ON THE RELEVANCE OF SCRIPT WRITING BASICS IN AUDIOVISUAL TRANSLATION PRACTICE AND TRAINING*

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Abstract: Audiovisual texts possess characteristics that clearly differentiate audiovisual translation from both oral and written translation, and prospective screen translators are usually taught about the issues that typically arise in audiovisual translation. This article argues for the development of an interdisciplinary approach that brings together Translation Studies and Film Studies, which would prepare future audiovisual translators to work with the nature and structure of a script in mind, in addition to the study of common and diverse translational aspects. Focusing on film, the article briefly discusses the nature and structure of scripts, and identifies key points in the development and structuring of a plot. These key points and various potential hurdles are illustrated with examples from the films *Chinatown* and *La habitación de Fermat*. The second part of this article addresses some implications for teaching audiovisual translation.

Keywords: Audiovisual translation training, script writing, film structure, Translation Studies, Film Studies.

The audiovisual text: two related perspectives

The single characteristic that best defines audiovisual translation is probably the type of text with which it deals. The audiovisual text has a number of features that make it unique and that distinguish it from other types of texts, such as oral or written

ones. Thus, *audiovisual translation* is often defined as translation of text that (1) is transmitted through two simultaneous and complementary channels (acoustic and visual) and (2) combines several signifying codes (Martínez-Sierra 2008: 29).

This definition seems appropriate and practical within the Translation Studies umbrella. However, it is possible – and perhaps necessary, as authors such as Díaz-Cintas (2004: online) suggest – to look at the issue from another perspective, which is not necessarily in opposition, but rather complementary to the Translation Studies paradigm, namely that of Film Studies. As Chaume (2004: 12) observes, "Audiovisual texts are usually built according to the conventions of film language, a complex language that overcomes [sic] linguistic communication and has its own rules and conventions." Therefore, "for the analysis of audiovisual texts from a translational perspective at least the theoretical contributions of Translation Studies and those of Film Studies are necessary", and in his own work, Chaume seeks "to establish a bridge between Translation Studies and Film Studies and to check whether knowledge of cinematographic components can better explain audiovisual translation operations" (2004: 16). However, work of this type is rare; Remael points to the "limited amount of attention the narrative functioning of film dialogue is attracting in the research and teaching of screen translation," but she also explains that this lack of interest is similarly applicable to film dialogues themselves: "Good film dialogue is appreciated by all, but studied by few" (2004: 103). Finally, Cattrysse and Gambier point out that "there is an increased need for translated screenplays," and focus on "the training of translators when it comes to translating (parts of) screenplays" (2008: 39).

The script writing process

Let us briefly consider how a script is produced.[1] There are different ways of doing this, although we will focus on one of them

(the most common one): the Three Act Structure which is based on the classic Arestotelian conception of drama. Broadly speaking, the process starts with an idea, which must be clearly formulated. From that idea the conflict, or synopsis, is developed (as a succinct summary of the script; just a few paragraphs), which will be expanded later into the treatment (a longer overview of the script; just a few pages), in which the characters will be included and the main action sequences described. The next steps are the definition of the dramatic action (the structure) and the delivery of the first draft, which will be rewritten several times until it reaches the dramatic unit or final draft state. This final version is the one that will be submitted to the producer.

The structure of a script

From a purely translational viewpoint, a number of aspects of an audiovisual product can seem crucial. For example, humour, in its many forms, is probably one of the most troublesome features from the point of view of translation. The ideal is for a translator to detect a joke and to render it successfully in the target version, though that is much more easily said than done. Cultural and intertextual references or allusions are also key aspects. However, in this article, I would like to concentrate on aspects that are essential from a more cinematographic perspective, such as the structure of the script, since humour and culture specific elements have been discussed extensively in the translation studies literature.[2]

As interesting as it is, we cannot forget that the process depicted in the previous section is the task of a scriptwriter. In any case, for the audiovisual translator, it can be highly relevant to consider the structure of a script, for this is precisely the type of material he or she has to deal with (as Cattrysse and Gambier point out, "to keep an audience interested, it helps if the narrative is somehow

structured" 2008: 47).[3] The typical script structure of a 120' film is illustrated in Figure 1:
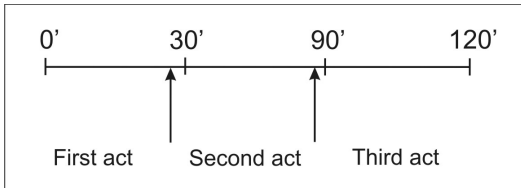

Figure 1. Script structure.

Most theories of screenwriting are structural. They include The Hero's Journey, Syd Field's Paradigm, the Sequence Approach, and the Three-act Structure.[4] The latter theory, illustrated in Figure 1, is probably the most basic and stems from Aristotle's *Poetics*. As shown in Figure 1, the film is divided into three acts: beginning or setup, middle or confrontation, and end or resolution (a dramatic structure that is repeated in every sequence and even scene). In the first act the dramatic situation is established and all the main characters are introduced. Towards the end of this first act a first incident takes place, a turning point (represented by an arrow in the illustration above) that complicates the story and that leads it in a different direction. In the second act, the protagonist tries to solve the problems derived from this first turning point. Near the end of the second act there is a second turning point (second arrow in the illustration above), an intense scene or sequence that once again dramatically turns the protagonist's convictions upside down. After this second turning point, the script leads to the resolution of the conflict.

So far we have identified two key points in a script: the first and second turning points. As we have seen, in the three-act structure these two points keep the plot evolving and mark the transition between acts. But there are other key points in a script, including, but

not confined to the *anagnorisis* and the *peripetia*, two terms that stem from Greek tragedy. Briefly put, the *anagnorisis* or discovery refers to the dramatic point – towards the end of the second act – at which the protagonist's ignorance suddenly becomes knowledge (for example, when Oedipus realises that the man he killed was his father and that he married his own mother). A good, well--written script will always have an *anagnorisis* point. Otherwise its structure will be weak. When the *anagnorisis* coincides with the second turning point, Aristotle's *peripetia* is achieved: the moment in which a sudden reversal of circumstances occurs in the sense that when everything seems to be resolved something happens that proves otherwise.

A film is a complex product, and so is its script. Besides the specific moments that have been identified above, other dramatic devices can be used by the scriptwriter and should be borne in mind by the translator, including, for instance, Aristotle's *hamartia* (some sort of defect – which can be linguistic – that characterises a character) and *metabole* (reversal of fortune). In this sense, it could be said that a good translator of humorous texts has to have a good sense of humour (not that he or she should be a comedian); similarly, a good film translator should have a sense of the nature of scriptwriting (not that he or she should be a scriptwriter).

Implications for the audiovisual translator

The key points addressed above are crucial in the development of a script. They structure the story, move it forward, and present it in an appealing way so that the viewer finds him or herself intrigued by the turns of the plot (let us not forget that cinema is first and foremost an entertainment form). Therefore, they should be dealt with carefully in translation.

As Ávila points out, those in charge of the film script translation process should be familiar with the characteristics of film language

(1997: 78). They should be aware of the key points discussed above and of their importance, since they are crucial for the development and structuring of a film and for its effectiveness as an entertainment device. But audiovisual texts are transmitted through two simultaneous and complementary channels, the acoustic and the visual, and the translator can only deal with the linguistic part, most of which is transmitted acoustically. Nevertheless, any reflection on an audiovisual text will be incomplete without taking into consideration other elements conveyed through the acoustic medium (such as music, sound effects, and paralinguistic features) and the visual channel. In the case of the latter, the image plays a significant role, because rather than posing a restriction, it frequently aids the understanding of the target text, as shown by, for example, Martínez-Sierra (2004 and 2009) and Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2007). The key point is that the translator should take into account all of the information that is provided by the two channels. In the following section, I will illustrate this using the example of the original and the Spanish dubbed versions of the film *Chinatown* (1974).

Chinatown

Written by Robert Towne, *Chinatown* was directed by Roman Polanski, and starred Jack Nicholson (J.J. 'Jake' Gittes), Faye Dunaway (Evelyn Cross Mulwray), and John Huston (Noah Cross).

Academy Award winner for best script, this film – considered a classic – features many elements of the film *noir* genre, and tells the story of Jake Gittes, a Los Angeles detective who starts dealing with an alleged case of marital infidelity and ends up finding himself in the middle of a vast conspiracy that involves water management, municipal corruption, real estate, and even murder.

First and second turning points: an illustration

The different key points that I want to illustrate are first iden-tified, and then the source and target dialogues of the different scenes are shown. I am aware that these examples are incomplete and even reductionist since they lack other fundamental features of audiovisual texts, namely, the music and sound effects as well as the image. I agree with Díaz-Cintas when he claims that "If we want to investigate products of an audiovisual nature, we should turn to academic discourses which also combine the visual with the auditory." However, as he also points out that, "it is not [...] easy [...] for an article or book to be accompanied by audiovisual material" (2004: online). Thus, I can only provide the dialogues and try to explain what happens on screen, inviting the reader to watch the film.

Example 1

First turning point: Jake Gittes is a private detective specialised in matrimonial cases. He is hired by Evelyn Mulwray, who sus-pects her husband of having an affair. Gittes does his job and takes some photographs that seem to prove the infidelity. The presumed affair results in a scandal. At his office, Gittes is visited by a wo-man – and her lawyer – who claims to be the real Mrs. Mulwray.

Source Version	Target Version
Gittes is telling a joke to his as-sociates. He does not notice that someone else is present, until he finishes and turns around.	
- Young woman: Mr. Gittes? - Gittes: Yes? - Young woman: Do you know me? - Gittes: Well... I think I... I would've remembered.	- Mujer joven: ¿Señor Gittes? - Gittes: ¿Sí? - Mujer joven: ¿Me conoce? - Gittes: Pues... la verdad, creo que me acordaría.

- Young woman: Have we ever met? - Gittes: Well, no. - Young woman: Never? - Gittes: Never. - Young woman: That's what I thought. You see, I'm Mrs. Evelyn Mulwray… you know, Mr. Mulwray's wife. *Gittes seems puzzled.*	- Mujer joven: ¿No nos hemos visto nunca? - Gittes: Pues, no. - Mujer joven: ¿Nunca? - Gittes: Nunca. - Mujer joven: Eso mismo creo yo. Verá, yo soy Evelyn Mulwray… la esposa del señor Mulwray.
- Gittes: Not that Mulwray? - Mrs. Mulwray: Yes, that Mulwray, Mr. Gittes. And since you agree with me we've never met, you must also agree that I haven't hired you to do anything, certainly not spy on my husband. I see you like publicity, Mr. Gittes. Well, you're going to get it. *She starts walking towards the door. Gittes follows her.*	- Gittes: ¿No será de Hollis Mulwray? - Señora Mulwray: Sí, señor Gittes, de Hollis Mulwray. Y ya que está de acuerdo conmigo en que nunca nos hemos visto, también debe estar de acuerdo en que no he solicitado sus servicios, y menos para espiar a mi marido. Veo que a usted le gusta la publicidad, señor Gittes. Pues la tendrá.
- Gittes: Now wait a minute, Mrs. Mulwray… there's some misunderstanding here. It's not going to do any good to get tough with me… *Mrs. Mulwray shows a cold smile.*	- Gittes: Escúcheme señora Mulwray… creo que aquí ha habido un malentendido. No tiene usted motivo para pedirme cuentas…
- Mrs. Mulwray: I don't get tough with anybody, Mr. Gittes. My lawyer does. *Mrs. Mulwray leaves and her lawyer addresses Gittes.*	- Señora Mulwray: Yo no le pido cuentas a nadie, señor Gittes. Eso lo hará mi abogado.
- Lawyer: Here's something for you, Mr. Gittes. *The lawyer hands Gittes a summons and complaint.*	- Abogado: Aquí tengo algo para usted, señor Gittes.
- Lawyer: I suppose we'll be hearing from your attorney.	- Abogado: Supongo que su abogado se manifestará pronto.

Table 1. First turning point (*Chinatown*).

Example 2

Second turning point + *anagnorisis* = *peripetia*. Gittes belie-ves he has solved the case, but he is about to find an object that will prove him wrong. He drives to Mrs. Mulwray's house, but apparently she has left. He steps out into the garden looking for her, and meets the Chinese gardener, who is working by the pond. They smile at each other.

Source Version	Target Version
- Gittes: Bad for *glass*. - Gardener: Oh yes, bad for *glass*. Salt water *velly* bad for *glass*.	- Gittes: Sí, malo para la hierba… - Jardinero: Sí, malo *pala* la *hielba*. Agua salada muy mala *pala* la *hielba*.
Gittes, who was walking in the other direction, suddenly stops and turns around.	
- Gittes: Salt water?	- Gittes: ¿Agua salada?
The gardener nods and points to the pond.	
- Gardener: *Velly velly* bad.	- Jardinero: Muy, muy mala. ¿Ve?
Gittes approaches the pond. He touches the water and tastes it. Then he spots something glinting in the bottom of the pond.	
- Gittes: What's that? - Gardener: Eh? - Gittes: Down there?	- Gittes: ¿Qué es eso? - Jardinero: ¿Eh? - Gittes: ¿Eso que hay ahí? Ahí dentro.
The gardener walks into the water, takes the object, and hands it to Gittes. It is a pair of bifocal eye glasses.	

Table 2. Second turning point (*Chinatown*).

The examples in Tables 2 and 3 clearly show how important the key points previously discussed are in the development of the plot and the structuring of the film. Yet, if we study the language used in these examples, we can easily determine that it is quite unproblematic in the sense that there are no serious linguistic or even cultural restrictions; in other words, from a pure translational point of view these excerpts are trouble-free. But let us consider a further example that clearly illlustrates the need to consider the dramatic flow of the story.

When the task complicates: La habitación de Fermat

Let us turn our attention to the English subtitled version of the Spanish film *La habitación de Fermat* (*Fermat's Room*). This thriller, directed by Luis Piedrahita and Rodrigo Sopeña in 2007, describes the story of three mathematicians and one inventor who are invited to a weekend meeting by a mysterious host on the pretext of solving a great enigma. The room in which they find themselves turns out to be a shrinking room, a deadly trap. The only way for them to escape alive is to keep solving, within the time allotted, the different puzzles that their mysterious host sets them.

In *La habitación de Fermat*, right after the second turning point, three of the guests who have apparently escaped from the shrinking room manage to leave the building. Once outdoors, one of them looks up at the sky, sees the moon, and utters a sentence that calls for a good translation job.

SOURCE VERSION	TARGET VERSION
- Oliva: Mira. Cuarto menguante. ¡Qué ironía!	- Oliva: Look. The last quarter. How ironic.
They look up to the sky and see the moon.	
- Oliva: Cuarto... menguante.	- Oliva: It's shrinking too.

Table 3. Third act (*La habitación de Fermat*).

This fragment poses several restricions:

1. There is a clear visual restriction: the image of the moon. Reference to our natural satelite must be made somehow in order to support the dialogue.
2. There is also a linguistic restriction: an adjective valid both for the *moon* and the *room* must be found. In Spanish, *cuarto* can mean both *room* and *quarter*. On the other hand, *menguante* means *getting smaller*. So, the double meaning of *a room* and *the moon getting smaller* works in Spanish, and it should somehow be also worked out in the English version.
3. Finally, there is also a *dramatic* restriction, given that it is crucial to find a good solution since the story's coherence is at stake. This is the type of restriction I would like to emphasise in this paper.

Teaching implications

Issues such as the ones discussed here can be of great significance in the training of audiovisual translators. As Cattrysse and Gambier suggest, "it might be useful for translators of screenplays to be trained, at least partly, in aspects of screenwriting" (2008: 39-40). One way to address this issue would be as Remael (2004: 107) proposes when she asserts that "In teaching, a two-tiered approach is […] needed." As an audiovisual translation teacher myself, I strive to make my students understand the complex nature of the audiovisual text and how the message is sent via the aforementioned channels. In this respect, I am in line with Remael's claim that "Subtitling students must […] be introduced to some basic dialogue features" (2004: 107), although I would make this claim extensive to audiovisual translation students in general, and not just to future subtitlers.

It is relevant to mention current academic efforts to approach the points highlighted above, for example, since 1984 the Uni-

versity of Lille has offered a postgraduate course on Audiovisual Translation which includes general cinematographic studies. In Spain, such curriculum – scriptwriting related content – is found in just a few higher education institutions. For instance, it can be found in the syllabus of the different posgraduate programmes such as the ones offered at the *Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona* (on AVT), the *Universitat de València* (on Creative and Humanistic Translation), and the *Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria* (on AVT; last taught in 2008). Moreover, we could also include the university in which, for four years, I taught audiovisual translation as part of the BA programme on Translation and Interpreting: Universidad de Murcia.

As an audiovisual translation trainer, since 2008 I have opted to include Film Studies content in the audiovisual translation course that I teach. More specifically, the cinematographic aspects that I discuss with my students are the ones that I have presented earlier in this paper: basically, the script writing process and the nature and structure of a film script. The examples used in this article are precisely the ones that I use in the classroom. I use the first and second examples (*Chinatown*'s first and second turning points, both the script and the video clips) to show my students what a turning point is. Hence, I do not use them for translational purposes, but rather for cinematographic purposes. I use the third example (from *La habitación de Fermat*) to show my students what can happen when the translation of one of the already explained crucial moments in a film is affected by restrictive factors. After studying this third example, we discuss the solution that was given and also some other possibilities that might or might not have worked, raising some awareness of the importance of keeping the story moving as planned by the original scriptwriter.

The feedback I have received from my students regarding our discussions has always been positive, but last year – November 2010 – I decided to quantify their opinion in a more formal manner. For that purpose, after the cinematographic content of the

course had been covered, I gave my students a questionnaire to complete anonymously (a questionnaire on their satisfaction with the inclusion of cinematographic elements in the course), where they only had to answer *Yes/No* and *Why?* The following are the questions included in that questionnaire:

1. Do you think that it is relevant to include Film Studies content (such as the scriptwriting process, the structure of a script, the turning points, etc.) in an AVT course?
2. Do you think that knowing the nature, function, composition, etc., of a film script can help translators do their job more efficiently?
3. Do you think that knowledge of the nature of a film script can be a useful tool for translators?
4. Do you think that an audiovisual translator with some degree of cinematographic knowledge is a better trained translator?

The questionnaire was completed by 13 students, providing the following answers:

- Question 1: 12 answered *Yes* (92.3%). Only 1 answered *No* (Reason: he/she thinks that it would make sense in a posgraduate course, so we could understand that this student is in favour of this kind of content but just at a more advanced stage in his or her training process).
- Question 2: 13 answered *Yes* (100%).
- Question 3: 12 answered *Yes* (92.3%), and 1 gave no answer (*I do not know*).
- Question 4: 12 answered *Yes* (92.3%). Only 1 answered *No* (Reason: he/she thinks that, although that kind of knowledge can help translators, it is not a must-have).

In light of these results, and even though they just scratch the surface, it seems reasonable to assume that this approach seems

welcomed by students since they feel it should benefit them, given that it can provide them with an additional (transdisciplinary[5]) perspective to do their job more effectively and accurately.[6] With regards to this point, Remael is certain and assures that "a subtitler who is aware of film dialogue's many functions and the way they are integrated into mainstream cinema's extremely coherent narrative structure, will produce better subtitles" (2004: 106). However, it is important not to deviate from the focus of instruction, in other words, we should not forget that we are training translators and not script writers; therefore, as Remael further adds, "All that is required is some knowledge of a few basics of dialogic communication, within a framework that demonstrates their applicability for film dialogue analysis" (2004: 107) and translation.

Works such as Chaume's (2004) point to the direction audiovisual translation training has to follow. In my opinion, it seems worthwhile to instruct our students on the structure of the scripts together with the ten codes Chaume mentions,[6] – even if it is only the classic one – with which they are going to deal, keeping in mind that not only movies have scripts, but that also other audiovisual products do as well, such as television series and even newscasts. We will do so in the hope that once they become professional translators and start working with scripts they will peform their job following an approach that combines both translational and film perspectives.

Concluding remarks

In this article I have drawn attention to the importance that knowledge of script nature and writing can have in audiovisual translation training and practice. Among other elements, the different turning points and some Aristotelian concepts such as *anagnorisis* and *peripetia*, all of which contribute to a good, well-written, powerful, and appealing story were explained and illustrated through concrete examples from two different films. As we have seen, di-

fferent authors, as well as students, agree that elements of cinematographic nature should be dealt with in any course on Audiovisual Translation. The elements alluded here seem appropriate, given their significance in the structure of certain major audiovisual texts (just as – along with the words – we pay attention to the image and sound as important features of audiovisual texts, it makes sense that we also consider their narrative structure). Notwithstanding, it is also advisable to analyse additional data to shed more light on the real, practical relevance of these concepts in the translator's task. It is hoped that this study will stimulate further investigation in this interdisciplinary field.

The different concepts explained and illustrated here represent a small sample of the many different aspects that can make up film dialogues, in particular, and scripts, in general. Works such as Remael's (2000 cf. Chapter 3, 2004, and 2008) are of great significance, since she provides a detailed discussion on film dialogue structure and function and further reflects on its relevance in audiovisual translation training. It also goes without saying that the audiovisual translators' task involves more extensive products other than films. As I previously mentioned, scripts are typical but not exclusive to films, hence their importance in the training of future audiovisual translators. Just as translation trainees are taught about synchronies, priorities, restrictions, intercultural features, and numerous other translational phenomena, they should also be trained to identify the dramatic structure (at least the mainstream one) of a film or of a television series (which, by the way, can differ significantly from one to the next), all in the belief that the bridge between Translation Studies and Film Studies can be highly productive, relevant, and even necessary.

A film is a complex text, in which many different elements interact to give life to a story whose ultimate purpose is to entertain whoever watches it. The words and their disposition, the sounds, the music, the light, the different images, etc., are all part of a whole that works as an entertainment machine in which *logos*, *pha-*

tos, and *ethos* are essential.[8] Should one single piece malfunction, the whole machinery would fail. Thus, the translator must become the mechanic that makes sure that the piece to which he or she has access – the dialogue – is in perfect condition. To do so, he or she will need some degree of expertise or know-how in addition to the appropriate tools, often – and hopefully – derived from the knowledge and awareness acquired when enrolled in an Audiovisual Translation course.

Notes

1. Several ideas addressed here derive from concepts explained and materials used in the Scriptwriting Course taught by Vicente Vercher at Jaume I University in April 2008. Cattrysse and Gambier provide further details on the different stages in screenwriting. They agree that "knowing the most important stepping stones of the writing process of a screenplay may help the translator of scripts" (2008: 40). See also Chion (1988) and Comparato (1988), besides various recent titles including the works of Decker (1998), Lazarus (2001), Tierno (2002), Field (2005), and Seger (2010). It should also be mentioned that currently there are several computer programmes available on the Internet (along with a considerable number of webpages devoted to script writing) which can be used to write scripts, such as *Scriptum.*

2. For a complete review on the subject and a list of authors, see Martínez Sierra (2008).

3. It is important to be aware that not only films have scripts, although film scripts are the focus of the present article.

4. For further information on the mechanics of scriptwriting, see McKee (1997).

5 See Cattrysse and Gambier (2008).

6. As Cattrysse and Gambier explain, "it helps if a translator knows how and why a script was written the way it was before starting to translate it." They also illustrate some screenwriting skills and refer to different specific strategies in which professional screenwriters are trained (2008: 45-50).

7. Namely, linguistic, paralinguistic, musical and special effects, sound arrangement, iconographic, photographic, planning, mobility, graphic, and syntactic codes.

8. For a deeper discussion of these three terms, see Comparato (1988).

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