

The subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing. A literature review in the field of audiovisual translation.

La subtitulación para personas sordas y con problemas de audición. Una revisión de la literatura en el campo de la traducción audiovisual

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Abstract

The subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing (SDHH) is an emerging research area in the field of audiovisual translation. This topic is of great interest, since it is very innovative that makes us think about the great difference between the subtitles for hearing people and subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing. This article reviews research focused on the SDHH from 2001-2016. The aim of this literature review is to identify, classify and describe the gaps on this topic. The results are based on 15 articles from journals, books and relevant databases like ResearchGate, Redalyc, Google Scholar. We present and discuss the results of the most popular investigated topics, which include background and methods used on previous studies, a new classification of subtitling, subtitling as part of audiovisual translation, subtitling for the deaf and the hearing. The results suggest that topics like subtitling and subtitling in the media are the most investigated and topics such as comprehension of interlingual subtitles at movies are the least.

Key words

Subtitling, deaf, hard of hearing, audiovisual translation

Resumen

La subtitulación para personas sordas y con problemas de audición (SDHH) es un área de investigación emergente en el campo de la traducción audiovisual. Este tema es de gran interés, ya que es muy innovador que nos hace pensar en la gran diferencia entre los subtítulos para personas oyentes y los subtítulos para personas sordas y con problemas de audición. Este artículo revisa 15 años de investigación centrada en el SDHH. El objetivo de esta revisión de la literatura es identificar, clasificar y describir los vacíos sobre este tema. Los resultados se basan en 15 artículos de revistas, libros y bases de datos relevantes como ResearchGate, Redalyc, Google Académico, etc. Presentamos y discutimos los resultados de los temas investigados más populares, que incluyen antecedentes y métodos utilizados en estudios anteriores, una nueva clasificación de subtitulado, subtitulado como parte de la traducción audiovisual, subtitulado para personas sordas y oyentes. Los resultados sugieren que temas como la subtitulación y la subtitulación en los medios son los más investigados y temas como la comprensión de subtítulos interlingüísticos en las películas son los menos investigados.

Palabras clave: subtitulación, discapacidad auditiva, traducción audiovisual.

Date of Submission: 28-08-2024

Date of Acceptance: 05-09-2024

I. Introduction

The aim of this literature review is to identify and describe the gaps about subtitling for the deaf and hard hearing (SDHH) of films and TV shows through a literature review analysis. The literature review was based on twenty research papers selected from books, and relevant databases: Google Scholar, Redalyc, JStor, ResearchGate. The main key words used were Subtitling, deaf, hard of hearing, audiovisual translation.

The subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing (SDHH) is an emerging research area in the field of audiovisual translation. This topic is of great interest, since it is very innovative that makes us think about the great difference between the subtitles for hearing people and subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing (SDHH). Ohene and Shipsey (2006), define subtitling as “are a transcription or translation of a television programme,

video or film displayed in real-time as text on the lower third of the screen. Subtitles may consist of a text display of audio dialogue and sound effects” (p.1)

Subtitling has become part and parcel of modern life. In addition to being part of the audiovisual translation, along with dubbing and voice-over, “it is the subfield of media accessibility, which covers subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing (SDHH) and audio-description for the blind and partially sighted” (Romero, 2016, p.56).

On the other hand, subtitles for people with hearing impairment carry other elements that the subtitles we normally know do not have. Pereira (cited in Utray, Pereira, & Orero, 2009, p.249) defines SDHH as:

A modality of mode transaction (from oral to writing), which sometimes occurs between languages. It consists of displaying a written text on screen which offers a semantic account of what is happening during a given programme: not only what is said but also how it is said (emphasis, tone of voice, accents, foreign languages, different noises, etc.) and who says it. It includes contextual sounds such as environmental music and noises, and also the numerous discursive elements which appear on the screen (letters, words on posters, etc.).

Subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing

Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2007) defines Intertitles, or title cards, are at the origin of subtitles. Intertitles consisted of short sentences, drawn or printed on paper, filmed and placed between sequences of the film. Normally the text was written in white on a black background. They were used mainly to convey dialogue and narrations related to the images.

A New Classification of Subtitling

In 2014, Lui proposed in his article “On the Classification of Subtitling” a new classification of subtitles based on different authors.

Traditionally, there are two ways of classifying subtitles, based on two different parameters, linguistic and technical, despite the existence of other less frequently used parameters.

A. Linguistic Parameter

Speaking of the linguistic parameter, one immediately thinks of language, as it is the most distinctive feature in this group, which will become the starting point of traditional classification. The parameter of language, as Bartoll (2004, p.57) puts it, signifies —the relationship that is established between source and target languages, whether this is the same or not. In line with his understanding, there are interlingual and intralingual subtitles or subtitling (Gottlieb, 1997, 2005; Shuttleworth & Cowie, 2004; Bartoll, 2004). With a slight difference in wording, Díaz Cintas (2001) also names two, intralinguistic subtitles and interlinguistic subtitles, in addition to a number of other types.

1. Interlingual subtitling

Interlingual subtitling, according to Gottlieb (1997), literally is the subtitling between two languages. It is a —transfer from a source language (SL) to a TL ...”, designating the relationship between different source and target languages (Díaz Cintas, 2006, p.199). Or to use an alternative term, interlinguistic subtitles, which occur —where there is translation (Bartoll, 2004, p.57). This type is similar to multilingual subtitling in Ivarsson’s categories. The essence of this type is that there must be a transfer or translation between two different languages, though it refers to subtitling instead of traditional written translation. It should be noticed that in this group not only two languages are involved but also two dimensions, speech and writing. Therefore, this type is alternatively called —diagonal subtitling or —oblique subtitling by Gottlieb (1997, pp.71–72), meaning that both mode and language are changed, crossing over from speech in one language to writing in another language.

2. Intralingual subtitling

According to Gottlieb’s (1997) classification, intralingual subtitling is the subtitling within the same language. It concerns the relationship between the same source and target languages. Alternatively, it is called intralinguistic, and since it works between the same languages, intralinguistic subtitles occur —where there is transcription (Bartoll, 2004, p.57). Díaz Cintas (2006, p.199) echoes this view and affirms no change of language, thus he calls it —captioning. Like interlingual subtitling, it touches upon dimensions as well. Gottlieb (2005, p.247) dubs it —vertical subtitling, which means that only mode is changed, but not language, taking speech down in writing in the original language. This type is mainly targeted at the following groups of people: the deaf and hard of hearing, language learners and karaoke singers (Díaz Cintas, 2001, 2006; Gottlieb, 2005; O’Connell, 2007). The first two groups are explained specifically.

(1) The deaf and hard of hearing

Surprisingly in such countries as the UK and the US, the concept of subtitling is generally equated with intralingual (English into English) subtitling for the deaf and hard-of-hearing (SDH) (Díaz Cintas & Anderman, 2009). But in other countries, intralingual subtitling needs to be specified in this regard. For those deaf and hard of hearing, this process involves not only turning the actors’ dialogues into written speech, but also keeping all

the paratextual information vital for plot development and scene-setting, which is inaccessible to deaf people if merely from the soundtrack, like telephones ringing, knocks on the door, etc. (Díaz Cintas, 2006).

(2) Language learners

Language learners constitute another group targeted by intralingual subtitling. This group encompasses foreign students along with other minorities such as immigrants, refugees, or those with literacy problems, who intend to improve their language skills by watching television programmes and making use of their audio and visual input (Vanderplank, 1988). An example of bi-modal L2 input is the situation in which English speakers viewing a Russian language film with Russian subtitles. For the same purpose, bilingual subtitles, as categorized by Díaz Cintas (2001), are used as well.

(3) Dialects

As for those suited for intralingual subtitling, one group often goes unnoticed —the audience having problems with dialects. Subtitling dialects, which is quite common now, should be added to the list. Intralingual subtitling is chiefly used for television, including some domestic and foreign-language programmes for different groups with different purposes. It is, according to de Linde (1999), non-existent in cinema. But in reality, the use of intralingual subtitling can be found in cinema when, for instance, the actors on screen, as conditioned by the roles they are playing, speak with accents which are difficult for certain audience to understand even though they share the same language.

Subtitles for Deaf and Hard of Hearing (SDH)

In his 2013 study, Szarkowska found that the overwhelming majority of subtitles for the deaf and the hard of hearing (SDH) are intralingual. The language of the subtitles is the same as the language of the audiovisual programme and no 'translation proper'. In contrast, interlingual SDH contain a translation of the dialogue list originally produced in a foreign language. One of the reasons behind the clear dominance of intralingual SDH over its interlingual counterpart may be rooted in the belief that hearing-impaired audiences can infer all the information necessary to the understanding of a foreign programme from 'standard' interlingual subtitles for hearing viewers, which contain only a translation of the dialogue, but no information on sound or speakers.

As Szarkowska (2013) points out from Díaz's research:

Failing to account for this type of subtitling [i.e. interlingual SDH] would imply a tacit acceptance of the fallacy that the deaf and hard of hearing only watch programmes originally produced in their mother tongue, when there is no doubt that they also watch programmes originating in other languages and cultures. This in turn would mean that they are forced to use the same interlingual subtitles as hearing people, when these subtitles are, to all intents and purposes, inappropriate for their needs.

Lui (2014) highlights the importance of the innovation of the interlingual subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing (SDH) which is a new type of subtitling that has emerged recently. The type of subtitling most often designated for the hearing impaired is intralingual subtitling. But this brings to the fore the question if those people with hearing problems only watch programmes in their mother tongue and never in a different language. Common sense tells us that the possibility of the latter cannot be ruled out. With the assumption that standard interlingual subtitles can provide enough information for all, this type has not been adequately accounted for in many countries. The awareness is being heightened that interlingual subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing differs from that for the ordinary viewers with no hearing problems, for the standard interlingual subtitles don't cater for this special group of audience and turn out to be inappropriate for their needs. Josélia Neves, who takes special interest in this subject, points out that the standard interlingual subtitles have two drawbacks: either they offer more information than those deaf viewers can digest, or they need to add more for the adequate transference of the whole semiotic message (Díaz Cintas & Anderman, 2009). In a word, the needs of this special group should be adequately dealt with in order to gain true access to audiovisual material. This type is made technically possible by the advent of digital television and DVDs in particular.

Besides, as Gambier mentioned, (cited in Orrego, 2013) defining the audience of the subtitles for the deaf and hearing impaired is quite complicated, since it is a highly heterogeneous group: there are different factors that affect the conditions of each of the users. Thus, deaf listeners are different from deaf people who use sign language. In the same way, the degree of hearing impairment, the age at which the hearing began to be lost and the type of deafness also complicate a possible classification. Table 1 presents a summary of Deaf and hard of hearing people experiences through many points of views.

Table 1

Deaf and hard of hearing experiences through media field NO APARECEN LAS REFERENCIAS DE ESTOS AUTORES

Author's name	Deaf and hard of hearing people experiences watching films
Boatner, 1950	In 1950, the American Schools for the Deaf found a subtitling solution that consisted in superimposing subtitles upon existing print without having to cut and insert intertitles. The subtitles would appear at the bottom of the screen without interrupting the film
Ivarsson, 2004.	In 1927, the first sound film was screened: <i>The Jazz Singer</i> . Intertitles disappeared with the end of the silent film era and the new soundtrack had to be replaced by means of subtitles or dubbing. The Netherlands, the Scandinavian countries, Hungary and France were pioneers in developing early subtitling techniques
Ivarsson, 2004.	An optical subtitling process was developed for television, whereby the subtitles were written on paper and then one-frame stills of each subtitle were shot. The resulting film negative was put in a scanner and fed either manually by the translator or automatically. The writing was generally white on a black background. Where no subtitle was required, blank frames were inserted between subtitle frames
Downey, 2008.	The United States preceded the United Kingdom and other pioneering European countries by a few years with the provision of SDH – or captions, as they are called in American English – for <i>The French Chef</i> , aired in 1972 on WGBH, the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) station licensed to Boston, Massachusetts

Zárate, S. (2021). *Captioning and Subtitling for d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing Audiences*. London: UCL Press.
Esta referencia se uso para realizar la tabla

Afterwards Ivarsson (2004) mention that in 1927, the first sound film was screened: *The Jazz Singer*. Intertitles disappeared with the end of the silent film era and the new soundtrack had to be replaced by means of subtitles or dubbing. In other words, subtitling started as intertitles or title cards where sentences were written at films screened at cinemas at that time. As a result, we can watch subtitles through films where deaf and hard of hearing has their suitable subtitles.

As a matter of fact, intertitles were not made for Deaf and hard of hearing audience, but it was an adaptable tool that could be used to have access to be shown on the media. For this reason, the media got interested in the production of subtitling of Deaf and hard of hearing people. So, more countries filmmakers provided productions focused on Deaf and hard of hearing audiences such as United Kingdom in 1979, in 1980 joined the main European countries like Belgium, France, West Germany, Italy and the Netherlands, followed by Portugal and Spain in the 1990s.

Hence this author remarks that there are three types of translations of subtitles which intralingual is used by SDH community at media. Therefore Jakobson (1959) made a distinction between three types of translation that has now become seminal: intralingual (or rewording), interlingual (or translation proper) and intersemiotic (or transmutation, from verbal to non-verbal sign systems). Based on this classification, a distinction has traditionally been made in the field of subtitling between interlingual subtitling – that is, the practice that implies translation from one language to another – and intralingual subtitling – in which translation takes place within the same language, as in the case of SDH. Because in intralingual subtitling there is no translation from a source language into a target language.

Thus, we must know that is important to Deaf and Hard of hearing community to have the same privilege that hearing people have at media such as subtitles of foreign languages. Moreover, there is a convention that fight for their rights. According to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) is an international human rights treaty issued by the United Nations and aimed at protecting the rights and dignity of people with disabilities. Article 30 of the Convention asserts: ‘States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to take part on an equal basis with others in cultural life and shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities ... enjoy access to television programmes, films, theatre and other cultural activities, in accessible formats’ (United Nations 2006a, Art. 30, para. 1)

II. Method

The current article reviews 15 years of research focused on the SDHH. The results are based on nearly 15 articles from journals, books and relevant databases like Google Academics, ResearchGate, Redalyc from 2001 to 2016 around 15 years of research papers.

The objective of this literature review is to analyse empiric research papers from relevant and trustful databases. It also is to demonstrate the SDH in the audio-visual translation field. As well this research looks up to the followed questions, has been Deaf and Hard of Hearing subtitles important in the audiovisual field? Are there research papers focused on SDH at media such as films, series etc? How important is SDH in audiovisual translation field.

III. Results

In this literature review we can notice that our research focus on Subtitling for Deaf and Hard of Hearing community in the audiovisual translation field. Afterward the articles found on relevant databases were about Comparison of Comprehension, subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing in multilingual films, The effects of text editing and subtitle presentation rate on the comprehension and reading patterns of interlingual and intralingual subtitles among deaf, hard of hearing and hearing viewers among other interesting papers. Some of them studied the background of SDH, how intralingual subtitles helped comprehend the message of a film, it also analysed each element that were part of Subtitling for Deaf and hard of hearing people and their function at audiovisual translation field. Joined that there were papers that focused on the development of SDH at relevant countries around the world and education field. Table 2 illustrates the main results.

Table 2
Main results of Subtitling of deaf and hard of hearing

Papers	Topics and Subtopics					
	1*	2*	3*	4*	5*	6*
Agnieszka Szarkowska et al., (2013)	✓					
Da-Yan, L. (2014)			✓	✓		
Debevc M, et al., (2015)		✓		✓		
Denis Burnham et al., (2008)	✓					
Izabela Krejtz et al., (2016)				✓		
Mangiron, C. (2016)		✓				✓
Margaret S. Jelinek Lewis et al., (2001)			✓		✓	
Ohene-Djan, J. et al., (2006)		✓		✓		
Romero-Fresco, P. (2016)		✓				
Szarkowska, A et al., (2013)			✓			
Szarkowska, A. K. (2011)		✓	✓			
Szarkowska, A et al., (2016)		✓	✓	✓		
Tamayo, A. (2017)				✓		
Utray, F. P. (2009)			✓			
Zárate, S. (2021)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

1* Emotional Subtitles as a Technology

2* Parameters in Television Captioning for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Adults

3* Subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing in multilingual films

4* interlingual subtitling for the deaf and the hard of hearing

5* *Game subtitles*

6* *Reading Function and Content Words in Subtitled Videos*

It was found that most of the articles were qualitative research but some of them were mixed methods. Most of them were published in other countries such as Russia, Spain and UK. The literature is scarce in Mexico, therefore, there is a need to do research on this topic, since Mexico has 2.3 million of deaf and hard of hearing population (CNDH, 2023). Most of the research has focused on parameters for the deaf and hard of hearing adults; subtitling in multilingual films; interlingual subtitling. Game subtitling and reading function and content words in subtitling videos deserve more attention.

IV. Conclusion

Thus, through searching there were not many papers that were about Subtitling of Deaf and Hard of hearing audiences from audiovisual field. Most of them were about elements that are part of the audiovisual translation field like subtitling at media, the history of subtitling, access and effects of intralingual subtitles for deaf and hard of hearing audience. In addition, the oldest article found on these databases was in 2010 and the most recent one was in 2021. There were a lot of problems identifying and finding articles, books and material that would be useful for this literature review because there is not much information about subtitling for deaf and hard of hearing community. Moreover, there are a lot of areas on audiovisual translation for Deaf and Hard of hearing audience that need improvement in research paper such as comprehension, understanding, technical considerations that could be important at translating a film or video for deaf and hard of hearing, observing if this subtitling for this community is being well employed at audiovisual translation field. Last of all, through this literature review shows the lack of papers done in this topic. There is a large area where it could be researched not excluding portion of communities that are not getting noticed by researchers. Finally, this study remarks the lack of published papers that talk about Subtitling of Deaf and Hard of hearing in Mexico and the entire world.

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