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Indirect (pivot) audiovisual translation: a burning issue for research and training

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ABSTRACT

This article serves as an introduction to the special issue on the practice of translating audiovisual content through an intermediate language or text. This increasingly common yet underexplored area presents numerous challenges and opportunities for research and training. By employing a broad definition of this practice, we aim to highlight its significance and complexity. We start by discussing the rationale behind focusing on this topic, noting the conceptual ambiguities and diverse terminology associated with it. Then, we review past, present, and anticipated developments in the field, and provide an overview of the contributions within this special issue. To conclude, we identify research questions and potential future directions, emphasising the need for continued exploration and reflection. Ultimately, with this introduction and the special issue as a whole, we aim to bring attention to this critical practice in audiovisual translation, encouraging further scholarly inquiry and practical advancements.

Introduction

Focusing on the audiovisual (AVT) landscape, this special issue explores indirect translation (also known as pivot translation), a practice that is fluid, fast-evolving, and often associated with conceptual fuzziness, repeated attempts at (re)definitions, and varied metalanguage (see, e.g. Ivaska, 2020; Pięta, Ivaska, et al., 2022). Our aim here is to show that this topic is a burning issue for AVT research and training, creating a basis for reflection on ways to move forward.

Since this special issue has an exploratory orientation, in this introductory article we adopt a widely encompassing definition of indirect translation. Therefore, building on Gambier's (1994) and Assis Rosa et al.'s (2017) conceptual proposals, we understand indirect translation as the process or product of translating audiovisual content through an intermediate language or text. This definition allows us to include indirect translation in its simplest form, where the translation process involves three different languages. This is, for example, the case of Polish subtitles for a Korean TV show that are done from an English-language template, i.e.

> a subtitle file consisting of the spotted subtitles of a film […] with specific settings in terms of words per minute and number of characters in a row, which is then translated into as many languages as necessary (Georgakopoulou, 2003, p. 220)

At the same time, the definition is broad enough to encompass instances where the translation process involves only two languages but three texts, as can be the case of interlingual translation of audio description scripts, where the scripts are created in the language heard in the audio and then translated further into other languages.

As regards terminology, when calling for contributions to this special issue, we have prioritised the term 'pivot translation.' This was because we wanted to attract attention from experts in AVT and, according to our earlier research, this term prevails in AVT scholarship (Assis Rosa et al., 2017), although – to our best knowledge – there have been no systematic studies on terminological tendencies in the industry. Based on our earlier literature review (Assis Rosa et al., 2017), it seemed that 'pivot translation' was often used inconsistently (e.g. interchangeably with 'relay,' or 'retranslation'), and there was hardly any evidence of prior metalinguistic reflection to justify this use. Our literature review also showed that within the field of Translation Studies, the label 'indirect translation' prevailed over other competing labels. Moreover, this term seemed particularly convenient because, unlike 'pivot translation,' it has a straightforward antonym (i.e. direct translation) and proved to be a convenient superordinate term of 'compilative,' 'second-hand,' 'third-hand,' 'retranslation,' etc. (Assis Rosa et al., 2017).

With this and earlier special issues on indirect translation (Assis Rosa et al., 2017; Buts et al., 2023; Pięta, Ivaska, et al., 2022; Pięta et al., 2023b), we also wanted to 'bridge the gaps between the segments' (Chesterman, 2019, p. 15) of Translation Studies, pave the way to a more meaningful intersection between different branches of this discipline that explore translating from translations (e.g. interpreting, literature), and, ultimately, help consolidate the knowledge generated by our discipline as a whole. This is why in the title, the introduction to this special issue, and the concluding dialogue-based article we decided to foreground the term 'indirect translation.' At the same time, we encouraged the contributors to this special issue to reflect on their terminological choices and, should they agree with our rationale, use indirect translation consistently throughout the article when referring to the process or the resulting final product.

In the remainder of this introductory article, we will delve into the motivation behind this special issue, in particular past, current, and future developments in indirect AVT practices, as well as trends in dedicated research and training. We will also critically summarise each contribution and suggest future research avenues that can emerge from the research presented in this special issue.

Why this topic?

Indirect AVT in the past

Just like the history of AVT in general (O'Sullivan & Cornu, 2019), the history of indirect AVT remains largely under-researched and full of blind spots. Very little is known about when exactly indirect translation was first deployed in this domain and how it fared throughout different periods of AVT history.

However, since 'the internationalism and supposed universalism of the silent era were in fact underwritten by a vast array of translation practices' (Dwyer, 2005, p. 301), it seems likely that indirect AVT goes right back to the pre-sound era. It might possibly be traced back to the translation of title cards and the work of 'film explainers' (O'Sullivan & Cornu, 2019, p. 16) who, apart from commenting on what was happening on the screen, read titles from the screen aloud. In certain settings, these translated titles were then further 'translated into a dozen languages' to cater to the needs of multilingual audiences (Brownlow, 1968/1973, p. 11).

There is some evidence pointing to the use of indirect translation in the early years of the sound period. One of the earliest documented instances that we know of is the work of Herman G. Weinberg, a US-based subtitler active from the early 1930s, who 'worked from the print and the original script of a film and, with languages in which he was not entirely fluent, a literal translation of the script into English' (Freedman, 1983).[1]

Another historical example relates to the translation of foreign films in Soviet Estonia, where the Russian language was often deployed as a pivot. When creating subtitles for foreign productions, Estonian subtitlers 'worked solely based on the post-production scripts of the Russian dubbings or voice-overs without seeing the film they were translating' (Hoffmann, 2023, p. 5). Another indirect translation practice common in the Soviet Estonian film clubs was 'simultaneous interpreting from Russian dubbing into Estonian' (Hoffmann, 2023, p. 11).

Another case in point dates back to the 1980s, when Japanese developers started releasing their products in the US-dominated video game market using a post-gold model (O'Hagan & Mangiron, 2013). In this configuration, Japanese games were first localised into English to cater to the needs of the dominant North American game industry. After some time, these localised versions were used as start texts for localised versions to be released in other, commercially less important markets.

Indirect translation was also at the heart of the new era in AVT history that began with the birth of DVD in the mid-1990s. DVDs generated the need to produce subtitles fast at a low cost (to avoid piracy and maximise profit), leading to the introduction of templates.

For quite some time, when the global media ecosystem was marked by the hegemony of English-language content, these intermediary texts were produced in English to accompany English language productions and help streamline further translations into multiple languages. They could thus be classified as 'ultimate source language-mediated' indirect translations (as per typology proposed in Assis Rosa et al., 2017). However, with the development of streaming media platforms in the late 2000s, and the increasing number of productions in a multitude of languages on these platforms (Rodríguez, 2017), a second generation of templates emerged: English language templates started to be created for audiovisual programmes that were originally produced in other languages (O'Hagan, 2007, p. 162). As per Assis Rosa et al.'s (2017) typology, this second generation of templates can be classified as 'mediating language-mediated indirect translations.'

These examples, cursory as they might be, suggest that indirect AVT has a long-standing and intricate history, and that this history remains to be thoroughly researched and written.

Indirect AVT today

Indirect AVT is a common practice in today's media ecosystem. It spans across different AVT modes (such as audio description, dubbing, fandubbing, fansubbing, fanvoicing, subtitling, surtitling, sign language interpreting, subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing). It can be found in a myriad of genres (films, TV shows, educational and corporate videos, commercials, video games, news broadcasts, etc.) and settings (streaming platforms, cinemas, cable TV, etc., social media). Indirect processes are deployed in various AVT workflows. For example, they can be found in fully automated subtitling workflows involving speech-to-text and machine translation applications, whereby an oral utterance from a video is first turned into text by an automatic speech recognition (ASR) system and then processed through machine translation (MT). In this scenario, the output generated by the ASR system acts as a stepping stone (intralingual and inter-modal) translation, which is then rendered into further languages by MT.

Another manifestation of indirect AVT practices is the already-mentioned pivot template-centered workflows, which AVT professionals appear to approach with mixed feelings. Some like them because they creates additional job opportunities for those working into or out of major languages, especially English (the language of the template). Another advantage of pivot templates is that they may grant greater freedom (because the 'target audience most probably does not understand the source language either', cf. anonymous quote from Oziemblewska & Szarkowska, 2022); and may save translators some part of the heavy-lifting e.g. the detective work to clarify culture-specific references (Valdez et al., 2023).

However, other professionals argue that the use of pivot templates negatively affects translators' working conditions and the quality of the final product. They express concerns about lower rates (since subtitlers are now paid only for translation and not for timing), the use of unhelpful annotations, locked templates, and templates not designed for pivot subtitling purposes, such as those created for SDH or different AVT modalities. Additionally, there are issues with English templates created by professionals who lack a thorough understanding of the source language or those serving dual purposes, acting both as subtitles aimed at English-language viewers and as a starting text for translators into other languages. These concerns are documented in various studies, including Čemerin (2014), DuPlessis (2020), Oziemblewska and Szarkowska (2022), and Pięta et al. (2023c), as well as by Valdez et al. (2023) and Torres-Simón et al. (2023).

Professional associations and policymakers also seem to eye pivot templates with suspicion. This is clear, for example, in the 'Wannabe' document on the AVTE webpage, which states:

> [F]or the sake of quality one should avoid translating via a third language. (…) Translators taking on jobs (…) through a third language will take jobs away from colleagues who are better suited for them, which will eventually undermine the quality of our work and lower the status of our profession (…). (AVTE, 2024)

Another case in point is the European Commission's report, which provides recommendations for the translation sector with a focus on 'cultural and creative works' (EC, 2022, p. 6). In this report, indirect translation practices are seen as a potential remedy 'that could compensate for a lack of translators, particularly in rare language combinations,' yet its current outputs are deemed to be of insufficient quality (EC, 2022, p. 10).

Consequently, the report advises against encouraging indirect translation as a long-term solution.

On the other hand, language service providers are reported to favour indirect AVT due to its numerous business advantages (Georgakopoulou, 2003). Firstly, it broadens the available talent base, serving as a solution for the perceived 'talent crunch'. This is because it's easier to find translators proficient in or translating from English than those with rarer language combinations. Secondly, it eliminates redundant efforts by completing timing only once during template creation. Thirdly, it lowers costs, as rates for language pairs involving major languages, such as English, acting as pivots, are typically lower than those for less common language pairs like Polish-Portuguese. Additionally, in template-centric workflows, subtitlers may only be compensated for translation and not timing, thus further reducing expenses. Fourthly, it simplifies quality control: if the person overseeing this aspect of the workflow lacks proficiency in the exotic language heard in the audio, they can verify the final subtitles against the intermediary English text.

Indirect AVT in the foreseeable future

Our analysis of past and current developments provides little evidence to suggest that, in the foreseeable future, indirect translation will diminish, let alone disappear, within the AVT ecosystem. Rather, current trends in the industry are likely to result in an increased demand for indirect AVT. Particularly noteworthy in this regard are streaming platforms' plans to expand their non-English source content (see, e.g. Collins, 2018). The intensified production and distribution of originals created in multiple languages lead to a new paradigm, whereby English is used increasingly at the stage of post-production, as a target or pivot language (Díaz-Cintas & Hayes, 2023). Equally relevant are the revisions to the European Union legislation (specifically Article 13 of Directive (EU) 2018/1808, amending Directive 2010/13/EU), which now stress that video-on-demand services need to have at least a 30% share of European content in their catalogues if they want to operate in the European Union member states (EC, 2018). This legislative emphasis on diverse language productions will surely heighten the need for translations into multiple languages, making pivot approaches a likely solution.

Even if there is an increase in the number of AVT translators specialising in less common language combinations and able to translate directly, it is difficult to imagine that there will be a sufficient number of qualified translators for every language pair in the world who, apart from language competencies, also meet other requirements (know-how to use specific technology, specialise in a given field of knowledge, etc.) and are always available when necessary. What is more, as long as the media industry is commercially driven and prioritises speed and cost over quality, the balance is tilted in favour of indirect translation, as the practice accelerates turnaround times and diminishes costs.

If translation history has taught us anything about indirect translation, it is that the practice has repeatedly survived and evolved with major disruptions. Therefore, it is likely to survive and evolve with the expansion of generative AI and large language models, which are key disruptive forces in today's mediascape. After all, depending on the specific model architecture and training data, large language models themselves can employ pivot methods when translating between low-resource language pairs.

What is likely to change, however, is the way indirect translation is currently deployed in the AVT industry. In response to the concerns voiced by translators (see Indirect AVT today), researchers recommend various measures, including having templates created by native speakers of the content language, ensuring fair remuneration for time spent on timing improvements in template-based subtitles, developing technologies and workflows facilitating smooth communication between template makers, subtitlers, and revisors, revising templates with the assistance of source-language specialists, providing research-based, cost-free training on pivot template creation, and advocating for author rights for template creators (for details, see Oziemblewska & Szarkowska, 2022; Pięta, Bueno Maia, et al., 2022; Pięta et al., 2023c; Torres-Simón et al., 2023; Valdez et al., 2023). All these measures may contribute to a more responsible use of pivot templates in the AVT industry.

Research on indirect AVT

Although indirect AVT is mentioned more and more in different academic and industry publications, dedicated systematic and empirical studies are recent and rare (see Pięta et al., 2023a). Dedicated entries on indirect AVT remain notably absent from AVT encyclopaedias and handbooks. The only exception seems to be the *Routledge Handbook of Audio Description* (Taylor & Perego, 2022), which includes two chapters on indirect AVT (Oncins, 2022 and Liu & Tor-Carroggio, 2022). As we delve into the review of indirect AVT, it becomes evident that a predominant portion of research on indirect AVT has primarily embraced product-oriented and, more recently, participant-oriented approaches to the examination of subtitling. Substantial research has also been directed toward investigating indirect practices of audio description. In contrast, scant attention has been paid to the exploration of other AV products and modes, even if there are signs of a recent surge in interest in video game localisation.

Indirect practices in professional subtitling, and, in some cases, of the pitfalls involved, have been the subject of discussions here and there. Gottlieb (1994, p. 117), for instance, describes pivot translations as a 'new potential source of errors in the world of subtitling' and pinpoints four potential pitfalls characteristic of pivot AVT, namely the propagation of errors present in the intermediary text, and transfer of features of the language of the intermediary text to the target language, as well as segmentation, layout, and cueing. In this respect, Nikolić (2015) offers a more balanced discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of employing source language templates (templates in the language of the original audiovisual product) and pivot templates as part of the current disruptions that translators have been facing more recently.

At the same time, books that have become a key reference for subtitlers' training have also acknowledged the prevalence of indirect practices in professional subtitling. Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2007/2014; 2021) books describe how the use of English as an intermediary language is a widespread practice for the translation of audiovisual products in lesser-known languages (2007, p. 2014, p. 32; 2021, p. 54) and mention in passing when indirect practices add to subtitlers' challenges. Pedersen's (2011) book also notes the prevalence of indirect translation practices as a means of saving editing time in regions like Scandinavia, where the written forms of target languages exhibit a high degree of mutual intelligibility (p. 17).

In what follows we will zoom in on research on indirect translation practices in different AVT modes.

Research on indirect translation practices in subtitling, dubbing and voice-over

Dedicated empirical studies on indirect AVT research have also prioritised professional subtitling, and, to a lesser extent, dubbing and voice-over. These studies have mostly been published in the last two decades. When conducting product-oriented studies, researchers have focused on examining the errors that this practice generates. For example, Zilberdik (2004) conducted a product-oriented study of the Hebrew subtitles of the Danish film Festen. To do so, the author compared the Danish original with the English intermediary text, followed by a comparison of the Hebrew subtitles with the Danish original, all to identify deviations. Vermeulen (2011) compared the transcripts of the original Flemish (Belgian Dutch) dialogue list of the film *De zaak Alzheimer* and the Spanish dubbing and subtitling of La memoria del asesino. Similarly to Zilberdik (2004), Vermeulen (2011) focused on the shifts between the original audiovisual product and the dubbed and subtitled version, which were attributed to the intermediary text, an English translation of the preproduction script. Gottlieb and Grigaravičiūtė's (1999) study was the only one that we could identify that looked at voice-over. Focusing on a product-oriented comparison, the authors examined the Lithuanian voice-over of the Danish TV serial *Charlot & Charlotte* based on the English pivot script. The findings highlighted the resulting misinterpretation and loss of information due to the translators' dependence on the intermediary English version.

What these studies have in common is the focus on the negative consequences of indirect translation, particularly on deviations from the original audiovisual product that are replicated or transferred because of the translators' overreliance on an English intermediary text. This is not surprising since a similar trend has been seen in indirect literary translation, where most empirical studies analyse the quality of the final translation (examples include Bąkowska, 2019; Haroon, 2022; see Pięta et al., 2023a). However, unlike in research on indirect literary translations, there is a dearth of tested hypotheses or comprehensive typologies of various instances of indirectness.

Participant-oriented studies and studies employing mixed methods are recent, and they have mainly focused on (professional) subtitling and quality issues that come from the use of intermediary versions. With the use of questionnaires and, less frequently, interviews, participant-oriented studies have explored current market practices and the perceptions of professional subtitlers and trainers regarding indirect subtitling and, more specifically, pivot templates. Casas-Tost and Bustins's (2021) study on Asian film festivals in Catalonia surveyed directors and festival organisers and conducted a comparative analysis of Johnny Ma's film Old Stone (2016) in Standard Chinese, the intermediary English subtitles, and the Catalan subtitles. Their objective was to understand the prevalence of indirect translation in film festivals and the effects of this practice on quality. In turn, Oziemblewska and Szarkowska's (2022) study was the first to gauge the opinions of subtitling professionals on the quality of templates with the goal of identifying actionable solutions to subtitlers' challenges. Pięta et al. (2023c) elicited templators' and trainers' experiences and expectations when creating pivot templates and teaching how to create them. This seems to be the first study that focused on the creators of templates and the training available to them. Torres-Simón et al. (2023) examined the

impact of pivot subtitling on the goals of promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth and decent work for all by reviewing European codes of ethics promoted by professional translators' associations and surveying subtitlers on their experience in working with pivot templates. Valdez et al. (2023) looked at how indirect subtitling practices impact language hierarchies and translation quality based on subtitlers' perspectives when translating from pivot templates for streaming services, among other media environments. In turn, Künzli (2022) zoomed in on how subtitlers perceive recent changes in working conditions in German-speaking countries. Indirect translation is positioned here as a challenge that, linked with other factors, affects subtitlers' working conditions negatively.

Research on indirect translation practices in AD

Within audio description research, there is a significant focus placed on indirect translation practices. The interlingual translation of existing audio descriptions, also known as audio description translation, has been extensively explored in the literature (see, for instance, Jankowska, 2015; Remael & Vercauteren, 2010), as evidenced by the inclusion of two dedicated entries on the topic in the *Routledge Handbook of Audio Description* (Taylor & Perego, 2022). These entries provide an overview of the current state of the art in AD translation, highlighting its relationship to prevailing legislation and standards (Oncins, 2022). Furthermore, a case study centred on AD translation in Chinese-Spanish (Liu & Tor-Carroggio, 2022) showcase the translation challenges of this practice. Several studies have adopted a product-oriented perspective to pivot audio description, with a particular focus on extralinguistic cultural references. For instance, Remael and Vercauteren (2010) conducted a product-oriented study of two English AD scripts and their translation into Dutch, examining potentially problematic translation units and extralinguistic cultural references. Their primary objective was to identify and discuss the challenges faced by translators of audio descriptions. Jankowska et al.'s (2017) study also delved into extralinguistic cultural references by examining the self-translation of Polish AD scripts into English, paying particular attention to these cultural nuances. In contrast, Liu et al.'s (2022) corpus-based study adopted a complementary perspective, conducting a contrastive analysis of Chinese AD with Spanish AD based on a multimodal corpus composed of AD of eight films in both languages. This analysis aimed to evaluate the feasibility of AD translation from Spanish into Chinese.

Process – and participant-oriented approaches to indirect translation practices in AD are less prevalent. An exception to this trend is Vera's (2006) experimental process-oriented study, which delves into the time and the creative processes involved in producing and adapting audio description scripts. More recently, Liu's (2023) reception-oriented study explored Chinese AD users' evaluations of three AD versions of the Spanish film The Invisible Guest, focusing on aspects of satisfaction and comprehension.

This growing body of research on AD translation points to the viability, cost-efficiency and time-efficiency of this method for producing quality AD that is well-received by target audiences.

Research on indirect translation practices in videogame localisation

Comparatively to subtitling and audio description, very few studies have investigated indirect video game localisation. The lack of research is particularly noteworthy since

this is a well-known and well-established practice in the localisation industry for non-English games. As mentioned, Japanese games are often first translated into English, and then it is that version that is used as the 'original' for other languages (see, for instance, O'Hagan, 2005). The fact that Mangiron's (2017) literature review on the existing research on game localisation does not mention pivot approaches in this practice suggests that this topic has not received the attention it deserves despite its prevalence in the industry.

Literature on game localisation that refers to indirect translation typically focuses on its challenging aspects. For instance, O'Hagan and Mangiron (2013) make several references to indirect video game localisation in their book and dedicate some space to the challenges that arise from using intermediary versions (as opposed to direct translation). One of these challenges is deciding to produce a dubbed version for certain locales where subtitling is the traditionally preferred audiovisual mode, as this decision is based on the intermediary version (p. 235). In a more recent study, O'Hagan (2023) examines the practices of a leading Japanese game developer and publisher that stands among the pioneers of game localisation, Square Enix, to discuss the driving forces, obstacles, and consequences of indirect game localisation. What is interesting to see is that the challenges are quite specific to indirect video game localisation, suggesting that further research is warranted into not only the specificities of this practice but also the translation process and its reception.

All in all, when compared to other domains, especially literature and interpreting that has been systematically examining indirect translation for some time now, research into indirect AVT is lagging very much behind. This might be partly because scholarly approaches to translation have long been anchored in models that attach more prestige to translating from the 'original' and translating into the translator's 'mother tongue' (Torres-Simón et al., 2023). There might also be other factors that contribute to this apparent lack of interest in indirect AVT stemming from a vacuum of theoretical and methodological tools, as well as openly available data, to systematically study this translation phenomenon. For instance, there is little information on which audiovisual products have been indirectly translated using which intermediary languages, and this poses challenges to researchers interested in conducting product-oriented studies that must infer which AV products have been translated indirectly.

The majority of the above-mentioned research on indirect AVT consists of small-scale case studies that focus on a limited number of participants, texts, languages, geographic areas, and/or timeframes. Additionally, there is a notable scarcity of replication studies, and this in turn hinders our ability to validate common assumptions and findings from prior research dedicated to indirect AVT. Since many of these assumptions and findings remain untested, they run the risk of solidifying into accepted truths through repetition and self-interest – a tendency often observed in small disciplinary circles like AVT Studies.

Equally problematic is the fact that only a limited number of studies critically engages with the expanding body of research on indirect translation developed in other subfields of Translation Studies (see Pięta, 2017 and Pięta et al., 2023a for overviews of dedicated research in other subfields). This lack of intradisciplinary dialogue is problematic, as it may lead to unnecessary duplication of research efforts and missed opportunities for knowledge exchange.

Training in indirect AVT

There appears to be a consensus that indirect translation is reasonably common, here to stay and poses distinct challenges vis-a-vis direct translation, thus requiring an additional set of skills (Bolaños-García-Escribano et al., 2021, p. 5; Pięta, Bueno Maia, et al., 2022). Since present-day translation training aims to prepare students for successful integration into the professional translation market (Nikolić & Bywood, 2021; Pym, 2011), educational institutions would best see to it that their students are exposed to indirect translation workflows in the classroom.

While the need to include indirect translation in translator training was recognised as early as the early 2000s (see, e.g. Gambier, 2003, p. 63), institutional acknowledgment and implementation were somewhat delayed (Torres-Simón et al., 2021). Nevertheless, promising developments are emerging with respect to competences, educational materials, as well as syllabi and classroom activities in this area.

As regards competences, an example that illustrates the slow and delayed recognition of indirect translation can be observed in the subsequent revisions of the EMT competence framework, regarded as the 'leading reference standard for translator training in the European Union and beyond, with applications in both academic and industrial contexts' (EMT, 2022, p. 2). Indirect translation was absent from the first version of this document, dated from 2009. The subsequent revised version of this framework, dated from 2017, only made a cursory mention of indirect translation in parentheses (EMT, 2017). This implied that the 2017 version did not acknowledge that translating for translation, or translating from translation, demands specific skills when compared to direct translation (Torres-Simón et al., 2021). The 2022 revised version of the framework now explicitly 'recognises the ability to translate from and into pivot languages' in the Foreword section on Translation Competences (EMT, 2022, p. 7). While this minor reformulation is a step in the right direction, this recognition is not visible in the list of the thirty-six competences provided within the framework. The lack of (implicit or explicit) references to indirect translation in the list of competences themselves is problematic, as it might leave educational centres clueless as to how to incorporate indirect translation into the set of learning outcomes for their translation training programmes.

Regarding educational materials, Torres-Simón et al. (2021) et al surveyed a selection of mainstream textbooks with recommendations and activities used in teaching translation practice. They identified a handful of activities on indirect translation for literary texts and interpreting, but none specifically related to AVT translation. This lack points to a low visibility of indirect translation in AVT pedagogical settings. It might also help further explain the slow pedagogical uptake of indirect AVT: 'in the end, the burden to incorporate these practices in the classroom falls on the shoulders of the trainers' (Torres-Simón et al., 2021, p. 15). Since the publication of the above-mentioned study, the situation has started to slowly change, and indirect translation has made its entry not only into textbooks with translation activities published in book form but also into the online, interactive educational resources. See, in this respect, Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2021), Pięta, Bueno Maia, et al. (2022), Valdez et al. (2024), or AVT Masterclass (2024) for a few exercises on translating from or for pivot templates in subtitling, video game localisation, and/or AD. While these initial attempts are still sparse and sporadic, they might herald the proliferation of educational materials focused on indirect AVT.

Regarding the syllabi of AVT courses, in 2020 Torres-Simón et al. (2021) conducted a qualitative analysis of EMT translation programmes to identify any references to indirect translation in the syllabi of translation courses offered as part of these programmes. They examined the syllabi of more than 80 translation programmes offered by more than 70 universities across 25 countries, all of which were part of the EMT network and accepted students during the 2018–2019 academic year. Their findings showed that none of the syllabi made explicit reference to the use of indirect translation in the classroom activities. A comprehensive replication study is needed to verify whether this institutional oversight still exists in the present day. However, our brief, non-systematic review of translation programmes conducted in November 2023 indicates that some changes might be on the horizon. For instance, at the University of Warwick, a course titled 'Translation in the Digital Age' includes a specific unit titled 'Subtitling and Pivot Translation.'

When it comes to the prevalence of indirect translation in audiovisual translation classrooms, some data are available about subtitler training. Pięta et al. (2023c) conducted a survey among subtitler trainers across Europe, eliciting responses from seventy-five respondents. Among these respondents, seventeen acknowledged teaching students how to translate from pivot templates, while only five mentioned teaching how to create pivot templates. The scarcity of training in pivot template creation is problematic because the quality of subtitles to which viewers have access often depends on the quality of the pivot template. Furthermore, the study suggested that training in translating for or from pivot templates originates from the industry rather than academic institutions. This also raises concerns, as industry-based training typically overlooks issues related to subtitler ethics and the long-term sustainability of the profession. To our best knowledge, there have been no studies looking at the presence of indirect in AVT classrooms focused on other AVT modalities, so we lack knowledge on the extent to which future AD, dubbing or videogame professionals have had access to training opportunities in this regard.

Summary of contributions

Apart from this introductory article, this special issue contains four research articles and one dialogue-based contribution on the topic of indirect AVT.

In the first research article, Jankowska explores the usefulness of annotated pivot templates in AD translation, investigating to what extent such a workflow helps avoid cultural loss. As cultural mediators, AD template translators are required to address culture specific references. The author examines how annotated pivot AD-templates impact the identification and explanation of such references, the AD-translators' decision-making processes, the time they allocate to research, and the way AD-translators prioritise information to decide on the best strategies to retain or adapt culture specific references.

In turn, Dore and De Nicola's research article explores how creativity and quality interrelate in indirect AVT. Through a detailed analysis of the challenges posed by the translation of kinship terms, coarse language, and Korean culture-specific references, as well as the identification of control factors that might affect translation quality, the authors examine how patterns established in the pivot text are carried over to subtitling

and dubbing, and how they influence translators' decision-making processes and creative output.

For its part, Liu, Casas-Tost, and Rovira-Esteva's study focuses on AD translation from Spanish to Chinese, particularly on how such workflows can help meet user expectations in China. Relying on data from four sources, the authors address information load, subjective comments, and sensitive scene treatment in AD, presenting four norms that steer AD providers' decision-making choices. The authors then propose a set of AD-localisation guidelines, calling for their consideration as a useful alternative in ensuring that AD becomes more widely accessible in China.

In the last research article in this issue, Corrius and Espasa explain how in advertising campaigns borders between source, mediating, and target languages can be blurred. They discuss how advertising translation traditions enhance the relevance of target language(s) and determine which elements of the source language(s) are to be kept or adapted. The case study they present illustrates how different versions of the same advertisement are co-created and presented simultaneously, thus increasing the visibility of specific features of texts in bilingual contexts and breaking binary relations between source and target texts.

Finally, to bring together some of the emerging themes from the contributions to this special issue and explore areas that warrant exploration but have not been addressed here in sufficient detail, the final contribution includes a dialogue on indirect AVT among experts from different AVT branches, namely Bellén Agulló Garcia (game localisation), David Orrego-Carmona (subtitling), and Giselle Spiteri Miggiani (dubbing). The dialogue takes us through several historical perspectives, current controversies, challenges, and solutions related to indirect AVT, as well as prospects for future practice, research, and training in this area.

Future directions

In this special issue, we stress that the the long-standing, increasingly widespread, and challenging practice of indirect AVT has not received sufficient attention from scholars and trainers. As such, it has become a pressing issue for both research and training. By mapping various aspects of indirect AVT, we have achieved a certain breadth in terms of languages (Catalan, Chinese, English, Korean, Italian, Spanish, Polish), geographic areas (Asia and Europe), and modalities (audio description, dubbing, subtitling, transcreation). However, many more aspects still need to be examined.

Drawing on the expert insights shared in the dialogue-based article, the findings of studies reported in the research articles compiled here, and the blind spots identified in our literature review, we propose the following follow-up questions:

- How were indirect AVT produced and received in the past? How are they produced and received today?
- What were/are the reasons and motivations for translating audiovisual content with further translation in mind?
- What were/are the attitudes, beliefs, and expectations of audiovisual translators who create or work from pivot texts? In which modes or settings are they more/less tolerant towards this practice? What about other stakeholders?

- How do pivot AVT differ from direct AVT, for example in terms of linguistic composition or translators' and viewers' expectations?
- Are there common patterns of indirectness across various AVT modes (e.g. deaf relay interpreting, video game localisation, fansubbing)? How do these patterns compare to those observed in other domains, such as indirect literary translation, relay interpreting, pivot machine translation, or translation of sacred texts?
- Which analytical models can help classify different instances of indirectness within AVT?
- How can conceptual and methodological insights from other disciplines, as well as dialogue within Translation Studies, enrich research and training efforts in indirect AVT?
- What designations are predominantly used to refer to different texts and agents involved in indirect AVT practices in academia and in the industry?
- What specific competencies and technologies are needed to efficiently and ethically translate audiovisual content with further translation in mind?
- When, where, and how should we train translators who produce pivot AVT that meet clients' and users' expectations?

Many of these questions were anticipated in the call for contributions to this special issue and remain to be answered. Indirect AVT is here to stay, but without insights into past and present practices, we will be unable to anticipate and prepare for future developments in this field. We hope that this special issue will help refine these questions and inspire new research and training paths in AVT. We welcome your feedback and contributions on these topics.

Note

1. We are grateful to Carol O'Sullivan for drawing our attention to this historical instance.

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