Dubbing in Slovakia: A Heuristic Overview of the Process

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Abstract
This paper deals with dubbing and its specifics in Slovakia. The categorization of countries according to their preference in audiovisual translation is re-considered and re-designed around the current data regarding audiovisual translation in Europe. The focus of the article then shifts to dubbing in Slovakia and to some extent Czech Republic, where there is a strong preference for dubbing over subtitling in television production. A heuristic basis for the process of dubbing production based on personal experience and observations of the author is introduced and some issues that arise during this process are addressed. The current situation and changes in comparison to the past in the (Czecho-)Slovak dubbing are depicted and analyzed. The paper offers a brief outlook on dubbing from a rather empirical point of view.
Keywords: dubbing, Slovakia, audiovisual translation, translation for dubbing, lip-sync editor

Introduction
The tradition of dubbing is characteristic of only a few countries in Europe. Audiovisual translation (AVT) has a much richer history and tradition in those countries that naturally felt the need to dub or subtitle what was produced in other states and in foreign languages. Some countries opted for subtitling, others for dubbing or voice-over. Even today, we can call certain countries "dubbing countries" and other "subtitling countries" (Gottlieb in Baker, 2001 p. 244) and, although this division has turned out to be insufficient (see e.g. Szarkowska, 2005), it is clear that the tradition of dubbing as a prevailing form of audiovisual translation is present only in some countries. This paper looks closely at how the countries are divided according to their prevailing audiovisual translation preference and then takes a closer look at the process of dubbing production in Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

A Dubbing Country, a Subtitling Country or Both?
According to Gottlieb (in Baker, 2001 p. 244), it is possible to divide the countries based on their audiovisual preference in the following way:
1. **SL (source language) countries**
SL countries do not have the need to translate films and programs frequently because vast majority of programs is created in their language. These are the English-speaking countries with little or no AVT tradition. If a program needs to be translated, there will be a general tendency towards subtitling, not dubbing.
2. **Dubbing countries**
(e. g. French-, Italian-, German-, Spanish-speaking)
Dubbing countries are countries where the general tendency in audiovisual translation is towards dubbing.
3. **Voice-over countries**
(e.g. Russia, Poland)
Voice-over countries prefer voice-over over dubbing because of its low costs.

4. **Subtitling countries**
Subtitling countries prefer subtitling over other forms of audiovisual translation.

As was hinted in the introduction, this division of countries to merely those which subtitle and those which dub or do voice-over, is not a good enough solution for the current situation. An interesting study depicting the situation in audiovisual translation in Europe has been published by the European Commission in 2011 (Safar, 2011). The study discusses the prevailing audiovisual traditions in the European countries but differs between the situation in cinema and in television. Such a division is very useful because it shows that there is a number of countries which prefer dubbing for television but not for cinema. The division can be seen in the Table 1.

Table 1: AVT preference for cinema and television in some European countries
(based on the source data from Safar, 2011)

	AVT for cinema	AVT for television
Subtitling	28	16
	Belgium (Flemish-speaking), Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland (German-speaking), Turkey, United Kingdom	Belgium (Flemish-speaking), Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Sweden and United Kingdom
Dubbing	7	11
	Austria, Belgium (French-speaking), France, Italy, Germany, Spain, Switzerland (French- and Italian-speaking)	Austria, Belgium (French-speaking), Czech Republic, France, Italy, Germany, Hungary, Slovakia, Spain, Switzerland and Turkey
Voice-over	-	5
	-	Bulgaria, Poland, Latvia and Lithuania, Estonia (to some extent)
other	-	2
	-	Malta, Luxembourg

One reason behind the differences in the Table 1 can be the cost of dubbing (Advameg, 2014). It would make sense in the cases when a smaller country with a relatively small market (e.g. the Netherlands) prefers subtitling and a bigger country with a bigger market (e.g. Germany – and this also means other German-speaking markets) prefers dubbing. There is, however, a group of small countries in Central Europe with a tradition of dubbing despite the fact that their markets are rather small (e.g. Hungary, the Czech Republic or Slovakia). (ibid.) Here one needs to search for reasons other than just the costs – most probably history and tradition. Where dubbing was once introduced, it would be difficult to let it go. Even in the bigger countries like Germany or Italy, the prevailing tendency to dub in the beginnings of audiovisual translation could be seen not only as a better solution for a bigger market, but also as a means of censorship which the totalitarian regimes and nationalists were keen to make use of (Klimová, 2012 p. 103). Even in smaller countries, foreign productions could more easily be censored through dubbing and where once a tradition was created, it was not let go.
Based on the Table 1, the above mentioned division of countries proposed by Gottlieb (in Baker, 2001 p. 244) is no more up-to-date and needs revising. A new categorization of countries based on their AVT practice is therefore proposed in the Table 2.

Table 2: Proposed categorization of countries according to their AVT practices based on Gottlieb (in Baker, 2001. p. 244) and Safar (2011) (Demjanová, 2015. p. 26)

	Name of the group	Description	Example country
dubbing	Full **dubbing countries**	...are countries which use dubbing for both cinema and television. These countries usually have bigger markets and a long tradition of dubbing.	FIGS, Austria
subtitling for cinema	Full **subtitling countries**	...are countries which use subtitling exclusively in both television and cinema, with the exception of programing for children. Their markets tend to be too small for dubbing. SL countries could also be fit in this category.	Denmark, Scandinavian countries
	Both **dubbing** (for television) **and subtitling** (for cinema) **countries**	...are countries which use both subtitling and dubbing. Subtitling is preferred in production for cinema and dubbing is used in television.	Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary
	Countries using subtitling (for cinema) **and other forms of AVT** (for television)	...are countries that use other means of AVT for television (usually voice-over) but prefer subtitling for the cinema.	Poland, Latvia, Lithuania
	Countries using subtitling (for cinema) **and no form of AVT** (for television)	...are specific cases in which movies are subtitled for the cinema but majority of television programs are broadcasted in their original versions because a majority of broadcasters are not based in these countries.	Malta, Luxembourg

It is also worth mentioning that Slovakia used to be a special case in its AVT practice. For various reasons, including lower costs, historical situation and a similarity of language, programs with Czech dubbing have long been broadcasted in Slovakia – either by Czech broadcasters themselves or, after the countries went their separate ways, by Slovak TV stations. The situation has changed in the recent years – since 2007 the State Language Law dictates that Slovak TV programming should be realized in Slovak language (Zákon č. 318/2009).

Creating Dubbed Programming: The Process and its Specifics
The process of creating dubbing may differ from one country to another. Let us now take a closer look at what the general tendencies of this process are in Czech Republic and Slovakia. The following passages are based on personal observations of the author, working practice and interviews with dubbing directors and translators for dubbing.

The process of dubbing creation encompasses several different areas and could be interesting from many different points of view including marketing, television studies, translation and linguistics or performing arts. For any further analysis of dubbed programming and its quality, it is important to be aware of the processes underlying the creation of dubbing. These are outlined in the Figure 1 and described below.
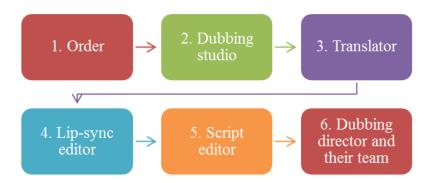
Figure 1. The process of creating dubbed programming (Demjanová, 2015 p. 31)

Order placement

For a dubbed program to be produced, an order must first be placed by the broadcaster or any other entity that has acquired the rights to the program in question. Based on the order placement, an agreement is drawn between the ordering party and a dubbing studio. The choice of dubbing studio is usually a matter of previous agreements between parties, in some cases, a broadcaster may have an exclusive contract with only one dubbing studio, at other times an open competition may be held to find the best candidate for the job.

Dubbing studio

After securing the contract, the dubbing studio starts its work. It functions as a sort of a project manager. The studio decides on the people involved in making the specific program (director and his team, translator, lip-sync editor, script editor) and creates an agenda based on the requirements of the ordering party. It is common that there are several programs being dubbed in one studio at the same time and that also means that the dubbing studio usually has contracts with several dubbing directors and teams.

Similarly to film production, dubbing director is one of the most important people working on the production of dubbed programing. The dubbing director usually works with their team and is often given a free hand at choosing the dubbing actors. In well-working dubbing studios, soundmen and dubbing directors form working pairs and often work together on projects. It is at this stage that the preliminary team and a dubbing director are decided.

Translator for dubbing

The dubbing studio also has contracts with (or at least keeps in contact with) a number of translators and lip-sync editors. These also may or may not work in pairs and there often are some inside rules as to who is assigned what – some work exclusively on one type of media texts, in pair with only one editor or only in productions of a certain director. A good practice is to hire the same translator and lip-sync editor for sequels and prequels or for new season of the same TV series. This assures consistency and makes their work more efficient.

When translating for dubbing, the translator should have to their disposal:

–the original script;

–the file with audio, video and a time stamp (a time stamp is used for better orientation in the text, general communication and notation);

–translations/dubbed versions of the previous episodes, films, programs, etc. (if there are any relevant to the particular translation).

Lip-sync editor

After the translator has prepared a 'raw' translation (the next section offers a discussion as to why this translation may not be so 'raw' after all), it is send to the lip-sync editor.

Lip-synchronization is a process in which the translation is reformulated to fit the lip movements of the characters on screen. It usually involves frequent re-watching, pausing and slow-playing of the original while the editor talks over the characters and tries to fit words on their lips.

Lip-synchronization is actually a very demanding process that requires lots of talent. A combination of great language skills (for reformulating, using metaphors and compensation techniques) in the target language, a good ear and eye and a sort of musical talent is required to do this job well, good lip-sync editors are usually also familiar with basic phonetics and phonology and form their own rules as to how to deal with the specific types of phones which appear in the original. There is currently no lip-sync editing training available in Slovakia. A good lip-sync editor simply must be talented and have experience or be trained by a senior editor.

When the job of the lip-sync editor is finished, the text is almost identical with what will eventually appear on screen.

Script editor

The lip-synchronized text is given to the script editor. It is the task of the script editor to check the overall consistency of what has been created so far. The script editor should be familiar with any previous programs that are connected with the program being translated. It is their task to check the terminology, whether the lines are "in character" and in line with what has previously been presented about the characters, if the information presented to the viewer are consistent and that there are no communication gaps or passages which would be too difficult to understand.

Practice shows that this stage of the process is often skipped completely, although names of the script editor still do appear at the DVDs and online. This tendency is however common in some dubbing studios only, and is usually accompanied by a generally low quality of their services.

Dubbing director and his team

The dubbing director has been chosen and assigned work in the early stages of the process. This time, in which the text is being transformed into the target language, is used by the good dubbing directors to get familiar with the program or film to be translated.

Director's knowledge and understanding of the original has a great influence on the final outcome. The director should have both the 'raw' translation and the lip-synchronized version available to him/her but it is also common that the directors speak the source language and do not need the translations to understand the program.

It is not uncommon that a dubbing director is allowed to choose their actors. It is also a common practice that the roles played by a popular foreign actor are always assigned to the same dubbing actors. This is done for many reasons including consistency and a certain respect towards the viewer, but also because dubbing requires the dubbing actor to identify with the actor on screen, follow them (and their lip movement) very closely, study their performance and try to fit into it. This, when done well, is a highly demanding work and every actor has their own practices as to how to achieve the best result. Once a connection is established between the dubbing actor and the on-screen actor, the audience grows aware of it and usually consider the pair a good match.

When the actors arrive at the studio, they are usually not familiar with the program or film that they are to dub. They come to the studio for a few hours during which they dub entire seasons of TV series and/or several different characters in one or more programs or films. This is done to cut the costs and pay the actors only for the time they actually spend acting. As a result, especially with supporting characters and smaller roles, the director always briefly introduces the scene and what is happening on screen to the dubbing actor and only then the actor acts out the scene. The director may correct actor's expressions, tone of voice and general performance so that it fits the situation on screen (or the director's understanding of the situation). Since actors often do not understand what is actually happening, it is all left to the director's interpretation and guidance.

The lip-synchronized script may be altered slightly at this stage, but it does not happen frequently. The director may opt for a different solution that he/she sees to be more fit or, at other times, the actors may decide to use some other word or a phrase because they feel they know the character and the actor and have a better sense of what he/she may say or simply because they find a better solution.

(Soundman)

There is another process that takes place here. A soundman (usually a part of the director's team) sits in the studio with the dubbing director and records all the lines performed by the actors. This is the first stage of their work.

In the second stage, the soundman works alone with the recordings and creates the final version of the translated program. This is often tedious and fussy work that requires a good ear and a perfect concentration. If the soundman discovers any mistakes at this stage, he/she usually tries to cover them up. The lines are only seldom re-recorded.

As can be seen from the description above, there are many different people and processes involved in the production of a dubbed program or a film. In Slovakia and the Czech Republic, there is currently also a great tendency towards lowering the costs of this process. Some aspects have already changed – the actors, for example, do not all get together in the studio and record lines together, there is therefore usually no reacting to one another in their performance. They are scheduled to visit the studio separately and record only their own lines. This solution lowers the costs significantly but may badly influence the quality of acting.

There are also other practices which lower both the costs of the process but also the quality of the outcome. Evidence shows (Demjanová, 2015 pp. 40-91) that inexperienced translators with lack of translation training are being employed for alarmingly low costs (ibid. p. 44–45). Furthermore, there also seems to be a tendency, which is specific to Slovakia and not to the Czech Republic, to employ only one person to perform the job of the translator and the lip-sync editor. Last but not least, the time a dubbing director has to record the dubbed version of a program or a film, is limited. The directors which are detail-oriented and insist on a perfect line delivery from the actor are at a disadvantage and are often considered too demanding, although their work may be of much higher quality.

How Has Translation for Dubbing Changed in Slovakia?

The rise of dubbing in Czechoslovakia during the 60's 70's and 80's can be evidenced not only by the dubbing production itself, but also by the expert publications on dubbing. While in 1960 Novák (p. 11) claimed that only a minority of programs and films in Czechoslovakia were dubbed at the time, a little over a decade later, Kautský (1972 p. 85) does not hesitate to claim that Czechoslovak dubbing is currently one of the best in the world's cinematography. In only twelve years, dubbing has transformed from an AVT form that is seldom used to the AVT form Czechoslovakia was the best at.

The claim that the Czechoslovak dubbing is currently one of the best in the world is no longer true and not only because Czechoslovakia no longer exists as a country. After the country split in two, both markets went their separate ways and Slovakia faced some difficulties. There was a tendency towards a 'pure' language in the media which made dubbed programming sound artificial. This started to change in the 90's (Klimová, 2012 p. 105) but Slovak dubbing production still faced a more difficult situation because the tradition of dubbing was not as old and a majority of studios was based in the Czech Republic.

Slovak audience was not satisfied with the state of dubbing in the 90's (Hladík, 1995) and this dissatisfaction persists till this day (see Blaženiaková, 2009; Kubinová, 2007 or Demjanová, 2015). The results of a questionnaire with more than a thousand Slovak respondents show that the audience rates Slovak dubbing as average (Demjanová, 2015 p. 36) and that only a third would choose Slovak over Czech dubbed programming if given the choice (ibid. p. 37). Academic research (see Borzová, 2012 or Demjanová 2015) shows that the quality of texts presented on screen to the Slovak viewer is rather low. Even dubbing enthusiasts do realize that there has been a change for the worse in the area (Slovenský dabing, 2016).

What has once been an artform, is today largely criticised by both scholars and laymen. What has changed? Some of the problems dubbing production deals with were already mentioned above. Many of them are caused by constant pressure to lower the costs for this proces. Translation and lip-synchronization are an important part of the dubbing production and there is also a lot that has changed in this area.

Walló (1987a and 1987b) has published helpful books on dubbing in her time and has also produced a list of requirements on the translation for dubbing. The author (1987b pp. 10-11) claims that translator should offer more than one solution to translation problems, should they arise, and similarly, more than one solution should be offered to the lip-sync editor when translating jokes, wordplays, nicknames and other challenging passages. This is seldom done today, although it is a practice of a good audiovisual translator. The translations are mass produced and carried out under

immense time pressure. It often happens that the person translating the script does not have the time to read through the text twice. This of course speaks to the quality of the translator in question, as well as to the conditions he/she is willing to work under.

Another one of Walló's requirements (ibid.) says that the translator should use a proper name at the same place as it was used in the original. This also used to be a common practice in dubbing – a proper name in the original meant a proper name in the dubbed version. This tendency has been abandoned by many, the reasons for this decision are unclear. It is very much possible that it is because the translations are not carried out by professionals who would be aware of the specific requirements in translation for dubbing.

The position of the translator for dubbing has also changed significantly. In the past, translation for dubbing has been called a "semi-finished textual product" (Kautský, 1972 p. 41) and many have called it a 'raw translation' that cannot stand on its own until the work of the lip-sync editor has been carried out (Paulínyová, 2014 p. 119). In her quantitative research, Paulínyová (2014 pp. 119-130) compares the translations submitted by the translator for dubbing, the scripts after lip-synchronization and the final outcome presented on the screen. The author claims that 89% of translator's and lip-sync editor's work remains unchanged and is presented on screen to the viewer. Out of the translator's work, almost a half (42%) is performed by the dubbing actors with no change whatsoever (ibid. p. 129). This means that, although the lip-sync editor still plays a very important role, the work of the translator is not as 'raw' as it used to be in the past, on the contrary, it may be quite well cooked.

The problem in researching dubbing in Slovakia is that there is a great difference, both in quality and in general practice, in dubbing for commercial broadcasters (e.g. JOJ, Markíza) and for the national TV broadcaster (RTVS). The working conditions and the translation rates are much better when working for the national broadcaster. Paulínyová's research (2014) is based on the materials from dubbing for the national broadcaster and her results point towards the fact that the translator and the lip-sync editor are equal colleagues. It also is based on the premise that there were two separate people – a translator and a lip-sync editor – involved in the creation of the dubbed script. This does not necessarily have to be the case in dubbing for the commercial broadcasters who have no problem with having no editing carried out whatsoever. (Demjanová, 2015 p. 92) In Slovakia there is definitely a tendency to push the position of the translator and the lip-sync editor together which is not as strongly present in the Czech Republic. This means that less people re-read and edit the text after it was once translated, which may result in its much lower quality. Furthermore, when a translation needs to be carried out quickly, it is nothing special that one two, three or even more translators are assigned to one season of a TV series or that there is simply a job description „translation and lip-synchronization" with several names officially assigned to it. (see e.g. Dabingforum 2011a or 2011b)

Conclusion

Dubbing is a process, a tradition specfic to only some countries. It may be approached as something these countries are special for, as an art form that can be considered their national heritage. The practices in AVT have changed significantly – and not only in Slovakia, but in Europe as a whole. That is why a new AVT categorization is needed and proposed in this paper.

If dubbing is to be preserved in Slovakia, the approach to this process must change. The quality of dubbing in Slovak television is currently declining. The first step towards a change is realizing that something is wrong and that something should be done. The second step is informing and educating not only the professionals but the viewers as well. The process should start at the universities with students of translation and also online, in the discussions and blogs about dubbed programming. Since we were unable to find a theoretical basis for the process of dubbing, we proposed it in this paper and hope that it will prove useful in the future. The information presented here are based on personal experience with translation in the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

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