

博士論文審査及び最終試験の結果

審査委員（主査） Philip Seaton 印

学位申請者 Lisa Sanders

論文名 **Cultural Signs in Audio Visual Translation: A new semiotically informed subtitling approach for translating Japanese film and animation**

1. Overview of the Dissertation

This dissertation proposes a semiotically informed subtitling methodology for Japanese-English audiovisual translation that addresses the tension between traditional reduction-focused practices and contemporary audiences' expectations for culturally rich translations. Drawing on Gorrée's semiotranslation framework and Kruger's application of Peircean semiotics, Sanders develops an "Audio Visual Translation" framework coordinating meaning-making across Audio (character voice, paralinguage), Visual (on-screen text, cinematography), and Translation (cultural-linguistic transfer) channels.

The dissertation is clearly structured and methodologically transparent. Following the introductory chapter, Sanders provides a comprehensive review of relevant literature in Translation Studies, Audiovisual Translation, and semiotics, situating her work within existing debates on reduction, equivalence, and cultural specificity. This is followed by a dedicated methodology chapter that articulates the principles of the proposed semiotically informed approach and outlines the criteria for subtitle analysis and comparison. The subsequent analytical chapters apply this framework systematically through three extended case studies, before a concluding chapter synthesises the findings and reflects on the broader implications of the research.

Building on this theoretical and methodological foundation, the three comparative case studies span live-action film, television drama, and animation, progressively demonstrating the methodology's application across different genres and levels of complexity. The first case study examines character voice construction through role language and honorific usage, foregrounding the Audio channel; the second emphasises Visual coordination through the treatment of on-screen text and its synchronisation with shot composition; and the final case study integrates all three channels in the context of animation, addressing complex challenges including wordplay, pacing, and culturally embedded reference.

For each work, Sanders created complete alternative subtitle sets that were systematically compared against existing professional subtitles and fansubs. This comparative methodology demonstrates how semiotically informed approaches can achieve what Sanders terms "maximal equivalence" within subtitling's inherent constraints of time, space, and readability. The theoretical foundation argues that subtitle reduction should prioritise the preservation of semiotic and cultural information over mere semantic content. Central to this argument is Sanders' concept of an "Audio Visual Translation contract", the claim that contemporary streaming audiences have developed tolerance for, and indeed expectation of, visually marked and culturally explicit subtitles that coordinate with the film's other semiotic channels.

2. Evaluation and Scholarly Contribution

This dissertation makes a significant and timely contribution to Audiovisual Translation studies. The committee recognises this work as successfully bridging the gap between academic Translation Studies theory and the creative practices of fansubbing communities. The tripartite Audio-Visual-Translation framework provides conceptual clarity for understanding how meaning is constructed across film's multiple semiotic channels, while the progressive case study design effectively demonstrates the methodology's scalability and adaptability across genres.

The comparative analysis throughout the case studies is methodologically rigorous. Sanders presents detailed comparative tables that place her subtitles alongside existing professional subtitles and fansubs, enabling a transparent evaluation of different translation approaches. Concrete examples, including the translation of layered wordplay, the handling of visually embedded textual puzzles and acronym-based humour, and the use of colour-coded subtitle strategies in animated contexts, demonstrate genuine semiotic problem-solving rather than abstract theoretical exercises.

Sanders demonstrates sophisticated treatment of Japanese-specific linguistic and cultural features, including *yakuwarigo* (role language), honorifics, dialect, and cultural references. Crucially, she also engages with the medium-specific dimensions of audiovisual communication, analysing how elements such as sound design, cinematography, shot composition, and on-screen visual elements coordinate with linguistic translation to create meaning. This demonstrates the work's fundamentally intermedial nature, requiring expertise in both translation theory and film/media analysis.

The external examiner noted that this thesis advances her own earlier semiotranslation model from a theoretical proposal into a practicable methodology. Sanders extends Peircean semiotics beyond purely linguistic signs to encompass film's full polysemiotic texture, representing a genuine theoretical advance. Her engagement with fansubbing as a legitimate site of creative translation practice, rather than merely amateur or derivative work, represents a methodologically valuable intervention that acknowledges the sophisticated translation strategies emerging from fan communities.

The dissertation also offers practical contributions. While Sanders appropriately acknowledges industrial and economic barriers to widespread adoption of her methodology in commercial streaming contexts, the framework has clear pedagogical value. The detailed case studies provide concrete examples that could inform both subtitling practice and translator training, particularly in developing sensitivity to the semiotic dimensions of audiovisual translation. The work arrives at a moment when debates about cultural specificity versus accessibility in translation are intensifying, and when the global circulation of Japanese media continues to grow.

3. Areas for Development and Committee Discussion

The committee identified several areas requiring further development, which Sanders acknowledged and addressed satisfactorily during the examination. These concerns do not represent fundamental flaws but rather productive directions for future research:

First, the relationship between “maximal equivalence” and “necessary reduction” requires sharper articulation. While Sanders successfully demonstrates how semiotic coordination enables culturally rich subtitling within formal constraints, the theoretical boundaries of these concepts need more precise definition. Committee members noted some oscillation in Sanders’ confidence regarding both the necessity and the possibility of equivalence, raising questions about whether the methodology can be applied systematically rather than relying on translator intuition and context-dependent judgment.

Second, the “Audio Visual Translation contract” concept, while innovative, requires further theorisation. Sanders argues that contemporary streaming audiences have developed a tolerance for visually marked, culturally explicit subtitles, but the empirical basis for this claim remains limited to the proof-of-concept demonstrations within the thesis. The committee discussed whether all audience segments benefit equally from increased semiotic information and whether comprehension necessarily improves with more culturally explicit translation.

Third, there are tensions in the application of skopos theory when comparing different subtitle approaches. Since professional subtitles, fansubs, and Sanders’ semiotically informed subtitles may have different purposes (skopoi) and target audiences, the basis for comparison and evaluation requires more explicit theorisation. Sanders’ response—positioning her work as proof-of-concept research establishing feasibility rather than claiming universal superiority—was deemed appropriate by the committee.

Fourth, committee members raised questions about specific translation choices, particularly the implications of translating dialect through grammatical variation and the potential risks of reinforcing stereotypes through visible marking of linguistic and cultural difference. One committee member noted the fundamental tension between attempts to convey “what they actually said” and the inevitable interpretive nature of all translation, particularly given that even source culture audiences are heterogeneous and bring diverse backgrounds to their viewing experiences. The question thus concerns the extent to which pursuing “author intentions” is either possible or desirable, given that audiovisual works involve multiple “authors” (directors, screenwriters, actors) whose intentions may not align or be fully knowable. The committee viewed these questions not as limitations of the present study but as evidence of the dissertation’s engagement with fundamental theoretical issues in audiovisual translation, which provide a strong foundation for future scholarly development.

Finally, minor corrections are needed regarding terminology consistency (particularly the spacing in “Audio Visual Translation” versus “Audiovisual Translation”), citation practices to ensure primary sources supplement secondary sources, and some very few remaining typographical errors despite careful revision following the preliminary review.

4. Final Examination Process and Outcome

Following the preliminary review conducted on 15 October 2025, the final examination was held on 12 January 2026, beginning at 16:00 via Zoom. All five committee members participated: Philip Seaton (Chair), Helena Kruger-Roux (External Examiner), Tsutomu Tomotsune, Irina Holca, and Iris Haukamp. One member of the public attended as an observer.

Sanders delivered a 20-minute presentation summarising her research, effectively highlighting her theoretical framework, methodological approach, and key findings from the

three case studies. She then responded to extensive questioning from all committee members with appropriate depth and scholarly maturity. Sanders demonstrated a thorough understanding of her methodology's strengths and its limitations, openly acknowledging areas requiring future development—particularly reception testing with actual audiences and further theoretical refinement of the AVT contract concept—while defending her methodological choices as appropriate for establishing a proof of concept.

In her responses, Sanders demonstrated a nuanced understanding of the theoretical tensions raised by committee members. She positioned her work appropriately as proof-of-concept research demonstrating the feasibility of semiotically informed subtitling, rather than making universal claims about superiority. She articulated a clear research vision for future work, including audience reception studies as a logical next step, and demonstrated intellectual independence in defending her interpretive qualitative approach against potential demands for quantitative validation that would be inappropriate to her semiotic framework.

Following Sanders' departure from the examination room, the committee deliberated and reached a unanimous consensus. The committee concluded that this dissertation merits the award of the doctoral degree, recognising it as demonstrating: (1) an original theoretical contribution advancing semiotranslation theory into practicable methodology; (2) rigorous methodology with systematic comparative analysis; (3) sophisticated engagement with both Japanese language and culture and the intermedial nature of film; (4) practical outputs with clear impact potential for AVT scholarship and pedagogy; and (5) mature scholarly writing that appropriately acknowledges limitations while making substantive claims.

While the committee identified areas for refinement as detailed in Section 3, these represent productive directions for future research rather than fundamental flaws requiring major revision. Sanders has successfully demonstrated her capacity for independent scholarly research and has made a significant contribution to the field of Audiovisual Translation studies at a time when questions of cultural representation, audience expectation, and translation practice are particularly urgent.

The examination committee unanimously recommends Lisa Sanders be awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD).