

Summary of dissertation in English

Dissertation title Cultural Signs in Audio Visual Translation: A new semiotically informed subtitling approach for translating Japanese film and animation
Name Lisa Sanders

This interdisciplinary study, bridging Translation Studies, Film Studies and Semiotics, proposes a new approach to translating and subtitling audiovisual media such as film, television series, and anime. Building on interpretive semiotics theory, existing subtitling guidelines, and the creative strategies employed by amateur subtitlers, the proposed methodology relies on the conceptual framework of *Audio Visual Translation* to redefine the role of subtitles within film's semiotic channels. In this framework, subtitles are seen as additive to the film's meaning, rather than an inconvenient obstacle to the film experience. They should engage directly with the film's sound and dialogue (*Audio*), its visible characters, backgrounds, and film editing (*Visual*), and consider all of the cultural elements within the film and how these are presented to the target culture (*Translation*).

This thesis serves as a proof-of-concept for a subtitling methodology that better serves contemporary viewers. After identifying and defining the key concepts within the thesis and examining the gaps this study fills in the introduction and literature review chapters, the methodology is explained in detail. Following this, a practical test of the method is presented in three case studies. Although each case study focuses on one of the three channels, they are also structured to emphasise the interrelated and cumulative nature of *Audio Visual Translation*.

Chapter 4 concerns the case of *Aristocrats* (Ano ko wa kizoku, 2020), a drama film that highlights issues of gender and social class. The primary focus of this case study is on *Audio*, particularly the gendered language and dialects that comprise *yakuwarigo* ("role language") and character voice, the paralinguistic that indicates a character's background, personality and social status. The new, semiotically informed subtitles conveyed the differences in how characters speak based on their backgrounds. This demonstrates that such representation is possible even within the constraints of subtitling, despite enduring arguments to the contrary.

Following an introduction to the film, Section 4.2 presents an extract that strongly features *yakuwarigo* in its true sense. It also highlights several "untranslatable" cultural references and clearly shows the film's focus on roles in general. Section 4.3 prominently features two dialects, Tokyo and Toyama, as distinct character voices. It also introduces the issue of translating on-screen text in the context of this movie and skopos. Section 4.4 becomes a true spectacle of character voice, contrasting the *yakuwarigo* of not two but *three* characters, speaking volumes about their differences despite being a relatively short scene. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how live-action film can still include deliberate, subtle semiotic signs that need to be translated for the audience.

The case of the 2018 series *Miss Sherlock* (Misu Shārokku) is presented in Chapter 5. The primary focus of this chapter is the *Visual*, given the importance of this semiotic channel within even the series's diegesis. Sherlock, who speaks not only incredibly quickly but in her particular character voice, notices things around her in vivid detail. This is emphasised again and again for the audience, alongside the expectation that they will notice specific *Visual* information to deduce the overarching plot alongside the detective. In one scene where Sherlock enters her "mind

palace”, on-screen text and images fill the entire screen. The subtitler must convey these additional signs together with the dialogue to minimise cognitive load on the viewer.

The first section provides an analysis of the creation and impacts of a *Miss Sherlock*, as well as a brief rationale for the subtitling strategies employed to translate it. Section 5.2, which focuses on the exposition in the first episode, limits the *Visual* focus to the subtitles themselves, showing how manipulating them can achieve certain effects, from conveying dialogue volume to assuring legibility despite fast subtitle pacing. Section 5.3 focuses on the semiotics-based subtitling of on-screen text, while continuing the exploration of *Visual* effects in the subtitles themselves. In Section 5.4, the subtitled extract becomes a true feast of the *Visual*, translating the complex semiotic weave of Sherlock’s “mind palace.” The chapter’s conclusion ties together the threads of the *Audio* and the *Visual*, setting the scene for the final case study focused on the last thread: *Translation*.

An extravaganza of *Audio Visual Translation* is presented in Chapter 6, through a case study of the anime series *The Disastrous Life of Saiki K.* (Saiki Kusuo no psi-nan, 2016). The issues of *Translation* are very much centred, however, as the series offers a surplus of untranslatable cultural references, ranging from unofficial psychological diagnoses affecting Japanese preteens to an endless series of nightmarishly complex puns. The series also presents numerous challenges for a subtitler on the *Audio* and *Visual* fronts, with multiple character voices and visual jokes that complicate the subtitling decision-making process unless these semiotic channels are integrated into the subtitles.

The first section explains the bizarre nature of *Saiki K.*, outlining its distinctive features and arguing for the subtitling strategies employed by amateur anime subtitlers in this particular translation. Section 6.2 analyses the translation of character voice through the use of *Visual* formatting of the subtitles, emphasising the link between the channels. Section 6.3 focuses on the translation of dialect, supplemented by how this is handled in the series through the *Audio* and *Visual* channels. Section 6.4 focuses on a running joke throughout an episode that relies on an acronym, further complicating the translation problem. The chapter concludes the case studies, briefly tying together the integrated concept of *Audio Visual Translation* and the proposed subtitling methodology’s application to translating various genres, before introducing the final thesis chapter.

The thesis concludes with a discussion of the key findings from the case studies and their implications for the proposed methodology, along with suggestions for future research avenues. This chapter re-emphasises the nature of this study as a proof-of-concept that can be adapted to other translation contexts, across various genres and language pairs, positioning the approach not as the final word in Audiovisual Translation, but as an option for translators seeking to make subtitles an experience of *Audio Visual Translation*.