

Sánchez-Mompeán, Sophia (2020). *The Prosody of Dubbed Speech, Beyond the Character's Words*. Palgrave MacMillan €83.19. ISBN 978-3-030-35520-3

Sofía Sánchez-Mompeán's *The Prosody of Dubbed Speech* makes an outstanding contribution to the rapidly emerging field of dubbing research by approaching the object of study from the often-overlooked prosodic level of communication. As the author suggests, "prosodic features should no longer be seen as mere dramatic flourishes or adornments of the text" (2019: 226) but rather as "part and parcel of the communicative act" (2019: 226).

The importance of focusing on this non-verbal aspect of communication is perhaps most-saliently felt in cases where characterisation was considerably lost in translation, often resulting in remarkably different viewing experiences from those prompted by the start product. Which begs the question: what could be more essential to an auditory stimulus than its "musical identity"?

I particularly enjoyed reading Sánchez-Mompeán's work as in one single stroke it broadens the scope of audiovisual research by exploring the intersection between music and language. It does so by proposing a model of dubbing analysis whilst providing quantifiable data from a case study of 12 episodes (6 episodes in English and their corresponding Spanish dubbed versions) from the US series *How I met your mother*.

The book is organized in 6 chapters. In chapter 1, the author sets out to unhide the art of dubbing by discussing its specificity as the most mimetic mode of audiovisual translation, whilst grounding her research within previous literature and limiting the scope of the study to a set of 5 parameters (prosodic correlates), i.e. intonation, loudness, tempo, rhythmicity and speech tension. Chapter 2 gives an in-depth overview of the two disciplines at the interface, where dubbing and prosodic studies are discussed from a theoretical standpoint (see the bearing of intonation on syntactic meaning) as well as from that of professional practice, as illustrated with examples from the audiovisual corpus under examination. A historical overview of dubbing practices by country is also provided with a view to introduce the idea of the advisability of integrating dubbing within the early stages of the filmmaking process, a point also discussed by Zanotti (2019) and Romero Fresco (2019). Drawing on Crystal's prosodic model (1969), Sánchez-Mompeán then proceeds to review the abovementioned prosodic parameters in depth, discussing their pragmatic implications from the interlingual perspective of English to Spanish prosodic rendition. Lastly, this chapter introduces the subject of dubbing naturalness (or lack thereof) in light of previous literature (see 2.3.1) as well as deconstructing the notion of attitudinal content as a feature of communication which is largely dependent on prosody. In chapter 3 the

author presents a proposed model of analysis whereby objective associations between prosodic cues and their attitudinal function in speech can be established both in the context of production as well as that of reception. Borrowing from O'Connor and Arnold (1973) and Monroy Casas (2002, 2005), the author sets out to examine both the original and dubbed corpora in light of an intonational modelling based on nuclear tones, heads and other interpretive variables such as syllables per second (tempo), articulation rate (speech tension) and pitch contour (F0). What makes Sánchez-Mompeán's approach particularly compelling is precisely the meticulously empirical nature of her research, with every utterance in the source and target text analysed via speech analysis software (i.e. Praat, WASP) in order to remove any danger of falling prey to potentially impressionistic views. This approach allows the author to assess the language of dubbing scientifically by focusing on the rise and fall of discourse. A series of concrete examples are offered along with a visual representation of the pitch contour of every utterance, namely screenshots taken on Praat. Thanks to this approach, Sánchez-Mompeán is able to single out the prosodic patterns which typify the unnatural prosody characterising audiovisual products dubbed in Spanish. Chapter 4 looks at potential difficulties in the translation of prosody as well as suggesting possible solutions. In 4.2., intelligently named "A tone is worth a thousand words", the author refines this point by focusing on the key concept of flexibility of intonation, suggesting English carries a lot more pragmatic information via prosody than Spanish (p. 164):

Such cross-language differences become of special interest from a translational point of view, especially when it is not possible to convey the meaning transmitted by way of intonation in English intonationally in Spanish.

Elaborating on the same point, Sánchez-Mompeán concludes (p. 184):

Indeed, future translators should become aware of how prosody works in the cross-cultural and cross-linguistic transfer and what means in the target language are more effective to convey a meaning that the source language has conveyed prosodically. Only then, it will be possible to "choose options that fall within the target language users' sense of what is textually and linguistically appropriate" (p. 184) and to produce translations that are also suitable from a semantic and pragmatic point of view.

Chapter 5 (brilliantly named "Pitch Perfect") covers several topics ranging from the reception of dubbed prosody (where unnaturalness is almost to be expected and tacitly accepted) to current guidelines and professional trends. It also suggests potential strategies to help the voice talents' delivery, such as paralinguistic information sheets, as well as discussing potential avenues for the training and teaching of prosody in the AVT classroom.

Chapter 6 draws conclusions and presents the most striking findings from the analysis of the audiovisual corpora. In it, the author concludes by way

of a metaphor where prosody is compared to one of the brushes at the disposal of a painter in the creation of a pictorial design, presenting it as a key element in the enjoyment of subtler, deeper meaning.

With dubbing fast becoming one of the preferred modes of audiovisual translation in traditionally non-dubbing territories, this monograph does a timely job in making the compelling case for the need to go beyond words and pay closer attention to the musical elements of speech. With back-catalogue products rapidly becoming available in video on demand streaming platforms (see *Dawson's Creek*, which has recently been featured in Netflix Italy's Top 10), the discrepancies between characterisations in original and dubbed products are becoming all the more apparent. This state of affairs should facilitate the work of AVT researchers and hopefully open the floodgates for a dubbing revolution in scholarly research.

I think *The Prosody of Dubbed Speech - Beyond the Character's Words* represents a cornerstone moment in this new academic milieu and deserves a special place in AVT curricula in the years to come. Reading this monograph, I had the impression that all the right questions concerning the translation of characterisation — that is, the transference of personality with obvious consequences on narrative development — were raised and partially answered. Incongruencies deriving from an erroneous interpretation of prosodic intention and attitudinal meaning, in fact, produce a rather uncanny viewing experience. As pointed out by the author, this state of affairs is widely accepted by Italian and Spanish audiences alike, but, as translators, we should be mindful of the cultural effect of misrepresentation as well as the financial impact of potentially disrupted narratives. On a personal level, I am often baffled by cases where fictional personae or filmic conversations feel stunted or somewhat disconnected. Arguably, filmmakers may be equally displeased.

Sánchez-Mompeán has brilliantly managed to demonstrate how this challenge can be successfully tackled following a scientific approach, as well as suggesting new avenues of research that might help guarantee a fruitful integration of the disciplines of dubbing and prosody. As viewers, we can only hope that AVT practitioners will take heed.

References

- **Crystal, David** (1969). *Prosodic Systems and Intonation in English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- **Monroy Casas, Rafael** (2002). "El sistema entonativo del murciano coloquial. Aspectos comunicativos y actitudinales." *Estudios Filológicos* 37, 77–101.
- **Monroy Casas, Rafael** (2005). "Spanish and English Intonation Patterns: A perceptual approach to attitudinal meaning." Christopher S. Butler, María de los Ángeles Gómez González and Susana M. Doval Suárez (eds) (2005). *The Dynamics of Language Use*.

Functional and Contrastive Perspectives. Pragmatics and Beyond New Series, 140. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 307–326.

- **O'Connor, Joseph D., and Arnold, Gordon Frederick** (1973). *Intonation of Colloquial English* (2nd ed). London: Longman.
- **Romero-Fresco, Pablo** (2019). *Accessible Filmmaking: Integrating translation and accessibility into the filmmaking process*. London and New York: Routledge.
- **Zanotti, Serenella** (2019). "Translation, performance and authorial control in the dubbed versions of Stanley Kubrick's films." Irene Ranzato and Serenella Zanotti (eds) (2019). *Reassessing Dubbing: Historical Approaches and Current Trends*. Benjamins Translation Library. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 80-100.

Stefano Bernardi

Roehampton University

E-mail: cultures2move@gmail.com