

Audiovisual translation in Cameroon: An Analysis of Voice-over in Cameroon Radio and Television (CRTV)

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Abstract

Cameroon is a multilingual country with people from different backgrounds with English and French as the official languages. The need to render information broadcast on television channels across the country to the population is accordingly of paramount importance. This can be achieved through subtitling and dubbing which attracted interest and have occupied an important place on both the national and privately run television channels. Other techniques of information dissemination such as voice-over which is a mode of audiovisual translation are lagging behind due to lack of understanding of the process. In academic circles, very little has been published on voice-over in the country unfortunately thus, very few people really understand what it is all about. The aim of this study was therefore to analyse voice-over mode using the national television channel (CRTV) through transcription and comparison of original French versions of interviews and the corresponding voice-over English versions. The results showed that synchrony which is an important aspect in the translation of voice-over was not respected and that the omission of words and the shortening of expressions in the process limited the viewer and the listener from grasping the entire message from the original interview. Furthermore, the use of deceptive similarities disconcerted and confused the viewers who naturally question the authenticity of the voice-over and become distracted from the rest of the speech of the interviewee. The use of divergence in the corpus caused more harm than good, given the fact that diverting from the message conveyed in the original interview prevented the viewers from getting the original message as it was delivered by the speaker. Procedures to ameliorate the quality of voice-over translation mode in television networks across the country are proposed based on these results.

Key Words: Audiovisual translation, subtitling, dubbing, voice-over, information.

Sommaire

Le Cameroun est un pays multilingue composé de personnes venants d'horizons différents avec l'Anglais et le Français comme langues officielles d'où la nécessité de diffuser l'information à tous. Ceci n'est possible qu'en passant par le sous-titrage et le doublage qui ont intéressé beaucoup de personnes et occupé une place centrale à la télévision nationale et privée. D'autres méthodes de diffusion audiovisuelle comme le voice-over ne sont presque pas utilisées à cause d'une mauvaise compréhension du processus. Il n'existe presque pas d'information publiée sur ce mode de traduction audiovisuelle dans les milieux académiques au Cameroun. Alors, très peu de personnes connaissent ce mode de traduction audiovisuelle. Le but de cette étude était donc d'analyser ce mode de traduction audiovisuelle à l'aide des données de la télévision nationale (CRTV). Des versions d'interviews originales en Français et leurs versions de voice-over en Anglais ont été transcrites et comparées. Les résultats ont montré que la synchronie qui est le plus important aspect en traduction de voice-over n'était pas respectée. L'omission des mots et la réduction des expressions empêchaient le téléspectateur d'écouter et de comprendre le message original. L'emploi des faux amis dérangeait tellement le téléspectateur qu'il n'arrivait plus à suivre le reste de l'interview. L'usage de divergence dans le corpus était tellement désastreux qu'il ne permettait pas au téléspectateur de comprendre le message original du locuteur. Les modalités d'amélioration de la qualité du mode voice-over dans toutes les télévisions au Cameroun sont proposées.

Mots Clés: Traduction audiovisuelle, sous-titrage, doublage, Voice-over, information

Introduction

Audiovisual products target a large number of people with different cultural backgrounds via television and internet. However, in Cameroon, very little research has been carried out or published on voice-over which is one of the audiovisual translation modes (AVT) used by television stations to reach out to different viewers. Luyken *et al.* (1991) defines voice-over as

“the faithful translation of the original speech” which is delivered in an “approximately synchronous delivery. It is normally used only in the context of a monologue such as an interview response or a series of responses from a single interviewee. The original sound is either reduced entirely or to a low level of audibility. A common practice is to allow the original sound to be heard for several seconds at the onset of the speech and to have it subsequently reduced so that the translated speech takes over. This contributes to the sense of authenticity in the translation and prevents a degree of mistrust from developing”.

As a form of language transfer, voice-over is not limited to the translation of brief monologues. It is sometimes used to cover whole programmes such as parliamentary debates, conferences and even imported films (Barauskiene and Blazevidiene, 2008). According to Gambier and Suomela-Salmi (1994), up till now, research has mainly been concerned with the subtitling and dubbing of fictive stories/fiction films. In the light of the huge variety of audio-visual communication, this may seem somewhat surprising. However, it reflects the prevailing orientation in translation theory, which is still highly dominated by literary translation. Franco (2000) established in his research study at Leuven that only 21 entries out of 1,231 were centered on TV programmes with one of their typical modes of language transfer being voice-over. In the same vein, Orero (2006) states that translation for voice-over has not been successful in

attracting the attention of the academic community and more in particular the interest of those researching in the field of audiovisual translation. A few articles deal with this mode of translation, “but out of the nearly 1,300 titles listed in a major bibliography on audiovisual language transfer (Gambier (Ed), 1997), less than 10 titles, most of them minor articles, focus on voice-over (Gottlieb, 2004).

Likewise Grigaraviciute and Gottlieb (1999) stated that in the West, where nearly all the titles on screen translation are written and published, voice-over is little used. They further added that in countries in Eastern Europe and elsewhere in the world where voice-over is the standard method on TV and video, little or no research is done, and certainly nothing has been published on the subject so far. The few publications on this mode of AVT have tackled general aspects except for Franco (2000) who looked at the translation in documentaries and Darwish (2006) who, on his part, looked at the translation of mediated news in Arabic television. No other scholar had delved into analyzing the translation process and the technical dimension of carrying out the voice-over mode of translation. Tawa (2010) however, looked at the prospects and potentials of voice-over translation in Cameroon while sampling the opinions of viewers of both private and public television stations and concluded that the quality of voice-over products is generally average with the disrespect of synchrony and other features such as the voice of the person reading the translation that characterizes voice-over translation.

Despite the popularity of media translation, particularly on TV programmes from which a respectable amount of publications have focused mostly on the subtitling and dubbing of films, very little work has been done on media translation and voice-over in particular. In Cameroon, most media outfits carry out voice-overs, especially the

national TV station CRTV. According to Tawa (2010), CRTV practices voice-over mode of translation more than the other stations for the translation of interviews, especially in cases where they have to communicate to an audience speaking another language other than the one of the interviewee. Also, because Cameroon has two official languages (English and French) and some Cameroonians do not understand either of them (Ayonghe, 2009), audiovisual products that these television stations offer to the general public do not in most cases, respect the standards of the voice-over mode. This situation causes problems since to viewers it defeats the purpose of authenticity for which the voice-over translation is carried out.

Consequently, the following questions are raised: are the formal features that characterize voice-over translation respected by the translator-adapter? What is the impact of lexical changes and the loss of meaning in translation in the voice-over versions? Has authenticity, as the main goal for voice-over translation been achieved?

The objectives of this research study are therefore to i) analyse the quality of the corpora made up of edited and broadcasted TV interviews; ii) demonstrate to what extent these products could be improved upon in order to make viewing better and determine the procedures used by the translator-adapter; iii) examine the technical aspects of voice-over translation and determine to what extent the voice-over product reflects the original, both in content and visual aspects; iv) evaluate our corpora in order to highlight the impact of the loss of meaning and the impact it will have on its ability to portray authenticity; and v) determine the role of translation in TV interviews.

Materials and Methods

The corpus for this study constituted edited and already broadcasted voice-over interviews taken

from CRTV, the national TV and Radio station since it is the leading national station in Cameroon in terms of promoting voice-over mode (Tawa, 2010). Secondly, CRTV is watched all over the national territory. The corpus was collected in two stages: (i) First of all, we collected every voice-over version (into English) of the interviews that we could obtain; (ii) Then next, we looked for their French original versions. Our focus was on both the visual aspects as well as the linguistic aspects and to ensure this, a lot of research on voice-over related documentation was carried out in order to better evaluate the weaknesses and strengths of these products. Qualitative data was taken from already edited and broadcast voice-over materials, particularly interviews in news and talk shows, and then analysed by bringing out instances where the formal features of voice-over translation were not respected. Then a critical evaluation of translation content was done to highlight the shortcomings and propose appropriate translations.

Results and interpretation

Evaluating the technical aspects of voice-over translation

Synchrony

Scholars who have written extensively on the voice-over mode of AVT believe that the element of synchrony is important when translating for voice-over. Although voice-over does not respect lip synchrony, other types of synchrony should be respected. Firstly, the short delay in the translation and the availability of the original soundtrack some two seconds before the target voice takes over, and the translation must end a few seconds before the original soundtrack or sometimes both may end at the same time (Orero, 2004). Secondly, there must be some degree of synchrony between what the speaker is saying and his body language (Orero, 2006). These aspects were taken into consideration during the analysis of the interviews (see examples 1 and 2 below) saved in electronic tapes by the journalist of CRTV

Example 1

An interview of a military officer giving out instructions on how the match past rehearsals, for the National Day celebrations, was going to take place.

	Source Language (SL)	Target Language (TL)
1	...Demain matin nous allons commencer les répétitions...je voudrais de ce fait que demain tout le monde soient rassemblés ici à 8h-58 th second to 1 min 02 seconds	Tomorrow morning we shall begin the match past rehearsal. Therefore all of you should assemble here (56 th second) at 8 a.m. prompt.

As propounded by Orero (2005), it is imperative that a translation be delivered as synchronous as possible with the images. This means that the voice reading the translation here should match the body language of the interviewee. Chaume (2004), in his proposed models for the analysis of audiovisual texts, suggests that representing images or symbols, which he refers to as iconographic codes in the translation is important, especially in a case where these images are accompanied by a verbal explanation. In the above example 1, it is hardly the case because in the interview, the speaker is giving orders to his junior officers and when he says:

«...je voudrais de ce fait que demain tout le monde soient rassemblé ici à 8h», he uses both hands in a gesture that explains that he wants everyone to be assembled at 8 a.m. prompt. This gesture appears from the 58th second to 1 min 02 seconds. On the contrary, when the word “here” is read, it appears at the 56th second. There is therefore no synchrony between the translation content and the images.

Example 2

Here, the interviewee is a young man who explains to us why he prefers to import electronic devices other than buying them from Cameroon.

	SL	TL
2	Cet appareil justement que j'ai derrière moi, en termes de CFA il m'a couté pratiquement cent vingt mille francs... (01 min 28 seconds to 01 min 30 seconds)	The TV I have cost me about one hundred and twenty thousand Francs CFA. Here, the same equipment costs three hundred Francs CFA... (01 min 34)

In example 2, synchrony between his speech and the images at the beginning of the original sound track is not respected. The purpose of voice-over goes beyond being simply descriptive; it also “contextualizes analyzes and interprets images

and events” (Reda & Rasa, 2008). When we watched the video, we realized that the reader of the translation does not respect this. At the beginning, the interviewee spoke about a television set, and while talking he showed us the television situated right behind him.

«Cet appareil justement que j'ai derrière moi...»

He used his left hand in a gesture that pointed at the television from behind and it appeared between 01 min 28 seconds and 30 seconds. On the contrary, the voice-over journalist’s speech came in at 01 min 34 seconds. There was therefore no synchrony between the translation and the images.

From the above examples, we realize that it is a common practice for editors in CRTV not to respect synchrony which is an important element in voice-over translation. The delay effect in voice-over is important because it reassures the viewer that what is being said in his language is what is being said by the interviewee.

When voice-over is used for the translation of an audiovisual programme, two voices are usually heard. We hear one voice in the background (the original speech) and the voice of the translation. Orero (2006) mentions that there may be a certain degree of interest in matching the actual features of the voice: male/female, genre and age and even the accent. As she puts it “...the voice and its many qualifiers may be one more important element to create the feeling of hyper-reality and generate what has been called the constructed reality”. These actual features will therefore be analyzed in examples 3 to 5 below.

Matching genre: male/female

Example 3

The interviewee was a woman who had just been involved in an accident. In her speech, she deplored the treatment given to her by the owners of the bus involved in the accident.

	SL	TL
3a	... au tournant, c'est pour cela qu'il s'est retrouvé face à face avec la petite voiture.	... a heavy duty truck, when it came face to face with the smaller car
3b	Moi je suis abandonnée depuis hier soir à 19h, j'ai passé même nuit ici. Les gens qui ont le bus ils n'ont même pas mon temps...	I have been abandoned here since Sunday at 7p.m. I spent the night here. The owners of the bus care less about me.

In example 3, we see a woman being interviewed and when the recorded translation is superimposed on the original sound, we instead hear the voice of a man. This practice is wrong in AVT mode. It is important to match the gender of the original soundtrack and that of the translation recording which means that when a woman is being interviewed, then a woman should be reading the voice-over and not a man, because there are obvious biological differences in the speech and voice quality between a man and a woman (Wells, 1982). Given the man's production of testosterone, his voice will be deeper than that of a woman's. Furthermore, the use of the same gender will definitely help in maintaining the feeling of authenticity.

Matching age

Example 4

The interviewee here is a CPDM party militant from the Sanaga Maritime Division proclaiming the support of the people of the Maritime Division. She is telling us that the President of the country should feel at home in their division, given that he received moral instruction there.

	SL	TL
4	Le président Biya, il est chez lui dans le Littoral, et particulièrement en Sanaga Maritime où il a fait ses premiers pas au séminaire...	President Biya is at home in the Littoral, particularly in the Sanaga Maritime Division...

Given the difference between the speech of young people and that of older people, in voice-over translation, there is a need to match the age in a case where a middle aged-man/woman is being interviewed. In this example, we hear the voice of a young woman, but the person we see is a middle-aged woman and again, such an approach of voice-over translation is wrong.

The accent of the voice

Example 5

A retailer is explaining to us what happens in the market and their lives when there is scarcity of mackerel fish.

	SL	TL
5	On dépense l'argent pour rien et c'est cher. Ça fait des trois mois aujourd'hui on ne voit même rien. Nous vivons encore de ça, nous sommes des peseuses	We spend money for nothing and it is expensive. It has been going on for months. We live on these.

Wells (1982) suggests that those "...obvious things we notice about a person's speech is that it tells us something about where he/she comes from..." and that accents are powerful indicators of geographical identity". From example 5 above, when we listen to the original soundtrack, we could easily identify the interviewee as a native from the Centre, East or South Regions because of the way they pronounce their words. As such in order to maintain this accent, the voice-over journalist should have, first of all, been a woman, in the first case, as suggested above and it would have been more original if the voice-over artist had a francophone accent or why not, the accent of a "Betiwoman".

Evaluating the linguistic aspect in the corpus

A textual analysis of the edited and broadcasted voice-over interviews from CRTV enabled us to examine the audiovisual text from a translational perspective. The linguistic aspect of the study aimed at evaluating the translation strategies used by the translator-adapter are presented in this section. Focus is placed on the shortening of semantic parts of some sentences that had an impact on the understanding of the message, the use of deceptive similarities and translation errors.

Shortening of sentences

Shortening is a type of translation procedure where for various reasons a part of the semantic content is lost. Shortening must be applied with care, as it might cause a loss of meaning in the TL or misunderstanding in translation. In this corpus, there were cases in the translation when bigger or

smaller semantic parts of sentences were cut off by the translator-adapter for some reason best known to him/her. These cuts either led to a loss of meaning or disrupted the smooth flow of an idea that could have eased understanding of the message.

Example 6

Here, the interviewee spoke about the limitations of the decentralisation process in Cameroon. He talked about its consolidation at the centre and not at the grassroots which is supposed to be the prime beneficiary.

SL	TL
6 Si un ministère transfère deux cent mille francs dans son transfère de compétence, ça n'aura pas d'impacte sur la commune.	If a ministry transfers two hundred thousand francs in its transfer of competence, this will not have any impact.

In example 6, the translator-adapter leaves out a portion of the original speech. The omitted part clearly provokes a loss of meaning because when we look at the end of the sentence, we notice that there is a semantic unit lacking. The French version ends thus «...ça n'aura pas d'impacte sur la commune».

The translator-adapter decided to omit the phrase «...sur la commune» rendering the English version instead as "...this will not have any impact". Given that the sentence is incomplete, we tend to ask ourselves the question; impact on whom or what? The answer will be "...on the local council". The sentence should read thus: "If a ministry transfers two hundred thousand francs in its transfer of competence, this will not have any impact on the local council".

Omission

This term, referred to by Vinay and Darbelnet (1969) as loss of meaning or entropy, is a case where a word in the source language is not translated in the target language. The difference between omission and shortening is that omission is when a word or expression is left out due to its absence in the TL whereas shortening is when a part of the semantic content is lost for reasons

best known to the translator. In the corpus, we noticed cases where the omission in the TL caused a loss in meaning. See example 7.

Example 7

In this interview, a relative of an accident victim is telling us how her niece was involved in an accident and lost her life in

SL	TL
7 C'est comme ça qu'on a commencé à s'inquiéter, on a commencé à la chercher, toute la nuit on n'a pas dormit. Et ce matin nous nous sommes rendus d'abord aux urgences à l'hôpital Central où on nous a renseignées...	That was when we began to worry. We got here this morning at around eleven a.m. and when we got to the mortuary we recognized her body.

the process. She tells us how they managed to know about her demise.

This example illustrates a typical case of omission which has an impact on the message of the TL. It is obvious from what the woman said, that when the family of the missing girl, could not contact their niece, they went to the emergency unit of the Central Hospital. This idea is expressed by the word «d'abord» which has been left out in the TL. Instead, the TL expresses the idea of them reaching the hospital and going to the mortuary. Secondly, «hôpital Central» is left out and translated as "here" thus causing one to ask what the word "here" refers to.

Use of deceptive similarities

From a semantic point of view, according to Vinay and Darbelnet (1969), deceptive similarities are those words that resemble one another by their etymology and their form which have developed different meaning in the course of their evolution in two different languages and civilizations. Vinay and Darbelnet (1969) further talk about partial deceptive similarities which refer to those words that have different meanings when applied in a particular context. In the current corpus, instances where those words that could mean the same thing in a particular context, but have different meanings in the context in which they have been used in the corpus are highlighted in example 8.

Example 8

As earlier mentioned, the interviewee is a CPDM militant who narates how their party president started his career as a politician.

	SL	TL
8	Le président Biya, il est chez lui dans le Littoral, et particulièrement en Sanaga Maritime où il a fait ses premiers pas au séminaire.	President Biya is at home in the Littoral, particularly in the Sanaga Maritime Division, where he made his first move in a Seminar in the Catholic mission.

In example 8, the word “seminar” in English is a false friend of the French word «séminaire» in terms of meaning in the context, because “seminar” refers to a forum where people meet to study or discuss something. The French version, «séminaire» refers to a college for training people to become priests and from the president’s biography; we learn that he spent part of his youth at a seminary in Sanaga Maritime. Therefore, the correct translation in English should have been “seminary” which also refers to a college that trains people to become priest.

Divergence

Vinay and Darbelnet (1969) define divergence as «*Tout écart entre deux langues rapprochées, qu’il s’agisse du sens, des valeurs stylistiques, de la structure ou de la métalinguistique*». Here, they refer to words in the TL that do not render the exact meaning of the SL. In the corpus, two cases where the translator-adapter used a word in English that did not adequately express the idea portrayed in the French language were highlighted (example 9).

Example 9

The interviewee is a local authority who is involved with the registration process for the October 2011 elections in Cameroon.

	SL	TL
9	...de croire et s’il fallait trouver un secret à cela, je dirais que c’est le déploiement sur le terrain	...beginning with traditional rulers who encourage people to register. The number of people wanting to register has increased these last days.

In this example, the translator-adapter makes use of divergence thus causing a change in the message of the SL. He translates the phrase «*déploiement sur le terrain*» as “has increased these last days” which does not appropriately translate the original message. The original speaker is actually saying that the reason why many more people are registering for the elections is just because there has been much sensitization going on in the field. The translated speech instead expresses the idea of an increased number of people in the last days of registration for the polls which is a different idea from that expressed in the original speech.

Discussion and Conclusion

It is evident that AVT, including voice-over is still embryonic in Cameroon. It has been researched and proven that AVT has many virtues that can benefit Cameroonians; for instance, AVT is a translation tool which promotes bilingualism and multilingualism. It facilitates language learning, language acquisition, literacy training and academic literacy (Ayonghe, 2009), and is therefore an important translation mode.

A comparison between voice-over methods in Europe (Orero, 2004) and in Cameroon (Enow, 2012), shows that the two procedures differ in the sense that in Europe, interviews are usually recorded with two cameras consequently, there are two recordings, two soundtracks and two different sets of images: one with the interviewer and the sound which is picked up through his microphone and another one with the interviewee’s image and the sound picked up through his microphone. In Cameroon, the journalist goes to the field with one cameraman who videotapes the interview between the interviewer and interviewee. This camera picks up the sound of the interviewer and that of the interviewee as well as the images. The final product obtained is a video with two soundtracks, but with one image.

Another comparison of the standard voice-over procedure by Luyken *et al.* (1991) further indicates

that Cameroon is still lagging behind in terms of voice-over mode. This means that CRTV still lacks professionally trained personnel, as well as professional equipment needed for that type of production. There is also lack of will and focus on the part of those in charge of voice-over production in CRTV. That is probably why most voice-over programmes in CRTV are generally poorly done: (i) Professional translators are not involved in the production process, most of the time; (ii) The field is invaded by quacks; (iii) Voice-over in CRTV is done by journalists who are not trained in the art of translation; and lastly (iv) There is lack of investments from CRTV and many media houses. Meanwhile voice-over is cheaper and more affordable to countries with low income like Cameroon. It renders the audiovisual product authentic if correctly translated as the viewers have the opportunity of getting both the original soundtrack as well as its translated version. It is accessible to everyone irrespective of their level of literacy, and is not as demanding, compared to other AVT modes.

Therefore, leaving voice-over in the hands of journalists and not competent translators could be disastrous finally, because the procedure involves not only experienced translators but also other trained persons like sound technicians and editors. The media houses in general, and CRTV in particular, would gain more by sending some of these sound technicians and editors for refresher courses in AVT and most especially in voice-over.

This study has demonstrated that the practice of voice-over in Cameroon in general, and in CRTV in particular has failed to respect the required norms as promoted by the propounders of the voice-over mode. This calls for more research and practical work to be done in voice-over mode in the country.

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