

Interview with Prof. Frederic Chaume

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On the 19th of September 2019 Vilnius University, Kaunas Faculty welcomed a world-class researcher, Professor of audiovisual translation at Universitat Jaume I (Spain) and Honorary Professor at University College London (UK) Frederic Chaume. During a five-day visit, he presented a series of lectures and workshops titled *Multimodal Research in Audiovisual Translation: Translation Paradigm of AVT Products in 2019*. Professor Chaume, often referred to as the godfather of dubbing due to the considerable influence of his publications on the academic world, has had an impressive career of 11 years as a professional translator for television, dubbing and subtitling companies. Nowadays, he is actively involved in various scientific research projects related to the field of audiovisual translation. Chaume is author and co-author of such books as *Doblatge i subtitulació per a la TV* (Eumo, 2003), *Cine y Traducción* (Càtedra, 2004), *Teories Contemporànies de la Traducció* (Bromera, 2010) *Audiovisual Translation: Dubbing* (Routledge, 2014),

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Pasado y Presente de la Traducción para el Doblaje (UPC, 2019), *La Traducción para el Doblaje: Mapa de Convenciones* (UJI, 2016) and *La Traducción para la Subtitulación: Mapa de Convenciones* (UJI, 2019), as well as a number of scientific publications regarding dubbing, subtitling and didactics of audiovisual translation. He is also a keynote speaker at international conferences, a member of editorial boards of scientific journals, and a research group coordinator officially awarded for constant university training in the field of audiovisual translation.

The entire community of the Faculty was delighted to welcome a scholar of such high calibre and take part in the following theoretical and practical sessions: *Introduction to AVT: Dubbing and Voice-Over as AVT Types*; *The Market of Media Localisation (Audiovisual Translation)*; *Translation for Dubbing: Juggling Take Segmentation, Dubbing Notations, Lip-synching and Natural Dialogues*; *Lip-Synching: The Three Synchronies*; *Hands-on Practice: A translation Brief for Netflix*; *Translating Titles, Songs, Cultural References & Multilingual Movies*; *Dubbing in the Cloud (with ZooDubs)*. The visit was initiated and coordinated by Professor Loreta Huber at the Institute of Languages, Literature and Translation. As a result, the second-year MA students of Audiovisual Translation provided their impressions and insights reflecting upon the theoretical lectures and workshops.

One of the MA students, Indrė Višinskaitė, pointed out that it was inspiring to have a leading audiovisual translation scholar share his knowledge and experience. She also added that Professor Chaume's suggestion to set up a portfolio containing samples of one's work is "beneficial since it helps in job interviews and also allows you to substantiate the fees for your work."

Another MA student, Viktorija Bareikytė, shared her thoughts on the professor's teaching methodology. According to her, Chaume's methods are "excellent" because he presents information in an extensively clear and understandable way. "It is fascinating to see in reality the person whom you quote in your works, especially when it is a professor of audiovisual translation", said Viktorija.

Edita Baltrūnaitė highlighted the possibility to apply the theoretical knowledge in practice. In her view, various insights on the dubbing industry, helpful examples and access to the professor's slides with many internet sources and information, was a valuable experience. "I am glad to have had such an opportunity", Edita remarked.

According to Austėja Baranauskaitė, the bonus Session 7 was very likely the most interesting part of the lectures. The professor introduced a cloud-based dubbing management platform *ZooDubs* and demonstrated how a short excerpt of a moving image was translated for dubbing in the cloud. Austėja said that she had never come across such a professional dubbing tool: "the platform seems to be functional and convenient for work."

Some students found the practical sessions to be fun and intriguing. Karolina Jenciūtė commented that even though she had experience with similar assignments, translating and writing a dubbing dialogue for a scene from the film *Who's my favourite girl?* was "a challenge" because of the pauses and paralinguistic sounds that had to be noted in the assignment.

MA student Airidas Kairys added that he enjoyed the practical sessions where the students translated according to the rules of taking segmentation, lip-synchrony and isochrony. Just like Austēja, he was also impressed by the dubbing software presented at the very last session.

After the lectures, Professor Chaume kindly agreed to share his professional experience and insights. The responsibility of preparing questions for the interview was delegated to the second-year MA students of audiovisual translation.

What was the first film that you ever dubbed?

I have translated up to one hundred and fifty audiovisual products, including films, TV series, cartoons, documentaries and some concerts, which were either dubbed or subtitled. Still, I can hardly remember the one which could be considered as the first dubbed film. I have subtitled such well-known live-action feature films as Stanley Kubrick's *Path of Glory* (1957), Woody Allen's *Mighty Aphrodite* (1995) and *Everybody Says I Love You* (1996). I have also done the translation and dialogue writing for dubbing of one of the parts of *The Godfather* (1972) directed by Francis Ford Coppola. But I cannot remember the first one. I started with documentaries, which is one of the ways to come into the industry because no one wants to translate them – since they are more complicated, a lot of information should be googled. After documentaries, I moved to cartoons and finished with TV series. I did the translation and adaptation for dubbing of some *Batman* (1960s), the fifth-highest-grossing classic TV series in North America, an American television sitcom fantasy series *Bewitched* (1964-1972), films such as *Fiddler on the Roof* (Norman Jewison, 1971), *Gideon's Trumpet* (Robert E. Collins, 1980) and *Year of the Gun* (John Frankenheimer, 1991), *Beauty and the Beast* (2012-2016) series, Michael Palin's *Around the World in 80 Days* (BBC, 1989), *The Ray Bradbury Theatre* (1985–1992) and others. If I could take a closer look at my CV, I would specify what the first dubbed film was.

What was the most memorable translation you have ever done?

I should acknowledge that the biggest challenge for me as a translator was Woody Allen's films. His production contains a great many cultural references, examples of intertextuality, double meanings and puns. Therefore, while translating his movies, I had to make many inquiries, consult with native speakers and examine information online.

I also love Stanley Kubrick. He was one of those film directors who was always concerned about translation. All of Kubrick's film titles have been translated in most dubbing countries, except the one with the proper name, *Lolita* (1962). Even though the film director could not speak many foreign languages, he used to check the translated titles of his films before being approved by the company. Among the translation difficulties he encountered was the title of his last film *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999). The title of the film has not been translated into many languages such as Italian, French, German and Spanish. Despite the many options that the official translators from the different dubbing countries sent him to translate the phrase “eyes wide shut”, which contributed much to the hidden meaning of the film and could be seen as the opposite of the set English phrase “eyes wide

open”, Kubrick didn’t finish his job because he died the day he had to approve the different translations of this title into many languages and that is the reason why the title has been kept in English in many dubbing countries, no one dared to approve those translations without his consent. The film production company refused to take responsibility and left the title untranslated, although it was very weird in some European countries to leave titles untranslated at that time.

Having worked in the television and dubbing industry for a long time, have you noticed a change in what employers are looking for from potential employees in terms of skill and values?

I think that the market is changing. Maybe in the past companies expected us to do the translation (and dialogue writing) full stop. Now they require a much more multitasking profile. Our employers want someone who can do translation and dialogue writing. Besides, they need someone who can also, apart from different AVT types such as dubbing, subtitling, SDH or AD, do video edition, sound edition with *ProTools* or art subtitles (changing fonts and sizes). Also, project management is on the rise; they also need someone who would be good at filling metadata. It means that new translators should be able to do all the paperwork around the dubbing project: files that have to be sent to the client, the glossaries, the production sheets.

I had experienced a situation when my students were offered to be project managers, but, unfortunately, they refused to accept the job offer. In my opinion, it is a big mistake to say: “I am not a project manager, my qualification is different, I am not into sales, and I am not into business”. I think recent graduates must accept such offers and start as project managers to get to know the company from inside. Once they know the company’s needs and expectations, they can work as freelancers for that company or other companies.

In general, the media localisation business needs new people with different skills now, as well as employers require more versatile specialists. Therefore, they hire not only those who can translate or do dialogue writing but also someone who can handle such technical issues as video and sound edition. It does not mean that multilingualism is unnecessary. The more multilingual new professionals are, the better, but not necessarily a specialist in Lithuanian or Spanish. The trend is moving towards technologies or media and communication studies. So, a new profile would be a mixture of translation and communication studies. Emphasis should be put on the ability to handle audio, video, Excel files, cloud technologies, to liaise with clients and translators as well as to communicate and build contacts with domestic and foreign clients. It could be someone good at voice-acting or dubbing directing. For example, some of my students were asked to be dubbing directors in Los Angeles as interns. They were so scared and shocked. It shows that even though we are not training students to do that, we have to move forward. On the one hand, we can benefit from drama or theatre studies to be able to dub ourselves and also to direct dubbing sessions, on the other hand, it should be the ability to manage software, video edition programmes, a bit of engineering and, of course, translation and dialogue writing. All in all, what they need is dialogue writing, acting and working with technologies.

Do you think there are differences in films that are dubbed in a small studio or a big company? If so, what are the differences?

I come from a city in Spain, Valencia, where dubbing and subtitling companies are mostly small. I have visited a lot of companies, and my first-hand experience is that most of them are small companies. Many companies in Madrid, Barcelona, Berlin, Rome and Paris are small companies. They have from three to five employees, at most ten people working for a company. It is not very easy to work for all companies in the same way because they want different things, maybe the whole thing is more or less the same, but the details vary. That is why it is essential to be trained and get to know how they do dubbing, voice-over or subtitling before joining different companies.

Large companies are easier to work for because everything is much more standardised. Large companies prepare one script for dubbing in 20 or more languages. Moreover, with large companies, the process is much more automatized. Since they know that they need a homogenised product in many languages, they take time and invest money to prepare a complete standardised script in advance, and give guidelines, add glossaries and explain potential translation issues between parenthesis in the script. Working in a big company is much more standardised, everything has to follow a protocol, whereas in a small studio a lot of things depend on the client.

Do you think that the increasing number of universities that offer translation programmes has a negative influence on the quality of translation?

Are they all capable of preparing good translators?

I don't think so. The more, the better. What is essential for me once you start a programme is that you can combine researchers and academics with practitioners. For me, people teaching AVT should have a background in professional practice. You can also combine, you can have academics, you can have teachers who know the bibliography because most of times practitioners don't know, they are not aware of what Istvan Fodor said some forty years ago, to give just one example, and they sometimes don't know how to justify their choices in front of their clients. However, they know what to do and how to do it. If academics have a background in professional AVT, it's a perfect combination because they do both. If they don't, then they provide the students with the theoretical part of AVT, which is also very important to defend yourselves in the companies. Then you know how things are done and can justify your choices. An ideal way to start a programme is when you can have the two profiles, i.e. academics who are or have been practitioners for a while and practitioners who want to reflect on what they do and how they do it. Or else, you must combine both academics and professionals.

There are indeed a lot of new programmes all over Europe and America. They're booming in South America and Asia. One of the examples is Doha in Qatar, Peru and China.

I don't think the quality is going down if you can combine these both approaches: the academic and professional approach. It's good because otherwise, you would have to learn the hard way, similar as I did. Since there was no AVT when I was studying in Valencia, and I couldn't study translation, I did English and German philology. Then I

learned audiovisual translation by doing it. It's okay, but I would have preferred to be at university and be taught what isochrony, takes or lip-sync are because I learned it by making mistakes and being not paid because of my initial mistakes. Then I sat down with AVT professionals and learned. I'm really grateful to them. Of course, when you get out of university, you need practice, because practice makes perfect. Finally, I think the quality is rising because of BA and MA levels all over Europe.

What recommendations and advice do you have for beginners in dubbing?

What are the key aspects that they should focus on in the process of dubbing?

I strongly recommend that they should open themselves to new technologies and new tasks. Do not stick to just translation or dialogue writing. Do more things. Learn how to play with *Audacity*, *Protools*, do a course on voice-acting, cloud dubbing, etc. My advice for them would be to open themselves and look for all possible tasks that they may carry out for dubbing and subtitling companies. They should know that it's possible to work for this industry if they are interested in it.

So, if you are searching for a job, my second recommendation would be going to the companies in person, setting an interview or a meeting, offering your services and telling what you can do. There are different reasons why you could be a good fit in Madrid, for example. You can help because your English level might be better than others'. Do things that others maybe can't. Show them a portfolio: sub, localise and say I can do this and that. If you want to get a foot in the market, eventually you will do that. It is a question of time, and the start is not easy as much as it is not easy to start working in other domains such as architecture, law or IT. We may tend to think that there are no prospects; however, every field has similar problems, and it's similar in other careers as well. Finally, only if you have your mind clear, you will end up where you really want.

How did the evolution of technologies affect the development of the dubbing process?

How is cloud translation going to change the translation process in the future?

Technological development has changed the dubbing process many times. Now we are getting into cloud dubbing, which affects the whole process of dubbing. Firstly, with cloud dubbing, actors do not need to go to the dubbing booth because they can dub at home from all over the world with a good microphone. However, translators are much more monitored as compared to actors because cloud dubbing is intended for many languages at the same time, so the company first creates a standardised homogeneous script in the original language, and each translator and dialogue writer creates what they call a different stream for each language (e.g. Lithuanian stream, Spanish stream, Portuguese stream). Due to this reason the translation is more homogeneous, the client can control us and watch what we do and how we do it, how much time we need, whether there are a lot of breaks during the process, if we translate at night or during the day, whether the pace or rhythm is adequate. In a way, this changes as well because everything can be controlled and monitored. We are not as free as we used to be in the past.

An advantage is that cloud dubbing is better in terms of coherence. Everybody has access to the same thing. There is a glossary and everybody can have access to the glossary. Either a translator or a dialogue writer can feed a glossary. Everything is interactive and automatically saved every single second, and a translator can get access to everything that the rest of the participants are making. The process changes. It has pros and cons, but we must be open to everything. In cloud dubbing, we have to respect such essential dubbing requirements as isochrony, kinetic synchrony, lip synchrony, takes or dubbing notations. What changes most in cloud dubbing is the process of working. It is also true that due to cloud dubbing, the translation prices can go down. That's why it is crucial to carry out other tasks, such as editing or proofreading. At the same time, it is easier because you are in contact with all the agents in the process at the same time, you can consult others. So, cloud dubbing has pros and cons; it's not either black or white.

What are you up to at the moment? Do you still translate or dub films?

Nowadays I don't dub films because I'm too pressed for time. I've been trying to remain in the profession for many years and what I did during the last years was trying to do some dubbing and subtitling at Christmas and Easter holiday not to lose track with the profession. In general, I really love doing dubbing and subtitling. However, I have been travelling a lot for the past ten or fifteen years. What I do instead [of translating] is visiting companies regularly, even in countries where the market of dubbing isn't well known yet, for instance, Peru. All the dubbing into Latin American Spanish is done in Mexico, Argentina, Colombia, Chile and Venezuela in what they call 'neutral Spanish', an artificial variety of Spanish only intended for dubbing, which does not sound spontaneous, especially in countries where they don't speak the local varieties of these other countries mentioned above. Whenever I go there, I encourage them to do dubbing in Peruvian Spanish. Now they've started doing dubbing, and they are doing it very well. For me, it is enriching. Besides, I supervise a programme of internships. Every year I send around thirty students to companies all over the world, from Sydney to the United States or London. That is very important for me because what I get in exchange is that my students can apply what they have learnt during their courses at uni on their internships and they can also provide the other students and me with information about what we need to teach to keep updated in our classes. This is an important way to keep up with the industry so that my students could fulfil the requirements of the companies and meet the needs of the market.