

# Minimizing Cultural Manipulation in Audiovisual Translation-based Language Learning through Adaptation

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## Abstract

Audiovisual translation has recently received a considerable attention, particularly by FL teaching and learning theorists. While learners try to focus on the linguistic input, culture overrides other considerations. Audiovisual Text-based language learning, particularly if MT-rendered, serves as a source of cultural and ideological manipulation through the emphasis on, and literal rendering of, the Source Language Text. AVT issues go beyond language, simple entertainment and formal linguistic norms, into broader cultural and ideological locus of argument, whether they are rendered by means of humans, or a machine. Subtitling, being a less costly type of AVT, compared to dubbing, literally transmits to learners the most hazardous nuances of the Source Language culture. Even-Zohar -in her Polysystem Theory- states that, "... I conceive of translated literature not only as an integral system within any literary polysystem, but as a most active system within it", underlining the fact that Audiovisual texts, being a type of literary texts, also interact as active systems that necessitates mitigating learners' exposition to such a system activity. Ensuring that the audiovisual texts to be used in language learning settings are rendered by human translators, not by machines, is necessary to avoid or diminish, learners' direct exposure to the polysystem activity of the Source Text in question, so as to drive the learners' attention towards the linguistic aspects of the audiovisual text, maintain the aims of the AVT-based language learning setting. It is, indeed, seems impossible to provide concrete guidelines pertaining to the use of AVT in individual learning settings, yet in directed AVT use in classrooms, teachers are highly recommended to use covert translations rather than the ones that violates cultural norms, particularly those rendered by a machine. Educational policymakers are urged to emphasize the use of censored audiovisual materials that are also covertly translated in a way that maintain learners' own culture, moral values and social norms.

**Keywords:** Audiovisual Translation, Adaptation, Culture, Manipulation, Language Learning

## Introduction

Audio-Visual or film translation are terms that are interchangeably used by various translation scholars. [Giampieri \(2016\)](#) defines film translation as "screen, multimedia, or audiovisual translation (AVT)", further defining dubbing as, "the act of applying re-voicing techniques to cover the original utterances and match the lip movement". Audio-Visual materials have recently been given optimum weight and met with an unprecedented academic interest by translation scholars in the past few years. Dubbing and subtitling are the two major types of Audio-Visual works known and dealt with by the majority of audience all over the world. Audio-Visual Translation refers to the transferring of an AV content from one linguistic code into another, mostly through dubbing, or subtitling. AV works, whether dubbed or subtitled, are abundantly produced and disseminated through various media channels to random and/or targeted type of audience. English-subtitled AV works, in particular, are currently under copious research in the domain of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning.

Despite the fact that AVT is torrentially practiced, by professionals, amateurs or directly by means of a Machine translation software, yet, according to [Munday \(2016\)](#) “audiovisual translation was more or less overlooked by translation theory”. The advent of digital technology, with the rapid commercialisation on DVD of films and other audiovisual material, led to a proliferation of companies working almost exclusively in subtitling..., [Cintas \(2012\)](#) emphasizes, denoting the “...inexhaustible need for professional subtitlers.”

Addressing the issue of audiovisual works, whether dubbed or subtitled, definitely red-flags the processes that take place within every single AV material. Such processes comprise what this paper refers to as the ‘polysystem activity’. By using this term, this paper seeks to highlight the processes and activities associated with the understanding, and thereafter rendering, of the AV material within its linguistic and cultural framework, that directly influence with whole stages of the AV text reproduction in any target language. The message communicated to a new set of receptors by means of AV translation, is subjected to a continuous strand of polysystem activities. Even-Zohar’s Polysystem Theory conceives of translated literature “...not only as an integral system within any literary polysystem, but as a most active system within it” Referring to the polystsem activities, then, indicates the active system within such work types.

### Theoretical Framework

This paper emphasizes the importance of investigating cultural and ideological manipulation in AVT within the context of the use of Audio-visual texts as a source of learning second or foreign languages, particularly by fragile age groups, i.e. teens.

In emphasis on the same, [Even-Zohar \(2021\)](#), states the following:

*“My argument is that translated works do correlate in at least two ways: (a) in the way their source texts are selected by the target literature, the principles of selection never being uncorrelatable with the home co-systems of the target literature (to put it in the most cautious way); and (b) in the way they adopt specific norms, behaviors, and policies – in short, in their use of the literary repertoire – which results from their*

*relations with the other home co-systems. These are not confined to the linguistic level only, but are manifest on any selection level as well. Thus, translated literature may possess a repertoire of its own, which to a certain extent could even be exclusive to it. (See Toury 1985 and 1985a.)”*

Studying the cultural manipulation in audiovisual texts, necessitates observing such texts’ polysystem activity and seeking ways to mitigate the possible effects on learners using AV texts as a source of language learning. In this paper, Even-Zohar’s polysystem is related to audiovisual works in the sense that, like any other literary texts, deep in AV materials there exists an inner activity of a system of ‘ins and outs’ that is liable to tamper with the learner’s system of culture, values and norms. If not properly administered as classroom activities, the inherited polysystem activities of AV works, thus, are likely to interfere in learners’ own beliefs and culture.

Chaume, as cited in ([Bartolomé & Cabrera, 2005](#)) enumerates varieties of reasons for choosing different AVT types, such as the language status; local habits and traditions in response to change; cultural reasons in multilingual societies that might recommend the original soundtrack, as in the Netherlands; finally, political or historical reasons (underpopulated countries such as Finland are used to subtitling). [Bartolomé and Cabrera \(2005\)](#) further claim that, one AVT type is better than the other, but it partly accounts for the distribution of AVT modes throughout countries.

Referring to dubbing, the procedures of which comprise translation, then performance by professional voice-overs, ...etc., [Bartolomé and Cabrera \(2005\)](#) define the role of the translator of such a type of AVT, stating that, “the translator is only involved in the translation process and rarely in the other steps”. Namely, after converting the spoken ST into a written one, the translator abandons the job to be furthered by other teamwork of actors/actresses. In the same respect, [Sukmaningrum et al. \(2022\)](#) assert that, “The cultural problem in translation becomes even more challenging in the process of dubbing. The dubbed version of the scene, however, is quite different from the text translation”.

Subtitling, on the other hand, can be rendered intra-lingually, or inter-lingually. [Bartolomé and](#)

[Cabrera \(2005\)](#) define Intralingual subtitling, as “... the transfer of the dialogues into text in the same language, but with the necessary synchronization constraints. It is similar to the SDH, but not exactly the same: intralingual subtitling is aimed at L2 learners and people with slight listening disabilities, and does not involve extralinguistic features”. Subtitling addressed by AVT research, is often associated with inter-lingual translation settings. Rendering an AV text from its Source (original) language into any Target language, necessitates considering aspects that surmounts trivial nuances of grammar, semantics, syntax and morphology of the SL! It stands at the crossroads of language, culture and translation.

### Materials and Methods

This paper investigates the menacing impact of AVT on receptors, particularly the teenage class, when rendered without any consideration for such social and/or ideological effects of the respective AVT content, namely, by means of a machine or when deliberately made to heighten and instigate such an influence. The imminent effects of MT-rendered AVT works can be avoided, or rather mitigated, by adopting translation techniques that abandons subjectivity and bias for the sole interest of protecting TL receptors against any possible social, cultural and/or ideological manipulation. Adapting the SL culture and social norms to fit the expectations of the TL receptor’s social needs and expectations is proposed through ‘Adaptation’. Getting exposed to MT-rendered AVT content is liable, in the long run, to endanger the social values of the TL receptors. Even AI-supported translation widgets are not trustworthy when it comes to the influence of AVT. Adapting the TL values serves to mitigate such effects and, thus, diminishes the volume of manipulation occurring at the level of social and cultural norms of the TL receptors. Other strategies and techniques such as omission, addition, and domestication/foreignization, can also be used to help alleviating the effects of the audiovisual works’ polysystem activity.

Still, a number of challenges exist in using AV materials in language learning settings. Ethical concerns in omitting or adapting the Source

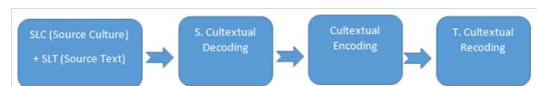
Language culture might be a controversial issue associated with culturally-manipulated translations.

### Results

Since “different text types require different translation strategies”, according to [Khazrouni \(2017\)](#), each AV content needs to be approached differently, observing the presence of any possible cultural or ideological disparities between those of the SL and its intended TL. Therefore, House’s covert translation is to be sought to overcome such a type of difficulties.

[House \(2006\)](#) refers to covert translation as “...a translation that is made to appear as a second original”. House further explains that “...translation is covert because it is not marked pragmatically as a translation at all, but may, conceivably, have been created in its own right”. In the same vein, [Khazrouni \(2017\)](#) indicates that,

*“This idea is echoed by House’s distinction between overt translation and covert translation. An overt translation is required whenever the source text is linked to the source language and its culture. A covert translation is closely linked to the target language. It enjoys the status of an original source text in the target language. In covert translation, functional equivalence is essential because it involves subtle cultural presuppositions which necessitate the application of a cultural filter”.*



**Figure 1 Interlingual Source vs Target Culture/ Text Compromise**

From Figure 1, it can be concluded that an AV text, since it has been designed to mirror the Source Culture, transferring such a text to a TL audience necessitates representing that culture in a different linguistic code to efficiently transfer the cultural information inherited in the SL-AV content through the assigned Norm of the intended speech event.

### Discussion

#### Uncensored AVT (AVT by Amateurs and/or Translation Widgets)

Free translation softwares have made subtitling even more accessible and in an accelerated use by

monolingual cinematic work viewers. Most Arab teens are often almost indulged in abundantly watching machine-translated Korean and Chinese AV works. English movies have also find their way Arabic subtitling. AVT is undeniably ideologically and culturally influential when rendered by means of amateurs, yet, it is even devastating when solely rendered by means of a machine. AVT is, indeed, the most challenging type of translation. [Chabbak \(2019\)](#) emphasizes that, “In AVT, the overlapping of text and image, and the interaction of semantic and semiotic signs, verbal and nonverbal codes, add to the challenges of translation”.

[Chabbak \(2019\)](#) explains that, “In transfer modes like subtitling and voice-over, manipulative translation is much more conspicuous and palpable given the simultaneous accessibility to both the source text and target text by the audience, in addition to the visual material”, additionally stating that, “This bicultural situation challenges the translator’s subtlety, intelligence, vigilance and choices”. ‘Bicultural situation’ referred to in this paper, can be defined as “a situation in which two different cultures operate in a single textual flow during one of the critical phases of its translation into a different language, being constantly prone to controversial cultural activity practiced during such processes, where only one culture is assumed to survive”. Culture, being an ‘intricately-interwoven’ texture in language, makes an entirely successful co-existence between the source and the target cultures the least possible, if not possible at all.

### **Ideological Influence of AVT**

Hawkins, cf ([Borumand et al., 2018](#)), stipulates that, “... the ideology is a set of beliefs which the experiences and expectations of the people are influenced by.” AVT is currently regarded as a major source of ‘ideology’ and social change. Rapid and, even, radical social change is ongoing as direct repercussions of such a reality. [Cintas \(2012\)](#) observes that, “Today, few would disagree with the fact that society is fully immersed in an era of digital and audiovisual communication.” In the same respect, [Borumand et al. \(2018\)](#) asserts that, “As it is obvious, nowadays people are under the influence of media such as the famous international movies. Thus,

the translation of these movies, whether subtitling or dubbing, plays an important role in conveying or manipulating the ideology.”

Considering the imminent threat lies in the teens’ frequent exposure to uncensored AV content, it irrefutably spews a sort of personality traits that departs from the cultural norms of the aggregate. Weird haircuts, whimsical manners, off-color moods, ...etc. are, but, odious repercussions of getting exposed to such an influential content. Being both an, aural as well as visual, content, AV materials are liable to have a more latent impact upon its addressees or receptors, adding more effects of acoustics, various sounds and images on their minds and, regrettably, souls.

Emphasizing the undeniable influence of translation, being a sort of ‘social activity’, [Cintas \(2012\)](#) asserts that, “...translation is not carried out in a vacuum and cannot, therefore, be exempt from a certain degree of subjectivity and bias on the part of the translator and the rest of the agents involved in the translational process.” Considering AVT, the volume of such ‘subjectivity and bias’ is even higher and intentional, having the agents involved, being the author/s of the original artistic work/s, producer/s, translator/s...etc. collectively seek to serve and maintain their own agendas and goals. Wu, cf ([Weng & Weng, 2021](#)), states that,

*“When college students are affected by bad ideas, they will spread quickly on campus. The network of colleges and universities is vulnerable to hacker attacks, which can easily affect the correct understanding of network ideology by college students. At the same time, many college students’ acceptance of network information is fragmented and one-sided, which affects their understanding of mainstream ideology to a large extent, and leads to deviations between many of their concepts and reality.”*

The Digital Era witnessed a rapid indulgence of individuals into such type of electro-social practices, accelerating the volume of direct exposure to everything that relates to everywhere. Platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, ... etc. kept the door ajar on such rapidly fluctuating and contradicting human aspects. Cinematic works are ceaselessly released either dubbed or, unstintingly, subtitled. Most MT-subtitled works are presented on a plate of gold to teens, where they can practice an unprecedented

freedom out of the sight of their guardians, directly watching AV works that mostly and deliberately give the upper hand to the SL culture and ideology. Fresh AVT receptors, namely teens and even naïve housewives, are often left unprotected against any such possible threats.

Barnes, cf ([Borumand et al., 2018](#)), emphasizes that, "...during a translation, the ideology of the source text might be manipulated or lost because of the translator's disability to transfer the ideology of source language text to target language text or due to the translator's decision during his work, which can be called as the translator's style."

### AVT: Bias or Manipulation

To maintain a proper, or even a perfect semantic equivalent of the Source Language context, [Sukmaningrum et al. \(2022\)](#) state that, a translator must go beyond the superficial meaning of the words. AVT goes even further in that respect, compelling the translator to surrender to constraints that go beyond the Source and Target languages' traditional aspects.

Whether carried out consciously or unconsciously, willingly or unwillingly, [Cintas \(2012\)](#) affirms that, in the transfer from the source to the target language subjectivity shifts will probably occur, provoking the displacement of part of the original meaning... [Cintas \(2012\)](#) further asserts the fact that, Migrating from a passive role as mere transmitters of information, translators are now considered to be active agents participating in the shaping of the ideological discourse of their culture, whose system of values they may consciously or unconsciously accept, contributing to their dissemination or subversion.

### Suggestions

#### Maintaining Cultural Norms through Adaptation

"The translation technique that enables the translator to replace the cultural element of the source language (SL) with one of the target languages (TL) is adaptation.", [Sukmaningrum et al. \(2022\)](#) emphasize. In the same respect, more recently, Pedersen, cf ([Munday, 2016](#)), has carried out a detailed investigation of linguistic norms of subtitling for television using a corpus of 100 Anglophone films subtitled into Danish and Swedish in an attempt

to circumvent the problem of individual case studies. The model of analysis is centred on 'extralinguistic cultural references (ECRs)' and the translation 'strategies' employed: retention, specification, direct translation, generalization, substitution, omission or the use of an official equivalent. In this way, it is made clear that AVT theories are assumed to handle most latent problems pertaining to SL-TL cultural assimilation.

Snell-Hornby, cf ([Leonardi, 2000](#)) does not believe that linguistics is the only discipline which enables people to carry out a translation, since translating involves different cultures and different situations at the same time and they do not always match from one language to another. As cited in ([Leonardi, 2000](#)), and in discussing equivalence in translation, [Snell-Hornby \(1988\)](#) considers the concept of equivalence in translation as being an illusion, further asserting that the translation process cannot simply be reduced to a linguistic exercise -referring to Catford as an instance- since there are also other factors, such as textual, cultural and situational aspects, which should be taken into consideration when translating. [Sukmaningrum et al. \(2022\)](#) emphasizes that adaptation "...is usually used when something specific culturally in one language occurs, and the translator cannot find its equivalent in the target culture. By using this technique, the translator replaces ST cultural element with one from the target culture. It is a shift in cultural context." In the same source, the other names of adaptation technique are introduced, namely: cultural equivalent (Newmark, 1988), 'cultural substitution' (Baker, 2011), and 'cultural equalization' (Hoed, 2006), stating that all terms "share the same concept."

#### Maintaining TT's Cultural Identity through Adaptation

The same as the identity of the Source Language is made dominant, TL, as well, seeks the maintain the same. Each receptor expects and has the right to get exposed to appropriate social and cultural norms and practices. The unquestioned diffusion of AV works rendered into verities of languages by means of free translation applications, aggravates and has made the situation even worse. [Kim \(2007\)](#) emphasizes that, "Given the wide range of differing conceptual



and methodological approaches being examined, the term cultural identity is employed broadly to include related concepts such as subcultural, national, ethnolinguistic, and racial identity.” Kim further explains that, “Cultural identity also designates both a sociological or demographic classification, as well as an individual’s psychological identification with a particular group.” This basic reality of assimilation is explained in Kim’s integrative communication theory of cross-cultural adaptation ([Kim, 2007](#)). This theory explains that, “through extensive, intensive, and cumulative experiences of intercultural communication, an individual’s original cultural identity undergoes a gradual transformation.”

Adapting the SL culture to fit the TL receptor expectations, is highly required in AVT. Adaptation is defined by [Khazrouni \(2017\)](#) as, “the changes translators need to make in the source text so that it suits the target readers’ needs and situation.” In the same vein, Raw, cf ([Khazrouni, 2017](#)) explains the importance of adaptation as follows: Whether it is consciously carried out by a translator or not, successful adaptation allows (or even forces) the target readers to discover the text in a way that suits its aim, ensures the optimal reception experience, or simply promotes understanding of a specific message.

According to Vinay and Darbelnet, cf ([Khazrouni, 2017](#)), adaptation is one of the seven translation procedures that should be used whenever the source text situation does not exist in the culture of the target text. In this case, translators need to recreate a new situation which can be considered more appropriate to the target audience. Bastin, cf ([Khazrouni, 2017](#)), states that, “adaptation is an efficient strategy that can be used to solve cultural dissimilarities”. For Bastin, cf ([Khazrouni, 2017](#)), “what makes adaptation different from translation is the fact that translation is text based because it focuses on meaning, while adaptation is context based because it recreates the purpose.”

## Conclusion

[Bartolomé and Cabrera \(2005\)](#) stipulate that, “AVT is part of show business, and thus, economic interests are a factor, too”. Claiming that, “dubbing and subtitling are linked to economic conditions”, they

explain that a country like France with its economic possibilities for technological development, can afford dubbing, whereas “poorer countries —such as some Eastern European countries— settle for subtitling or voice over.” Cabrera & Bartolomé point out the distressing problem that emerges in the poorer countries, where subtitles are often made available for teenagers and even kids, simply by means of a Machine, leaving AV audience amidst a hurricane of cultural as well as ideological challenges. Can we ever imagine abundantly produced Korean and Chinese AV works, electronically disseminated, to be rendered by professional translators who ethically consider cultural differences and ideological wellbeing of naïve Arab audience?!

Doudou & Yang, cf ([Weng & Weng, 2021](#)) state that, A solid cultural confidence is the foundation, which paves the way for ideological construction. Therefore, and to practically alienate language learners from the Source Text’s latent polysystem activity in learning settings in AV works, this paper proposes that texts translated by non-humans, and/or texts intentionally foreignized, are not recommended to be used as learning sources. Dealing with all possible contingencies for the AV works, provides a wider space for researchers to discuss and bring together linguistic, cultural and translation theories, to establish for more novice safe language learning settings.

Amidst an era of deep involvement in a globalized culture, language learners need to raise adequate network awareness by strengthening their cultural and ideological self-confidence in colleges and universities, and according to [Weng and Weng \(2021\)](#), it’s necessary to actively mobilize the wisdom and strength of teachers and students. Educators and policymakers are assumed to take collaborated measures in order to insure the appropriacy of the AV works before they are adopted in second or foreign language learning settings. Human translators’ role is essential to ensure the cultural adequacy of the AV texts by examining their cultural polysystem activity and avoiding any possible counter effects of such text types. The selection of the AV materials to be used in language teaching and learning settings need to be rendered maintaining an appropriated adaptation of their cultural messages.

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