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Audiovisual Translation as an Educational Tool in New Egypt

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Abstracts

In an age where the average Egyptian viewer has access to more than 500 Arabic-language channels and with crumbling state censorship, the issue of education and entertainment in the contemporary digital age becomes very significant, particularly when the percentage of those under 20 accounts for 40% of the total population. The paper looks at the role of Audiovisual Translation (AVT) in raising the standard of education in the digital age. AVT research remains a western European academic pursuit and it has not been translated into different linguistic or cultural settings. AVT research and studies in Arabic remain few and far in between (Gamal: 2007, 2008, 2010, 2012). And while most western research focuses on subtitling, dubbing and audio description, research in other parts of the world need not follow suit. It should use global techniques to tackle local issues and problems and create innovative solutions. Such global/local, or as the now-accepted term 'glocal', suggests a new approach for making AVT a vehicle for educational change and cultural development. The paper examines the situation of audiovisual translation in Egypt and reflects on the Arab world which exhibits the same features seen in Egypt. In previous studies by the author, he points to the need to develop Screen Translation which focuses only on subtitling and dubbing to widen its scope to include other relevant areas such as the DVD Industry, audio-description on television, same language subtitling and the enhancement of the on-line content in Arabic.

Key words: DVD industry, digital technology, young population, Omar Sharif, Arabic content.

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The digital age

The last decade of the Twentieth Century witnessed major changes to the way information is created, stored and accessed. This can be seen through the advancement in computer technology particularly multimedia and the emergence of digital technology. The Internet became popularised and the size of the computer hard disk has been rising since the early 1990s. Software programs appeared in almost every domain and by 1995 Microsoft offered integrated computing solutions for the average computer user through its Windows 95 operating system. By the mid-1990s multimedia became the operative word with programs co-deploying text, image, colour, sound, motion, and video in a single medium. Software programs such as PowerPoint (1997) had an impressive impact on the style of presentation not only in academic and educational settings but also in business, medical and the financial sectors. This development gave rise to multimodality as an area in linguistics that took the mono-dimensional Hallidayian Systemic Functional Linguistics a step further (Baldry and Thibault: 2006). Today, texts and discourse are characterised by their multisemiotic nature and this, in turn, led to different approaches in text analysis which focus on the multimodality of the text whether in print, on the internet or on screen.

The new medium

While multimodality is not a totally new concept since the ancient Egyptians employed a verbo-visual system of writing (the hieroglyphs) and through to the last two centuries cartoons, children books, picture books, and advertisements have been using image and language to create meaning, the concept of multi-modal and dynamic text was born with the digital technology that enhanced the resources of meaning-making activities as can be seen today through interactive web sites, commercials, CD-ROMS, educational programs and promotional material in electronic format. Today, the concept of *infotainment* is part and parcel of the cultural scene in the 21st century and is endorsed by the educational sector as well as the entertainment industry. The manifestation of this can also be seen in the complimentary CDs that accompany books, magazines, newspapers and the promotional DVDs that corporates produce in a wide range of industries from tourism to investment.

The digital versatile disc

The appearance of the Digital Versatile Disk (DVD) in 1998 gave the broadcasting, cinema and television industries a unique advantage: accessibility. The invention of the DVD has been termed the most significant invention for film since the advent of sound. The DVD differs from the CD-ROM (Compact Disc –Read Only Memory) in many ways as it stores up to 70 times the content of a normal CD-ROM but more importantly it can store video, text and sound. It can also arrange material into chapters which are searchable. The medium has been widely utilized by a large number of publications offering DVDs for specialized coverage. Magazines particularly make use of the new medium by presenting topics capitalizing on the inclusive multimedia capability of DVDs. Corporate videos, which originally replaced print brochures and information packages, now appear on DVDs with

several topics arranged in a searchable format and with multi-language versions. This last capability means that films could now be stored with subtitles in a large number of languages loaded on the same searchable disc. A single DVD disc can store subtitles in up to 40 languages and soundtracks for up to 8 languages (Carroll: 2004).

A typical feature film DVD has two sections: the film and the Extra Features. The Extra Features vary from film to film, but on average they include the following: film trailer, scene selection, deleted scenes, changed endings, bloopers, interviews with cast and crew, commentary on the film, the original film poster and the language options. This could take the form of either subtitles or language tracks. An average American film sold in Australia is typically subtitled into 12 to 20 languages and has sound tracks in about three to four languages. In addition to the bonus or Extra Features, there are several versions of the same subtitled film such as: the standard release, the deluxe release with commentary, the anniversary release with deleted scenes, the box-set release with similarly themed pictures, and the aluminum box-set release with the director's other titles.

National cinema industries began producing DVDs of their films with subtitles and dubbed sound tracks since the year 2000. The portability of DVDs meant that films can be available and accessible by wide audiences the world over. Whereas American films have dominated the world market for many decades due, inter alia, to their technical specifications and distributing power, the new digital medium offers local cinemas an opportunity that was unattainable prior to 1998. Today, almost every cinema in the world has its own films available on DVD and many of them come with subtitles at least in one foreign language: English.

Egyptian DVDs

The first Egyptian DVDs appeared in 2002 (Asharqalwasat: July 2002) with two significant works: *Days of Sadat* (2001) and *A Man in Our House* (1961). The former examines the life and times of Egyptian president Anwar Sadat (1918-1981) starring prominent Egyptian actor Ahmad Zaki. The film was a recent success coinciding with the twentieth anniversary of Sadat's assassination. The latter starring Omar Sharif is considered one of the Best 100 Films ever produced by Egyptian cinema (Tawfic: 1969) and also one of the Most Important 100 Films that reflect the development of the Egyptian cinema industry (Al Hadary: 2007). The early history of the DVD industry in Egypt has not been documented and the little available information is neither complete nor official (Gamal: 2007). The first collection of films to be produced on DVD was titled 'Egyptian Cinema Classics' which included a number of films that appeared in Tawfic's (1969) initial list of the Best 100 films although it also contained a number of other popular films (Alsharqalawsat: September 2002). The company Finoon produced about 100 titles before it was acquired by Rotana, a Saudi media company that also purchased the originals of almost one third of the Egyptian film library and remastered them for its free-to-air *Rotana Cinema* and *Rotana Zaman*, two satellite channels that specialize in showing current Egyptian films and old films. The viewership of Egyptian films exceeds the 300 million viewers in the Arab world and extends to Arabic-speaking communities almost everywhere in the world via satellite. The Arabic word *Zaman* means old, previous and

before. However, one of the connotations of the word is “good old times” and also classic. Thus Rotana *Zaman* has come to signify classic Egyptian cinema. In May 2012, Rotana Company launched a new channel titled *Rotana Classic* which, in addition to showing old and classic Egyptian films, it began showing old television interviews and live concerts mostly from Egypt which in this context the word classic came to mean old and “archival” programs. The channel uses as a subtitle “Eternal masterpieces”.

At their first appearance in 2002, Egyptian DVDs though remastered and produced in a portable format were not intended for the local market, neither the Egyptian nor the regional Arabic-speaking market. This could be ascertained from the following observations: There are numerous paid and free-to-air satellite channels showing and even specializing in showing Egyptian films, which by far, is the primary cinema industry in the region (Hayward: 2000). In the most populated-Arab country, Egypt, the number of people under the age of 20 reaches 40% (www.cia.gov) and this age group tend to be more interested in contemporary films rather than in old or “classic” films. Also, the DVDs were originally remastered for satellite broadcasting but with the DVD technology the subtitling was added and the DVDs were marketed in Europe first and later in the Middle East. Finally, when the un-mastered version of the film was being sold on CD-ROM for 11 Egyptian pounds (A\$2.40) the DVD was being sold for 80 Egyptian pounds (then equivalent to the same cost of a DVD in Australia A\$20). This means that the cost of the DVD was beyond the purchasing power of the average Egyptian viewer. The subtitling of the films, old and new, was offered into English and French and with the remastering and marketing being in London, it was almost certain that the DVD industry was intended for the “target” viewer. Today, the only source for what Egyptian film is available on DVD is at the London-based company Fineartfilm.

Cinema in Egypt

The Lumiere Brothers took their Cinematograph to Alexandria in 1896, the same year they were showing their early films at cafes in Paris (Abu Shadi: 2004). Within a decade, and in 1907, Egypt would have its dedicated buildings to showing films: a cinema theatre. Egyptian silent films began as early as the 1920s and the first feature silent films *A Kiss in the Desert* and *Laila* appeared in April and November of 1927. In 1932, the first talkie *Children of the Rich* was montaged and subtitled in Paris. The first purpose-built studios were established in 1935 and *Zainab* was the first Egyptian film to participate abroad at the first session of the Venice International Film Festival of 1936. During its peak Egyptian cinema was producing 80 films a year and since 1927 it has been the powerhouse of Arab cinema (Hassan: 1995).

SouEIF (2004) points out that in Egypt, films are described as either Arabic or foreign films. Yet, in all other countries films are described as either “Egyptian” or foreign films despite the fact that almost all Arabic-speaking countries have no viable local film industry. In north Africa, where more films are made than anywhere else (except in Egypt) the films have no local audience and are largely viewed as ‘art films’ made for export and directed at ‘target’ audience abroad. Likewise, in Syria, films are produced by the state cinema organisation at

the rate of one film every two years for the purpose of participating at international film festivals. The rest of the Arab world watches “Egyptian” films.

Today, the total number of Egyptian films is estimated to be around 4000 titles which feed the Arab satellite channels (Kassem: 2002). Some of these channels are dedicated solely to the broadcasting of Egyptian films. Throughout its history Egyptian cinema participated at international film festivals and presented its work through some of the most gifted and internationally known directors such as Youssef Chahine, Henry Barakat and some of the talented actors such as Omar Sharif.

Omar Sharif

In *Blazing Sun* (1954) Omar Sharif made his debut in Egypt thanks to the opportunity given by his school mate and later Egypt’s prominent film director Youssef Chahine and the patronage of Egypt’s first female actress of the day; Faten Hamama. Sharif later married Hamama in 1955, the same year Anwar Wagdi, Egypt’s most popular male actor died. Sharif, through films with Hamama, soon became the most popular ‘premier garçon’ of Egyptian cinema.

Prior to his debut in David Lean’s *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) Egyptian actor Omar Sharif was already the top male actor in the country. He had appeared in 22 Arabic-speaking Egyptian films in addition to other films in Lebanon and Tunisia where he acted in French. Since his move to Hollywood and subsequent residence in France, he participated in several local productions and acted in English, French and Italian. Yet, despite his residence abroad he continued to be the voice of Egypt through his commentaries on National Geographic documentaries on Egyptian archaeological heritage, Egyptian documentaries and his presence at important functions both in Egypt and abroad. Politically, widely-known but never confirmed, he played a role in Egyptian President Anwar Sadat’s endeavours to restore ties with the US (1974) and to open diplomatic channels with Israel in 1977 (Ynetnews:2006). In 2004, the Egyptian Football Association enlisted him in the team to present Egypt’s case for the 2010 World Cup bid and he has been the honorary President of the Cairo International Film Festival since 2006. Most recently, he provided the audio commentary for the ‘Treasures of Tut Ankh Amun’ Exhibition held in Melbourne in 2011.

While Sharif’s filmography since 1962 is fairly well known and documented for instance at the Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com), his filmography prior to 1962 is neither examined nor documented. When the Egyptian DVD industry began with an Omar Sharif film it was addressing both the foreign audience by offering a film of a familiar face and the local audience by offering a repeatedly shown and often-watched film. The selected film for this research, *A Man in our House*, is widely considered one of the most loved Egyptian films, a classic in its own right.

Definition of Classic:

Over the past fifty-one years and since its first screening in April 1961 (Kassem: 2002), *A man in Our House* has been shown several times a year in almost every Arab country. The

film is directed by Henry Barakat (1912-1997), one of the foremost Egyptian directors of the fifties and sixties, a period commonly referred to as La Belle Époque of Egyptian cinema (Maarouf: 2005). In casting the film, Barakat brings together some of the leading actors of the day who made the production a national document that is repeatedly viewed. The film takes as its main theme the struggle for liberation and independence from the British occupation yet the real issue examined is the context of an average Egyptian family and its values. The film is based on a novel by a famous novelist Ehssan Abdelqudous whose novels graced Egyptian cinema more than Egypt's prominent novelist and the 1988 Nobel Prize winner of Literature Naguib Mahfouz. Yet, despite the crew and cast, the popular novel and theme it is the cinematic language employed that created a national icon. Here, multisemiotic features exemplified in the dialogue, décor, cultural semiotic features that are deployed and co-deployed in a particular fashion to create meaning come together to create a film of significant form. Buckland (2003: 2) explains the term

“The art critic Clive Bell came up with the term ‘significant form’ to indicate what he believes distinguishes good art from bad art. When we say that a film has ‘significant form’, what we mean is that the whole is more than the sum of its parts. The film’s parts add up to create a new entity that does not exist in each part.”

Furthermore, Stefan Sharff offers a definition of the term: “Significant form is the opposite of pedestrian rendition... Images fit together so magnificently that they ascend to a higher level of visual meaning” (1982: 7). Film critic and former Censor General in Egypt Abu Shadi (2004, 2006) examines *Fifty classic Egyptian films* and offers a definition of classic films: “Films that transcend time, place and language and command repeated viewing”. In her attempt to define classic films, Anthony (2003) suggests “classic movies embody a method of storytelling that leaves something to the audience's imagination”. While different views abound on the definition of a classic film, the fact remains that in Egypt *A Man in Our House* is considered an Egyptian classic by virtue of its inclusion in the List of the Best 100 Films (Tawfic: 1969) and in the List of the Most Significant 100 Films (Al Hadary: 2007). Moreover, its repeated showing on July 23rd, the National Day of Egypt, since 1961 as well as its showing on Victory Day since 1974 as well as during the month of Ramadan has bestowed, if not confirmed, a special place and position in modern Egyptian and Arab culture. For instance, the film was shown on Emirates Airlines flights as recent as October 2011. The fact that the DVD industry chose to launch its production with the film appears to be justified in attempting to address the local market despite the prohibitive cost of the DVD as well as the non-Arabic viewer who is familiar with the Hollywood actor but has never seen any of his earlier 22 Arabic-language films.

Prior to its release on DVD the film was remastered for broadcasting on satellite channels like hundreds of other Egyptian films that were purchased by foreign media companies and shown on their satellite channels. The Rotana Media Company was founded in 2002 and in 2004 it launched its specialized Rotana Cinema and Rotana Zaman offering round-the-clock “Egyptian” films with the occasional film or two from Lebanon and in 2006 when Keif El-hal (How are you?) the first Saudi Arabian film was produced, it was given a courtesy showing by the Saudi owned company. Rotana purchased the originals of almost one-third the

Egyptian library of films and continued to release the remastered films on DVD. The other two-thirds of the Egyptian film library are almost in the hands of another Saudi Media Company that runs the original Film Channel the ART (Arab Radio and Television) which was launched in 1991. This prompted an Egyptian outcry to ban the sale of originals/negatives and even called on the parliament to initiate a national campaign to buy back Egyptian filmic heritage which should remain in Egypt and not abroad. Once again, the cost of the original film buyback proved to be prohibitive for the Egyptian Ministry of Investments which pulled out of the national campaign. Rotana replied by acknowledging the Egyptian heritage stating that the purchase was legal from the various owners of the originals. Furthermore, it had invested large sums of money in remastering the damaged negatives and most importantly the company is based in Cairo. This means that it employs Egyptians, it has its originals in Egypt and it shows the Egyptian films round-the-clock on its free-to-air film channels.

The debate over the ownership of the negatives of the Egyptian classic films raises some issues. By virtue of having remastered the film and having it broadcast in its original language the media company has discharged a major part of its responsibility towards the Egyptian viewer. However, it is the subtitled version of the film (the DVD) that harms both the company and the reputation of Egyptian cinema abroad by virtue of its defective subtitling. By offering inadequate subtitling, Rotana could be said to subverting the cinema industry in Egypt. An analogy to the translation of Egyptian literary classics is perhaps in order. If classic literature written by Egypt's prominent novelists such as Naguib Mahfouz, Ihsan Abdelqudous and Youssef Idris is translated by well-known and accomplished native English translators the like of Denys Johnson-Davis, William Hutchins and Humphrey Davies, shouldn't the subtitling of films based on these novels merit the same treatment?

The audiovisual scene in Egypt

The argument on whether the subtitling of Egyptian classic films should be entrusted to experienced or accomplished subtitlers has not been examined in Egypt simply because the professional context is lacking. The demand for subtitled programs to feed the mushrooming satellite channels, all broadcasting around the clock, has not been mirrored by a demand for subtitling courses or subtitler training opportunities. Subtitling in Egypt has traditionally been a one-way street: subtitling foreign films and television drama into Arabic and prior to the digital age of satellite channels there has been one subtitling company in Egypt: Anis Ebaid & Sons founded in the 1940s (Al Ahram : 1980). The proliferation of satellite channels created the demand for subtitled programs which in turn invited channels to hire more 'translators' to 'translate films' into Arabic. It is perhaps insightful to observe that Arabic does not have a word for subtitling but uses the combination 'film translation', even in the credits of a subtitled film one could read "Translated by..." instead of 'subtitled by...'. Despite the fact that subtitling into Arabic as a professional practice lacks both professional training and academic examination (Gamal: 2008) it continues to respond to market needs on an *ad hoc* basis and despite some well-known and documented challenges (Al Ahram: 2006, Alsharqalawsat: 2003). However, the subtitling of Egyptian programs and feature films into foreign languages and particularly Egyptian films of significant form is a rare activity that has

very little demand in Egypt. In a nut shell, Egypt has always been an importer of audiovisual material and subtitles very little of its own into English. The only subtitling of Egyptian films seems to be confined to international film festivals and in this case the subtitling is privately commissioned by the producer and/or director and is rarely examined. On the other hand, Swedish subtitler Ivarsson and Carroll comment on the logistics of subtitling and points to the important but neglected area of post-production “directors do not care about what happens to their films overseas”(1998: ii). It is also insightful to observe that official translation programs in Egypt (and the rest of the Arab world) continue to disregard audiovisual translation and focus on print translation. For instance, in 2011 several conferences were held by Arabic language academies in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia to examine ways to strengthen Arabic in the age of globalisation and have suggested several strategies to boost the use of Arabic as well as the national translation programs. However, the multimedia world remains outside their immediate concern and translation on screen does not merit even a mention. It is in this light that the subtitling of Egyptian films and particularly those deemed to be classic films of export quality, should be viewed and judged. Historically, there has been no opportunity neither for the training in or the examination of subtitling Arabic-language films into English.

Significance of the DVD industry in today's world

While the term DVD is mostly associated with feature films it is increasingly becoming associated with the audiovisual translation world. In addition to subtitling and dubbing, audio-description for the deaf and hard of hearing viewers, it is also associated with the do-it-yourself or how-to books. Several books, including a book on audiovisual translation (Cintaz: 2007), come with a DVD. As culture in the Twenty First Century is increasingly becoming reliant on online and digital technology, an increasing number of institutions began employing the multimedia format of the DVD as the most convenient format for presenting and storing information and more significantly for making it accessible. DVDs are now used in almost every domain where accessibility through multilingual translation is required. This covers cinema, tourism, law, marketing, advertising, finance, health and investment to name but a few common areas. For emerging economies keen on attracting investments, a single DVD could provide the most convenient and affordable format for producing vital information that is portable, affordable and accessible.

Examining translation in the multimedia format

Digital technology over the past two decades changed completely the way translation is produced and consumed (Gambier: 2003, Diaz Cintas: 2007, 2008, 2010). Most translations are now produced and accessed on screen and are associated with more channels: visual, acoustic, video, colour and text. This multimodal format has in turn made translation a complex process that must account for these channels. Whereas traditional print translation was mono-dimensional in the sense that it relied almost solely on text, the current multimodal translation accounts for more. In the case of DVD translation and particularly in the case of feature films, subtitling is a lot more than just translation. The dean of Japanese subtitling Shimizu published a number of articles on the art of subtitling which were collected and

published posthumously in 1992 under the title “Subtitling is not translation”. The dictum originally referred to the fact that in subtitling a film dialogue not everything said is necessarily translated due to the constraints imposed by the medium of film/screen. In the multimodal age, the dictum could be seen in a different light and this time it is not only seen as a reductive form of translation but as a more inclusive form that accounts for other meaning-making features of the medium. In film, and as Abe Mark Nornes (1999) explains translation must be mindful not only of the words spoken, but also of the words unspoken (non-verbal communication), and the other meaning-making features of décor, cultural references, proxemics, kinesics features that contribute to the (target) viewer’s understanding of the subtitled film.

De Linde and Kay (1999) also observes that while native viewers are capable of processing meaning-making features in film “simultaneously” target language viewers tend to process such features “serially”. This means that subtitling must account for a lot more than just the dialogue. Multimodal discourse analysis (O’Hallaron: 2006) offers subtitlers a modus operandi that enables them to capture these meaning-making features in a detailed fashion that would make translation easier to account for all features that are deemed necessary for translating meaning and not just the audio. While multimodal description is a slow process (Baldry and Thibault: 2006) time-consuming and a commercially unviable (Taylor: 2003) and even “costly and boring” (Lemke: 2006) the purpose of multimodal analysis has significant relevance to the examination of multimodal documents such as film. One of the main advantages is that it identifies the diverse features that help in making meaning in film. While it is arguable whether a multimodal analysis would benefit a subtitler with undeveloped film literacy, it is almost certain that multimodal analysis is a step in the right direction towards acquiring a heightened awareness of meaning-making features in film and would enhance the subtitling process by making it more sensitive to the visual than to the audio, which is the current situation in the Egyptian DVD subtitling practice. O’Hagan and Ashworth concur that “increasingly translators needed to become computer literate, and now it is becoming increasingly necessary for them to be literate with digital media so that they are able to process various digital content that is subject to language facilitation (2002: 132).

Conclusion

The events of the Arab Spring in Egypt in 2011 have brought to the fore the importance of the digital technology and social media. The controls exercised by the old regime have crumbled with the espousing of online technology by a massive young population estimated at 405 of the population. The young have espoused digital technology to form new groups of soccer fans The Ultras, political opposition parties April 6th Movement, made Facebook the virtual meeting place and are now exploring the field of on-line authoring. For generations literary figures and education specialists have been bemoaning the low level of reading by young Egyptians. While it is indisputable that reading is, and has never been, a national pastime, the new digital age has brought with it some opportunities. Thousands are now contributing online and this energy, if harnessed, may help leading institutions such as the Library of Alexandria to lead the way into enriching the Arabic content online. Reading habits will change in the new digital age and schools must begin putting some of its curricula

on DVD to teach the young how to deal with the new tool, and how to manipulate its features and ultimately author and contribute content and not simply consume it.

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