

Romero-Fresco, Pablo (2019). *Accessible Filmmaking: Integrating translation and accessibility into the filmmaking process*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 266, £ 110. ISBN 978 1138493001 (hardback).

This is an extremely readable book made specifically to explain to filmmakers (and anyone else interested) why Accessible Filmmaking (AFM) should become central to the industry. Romero-Fresco's hands-on approach is visible throughout the book, but he also credits a number of other expert contributors.

The book takes us through what actually happens to a film when it is translated for a foreign or sensory-impaired audience. The main thrust is that dubbed and subtitled versions of blockbuster films, including versions for the deaf and the blind, count for almost exactly 50% of the earnings made for the films. However, the new audiences will never be watching or hearing the actual film that the original director created. In almost all cases, the director loses artistic control, and "media experts" will be superimposing other voices or texts onto the film. Clearly, almost all the time (the exceptions are discussed) these media experts will have ignored and trod upon the director's carefully constructed mise-on-scene. The result is at best a different film, and at worst a second-rate distortion and reduction, which will have a knock-on effect in terms of earnings.

So, as Romero-Fresco tells us, taking a leaf out of Norne's provocative article on AVT, "The time is ripe for AFM" (241), meaning that a translator or Media Accessibility (MA) expert should be working "in collaboration with the creative team of the film as part of the (post-) production process" (213). The argument makes economic sense and is backed up with an analysis of costs and workflow for when (for the moment, if) a director of accessibility and translation (DAT) (214) is part of the filmmaking team. To prepare for AFM, Romero-Fresco makes much use of the (film)maker–(media or translation) expert–user gap, with each chapter more or less focusing on one of aspect of the gap.

The first gap is that between filmmaking studies, MA and AVT. While AVT has traditionally focused on dubbing and subtitling, MA has been concerned with making media accessible for those with sensory disabilities. Yet, as Romero-Fresco (98) points out, 80% of those who use subtitling for the deaf or hard of hearing are actually hearing audiences. They may, for example, be in a noisy environment, may need to keep the sound low or off, or are using the subtitles for learning purposes. Indeed, we are told, many of the solutions for the sensory-impaired are just as useful for all audiences – so there is a strong argument, not for 'particular' solutions, but for the separate disciplines to collaborate, to make both translation and accessibility an integral part of the filmmaking process.

The second gap is between filmmakers and viewers. The examples given are instantly revealing. For example, Vito's scream in *The Godfather Part*

III is hair-raisingly dramatic – because it is silent. If we explain what is going on to the deaf, “the viewers have turned into readers who know what sounds [or dramatic silences] were made but who have missed the visual action” (121). Romero-Fresco suggests that an even larger problem exists in Audio Description (AD) for the blind, which turns filmmaking “on its head by telling what is shown” (172). Given that AD is destined to become a mainstream option, this means that a significant audience may easily lose any reference to non-verbal communication and, for example, the significance of colours, not to mention non-diegetic elements such as camera angles – if the media expert herself is not aware of the filmmaker’s intentions, which constitutes the third gap.

The “MA experts” range from traditional translators to “sensory-impaired MA consultants”. What might seem totally obvious to those involved in translation studies, but is clearly not obvious to those in film studies, is that “filmmakers are not part of the decision about which words will be subtitled [or dubbed and how]” (81). At times, Romero-Fresco also gives us solutions. For example, subtitles often impede on the action, and Romero-Fresco suggests that “the cameraperson [...] have an indication through the viewfinder of where the subtitles would potentially be displayed, so that a decision can be made as to whether a particular shot is to be framed in a subtitle-friendly manner or not” (96).

At the end of the book we are left convinced of the need for filmmakers to produce films designed with accessibility in mind and to collaborate with the MA experts and translators. We are also left with the idea that traditional subtitling must give way to newer techniques using “integrated” or “creative subtitling” of which there is some tantalizing discussion (such as the use of non-traditional fonts, placement etc.). There is however much more that can and should be done here to improve accessibility. And maybe this would be spearheaded by the AFM director of accessibility and translation.

David Katan
University of Salento (Lecce, Italy)
University of South Africa
E-mail: david.katan@unisalento.it