

Ex-Pat TV

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When it comes to the discussion of Ex-Pat Television, I would emphasize the relationship between viewing practices and the possible development of language skills or intercultural knowledge. When consuming subtitled programs on television abroad, one has the ability to consume its original language, or else read the subtitles, thereby developing language skills. (This is complicated by the degree to which the dialect utilized by the translators is akin to that of the importing country; for example, the words for “straw” or “popcorn” vary throughout Latin America.) By contrast, dubbed programming removes the capacity for consuming the original language, thus removing a great deal of comprehension; in terms of language apprehension, this would be of the ‘complete language emersion’ variety.

At the other end of the spectrum is consumption online or on DVD that often has no translation, unless a subtitling or dubbing option is employed on the DVD. The option of untranslated programming relieves the foreignness of consumption, while the previous modes put the American in the often unfamiliar position of not having dominant language skills. (Thus, viewing programming abroad offers Americans the opportunity to experience what it might be like for non-English speaking people who watch TV in America.)

Language acquisition and development in and of itself is insufficient for understanding the significance of Ex-Pat TV; we must also consider more broadly cultural factors. I recently spent time in Mexico observing and learning about the process of dubbing of American media for Latin American audiences at a studio called New Art Dub. When New Art dubs American content for Latin American consumption, they do so by adapting the text in such a way that it is consumable by the greatest majority of individuals; this is accomplished, for example, through the use of dictionaries which outline the options for a given word and specify that which is the most common. Their dedication to replicating the sentiment of the original text, i.e. a sense-for-sense rather than word-for-word adaptation, ensures the greatest likelihood of the text maintaining its original, albeit polysemic, meaning as it travels the globe.

Although this process sheds light on the ways in which “TV created in one place, intended for a certain audience or national context, is distributed and consumed in other places,” it is not specific to the consumption of the text by its original intended audience. Instead, this focus is on spreading the text to reach new audiences in a foreign language. Just as the process of subtitling better equips English-speaking viewers with language acquisition skills, so too does it allow foreign consumers of American texts to develop their English-language skills. This is not to say that foreign language acquisition is a goal of TV adaptation processes, but rather that it is an added benefit, one which I would argue is more easily achieved through subtitling than dubbing. The determination of whether an American text is dubbed or subtitled before airing abroad is based on a number of factors, including costs, generic qualities, and cultural motivations. My

experiences with New Art demonstrate a refusal to make cultural adaptations to texts which might censor taboo content for foreign audiences. In the case of *Glee*, for example, nothing is (consciously) done in the adaptation process which would eliminate any of the 'gay' qualities for Catholic audiences; in fact, real consideration has been given to the dubbing of the trans character Wade/Unique, so that the character is presented respectfully and without mockery. That being said, New Art cannot necessarily be understood to represent all adaptation companies and translation processes. Ex-Pats living and consuming American media abroad, particularly those who are somewhat fluent in the language of their new homeland, are best equipped, through the consumption of subtitled American media content, to identify the ways in which adaptation processes affect the American TV shows that flow throughout the globe.