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## DEVELOPING STUDENTS' TRANSLATION COMPETENCE AND INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS THROUGH SUBTITLING: A DIDACTIC PROPOSAL

The aim of this paper is to highlight the validity of subtitling as a pedagogical tool having a significant impact on the improvement of various skills, ranging from translation to the acquisition of socio-cultural knowledge and intercultural awareness. Specifically, it describes a didactic proposal based on the integration of interlingual subtitling into university general translation courses. The didactic project was carried out with a class of undergraduate language students attending a university translation module who were asked to engage in subtitling activities of a variety of films and TV series. Particular emphasis was given to multilingual films which involve specific translation problems, such as the rendering of language diversity and variation (i.e. ethnolects, dialects, sociolects, accents, language varieties, idiolects, etc.) and cultural references. Such translation tasks can enhance students' awareness of the complexity of the translation process and of the role of the translator as a cultural mediator, not only fostering the development of strategies related to audiovisual comprehension and audiovisual translation, but also promoting students' intercultural awareness.

### 1. Introduction: Subtitling as a didactic tool in Foreign Language and Translation Teaching

The aim of this paper is to propose a didactic approach based on the active production of interlingual subtitles in order to encourage and motivate students to reflect critically on translation issues and develop intercultural awareness, while at the same time enhancing other skills such as audiovisual comprehension. By focusing on the relationship between the didactics of general translation and audiovisual translation (AVT) as a methodological resource, this contribution explores the possibilities offered by subtitling as a pedagogical tool in the teaching of translation. Translating subtitles in fact provides an ideal arena for students to become aware of the complexity of translation as a cultural process.

A significant number of scholars in the last few decades have analysed the potential of subtitling as a support for language learning. These studies have discussed the benefits of intra- and interlingual subtitled materials for foreign language learning in general, and for the development of specific language skills, such as listening and reading comprehension, spoken production, vocabulary building and grammar (Araújo 2008; Bravo 2010; Caimi 2006, 2008; Danan 2004; d'Yadewalle and Pavakanun 1997; Ghia 2012; Pavakanun and d'Yadewalle 1992; Pavesi 2002; Sokoli 2006; van Lommel et al 2006). Some studies, including one by the European Commission (2011)<sup>1</sup>, highlight how subtitled videos appear to foster and develop learner motivation and engagement (Ryan 1998; Vanderplank 1988; Williams and Thorne 2000). Furthermore, according to Chapman, one of the aims of using subtitled videos in class can be

to train students to be good subtitle readers, breaking down any reticence or fear that might exist due to supposed extra effort or missing something important in the visual part of the film. This is especially important in dubbing countries such as Italy where great emphasis is placed on the skills of the dubbing industry and the presumed difficulty of watching subtitled video. (2017, 8)

More recently, research has investigated the benefits of active subtitling for foreign language learning (Lertola 2012, 2015; López Cirugeda and Sánchez Ruiz 2013; Incalcaterra McLoughlin 2009; Incalcaterra McLoughlin and Lertola 2011, 2014; Ragni 2018; Sokoli 2018; Talavan 2006, 2010, 2014). Indeed, the

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<sup>1</sup> Study on the use of subtitling. The potential of subtitling to encourage foreign language learning and improve the mastery of foreign languages. <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/e4d5cbf4-a839-4a8a-81d0-7b19a22cc5ce> (Accessed October 28, 2018).



integration of audiovisual materials (e.g. films and TV series) into the foreign language classroom has become an increasingly widespread approach offering learners “an accessible window” (Bueno 2009, 319) onto the foreign language and culture, and at the same time allowing teachers to create a wide range of foreign language learning activities. Talavan (2010, 286), for instance, claims that the active production of subtitles by students is a functional and interactive activity which can have notable impact on the improvement of foreign language skills. It is also worth mentioning the studies carried out by Borghetti (2011) and Borghetti and Lertola (2014), who explore the possibilities of active interlingual subtitling for intercultural learning beyond linguistic skills, thus promoting the development of intercultural competence in the foreign language classroom.

While the above-mentioned studies consider active subtitling mainly as a didactic tool for learning a foreign language, one area of research in Audiovisual Translation Studies has on the other hand focused on subtitling in the context of translation teaching, describing how subtitling modules can be used in university courses (Beseghi 2013; Bartrina 2009; Blane 1996; Díaz Cintas 2001, 2008; Kruger 2008; Neves 2004). Neves shows that “students attending such courses gained skills and language awareness that reflected itself in their performance in other courses and activities” (2004, 127), while Kruger claims that subtitling can be integrated successfully into any generic training in translation, “firstly to expose students to the benefits related to the constant need for creative translation solutions, often requiring agile lateral thinking skills, and secondly to introduce them to subtitling as a possible field of specialisation” (2008, 79).

Within the vast topic of subtitling in foreign language and translation teaching, this paper will attempt to shed some light on the use of subtitling activities in general translation courses in order to develop not only students’ audiovisual comprehension and translation skills but also their socio-cultural and intercultural awareness as translators.

## **2. A didactic proposal: subtitling in a general translation course**

As noted above, the didactic proposal described in this contribution is based on the integration of subtitling in the translation class. It will be described by presenting a classroom experiment carried out in academic year 2016-2017 at the University of Parma, in the Translation Module of the subject English Language and Translation (*Lingua e Traduzione Inglese*) in the third and final year of the first level degree course *Civiltà e Lingue Straniere Moderne*<sup>2</sup>. In order to be able to graduate, students are required to reach the C1 level of the *Common European Framework of Reference* (CEFR), which is assessed in a final English exam that includes Translation Theory and Practice, among other components (i.e. Listening Comprehension, Reading Comprehension, Use of English, Writing, Speaking). One of the various topics of the Translation Module is Audiovisual Translation, where students are introduced to the main AVT modalities and features, including subtitling and its technical features.

The pedagogical construct for this course draws on the social-constructivist, collaborative, authentic-project-based approach proposed by Kiraly (2000), according to which learning is context-dependent, learner-centred and co-creative. The teaching situation is a Translation Module which, rather than focusing on model translation solutions or specific translation problems, attempts to encourage students to develop a range of skills that can be applied to various translation activities (Beseghi 2013, 398). As highlighted by Kruger, although any translation training should be underpinned by theory, it is important to give students the opportunity to gain practical experience in “the skills required in this technological age, including translation skills, and skills in the use of different electronic and other tools” which they can apply in different fields, including audiovisual translation (2008, 73).

In the context of a general translation module, subtitling as an individual and collaborative task can provide a range of activities aimed at developing translation skills, at the same time promoting students’ awareness of the translation process as well as their motivation and involvement in a translation (Sokoli 2006, 66). According to Blane, interlingual subtitling in the translation curriculum has a motivational function because it “engages students’ interest and enthusiasm, promotes confidence and security, fosters development of L2 learning strategies and translation strategies and offers additional benefits in the form of transferable skills, relevant to the professional activities of the present and future” (1996, 186).

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<sup>2</sup> The use of different kinds of subtitling activities in this course started with a didactic project carried out in academic year 2011-2012 (Beseghi 2013).



The subtitling activities proposed in this paper are aimed at fostering the development of an integrated set of skills, both receptive and productive, both linguistic and (inter)cultural, ultimately encouraging the students to reflect on the role of the translator and the process of translation.

### 3. Preliminary survey

Before starting the Translation Module, it was deemed important to gather some data on the students' habitual viewing behaviours, their awareness of AVT and their familiarity with new technological tools. The starting assumption was that university language students are familiar with audiovisual language, which they experience through frequent viewing of audiovisual products (e.g. films and TV series). In order to verify this hypothesis and investigate students' viewing habits and preferred AVT modalities, as well as their attitudes to subtitling, a preliminary survey was carried out at the beginning of the module.

A questionnaire consisting of six questions (Table 1) was administered to the students, in order to investigate their preferences in terms of AVT modalities (Questions 1 and 2), viewing habits (Questions 3 and 4) and genres or types of programmes (Questions 5 and 6). A total of 43 Italian students following the Translation Module filled in the questionnaire anonymously. The respondent group consisted of 29 female students and 14 male students, whose age ranged between 22 and 25.

<p>1. Do you prefer watching films and/or TV series</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dubbed?</li> <li>• In the original language (i.e. English) with subtitles?</li> <li>• In the original language (i.e. English) without subtitles?</li> </ul>
<p>2. Why? Does the type/genre of audiovisual programme make a difference?</p>
<p>3. How do you usually watch audiovisual products?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cinema</li> <li>• TV</li> <li>• DVD</li> <li>• Computer or other device</li> </ul>
<p>4. How often do you watch audiovisual products?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Every day</li> <li>• 3 or more times a week</li> <li>• Twice a week</li> <li>• Once a week</li> <li>• Less than once a week</li> </ul>
<p>5. Name your favourite film(s)</p>
<p>6. Name your favourite TV series</p>

**Table 1:** Preliminary survey

The aim of the first question was to discover students' preferred AVT modality when watching films and TV series. The data obtained revealed that only 5 respondents (12%) prefer dubbing, 30 respondents (70%) prefer to watch films and TV series in the original language with subtitles, 4 students (9%) favour the original language without subtitles, and finally 4 students (9%) prefer dubbing when watching a film for the first time and subtitling for the second viewing. These data clearly show a preference for subtitling and for the original language, which seems to confirm the widespread assumption that younger generations - and especially students specialising in foreign languages - are nowadays eager to view audiovisual products in the original language.



The purpose of the second question was to investigate the reasons behind these preferences. The students who indicated subtitling as their preferred modality gave mainly three kinds of explanations:

- 15 students make use of subtitling for learning purposes, because hearing the original language helps them improve their linguistic and cultural knowledge (listening, pronunciation, vocabulary, wordplays, idioms, cultural references);
- 11 students believe that subtitling is more “faithful” and “natural” than dubbing since it gives exposure to the original voices of the actors, while dubbing can be considered “fake” because it conceals the original voices and it changes the original version in many ways, thus leading to a greater loss of meaning;
- 5 students explained that they do not like waiting too long for the dubbed version of their favourite audiovisual programmes to be broadcast on TV, so they watch them online in the original language with subtitles.

The students who indicated a preference for viewing the original version without subtitles explained that they feel they learn more without any aid and that subtitles are a “distraction.” The students who indicated both AVT modalities explained that they enjoy making comparisons between the dubbed and subtitled versions. Moreover, they specified that they usually watch films that are dubbed but prefer subtitling for TV series. The students who indicated a preference for dubbing explained that they prefer to enjoy films and/or TV series without having to read subtitles or making extra effort to understand the words in the foreign language. This seems to be in line with the common prejudice which exists against the disturbing or even bothersome nature of subtitles (Tavavan 2006, 42). These findings may be indicative of university language students’ consciousness of the significance of audiovisuals in the language learning process. Indeed, in their responses, they openly claim that they feel their foreign language skills improve when they watch films or TV series in the original language.

Question 3 aimed at obtaining information about students’ preferred media for watching audiovisuals. 37% of the respondents indicated that they mainly watch films and TV series on the Internet and on Streaming Platforms using their Computer or iPad, 35% prefer TV (including Pay-per-view channels), while only 14% expressed their preference for DVD and another 14% for cinema. These data seem to confirm the idea that Internet broadcasting or “TV on the move” is leading the field in the current “audiovisual revolution” (Díaz Cintas 2008, 100).

The aim of Question 4 was to find out how much of their time students allocate to watching audiovisuals: 65% of the respondents watch audiovisuals every day, 19% three or four times a week, 12% twice a week and 4% once a week. No one selected the answer “less than once a week,” showing clearly that audiovisuals play a significant role in university students’ everyday lives.

Finally, the intention behind Questions 5 and 6 was to investigate students’ favourite films and TV series, hence their preferred genres. The responses to these two last questions revealed that students watch a wide range of American and British films and TV series, ranging from comedy to drama and fantasy. Table 2 reports the most popular films and TV series as found by the survey. It appears that the most popular TV series mainly belong to the comedy genre (*The Big Bang Theory*, *How I Met Your Mother*, *Friends*, *New Girl*) while the most popular films are mostly dramas (*Inglourious Basterds*, *The King’s Speech*, *Forrest Gump*, *Trainspotting*, *Dead Poets’ Society*).

Films	TV series
1. <i>Inglourious Basterds</i> (Quentin Tarantino 2009)	1. <i>The Big Bang Theory</i>
2. <i>The King’s Speech</i> (Tom Hooper 2010)	2. <i>How I Met Your Mother</i>
3. <i>Forrest Gump</i> (Robert Zemeckis 1994)	3. <i>Grey’s Anatomy</i>
4. <i>Trainspotting</i> (Danny Boyle 1996)	4. <i>Friends</i>
5. <i>Notting Hill</i> (Roger Michell 1999)	5. <i>New Girl</i>
6. <i>The Devil Wears Prada</i> (David	6. <i>Game of Thrones</i>
	7. <i>Criminal Minds</i>
	8. <i>Sherlock</i>



Frankel 2006) 7. <i>Dead Poets' Society</i> (Tom Schulman 1989) 8. <i>Midnight in Paris</i> (Woody Allen 2011)	
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**Table 2**

The data obtained from the questionnaire-based survey highlight a number of significant facts:

- As far as AVT modalities are concerned, the majority of students are familiar with subtitling and use it on a regular basis to access films and TV series.
- The vast majority of students acknowledge the potential of audiovisuals to improve their English language skills and deliberately exploit them for learning purposes.
- Students are familiar with audiovisual language, due to their frequent exposure to it.
- It also emerges that students watch a variety of films and TV series. These can be exploited by the teacher to create subtitling activities that reflect student preferences, thus making the learning experience more pleasurable and involving.

These findings appear to support the assumption that using audiovisuals in a learning or educational context can have a motivational impact on the students since these materials are part of their everyday lives. From a pedagogical perspective, among the strategies to motivate language learners, the choice of teaching materials plays an important role: Dornyei recommends “using authentic materials that are within students’ grasp” and discussing with the students the selection of materials in terms of utility, attractiveness, and interest (1994, 281).

Besides being accustomed to audiovisual materials, these students are also familiar with subtitling, which they frequently utilise to support their language learning. Therefore, if within the context of translation training, the students are asked to create interlingual subtitles for films and TV series, they are given the opportunity to apply translation skills to a specific type of text (i.e. the audiovisual text) which they already deal with. In addition, interlingual subtitling as a didactic task in the translation classroom helps the students to develop several skills, both receptive (audiovisual comprehension) and productive (linguistic and cultural mediation, spoken discussion).

#### **4. Subtitling activities in the translation classroom**

The activities devised for the Translation Module include the production of interlingual subtitles – from English into Italian – for a variety of films and TV series. The subtitling software selected for this didactic experiment is *Subtitle Workshop*, a user-friendly freeware programme<sup>3</sup> which allows students to develop basic technical and software-related skills in subtitling. One such skill is spotting, which entails “dividing the original dialogue into units to be subtitled, taking into considerations both the length of each of the exchanges and the media limitations. It indicates the in and out times of each individual subtitle” (Díaz Cintas 2008, 95). An advantage of *Subtitle Workshop* is that students can download it onto their personal computers and work autonomously at home, exploring its various options and practising with the audiovisual material they prefer. This learner-centred approach entails a shift from face-to-face classroom teaching to an environment in which students are encouraged to work independently inside and outside the classroom (Beseghi 2013, 399).

At the beginning of the module, students are introduced to the main principles underpinning the subtitling process, its technical restrictions in terms of temporal and spatial constraints and the semiotic priorities which govern it (Díaz Cintas and Remael 2007). Subtitling is in fact a particular kind of translation: it is constrained, because it involves “the need to render *speech* in two lines of concise and intelligible *writing* with a *minimal loss in informative content*” (Remael 2004, 104) and it involves the transfer of a polysemiotic text where four semiotic channels interact – non-verbal visual, non-verbal audio, verbal visual, verbal audio – into a target language written text (Incalcaterra McLoughlin and Lertola 2014, 72). One fundamental issue in subtitling is in fact the shift from oral to written speech: if subtitles were a mere transcription of dialogue, with all its

<sup>3</sup> <http://subworkshop.sourceforge.net/> (Accessed October 30, 2018).



redundancies and repetitions, incomplete sentences, hesitations, grammatical mistakes and so on, they would be unreadable and difficult to understand (Díaz Cintas 2008, 100).

Although film dialogue is not spontaneous oral conversation, but rather a discourse genre known as “prefabricated orality” (Chaume 2004, 168) or “written to be spoken as if not written” (Taylor 1999, 248), created by a scriptwriter and intended to be performed orally as true-to-life conversation, it is important that students realise the risks associated with conforming to the rules of written language in subtitles. Neutralising paralinguistic features and other markers typical of spoken language may in fact lead to ‘flattened’ subtitles. This issue enhances students’ awareness of the responsibility of the translator to the author (in this case the filmmaker) and to the target audience, who should be given the opportunity to understand the film without missing the author’s original intent.

Students are then presented with one the key strategies in subtitling, reduction, which can be applied to the text either through condensation or omission, or a combination of both. They are consequently encouraged “to dismiss a word-for-word approach and to look for the main ideas being conveyed, rephrasing them in a way that sounds natural and does not jar with the image or the soundtrack of the original” (Díaz Cintas 2008, 100).

Each translation task obviously involves a series of phases, thus contributing to raising students’ awareness of the complexity of the translation process, which should not be seen as the mere transfer from a source language to a target language. Interlingual subtitling, in fact, is further complicated by the technical constraints inherent to the audiovisual context. The different phases of each translation activity can be implemented in a single lesson of at least two hours, or in two consecutive lessons of 60-90 minutes each. They can be summarised as follows:

- selection of audiovisual material to be translated;
- pre-translation discussion and script analysis;
- organisation of the task;
- subtitling;
- revision and post-translation discussion.

First of all, the teacher selects the material to be translated, which consists of short video clips of two or three minutes taken from English films and television series. The selection can take into consideration students’ preferences in terms of genres and specific audiovisual products, which obviously increases their interest and involvement in the activity, and can depend on the didactic purpose of each lesson. For instance, if the teacher wants to focus on the translation of taboo language, s/he can choose a clip from a film or TV series characterised by an extensive use of swear words. The selected clips should also be “self-contained, having significance in themselves” (Talavan 2006, 45).

Once the teacher has selected the clip, the film/TV series is presented to the students. The lessons are held in the university multimedia language laboratory, which is equipped with computers that are used by the students to carry out preliminary research in the phases before the actual translation and to create subtitles with *Subtitle Workshop*. The phase of pre-translation discussion and script analysis revolves around the main features of the film: students are first of all asked to investigate this independently, by collecting information on the genre of the film or TV series, the director, the plot, the main characters, the cultural features and the themes or message of the film. At this stage, if they have not already seen the film, they can watch the trailer and read reviews or interviews with the director and/or actors. After watching the clip selected for the translation task several times, they search for the film script online in order to use it as a main source for the translation.<sup>4</sup> It is useful at this stage to focus students’ attention on the fact that film scripts contain more information than just the dialogue, and that there can be differences between the pre-production script and the actual dialogue they hear in the film. Class discussion in English is then encouraged by the teacher, both in small groups of students and in an open class format, and covers foreseeable translation problems or difficulties related to the linguistic and (inter)cultural features of the clip. Although the translation task involves the production of interlingual subtitles for a brief video, which can be carried out during a single lesson of 60 or 90 minutes, the pre-translation phase can be exploited to discuss broader aspects concerning the linguistic and cultural nature of the film and to consider the overall

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<sup>4</sup> If the film script is not available, dialogue transcriptions can easily be found online (see, for example, [https://www.springfieldspringfield.co.uk/movie\\_scripts.php](https://www.springfieldspringfield.co.uk/movie_scripts.php). Accessed October 31, 2018).



translation strategies to apply in the subtitles. This phase thus focuses both on receptive skills (audiovisual comprehension and reading of the written materials) and productive skills (class discussion in English). A degree of autonomy is also encouraged in that students explore and reflect on the topic individually before sharing their opinions with the class.

The second phase involves the organisation of the translation task. The teacher, acting as a coordinator, divides the students into small groups or teams of translators. This means that each team will produce their own set of subtitles, which will be compared and possibly combined with the other teams' subtitles in the final phase of the activity. Although students can also work individually at this stage, working in groups gives them the opportunity to interact and negotiate translation choices. This constructivist approach encourages students to take responsibility for their decisions and to be able to collaborate in teams, which may be useful transferable skills if they intend to have a career in translation.

Once students have identified, discussed and analysed the linguistic and cultural features of the clip, the phase of subtitling – i.e. the actual creation of subtitles in Italian – can begin. Working in teams, students produce subtitles translating from the script or dialogue list. With *Subtitle Workshop*, spotting can be done at this stage, so students divide the original dialogue and decide the in and out times of each subtitle. The spotting phase can be very time-consuming, so alternatively it can be done by the teacher beforehand so that students can focus on translating during classroom time. However, it is advisable to instruct students on spotting in the first lessons, and to encourage them to practise it individually in order to learn the skill. With the clip playing in the background, the teams, supported by online and offline resources (e.g. dictionaries), produce their sequence of subtitles which will be compared with those produced by the other teams. At this stage, the students have to focus on linguistic, cultural and technical aspects all at the same time, which encourages them to reflect on the complexity of the translation process.

The post-translation phase mainly consists of a revision of the subtitles, which are analysed in terms of lexical choice, syntax, style and in terms of technical quality as regards space and time constraints. The teacher takes on the role of moderator, coordinating the teams and encouraging group discussion. After the revision, the teams can compare their subtitles and justify or defend their choices, and eventually combine the various translation solutions into one version. The post-translation phase again is particularly meaningful, mainly because students have the opportunity to reflect on their own choices. Various thorny issues will inevitably arise, for example the translation of slang and idiomatic expressions, the rendering of taboo language, the problem of language variation (e.g. the presence of accents, dialects, sociolects or idiolects in the film) and the translation of cultural references. The teacher can play the clip several times to showcase subtitles created by the different teams, and it may also be possible to compare student versions with 'official' versions produced by professional translators, if they are available. This phase encourages students to reflect on their translation skills and actively engage in debate on translation options and solutions, as well as translation loss and cultural differences.

## 5. Subtitling multilingual films in the translation classroom

As discussed in the previous section, subtitling activities can be based on a variety of materials, ranging from films to television series, and across many different genres such as drama, comedy, fantasy, etc. It is not only the actual subtitling task, which is clearly a challenge for the students/translators who have to deal with technical constraints as well as a number of translation issues, but also the debate before and after the translation activity which allows students to develop further reflections about translation strategies and translation in general. Depending on its linguistic and cultural features, each audiovisual product will lead to a different discussion.

Among the audiovisual materials that can be exploited for subtitling activities in the translation classroom, from a pedagogical perspective, multilingual films appear to be particularly useful to develop students' awareness of translation as a complex intercultural process. In point of fact, as noted by Borghetti, "AVT is only made possible through a complex process of reflection and calculation which is intrinsically intercultural" (2011, 113). This claim is even more significant in the case of multilingual films, where translators have to deal with a complex intersection of languages, voices and cultures. Students/translators thus need to develop their "intercultural awareness," in other words, their ability to apply "knowledge, attitudes and skills" to different cultures (Borghetti and Lertola 2014, 425), in order to decode the complexity of the original film and encode it in the translated version.



Multilingual films are strongly characterised by the presence of language diversity. In line with Voellmer and Zabalbeascoa, the expression multilingual film is used here to refer to films that contain both interlingual and intralingual variants (2014, 233). In other words, a multilingual film may involve the use of two or more official – or invented – languages as well as dialects, sociolects or different language varieties (Beseghi 2017, 15). Such films have become increasingly widespread in the last few decades, revealing filmmakers' growing attention to linguistic verisimilitude and defence of language diversity (Díaz Cintas 2011, 17). Indeed, the most popular films and television series identified by the students in the preliminary survey are often characterised by the presence of multiple languages (*Inglourious Basterds*, *Midnight in Paris*, *Game of Thrones*) or varieties of language (*Trainspotting*, *The Big Bang Theory*, *New Girl*).

The assumption in this methodological proposal is that selecting clips from multilingual films for subtitling activities can be beneficial in terms of a more comprehensive translation pedagogy. It is advisable to ask the students to watch the entire film before the phase of pre-translation discussion and script analysis, so that they can first grasp the multilingual nature of the film and then be ready to discuss, in class, multilingualism in the film in relation to socio-cultural or multicultural themes. The clip selected for the activity should contain some form of multilingualism (e.g. coexistence of different languages or presence of intralingual variation) in order for the students to reflect upon its significance first and then deal with its translation.

In the phase of pre-translation discussion, students can be encouraged to reflect on conceptual and theoretical issues concerning the nature of translation itself. Discussion in English may involve brainstorming in pairs or teams or as a whole class. First of all, students can discuss whether the 'traditional' concept of interlingual translation, which involves a shift from a source language (SL) to a target language (TL), is compatible with the complexity of multilingual films. When translating a multilingual film, the translator has to deal with more than one SL, and translation cannot simply be considered a shift from a single SL to a single TL (Beseghi 2017, 27). Through multilingual films, students are encouraged to think of translation as a complex phenomenon based on flexible notions, rather than on one-to-one relationships such as source language to target language, or source text to target text (Zabalbeascoa 2010, 37) or clear-cut oppositions such as original versus translation or monolingual text versus multilingual text. In this sense, translation is not viewed as "a process taking place between geographically confined cultures but rather as a form of intercultural communication" (Beseghi 2017, 40), which reflects increasingly multicultural and multilingual human communication (Zabalbeascoa 2010, 38).

Class discussion and script analysis provide the opportunity to reflect on and analyse multilingualism and its functions in the audiovisual text. Students may refer to the model of the third language (L3) introduced by Corrius and Zabalbeascoa (2011), according to which L1 is the main language of the source text, L2 is the main language of the translated text and L3 is any other language(s) found in the text (Corrius and Zabalbeascoa 2011, 113). In this model, L3 can be an independent language – natural or invented – or an instance of significant language variation (ibidem). Students can first identify autonomously and then discuss in groups the presence and nature of L3 in the film, making assumptions on the cultural significance of such diversity and on the functions it plays in the audiovisual context (e.g. realistic, comic, socio-cultural).

After reflecting on the multilingual nature of the film, students/translators can formulate a number of questions about the clip:

- What languages or varieties of language are spoken?
- What are the functions of L3 in the original text?
- What is the relationship between L1 and L3?

At this stage, students/translators have to consider another distinctive feature of multilingual texts, that is, the fact that translation is often present in the original version. For instance, if L3 is an official or invented language, subtitles in L1 (English) are usually provided (e.g. *Inglourious Basterds*, *Game of Thrones*). In this case, the students will have to translate the English subtitles rather than the dialogue lines in L3.

During the actual subtitling task, students will be obliged to reflect on the cultural meaning of subtitling multilingualism: if the language diversity of the source text (L1 and L3) is rendered with monolingual subtitles in L2, the target audience will have to rely only on the original soundtrack to spot such diversity. At this point it is important to make the students/translators aware of their responsibility to the target audience: will the audience be able to detect language diversity just by hearing the original soundtrack? Are there ways to signal such diversity in the subtitles? Students can be encouraged to find creative solutions, for example indicating the L3 in brackets, or using different fonts or colours for different languages. On the other hand, if



the clip contains intralingual variation and L3 is a language variety (e.g. a dialect, a sociolect, an ethnolect or even an idiolect), the students face the challenge of making this variation appear in their subtitles, in addition to complying with the technical constraints and the written nature of subtitles. Students/translators should be made aware that “the suppression or oversimplification of a character’s speech may mean suppressing a voice that comes from a specific cultural, ethnic, or social group” and that “changes to the characters’ way of speaking may affect character portrayal and ultimately the message of the film.” (Beseghi 2017, 37). The final phase of subtitle revision and post-translation discussion is particularly important in the case of multilingual films, since students/translators can exchange views on the strategies they used to deal – or not – with language diversity and variation and consider the effects of these choices for the target audience.

One of the clips assigned in the module is taken from *Bend it like Beckham* (Gurinder Chadha 2002), a multilingual film which tells the story of a British Indian girl growing up in London in a traditional family of immigrants. After watching the entire film at home and the clip in class, the students discuss the main thematic focus of the film (i.e. multiculturalism in Britain, the representation of British-Asian culture and the difficulties of living between different languages and cultures), its multilingual nature as well as the relationship between language and characterisation. It is important for students/translators to notice that one of the main ways the cultural gap between the two generations of immigrants is represented is through language, which varies interlingually and intralingually, diatopically and diastratically. In the phase of pre-translation discussion, students identify the presence of L3 in the film, which includes official languages (i.e. Punjabi and German) as well as varieties of language (e.g. Irish English) and ethnolects (e.g. South Asian English).

The selected video clip shows a scene in which the protagonist – Jess – has an argument with her Indian parents because they do not want her to play football. The clip presents both interlingual variation (i.e. code-switching and code-mixing between L1, English, and L3, Punjabi) and intralingual variation, since Jess speaks British English while her Indian parents speak a variety of English (i.e. South Asian English) characterised by a distinctive Indian accent and non-standard morpho-syntactical features. The students/translators are thus faced with the challenge of reproducing or at least suggesting interlingual and intralingual variation in their subtitles, bearing in mind that language and characterisation are closely connected.

In the phase of revision and post-translation discussion, the teams of translators compare their subtitles and the solutions they have adopted to deal with intralingual and interlingual variation. In the case of interlingual variation, all the students taking part in the project decided not to subtitle the lines in Punjabi, as subtitles in L1 are not included in the original clip. However, when interlingual variation involves single words or expressions (i.e. code-mixing), students opted for two main solutions: retention of the word in L3 and translation from L3 to L2. All the students avoided the translation strategy of deletion. Code-mixing in the clip mainly occurs with reference to Indian culinary traditions (e.g. *daal*, *chapatti*, *aloo gobi*) and for vocatives (e.g. *putar*) so students/translators make their decisions taking into account the polysemiotic context (e.g. the visual channel) and their expectations about the target audience. As far as intralingual variation is concerned, the students/translators mainly opted for two translation strategies: neutralisation (i.e. at a phonological level) and compensation (i.e. non-standard morpho-syntactic features are rendered at a lexical level). At this stage, students are required to consider translation options and make decisions about translation strategies, which are closely connected with cultural and intercultural issues.

The post-translation discussion provides an important opportunity for students/translators to achieve a better understanding of sociolinguistic and multilingual practices in the film and to gain an increased awareness of the cultural meaning that a given translation solution may generate.

## 6. Final survey and results

At the end of the Translation Module, students were asked to complete a final feedback questionnaire on the subtitling activities proposed in the course. The question types are multiple-choice (Questions 6 and 7), 5-point rating scale (Questions 1, 3, 4, 5), and yes-or-no (Questions 2 and 8), and there is one final open question which asks the students to make a personal comment on the didactic experience (Question 9). All 43 students who attended the course completed the questionnaire. Table 2 reports the questions and the percentage of students’ answers.



<p>1. Did you enjoy creating subtitles in Italian? (On a scale from 1 to 5)</p> <p>Not at all (0%) Not so much (0%) A little (5%) Quite a lot (14%) Very much (81%)</p>
<p>2. After this didactic experience, do you watch more subtitled material?</p> <p>YES (60%) NO (40%)</p>
<p>3. Do you think interlingual subtitling helped you improve your general translation skills? (On a scale from 1 to 5)</p> <p>Not at all (0%) Not so much (0%) A little (7%) Quite a lot (23%) Very much (70%)</p>
<p>4. Did you learn anything about other cultures? (On a scale from 1 to 5)</p> <p>Not at all (0%) Not so much (0%) A little (9%) Quite a lot (40%) Very much (51%)</p>
<p>5. Do you think active subtitling has made you a more aware and responsible translator? (On a scale from 1 to 5)</p> <p>Not at all (0%) Not so much (0%) A little (0%) Quite a lot (37%) Very much (63%)</p>
<p>6. What was the most challenging aspect of subtitling?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Spotting and technical aspects (42%)</li><li>• The need for textual reduction (23%)</li><li>• The polysemiotic nature of the text (5%)</li><li>• Linguistic issues (16%)</li><li>• Cultural issues (14%)</li></ul>
<p>7. In which skills/areas do you think you have improved the most thanks to active subtitling? (You can choose more than one)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Listening (81%, 35 students)</li><li>• Reading (35%, 15 students)</li><li>• Speaking (41%, 18 students)</li><li>• Vocabulary (70%, 30 students)</li><li>• Translation (100%, 43 students)</li><li>• (Inter)cultural awareness (88%, 38 students)</li></ul>



8. Have you practised subtitling autonomously (outside the classroom)? YES (74%) NO (26%)
9. Please leave a personal comment on the subtitling experience.

**Table 2:** Final survey

Answers to the first question show that an overwhelming majority of students enjoyed subtitling (95%), while none of the respondents rated the experience negatively. It is surprising that 60% of the students have changed the way they use audiovisual material (Question 2), stating that they have watched more subtitled programmes since the subtitling experience in class. Since the majority of students already expressed their preference for subtitled materials in the preliminary questionnaire, it means that the subtitling activities in class increased their interest in subtitling, as some of them specified in their comments (see Question 9). In terms of competence, 93% of the students feel that they have significantly improved their translation skills (Question 3) and 91% think they have gained cultural knowledge (Question 4). Moreover, all the students state that they consider themselves more aware and responsible translators after the subtitling experience (Question 5), which is probably due to the emphasis given to reflection and group discussion in the pre- and post-translation phases. In terms of challenges (Question 6), the majority (43%) found spotting and the technical aspects of subtitling to be the most difficult part of the translation task, while for 23% the need for textual reduction is the most challenging aspect. It is interesting to note that only 5% think the polysemiotic nature of the text can pose problems, and this is probably because these students are already familiar with audiovisual language.

Question 7 asked students to self-evaluate their improvement in a number of skills. All the students think they have improved in translation skills and 88% feel more (inter)culturally aware, which is plausible since many clips were taken from films dealing with multicultural issues. The process of decoding the message in one language and encoding it into another also helped many of them acquire vocabulary (70%). Watching audiovisual material in the original language was also helpful in terms of listening skills (81%), and the phase of script analysis was useful to improve reading skills (35%). A number of students also feel they have improved their speaking skills (41%), thanks to the opportunity to communicate orally in English in the pre- and post-translation discussion phases. These data show that while improving their translation skills and increasing intercultural knowledge, collaborative interlingual subtitling activities can also lead to enhanced linguistic competence in both receptive and productive skills. This means that while they are learning how to subtitle, students are also gaining a greater language awareness which helps them prepare for other components of the English Language and Translation exam (i.e. Listening, Reading, Speaking, Use of English).

Question 8 was aimed at verifying the motivational impact of the subtitling experience: a striking majority of students (74%) have practised subtitling autonomously outside the classroom, which indicates that this kind of activity has significant effects in fostering learner motivation as well as autonomy. The decision to undertake this activity independently shows that these students have taken charge of their own learning, which is the defining feature of learner autonomy (Holec 1981, 3).

In Question 9, students made it clear in their comments that they enjoyed the subtitling activities for a variety of reasons. The first is the opportunity to practise translation with authentic AV material which they are in the habit of watching. Secondly, they enjoyed the collaborative nature of the task and the opportunities for class discussion, which helped them gain awareness of the difficult decision-making process involved in translation. Despite the challenging nature of subtitling, due especially to its technical constraints, many students claimed that they were fascinated by the complex dynamics of this form of translation, and thus watched more subtitled videos in order to understand it more deeply. Moreover, some students highlighted that the films chosen for the activities made them reflect on cultural issues and increased their interest in multiculturalism. Some students underlined that they gained a better insight into the complexity of translation, by reflecting more closely on concepts such as multilingualism, language variation and untranslatability.



Finally, several students claimed that involvement in subtitling activities made them more aware of the translator's responsibility to both the filmmaker or director and the target audience.

## 7. Conclusion

The aim of this contribution was to propose a methodological approach for the integration of interlingual subtitling into a general translation course. Indeed, modern technological resources and the availability of free and accessible software make the production of subtitles a realistic task that can be carried out in the translation classroom. In line with previous studies (Beseghi 2013; Incalcaterra McLoughlin and Lertola 2014; Borghetti and Lertola 2014), the qualitative data obtained seem to confirm that subtitling can be used as a pedagogical tool to not only improve students' language and translation skills but also enhance their intercultural awareness, an area of research which has perhaps received little attention in the past. Subtitling also proved to be effective as an activity developed both in and outside class, which helps develop learner autonomy while at the same time fostering motivation and involvement.

As underlined by the students' responses, the didactic experience was highly motivational, suggesting that subtitling can actually be integrated into general translation courses as a translation activity based on authentic material which students enjoy and appreciate. Their responses show that at the end of the module they felt more competent in their translation skills, and felt they had improved in a number of language skills such as listening, reading, vocabulary acquisition and speaking. In particular, multilingual films, where language, culture and identity are interconnected, provide the ideal AV material for students to practise their translation skills and develop their intercultural awareness. Moreover, students expressed their increased interest in themes such as multiculturalism and multilingual societies, as well as becoming more conscious of the complexity of the translation process. As underlined by Veiga's study on the use of films in translation classes, films are valuable pedagogical tools which can help students "enhance, corroborate and expand on translation theories effectively" (2010, 266), thus bridging the gap between theory and practice.

The encouraging results of this exploratory study call for further, more systematic research on the role of subtitling as an educational tool in translation courses, especially on its role in helping students acquire an integrated set of linguistic, cultural and translation skills which can be beneficial and easily adapted to their future professional lives.

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