

# Audio Description: A cuckoo in the nest of Translation Studies?

**Louise Fryer**



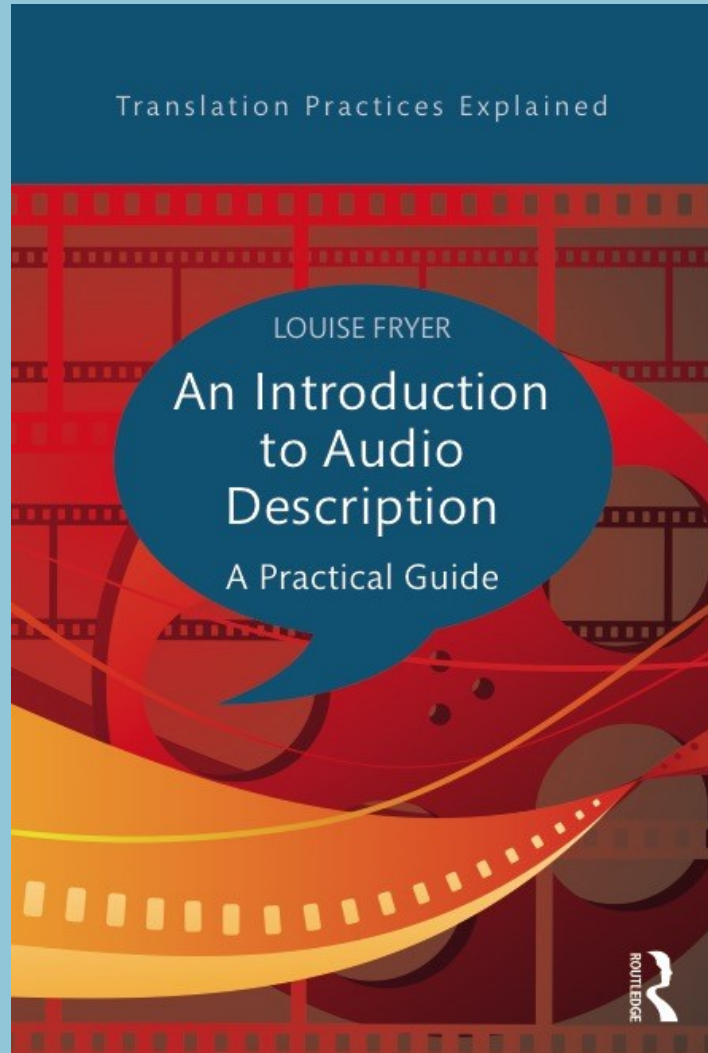
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# Louise Who?





# What am I going to cover?

- What is a cuckoo?
- What is AD?
- What is Media Accessibility (MA)?
- The House of AVT.
- How does MA fit into AVT?
- How does AVT fit into Translation Studies? (TS)
- Abusive translation.
- Integrated: AD abusive or creative?
- Does AD fit with AVT?



# Common Cuckoo



- Order: Cuculiformes
- Family: Cuculidae
- Widespread found on every continent except Antarctica.
- Defining feature: **Brood parasites** - lay eggs in the nests of other birds.



# Cuckoos & AD

- Visually uninteresting.
- Recognise them aurally by their distinctive call.



- Cultural references: in Europe they connote infidelity.
- In India sacred to Kamadeva, god of desire and longing.
- In Japan symbol of unrequited love.



# Would you need to AD a cuckoo?

- How and when would you identify it?
- When it first appears?
- Most sighted people wouldn't recognise one
- After we first hear it?
- Is the call enough?
  
- Would you be expected to clarify the cultural reference?



# What is AD?

- AD is an oral commentary, designed to improve access to audiovisual media by describing the visual elements, users cannot perceive themselves.



# AD is one of the access modes of Audio Visual Translation

- Sign-language interpreting.
- Subtitling (captioning) for the D/deaf, HoH.
- These modes enable users with a sensory disability to access AV media.





# Gambier (2007)

- suggests these types of *translation* may be better thought of as adaptation, manipulation, transfer or remake.



# What is translation?

- It is an exchange, making an inaccessible source text available to users of the target text.



Accessibility is acknowledged as an umbrella term that encompasses all modes of translation for minorities with sensory disabilities (Cintas & Anderman, 2008).



# Media Accessibility

- “The research area dealing with theories, practices, technologies and instruments that provide access to media products and environments for people who cannot, or cannot fully access content in its original form.” (Greco, 2016)



- MA & Translation share the same aims.
- MA deserves a room in the house of TS (Romero Fresco, 2018).



# Access to Media is a human right

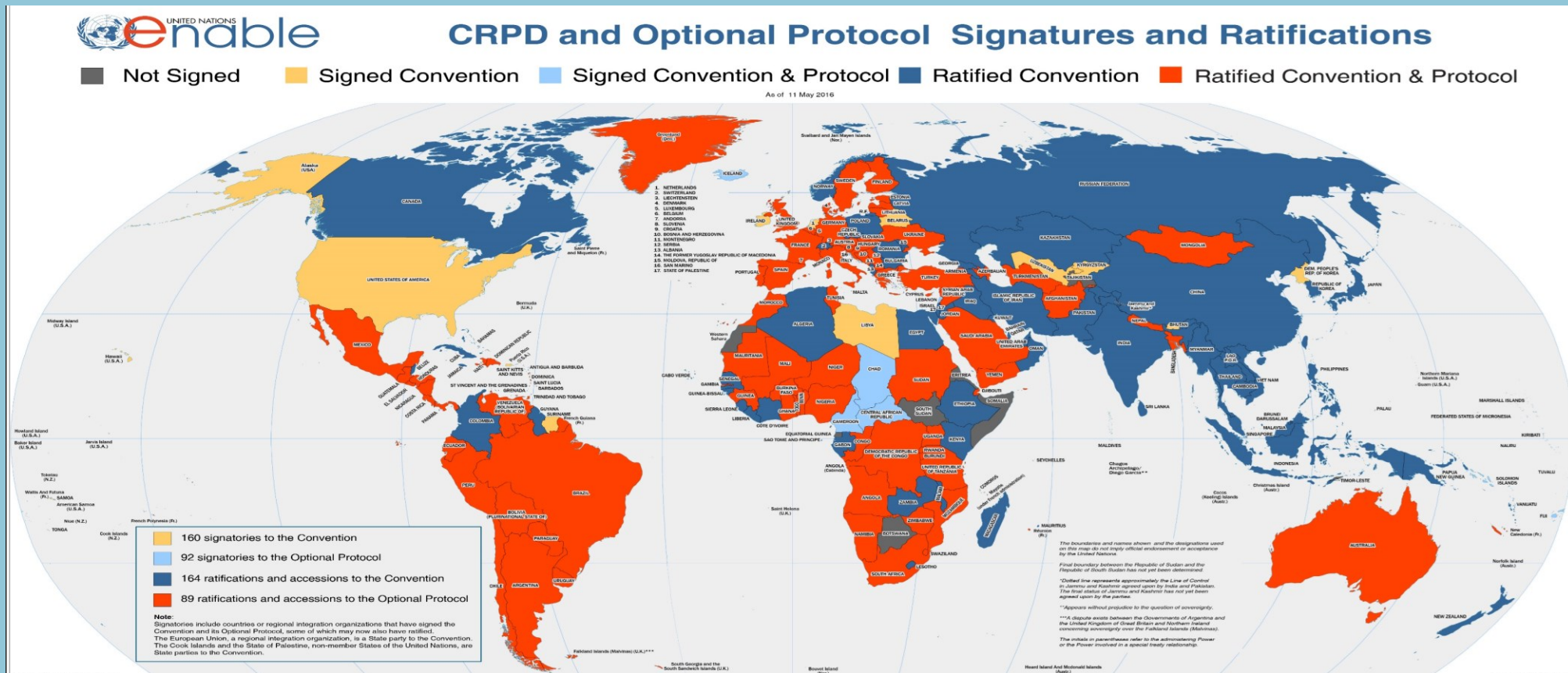
- The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, 2008) article 19:
- All disabled people have the right to live and participate in the community.



# UNCRPD Article 30

- Recognizes “the right of persons with disabilities to take part on an equal basis with others in cultural life.”
- Signatory countries “shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities enjoy access to cultural materials in accessible formats.”

# Signatories & ratifications (2016): not South Sudan, Eritrea; Botswana; Tajikistan. China signed the convention in 2007.







# The social model of disability

- “**Disability** is caused by the way society is organised, rather than by a person's impairment or difference. It looks at ways of removing barriers that restrict life choices for **disabled** people.” (Oliver 1983).



# Social Model

- “The ‘problem’ of disability is relocated from the individual, to the barriers and attitudes which disable her.” (Hasler, 1993)



# Social vs Medical Model

- Doctors and medicine seek to remedy impairment (cure the person), the real priority is to accept impairment and to remove disability (cure society). (Hasler, 1993)



# Social model is reflected linguistically ...

- In the UK it is not acceptable to talk about “the deaf” or “the blind”. The social model encourages us to think of people as individuals.
- BPS: Blind and partially sighted *people*.
- VIPs: Visually impaired *people* (*NB it is also the acronym for Very Important People*).
- UN: PSL.



# Accessibility

- At its broadest accessibility tackles not only physical or sensory barriers but also linguistic and environmental ones.
- Intralingual subtitles are useful to a hearing person in a noisy environment.
- Some people use AD to create an “audio film” when driving.



# How is Media Accessibility different from AVT?

- Intralingual: Leaves the TL unchanged.
- Requires different skills & competencies.



# How is AD different from other modes of MA?

- Most modes translate speech/dialogue.
- AD creates narrative, translates visual action. Closer to stage directions.
- speech/dialogue is left untouched.
- The describer generates words from visual information. There is no existing verbal text on which to draw.
- Requires different skills & competencies.



# Competences (I02)

- ADLAB PRO surveyed 65 describers & 100 users.
- Importance (out of 5)
- Choosing the most relevant information to describe = 4.87.
- Perfect use of mother tongue = 4.70.
- Knowledge of the needs of visually impaired people = 4.65.
- Choosing appropriate AD strategies (e.g. deciding when to name a character) = 4.46.





# Romero Fresco

- MA is in transition
- 1<sup>st</sup> particularist account – for people with disabilities.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> addition of language barriers, migrants.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> universalist account - for older people and all people in disabling situations.



# Universalist account

The danger of widening the scope:

- Overlooking minorities with disabilities whose needs are still not being addressed.
- e.g. the amount and quality of SDH is growing exponentially but more suitable for hard-of-hearing viewers than for Deaf users (Romero-Fresco, 2015).



# One of the Family

- Removal of linguistic barriers: one of the aims of translation
- Puts MA firmly in the house of TS.

- Order: Translation
- Family: AVT
- Genus: MA
- Species: AD modes
- Increasingly found on every continent except Antarctica.

Order: Cuculiformes

Family: Cuculidae

Widespread found on every continent except Antarctica.

Defining feature: **Brood parasites** - lay eggs in the nests of other birds.



# AD species

- AD for screen (film & TV).
- AD for live (semi live) events e.g. theatre, opera, ballet, sport, circus.
- AD for static arts and environments (live and recorded).
- AD for tourism and heritage sites.
- AD for interactive media.



# Family: Audiovisual Translation (AVT)

- interlingual: SL → TL : dubbing, subtitles.
- Access modes intralingual SL = TL.

Intermodal.

- Subtitles or signing for D/deaf H-o-H: Audio → Visual.
- AD: Visual → Audio (Verbal).



# AVT has flown the nest –

- “constitutes a legitimate and independent field of studies, matching the status of any other area of studies in translation and interpreting.” (Chaume 2018)



# History of AVT in Europe (Chaume, 2018)

- Relatively recent
- 1<sup>st</sup> Monograph (Laks, 1957)
- 1<sup>st</sup> Journal (Babel, 1960).
- 1<sup>st</sup> Research (PhD thesis on French subtitling) - Brant, 1984



# History of AVT in China

Haina Jin, Communication University of China, Beijing

- Dates back to silent film era.
- Foreign products → Chinese.
- Chinese products → foreign languages.
- Chinese products → minority languages within China.





# AVT in China

- “has long been recognised as a form of translation and has played an important role in cross-cultural communication, industrial development and social integration.” (Jin, 2018)



# Cultural Differences

- Positive attitude to AVT in China.
- Still regarded with suspicion in Europe.



# Cuckoos bring benefits

- Are hosts dupes?
- What is the benefit of hosting a parasite?
- Research shows that eggs in nests with cuckoos raise more chicks. (Canestrari et al, 2010)
- Cuckoos have better defence mechanisms.
- Co-operative hosts share chick provisioning and territory defence.
- Cuckoos provide benefits for the incubating parent.
- Arguably cuckoos choose nests with better parents.



# What benefits has AVT brought for TS?

- Broadening the concept of a text:
- Text no longer only means written discourse.
- “Linguistic elements...may be complemented by non-linguistic or non-verbal means, such as intonation, facial expressions or gestures .. Or by illustrations, layout, a company logo etc.” Nord, C. (2005)



# Significance of AVT for TS? Continued...

- Kept TS relevant and up-to-date.
- Highlighted how an individual's sensory and linguistic processing systems impact on the reception of a text.
- Encouraged the use of technology in empirical research e.g. eye-tracking, neurophysiological measures including GSR, HR, EEG
- Reconsider the role of the translator.
- The role of the user.
- The importance of synchrony.



# The MA cuckoo

- SDH, sign language interpreting to AVT.
- Last to the party was AD.



# AD in Europe

- UK: 1986 first AD theatre performance in the UK.
- 1991 – 94 Audetel.
- 1994 – 2005 RNIB Home Video Service.
- 2000 first commercial UK AD units established.
- 2002 first AD cinema releases.



# Legal background to the adoption of AD

- **1995 Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)**
- **1996 Broadcasting Act**
- **2003 Communications Act**
- **2010** DDA replaced by **Equality Act**





# MA in China

Haina Jin, Communication University of China, Beijing.

- No legal obligation.
- Occasional AD for films provided by cinemas and libraries in large cities such as Shanghai and Beijing (e.g. China Braille library).
- Occasional sign language translation services on television.



# Media Accessibility in Hong Kong

Dr. Dawning Leung

- AD – just becoming available on TV.
- Occasional services live AD in museums, live arts, films, visits & outings provided by NGOs since 2009.



# What does MA have to do with translation?

- MA subset of AVT → discipline in its own right.
- (own body of research, dedicated conferences).
- Journal of Audiovisual Translation Vol 1; Issue 1 (Nov 2018)
- Ever more consumer groups asking for, and getting, their due right to media accessibility.



# benefits conferred by MA on AVT/TS?

- Reconsider what translation is.
- Move from a particularist (lexical) account.
- To a universalist (multimodal) account.
- Expands AVT from a unimodal, interlingual account (subtitling).
- To an intermodal and intralingual account.
- Spotlit: Function of translation.



# Benefits ctd.

- Interdisciplinarity.
- Funding = chick provisioning.
- Opportunities for collaboration.
- Reinvigorated functionalist approaches (e.g. Reiss & Vermeer).
- Skopos.
- Reinforced the importance of the social context of translation.



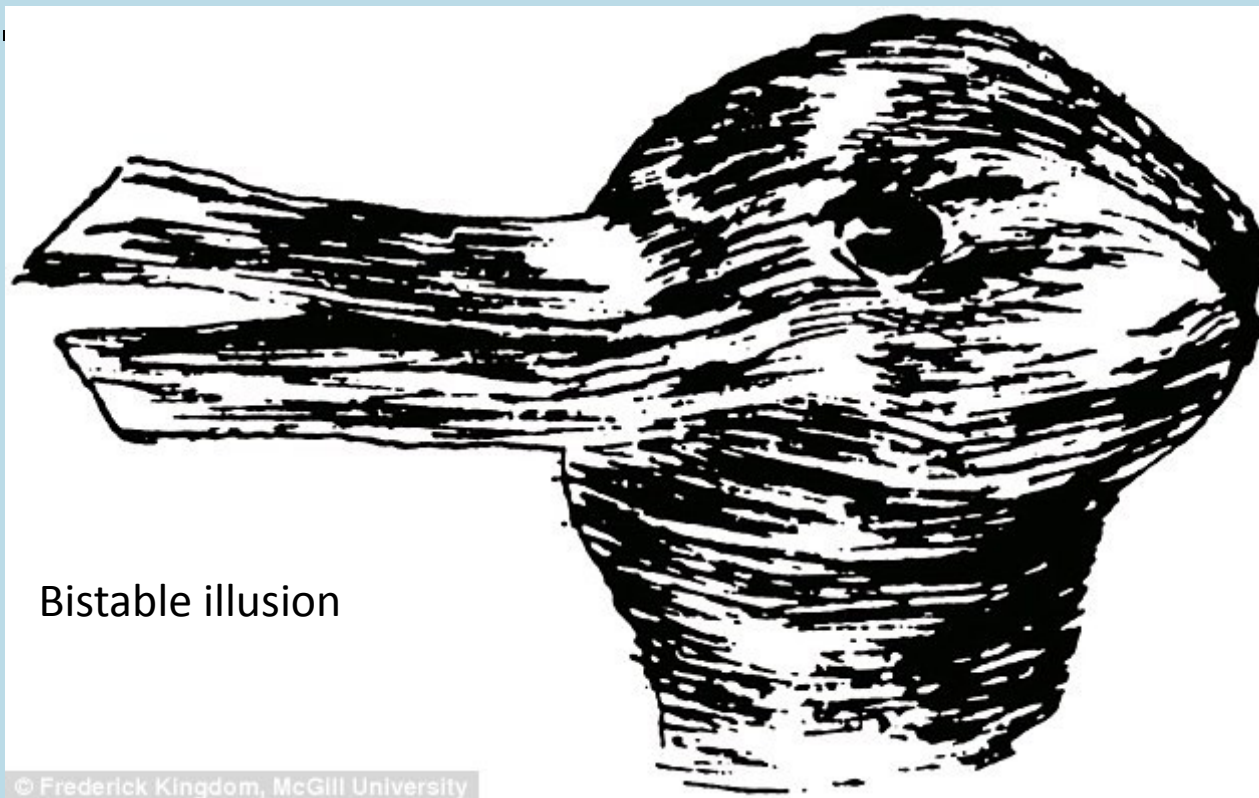
# interdisciplinarity

- An individual's sensory and linguistic processing systems impact on the reception of a text.
- Reception research in MA has embraced eye-tracking, neurophysiological measures including GSR, HR, EEG.



# AD allows us to look at translation from a different perspective

- All translation is subjective; AD especially, as no two people see the same thing.



Bistable illusion

© Frederick Kingdom, McGill University



# Gambier (2007)

- Sees Translation differently.
- Suggests MA may be better thought of as adaptation, manipulation, transfer or remake.





# Is AD not translation but transcreation?

- Transcreations are not considered as replacements of the original (Tymoczko 2007: 68) but as art in their own right.



# Indian academic P. Lal

- Transcreation as a “readable, not strictly faithful translation.”
- The Writer’s Workshop: books were hand-stitched, hand-pasted and hand-bound with hand-loomed cloth. They also boasted fine calligraphy; **Lal had a keen sense of the book as art.**
- The raison d'etre of Writers Workshop was its accessibility (open to young writers).



# Transcreation

- Not unknown to TS.
- “Text featuring creative wordplay and techniques such as assonance or alliteration requires more than a straightforward translation, they need to be transcreated to ensure this impact is retained.” (TransPerfect)
- Originated in Advertising.



# Current AD provision presents some problems

## **Technical:**

- **Headsets:** Uncomfortable; socially isolating; complex to use.
- **Sound Quality:** interference; balance.

## • **Ethical:**

- created by an external professional.



# Integrated AD & AFM

- Embedded provision thought about *a priori*.
- Less as a neutral way of conveying the source text and more as a creative tool, with the aim of “connecting both audience and performer to each other and the artistic content of a piece in a positive way” Cavallo, 2015.



# Integrated AD - characteristics

- Non-neutral (creative/subjective).
- Collaborative.
- Reflects the director's vision (auteur).
- *a priori*.
- Open and inclusive (heard by all.)



# Nornes (1999)

- Abusive translation.
- Subtitles violently transform the source text.
- Non-verbatim = suppression.
- AD does the same.
- Impoverished translations.



# Integration and Collaboration

- Shifts responsibility.
  - From external describer
  - To describer+ artistic team.
- 
- AD becomes part of the weft of the production.





# MA: Catalyst for Creativity

- “A creative team has a palette to work from and they've got very good at sets and costumes and lighting and then they introduced Audiovisual projection. That was a new thing in the palette. When you think about access as one of those - it's something else for you to work with.” (Holmes, 2018)



# AD is changing

- From user comprehension.
- To user enjoyment and immersion.



# So is AD a transcreative cuckoo?

- I think it might be.



- Not parasitic
- symbiotic

# But given the benefits...



# Next time you hear a cuckoo





# Maybe you'll think of it differently...

- Thank you.
- Any Questions?