

Sign Languages in Audiovisual Media: Towards a Taxonomy from a Translational Point of View

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Abstract

Sign language (SL), sign language interpreting (SLI) and sign language translation (SLT) have often been overlooked in both theoretical and more practical approaches within Audiovisual Translation (AVT) studies. This is a theoretical contribution that aims at presenting a taxonomy for the classification of SL, SLI and SLT that might serve to encourage and develop descriptive accounts in the field. This objective is achieved through a review of previous literature on sign language, media accessibility and descriptive AVT studies. To this end, a brief introduction to how SLT and SLI are conducted in the area of audiovisual (AV) content will be presented. A short discussion from an AVT perspective on source languages (L1s), target languages (L2s) and third languages (L3s) will follow, including observations on the role of SLs in AV production, the stages at which SLs are implemented, and the possible translation modes for these languages. Reflections here will lead to the proposal of the first ever taxonomy for the analysis of those AVT modes which include the presence of SLs in AV content. Finally, conclusions will focus on the importance of fostering methodologically strong descriptive studies on SL translation and interpreting from an AVT perspective.

Key words: sign language, sign language translation, sign language interpreting, media accessibility, audiovisual translation modes, descriptive studies.

1. Research Into Sign Language Within Audiovisual Translation

Before contextualising research into sign language within audiovisual translation, a brief explanation of the abbreviations used throughout this paper is called for. In the present contribution, the following abbreviations will be used: SL(I)(T) indicates any representation of sign language (SL), sign language interpreting (SLI) and sign language live (SLLT) and non-live translation (SLT). More specifically, SLI(T) refers to any form of translation, interpreting and accessibility by means of a SL. And SLI(LT) means any form of live interpreting or semi-live translation and accessibility by means of a SL. These and other relevant abbreviations will be described in detail further in the paper. It should also be noted that although the translation involving a sign language has traditionally been called *sign language interpreting*, differentiation between sign language *interpreting* and sign language *translation* (SLI and SLT) (Napier & Leeson, 2016; HBB4ALL, 2017; CNLSE, 2017) as well as the term *sign language live translation* (SLLT) is relevant and will be explained in detail in section 2.

Research on SL is as old, or young, as research on audiovisual translation. Modern and scientific research on SL began in the 1960s and 70s, with the recognition of SLs as fully-fledged natural languages. The publication of *Sign Language Structure* (Stokoe, 1960) and the founding of the journal *Sign Language Studies* in 1972 were the principal milestones during those decades. Since then, the quantity and quality of contributions from the fields of linguistics, neuroscience, education and Deaf Studies, which include the study of Deaf¹ culture, people, history, and art, among others, have been quite significant in the understanding of this communication mode and its users and culture. Nevertheless, not much has been said about SLs from the point of view of audiovisual translation.

Sign language (SL), sign language interpreting (SLI) and sign language translation (SLT) have often been left out of both theoretical and more practical approaches within Translation Studies (TS), Audiovisual Translation (AVT), and Media Accessibility (MA) studies. Moreover, many well regarded publications on AVT and accessibility fail to mention, let alone study, SL(I)(T) as a form of MA; current training programs on AVT and MA typically do not include modules on SL; and prestigious and up-to-date publications often fail to include even a chapter or article on SL(I)(T) within AV media. There are a few exceptions to this lack of attention to SL(I)(T) within the AVT field, perhaps the most notable being the HBB4ALL² project and certain publications from members of the Transmedia Catalonia

¹ Following the conventions of Woodward (1972) and general conventions in sign language literature (see, for instance, Forbes-Robertson, 2004; Vermeerbergen, 2006; Wehrmeyer, 2015; Meek, 2020), this article uses the term *Deaf* to refer to members of the Deaf community and Deaf culture belonging to a linguistic minority, and the term *deaf* to refer to the audiological condition of not hearing (Padden & Humphries, 1988, in National Association of the Deaf, 2021). This distinction seems useful for this particular contribution because it highlights the linguistic identity that may be associated with the use of *Deaf* and, therefore, the need for translation and interpreting of SLs. Nevertheless, I am aware of the “growing trend of lowercase ‘deaf’ being used to signify the fluidity of deaf cultural identities being placed at multiple places anywhere along the continuum between ‘deaf’ and ‘Deaf’” (Morgan & Kaneko, 2019, p. 2).

² Information on the project: <https://pagines.uab.cat/hbb4all/>

Research Group.³ As Bosch-Baliarda et al. (2020) put it, “even though SLI made its first appearance on TV nearly 70 years ago, it is still an underdeveloped and under-researched access service” (p. 111).

Despite this lack of academic interest from the fields of TS, AVT and MA, it is widely acknowledged that SLI(T) is an AVT and MA mode. The book *Media for all 1: Subtitling for the Deaf, Audio Description, and Sign Language* (Díaz-Cintas et al., 2007) was probably the first publication of any kind to make a solid statement in presenting SLI as a translation and accessibility service from an AVT and MA perspective, at least in terms of its cover (which included an image of a dactylological alphabet) and title. It included only one chapter on SLI as an accessibility service (in the section dedicated to subtitling for the deaf and hard-of-hearing, SDH), as opposed to four chapters on SDH and nine on audio description (AD). Despite the acknowledgment of SLI(T), then, the quantity of research into it within the fields of TS, AVT and MA studies continues to lag in comparison to work on other accessibility and translation modes, probably because many scholars in the fields of TS, AVT and MA lack expertise in SL and because SLI(T) as an accessibility service and AVT mode is not as widespread as SDH and AD.

Now, we still face the risk of leaving SLI(T) behind, unless we start to provide solid theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of SL(I)(T) within TS, AVT, MA and beyond. In recent years, these fields have experienced a strong theoretical and methodological development. In fact, the methodological turns concerning audiovisual content and its translation and accessibility are “definitely pushing some translational theoretical concepts against the ropes” (Chaume, 2018, p. 58). Thus, the theoretical scope and suitability of terms such as TS, AVT, MA and Accessibility Studies (AS) have been examined in depth (see, for instance, Greco 2016a, 2016b, 2018; Romero-Fresco, 2018; Greco & Jankowska, 2020; Neves, 2020). The boundaries between these terms are blurred (Romero-Fresco, 2018) and we might feel the need for more in depth reflections towards finally achieving a framework that serves the purposes of all of those working in the fields of TS, AVT, MA and AS, in order to establish a more stable approach to the study of accessibility to audiovisual media. Within all these theoretical and methodological reconsiderations in the fields of TS, AVT, MA and AS, this article hopes to contribute to a more solid theoretical and methodological approach to descriptive studies that include sign languages in audiovisual content.

2. Conventional Sign Language Translation and Interpreting in Audiovisual Content

Sign languages are fully-fledged natural languages, which use a visual mode of communication relying on movement of the body in space to convey meaning. Signers use their hands, arms, body positioning and facial expression to communicate.⁴ There is no universal sign language (although there is an international sign system); each sign language emerges and develops naturally, with its

³ Information on the research group: <https://grupsderecerca.uab.cat/transmedia/>

⁴ For an in-depth understanding of sign language structures, see Fischer and van der Hulst (2003).

own grammar and lexicon, and is linguistically unrelated to the oral languages that are spoken in the same region.⁵

The European Union of the Deaf (EUD) and the European Forum of Sign Language interpreters (EFSLI) in their *Sign Language Interpreter Guidelines for International and European Meetings* define the sign language interpreter as “a professional who is fluent in two or more (sign) languages and interprets between a source language and a target language and mediates across cultures” (EUD & EFSLI, 2012). Therefore, sign language translation and interpreting is the transfer of an utterance from an oral language into a sign language or vice versa, from one sign language into another sign language, or from an oral or sign language into the international sign system or vice versa. This act of interpretation is usually carried out simultaneously, but can also be done by means of consecutive or *liason* interpreting.

Non-live broadcast interpreting has been referred to as *sign language translation* (SLT) (Napier & Leeson, 2016; CNLSE, 2017; HBB4ALL, 2017), because of the analogy with written translations in terms of time available for documentation, the search for equivalences, the possibility of modifying the target text as many times as necessary, the impact on linguistic and communicative quality, etc. (CNLSE, 2017). In addition to SLI and SLT, a third type of translation is also available, namely, *sign language live translation* (SLLT), which involves a prepared translation provided live in so-called semi-live events such as theatre, opera, concerts, etc. Differences between SLI, SLLT and SLT in terms of time available for documentation and preparation of the final text, dealing with stress and psychological issues, technical problems, among others, can be seen as comparable to the differences between the *traditional* distinction of interpretation of oral texts and translation of written texts. This distinction (SLI, SLLT and SLT) is very useful, and indeed necessary, in TS, AVT and MA studies. It helps distinguishing between three very different processes that need different translation and interpreting strategies and techniques, which, in turn, lead to different outcomes that, although similar in many ways, cannot be regarded as equal. Thus, in the taxonomy presented in this contribution, the terms SLT and SLLT will also be used, along with the traditional term SLI, which here will refer exclusively to live events.

To provide more context, the following subsections present some general and conventional SLI(T) practices in AV media. I will address mostly, but not exclusively, practices on television and mostly, but not exclusively, in Spain. What follows, then, serves as a brief contextualisation of what SLI(T) is and what it usually looks like within AV media, and should not be taken as an exhaustive description of current practices, nor as a complete review of the parameters of SLI(T) from an AV communication perspective. A brief introduction to conventional AVT modes; position, size and continuity of signers; looks of the signers and number of signers will be offered. Deeper analysis and reflections on these and other parameters, towards a useful taxonomy from an AV communication perspective, would be

⁵ For an extended discussion of the origins of sign languages, see Armstrong and Wilcox (2003).

extremely welcome in the field, but this is not the aim of the current study, which seeks to offer a taxonomy of AVT modes when SLs are present in AV content.

2.1. Audiovisual Translation Modes

In AV media, SLI(T) is usually conducted from an oral language into a sign language, as a form of intermodal (and interlingual) and extradiegetic interpreting (eSLI) or translation (eSLT). SLI(T) is usually a translation and accessibility service that is added to the product in post-production and is usually broadcast as an open mode; that is, users cannot choose to turn off the SLI(T) (Centro de Normalización Lingüística de la Lengua de Signos Española, CNLSE, [Centre for the Standardisation of Spanish Sign Language], 2017, p. 14).

2.2. Position, Size and Continuity of the Signers

SLI(T) is usually broadcast in one of the lower corners of the screen in a separate box or window (as shown in Image 1) or without a box, showing only the image of the signer superimposed onto the original image.⁶ In some cases, the rest of the visual content is made smaller to allow for a larger image of the signer, as can be seen in Image 2.

Image 1.

SLI of a broadcast of a plenary session of the Congreso de los Diputados (House of Representatives) in Spain (2015)



Source: Canal Parlamento (2015).

⁶ For an in depth review of different current appearance options of SLI and SLT on screen, see the report of the CNLSE (2017).

Image 2.

Larger image of signer. [La 2, En lengua de signos] (13/10/2012)



Source: APASCIDE (2012).

The image of the signer can be continuous or intermittent. When the image is continuous, if there are elements that do not need signing, the signer remains visible but does not sign. In the intermittent mode, the image of the signer disappears when there is no content to be signed.

At this point we should note one characteristic regarding conventional SLI(T) in AV media. When SLI(LT) is provided for live or semi-live performances (such as conferences or theatre), the interpreter/translator usually stands at one side of the stage, and the user needs to choose between watching the performance or the signer. Although this may be more of an issue in staged events, where the distance between interpreter/translator and action is likely to be greater, the need to focus on the signer also affects the reception in television or any other media. The need to divide one's attention between two different stimuli is ever-present (Nebel et al., 2005, p. 760; in Bosch-Baliarda et al., 2020, pp. 114–115), and the attention required to follow the signing limits the time viewers have to understand and enjoy other visual or textual elements on screen or stage, as shown in eye-tracking studies (such as Wehrmeyer, 2014). Moreover, the literature suggests that this divided attention between multiple simultaneous information sources creates a potential issue for Deaf audiences in comprehending signers in general (Wehrmeyer, 2014, 2015), although more work is needed here, looking at different AV products and different Deaf communities.

2.3. Looks of the Signers

Signers are usually dressed in a single color that contrasts as much as possible with their skin tone (CNLSE, 2017). When SLI(T) is projected into a box or window, a monochrome background that contrasts as much as possible with the signer's clothes and skin tone is recommended (Ryan & Skinner, 2015; CNLSE, 2017) to facilitate comprehension and avoid visual fatigue in the viewer, as shown in Image 1.

For the same reason, wearing jewelry, accessories or nail polish is not recommended (CNLSE, 2017). Nevertheless, in performances in which clothing or other visual accessories are an important element, such as in a program aired as part of carnival celebrations, SLI(T) can incorporate appropriate aesthetic components (CNLSE, 2017), as shown in Image 3.

Image 3.

Matching clothing of translator in the traditional Cadiz carnival in Spain (Comparsa de Nene Cheza) [Nene Cheza Troupe], 2019



Source: El Pasacalles de Carnaval (2019).

2.4. Number of Signers

In live events, bearing in mind that even highly experienced interpreters tire after about 20 to 30 minutes of simultaneous interpreting (Moser-Mercer et al., 1998; Fundación CNSE, 2003; Ryan & Skinner, 2015), there are usually two (or more) interpreters who take turns.⁷ As is the case with simultaneous interpreting between oral languages (Chmiel, 2008), the passive interpreter (the one not interpreting at a given moment) not only takes time to rest but also assists their colleague if

⁷ The European Commission (n.d., online) recommends turns of 15 minutes for conferences. Although in the literature turns of between 15 and 30 minutes are recommended, the most appropriate length will depend on factors such as the complexity of the topic, acoustic quality, or speed of the original speech, among others.

needed. For long live events (more than two hours), CNLSE (2017) recommends teams of three interpreters to allow one interpreter to rest while the other two act as active (interpreting) and passive (supporting) interpreters. These live events can be interpreted in situ or remotely. Sometimes, live interpreting for television is carried out from a remote location with limited visual access to the original broadcast, as with the parliamentary session in Image 1 (Canal Parlamento, 2015).

In pre-recorded and semi-live events, by contrast, it is very common to see just one person interpreting or translating the utterances of all characters using the role shifting technique (moving their body, eyes or head to assume the role of different characters) or by using the name sign of each character to indicate who is speaking.

As noted by Soler Vilageliu et al. (2015), parameters described in these subsections, such as clothing, color or the size of the signer's screen, among others, can differ among broadcasters. Moreover, we still need to define the key parameters adopted by different broadcasters in providing SLI(T) (Bosch-Baliarda et al., 2020) as well as to look more closely at preferences for, and the enjoyment and comprehension of, these various parameters by deaf and signers.

Leaving current conventional practices aside, in the following section a review of multilingualism and multimodalism in AV content will be carried out, which will serve as the basis for the taxonomy proposed in section 4. Throughout the following sections, the term *mode* will be used to refer to different concepts: communication mode (oral and signed) and AVT mode (revoicing, captioning, and different forms of SLT, SLI and SLLT).

3. Languages in Audiovisual Content and Their Translation

Translation has traditionally been regarded as the transfer from one source language to another target language (Bassnett-McGuire, 1991, p. 2; in de Higes Andino, 2014, p. 89). That is, as the “*full* transposition of *one* (monolingual) source code into *another* (monolingual) target code for the benefit of a *monolingual* target public” (Maylaerts, 2006, p. 5; in de Higes Andino, 2014, p. 89). Taking AVT publications as a reference (such as Corrius i Gimbert, 2008; or de Higes Andino, 2014), the present contribution will use the term L1 to refer to the source language (main language) of a film, L2⁸ for the target language (language of translation), and L3 to refer to secondary or third languages (the presence of which will allow us to talk about multilingual texts).

⁸ Note that the term L2 is widely used to refer to second languages (non-native languages) in language acquisition research. In this sense, since much research on SL has focused on its acquisition or on acquisition of oral languages by Deaf communities, references to L2 within Sign Language Studies (SLS) are more likely to deal with language acquisition. Here, the use of L2 is seen solely from a translational point of view, as the language of translation or target language, and thus it is not intended to refer to language acquisition.

Sign languages can be present in an AV product in two ways: as a source language, or as a target language providing a translation (and accessibility) service. When a SL is present as a source language it can act as the main language of a film (that is, as an L1), as in the case of the series *Small World*⁹ (Neethling, 2014–present), produced by BSL Zone; or as a secondary language in a multilingual (or bilingual) and multimodal production (that is, as an L3), as in the case of *Children of a Lesser God* (Haines, 1986) or *La Famille Bélier* (Lartigau, 2014). When a SL is providing a translation (and accessibility) service, it acts as an L2. In such cases, it is most commonly represented as described in section 2. Nevertheless, as will be argued in section 4, SLs can act as both a source and target language (when they serve as L3s).

Although the inclusion of SLs as L1s or L3s is not a common practice in the AV industry globally (hence, the lack of methodologies and taxonomies including SLs, as well as the lack of interest in SLI[T] from an AVT perspective), there is a growing number of examples that illustrate bimodalism (oral and signed) and signed monomodalism in AV production. These include productions from BSL Zone, Deafinitely Theatre, and initiatives from directors and producers such as Miguel Ángel Font-Bisier or Arymux, among many others. As with other minoritised languages, there is currently a need to encourage the use of SLs as L1s in AV media. In Spain, Article 8 of the Ley 7/2010 General de Comunicación Audiovisual (General Law on Communication, 2010) promotes the normalised and inclusive social representation of people with disabilities in AV media, which could be seen as an invitation to include SLs as an L1 in audiovisual production (CNLSE, 2017, p. 42). Also, there is a need to make SLs visible as L3s, and to make SLs (as L1s or L3s) accessible for other signing communities and for non-signers.

Widely cited works dealing with multilingualism in films within AVT (such as Corrius i Gimbert, 2008; Corrius & Zabalbeascoa, 2011; Zabalbeascoa, 2012; de Higes Andino, 2014) fail to include the possibility of languages (either L1, L2 or L3) being in a mode other than oral (or its written representation¹⁰), as shown in the review by Pérez L. de Heredia and de Higes Andino (2019). Bearing this and all of the above in mind, it seems useful to offer a descriptive taxonomy that includes all three roles (L1, L2 and L3) that might be played by SLs in AV media. In addition, and considering new practices that highlight the importance and usefulness of thinking about translation and accessibility during different stages in AV production, that is, accessible filmmaking (AFM) (see Romero-Fresco, 2019), it also seems useful to refer to the stages at which SLs could be implemented. The following section aims to fill this gap by proposing a new taxonomy based on de Higes Andino (2014) who offers a solid and widely used taxonomy for the analysis of multilingualism in AV media. De Higes Andino bases her own analysis and proposal on a detailed theoretical review of previous studies on multilingualism, filmmaking and translation taking into account, among many others, works from

⁹ Available at: <https://www.bszone.co.uk/watch/small-world-series-1/small-world>

¹⁰ Note that there are only two types of natural languages, that is, languages that can be acquired naturally, that do not need formal instruction: oral and signed. “Other ways of expressing language such as reading and writing, Morse code, or whistled languages are surrogates of these modalities and require explicit instruction” (Carreiras, 2010, p. 430).

Delabastita (2002), Wahl (2008) or de Bonis (2011, 2012). The classification proposed in what follows takes into account current practices, the special and minoritised situation of SLs, and the fact that SLs could be used as source languages or as target languages providing a translation and accessibility service in AV production. Stages and roles of SLs in AV media will be discussed in the following section, as well as the possible AVT modes for SLs and the parameters that define those AVT modes.

4. Towards a Descriptive Taxonomy

In this section, I propose a taxonomy for the descriptive analysis of AVT modes when SLs are present in AV media. Firstly, I introduce the full taxonomy (Figure 1), which summarises stages, roles and AVT modes available when a SL is involved in AV media and illustrates the possible combinations. Secondly, these three main aspects (stages, roles and AVT modes) are explained. Finally, the parameters identifying the different possible AVT modes are discussed in subsection 4.4 and presented in Figure 2.

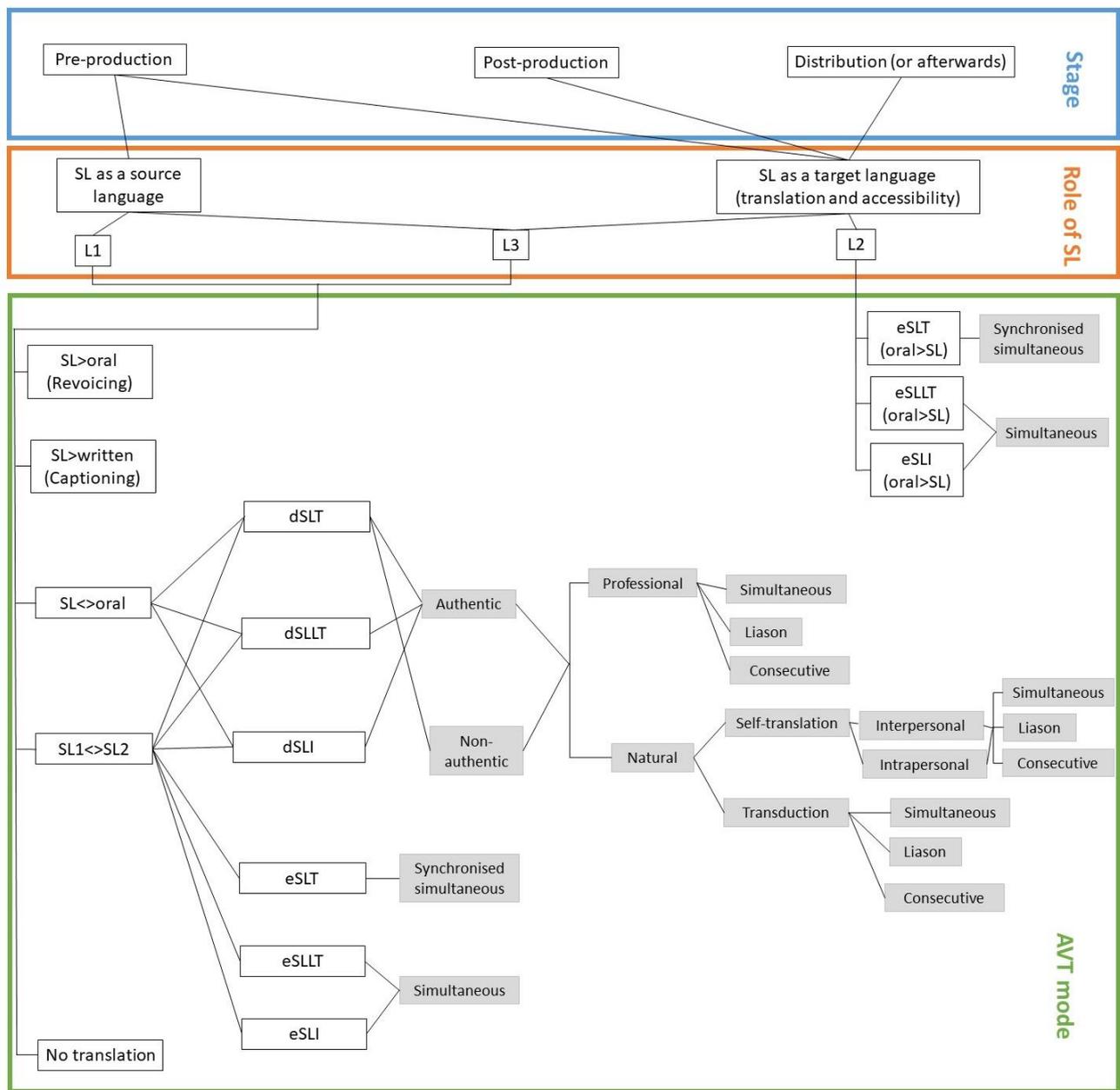
The taxonomy presented below (Figure 1) offers a first approach for descriptive AVT studies dealing with translation modes of SLs in AV content. As noted above, it is based on the study by de Higes Andino (2014). The main innovations are related to:

- the fact that the translation and interpreting can occur both extradiegetically (external to the AV content) and (intra)diegetically (within the AV content);
- the fact that SLI, SLT and SLLT can be intermodal (from oral to signed or vice versa) or intramodal (from a sign language into another sign language);
- the importance of distinguishing between SLI, SLT (Napier & Leeson, 2016; HBB4ALL, 2017; CNLSE, 2017) and SLLT; and
- the inclusion of stages and the distinction between SLs acting as source languages and as target languages providing a translation and accessibility service.

Other important additions take into account the fact that SLT can be authentic or non-authentic (in the latter, the signer is not a real translator, they may be an actor portraying a role) and that the simultaneity in extradiegetic SLT is a prefabricated one, as it is synchronised with original text (i.e. *synchronised simultaneous translation*). These concepts, among others, will be explained in detail in section 4.4. As noted in Figure 1, there is also the possibility of not translating the SL when it acts as an L1 or L3. In addition, the combination of different AVT modes is also a possibility (de Higes Andino, 2014).

Figure 1.

AV products and SLs: stages, roles and AVT modes



Source: Author's own elaboration.

4.1. Stages

Depending on the role of the sign language (L1, L2 or L3), SL(I)(T) is normally implemented at a specific stage in AV production (pre-production, post-production or distribution), as shown in Figure 1. Although the most common way to see it is as an L2 and thus at the distribution (or even the post-distribution) stage, as with the case of the SLT provided in the Spanish video on demand platform

Movistar+ 5S¹¹, all three roles of SLs (L1, L2 and L3) could be taken into account at the earlier stages, as shown in Figure 1.

Furthermore, as can be seen in Figure 1, the translation and interpreting possibilities increase when the inclusion of SLs is considered at earlier stages. Which role or AVT mode is to be chosen, and at what stage should SL(I)(T) be considered (pre-production, post-production or distribution) must be decided by the creative team. Where possible, it should also take into account the expertise of both a translation and accessibility director (Udo & Fels, 2009; in Romero-Fresco, 2013; Romero-Fresco, 2019) and those involved with SL in the production (translators and interpreters, consultants, Deaf actors). When SL is relegated to the status of an L2, after all production stages, there is little that the creative team can do to integrate it *into* the AV content. Although the addition of extradiegetic SLT (eSLT), SLLT (eSLLT) or SLI (eSLI) is usually considered after post-production, this does not mean that it cannot be carried out with some of the principles of AFM (Romero-Fresco, 2019) in mind.

4.2. Roles

As stated above, L2 is the most common way to see SLs represented in AV content. When SLs act as a source language, and not as target languages providing a translation and accessibility service, they are either L1s or L3s. SL as an L3 is the most common way of seeing SLs as a source language in AV production, as the use of SLs as L1s is a non-mainstream practice. When a SL acts as an L3 it is normally used both as a source language and as a target language in a diegetic translation (as can be seen, for example in *La Famille Bélier*), as it rarely goes untranslated for non-signing audiences in an AV product with an oral language as an L1.

When a SL is used to provide a translation and accessibility service, it is most commonly represented as an L2 as intermodal eSLI for live broadcasts (as in the case of news programs), intermodal eSLLT for semi-live ones (as in the case of theater productions with eSLLT as an accessibility service), and intermodal eSLT for pre-recorded broadcasts (as in the case of the services provided by Movistar+ 5S). Here the eSLI, eSLLT and eSLT are usually (but not always) directed only at a Deaf audience, and they are not part of the plot. In other words, SLs are here usually implemented as an accessibility service aimed at a particular audience, not as part of the audiovisual content itself that could be enjoyed and understood by a wider audience. This is by far the most common way to see SLs in AV content, mainly in films and live broadcasts such as news or public appearances. To my knowledge, in AV production one can only see cases of SLs as an L2 when the L1 is an oral language, that is, as intermodal (and interlingual) translation or interpreting, as in all examples mentioned above. Nevertheless, as shown in Figure 1, it is indeed possible to translate from one SL (as an L1 or L3) into another SL (as an L2) with eSLI, eSLLT or eSLT, as an intramodal but interlingual translation.

¹¹ More information available at: <https://www.movistar.es/particulares/movistarplus/guia-rapida/5s-plataforma-contenidos-accesibles/>

4.3. Audiovisual Translation Modes

As discussed above, when a SL is there to provide a translation and accessibility service (L2), and when there is a live event, it takes the form of eSLI from an oral language into a sign language. In pre-recorded events, it takes the form of eSLT, from an oral language into a sign language. In rehearsed live events, it takes the form of extradiegetic sign language live translation (eSLLT). eSLI is always carried out simultaneously, while eSLT is broadcast as a synchronised prefabricated simultaneity (in that it is pre-recorded) and eSLLT is a simultaneous translation for semi-live events. All three, eSLT, eSLLT and eSLI, usually bear in mind those aspects included in section 2, such as broadcast in one of the lower corners of the screen or the use of plain clothes, make-up and looks.

As shown in Figure 1, when a SL acts as an L1 or L3, the translation and interpreting possibilities increase. SLs can be translated into an oral language (or its written representation) through revoicing or captioning. It is worth noting here that *captioning* refers here to any form of written added language on screen (interlingual subtitling, SDH, creative subtitles, easy to read subtitles) and can include different resources to specify the language (quotation marks, italics, tags, etc.; see de Higes Andino, 2014) and interact with written language in the original content itself. Likewise, *revoicing* refers here to any AVT mode that involves adding voices to the original track (mostly dubbing and voice-over).

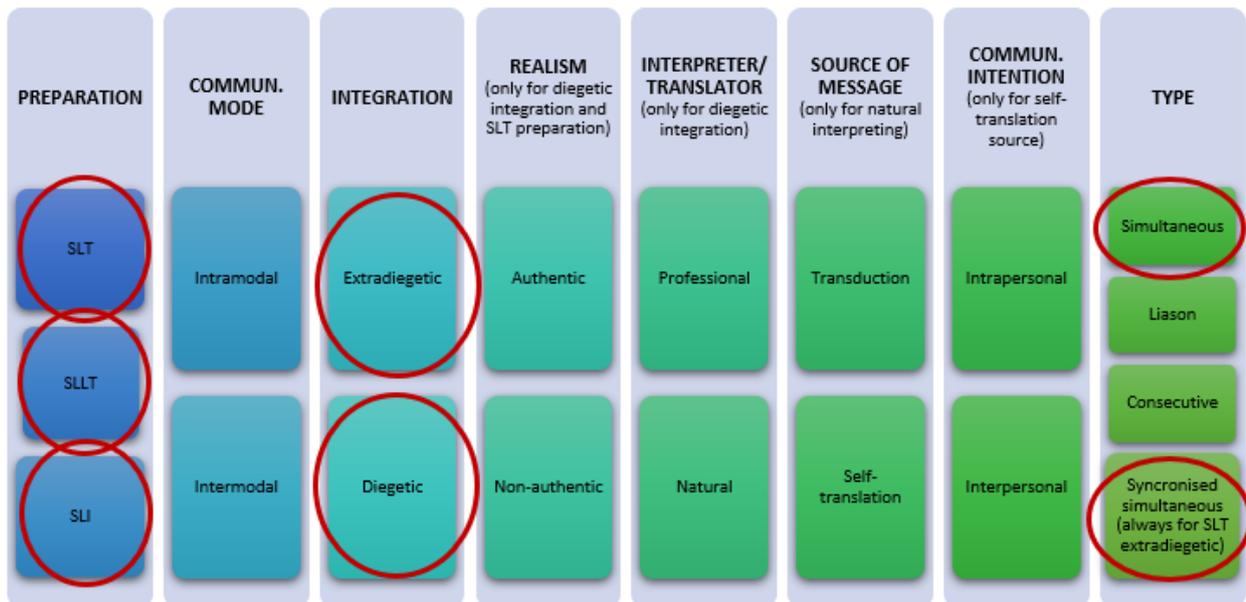
4.4. Parameters Identifying Sign Language Interpreting, Translation and Live Translation

The following Figure 2 helps to clarify the parameters identifying SLI, SLLT and SLT from a translational point of view. Options marked with a red circle are the only ones available when a SL is present solely to provide a translation and accessibility service, that is, when it acts as an L2, and is implemented at the post-production stage or afterwards. All options are available when SLs act as an L1 or L3, except for the combination of intermodal mode (SL>oral) with extradiegetic integration (since this would be a form of revoicing). As noted above, when a SL is present as a source language (L1 or L3), these options must be explored at the pre-production stage.

These parameters should not be taken as a fixed list; they might change, and will probably increase in number as technology evolves. Thus, in the future we are likely to see that parameters such as setting (immersive or non-immersive), signer (human or avatar), among others, will become relevant in the definition of AVT modes and the parameters identifying them. However, whereas these parameters are real possibilities, and are currently being researched and implemented in the industry, at the moment they do not seem sufficiently relevant to define further AVT modes.

Figure 2.

Parameters defining SLI, SLLT and SLT in AV media from a translational perspective



Source: Author's own elaboration.

In the following subsections, parameters defining SLI, SLLT and SLT in AV media will be described. The first of these is *preparation* (along with *realism*), *communication mode* and *integration*. Preparation deals with the time available to prepare and record SLI(T); realism deals with the authenticity of the signer, translator or interpreter of the content; mode refers to the change of communication mode (oral and signed) and integration deals with the concepts of extradiegetic and (intra)diegetic translation and interpreting. Next, the concepts and parameters *interpreter/translator*, *source of message* and *communicative intention* will be explored. Interpreter/translator will tackle the nature of the interpreting or translation (professional or natural transfer); source of message will deal with the concepts of transduction and self-translation; and communicative intention will refer to whether the message is translated or interpreted for others or for oneself. Finally the parameter *type* will be addressed, which deals with the type of transfer (simultaneous, *liason*, consecutive or synchronised simultaneous).

4.4.1. Preparation (and Realism), Communication Mode and Integration

Preparation, communication mode and integration are the three main parameters identifying SLI, SLLT and SLT in AV media. The parameter *preparation* allows making a distinction between SLI, SLLT and SLT, as discussed in section 2. This parameter is closely linked to the parameter *realism*, since diegetic sign language translation (dSLT) can be either non-authentic or authentic, unlike SLI and SLLT, which are always authentic. Non-authentic dSLT takes place, for example, in fictional films, such as

in *La Famillie Bélier* (Lartigau, 2014). Here, translation might be carried out, for example, by an actor pretending to be proficient in a sign language and not by a professional interpreter or translator. In those cases, dSLT can be directed at the same time, fictionally, at actors (who are not always deaf and are definitely not the end users of the translation) and, truly, at viewers (who might need a translation of an oral or sign language). Authentic dSLT can take place, for instance, in non-fictional films (such as documentaries or reality television). Here, dSLT can be an authentic practice for which a real interpreter/translator might have had time to prepare. Translation can be recorded several times if necessary, and can actually be aimed at both the people in the film (both Deaf and hearing) and end viewers.

Secondly, we need to make a distinction related to *communication modes*: intramodal translation and interpreting (from one SL into another SL) and intermodal translation and interpreting (from a SL to an oral language and vice versa). As noted above, intramodal translation and interpreting (both diegetic and extradiegetic) is, to my knowledge, not a current practice in media accessibility, although it is a regular practice in other areas, such as in conferences with Deaf academics and researchers.

Thirdly, we need to make a distinction between two different forms of *integration* of the translated material in the product: diegetic translation, live translation and interpreting (dSLT, dSLLT and dSLI), that is, the one that occurs within the plot, and extradiegetic translation, live translation and interpreting (eSLT, eSLLT and eSLI), the one implemented externally to the AV content. Although intramodal eSLI from one sign language into another (SL1>SL2) or from one sign language into another and vice versa (SL1<>SL2) can be implemented in post-production (or after), in Figure 1 it is linked to the pre-production stage because the implementation of the first SL (SL1) must be done in earlier phases. Both inter- and intramodal eSLI are usually carried out simultaneously.

We might note that all diegetic AVT modes can only be considered in preproduction stages, while extradiegetic options, as well as revoicing and captioning, might be considered and implemented in post-production or afterwards.

4.4.2. Interpreter/Translator, Source of Message, and Communicative Intention

Diegetic translation and interpreting (both intra- and intermodal) offers more possibilities than extradiegetic transfer. Regarding the *interpreter/translator*, on the one hand, dSLI, dSLLT and dSLT is regarded as natural interpreting or translation (de Higes Andino, 2014) when a relative or friend acts as the interpreter/translator. The AVT modes described in de Higes Andino (2014, p. 34) for natural interpreting are also applicable in our case. Regarding *source of message* (transduction or self-translation) and *communicative intention* (intrapersonal or interpersonal), natural interpreting/translation can be an intrapersonal self-translation, when the bilingual (or bimodal) person says something and translates the message for themselves without any communicative intention. It can also be an interpersonal self-translation, when the bilingual (or bimodal) person says something and translates the message for other people in order that they understand it. When the

natural interpreter/translator translates the message of one person to ease their communication with another person, it is called transduction. Although this is normally seen as a *liason* or consecutive interpreting (de Higes Andino, 2014, p. 34), it could also take the form of simultaneous dSLI, dSLLT or dSLT when it involves a SL.

On the other hand, and turning once more to the parameter *interpreter/translator*, it could be professional interpreting or translation, either authentic (in dSLI, dSLLT and dSLT, carried out by a real interpreter/translator) or non-authentic (in dSLT, carried out, for example, by an actor portraying a professional interpreter). This kind of professional interpreting/translation might take the form of simultaneous, *liason* or consecutive interpreting.

4.4.3. Type

In addition to the most widely known *types* of interpreting (simultaneous, *liason* and consecutive), de Higes Andino (2014) argues in favor of a fourth type, cultural mediation. In the current approach, and bearing in mind the inherent link of SLI to mediation stated in the definition of the EUD and EFSLI (2012) in section 2 (most of all in authentic consecutive and *liason* interpreting with government bodies and social services), mediation is seen as a task inherent to SLI and not as a type itself.¹² In this sense, when SLI, SLLT and SLT are authentic, I view mediation as inherent to interpreting and translational practice.

As can be seen in Figure 1 and Figure 2, another type of transfer has been added to the current proposal, namely *synchronised simultaneous translation*. When SLT is recorded extradiegetically and broadcast simultaneously with the original media, it is synchronised in post-production (or after), and not actually translated simultaneously.

5. Conclusions

This contribution has presented a first descriptive methodological approach to the analysis of the linguistic role of SLs and the AVT modes used for its translation in AV media. As with many initial methodological approaches, it should not be taken as a final taxonomy, but as a work in progress. Innovations related to technology and to new and potentially inspiring approaches emerging from

¹² In some professional SLI contexts (such as SLI with a government body or social services), mediation between sign and oral languages has been called interpreting and not translation, when in fact the delimitation between these two concepts may be arguable in contexts with SLs (Bao Fente & González Montesino, 2013, p. 293). Báez Montero and Fernández Soneira (2010, p. 2) point out that mediation between sign and oral languages has conventionally been called interpreting, whereas according to Gile's (1995) taxonomy, such mediation cannot fall into this category, since orality is only a paralinguistic feature. Nevertheless, and for practical reasons, in the current contribution, as in Bao Fente and González Montesino (2013), the mediation practice will be placed within the category of interpreting.

various creative fields, as well as a deeper understanding and further theoretical and methodological reflections on the topic may (and probably should) change this taxonomy in the future.

One of the objectives of this paper has been to encourage the study of SL, SLI, SLLT and SLT from a translational perspective, which thus far has been notably overlooked. This may be because of the limited knowledge of SLs from researchers in AVT, or because SLI, SLLT and SLT are not seen as widespread and useful accessibility practices. In this sense, I hope the present paper has, (1) encouraged a minimum of understanding and knowledge of SLs for all researchers dealing with TS, AVT, MA and AS, and (2) highlighted the usefulness of, and the need for, research into SLI, SLLT and SLT within all these fields of study.

As for future research, it is beyond the scope of the present contribution to review traditionally oral-based concepts in AVT such as mono- and multilingualism, interlanguage or interculture, or oral-based methodologies for the descriptive analysis of AVT content such as those on AVT restrictions (Martí-Ferriol, 2010), or translation strategies and techniques (Hurtado, 2001; Martí-Ferriol, 2010). Nevertheless, these concepts, which are already vital in the representation of languages and cultures in AV media, gain importance when dealing with SLs. The inclusion of SLs as L1s, but mainly as L3s, may intensify some of the significant aspects of multilingualism in AV media, as their inclusion represents not only a change of language and culture, but also a change of communication mode. On the same lines, it might be useful to revise the functions of this form of multilingualism (described in de Higes Andino, 2014, pp. 92–93; and based in authors such as Delabastita, 2002; Wahl, 2008; or de Bonis, 2011, 2012) to include aspects that deal with changes of modality and, more importantly, aspects that might derive from the disability or impairment *traditionally* associated with the use of SLs. An in depth theoretical review of concepts and of widely applied descriptive methodologies and taxonomies might need to be revisited and reappraised when being applied to AVT and MA research dealing with SLs.

More applied research would also be welcome. In this sense, it might be interesting to explore the question of whether the visual identity of sign languages interferes with their representation in translated versions when they act as L3s, because, for example, the elimination of SLs might not be as straightforward with translation techniques and AVT modes unless the visual channel is manipulated. Of course, more research with eye-tracking techniques, looking at the perception of quality (as recommended by CNLSE, 2017), and on comprehension and enjoyment of signed AV media by signing audiences (both D/deaf and hearing), will all serve to bring about a greater understanding of how the presence of SLs, SLI, SLLT and SLT impacts on the reception of AV content.

In more practical terms, and bearing in mind that eSLI, eSLLT and eSLT displayed in a corner of the visual action might be difficult to understand (Wehrmeyer, 2014), this contribution calls for more integrated SLI, SLLT and SLT.

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