

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Exploring the Use of Subtitling in Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language: Theories and Applications

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ABSTRACT

Technology occupies a significant resource that can be exploited empirically to contribute to translation learning and research, as it can give enormous opportunities for language learners and educators to exploit in their teaching and provide students with practical learning activities. Many researchers highly recommend the extensive use of IT in enhancing the competence of translation students and L2 learners' language skills. Since there has been an abundance of empirical research studies carried out over the last two decades, many novice researchers cannot review and handle them within their limited time. For this reason, this paper introduces the key researchers who carried out studies on the employment of audiovisual translation (AVT) in language learning and teaching; it explores and reviews the main previous research studies conducted on the impact of audiovisual translation, namely subtitling and subtitles on enhancing language learning. It first considers briefly how audiovisual translation emerged as an independent branch of Translation Studies (ST), then discusses its development as well as its continuity within Translation Studies. It also explores its classifications and highlights future research avenues.

KEYWORDS

Audiovisual translation, subtitling, dubbing, language learning, language acquisition, interlingual subtitling.

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1. Introduction

The technological developments and digitalization of audiovisual media seen in the late 1990s have led educators and researchers to explore a plethora of innovative teaching methods to be adopted and adapted inside and outside the classroom in the process of language-learning. Among these methods, AVT has been exploited as an educational tool in the field of Second/Foreign Language Learning.

To the best of my knowledge, there is a lack of research studies on a large-scale to explore and address the educational potential of AVT, namely subtitling in the acquisition of English language skills conducted in the educational departments at Iraqi universities. Therefore, this endeavor is the first of its kind as an introduction to the key scholars and main studies in the field with the aim to acquaint future researchers with the key research studies conducted up-to-date and make it easily approachable for them; the study also tries to explain how integrates AVT as an educational tool for enhancing the acquisition of foreign language skills. Consequently, this research is the first step towards a more in-depth analysis in future research endeavours regarding this topic in the lraqi context.

1.1 Definition of the Key Terms

Audiovisual Translation (AVT): It is an umbrella term used to indicate the simultaneous convergence of visual and acoustic AV material of a language into another language; it includes screen-translation, multimedia translation, and film translation (Chiaro, 2009; Perego, 2005)

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Subtitle: A mode of AVT practice where rendering, usually in written form, the original dialogues exchanges spoken by different speakers that usually appear at the bottom of the screen; it also includes all other verbal information that appears written on-screen (letters, banners, inserts) or is transmitted aurally in the soundtrack (song lyrics, voices off) (Diaz Cintas, 2020, p. 150).

Interlingual subtitle: A mode in which the visual and the auditory message of the original material is translated into another language referred to as a target language (TL) (Remael, 2010).

Intralingual subtitle: It is known as a caption in American English which is, in fact, the co-existence and occurrence of the language of the program and the written on-screen text of it. Subtitling for the deaf and the hard of hearing (SDH) is the most famed version (Remael, 2010).

Foreign language education: It broadly refers to the act of teaching or learning a modern language outside the setting where it is commonly spoken (Moeller & Catalano, 2015).

Second language acquisition: Sometimes is used interchangeably with " second language learning"; it refers, broadly speaking, to the process by which a nonnative language is acquired after the mother language (L1) has been learnt. This can either happen in a naturalistic environment or in a formal setting (Miao, 2015).

1.2 Introduction

Apart from employing subtitles and subtitling tasks as educational tools in language learning, this study can be considered the first to date in the lraqi context to explore the key research studies and researchers towards incorporating AVT in the translation curricula. Additionally, the study underlines the significance of hands-on subtitling activities to stimulate the principles of constructivist learning among translation students through working on simulated subtitling assignments foster cooperation, interaction, and social learning.

The aim of this paper is to review recent research into the contributions of key scholars on the impact of different subtitle modes and subtitling as a practical activity on the acquisition of various language aspects. This growing interest in the educational aspects of AVT is accounted for by educators' thriving reliance on employing technology in the language classroom as well as the reviving exploitation of translation as a teaching method after decades of exclusion (Cook 2007, 2010).

2. Literature Review

2.1 The beginnings of audiovisual translation

Audiovisual translation (AVT) probably began with the creation of silent cinema. Since it was sometimes hard for viewers to understand the film plot, often very expressive, the idea began when filmmakers started hiring actors-interpreters in cinemas. Their roles were to read or play live dialogues to the accompanying scenes appearing on the screen. Today, researchers consider those participants to be the first audiovisual translators.

Another phase in the history of audiovisual translation started with the attempts to translate films into other languages, which started with the production of cinema with sound in the USA. Therefore, film production companies find it highly costly to produce the same film in different languages; hence, the focus was to record films in English. This status quo faced another problem related to some of the audience who were illiterate. This problem was solved by producing the first dubbed film entitled "Rio Rita" in 1929 (Diaz, 2014).

Although it has been nearly 100 years since its appearance, audiovisual translation (AVT) is still in great demand by the audience market around the globe. Technical progress introduced a number of changes to translation techniques. Recently, audiovisual translation products increased rapidly: shows and series, video gamesadvertisements, films, TV, corporate videos, training videos, documentaries, interviews, conferences, etc.

2.2 AVT Modalities

Subtitling and dubbing are the most researched modalities of audiovisual translation, and they are the most popular AVT modes used for language-learning by educators and foreign language learners; therefore, they are the ones that have been understandably addressed by wider academic focus. Similarly, but with lesser attention, at least for the time being, researchers and language educators have begun to address the undeniable pedagogical potential of other but less known modalities, such as audio-description, voiceover, and narration.

2.3 The Educational Didactics of AVT

In his seminal research, Pérez González (2009) broadly divided AVT modalities into two main categories: captioning (verbal language convergence procedures) and revoicing (auditory language convergence procedures). Further, the subtitling mode can be either interlingual or intralingual; revoicing includes dubbing, voice-over, narration, audio description, free commentary, and interpreting. In second language learning, translation has been abandoned and frowned upon for a relatively long period of time due to the rise of new communicative language methodologies and the decline of the audio-lingual approach in teaching.

However, a recent research review indicates a fast-growing interest in the pedagogical applications of audiovisual translation (AVT) to FL learning, namely the potential benefits of both captioning and revoicing; this research focus can undeniably support the integration of AVT tasks as an effective learning tool to enhance language competence in language learners, especially in translation students at university level. Simultaneously, research on the didactics of AVT has proved its enhancement of other aspects of language, such as interculturality and mediation, as it has been endorsed by the *Common European Framework of Languages* (2001) and its *Companion Volume* (2018). However, only subtitles and subtitling will be addressed in this study.

2.3.1 Captioning and Second language learning

The potentiality of captioning in (SLA) has been the subject of extensive research studies over the last two decades. Researchers addressed the potential of AVT as a language learning strategy to enhance productive language skills such as reading comprehension (Gant Guillory 1998; Bravo 2008), oral production (Borrás & Lafayette 1994), and receptive skills such as listening comprehension (Danan 2004; Caimi 2006); other studies tackled the acquisition of language components like vocabulary recall (Bird & Williams 2002; Talaván 2007). Other scholars (Burger 1989; Vanderplank 1988) conducted their research on the impact of captioning to conclude that captions can help lower learners' anxiety and boost their motivation. Other aspects of language learning were also addressed by research studies. For instance, subtitles have been claimed to have effects on enriching the lexical deposit and helping learners improve their listening and communication skills (Baltova, 1999; Garza, 1991). Equally important, Markham (1989) consolidated previous research to claim that captions can enhance learners' language skills, including listening and speaking, in addition to improving their comprehension level. Of the various forms of AVT employed empirically by educators in FL teaching, subtitling modality is the most researched by scholars, appreciated and enjoyed by learners. (Laura Incalcaterra McLoughlina & Jennifer Lertola, 2014); the following section will investigate the effects of subtitling (interlingual and intralingual) on the acquisition of various aspects of L2.

2.3.2 Subtitling

The fast-growing exploitation of technological innovations in the field of language learning has prompted numerous studies investigating the potential benefits of AVT modalities and their impact on enhancing several language skills. For instance, some researchers have addressed the potential effects of AVT on vocabulary acquisition (Lertola, 2012); other researchers (Borghetti & Lertola, 2014) addressed the role of AVT on intercultural awareness while its effect on raising learners' pragmatic awareness has been researched by others (Lopriore & Ceruti, 2015).

Among AVT various modes, the employment of subtitles and subtitling in language learning has been extensively researched. Scholars such as (Ávila-Cabrera, 2018; Talaván, Ibáñez, & Bárcena, 2017; Talaván & Rodríguez-Arancón, 2014) considered the use of interlingual reverse subtitling to improve writing skills whereas the impact of intralingual subtitling on the enhancement of listening and writing skills has been researched by (Talaván, Lertola, & Costal, 2016).

The online software ClipFair has been considered one of the significant technological advances in the field to date, created by scholars' joint efforts and funded by the European Commission Lifelong Learning Programme. This innovative software contains hundreds of ready-made activities and videos in several languages, including Arabic, specifically designed to use AVT in FL education through both captioning and revoicing (Sokoli, 2018).

This created the need to address its effective potentiality; hence, based on empirical research, a number of scholars took the initiative (Incalcaterra McLoughlin and Lertola 2014; Díaz Cintas 1995, 1997, 2001) to recommend the introduction of subtitles as a new and motivating teaching activity in foreign language learning. They propose that educators should incorporate subtitles into their routine teaching methods for the potential they have to enhance vocabulary acquisition and raising cultural awareness.

Other researchers, such as Vermeulen (2003) and Wagener (2006), state that subtitles can act as pedagogical tools and motivating exercises for learners through video and translation in class. According to Wagner (2006), the use of digital laboratories can help develop the learners' autonomy. Drawing on the above empirical studies, educational teachers can incorporate subtitling in their teaching methods apparatus. Similarly, novice researchers can utilize this brief review to carry out more in-depth research.

2.4 Creative Subtitling Tasks

The active use of AVT tasks by FL learners is raising interest among researchers and FL educationalists alike. For this reason, this section will briefly consider the most relevant and specific studies conducted so far in this thriving area of research. Over the last two decades, scholars have carried out a number of empirical studies on the applications of intralingual and interlingual practical subtitling and their impact on L2 learning (Talaván 2010; Bravo 2008; Sokoli 2006; Williams and Thorne 2000).

In a detailed study, Talaván (2006a) stressed that learners should get actively engaged in 'ad hoc subtitles' as an effective learning strategy exploited by learners with different linguistic proficiency levels; this learning strategy is an opportunity to "negotiate and notice language"; also, to boost learners' motivation; and to enhance most language learning areas, that typically pose a challenge for teachers to teach and acquire (p. 45). Furthermore, Talaván stresses the benefits of using subtitled authentic multimodal input, suggesting that the most effective learning of a foreign language takes place when subtitling and subtitles are employed simultaneously in a single learning task.

For that reason, Sokoli (2006) introduced an innovative software designed specifically to employ active subtitling as an educational method (LvS, Learning via Subtitling) whereas Bravo (2009) addressed the effectiveness of interlingual subtitling for idiomatic expression retention and recall; Talaván (2010), explored the potentiality of didactic subtitling in improving learners' listening comprehension skills; based on subtitling, Incalcaterra McLoughlin and Lertola (2011, 2014) provided a tentative methodological model to lay the foundations for incorporating didactic subtitling in the FL curriculum.

At the beginning, educationalists considered subtitling as a learning tool employed by speakers of other languages (interlingual subtitling) or as an aid for the hearing impaired (intralingual subtitling); nevertheless, ample evidence suggests that teachers have used it as a learning tool in their classes; hence many scholars such as Vanderplank, Danan, Diaz Cintas, and Talavan have written extensive anecdotal or empirical research on its benefits.

Drawing on pre-test and post-test methodology, researchers carry out experimental studies on the effective use of subtitling to improve learners' language skills. In these studies, learners are practically involved in subtitling AV materials as an effective learning activity to enhance their language acquisition. They are given assignments that seem to be beneficial tools in SLA. For example, to test their retention and recall of idiomatic expressions, Bravo (2008) carried out an experiment on a total of 20 Portuguese undergraduate students of English (level A2/B1). The students sat for a pre-test exam to check their unfamiliarity with the targeted idiomatic expressions before they were exposed to AV materials with intralingual subtitles (L2-L2), which have these expressions. The participants then sat to answer a multiple-choice post-viewing questionnaire. To involve them practically in their learning, the researcher asked the participants a week later to use the *Learning via Subtitling* simulator and create subtitling for the selected expressions on their own (from English into Portuguese). Days later, the same multiple choice questionnaires on the idiomatic expressions were used, which proved progress in the participants' idiomatic competence.

Borghetti (2011) suggests that the subtitling process falls into five steps in a staged learning process to enhance learners' intercultural competence. With this hands-on subtitling learning experience of AV L2 language texts, learners have ample opportunities to better comprehend L2 culture and thus foster intercultural knowledge in foreign languages.

In a similar vein, subtitling can also enhance learners' writing and speaking skills. In her empirical research with Business English learners, Talaván (2006b), using a novel strategy, asked students to work actively with a variety of short film clips (from TV series, films, etc.) as a hands-on activity to enhance their writing and speaking skills.

Equally significant, in a blended learning setting, Talaván and Rodríguez-Arancón (2014a) explored the effects of interlingual subtitling, namely from English into Spanish, in the enhancement of advanced English students' listening comprehension skills. In second language acquisition studies, pragmatic awareness and competence are considered essential aspects of communication skills. For instance, in an experimental study, Incalcaterra McLoughlin and Lertola (2016) used subtitling as a learning activity to argue that AVT can play a key role in enhancing learners' attitudes and perception of emotional such as (im)politeness language among L2 speakers.

Similarly, "noticing" is an essential aspect of language acquisition; Lertola (2012) concludes that engaging learners in active subtitling tasks can assist learners in noticing L2 words due to contrastive association with their L1 equivalents. Therefore, what is currently known as didactic AVT in academic and research circles involves the active engagement of learners themselves in AVT learning tasks and has been the focus of thriving research and practice over the last twenty years (Lertola, 2019a; Talaván, 2020). When students are actively involved in didactic AVT tasks, they produce a transfer of verbal language in audiovisual media by means of captioning and revoicing (Sokoli, 2015).

2.4.1 Friendly Software Subtitling Programs

Scholars and European institutions have recognized the potential utility of didactic AVT. The latter have funded some research projects such as ClipFlair or PluriTAV for educational purposes. Researchers have also referred to many other famous and free downloadable subtitling software programs (Kerr 2014):

1. Subtitle Workshop: It is a user-friendly subtitling software that allows its users to add and edit subtitles on previously downloaded videos and short clips. The users (teachers or students) can also check spelling or adjust time.

2. Aegisub: It is an easy to use and free subtitling software; it gives users the ability to make and edit subtitles in many different formats. It has a built-in translation assistant too, so that students will be able to rely on the translation to work on the foreign language. 3. Pocket- DivXEncoder: This software, which supports .srt files, allows both students and teachers to add or paste subtitles for pedagogical purposes and embed them into a clip or video of their choice. 4. Virtual Dub is a free video capture and video processing that works efficiently with Microsoft Windows.

2.4.2 Limitations in Using Subtitling

Despite all the previously mentioned benefits, exploiting subtitling in language learning and teaching has some crippling limitations. One disadvantage is that, being engrossed in reading subtitled AV material, learners forget to listen and pay attention to the dialogues. Nevertheless, as methodologists suggest, teachers can overcome this limitation by adopting and refining special teaching activities that compel learners to read and listen simultaneously. The other common limitation is that because learners feel safe and secure in reading the captions, they will get used to and have difficulty breaking this habit in the future, even if they listen to dialogues (Talavan, 2006).

3. Conclusion

Though the paper was brief, summarizing the current key research avenues and educational applications of audiovisual translation (AVT), namely subtitling, the findings highlighted feasible research directions for further in-depth investigation. So, it is significant enough to extend the research scope to include AVT translators, interpreters, and practitioners as well as.

In addition, the research findings are of particular value to novice researchers and educationalists working in the field of language teaching and learning. Applications of other AVT modalities are worthwhile, fresh, and valuable research areas to investigate in education, training, and learning foreign languages.

Furthermore, by demonstrating and reviewing previous studies, the paper provides empirical evidence, as well as definitional clarity, for future researchers as to the ways in which subtitles and subtitling activities can and could potentially influence language teaching and learning. The detailed picture of the professional reality of subtitling practitioners in Europe and other countries, including their main challenges and professional aims, is particularly useful for academics as it concretely links their work to that of practitioners, a basis upon which could help to produce more impactful research, or least provide indicators as to how to demonstrate impact on practice more insightfully.

Finally, pay and practitioners' working conditions may be other valuable research areas, as highlighted by many other studies. Researchers have investigated the professional realities of subtitlers and other AVT practitioners; the lack of professional and social recognition indicates that more education and outreach may be necessary to increase the visibility of the profession and the work of professional subtitlers.

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