

## Simil Sync/Linear Sync: Past, Present, and Future

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### Abstract

This paper examines the emergence and evolution of simil sync in the Italian audiovisual sector, which originated in the mid-2000s as a spontaneous adaptation of voiceover techniques for non-scripted genres on thematic channels and OTT platforms. It traces changes in terminology, technical development, and recognition within the industry, also influenced by National Collective Labor Agreements (CCNLs). The study surveys Italian TV genres that shaped adaptation styles and examines the shifting role of non-automated adaptors and dubbing actors amid growing AI integration. Given the status of simil sync as a low-quality adaptation and niche modality, the concluding section explores potential future scenarios, with particular attention to the impact of AI-driven tools. Three video editing platforms – Dubverse, Vidnoz, and Wondershare Filmora 14 – were tested on a short clip containing the idiom “hit the books,” evaluated on (1) qualitative and (2) quantitative sync, (3) audio-visual/multimodal consistency, (4) translation accuracy, and (5) voice naturalness – prioritizing an accessible and audience-friendly viewing experience.

**Key words:** audiovisual translation, dubbing, voiceover, Italian simil sync, AI tools, non-scripted content.

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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Simil sync is a form of screen translation exclusively employed in Italy. This modality emerged in the mid-2000s as a sort of hybrid that sits between dubbing and voiceover. Like dubbing, it is an oral translation mode, but unlike dubbing, it disregards lip synchronization and allows audiences to hear the barely audible original soundtrack beneath the new, translated audio. In simil sync, translated utterances are the same length as the original utterances, and target pauses match the original source pauses too (Sileo, 2018)<sup>2</sup>; only lip sync is ignored. In standard voiceover, traditionally used for documentaries (Luyken et al., 1991) and to a lesser extent interviews, a few original soundbites are left audible, and, unlike simil sync, the utterances are not synchronized with the original. In addition, the professional who reads the lines of a script may be called a “speaker” rather than a “voice actor” since their voice tends to be neutral, restrained and authoritative. Simil sync, instead, is often characterized by an emotionally charged<sup>3</sup> performance by the voice actor, which may be so highly charged that it diverges from the original voice that may still be vaguely audible in the background.

Simil sync is used uniquely as a translation modality for light non-fiction entertainment, such as reality TV shows, docudramas, docusoaps, makeover programs, game shows, cooking game shows, and lifestyle shows. These programs are primarily broadcast on linear television and thematic channels (see 1.3) as well as on OTT (over-the-top) platforms, which offer non-linear streaming services, such as Netflix. As argued by Sileo (2018), for some time in the past, when the first reality TV shows and docusoaps were broadcast on minor networks, such as MTV, these non-mainstream audiovisual products were subtitled. However, subtitling was soon replaced by voiceovers that tended to be emotionally charged, which were better suited to the Italian audience, who at the time were accustomed to listening to fictional content that was dubbed in a way that respected lip sync. While standard dubbing requires great accuracy, especially in terms of lip and utterance sync between source and target languages, and involves numerous operators, including more voice actors in the case of interviews, for example, it has higher production costs when compared to simil sync. Above all, as it does not require lip synchronization, dialogue writers and voice actors are paid less than they would be for a traditional synced dub. Therefore, it can be seen as a compromise for translating light non-fiction programs, which are considered less prestigious than films and series, with the added advantage that they are user-friendly for audiences accustomed to dubbing (Rossato, 2020). Therefore, simil sync was very similar to emotionally charged voiceovers found in many interviews, but over time, as this paper will argue by introducing the term “dubbingization”, it came to resemble standard dubbing without lip-sync. However, not all simil-synced programs display the same

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<sup>1</sup> Although the final design of the paper is the outcome of the close collaboration between the authors, for academic purposes Valentina Di Francesco is responsible for § Introduction and § 1, while Angela Sileo wrote § 2 and § 3. Responsibility for § 4 is equally shared.

<sup>2</sup> Readers may also find terms such as “isochrony” or the “isochronous” timing of the translated dialogues, or “quantitative synchronization.”

<sup>3</sup> I would like to thank Professor Delia Chiaro for the suggestion on how to define performance in simil sync and how to manage the herculean task of naming it.

characteristics. For instance, especially at the beginning of the mid-2000s, there were some programs in which the length of the translated utterances was out of sync with the original, and others in which the original soundtrack was clearly audible in the background. In other words, in contrast to standard dubbing and voiceover, *simil sync* has struggled to establish a unique standard protocol that allows dialogue writers and voice actors to perform in a single, recognizable and consistent way. For these reasons, this technique has been variously defined with expressions such as a hybrid form of dubbing (Sileo, 2018, 2020; Barra et al., 2020; Rossato, 2020), “non-standard type of dubbing” (Barra et al., 2020, p. 7), AVT approach “performed by several interacting voice actors without lip synchronization” (Rossato, 2020, p. 279).

Among professionals, under the expression “*sincronismo ritmico non labiale*” (SRNL, or non-labial rhythmic sync) (Anica, 2017), *simil sync* was officially recognized only in 2017 by the Contratto Collettivo Nazionale del Lavoro (CCNL) (National Collective Labor Agreement), which regulates the wages and tasks of operators working within the Italian dubbing industry. In the 2023 agreement, the term changed to “linear sync”. However, the term *simil sync*, whose origin remains uncertain, continues to be widely used in the local market by both professionals and non-professionals alike. For this reason, we will use this term throughout the paper, seeing that, when all is said and done, the label *simil sync* – “similar to synchrony” – speaks for itself, in that the modality “comes close to” or “resembles” simultaneity but does not exactly match it as in traditional dubbing.

As for academia, compared to traditional dubbing, research on *simil sync* is still limited, with contributions from Sileo (2018, 2020), Rossato (2014, 2020), Barra et al. (2020), Antoniazzi and Barra (2020), Barra and Farinacci (2021), and Di Francesco (2021, 2024, 2025). Furthermore, international scholars have begun to mention it as an Italian peculiarity (Baños, 2019; Chaume, 2020; Spiteri Miggiani, 2019).

This study showcases the evolution of *simil sync* from the 1990s to today, highlighting technical and terminological changes alongside the development of light non-fiction programming. It also seeks to explore potential future developments concerning the use of generative AI within screen translation, attempting to hypothesize what will become of *simil sync* when AI reaches such a level of efficiency that Italian viewers will no longer have to settle for the compromise represented by *simil sync*. The final section evaluates three AI tools on a short video excerpt, assessing their output based on five criteria for accessible and viewer-friendly audiovisual adaptation.

## 1. The History of Simil Sync

Its origin is uncertain, and who coined the term is unknown. In 2012, the Italian Association of Translators and Interpreters (AITI) of Piemonte and Valle d’Aosta organized a workshop titled “Tradurre per il piccolo schermo: voiceover, *simil sync*, reality e dintorni” (“Translating for the small screen: voiceover, *simil sync*, reality TV shows and surroundings”, our translation).

However, professionals in the dubbing industry agree that *simil sync* started to be used in the mid-2000s in the first foreign reality TV shows that appeared in Italy, such as *Survivor* and *Hell's Kitchen*. While fictional TV programs in Italy continue to be dubbed, the proliferation of international non-scripted<sup>4</sup> programs, following the introduction of digital satellite channels in the late 1990s, and later the digital switchover<sup>5</sup>, had gradually led to a new translation mode, initially similar to the standard voiceover used for interviews<sup>6</sup>, where some original soundbites are left audible for a few seconds throughout the translated voice over. However, in reality TV programs, due to the fast-paced conversations that occur with multiple speakers talking simultaneously, and the overlapping utterances of the original dialogues, standard voiceover was thought to be excessively confusing for the audience. In fact, as described in the next section of this paper (see 1.1), the combination of these elements sometimes made it difficult for viewers to follow the flow of the dialogues. Therefore, dialogue writers, and sound engineers, with their professional expertise, began to both eliminate soundbites from the source dialogues and better align the target dialogues with the rhythm and pauses of the original.

Thus, non-fiction entertainment programming offered on so-called “thematic” channels, dedicated to a specific area of entertainment (i.e., sports, films, shows for children, documentaries, etc.) or topic (i.e., food, motor cars, home, lifestyle, etc.) had increasingly adopted the *simil sync* translation mode<sup>7</sup>. However, since there were no guidelines with precise instructions, programs could adopt their own style of *simil sync*, where, for example, utterance synchronization in one program could be more accurate than in another, or the volume of the original soundtrack might be more audible in one program than in another. Such differences are evident even in different seasons of the same product.

### 1.1. The “Dubbingization” of *Simil Sync*: An Example

Since the mid-2000s, *simil sync* has been characterized by several changes, which will be exemplified through the case of *Abito da sposa cercasi* (Say Yes to the Dress) (Inge, 2007–present), one of the most popular and long-lasting reality television programs in Italy and globally. Broadcast in Italy on Discovery+, it is an American show set in the luxury Kleinfeld Bridal boutique in Manhattan that

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<sup>4</sup>The term “non-scripted” or “unscripted” refers to those programs that have a strong basis on reality and do not involve characters or settings devised by scriptwriters in much detail. These products tend to be characterized by improvisation and casual response to real and potentially unexpected situations.

<sup>5</sup>Digital satellite TV began to spread in Italy with the arrival of major pay-TV operators such as Telepiù and Stream in the 1990s and Sky Italia since 2003. The digital switch-over was completed in Italy only in 2012.

<sup>6</sup>The term voice-over was used for documentaries. However, this technique was also used in programs where people on screen are the interviewees who are invited to talk as experts of a particular subject or are commentators on a particular issue.

<sup>7</sup>In Italy, in addition to the channels belonging to public TV Rai and private TV Mediaset, Discovery+ channels are those “specialized” in light non-fiction programming: Real Time, Food Network, Home and Garden TV, Giallo and DMAX.

follows the staff and brides who visit the store in search of their ideal wedding dress. The 2008 season, which in Italy was aired in 2011, presents a high number of translated utterances that are not synchronized with the original ones, and numerous soundbites from the original clearly emerge. In other words, the Italian voice starts after or stops before the original voice begins to speak. In this case, the translated utterances are out of sync and the audible sound bites can interrupt the flow of the translation. For instance, when a bride exclaims a typical utterance like “Oh my god, this is everything I’ve dreamt of! Isn’t it beautiful?” (Parker, 2008), the Italian voice comes in too late and overlaps with the next speaker. The original soundtrack, which can be heard below the Italian dialogues, is clearly audible and in most cases, the rhythm and the pauses are not maintained in the translated version. These elements, which occur simultaneously, might cause a certain amount of confusion, making it difficult for viewers to clearly identify who is speaking. The voice actors’ attitude is emotionally charged.

Episodes from the 2015 series exhibit translated utterances that are well synchronized with the original, respecting the pauses of the source dialogues too. The original soundtrack can be quite audible, but the voice actors still deliver an emotionally charged *simil sync*. In the 2019 season, the dialogues are well-synchronized, too. A somewhat “histrionic” attitude is still part of the translated version, but the original soundtrack is less audible than in the previous series.

It appears that, over time, dubbing operators’ attention has mainly focused on two characteristics: the isochronous or perfect timing of the translated dialogues, which has become increasingly well-synchronized, and the original soundtrack, which has gradually become less audible below the translated dialogues. Such a change may suggest a “dubbingization” of *simil sync* over time, moving it further away from traditional voiceover and closer to standard dubbing. While voiceover preserves audible soundbites from the original soundtrack, *simil sync*, which respects the length of the original utterances and provides a barely audible original soundtrack, seems to imitate standard dubbing practice, where the original soundtrack is completely muted.

## **1.2. Recommended Practices by Netflix for Non-Fiction Content**

As previously noted, no written guidelines were available or retrievable for operators working with *simil sync*. However, although not focusing specifically on *simil sync*, an attempt to provide guidance for dubbing unscripted products was made by Netflix, the on-demand video content streaming platform that was launched in Italy in 2015 and contributed to the increase of light non-fiction entertainment programming on offer (i.e., reality TV shows, docuseries, cooking competitions, dating shows, makeover reality shows, etc.).

For her analysis of *simil-synced* products, Di Francesco (2023) retrieved and analyzed the guidelines<sup>8</sup> provided online by Netflix for the translation/adaptation of scripted and unscripted programs. These

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<sup>8</sup> Last accessed 03/11/2022. The web page is no longer available since it has been updated.

guidelines officially stated that unscripted products were dubbed in “VO-style dubbing” (where “VO” stands for voiceover). The paragraph “Sync” “(Section 3.1)” reported that:

[f]or this VO-style dubbing, allow original dialogue to be heard at normal volume for a beat – usually 1–3 seconds. Delaying the translation (leaving a few seconds with no translations at the beginning and, where possible, at the end) enhances authenticity. This may mean condensing translations to ensure the original audio is heard. **However, if valuable information is lost because the translation is condensed too much, it is acceptable to have the VO sync with the original dialogue** [emphasis added]. (Netflix, 2022)

The last part of this paragraph shows that, since dialogues in unscripted programs are supposed to be semi-spontaneous or spontaneous, and the quick exchanges of lines may often overlap, there is not enough time to leave original soundbites. Therefore, guidelines suggest that the voiceover should be synchronized with the original dialogue for better clarity.

The voice actors’ attitude is another aspect that was taken into consideration in these guidelines. The “Performance” paragraph in the Netflix guidelines for unscripted content suggests that it is the genre of the program that determines whether voice actors should deliver a “more energetic performance” or not, providing the following suggestions:

VO dubbing should not fully match the delivery of the original version. Authenticity should still be respected since the original audio can still be heard in the background. **Instead, certain unscripted titles may merit more energetic performance due to the nature of the content (e.g., cooking shows, competitions). Please use best judgement [sic] when making these decisions in tone and rhythm of speaker [sic].** If in doubt, please reach out to your Netflix representative for guidance. Reminder, as mentioned in section 1.1.: Efforts/reactions should not be recreated. Allow the original audio to shine through where possible [emphasis added]. (Netflix, 2022)

As observed so far, there was no objective standard for voice actor performance and utterance synchronization in non-linear offerings or linear television programming. As Di Francesco (2021) notes, “translation for non-fictional products still presents blurred areas due to difficulty in obtaining a conclusive definition” (p. 183). This observation stems from the rapid evolution of the audiovisual landscape and television genres, with which agreements and regulations struggle to keep pace.

### 1.3. Television Genres and Simil Sync: An Overview

Di Francesco’s work (2023) outlines the audiovisual content dubbed with simil sync (or voiceover, in the case of Netflix) on Discovery+<sup>9</sup> and Netflix platforms (March 2020 – February 2021). Although the

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<sup>9</sup> In 2020, Discovery+ was called Dplay.

two platforms use two different ways to describe television genres (i.e., Netflix uses “descriptors” such as “Food & Travel”, “Competition reality TV”, “Lifestyle”, “Home & Garden reality TV”, etc.), some overarching trends in content offering emerged, nonetheless.

Netflix employs a multi-tagging system, and most programs are classified under multiple genre categories. For instance, *The Final Table* comprises the “food,” “competition,” and “family and reality TV shows” labels. This system supports target audience segmentation and maximizes viewership across interest groups and discovery through the catalogue. Family-oriented, adult-oriented, and teen-oriented content identify the main target audience.

Most programs include “Reality TV” as a first or second genre descriptor, combined with various sub-categories. “Food & Travel TV” is the most prevalent genre, followed by “Home & Garden”, “Competition Reality”, “Lifestyle”, “Sports”, and “Wedding & Romance”; data also shows the transition from broader docuseries to more specific topics such as sports, science, and culture.

Discovery+ approach to categorization used labels such as “Beauty and Style”, “Real life”, “Real Adventure”, “Food”, “Home”, “Medical”, “Crime”. The most notable 2020–2021 trend appeared to be the rise of crime content with some titles such as *Vittime senza nome* (Cold Case Files), *Mogli assassine* (Wives with Knives), etc. While the Real Life and Home Makeover categories were the most productive categories, the long-running shows, such as *Abito da sposa cercasi* (Say Yes to the Dress) (Inge, 2007–present) and *Vite al limite* (My 600-lb Life) (Tarantino et al., 2012–present), which addressed a specific target audience, served as cornerstones of each thematic channel.

During 2020–2021, specific genres became particularly relevant, probably in response to the pandemic. Home renovation and real estate shows, for example, likely appealed to viewers more interested in their living spaces, and adventure shows might have offered a form of escapism during travel restrictions. In general, light non-fiction entertainment increased, confirming past Italian television trends and creating the conditions for improving simil sync production and its consistent delivery. This overview confirms both the “dubbingization” (see 1.1) of simil sync and the increasing request for non-fiction products to be dubbed with simil sync, which has given major attention to this modality and a response by operators in the dubbing industry (see 1.5). Consequently, in late 2023, a new Agreement provided detailed information for simil sync delivery.

#### **1.4. Adapting to Change: The Legal Recognition of Simil Sync and Genre Evolution in the CCNL From the 1990s to the 2020s**

Over the past years, the Italian audiovisual translation industry has made changes in categorizing and compensating different forms of dubbing. The simil sync mode of audiovisual translation has also undergone a significant evolution and redefinition from a legal point of view.

In the 1990s, the Italian dubbing industry classified audiovisual products into the categories of films, television series, and soap operas, only mentioning the general term *doppiaggio* (dubbing). By 1999,



the industry began to recognize more nuanced approaches to audiovisual translation. The 1999 National Collective Labor Agreement of the dubbing industry introduced the term *oversound* to refer to the standard voiceover for interviews, mentioning that this technique did not require lip synchronization. This Agreement also expanded genre classifications and specifically distinguished between documentaries “with synch” and those with *oversound* (voiceover). By 2004, the terminology had evolved further. “Non in sincrono labiale” (without lip sync) was replaced by “non in sinc” (out of sync), a more precise formula indicating the absence of both lip synch and utterance length synch (isochrony) (Associazione Produttori Audiovisivi [APA], 2004).

### 1.5. The Turning Point: Reality TV Shows, New Formats, and Formal Recognition

Compared to the minor revisions in previous Agreements, the changes from the mid-2000s onward have been more frequent and substantial than in previous years. Although professionals in the dubbing industry agreed that *simil sync* started to be used in the mid-2000s in the first foreign reality TV shows, specific terminology in the Agreement came a few years later. In fact, new formats began to proliferate in the mid-2000s. Still, a rapid increase in the number of products can be observed in the following fifteen years.

The 2008 Agreement was a significant turning point in the recognition of dubbing techniques other than standard dubbing. For the first time, the document clearly distinguishes between two legitimate techniques: dubbing and “oversound” (voiceover). The Agreement also included “reality TV shows” and “docudramas” as new genre categories that reflected the explosion of light non-fiction entertainment programming, which the Italian dubbing industry had to face.

The official recognition of *simil sync* came in the 2017 Agreement with the expression “adattamento in sincronismo ritmico non labiale” (adaptation without lip synchronization, which respects the pauses and length of the original utterances). It also introduced the terms *factual e prodotti assimilati* (i.e., “factual and similar products”) through which all non-fiction genres are collected under the same umbrella category. The introduction of this new terminology underlines the need for the dubbing industry to monitor the ever-changing audiovisual offer of products with which screen translation modalities have to keep up pace.

In conclusion, the evolution of *simil sync* reflects the transformations in the Italian audiovisual landscape: the Italian experience highlights how audiovisual translation operators can develop more user-friendly modalities to adapt to the diversified television offerings.

## 2. Simil Sync Today

In October 2023, the Italian association of TV and movie script writers and adaptors (AIDAC) reached a new Agreement that was to provide a clear-cut definition for *simil sync*. As of January 1, 2024, it was officially rebranded “linear sync,” while the acronym SRNL was to be reserved exclusively



thereafter for traditional voiceover adaptations for interviews. Article 8 of the new Agreement provides detailed guidelines for adapting non-cinematic works, focusing primarily on the highest level of quantitative synchronization while setting aside suprasegmental features such as breathing, laughter, and crying. Under these provisions, the voice actor's role is reduced to reading. This protocol, however, contrasts with on-the-ground practices: as already mentioned, in the local dubbing industry, *simil sync* is still retaining its original label; its technical features, in terms of pauses, rhythm, and expressiveness, remain in widespread use, as reported by some local professionals. This is confirmed in the analysis of audiovisual products spanning decades: in *Abito da sposa cerca* (Inge, 2007–present), as anticipated in the previous section, what seems to have changed in terms of show's format and adaptation technique is that *simil sync* has been slowly making its way towards traditional synced dubbing, sometimes coming so close that it even replicates the original lip sync, which shows how actual practice does not comply with the provisions contained in the latest Agreement. The TV show is aired on Real Time, a branch of the Discovery+ Group, which stands as an exception in the Italian TV panorama due to its consistent programming of non-fiction content adapted in *simil sync*.

A weekday analysis of the local television schedule has indeed confirmed this pattern: *simil synced* programs cluster primarily on channels like Real Time, HGTV, and D-Max – all belonging to Discovery+; in contrast, “generalist” (i.e., linear) networks (namely, RAI and Mediaset) largely avoid such programming, except for news report interviews, which are adapted in quite an emotionally charged version of voiceover technique that in time has been sounding more and more akin to *simil sync* (Di Francesco, 2024, 2025).

OTT platforms cannot be left out of this survey, as they play a pivotal role in the audiovisual landscape and operate in the sector under their own specific guidelines, generally at odds with AIDAC's recommendations. Netflix, just to mention one example, mandates that all lines must be fully covered in the adaptation of unscripted AV content except for the first 1–3 seconds of the original audio, which should still be audible, but offers no explicit distinction between *simil sync* – which is never mentioned – and traditional voiceover. An examination of a couple of unscripted AV products from 2025 – *A scuola di sopravvivenza* (Bear Grylls: Survival School) (Corwin & Murray, 2016–present) and *With Love, Meghan* (Markle et al., 2025) – shows that neither the internal guidelines nor the new Agreement are being systematically enforced: the original audio is inaudible for the first few seconds, and the dubbing actors' performances are far from being monotonous and unexpressive.

The 2023 Agreement was drafted, in part, to protect professionals, especially those in early-career, from unsustainable client expectations – such as demanding actors to deliver overstated performances and dialogue writers to approach the standards of qualitative sync, all while offering inadequate pay. All things considered, the contract strived – but failed – to precisely frame and define the boundaries of proper dubbing as opposed to other techniques used for non-fiction works; likewise, it failed to struggle against exploitative practices within the sector.

### 3. Simil Sync Tomorrow

Compromising between quality and cost-effectiveness has always been central to the inception and development of the simil sync technique, particularly for non-fiction and low-budget programs. The same motivation now drives the technological shift toward AI-assisted AVT, which has raised concerns among voice actors and dialogue writers, as the sector faces disruption to its traditional model by automated processes that are faster and less expensive. While the local industry is actively seeking ways to defend its craft and maintain standards, AI-assisted dubbing currently offers unparalleled speed and cost savings, and it is reasonable to anticipate that it will eventually achieve the same efficiency. This is especially appealing for low-budget content, which often cannot justify the cost of full traditional dubbing and has typically relied on simil sync. Given that the latter has never fully integrated into the local market – retaining the stigma of being a low-quality adaptation – it seems plausible that AI dubbing could replace simil sync.

AI has indeed already been used also to dub AV products traditionally handled through either voiceover or simil sync, i.e., interviews. A case in point is the Italian TV show *Ballando con le stelle* (Nicola, 2005–present) – the local version of the British format *Strictly Come Dancing* (Smith et al., 2004–present): over the past two decades, the show has starred international artists whose speech tended to be translated simultaneously by an interpreter for the live part of the program, with either voiceover or subtitles used for interviews and other pre-recorded video clips. As reported by Di Francesco (2025), since the 2010 edition, there has been a shift towards a more emotionally charged acting style, as well as a change in quantitative sync, the one pertaining to utterance length: the original soundtrack has become progressively less audible, and lines are now covered in their entirety. The 2024 edition marked a watershed moment with the use of AI-based lip-sync dubbing for Turkish actor Furkan Palalı's pre-recorded interviews. Although the sync was impeccable, the AI-generated speech sharply contrasted with his natural voice and fluency in Italian. This was evident when responding to judges in real time in Italian. This also applies to the use of an unnaturally lofty style and syntax, which are less typical of spontaneous speech, as in:

(i) Sono cresciuto con il supporto di mia madre. È amorevole, e affettuosa, e premuroso, che *mi accarezzava dolcemente sempre la schiena*. (*Ballando con le stelle*). (De Andreis & Alcini, 2024, October 12)

As Italian speakers would easily discern, the passage comes across as stilted and syntactically awkward, with “premuroso” being misgendered and the final clause – “che mi accarezzava dolcemente la schiena” – sounding artificial due to misinterpreted pausing conventions, which slipped through post-editing (if any). The highly formal register further undermines the naturalness of the dialogue, a problem compounded by the mismatch between the actor's actual, stuttered Italian and the fluency, complexity, and style of the dubbed version, with its perfect lip sync and utterly convincing deepfake effect.

### 3.1. The “Hit the Books” Test

When AI advances to provide a viewing experience as satisfying and less expensive than traditional dubbing, audience and industry preferences will likely shift away from *simil sync*. Although tolerance for it has grown recently (Sileo, 2025), it remains less favoured locally, with many professionals supporting lip-sync adaptation. Consequently, it may soon be limited to voiceover content and eventually disappear once AI dubbing gains wider acceptance. For these reasons, this adaptation modality might soon be relegated to content currently adapted using voiceover and then, presumably, disappear entirely once AI dubbing has been refined enough to gain acceptance and appreciation from local audiences. To assess the plausibility of this scenario, we experimented with automated dubbing to evaluate its potential impact based on five main technical requirements which must be met when adapting an audiovisual product, e.g., (1) qualitative or lip sync and (2) quantitative or utterance length sync, (3) translation accuracy, (4) multimodal consistency (i.e., consistency between the audio and the visual components), and (5) voice naturalness. For this purpose, we tested three different AI-driven video editors<sup>10</sup> – Dubverse (Lensmatic Solutions, 2023), Vidnoz (Wise Reward Limited, 2016), and Wondershare Filmora 14 (Wondershare Technology Group Co., 2003) – on an educational video clip<sup>11</sup> aiming to help learners sound more like native speakers through the use of English idioms. Out of the 15 idiomatic expressions, we shortlisted one for analysis, “Hit the books,” for several reasons:

- the content consists mainly of non-fiction – which is typically adapted using *simil sync* – with two minor inclusions of fictional content – which is more commonly dubbed. In this way, the selection covers the full range of genres usually associated with both techniques;
- the content is under one minute in length, a duration which video editors generally process free of charge;
- the selection was based on linguistic criteria, focusing on the idiom’s figurative meaning, its sensitivity to context, and the fact that it has several possible Italian translations. These range from the more precise “*mettersi sui libri*” or “*mettersi a studiare*”, to the broader and potentially ambiguous “*mettersi sotto*”, which can simply mean “to grind away” and does not always refer to studying. In this scene, the video literally shows books being hit on a desk. This clarifies the literal meaning of the idiom, but it shifts attention away from the intended figurative sense – studying – to the physical action of striking the books. As a result, viewers (especially those unfamiliar with the idiom or non-native speakers) might misunderstand the message. Similarly, AI tools that are not fully trained to analyze both images and language may also miss the figurative meaning.

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<sup>10</sup> To select the editors, we first consulted multiple AI platforms, asking each to provide a list of recommended editors. We then performed a cross-check of these lists to identify the most frequently suggested options.

<sup>11</sup> [Learn 15 Common English Idioms \(With Examples\)](#), accessed 16/03/2025.

The selected excerpt submitted for dubbing runs for 43 seconds and features three different characters – as shown in the table below, which shows the original script and the in-times of each speaker's turn.

**Table 1.**

*The "Hit the Books" Script<sup>12</sup>*

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**Speaker #1:** [00:00:00] "Hit the books." / What does that mean? If we try to kind of translate and explain it by just / translating every single word in this phrase, "hit the books," // I would say, you know, "I will take books and start hitting my table with them." What does that mean?

[Change of scene]

**Speaker #2:** [00:00:13] You're gonna hit the books / and pass it.

[Change of scene]

**Speaker #1:** [00:00:15] In reality, / we can't just do that to an idiom. With an idiom / we have to understand what it means without / translating every single word. So / "hit the books" means "to study hard." For example, / if your friend is asking you whether you want to go out tonight, you can say, "No, I gotta hit the books. I gotta stay home." This is an idiom that means "study hard."

[Change of scene]

**Speaker #3:** [00:00:39] Tomorrow / I buckle down // and hit the books.

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*Source:* Author's own elaboration.

Speaker #1, who plays the role of the instructor, provides a definition of the phrase, offers a possible synonym, and supplies examples that contribute to more accurate contextualization. The video is interspersed with two short excerpts taken from audiovisual productions. In the first one, a young woman – Speaker #2 – is seen standing next to some cardboard boxes, one of which is labeled "Law Text Books." She addresses another interlocutor, who is only visible from behind, telling her that she needs to buckle down and pass it, referring – visually and contextually – to a test, presumably an entrance exam for law school. The pronoun "it" in her line can be problematic in translation if the visual component of the product is ignored, as its referent is dependent on the visual context, so translating this element requires intersemiotic competence. In the second excerpt, another woman – Speaker #3 – mimics writing a sentence on the screen using her finger instead of a pen and making a couple of pauses as signaled in the table above.

Sources of potential adaptation problems pertain to the type of shots, mainly close-ups, which are demanding in terms of qualitative sync, posing a problem especially for video editors which do not modify lip movements by adjusting them to the target language. On the other hand, quantitative

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<sup>12</sup> In the script, "/" signals a short pause; "//" signals a longer pause.

sync is challenged by the amount of words/characters per second, with English words being comparatively shorter than Italian ones, which urges (non)human adaptors to retain information-dense discourse elements – nouns and verbs, among others – and leave out some of the less necessary content, such as repetitions, pause fillers, and markers of orality in general, which abound in spontaneous speech – and are mildly present in this one.

The following sub-sections will be devoted to the analysis of the output from every video editor implemented for the test. Apart from the ability to transfer culture-related and figurative phrases such as idioms, other criteria shall be applied, besides the match between the source and the target content in terms of qualitative, quantitative, and “kinetic” (Chaume, 2004) sync.

### 3.1.1. Dubverse

Dubverse (Lensmatic Solutions, 2023) promises to generate “AI voiceovers [sic] that feel real and relatable rather than cold and mechanical”<sup>13</sup>. The free online version of their AI dubbing services offers an adaptation in which lip sync is generally poor and quantitative sync is sometimes neglected, especially since elocution is significantly accelerated in some segments to fit the entire content.

As previously observed in the AI dubbing of *Ballando con le stelle* (Nicola, 2005–present), pauses are misinterpreted as full stops, so this trend breaks coherence, resulting in two disconnected and incoherent halves:

- a) We have to understand what it means without... translating every single word.

Dobbiamo capire cosa vuol dire senza. Traducendo ogni singola parola<sup>14</sup>.

[Back Translation: We have to understand what it means without it. By translating every single word.]

Some mistranslations have been detected in

- b) You’re gonna hit the books and pass it = Stanno per mettersi a studiare e passare alla realtà

[BT: They are about to hit the books and get down to reality.

Preferred translation: Adesso ti metti sotto e lo passi<sup>15</sup>.]

<sup>13</sup> [Dubverse: AI Text to Speech, AI Video Dubbing, Auto Subtitles, API](#), accessed 16/03/2024.

<sup>14</sup> The same outcome can be found in the Vidnoz output.

<sup>15</sup> Vidnoz gives a more precise version, still far from being acceptable: “Stai per andare sui libri e passarlo” [BT: “You’re about to go to the books and pass it”].

There is a blatant misunderstanding in the subject (you > they), but, more importantly, we can observe a tendency that seems to be generalized when it comes to artificial intelligence, which is the unnecessary addition of content, as in “pass it” > “passare alla realtà” (BT: “to come down to reality”): a non-sequitur likely due to overgeneralized interference from corpus data which testifies to context-blind literalism.

A serious mistranslation occurs in the equivalence “buckle down” > “mi allaccio” (BT: “I fasten myself”), implying a mistake in the selection among the numerous meanings of the phrase, due to a lack of context differentiation<sup>16</sup>. The result is thus semantically inappropriate and, as said, contextually absurd. Moreover, the ensuing pause – meant to convey hesitation or emphasis – is again interpreted as an interruption, leading to complete disconnection between the two constituting parts of the same utterance.

Voice naturalness is further compromised by the reuse of the same synthetic voice for all characters and the arbitrary shifts in pitch (ascending/descending intonations) at random points in utterances, which contribute to altering their sense.

### 3.1.2. Vidnoz

Vidnoz<sup>17</sup> (Wise Reward Limited, 2016) is a video editing service that provides AI-produced videos in a free, easy, and fast way, which also offers a set of realistic avatars, voices, and customizable patterns. The synthetic voices offered – a different one for each character – occasionally sound more natural than those with Dubverse (Lensmatic Solutions, 2023), although they both share the same issues in terms of quantitative sync – which is generally respected at any cost, even if it leads to speeding up and/or slowing down the speech, at the expense of intelligibility.

Like Dubverse (Lensmatic Solutions, 2023), Vidnoz (Wise Reward Limited, 2016) misreads pauses and lacks actual qualitative sync. Furthermore, just like other automated systems, Vidnoz falls into typical “translation traps,” especially when it comes to such a polysemic word as “just”:

c) In reality, we can’t just do that to an idiom.

In realtà, non possiamo farlo solo con un modo di dire.<sup>18</sup>

[BT: Actually, we can’t do it only with one idiom.]

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<sup>16</sup> A similar error was made by Vidnoz: in “Mi allaccio... e si mise sui libri” [BT: “I fasten myself... and he/she hit the books”], we can notice some odd subject and verb tense change in the second fraction of the utterance.

<sup>17</sup> <https://it.vidnoz.com/>, accessed 22/03/2025.

<sup>18</sup> In Dubverse, “Non possiamo semplicemente fare questo a un modo di dire” [BT: “We can’t simply do this to an idiom”].

“Just” is here translated as *solo* and interpreted as “exclusively,” thus neglecting the role of de-semanticized marker occasionally played by the adverb, typically in oral discourse; in this specific case, it may also be left untranslated, as in the source language it does not carry any meaning-full burden.

### 3.1.3. Wondershare Filmora 14

Filmora<sup>19</sup> (Wondershare Technology Group Co., 2003) is a video editing software program that offers a wide range of features, including AI-powered tools. Among the three shortlisted video editors, it stands out as the only one that provides adjustments to the mouth movements of on-screen characters to ensure 100% lip sync with the audio content. Despite this, the lip sync is not always perfectly crafted, nor are the target language lip movements seamlessly integrated with the surrounding image. Additionally, speech is at times accelerated, though less evidently than with other editors, and intonations and rhythm are often unnatural and robotic, due to the presence of pauses and hesitations in the original script, which are generally misinterpreted.

In terms of viewing experience, Filmora (Wondershare Technology Group Co., 2003) outperforms the other tools, were it not for the poor quality of the translation. The core phrase “hit the books” is translated as “colpire i libri,” a direct and word-for-word equivalence that conveys a completely different meaning in Italian, although it partially matches the visual component as Speaker #1 grabs a book and hits the table with it. Since the phrase’s idiomatic meaning (“to study”) is culturally embedded rather than compositional, AI’s approach fails to capture this performative dimension, reducing language to decontextualized lexemes. Speaker #2’s line, which has posed a translation challenge for all three editors, takes on a completely different meaning: “andrò a colpire i libri e a passare” is “I’ll go and hit the books, and pass.” Such a rendition distorts the idiom and presents syntactic awkwardness. We can also detect one instance of “hit the books” > “andare a prendere i libri” (BT: “to go get the books”), for no discernible reason.

A “trap” in which translators may get caught is related to false friends: Filmora (Wondershare Technology Group Co., 2003) is the only editor “stumbling” into the “idiom” > “idioma” (BT: “language”) pair, thus showing AI’s struggle with lexical ambiguity. That said, the software can be praised for the way it coped with the final line of the script. In fact, unlike the others, it does not get “tricked” by the original pause – which is totally ignored – and provides a tense- and subject-consistent utterance – “Domani prenderò e colpirò i libri” (BT: “Tomorrow I’ll take and hit the books”). Unfortunately, it still replicates the source text word for word, thus failing to provide accurate and sensible translation.

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<sup>19</sup> [Miglior software video editor per principianti](#), accessed 22/03/2025.



### 3.2. Wrapping Up

The table below sums up the three most relevant challenges in the adaptation of this short script and the relative output produced by each video editor, as described in detail in the previous paragraphs.

**Table 2.**

*Overview of the Most Relevant Adaptation Challenges and Editor Outcomes*

	<b>Dubverse</b>	<b>Vidnoz</b>	<b>Filmora 14</b>
Hit the books	Mettersi a studiare Studiare seriamente <sup>20</sup> Dare il massimo <sup>21</sup>	Buttarsi sui libri Andiamo sui libri Studiare sodo <sup>22</sup>	Colpire i libri Andare a prendere i libri (Per) studiare sodo <sup>23</sup>
You're gonna hit the books and pass it	Stanno per mettersi a studiare e passare alla realtà.	Stai per andare sui libri e passarlo.	Andrò a colpire i libri e a passare.
I buckle down and... hit the books	Domani mi allaccio e... mettersi a studiare.	Domani mi allaccio... e si mise sui libri.	Domani prenderò e colpirò i libri.

*Source:* Author's own work.

To ensure a successful adaptation and a comfortable viewing experience, five criteria should be fulfilled: qualitative and quantitative sync, audio-visual match<sup>24</sup>, translation accuracy, and voice naturalness. We have decided to use them to assess each video editor's performance on a 0–10 scale out of a total score of 50 points, as in the following table.

<sup>20</sup> BT: "To study diligently."

<sup>21</sup> BT: "To do one's best" – a bit more general meaning, compared to the original.

<sup>22</sup> BT: "To Study hard."

<sup>23</sup> BT: "(In order) to study hard."

<sup>24</sup> In other words, the correspondence between the aural component – the adapted script – and the visual one.

**Table 3.***Overview of Each Editor's Performance on a 0–10 Evaluation Scale*

	<b>Dubverse</b>	<b>Vidnoz</b>	<b>Filmora 14</b>
<b>Qualitative sync</b>	2	5	9
<b>Quantitative sync</b>	5	7	10
<b>Audio-visual match</b>	5	7	9
<b>Translation accuracy</b>	4	5	4
<b>Voice naturalness</b>	5	5	7 <sup>25</sup>
<b>Total score</b>	21/50	29/50	39/50

*Source:* Author's own work.

Table 3 shows that Filmora stands out as the best performing among the editors, grading high in terms of sync, though less so when it comes to voice naturalness, a feature in which it seems to be wavering between almost perfectly natural-sounding voices and more robotic ones, even within the same utterance by the same on-screen speaker. As discussed, it clearly lacks the same translation accuracy as the other editors. Among the five criteria, qualitative sync remains the most challenging feature to successfully accomplish when the editor does not provide users with the automated adjustment of lip movements. However, *Ballando con le stelle* (Nicola, 2005–present) confirms that the obstacle can be successfully overcome by utilizing efficient software. Translation accuracy, finally, turns out to be the only criterion that the tested video editors cannot – so far – satisfy. Post-editing still appears to be crucial when dealing with context-blind literalism and lexical ambiguity as evidenced in the examples provided, where automated tools often used a word-for-word approach, resulting in literally correct but contextually and multimodally nonsensical renderings in the target linguo-cultural system. Another common translation “trap” for some AI tools – as well as for inexperienced human translators – is polysemy, especially when visual cues are not available or accessible. This was evident in our experiment with the word “buckle.” In all these aspects, human agency can still prove indispensable – at least for now.

<sup>25</sup> This feature turns out to have a fluctuating trend, ranging from high naturalness to abrupt and unjustified change of voice type – generally occurring simultaneously with pauses – for the same on-screen character; this adds to the overtly synthetic nature of some of these voices, resulting in a non-completely pleasant viewing experience.

#### 4. Conclusions

The chronological review of the history of the *simil sync* technique has revealed that terminology in the dubbing industry, as provided by the CCNLs, has adapted to new offerings in the audiovisual market. Despite its reputation as an easier, faster, and less expensive dubbing modality, *simil sync* has undergone many changes in terms of technical terminology and practical realization. In contrast to standard dubbing and voiceover, which have remained essentially consistent and unchanged, *simil sync* has seen ongoing efforts to establish standardized directions. As observed in Section 1.1, it initially had no guidelines and was increasingly characterized by barely audible original soundtracks and translated utterances respecting the same length as the original ones. Such a change may suggest a “dubbingization” of *simil sync*, moving it further from traditional voiceover and closer to standard dubbing, where the main difference is the absence of lip synchronization.

We argue that, in the past, non-fiction entertainment favored *simil sync* and *simil sync* favored the rapid growth of non-fiction entertainment programming. In other words, they have encouraged each other’s evolution, which has corresponded to programming demands. Across all distribution channels, including linear television and thematic channels, as well as non-linear platforms, reality TV shows focused on food, real life, and home makeover programs were the most *simil-synced* genres. Over time, the mutual identification “specific genres-*simil sync*” became stronger. Moreover, since factual programs were often considered “light” or trivial, *simil sync* tended to be perceived by local professionals and audiences as a less prestigious technique than dubbing (Barra et al., 2020).

An overview of the current situation in the Italian AVT landscape indicates that the 2023 CCNL appears to have had little to no impact on terminology and technique, at least for the time being. Noteworthy future developments in the local industry are very likely to be related to the use of AI, which is still taking its first hesitant steps in the tele-cinematic realm, whereas online social media content and advertising have been more and more frequently relying on it. See, as an instance, the “Arredissima” commercial (Alternative Group, 2025), featuring the store’s staff assembling and selling furniture, all being deepfaked with Italian presenter Gerry Scotti’s face and voice, which are adjusted to match the gender and age characteristics of each character on the screen.

AI dubbing’s quality is rapidly improving – so much so that the content of the second part of this paper is bound to become quickly outdated –, offering significant advantages in terms of faster and more cost-efficient production. In this scenario, *simil sync* is going to be greatly impacted, also because it still carries a stigma as a low-quality adaptation among a large part of local professionals and audiences alike (Barra et al., 2020). Consequently, once AI dubbing can provide a more efficient and increasingly natural alternative, it is plausible that it will gradually replace *simil sync*, especially in B-tier or non-fiction programs where budget and speed are paramount.

Audience reception, on the other hand, should not be ignored. Since “viewers are creatures of habit” (Ivarsson, 1992, p. 66) and generally tend to cling to their customary viewing experience, the question now is whether the audience would appreciate non-fiction content dubbed with AI in full

lip-sync. Di Francesco's study (2023) found that the absence of lip-sync in unscripted programs is quite well tolerated by Italian audiences if the volume of the original soundtrack is slightly audible. Therefore, one may infer that people may be getting used to simil sync as such. However, if non-fiction programs were dubbed with AI, questions remain regarding the potential alienating effect this could have on audiences.

In other words, considering all these premises, Di Francesco seems skeptical about the use of AI for simil-synced programs, not so much for the "voice-actors vocal sounds" – whose "approval may well be less tolerable" by audiences than translation (Chiaro, 2021, p. A125) –, but rather for the characteristics of non-fiction genres. The issue is linked to the tension between the perceived "unpolished" style of non-fiction content and the highly controlled precision of AI dubbing (which is more suitable for standard dubbing). This mismatch risks undermining the viewer's sense of authenticity. Non-fiction programs such as reality TV shows and docudramas are often characterized by fast-paced conversations, overlapping utterances and a lack of lip-sync, which is very typical of unscripted or semi-scripted content. If these were dubbed using AI systems that follow perfect lip-syncing, programs could lose their genre-specific features, in other words, their identifiability, and blur into more conventional dubbing. So far, in fact, AI dubbing has focused on achieving accurate lip sync which is obviously absent in simil-synced products. The issue is not the technical quality of AI dubbing, which is expected to reach high standards, but rather the need to preserve the recognizable characteristics of light entertainment programs and to avoid mismatching between translation modes and genres.

Looking ahead, we can only speculate what the future may unfold for simil sync. Sileo envisions a scenario where AI is expected to become increasingly applied and improved, ensuring an ever more enjoyable viewing experience for dubbing enthusiasts. In this scenario, voiceover is likely to be progressively replaced by simil sync, which is more audience-friendly and as expensive as the former adaptation mode, based on the latest Agreement. However, despite growing tolerance towards the lack of lip sync, this technique might shrink back into a less and less pivotal adaptation technique only implemented for low-budget – thus, less prestigious – non-scripted AV products, which require neither convincing voice-acting performances nor high-quality lip sync. It may even simply disappear, thus classifying similar sync as a short-lived Italian audiovisual translation experiment.

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