



Case Study

Eco-Introducing audio visual translation to the Sri Lankan University curriculum: a study based on subtitling the Japanese film 100 Yen Love in to Sinhala Language

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Abstract

Records indicate that a cartoon named “Little Claus and Big Claus” which was telecasted on the 15th of February 1985 was the first Sinhala dubbed television program in Sri Lanka. Even though it is almost thirty years passed since 1985, it is visible that the Sri Lankan field of Dubbing Translation has not gained any consequential touch as an entity of academic research. We can witness that the translators involve as dubbing and subtitling script writers are mostly those who have qualified in only the language proficiency but not the skills needed for the script writing. “The Jewel in the Palace” (Korea), “Oshin” (Japan) and “Dong Yi” (Korea) are classic examples for recently telecasted Tele-dramas. This research is based on the subtitling script of the Japanese film “100 Yen Love” by Take Masaharu, which was translated in to Sinhala by the author of this research. It is a contrastive analysis of the original Japanese script, author’s translation and the final production. Translating cultural terms, word limit and number of lines in a single frame were challenges as the author lacks the skills and techniques of subtitling. Audio Visual Translation (AVT) is given less attention in Sri Lanka, when compared to the other forms of literary translations. Many of the translators have not completely realized the complexity of composing a subtitling script or a dubbing script, which seeks an economical use of words and phrases. Translators who are involved in Dubbing Translation require special skills and techniques other than the literary translators who work on printed forms of literature. As some universities in Sri Lanka offer Translation Studies as a subject, the author recommends increasing the weightage of credits for Audio Visual Translation as a specialized course unit under the Translation Studies for those who are willing to be the translators in dubbing and subtitling fields.

Keywords: Dubbing and subtitling, translation studies, 100 Yen Love, ScriptWriting, course units.

Introduction

Records highlights that the cartoon “Little Claus and Big Claus” by the Danish writer Hans Christian Andersen (Denmark, 1835) which was telecasted in Sri Lanka as “Loku Baas Podi Baas” on the 15th of February 1985¹ through the channel Sri Lanka Rupavahini, was the first Sinhala dubbed cartoon in Sri Lanka, though the unrecorded history of dubbing dates back to the year 1979². Sri Lanka Rupavahini Cooperation, the state television channel of Sri Lanka, was the pioneering television channel to establish the first professional dubbing studio and to telecast the Sinhala dubbed foreign Tele dramas and cartoons to the Sri Lankan audience for the first time³. It was the opening of a new cultural experience of entertaining the masterpieces of foreign literature in their own language.

“The Rupavahini holds the record as the first channel to dub foreign Tele dramas into Sinhala, and the world famous Japanese creation Oshin, a gift from the Japan Foundation was dubbed into Sinhala and became the most popular. At present there is a surge of such dubbed films whatever its quality”³.

Malgudi Days-India⁴, The Count of Monte Cristo-France⁵, Les Misérables-France⁶, Dr. Doolittle-USA⁷, Oshin-Japan⁸, The Famous Five-United Kingdom⁹, Beary’s Family Album-USA¹⁰ are some of the classic examples for the impressive Tele dramas and cartoons which were dubbed in to Sinhala under the supervision of the renowned dubbing director Titus Thotawaththa. It gained a huge popularity during the period of 80’s and 90’s and that was a momentous era of the dubbing history in Sri Lanka.

After several years of silence, the dubbing unit of Sri Lanka Rupavahini Cooperation was successful in regaining the huge popularity they had, by re-telecasting Oshin (Japan) from 6.30-7.30pm on weekdays in 2012. At the end of Oshin, they replaced the time slot by a newly dubbed Korean Tele drama “The Jewel in the Palace”¹¹, which brought an unexpected boom throughout the country. The 6.30-7.30 pm time slot became the prime time attracting every section of the Sri Lankan audience³. The story of Sujatha Dhiyani became an explosive subject as almost all the families got used to sit around the television

during 6.30pm to 7.30pm on weekdays. It had made a tremendous impact on the lifestyles of the commoners in Sri Lanka¹². At this juncture, Athula Ransirilal, as the director of the dubbing unit, decided to maintain the huge popularity even after the end of telecasting Sujatha Dhiyani. He consulted the Embassy of Korea and received another Korean Tele series named “Dong Yi”¹³. The popularity of the 6.30-7.30 time belt continued, and as a result, the dubbing unit faced a high demand for the historical Korean and Chinese Tele dramas and faced a surge to compose the dubbing scripts in a comparatively high speed. At this point dubbing unit recruited university undergraduates as freelance dubbing script writers. The author of this paper was one of those undergraduates. The freelancers soon realized that the competency in foreign languages does not serve as the sole qualification to be a dubbing script writer. They lacked the training of writing Lip Sync Dubbing scripts.

Dubbing/Subtitling as an Academic Discipline in Sri Lanka:

Even though it is almost thirty years passed since 1985, it is visible that the Sri Lankan field of Dubbing Translation (Audio Visual Translation-AVT) has not gained any consequential touch as an entity of academic research^{14,15}.

“But due to the complexity of the field of dubbing and various factors like the high amount of cost for a dubbing production, lack of human and technical resources available in the country, the field of dubbing has not developed in Sri Lanka, compared to other countries who telecast AVT products based on dubbing”¹⁴.

During the past decades, AVT has been newly introduced to the discipline of Translation Studies in many parts of the world and has shown a rapid growth as a branch of Translation Studies. Since its polysemiotic nature, AVT is a rapidly growing field of research in the world¹⁵.

Even though the history of Translations in Sri Lanka dates back to the time when Buddhism was introduced to Sri Lanka¹⁶, only three universities among the fifteen state universities in Sri Lanka offers Translation Studies as an academic discipline. Among these three, University of Kelaniya offers “Introduction to Audio-Visual Translation” as a compulsory course unit whereas in the University of Sabaragamuwa, a similar course unit is included as an optional course unit, but due to the unavailability of resource persons, it is not offered at Sabaragamuwa University at the moment^{17,18}. The above mentioned university curricula can be furnished as follows.

TRL 413(3) Introduction to Audio Visual Translation: An Introduction to Audio Visual Translation, Lip Synchronization and Semantic Translation in Dubbing, Techniques Used in Dubbing, Sub Titling, Transcription. Field study will be an integral part of this course unit.

TRSP 42572 Introduction to Audio-visual translation: Investigate techniques used in lip synchronization and semantic

translation in dubbing. Confront with problems in dubbing e.g. time frame management. Do sub-titling without distorting nuances of meaning of the original. i. Techniques in Dubbing and Subtitling. ii. Original videos and their dubbed versions. Discussions, Group activities, Audio and Video presentations.

As of 2017, the only academic paths available were these study courses at the universities of Sabaragamuwa and Kelaniya. It was visible that the translators involved as dubbing and subtitling script writers in both state and private television channels were mostly those who have qualified only in the language proficiency but not in the skills needed for the script writing. Apart from the above mentioned curricula in the two state universities, the only job oriented academy in public sector was the Sri Lanka Media Training Institute (SLMTI) until 2017¹⁹. Athula Ransirilal, the director of dubbing unit at Sri Lanka Rupavahini, was retired from his post in 2017 and has started “Lanka Television and Radio Academy” in 2018 on his own. Furthermore, encapsulating his long experience in dubbing industry, he composed a book titled “*Handakeweem kalaawa* (The Art of Dubbing)”²⁰ as the first-ever academic book on the subject of dubbing in Sri Lanka available in Sinhalese²⁰. It can be identified as a new aspiration for the future dubbing and subtitling artists.

Literature Review: The history of translations in Sri Lanka dates back to the time when Buddhism was introduced to Sri Lanka²¹. Most of the religious books was translated to Sinhala from Pali and Sanskrit languages. Translation is the process of expressing word or texts from one language to another. The original language which the text is written is identified as Source Language (SL) and the different language which the original text is going to be translated is identified as Target Language (TL).

According to Perera²² and Karunathilake²², a translator can be mentioned as a re-creator because the translator’s task is to recreate the source text to be understandable by a completely different audience. We can identify Audio Visual Translation (AVT) as a new branch of Translation Studies. According to Jayamanne²², translation in the television media has created some new methods in AVT called as Subtitles, Lip-synch dubbing, Action-synch dubbing and Background Narration. Audio Visual Translation employs a vast range of audio visual products as films, Tele dramas, cartoons, advertisements and all sorts of genres in electronic media¹⁴. AVT too can be mentioned as a recreational task, as the translator has to match the source program to the cultural background of the target audience. Thus, these limitations may affect the creativity²³. Translation in electronic media is given less attention in Sri Lanka, when compared to the other forms of literal translations. There is a complete difference between composing a subtitling/dubbing script, which seeks an economical use of words, and translating written materials as novels and magazines²². Translators involved in Dubbing/Subtitling Translation, require special skills and techniques other than the literal translators who work on printed forms of literature.

“The skills required for subtitling and those required for translation are different. Mastering and applying these skills take a long time. AVT translator has to apply these skills within a strictly limited time and space”²⁴. “It is then of paramount importance to note that the skills involved in negotiating meaning across languages in subtitling are quite different from those required in translation”²⁵

According to Ransirilal², Dubbing/Subtitling Translation can be identified as an inter-cultural study. Furthermore he has specified it as a thorough study of the target language and source language, and taking the two languages to new dimensions as well.

As the dubbing/subtitling translation has to be specific on the number of lines, words and time duration, Kramitroglou²⁴ has introduced some common guidelines for the European television industry.

“The general practice of the production and layout of TV subtitles should be guided by the aim to provide maximum appreciation and comprehension of the target film as a whole by maximizing the legibility and readability of the inserted subtitled text. A maximum of two lines of subtitles should be presented at a time. Each subtitle line should allow around 35 characters in order to be able to accommodate a satisfactory portion of the (translated) spoken text”²⁴.

An Indonesian researcher, Frida Maslahah²⁶ has pointed out that the cultural background of both source language and target language is highly important in order to interpret the ambiguous phrases.

“Context is needed to interpret utterances or sentences from source language to target language, because without context, the sentences could have variation meaning. However, some people blatantly say unclear utterance and wish the hearers could infer them by themselves. This phenomenon is called maxim flouts”²⁶.

Hypothesis: i. Sri Lankan dubbing and subtitling field has passed a long way without a substantial touch of an academic entity. ii. There is a necessity to combine the field of dubbing and subtitling in Sri Lanka, with the academic field of research.

Objectives: i. To identify the research gap in Audio Visual Translation in Sri Lanka. ii. To identify the lack of academically trained script writers in the field of AVT in Sri Lanka. iii. To make a link between the academics and the actual work environment in AVT.

Methodology

This research is mainly based on the subtitle script of the Japanese film “100 Yen Love” (2014) by Masaharu Take, which was translated to Sinhala by the author of this research. It is a

contrastive analysis of the original Japanese script, author’s translation and the final production. Apart from the case study method, this research utilizes mixed methods. As very few academic studies are available in the Sri Lankan context, numerous journal articles, newspaper articles and unpublished thesis are sufficiently used in this study. A key informant and one book were used as well.

Results and discussion

The film 100 Yen Love was directed by a prominent film director in modern Japan, Masaharu Take. It has won several Awards inside Japan, and was selected as the Japanese entry for the Best Foreign Language Film at the 88th Academy Awards but it was not nominated. In 2018, The Kizuna International, a private business company in Sri Lanka, organized a large scale carnival named “Expo-Japan 2018”, and parallel they organized a Japanese film festival as well. As a Japanese Language Lecturer, the author of this research was requested to subtitle one of the films in to Sinhala, which was “100 Yen Love”²⁷ by Masaharu Take.

At the beginning of the film, the protagonist ‘Ichiko’ plays a video game with her sister’s son. They have a conversation where he says something about ragging. In Sri Lankan context ragging in primary schools cannot be understood by most of the Sri Lankans. Therefore the translator had to replace it with different phrases²⁷. According to Karamitroglou²⁴ there are five possible alternatives to transfer culture specific linguistic elements. They are Cultural transfer, transposition, transposition with explanation, neutralization and omission. The author omitted the phrases related to ragging. In another scene, there was a mention on sex toys and the author omitted it as well. But according to Karamitroglou²⁴, taboo words should not be censored unless its frequent repetition affects the text economy. There is a dialogue about ‘Mixi’, a social network in Japan completely similar to Facebook. But Sri Lankans are not familiar with this network. So the author replaced Mixi with Facebook. But as it is subtitled, the audience does not hear the sound of the word ‘Facebook’²⁷. According to Ransirilal², it is expected that the script writer would pay attention to the sounds of names of people and places, so that the audience can see and hear the word simultaneously. There is a scene of a girl, a street vendor, who sells *Tofu* (bean curd). She uses a phrase unique to Japanese culture, which literally means ‘if you are a man you would better eat tofu, if you are a woman, still you would better eat tofu.’ Sri Lankan audience would not be able to understand this phrase if it was translated word-to-word. Therefore the author has replaced the phrase with a saying which is unique to Sri Lankan culture²⁷. It is according to the theory of Cultural Transfer suggested by Karamitroglou in 1998²⁴. Finally, when compared to the final production, author’s script had some considerable deviations related to the limit of lines and number of words. Author’s subtitles were somewhat lengthy and the producer had to edit those to fit the accepted standards.

Selecting a Japanese Language Lecturer as a subtitling script writer can be considered a better option but not the best, as language lecturers are proficient in the particular foreign language and its cultural background but are not proficient in the skills needed for subtitling. If a script writer from a television channel were selected upon a lecturer, he may lack the understanding of Japanese culture and the cultural connotations of the language spoken in the film.

Therefore, through this study it is realized that the language studies and the AVT still exist as two different streams, and it had lead the Sri Lankan AVT field to be most untouched by academic researchers. The author herself has realized her own limitations in writing the subtitling script of the Japanese film, "100 Yen Love".

Conclusion

Translators who are engaged in audio visual productions, require special skills, techniques, creativity and also most importantly the understanding of the cultural background of Source Language and Target Language. Hence it is recommended that the dubbing/subtitling script writers should undergo a well-designed study program which includes both theory and practice. There is a lack of coordination between the academic field and the dubbing/subtitling units of television channels in Sri Lanka. The author recommends a combination of the two streams as it will be an inspiration to present more successful productions in future.

Further Work: A project is proposed to the University of Sabaragamuwa by the author to enhance the popularity of the Audio Visual Translation as a subject among the undergraduates. Author expects to invite Mr. Athula Ransirilal, former director of dubbing/subtitling at Sri Lanka Rupavahini Cooperation and the present director of the Lanka Television and Radio Academy, as a resource person for the above mentioned project. As the initial step, it is expected to implement the above mentioned TRL 413 course unit which is currently limited only to the students hand book. The proposed project is to select a Japanese Tele series and to compose the subtitle/dubbing script as a practical component of TRL 413 (Introduction to Audio Visual Translation). The author suggests that it will be better if both Translation Studies (TRL) students and Japanese Studies (JPN) students in the Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lankawould be engaged in this project, as the collective attempt of the two groups will definitely be a fruitful attempt. Currently Japanese Studies (JPN) students follow a course unit named JPN 315 – Theory and Practice of Translations. The lecturers of Japanese at the Sabaragamuwa University contemplate a curriculum revision to be implemented with the next intake of students. Hence the lecturers plan a modification for the JPN 315 course unit in order to make it easy to combine it with the TRL 413 course unit. Consequently the above mentioned AVT project could be smoothly designed

involving both Japanese Studies students and the Translation Studies students.

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