

The Trouble with Subtitling is a Matter of Interpretation – an online public lecture by guest speaker Professor Lawrence Venuti organized by Transnational Cultural & Visual Studies, School of Modern Languages, Cardiff University, December 3, 2020

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Ever since Translation studies developed as an established academic discipline, Lawrence Venuti has become a cornerstone and a leading figure in this field. An internationally renowned translator and translation theorist, Venuti has laboriously delved into the (socio)cultural role of translation, thus irrevocably changing the course of conversation about translation around the globe, asking both translators and readers to be more mindful of the cultural differences in the translation process. According to Venuti, translators must employ strategies for bringing the foreign text into a different culture without concealing and without homogenizing foreign cultures. His most important publications include *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (1995), *The Scandals of Translation* (1998), *Translation Changes Everything* (2012). He has edited Routledge's *The Translation Studies Reader* (2012), a comprehensive survey of the most important developments in the history of translation theory and research. He is a member of the faculty at Temple University, PA, USA.

As someone who has quoted Professor Venuti's concepts and ideas on countless occasions – in classes, in academic papers, at conferences, we embraced the invitation received from a colleague from Cardiff University to attend an online public lecture to be delivered by Lawrence Venuti on December 3, 2020. I came to realize that the word 'public' was misleading as the registration procedure was thorough and I had the impression that the participants, all 900 of them, were carefully selected. Venuti's lecture *The Trouble with Subtitling is a Matter of Interpretation* lasted for forty-five minutes and it was followed by participants' questions and feedback for another thirty minutes.

Even though it may be challenging to summarize everything Venuti talked about within the constraints of this format, we hope to present the main points. In the very beginning, it was underlined that good subtitles should show no loss of quality. Starting from his well-known premise that "any translation is already an interpretation", Venuti posed the question of how the translator's choice of words inscribed a particular interpretation into the original, how to translate markedly colloquial language (colloquial syntax, lexis, lower register), and how to translate a more conversational tone. To illustrate the importance of properly translating these elements in subtitles, Venuti played the scene from A. Hitchcock's *Psycho* in which a car-dealer negotiates the terms of car exchange with runaway Marion. The salesman speaks fast Californian English. As demonstrated in the lecture, his English was translated as standard Spanish

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and standard Italian in Spanish and Italian subtitles, thus transforming the original material. In this context, Venuti's translation theory postulates were repeated: every translation decontextualizes the source text and it recontextualizes it in the target text, thus making translation an interpretive act that varies the original form, syntax, lexis etc. Contrary to Pedersen's instrumental model, Venuti emphasizes the need to develop a hermeneutic model of translation established on the notion that translation is a transformation, taking into account the social situation where translation is received. In Venuti's words, the deficiency of the instrumental model is that it excludes interpretive possibilities. For instance, it does not consider that characterization is influenced by translation. Or, it neglects extra-linguistic factors which must be taken into account because they are laden with meaning. It is inevitable that subtitles transform the material.

Further on, the case of Henri Béhar, a renowned French subtitler who translated more than one hundred French- and English-language films, was discussed. In Béhar's work, subtitles often included reformulation and omission in an attempt that subtitles be in sync with the film. In his essay "Cultural Ventriloquism" (2004), Béhar argues for a hermeneutic model of translation which would consider non-standard items because they derive from a particular moment in the language. Touching on this, Venuti continues with explicitly formulating the need to acknowledge the definition of translation which gives us semantic correspondence and "complex cultural artifacts that can never be transferred with *only* semantics", but with openness to linguistic variation. In other words, cultural and social impact of translation must not be negated, as well as interpretive possibilities, but this requires "critical self-awareness by readers, critics, students". According to Venuti, the problem lies in the general notion that translation reproduces the source text and this notion can limit the critical self-awareness needed for the translation studies progress.

On this note about different interpretive possibilities, suggested in the title and elaborated throughout the talk, the Professor finished his talk. Expectedly, the lecture extended into the question-and-answer session. It is not our intention to transcribe here all the questions asked despite their being topical and relevant. However, as Venuti has at length written about the translation strategies of domestication and foreignization, one question begs to be mentioned, and that is the matter of domestication in subtitling. Venuti asserted that we should be moving away from domestication in all forms of translation, subtitles included.

All in all, we have found Venuti's lecture to be intellectually stimulating as it was given with intellectual vigour and ease of his trademark scholarliness.