance among the different types of synchrony (character, content and visual synchrony, i.e., lip sync, kinetic synchrony, and isochrony). We present some of the most common translation problems, which have the greatest influence on the final choice of linguistic elements in the target text, followed by a summary of the specific characteristics of audiovisual macro-genres and their translation for dubbing (films and series, documentaries, cartoons and advertising). We also recapitulate the main lines of research currently under way, without forgetting that this modality is also applied in university education and represents a very interesting field of transfer that is already bearing fruit in the form of stylebooks and guides, which are used by both dubbing studios and audiovisual media corporations. The entry will also provide key bibliographic references, where we aim to find a balance between what is considered classic research and essential knowledge and the most recent studies, which can offer new ways of analysing dubbing and improving translation practices.



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# Entry



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## Introduction

A globalised world has an even greater need for good communication that allows all kinds of transactions, ranging from the most technical to those that appeal to our emotions and feelings, regardless of whether we have the possibility of exchanging experiences in different countries or we do not leave our immediate environment. The screens that are now almost ubiquitous in our daily lives provide us with access to a large part of our needs both as a society and as individuals. And audiovisual translation ensures that all this information and entertainment does not come up against any additional barriers due to linguistic diversity.

Audiovisual translation (AVT) is a modality of translation that comprises any text in which there is a combination of verbal codes (oral and written) and visual codes (iconic and linguistic) and, in most cases, entails the need for a screen to display them. One of the essential characteristics is the mode, since the translator has to produce a written text "to be spoken or read as though it were not written". Although in the early days, AVT dealt with cinema and, later, also with television, with the arrival of the new technologies and the concern for [Design for all](#), the field of action has expanded enormously with the incorporation of a market that has a huge scope thanks to multimedia products and the different digital platforms that now exist.

Over the last few decades, video game [localisation](#), audio description, [subtitling for the deaf](#), sign language and respeaking, among others, have been added to the more traditional modalities of [subtitling](#), dubbing and voice-over. Dubbing is one of the modalities of audiovisual translation that allows the survival of the [linguistic and cultural ecosystem](#) in which we live. To define what dubbing is, we can draw on one of its first known descriptions:

**Dubbing is essentially a re-recording process and has three important applications. The first is the re-recording of a completed feature from one form to another, as from film to disk, for release purposes. The second is the re-recording of the dialog, for the purpose of mixing in with it, sound effects or incidental**

**music which, for technical or economic reasons, could not have been put in during the original recording. The third application is the synchronising of foreign voices to a picture which was originally recorded in English. This last is a “doubling” rather than a dubbing process.**

**(Lewin 1931: 38)**

Although simple, this definition already includes most of the aspects that have appeared in the dozens of other definitions that have subsequently emerged, namely, several oral and written linguistic codes, a great diversity of sound codes and visual codes, technical difficulties, a complex process involving many people who are responsible for distribution, translation, synchronisation, interpreting, and professional and technical issues.

In the same way, since the first reflections on dubbing, explanations have also been put forward about the complexity of this form of translation and the most decisive stages to guarantee the success of the final text:

**The third method is the so-called “dubbed” versions. In this method the original picture is preserved, but a foreign cast is assembled and after much painstaking preparation, a foreign dialog script is prepared which matches the lip movements of the original picture. The dubbed version has the advantage of preserving the original cast in the picture, but is very difficult to synchronize, and there are many places where it is undoubtedly apparent that the voices have been faked. [...] In making the dubbed version, only the dialog is recorded. After this has been completed, the picture must be scored and synchronized, just as an original version is. If several foreign versions of the same picture are to be made, as is often the case, it is a good plan to record all synchronized music and sound effects on a separate track. All the foreign versions can then be synchronized by dubbing this sound track.**

**(Lewin 1931: 44)**

We could therefore say that dubbing is the modality of audiovisual translation in which the original soundtrack of the source text is replaced by a soundtrack in the target language so as to maintain the illusion of originality. This is achieved by preserving the match between the original and the new voices, the fidelity between the new version of the text and the meaning of the original, and the synchronisation of the visible articulatory movements and the sounds we perceive.

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## History of dubbing

The beginnings of modern cinema (Pommier 1988: 9) date back to the late 19th century. August Baron tried to accomplish a mechanical synchronisation between the phonograph and the cinematographic projector. On 16 November 1899 he applied for a patent for “*un système d’appareils pour projections panoramiques circulaires animées en couleurs et parlantes dit cinématographes parlants*”. Others followed him in his efforts to develop the technique, but it was

not until 1910 that Gaumont garnered a certain repercussion with the presentation of his *chronophone* at the Academy of Sciences:

**Le cinématographe pour nos yeux enregistre le souvenir d'un moment: le phonographe pour nos oreilles enregistre le souvenir de la parole. Réaliser l'alliance parfaite des deux instruments, c'est reconstituer le souvenir de la vie même.**

**(Pommier 1988: 11)**

The United States showed a great deal of interest in this new technique and, in 1927, Alan Crossland directed *The Jazz Singer*, the first film with scenes that featured singing and speaking that viewers could hear. This shift from silent films to sound films (*talkies*) gave rise to a kind of second Tower of Babel (Yzard 1992: 4), as sound cinema drew renewed attention to the diversity of languages. This transition had many defenders and detractors. As an example, we can compare Charles Chaplin's statement ("Moving pictures need sound as much as Beethoven symphonies need lyrics") with Marcel Pagnol's ("le cinéma parlant est la forme nouvelle de l'art dramatique"; Agost 1999: 41 et seq.).

Sound films were introduced in Hollywood and the great mecca of the cinema industry began to create and export films, which sparked a reaction in other countries because of viewers' failure to understand the dialogues, even in other English-speaking countries. The initial solution was to produce multiple versions, also known as multilingual versions. At first, films were shot in the United States, but the cost of travelling and accommodation arrangements for actors and actresses from different countries was very high and so some European studios were set up in Joinville, a large production centre.

However, viewers were eager to see Hollywood stars, and with a host of problems of all kinds, the advent of a technique devised by Hopkins in the 1930s spelt the end of these multilingual versions. Currently, in countries such as Spain, where there are several official languages, some Federation of Autonomous Radio and Television Organisations (FORTA) productions still use the multiple filming system to offer the same production in different languages.

Karol (1928) had the idea of replacing the original text with texts translated into other languages, which significantly reduced the costs involved. And Hopkins (*The Phantom Flyer* 1928) was the first to apply the technique known at that time as dubbing (intra-lingual dubbing), what we now call post-synchronisation, which consisted in "substituer une voix phonogénique à une voix dite "exécration", d'une vedette très à la mode", according to Pommier (1988: 13). But finally Karol went a step further and decided to use dubbing to replace the original dialogues with others in different languages as we know it today (interlingual dubbing). *Río Rita* (1929) was the first film to be dubbed in Spanish. The combination of dubbing (replacing some dialogues with others) and post-synchronisation (a technique that allows this substitution to be perfectly synchronised in time and creates the illusion that the original characters are speaking) allowed



Zárraga, Miguel de. 1932. "La voz de los nuestros", *Cine*

for the appearance of a new cinematographic activity. According to [Mundial, 17:10. 648, 699-700](#) Chaves (2000: 30) it was Hopkins who, in 1930, finally established all the parameters that currently characterise dubbing, although two years earlier he had already advanced his discovery in an engineering publication (Đurovičová 2003: 9). By 1935, nearly all films were being dubbed in many countries. Articles in publications devoted to cinema provide clear evidence of this. The following image is a good example.

The reasons why dubbing was the preferred choice in many countries were essentially of an economic, cultural and even political nature (Izard 1992; Agost 1999; Lorenzo & Pereira 2000; Chaume 2012; Martínez Sierra 2012; Barambones 2012; Pavesi, Formentelli & Ghia, 2014; Bosseaux 2015; Ranzato, 2016; Marzà & Prats 2018). For Spanish, see Ávila (1997); for Portugal, Chorão (2013); for France, Cornu (2014); for German, Wahl (2016); and for Italy, Bergamo (1988) and Mereu Keating (2016).

For decades, [the audience in each country](#) gradually became accustomed to what they were being offered. However, that initial offer has changed and the cliché of the dichotomy between dubbing and subtitling countries is no longer valid (Chaume 2012). The first reason why it has changed is that there is one dramatic genre – cartoons – that is dubbed the world over. The second is that in many so-called dubbing countries, subtitling coexists, especially in projections in cinemas. The third is because technology enables us, through television or DVD, to choose our preferred version (original, dubbed or subtitled) in the comfort of our own home. Finally, in some countries with a tradition of subtitling, dubbing is starting to become somewhat more common, as is the case in Latin American countries, Portugal (Chorão 2013), Norway and Denmark (Tveit 2009). This is a trend that affects teenagers to a considerable extent and also fosters the existence of a wide range of dubbed versions in the most common languages on digital platforms.

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## ¶ Characteristics of dubbing

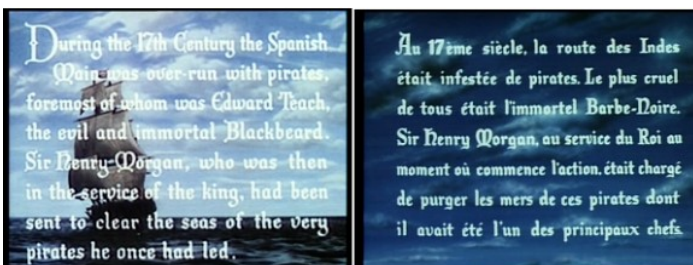
The characteristic that defines and differentiates dubbing from other modalities of audiovisual translation is the need to achieve visual synchrony.

In the early days of the literature on film translation, there was some confusion as regards the terminology, especially over the terms dubbing, synchronisation and post-synchronisation. Many authors used the word synchronisation as a synonym for the dubbing process, but in actual fact dubbing was a type of synchronisation called post-synchronisation. Post-synchronisation allows the sound recorded directly during filming to be replaced with a new sound recorded in the studio. Yet, it is used on different occasions and is given different names, for example, when the aim is to replace the original language with another, i.e. to make foreign versions of an audiovisual product, it is called dubbing, whereas when the purpose is to add sound to a previously recorded image, it is called post-synchronisation.

1. Authors such as Fodor (1976) considered that there is only one type of phonetic synchrony, which consists in matching the movements of the actor's lips and what is being said. Whitman-Linsen (1992) and Agost (1999) posited that there is also a character, or acoustic, synchrony or agreement between the voice of the dubbing actor or actress and the appearance and gestures shown on screen. This task is the responsibility of the dubbing

coordinator, or art director, and has a very high creative component. In this type of synchronisation, the idiosyncrasy of the voices and the paralinguistic elements (tone, timbre), prosodic elements (intonation, melody, tempo), etc. must be taken into account. In many high-level productions, selection tests are frequently carried out with different actors and actresses. Each dubbing studio usually has a more or less fixed team of voice actresses and actors, who are usually versatile, although they tend to specialise in a particular type of character. The actresses or actors use their voice to convey a content that goes beyond the purely semantic aspects of the sentence and enables us to feel all the nuances of human emotions.

2. A second type of synchronisation is that of the content, which involves all those problems related to the congruence between the new version of the text and the story line that is being dubbed. This is a job for the translator. In this type of synchrony, the following considerations must be taken into account:
  - The cultural variations, accents and dialects. This is one of the recurring themes in case studies on dubbing. In Spain, for example, for years we were used to hearing North American Indians speaking with infinitives, Germans with very particular R's and calling out *Herr* and *Frau* all over the place, the coloured folk of Harlem speaking *cheli* or *pasota* or the French *mataharis* speaking Spanish with a strong French accent. In other cases, equivalences were established between the geographical dialects of the original and those of the target language. However, since the 1990s, many professionals have shown themselves to be more in favour of employing just the necessary number of touches to mark each character. This may consist in a character using a distinctive word or a certain form of address that helps to explain their origin (*frau*, *monsieur*, *signora*, etc.).
  - Another problem is often the presence of several languages in the same film. This may be anecdotal or it can be a crucial part of the film (multilingual cinema) (Agost 2000; Pérez López de Heredia and de Higes 2019).
  - The presence of graphic elements on screen may pose problems for visual-content synchrony. The following example from *Blackbeard the Pirate* (1952) and its French version (*Barbe-Noire le pirate*) clearly illustrates this kind of problem.



O'Sullivan, Carol (2013) : "Quand l'image traduit l'image: doubler le texte à l'écran. *L'Ecran traduit 2*

- Finally, we have visual synchrony, which in general terms comprises the problems of matching the visible articulatory movements and the sounds we perceive. Achieving this is usually the adapter's responsibility, although in some cases it is another of the tasks performed by the translator while in others it is done by the person who carries out a detection process prior to the translation and is continued by the translator. It can also be carried out by the dubbing coordinator. The following aspects are important in visual synchrony:

- Lip sync (phonetic synchrony) involves the match between the articulation of vowels and consonants by the actors and actresses perceived on the screen and what we hear. It also

deals with the coherence between the visual and acoustic perception of the articulation of syllables, as well as the match between the visual and acoustic perception of the beginnings and ends of sentences. This is crucial in scenes in which the characters' faces appear in the foreground looking at the camera (Fodor 1976: 21). An example cited by Caillé (1960: 106) may illustrate this situation: in one film, the actor said “See Naples and die” and in the French translation the sentence was “Voir Naples et mourir”. In this scene, the problem was the bilabial consonant in *mourir*. As Caillé said: “*Que faire, notre infortuné confrère eut une idée de génie. Mourir a un synonyme; et l'on entendit cette belle phrase devenue classique: voir Naples et décéder*”.

- The synchrony of syllable articulation, synchrony in the length of the sentence (isochrony). This typical dubbing syntax, determined by sounds and silences, has a very direct impact on the translation, since, if the sentence does not "fit" the actors' lips, the adjuster has to reduce it, which can affect the meaning of the translation because there may be an omission or an explicitation. The problem of isochrony varies according to the target languages; for example, it is easier to translate and synchronise a film from English into Catalan than into Spanish because Catalan is a language that uses far more monosyllables than Spanish and the process therefore requires less effort. Each country focuses on different aspects, for instance, French audiences are used to a very high level of lip-sync, while Italian audiences prefer a perfect rendering of the emotions conveyed by the original. In other countries, such as Poland, dubbing is carried out by a single person who voices all the characters and no importance at all is given to this issue.
- Synchronisation with facial expressions and gestures (kinesics): it is a known fact that every language and every culture has a series of characteristic gestures, which may represent a problem for dubbing. As stated by Balász (1979: 65): “The structure of each language also includes those expressive gestures characteristic of its speakers. You cannot speak English with Italian hand gestures” (my translation).

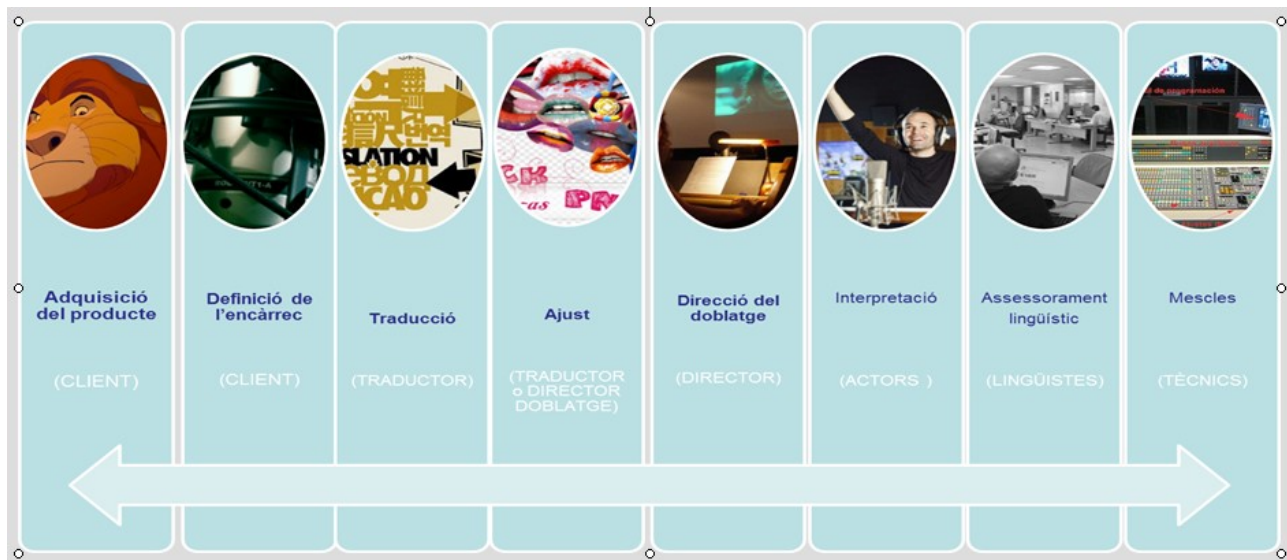
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## The dubbing process

Dubbing is a complex process characterised by the need for synchrony between the voices of the dubbing actors and actresses and the images of the audiovisual text (Del Águila and Rodero 2005). This synchrony also affects the content of the translated text and the in-studio performance. We therefore speak of a triple synchrony: content, visual and character.

These three types of synchrony correspond to three phases of the dubbing process. Dubbing is more heterogeneous than subtitling in terms of its form, since the latter is subject to a greater number of internationally accepted standards. Dubbing conventions, in contrast, are closely related to the tradition in each country. In fact, the conventions can even depend on the tradition of each dubbing studio. For further information on professional practice in Europe, mainly Italy, France, Germany and Spain, see Chaume (2007) and Whahl (2016). In this article, we will focus on the most common process used in Spain and compare it with what is done in Latin America and also in France, as these are three of the most representative models (Agost 1997, 1999).



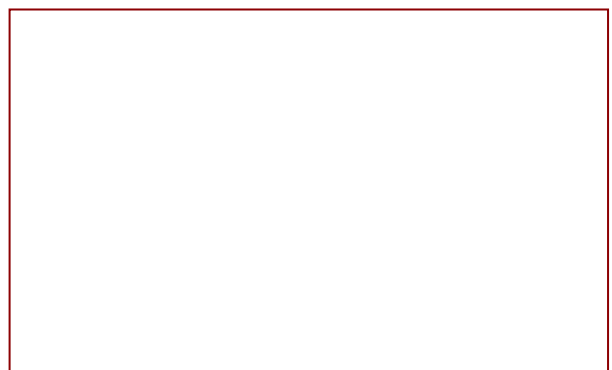


Dubbing steps, Starting left: product acquisition (client); defining the commission (client); translation (translator); adjustment (translator or dubbing director); acting (actors); linguistic consulting (linguists); mix (sound engineers). Source: Agost, 2018. Lecture at Universitat Rovira i Virgili

The dubbing process in Spain even varies from one dubbing company to another or according to the type of assignment (Cerezo, Chaume & Granel 2016). For example, feature films for the big screen tend to undergo a more elaborate (and time-consuming) process than TV films or series or those for digital platforms. In general terms, we can say that the phases of Spanish dubbing are sketched in the diagram above.

The process begins with the translation assignment, mostly from production companies, television channels and advertising companies. In many cases, they delegate the order to the studios where the dubbing will be performed. This studio is responsible for selecting the translator, who is rarely on the company's payroll. Nowadays, the translator almost always receives the material electronically. In big budget, world première feature films, translators may be restricted in some way, such as being given a very poor quality version in order to avoid the illegal distribution of copies. There may also be some variation from the original script, ranging from scripts with a very high level of explanatory detail to simple dialogue lists. They may also be pre-production scripts, with incomplete dialogues, and the text may have to be completed by "culling" from the screen, an additional time-consuming and labour-intensive task.

Once this first approach (content synchrony) has been completed, the synchronisation or adaptation phase begins. This is one of the most controversial phases, as it is sometimes done by the translators as they translate. Some authors argue that it should be the translators who synchronise or, failing that, they should be in contact with the person who does the synchronisation, so that the translation contains the



content with as few alterations as possible. Other proposals, however, defend the existence of a clear separation between the two phases, which would thus comprise two perfectly differentiated activities in professional practice (Agost 1999: 65; Gilabert, Ledesma & Trifol 2001: 327)

In fact, in Spain, the figure of adapter is recognised by the General Society of Authors and is paid royalties. At this stage, the translation must "fit" the images and conform to the movement of the actors' mouths. Traditionally, adjusters have also been responsible for checking and controlling the style of the script, the quality of the language used and the coherence between word and image. In addition, in the synchronisation process, symbols or conventions and formal guidelines for the presentation of dialogue lists are used in order to properly prepare the material with which the actors and actresses will work in the studio, together with the art director and the technicians. As we can see in the following image, these symbols can indicate the exact beginning of the actors' intervention, the presence of pauses of varying lengths or whether they should speed up or slow down their intervention. It should also be noted that not all studios use the same symbols.

Once the synchronisation has been completed, in some bilingual communities there is a phase of linguistic revision aimed at ensuring the quality according to the linguistic criteria of their stylebooks. Catalan and Valencian television stand out in particular, as they also have a selection of translators, consultants and approved studios. In the case of the *Corporació Catalana de Mitjans Audiovisuals*, this process has always existed. In the Valencian case, there was one during a very brief period in the early days of the previous regional broadcasting company, RTVV. After the closure of the organisation in 2013, the *Corporació Valenciana de Mitjans de Comunicació* was created in 2017, which from its first television broadcasts has incorporated the consultancy phase as standard procedure in all its broadcasts, including outside productions.

TABLA 1. SÍMBOLOS UTILIZADOS POR MÁS DEL 80% DE LOS ESTUDIOS ENCUESTADOS

(ON)	el personaje aparece en escena y su boca es perceptible
(OFF)	el personaje no aparece en escena
(P) / (X) / (T)	el principio de la frase de un personaje «pisa» o se superpone al final de la frase de otro personaje
(R) / (RIU)	risa
(G)	signos paralingüísticos y cualquier gesto humano emitido con la ayuda de las cuerdas vocales o el aparato de fonación
(G)→/(G→)/(Gs)/(GG)	varios gestos seguidos
(/)	pausa de unos 4 ó 5 segundos

TABLA 2. SÍMBOLOS UTILIZADOS POR MÁS DEL 50% DE LOS ESTUDIOS ENCUESTADOS

(DE) / (D'E)	el personaje aparece en pantalla pero está de espaldas
(LL) / (PL) / (PLORA)	lloro
(/)	pausa de entre 5 y 15 segundos
(AD LIB)	diálogos de ambiente improvisados, sin trascendencia para la historia
(AMB)	ambiente

Marzà & Torralba (2013: 45).

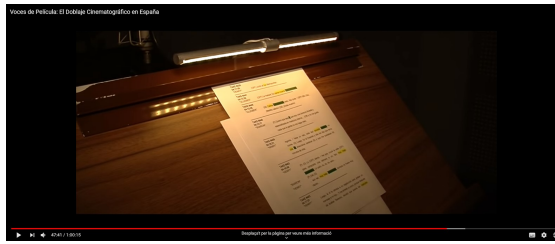
4	10.01.36
INSERT	Benvolguda Jane Lockhart, Gràcies per enviar-nos el manuscrit de la seua novel·la, <i>La interminable angouxa del meu pare</i> . Tot i que m'han agradat alguns passatges, malauradament la major part del llibre és avorrit i té una redacció deficient. Potser podria provar a escriure des de l'experiència pròpia. Avisem si necessita que li retornem el manuscrit.
NOTA: és una carta	
5	10.01.54
TÍTOL	Buscant un final felç.
6	10.02.20
TOM	Roddy! / Amunt!
RODDY	(OFF) Bon dia.
7	10.03.12
TOM	Vols obrir tu?
RODDY	(OFF) Si no em dus tu, hauré d'agafar un altre taxi.
TOM	(20) Tristesse Books.
RODDY	(22) (OFF) Que he tingut "Clms (ON) borrascosos", (OFF) amb els de dècim! (DE) Hola, què vol?
JANE	Tristesse Books? Tom Duval?
RODDY	(DE) Ah, sí, passe. (OFF) Al final del vestíbul.

Sample translation and synchronisation carried out by Rosa Agost for *À Punt* (2018)

The next stage in the process is the art direction and performance. The actors and actresses prepare the list of previously synchronised and, if necessary, revised dialogues. The dubbing director, or coordinator, draws up the work plan, selects the most suitable voices and guides the performance, since, together with the translator, he or she is the only person who has seen the original text in its entirety. The actors and actresses, before recording their interventions,

listen to and watch the original version, which allows them to capture all the nuances of the original actors.

Finally, the technicians mix the different tracks on which the interventions of the characters, the soundtrack, the ambient sounds, etc. have been recorded. Over the last 30 years there has also been a certain evolution in these last phases: the change from analogue to digital makes it possible to record the takes with great precision. Takes are



López (2015).



Recording the series  
*Merlin* in Basque (EITB  
2017)

the units into which the text is divided so as to allow recording in a more controlled way as well as being the unit of measurement taken as the basis on which to pay the actors and actresses. In

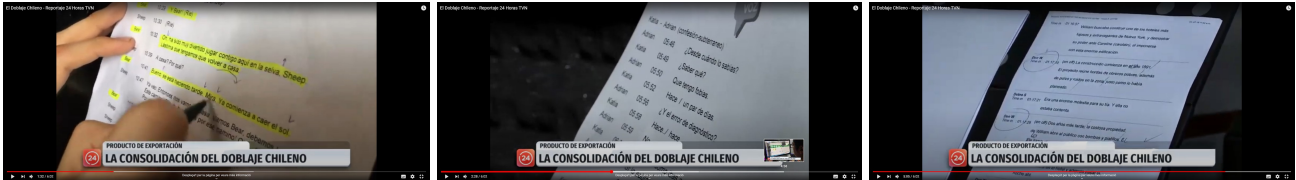
many studios, with the advent of tablets, there has been a shift from reading on paper to reading directly from screens. However, many professionals still prefer paper as it allows them to mark aspects they want to insist on when performing or to write down the coordinator's last indications and little changes.

For a more detailed understanding of the work of dubbing studios in Spain, we recommend watching Alfonso G. Suárez, 2008, [Voces en imágenes / Voices in images](#) and Borja López Sánchez, 2015, [Voces de película. El Doblaje Cinematográfico en España / Film voices. Cinema Dubbing in Spain](#). Also of great interest is the 5th virtual seminar of [Las quedadas de ATRAE / The ATRAE Meetings](#), dedicated to synchronisation and adaptation, held in May 2020.

In Latin America, the beginnings of dubbing are to be found in Mexico, where there are five well-known dubbing schools, and it then spread to most of the other countries, although they all work for a single common market, thanks to the use of what is called [español neutro / neutral Spanish](#). To understand how the most representative studios work, we recommend watching the documentary [El Mundo del doblaje / The World of Dubbing](#) (Bautista and Manjarrez 2012) for Mexico, and [De visita en: la Escuela Argentina de Doblaje / Visiting: the Argentinian School of Dubbing](#), an in-depth interview with the director and actor Dany de Álzaga. For dubbing in Chile, see [Chile conectado TVN / Chile connected TVN](#) (2013), about the country's only dubbing school. [Maureen Herman](#) (2013), Chilean art director, dubbing actress and teacher says that her students:

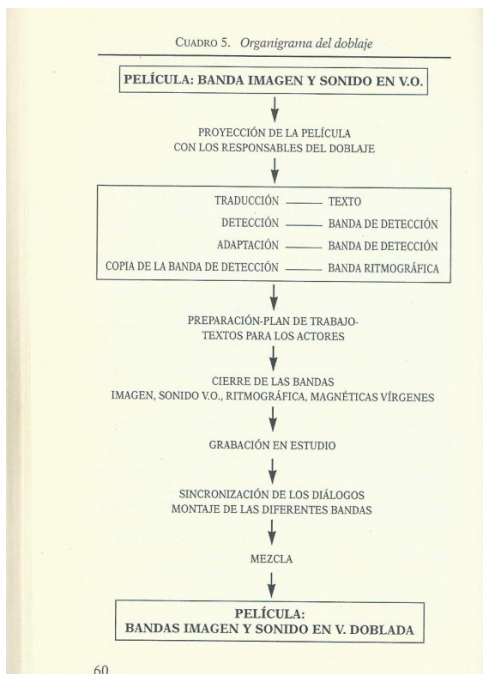
**[...] learn to use the international language, which is a neutral tone, so that no one understands exactly what country it is from, eliminate idioms, that is international language. They learn to work on their diction, which is to speak well: all the b's, all the r's, all the s's, to make sure they don't miss anything because otherwise they can't perform, which is the third part that they learn: performing. [our translation]**

And they refer to synchronisation as the technique of "how to fit the voice to the image", while dubbing actors are defined as *doblajistas*. For them, visual synchrony means lip sync and the conventions used in the presentation of dialogue lists are different from those used in Spain and other European countries, as they do not cut any takes. The minimum unit for recording (and also for paying actors and actresses) is now based on the interventions of each character, in a process called *doblaje por ritmos* ("beat dubbing"). In the first image we can see an example of the Chilean school, without cutting any takes. And in the next ones, we can see some more examples of spotting. In all cases they are images of professional dubbing scripts:



Translators work directly with the studio and it is a profession that is still not as firmly established or recognised in university studies as it is in Spain. There are, however, expert courses that, although not always carried out in higher education centres, offer qualifications such as "Specialist in English-Spanish translation" or "Diploma Specialising in Audiovisual Translation and Localisation", for example in Chile, through the *Instituto Profesional Chileno Británico de Cultura*.

Back in Europe, we now focus on the process of dubbing in France, as it is a unique case. Agost (1999: 60) reproduced the flowchart describing the structure of French dubbing according to Pommier (1988: 27):



We can see that one process that stands out above the rest is that called *detection*, defined as the technical transcription of the dialogue and all the mouth movements that have to be respected (Justamand 2006; Le Nouvel 2007).

Detection is performed by a professional (*detécteur*) and it could be said that he or she is responsible for putting together a kind of musical score *sui generis*, in which the silences and sounds (words, in our case) can be read, together with the critical moments for the synchronisation, by means of a series of conventionalised typographic signs (beginnings and ends of sentences, bilabials, labiodentals, openings, closings, etc.). The most important are the bilabials *m*, *p*, *b*, represented by an m-dash; labiodentals such as *f* and *v*, which are marked with a cross (×); mouth openings, marked with a kind of legato expression line). Beneath these signs the translator will write the French translation in the so-called *bande rythmo*.

Flowchart describing the French dubbing process (Agost 1999: 60)

The video is synchronised with the detection so that the movements of the mouth that have been detected correspond exactly to those of the actors and actresses. With bilabials (which are closed mouths), the program synchronises the detection with the image and signals that closed mouth at the precise moment it is heard.

The translator listens to each fragment in the original so as to gain an understanding of what is said. He or she then watches it again without the voice, focusing only on the detection and the images. The purpose of so doing is to forget the words in the original language and to try to find the most appropriate ones in French so as to ensure this score of words and silences – this very particular syntax – follows the rhythm of the actor or actress on the screen. The following images shows an example.

In the dubbing studio, there are also differences compared to the Spanish dubbing process because the *bande rythmo* is also visible at the bottom of the audiovisual text. The voice actors and actresses read the lower line in French directly, on a fairly large screen. In the following example, we can see that both technicians and actors share the same space, whereas in most countries, they are in adjoining spaces separated by a glass (recording booth):

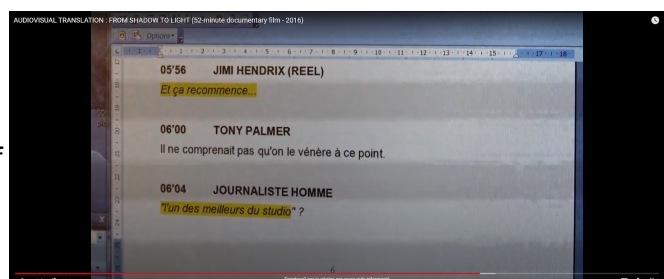


La traduction audiovisuelle: de l'ombre à la lumière. 2017. Production, direction and editing: Serge Gallo.  
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In the translation stage, they also work on temporal synchrony, which means that reduction and condensation are very common resources. The French translator is already doing work that, in other countries, would be done directly in the synchronisation phase. Dubbing requires a greater effort on the part of the translator than other modalities: when the original text is of high quality and the dubbing team (coordinator and actors) also has a good level, everything is “more likely to fit” in the dubbing process. As for the translation process itself, in addition to a sound knowledge of language and culture, dubbing also requires an additional dose of creativity and a command of orality so as to be able to recreate the emotions of the original text. Some translators (for example, Maï Boiron 2017) speak of greater physical fatigue when translating for dubbing because of the emotional involvement, which is accentuated because when we translate and synchronise, we do it out loud, as though we were acting.

In France, in the case of major productions, the synchronisation is usually reviewed by the translator together with another colleague. This is followed by a check with the client and the art director. The text also has to be validated by the dubbing director, who is the person who pays the most attention to the details that can make the final rendering of the text possible, such as the naturalness of the text, problems with diction, correct conveyance of emotions, visual synchrony, etc.

It is a phase in which, once again, it becomes clear that dubbing is a team effort at the service of both the source text and the target text, simultaneously, as though they were two sides of the same coin. This is an excellent metaphor to define what translation is.



The following image enables us to see some of the differences compared to voice-over, which presents a very low degree of complexity, since the only acoustic restriction it has is that of isochrony and, moreover, with a mismatch in time.

[La traduction audiovisuelle: de l'ombre à la lumière. 2017. Production, direction and editing: Serge Gallo. With the kind permission of the author and Idoneo Films. All rights reserved.](#)

When the audience views a dubbed text and does not notice anything, when they do not perceive any kind of interference between them and the screen, we will have achieved our goal: "A job has been well done when the receiver does not feel that something is missing" (Herbst 1987).

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## The genres of dubbing

Not all the texts that appear on cinema, television or mobile screens can be dubbed (Agost 1999: 29-40; Agost 2001: 229-249). The decision to dub or not to dub will depend on political, economic, technical and sociological factors: the immediacy of the consumption of the content, the existence (or not) of complex intertextual references, the type of target audience, the different language policies, the economic benefit, etc. We can establish four major macro-genres of dubbing, although it is true that, since the end of the 20th century, audiovisual texts have tended towards hybridisation and heterogeneity: dramatic genres (films of different genres, such as [film noir](#) or [science fiction](#), series, [cartoons](#), [TV films](#), [soap operas](#)); informative genres ([documentaries](#), [reports](#), informative and cultural programmes); [advertising](#) genres (Valdés 2004) (commercials, campaigns, home shopping network, etc.); and [entertainment genres](#). From both a professional and a didactic point of view, it is interesting to understand their differences and characteristics as this can help us detect the importance of the pragmatic elements of cartoons, of the terminology and referentiality of documentaries, the difficulty of translating songs in musicals (Apter & Herman 2016; Brugué 2013) or the creativity in literary films, among other aspects. In addition, when we are preparing our courses, they can help us by marking a progression in the teaching of genres according to the difficulties posed in each case: for example, the synchronisation required by documentaries is less difficult than that of films (Agost & Chaume 1996).

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## Research potential

From the early days of AVT research until the beginning of the 21st century, dubbing received a certain amount of attention, as it was one of the most frequent modalities. With the appearance of multimedia systems, researchers' attention has been redirected and diversified in equal parts.

Until the 1980s, most publications were short articles: Lewin (1931); Zárrega (1932); Caillé, 1960, 1965; and Cary, 1960, 1985. All of them represented the professional-researcher model with the clear aim of being educational and informative. Fodor (1976) is another of the cornerstones of studies on dubbing, especially for those who have wanted to go beyond the purely linguistic aspects. With Luyken (1987), we moved on to dubbing for screens other than those of large-format cinema. Pommier (1988) is another pioneer who contributed with his professional experience. Whitman-Linsen (1991) introduced a new line of research, that of more systematic analyses of

complete audiovisual texts from corpora chosen on the basis of more selective criteria. Over the last decade of the 20th century, we observe how the interest in this modality was growing, but slowly. In Agost (1999: 147-156) we can find a thematic bibliography from this period with titles dealing with general aspects of audiovisual translation; dubbing and its relationship with the media; historical studies on dubbing; and systematic and descriptive dubbing studies. Other references from the same source involve studies on the dubbing process, the didactics of audiovisual translation, the controversy between dubbing and subtitling, dubbing and its relationship with cinema and literature, linguistic aspects in dubbing or translation problems in dubbing.

Throughout the first decade of the 21st century, the number increased considerably. The academic recognition of audiovisual translation and the inclusion of subjects addressing AVT in universities is at the origin of this research explosion. Chaume (2012: 159-161) offered a summary of the most interesting studies up to that time. For an overview of the most representative bibliographical references prior to the second decade of the 21st century, we recommend Matamala (2019: 104-107), which contains a selection of works that are also organised by blocks.

Apart from monographs, doctoral theses represent more profound reflections and analyses, many of which will later go on to become books. Studies dedicated to the didactics of dubbing have allowed for feedback between theory and practice, between the academic world and the strictly professional world (Bartrina & Espasa 2001; Merino 2005; Chaume 2012). And this is essential in order to overcome the prejudices of part of the profession, which considers (and rightly so in some cases) that many of the studies that are conducted are excessively abstract, that they do not take into account professional conditioning factors and that they are not really very helpful in the translator's day-to-day activity. There are numerous associations that promote this symbiosis, such as [ESIST](#) (European Association for Studies on Screen Translation), founded in 1995; Association des Traducteurs/Adaptateurs de l'Audiovisuel ([ATAA](#)), created in 2006, which has an excellent journal specialised in audiovisual translation, [L'Ecran Traduit](#), and the Spanish Asociación de Traducción y Adaptación Audiovisual en España ([ATRAE](#)), in operation since 2010.

We end this section with another of the aspects we consider important, that is, the transition from research to transfer (Agost 2017). As we have seen, over the last few decades, AVT studies have undergone a constant evolution, as a result of the advances in the discipline (from prescriptivism to descriptivism, the emergence of empirical studies, etc.), technological innovations, such as cable television, digital platforms, social networks, video games with multiple media, machine dubbing, etc. (Mejías 2018; Nayak, Baumann, Battacharya *et al.* [2020](#); Karakanta, Bhattacharya, Nayak *et al.* [2020](#)) and changes in society (laws in defence of equal opportunities, obligation of accessible content, increase in multilingualism, etc.). Some media corporations have adapted themselves to many of these changes and, in this regard, AVT has gone a step further by serving as a guide to writing and translating the contents offered by these corporations.

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