

# A Reception Study on AVT: A Literature Review

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## Abstract

This paper reviews and collates studies on AVT reception conducted inside and outside China since the beginning of the 21st century, summarizing general trends and differences in this field over the past 20 years. It is found that AVT reception studies in China tend to focus on the text analysis of cultural expression and digital humanities. In contrast, AVT reception studies abroad are dominated by variable-oriented comparative empirical research, with translation mode and country of translation serving as the main variables. In terms of audiovisual works selection, scholars both inside and outside China are increasingly focusing on the reception of subtitle translation in online educational videos. Additionally, foreign countries are more aligned with the growing trend of game localization, audio descriptions and subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing. This paper, by reviewing the commonalities and differences in AVT reception studies inside and outside China over the past 20 years, offers insights into the application of experimental and questionnaire methods in AVT reception studies and broaden the analytical perspective within this field.

**Key Words:** Audiovisual Translation, reception study, digital humanities

## 1. Introduction

In China, AVT reception studies began at the start of the 21st century, but in their initial stages, these studies primarily focused on text analysis without employing empirical methods to directly analyze audience attitudes. Ou (2006) is a representative example from this early period, examining audience perceptions of subtitle translation and treating it as a psycholinguistic activity. Using psycholinguistic theories on word and sentence reception and understanding, the study analyzes subtitle translation from three perspectives: textual reduction, syntax, and lexical expression. While this dissertation marks an early attempt to study audience reception of subtitle translation in the early 21st century, the lack of theoretical and technical support during that time limited the study to a textual level, resulting in only nominal reception analysis without empirical exploration of audience attitudes.

It was not until 2007 that Chesterman introduced the distinction of three types of translation reception—reaction, response, and effect (repercussion), collectively referred to as the 3R model. However, while Chesterman outlined these concepts, he did not apply them to audiovisual works nor to specific cases. At that time, the application of the 3R model to explain AVT phenomena was largely absent.

Audiovisual translation serves as a relatively promising and evolving perspective within translation studies, though has not yet become mainstream in reception studies, either domestically or internationally. Despite the long history of translation reception studies, the German functionalist approach, as outlined by Nord (1997), emphasizes the importance of receptionists, who possess specific cultural background knowledge, expectations, and communicative needs, as a key component of translation behavior. Yet, reception studies in translation have not gained widespread attention within the field. Even among the various forms of translation, audiovisual translation—despite its potential as a novel focus—remains on the periphery of reception research, both inside and outside China. Over the past 20 years, there have been 354 domestic and international studies in this area, with a peak in 2018, as shown in Figure 1. However, in the special issue on audiovisual translation in *Perspectives* (2022), A. Valdeón (2022) identifies reception studies as one of the emerging trends in AVT research.

This paper aims to systematically review the existing body of AVT reception research from a diachronic perspective, summarizing historical trends and significant achievements in the field. By analyzing and evaluating literature both inside and outside China, this paper seeks to offer new insights and methodologies for future studies in AVT reception research.

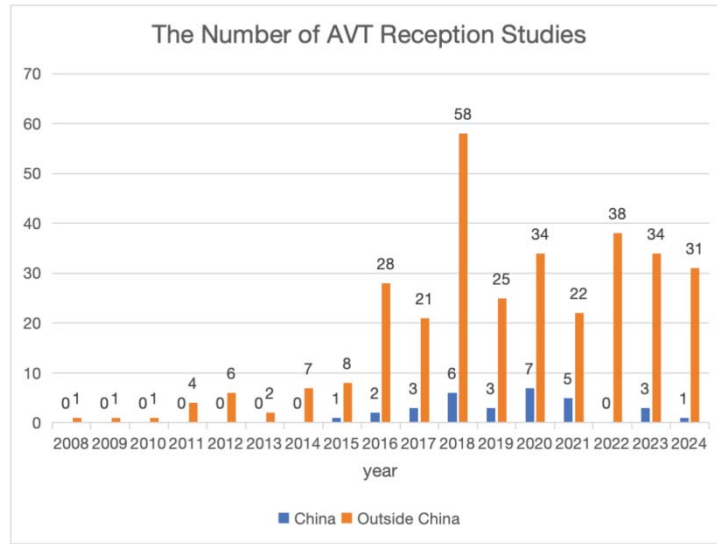


Figure 1. Development in the number of audiovisual translation reception studies (2000-2024)

## 2. Overall Trends

Through investigation, it has been found that the mainstream trend in AVT reception studies in China focuses on cultural expression, with a growing shift toward digital humanities in recent years. In contrast, outside China, the dominant trend is empirical research, often using translation mode or country as key variables. Table 1 outlines the total number of AVT reception studies in each region and highlights the proportion of studies following these main trends. This section will summarize the representative works within each trend and their distinguishing characteristics.

Table 1. The number and proportion of trends in audiovisual translation reception studies (2000-2024)

Rank	The total number of AVT Reception Study	Trend	Numbers	Proportion
China	33	AVT Reception Study on Cultural Expression	16	48.48%
		AVT Reception Study in Digital Humanities Turn	9	27.27%
Outside China	321	AVT Reception Study as Variable-oriented Empirical Study	284	88.47%

### 2.1 Domestic Trends: AVT Cultural Expression Reception Study and Digital Humanities Turn

Domestic scholars have primarily focused on the reception of specific elements such as humor and cultural expression in translated works, proposing various methodologies from the theoretical perspective of digital humanities, though empirical studies remain limited.

Humor translation, a key aspect of audiovisual translation, has garnered significant attention from domestic scholars in recent years. Shen (2017) examines humor-loaded cultural expressions in the Renren subtitles of the first season of *The Big Bang Theory*, using a questionnaire to analyze audience comprehension of humorous segments. The study concludes that audience understanding of these humor-loaded expressions is generally low. Similarly, Wang (2018) explores audience attitudes toward humor translation in AVT, again using *The Big Bang Theory* as a case study to assess audience psychology via questionnaire. Wang's longer study categorizes verbal humor into four types based on humor theory, finding that humor related to science is the most comprehensible to the audience. These two studies, as typical examples of AVT reception studies focused on humor translation, reflect the trend toward empirical research in domestic AVT, shifting from text analysis to investigating audience attitudes. However, both studies are limited in their selection of texts and subjects, as they primarily involve college students and focus on American sitcoms.

Over the past five years, three major trends have emerged in domestic AVT reception studies: audience-oriented, export-oriented, and digital humanities-oriented approaches.

Zhu (2021) is a representative AVT reception study directly targeting public audience attitudes, using a questionnaire to analyze audience responses to the subtitles of *Emergency Call*. While it retains the traditional focus on textual analysis, this study finds that annotations are a favored addition for Chinese audiences. A notable aspect of this study is its use of questionnaires, which not only rely on the Likert scale but also incorporate text cases from audiovisual works. However, its focus on a specific audience and a single film limits the generalizability of the findings.

While most scholars have examined the introduction of foreign film and television works, Liang (2022) presents a typical export-oriented study on the reception of subtitle translation in Chinese science fiction films. This study introduces cognitive reception methods, such as eye-tracking technology and multimodal corpus analysis, to explore the reception of Chinese works abroad. Liang's research marks a rare study on the international reception of domestic works in recent years.

Influenced by the digital humanities trend, Li and Zhang (2023) have expanded the methodologies used in AVT reception studies. They propose using bibliometric tools and corpus analysis to quantitatively examine audience reception, and suggest integrating geographical information systems to track the dissemination of audiovisual translations. Additionally, they encourage scholars to use programming languages to analyze audience comments and attitudes. These theoretical advancements offer multiple pathways for future AVT reception research.

### *2.2 Foreign Trends: Variable-oriented Empirical Study*

In contrast to domestic scholars' focus on text analysis and cultural expression, foreign AVT reception studies tend to prioritize comparative empirical research, with translation mode or country as key variables.

Several scholars have examined the reception of dubbing versus subtitling, comparing how audiences respond to each. Perego et al. (2016a) uses eye-tracking and questionnaires to test audience reception of dubbing and subtitling, analyzing whether the complexity of AV products affects viewers' scanning strategies. It is found that cognitive processing of subtitled material is as effective as that of dubbed material. This study combines behavioral data and eye-tracking technology, focusing on Italian audiences—a population from a dubbing country. However, the short AV clips used may limit the authenticity of the results. Similarly, Matamala et al. (2017) conducts a comparative study in Spain, another dubbing country, examining audience attitudes toward dubbing and subtitling. This study divides participants into dubbing and subtitling groups, using evaluative and cognitive questionnaires. While it does not incorporate eye-tracking, the extended AV segments made the results more realistic than those of Perego et al. (2016a).

Foreign scholars have also considered how AVT traditions vary by country and how audience nationality affects reception. Perego et al. (2016b) examines nationality as a variable, selecting participants from Italy, Spain, Poland, and Dutch-speaking Belgium. As in Matamala et al. (2017), participants are asked to complete evaluative and cognitive questionnaires during the viewing process. The results show that in traditional dubbing countries (Italy and Spain), participants primarily consume dubbed content but are increasingly comfortable using subtitles. This experiment highlights the importance of considering individual differences, such as nationality, in AVT reception studies, as countries with dubbing traditions may have distinct viewing habits compared to those with subtitling histories.

## **3. Differences in the Media**

### *3.1 Differences in AVT Products Selection*

In terms of AVT product selection, in addition to film and television works, Chinese scholars pay more attention to the reception of online educational video subtitle, while foreign scholars' product is more diverse and specific. Ren (2018) focuses on the reception of subtitle translation in online educational videos, with the online athlete training videos from the International Olympic Organizing Committee as materials, to analyze the audience's reception according to the existing subtitle quality standards. It is found that the existing online educational video subtitle translation should improve the vigilance of misspellings and the accuracy of proper nouns. The study focuses on audience reception, expanding the scope of AVT's materials to include online educational videos, not limited to film and television works. But the focus remains on the processing of text. It does not directly touch the audience, but only makes error corrections according to the existing subtitle translation standards.

Scholars outside China not only analyze the text, but also adopt the method of empirical study to pay attention to the audience attitude of other AV products except film and television works. Mangiron (2016) conducts a small-scale reception study on video game captioning through eye-tracking technology and questionnaire survey. The subjects are divided into hearing users and deaf users and are under two surveys before and after playing games with the eye tracker. This exploration expands the product types of audiovisual translation reception study. Hu (2020) adopts Gambier's reception model and, with eye tracking and questionnaire survey, respectively put perspectives on MT subtitle translation of MOOCs. Compared with Chinese

students' raw machine translated subtitles, fully post-edited machine is more widely accepted. This study also expands the product types of AVT to be studied and it follows the current trend of machine translation with MT taken into consideration rather than simply official subtitles or fansubbing subtitles and the experiment design is based on a concrete reception model.

### 3.2 Differences in AD and SDH Reception Studies

In China, Xiao Weiqing is a leading expert in audio description (AD) reception studies. Xiao and Dong (2020) shifts the focus from subtitle and dubbing translation to AD reception studies. Their study, based on two comparable episodes of *When Will There Be a Moon*, uses questionnaires to analyze audience attitudes toward speech synthesis and human voice dubbing. The results indicate a preference for human voice dubbing, though speech synthesis is also considered a viable option due to its efficiency. This study, which employs eye-tracking technology, represents a rare example of AD reception research in China. The research design is comprehensive, with pre-experiment interviews conducted with users, and the study stands out for its detailed literature review, clear text expression, and rigorous quantitative data.

Compared to just two AD reception studies in China, there are 37 such studies in foreign countries—more than 18 times the number in China. The methodologies used in foreign studies are also more mature. Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between the quantity of studies and the year of publication inside and outside China. Fernandez-Torne et al. (2015) analyzes the reception of text-to-speech in dubbed films in the Catalan context, using questionnaires based on the Mean Opinion Score (MOS) test. The study finds that most blind or visually impaired audience members accept text-to-speech audio descriptions, particularly those with synthetic feminine voices. Chmiel and Mazur (2022) also examines audience attitudes toward AD, dividing subjects into groups based on congenital blindness, non-congenital blindness, and low vision. This classification allows for more specific analysis, and the universal nature of AD in foreign countries leads to more diverse experimental materials and longer experiment durations, resulting in more authentic findings.

In contrast, less attention has been paid to subtitles for the deaf and hard-of-hearing (SDH) in AVT in China, though relevant reception studies exist in other countries. Aleksandrowicz (2019) guides participants through a Differential Emotions Scale questionnaire based on film fragments, revealing that all subtitling methods—whether they included musical descriptions, the title of the composition and performer's name, or no information about the music—effectively convey the mood of the film score. This study, which focuses on background music subtitles in films, represents a rare example of SDH reception research, a subject often overlooked by scholars.

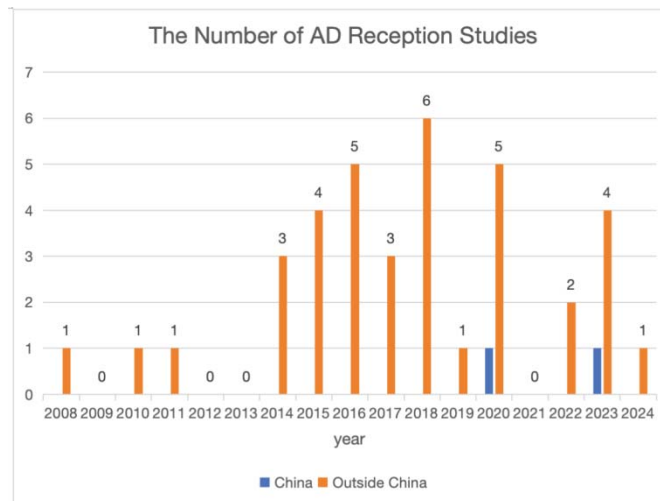


Figure 2. Development in the number of AD reception studies (2000-2024)

## 4. Conclusion

Through a review and analysis of relevant literature, this paper identifies significant differences in AVT reception studies inside and outside China.

In terms of overall trends, China remains more focused on the study of cultural expression reception and text analysis. Although some scholars, within the context of digital humanities, have proposed using geographic techniques, programming languages, corpora, eye-tracking technologies, and other methods (Liang, 2022; Li & Zhang, 2023), research still tends to emphasize theoretical approaches, with relatively few empirical studies. In contrast, other countries focus more on variable-oriented empirical studies, examining factors such as the nationality of subjects, the type of subtitle producers (machine

translation or not), and the listening status of subjects. Experimental methods, questionnaires, and interviews are commonly used to assess audience reception of audiovisual works across different variables.

In terms of the reception of AVT products beyond film and television, Chinese scholars typically rely on relatively simple materials, such as online educational videos, and concentrate on textual analysis. Meanwhile, foreign scholars are also following the trend of game localization, employing eye-tracking technology, questionnaires, and other methods to explore the gaming experience or video-viewing experience outside China.

AVT research encompasses not only video works, online videos, and games but also includes studies on audio description (AD) and subtitles for the deaf and hard-of-hearing (SDH). The review finds that, due to the prevalence of AD outside China, there is a greater volume of AD studies in foreign contexts, with more diverse research perspectives. Some studies focus on sound sources, while others emphasize text content, with more specific classifications of subjects. Foreign SDH reception studies also adopt more novel perspectives, such as tracking subtitle reception for film soundtracks (Aleksandrowicz, 2019). However, recent work by the Chinese team led by Professor Xiao has begun exploring these aspects, offering promising developments in this area.

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