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Not Quiet on the AD Front – A Multilingual, Parallel Corpus for AD Analysis and Teaching

Con novedades en el frente de la AD. Un corpus multilingüe y paralelo para analizar y enseñar AD

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ABSTRACT: This work is concerned with the creation of a quadrilingual corpus by means of transcription and annotation from the recording of 30 minutes from the middle of the prize-winning film *All Quiet on the Western Front* (Berger 2022). In the context of research-based learning processes, the creation and analysis of such corpora seems suitable for familiarizing students of Translation Studies with the characteristics of audio description. The article shows how the corpus can be used for different research question. The focus is on an exemplary analysis of the verbalization of motions events in four different languages. Of particular interest in this context is the question of whether manner of motion is encoded or not and, if this is the case, by which element it is conveyed. The findings show that corpus-driven insights may help students and future audio describers make informed decisions.

KEYWORDS: audio description; corpus linguistics; contrastive analysis; didactics.

RESUMEN: Este estudio se ocupa de la creación de un corpus cuatrilingüe mediante transcripción y anotación a partir de la grabación de 30 minutos de la premiada película *Sin novedad en el frente* (Berger 2022). En el contexto de los procesos de aprendizaje basados en la investigación, la creación y el análisis de este tipo de corpus parece adecuado para familiarizar a los estudiantes de Traducción con las características de la

audiodescripción. El artículo muestra cómo se puede utilizar el corpus para diferentes cuestiones de investigación. La investigación se centra en un análisis ejemplar de la verbalización de movimientos en cuatro idiomas diferentes. En este contexto, reviste especial interés la cuestión de si la manera de moverse está codificada o no y, en caso afirmativo, mediante qué elemento se transmite. Los resultados demuestran que los conocimientos basados en corpus pueden ayudar a futuros audiodescriptores a tomar decisiones bien fundadas.

PALABRAS CLAVE: audiodescripción; lingüística de corpus; análisis contrastivo; didáctica.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the beginnings of their study, students of audiovisual translation (AVT) are often unsure how to translate adequately for the media. Important insights into how, for example, audio description works in practice, can be gained by the analysis of audio description corpora. For this purpose, it seems reasonable to let students create their own corpora which should be annotated and then, in a further step, analyzed with respect to current topics of translatological interest. Such research-driven didactics is widely recognized as supporting learners' motivation and engagement with course topics. Topics of interest may involve, but are not reduced to, (i) the application of guidelines such as the adaption of temporal restrictions and the length of audio description, (ii) the language chosen such as register and style, but also the interpretive-objective divide, and more linguistic aspects such as the use of motion verbs, and (iii) cultural aspects such as gender stereotypes and diversity within a movie or series. Especially in this latter respect, it is of high interest what aspects are made explicit in the audio description and what aspects remain implicit (such as deviations from norms or stereotypes, cf. Jaki (in prep.)), and how ethical issues come into play here.

It seems particularly interesting to compare the audio description of the same film in different languages, as this allows to identify similarities and differences and to highlight general characteristics. For this reason, we created a multilingual parallel corpus, which offers insights into how the same visual input is encoded in several, different languages. The comparative analysis may serve as inspiration and assurance for students.

In an exemplary analysis, we annotated the description of motion events in the German, English, French, and Italian audio description of the film *All Quiet on the Western Front* (Berger 2022) in order to show how audio description differs between these languages and countries, and how this may affect Translation Studies.

2. AUDIO DESCRIPTION AS TRANSLATION

Audio description is «the technique used for making theatre, movies and TV programmes [etc.] accessible to blind and visually impaired people» (Benecke 2004, 78). The Ofcom guidelines define audio description in television as comprising «a commentary woven around the soundtrack, exploiting pauses to explain on screen action,

describe characters, locations, costumes, body language and facial expressions to enhance meaning and enjoyment». It is considered to be a type of intersemiotic translation in the vein of Roman Jakobson, in which the visual signs of the source (no matter whether verbal or non-verbal), are translated into audio-verbal signs and adapted to fit in between the existing soundtrack (i.e. the uttered words and other iconic sounds or music, ADLAB).

Audio description has been shown to have a narrative function (Salway 2007, 152). It puts in words the story that the film makers wanted to tell by the original soundtrack and the visual input that is unavailable or only partially available to the blind and visually impaired (ADLAB). Regarding the lexis, the language should be clear, concrete, precise, and detailed. ADLAB also suggests to use different verbs to make the audio description more entertaining, and to reflect the visual nature of the film by using verbs of movement, among others. The importance of verb variation is also stressed in the Ofcom guidelines. While these latter apply to TV and radio programmes in the United Kingdom, the ADLAB guidelines were developed by several European countries involving Great Britain, Italy, and Germany. They provide orientation for all countries, though it has been shown earlier on that some countries tend to be more expressive in their audio descriptions than others (Bourne et al. 2007). Up to now, few studies have explored audio description comparatively. The aim of this work is to contribute to our knowledge of language-specific differences in audio description. As an exemplary topic, we address the case of motion verbs, which in line with the guidelines should reflect some variation, but could show different degrees of variation depending on their country of origin and its tendency towards expressiveness. Hence, the audio descriptions could also differ in their degree of entertainment with respect to this particular aspect of audio description.

3. CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF MOTION EVENTS IN AD

Motion events refer to situations in which an animate FIGURE moves on a GROUND from a starting point to an endpoint, traversing a PATH (Talmy 2000). Earlier research has shown that motion is usually encoded differently in Romance and Germanic languages (Talmy 2000; Slobin 2004). They reveal systematic differences which have led to the typological differentiation between so-called verb-framed and satellite-framed languages, depending on whether the path is typically expressed in the verb root (V-languages in short, see Ex. (1)) or in a satellite, i.e. a prefix or particle (S-languages in short, see Ex. (2)).

Ex. (1) PATH in verb:
- a. *It.* Il bambino scende.
- b. *Fr.* L'enfant descend.

Ex. (2) PATH in satellite:
- a. *Eng.* The child is coming down.
- b. *Ger.* Das Kind kommt runter.

While the PATH, FIGURE and GROUND components described above are essential for the existence of a motion event, there may also be non-compulsory co-events,

such as CAUSE and MANNER (Talmy 2000). MANNER seems particularly interesting from a typological point of view, since S-languages express manner much more often than V-languages (Slobin 2004). This is due to the fact that in the first case the verb root is free for information such as MANNER, since the PATH is expressed in the satellite (see Ex. (3)). As the verb in the second case is occupied by the expression of PATH, V-languages tend to convey MANNER in a subordinate constituent (e.g. a gerund, see Ex. (4)).

Ex. (3) MANNER in verb:
a. *Eng.* The child is running outside.
b. *Ger.* Das Kind rennt raus. (The child is running outside.)

Ex. (4) MANNER in constituent (or not expressed):
a. *It.* Il bambino esce correndo. (The child is exiting running.)
b. *Fr.* L'enfant sort en courant. (The child is leaving running.)

Though the two language types tend to encode MANNER and PATH as sketched above, there are some exceptions. For example, verbs like *volare/voler* (*to fly*) express MANNER in the verb root although they belong to V-languages. In this regard, however, it should be noted that the expression of PATH is questionable because there seem to be boundary-crossing constraints in V-languages which means that boundary-crossing events like «exit», «enter», «cross» cannot be expressed in a prepositional phrase after a MANNER verb like *volare*/*voler* (Slobin 2004).

4. CORPUS STUDY

The corpus was built from the recording of 30 minutes from the middle of the prize-winning film *All Quiet on the Western Front* (Berger 2022) involving audio description and film dialogue. At the moment of data collection, Netflix in Germany offered audio description in four languages, namely German, English, French, and Italian. The recordings were transcribed by AI transcription software and corrected manually afterwards.

tokens	German	English	French	Italian
film dialogue	632	886	884	620
AD	2942	2481	2064	2669

Table 1. Word count with respect to film dialogue (original/synchronization) and audio description

As Table 1 shows, the 30 minutes film involved 632 tokens within the German original film dialogue which were synchronized into 886 English, 884 French, and 620 Italian tokens. This was complemented by an audio description of 2942 tokens in German, 2481 tokens in English, 2064 tokens in French, and 2669 tokens in Italian. Thus, while for German and Italian on the one hand and for English and French on the other hand the tokens of the synchronization seem comparable, the amount of tokens in the audio descriptions is quite diverse, with an extensive audio description in German, a comparable

amount in English and Italian, and a rather brief audio description in French. Further, the portion of audio description is much higher than the film dialogue in this corpus. In the following, we focus on the encoding of motion events within the audio description parts.

As Ex. (5) shows, motion events are encoded differently in the distinct audio descriptions in the different languages, although they refer to the same visual input. Thus, audio descriptions may, first, differ with respect to what narrative elements the audio describer has chosen in order to retell the story of the film (see section 2).

Ex. (5) Audio description example:

a. *Ger.* Paul steht auf der Leiter mit leerem Blick und halb offenem Mund. Paul stürmt zusammen mit den anderen Soldaten auf das Schlachtfeld. (Paul stands on the ladder with a blank stare and half-open mouth. Paul storms onto the battlefield with the other soldiers.)

b. *Eng.* Paul and his friends climb up over the lip of the trench. They march forward with the rest of the company.

c. *Fr.* Eden Kaczynski et Paul s'exécutent à leur tour. Fusil en main, les soldats s'élancent sur le champ de bataille boueux. (Eden Kaczynski and Paul execute their turn. Rifles in hand, the soldiers set off across the muddy battlefield.)

d. *It.* Paolo, insieme agli altri soldati, esce correndo dalla trincea. Hanno il fucile in mano e avanzano disordinatamente per il campo fangoso. (Paul, together with the other soldiers, comes running out of the trench. They have their rifles in their hands and advance haphazardly across the muddy field.)

Second, the examples show the typical encoding of motion events with respect to whether they are S- or V-languages. The German audio description places the focus on the protagonist and encodes only one motion event (*stürmt + auf (storms + onto)*). The English audio description, in contrast, expresses the motion events with MANNER in the verb (*climb, march*) and PATH in satellites (*up, forward*), in the first case in combination with a prepositional phrase. The French audio description encodes MANNER of motion, similar to the German version, in the verb *s'élancer* (*storm*), whereas the first motion verb (*s'exécutent (execute, carry out)*) only indicates the process of succession and thus only encodes PATH. The Italian audio description finally reveals the typical scheme of V-languages. While the PATH is encoded in the finite verbs (*esce* (*exit*), *avanzano* (*advance*) and a prepositional phrase (*dalla trincea* (*from the trenches*)), MANNER is encoded in a subordinate constituent in form of a gerund (*correndo* (*running*)) or an adverb (*disordinatamente* (*haphazardly*)).

This comparative, qualitative analysis has shown very clearly that the typical patterns mentioned in the literature for S- and V-languages also occur here to some extent (cf. the Italian audio description), but that this is not necessarily the case (cf. the French audio description). In the following, a quantitative analysis will provide more detailed information on the distribution of PATH and MANNER. Figure 1 shows the proportions of PATH as encoded in the four languages in verbs and their constituents in comparison to satellites. Thus, in the Romance languages, PATH is most frequently expressed only in the verb root (light green column). In the Germanic languages, on the other hand,

PATH is less frequently expressed only in the verb root. Here it is more often a satellite (light blue column) or a prepositional phrase (yellow column) that encodes the PATH.

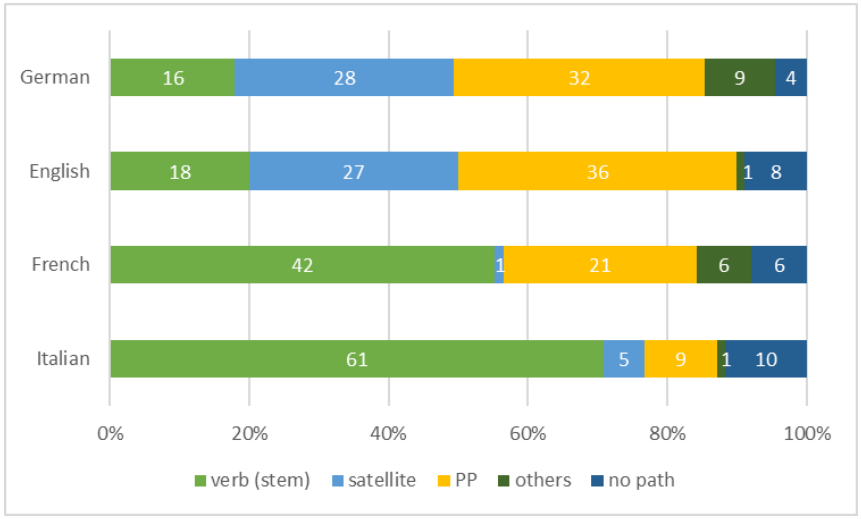

Figure 1. Proportion of PATH encoded in the verb and its constituents or in a satellite

As regards MANNER of motion, Figure 2 shows that it is expressed more frequently in the German and English audio description than in the French and the Italian version. While MANNER in Italian can also be partially encoded outside the finite verb by means of a gerund or an adverb (as can be seen in Ex. (5)d, which is typical for V-languages, this pattern cannot be observed for any of the other languages, not even for French as a V-language. A clear difference can be seen in the fact that in German and English more than 60 % of the verbs convey MANNER in the verb or an additional element, whereas in Italian and French MANNER is encoded in around 40-45 % of the cases.

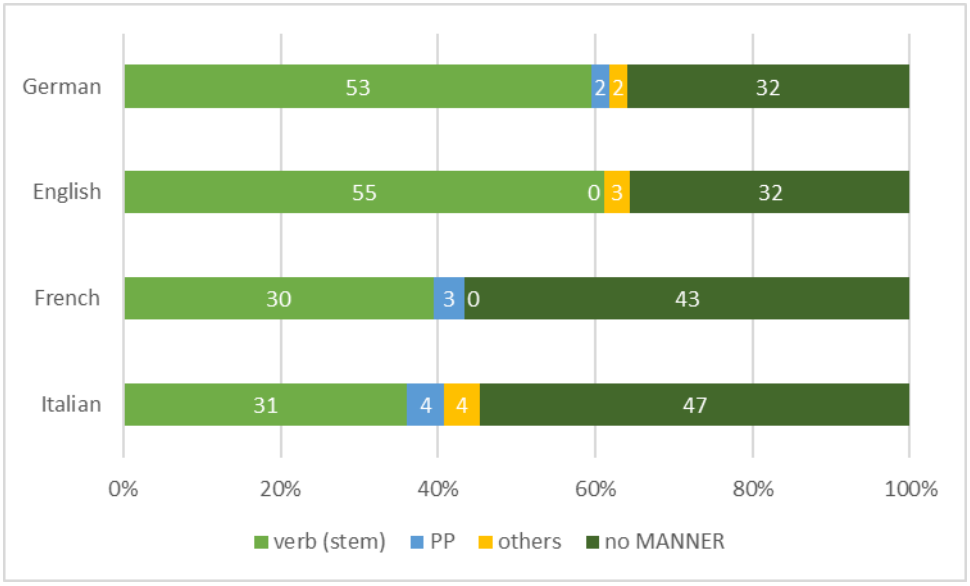

Figure 2. Proportion of MANNER encoded in and outside the verb, or left implicit

This brief analysis shows that the patterns of V- and S-languages are also applied in audio description. In the Germanic languages, the typical encoding of motion events with MANNER in the verb root and PATH in a satellite dominates here as well. The Romance languages mainly verbalize motion events with path in the verb root and manner in a constituent.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This paper aimed at demonstrating how easily corpora of audio description data can be built with the technical devices and artificial intelligence services available these days, and that such corpora offer students and researchers the opportunity to analyze various questions concerning linguistic, cultural, or technical aspects of audio description within a reasonable amount of time, and are therefore suitable for research-based teaching and learning.

Our exemplary contrastive analysis of motion events in four languages has shown that language-specific patterns are replicated in audio description. Despite limitations due to the amount of data under analysis, the results indicate that it could be advantageous to teach students of audiovisual translation the typological differences between Romance and Germanic languages in this respect. This may help students make informed decisions as future audio describers. Furthermore, they will strengthen their competence for the upcoming market of interlingual translation of audio description. Overall, the paper shows that such corpora offer many possibilities for more in-depth analysis of language-specific patterns, such as the frequency of particular motion verbs and genre-specific differences, among others.

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