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ABSTRACT
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subtitling are highlighted such as theory and practice; professional and
linguistic dimensions; equipment needed; Internet resources; and the like.
Attention is paid to the rationale for such a module as well as the learning
outcomes to be expected. Ideas about possible exercises with subtitles to
stimulate students' creativity are also discussed. (Contains 25 published and
Web references.) (KFT)

Teaching subtitling at university

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There has been a clear increase in the exchange of products that need some form of translation and particularly in the field of audiovisual material. However, very few higher education institutions in the UK have taken up the challenge to teach any of the translation modes implemented in the world of audiovisual products: subtitling, dubbing or voice-over. By focusing in this paper solely on subtitling, I intend to foreground several aspects that ought to be taken into consideration when teaching a module on subtitling: theory and practice, professional and linguistic dimensions, equipment needed, internet resources and the like. I will also pay attention to the rationale for such a module as well as to the learning outcomes that one could expect from the students. Some ideas about possible exercises with subtitles to stimulate students' creativity will also be discussed.

Where are we?

As inhabitants of the so-called global village, we are bound to be witnesses in this new millennium of an ever greater increase in the exchange of products that will need some form of translation and, particularly, in the field of audiovisual material. The fast developments taking place on the internet, the exponential growth of television channels, the popularity of computer games and the advent of DVD are but just a few examples that point clearly in this direction. However, and despite the importance of this area in our daily lives, very few educational institutions in the UK have taken up the challenge to teach dedicated modules on any of the translation modes implemented generally in the world of audiovisual products, be it subtitling, dubbing or voice-over. To the best of my knowledge, at an under-graduate level, only the University of Lampeter offers a module on subtitling and, as from academic year 2001, also the Roehampton University of Surrey. The virtual absence of degrees on translation and interpreting in the UK, except for the ones run at the University of Heriot-Watt and Sheffield, must be partially to blame for this situation. At an MA level, the University of Leeds and UMIST do have some modules dedicated to the subtitling of films. In the rest of Europe the picture is a lot more positive, with BA courses on subtitling at universities at the following locations: Antwerp, Barcelona, Brussels, Castellón, Corfu, Dublin, Ghent, Granada, Ljubliana, Maastricht, Mons, Turku and Vigo. There are also courses at Brussels, Copenhagen, Lille and Strasbourg that specialise in postgraduate study. In the main, all these courses concentrate on subtitling and only the Spanish Universities run parallel courses on dubbing, the primary mode of translating audiovisual products in this Iberian nation[1].

Whilst there is a clear need for screen translators in countries that do not have English as their official language, one might argue that, given the fact that most of the audiovisual market is swamped with USA products originally in English, the need is not so acute in a country such as the UK. However, as I hope to demonstrate in these pages, subtitling has a great educational potential and can be used as an exciting and powerful tool in the language learning process. It deals with transferable skills, ability to summarise and get the gist of the message, interaction with the new technologies and the use of videos. Besides, the translation problems that students have to resolve when subtitling can easily be extrapolated to other translation areas: cultural references, linguistic variation, humour, false friends, etc.

By focusing in this paper solely on subtitling, I intend to foreground several aspects that ought to be taken into consideration when teaching a module on subtitling: theory and practice, professional and linguistic dimensions, equipment needs and internet resources among others. I will also pay attention to the rationale for such a module as well as to the learning outcomes that one could expect.

Objectives

Even though the main focus of the module is the theory and practice of subtitling, the first lessons ought to be aimed at presenting the students with the different translation modes of audiovisual products (dubbing, voice-over, interpreting and subtitling), so that they can have a complete picture of the market and are aware of the similarities and discrepancies that characterise

the various approaches. The differences between the traditional and simultaneous or live interpreting should also be investigated, as well as the different types of subtitling according to the linguistic dimension (inter-lingual and intra-lingual) or the technical dimension (open and close).

Students will also learn the principles that regulate audiovisual translation, the main constraints that characterise this medium as well as the priorities that need to be established when dealing with an audiovisual text. As far as possible, the lecturer should work with original and real audiovisual texts and products and students should adhere to professional standards when rendering their translations.

Professional dimension

Subtitling is the end-result of the work carried out not only by the translator, but by a group of professionals that take part in the process. Students should learn about the different stages that are needed from the commission of the work until the broadcast or screening of the subtitled product. Of the people involved, the figures of the translator and the adaptor or subtitler are the most interesting from our perspective. Professional practice is rather divided in this area, and some studios will count on two different people, one to translate the dialogue and the other one to spot where and when the subtitles ought to appear and disappear on the screen and to adjust the verbatim translation according to the time and space constrains. The general tendency, though, is to get the same person to do all these stages and it is my belief that students ought to learn how to spot the dialogue, that is, how to decide when the subtitles appear on screen and when they disappear as well as to translate and adapt their solutions to the space and time available. The more prepared they leave university, the more employable they will be.

Other related professional areas that such a course ought to take into consideration are:
- normal practice in the real world;
- in-house working versus freelancing;
- expected salaries and pay rates, in order to be informed and, most crucially, to avoid flooding the market with unfair competition practices;
- the different possibilities of finding work: nationally and internationally, via the internet;
- prospective employers –public and private TV channels, subtitling studios, film distribution companies;
- tax responsibilities and copyright ownership;
- the existence and operation of some associations such as the *European Association for Studies in Screen Translation* (ESIST).

Given the practical nature of this type of translation and its connection with the industry, possible links with some of the social agents could also be explored. Some overseas institutions have successfully established contacts that include visits to and work experience in some television channels, subtitling companies or film festivals.

Linguistic dimension

Subtitling consists in rendering in writing, usually at the bottom of the screen, the translation into a given target language of the linguistic exchanges uttered by the different actors, without forgetting the linguistic information that may come embedded in the image, e.g. letters, captions, or graffiti. Unless the original product is brief in dialogue and relies mostly on the action or the photography, reduction is one of the main strategies that good subtitlers have to master. Prior to any proper subtitling, gist summaries are excellent exercises to prepare students. The added value of this way of looking at translation is that students have to renounce a word-for-word approach and consider the message that is being conveyed. They, then, have to try to render it in their own language, in a way that sounds natural and does not conflict with the image or the soundtrack of the original.

Reductions can be of two types: partial, where we are dealing with condensation and total, when part of the message has to be eliminated. In the first case, students have to be aware that the need for semantic condensation must not jeopardise the syntax or style of the original. When restructuring the original message, "the subtitler has to be a master of précis whilst still producing acceptable language" (Fawcett 1983:187). The value of the image cannot be forgotten and the

student should come up with solutions that take the iconic information into account and avoid translating what is explicitly communicated through the image. Coherence and cohesion are two extremely important parameters here and what is conveyed in the subtitle must not contradict what the image is telling the viewer. Moreover, since long sentences need to be continued in following subtitles and the viewer does not have the possibility of back-tracking in order to retrieve information, students must be made aware that the syntactic cohesion of the message needs to be given priority.

In the case of elimination, students must be aware that they cannot dispose of information that later on in the film may be essential to the dramatic development of the story. Statements or comments that in a given moment of the film may seem anodyne and meaningless may later take a diegetic full meaning. If they have not properly transferred the relevant information, the coherence of the whole will be at stake. As with literary translation, or any other specialisation, students are strongly advised to watch the programme in its entirety in order to have an overall view of the product and avoid falling in the above-mentioned traps. This emphasis on reduction allows us to establish a parallel between the subtitler and the interpreter, in the sense that both professionals are forced to select and transfer into the other language only part of the original message, i.e. what is relevant to the communication act.

However, there is a crucial point that distances both intercultural practices and that is their mode of discourse. Whereas interpreting remains in the realm of orality, subtitling implies a change of medium from oral to written speech. Although screen dialogue is not the same as the dialogue of everyday life, it still shows a series of paralinguistic characteristics that distance it from written discourse. Oral speech has a higher level of redundancy and repetitions. Sometimes actors do not finish their sentences or contradict themselves. In other instances their statements are grammatically or syntactically incorrect. If all these devices were to be transcribed verbatim in the subtitles, the audience will be taken aback and the message very difficult, if not impossible, to understand. Students need to be made aware of the strategies available to them when subtitling this material. The implications of this shift of medium, together with the ubiquitous need for reduction, means that not everything said can or needs to be accounted for in the subtitle. Depending on the context some solutions will take priority over some others. Elements of the linguistic exchanges that fulfil a phatic function such as fillers (you know, man, I mean...), vocatives and expressions as a way of introduction (hi, hello, hiya, bye...) can be eliminated along with repetitions that do not have a particular relevance, as is in the following example from *Manhattan Murder Mystery* (Woody Allen, 1993):

> No, wait a minute, wait. It, but it doesn't make any sense at all, Larry, because suddenly, you know, he murders her. I mean, what's it all about?
> No tiene sentido...
> ...porque luego la asesina. ¿Qué pasa?

Given the general belief that taboo expressions are a lot more offensive when written down than when uttered verbally, they do not have to be fully accounted for in the subtitles. Using them sparingly can also convey the same effect. The key point in this area is to be able to strike the right balance[2].

The semiotic dimension of the image and the visual context in which the action takes place can also be essential in the shaping of the subtitle, and the use of deictics, contractions and imperatives may help the subtitler to keep within the space restrictions. So, a question of the type "is that your computer?" can easily be subtitled as "is that yours?" if the person asking is pointing to a computer that appears on screen.

In some areas, such as cases of linguistic variation —dialects, sociolects, regionalism and the like— the strategies to overcome the problems can be very limited and in most cases the subtitler will have to concede defeat. Only the spectator with a flair for foreign languages and a good ear for detail will be able to feed from the original soundtrack.

Technical dimension

The way to teach subtitling and what to expect from students will largely depend on whether the institution has access to dedicated subtitling programmes or not. The following points should be covered in the course, assuming students can work on one of the various professional work units available in the market. Given the fact that these programmes can be rather expensive, I will also advise on possible alternatives that do not require the technical equipment.

The spotting of subtitles is subject to some considerations that students must be familiar with. Firstly, the time factor. The subtitle has to appear at the same time as the actor starts speaking and disappear when he stops talking. Although a margin of asynchrony is allowed in professional practice, students ought to try their best to keep to this principle.

The presence of the subtitle on screen depends on the speed and rhythm at which the original dialogue takes place and the assumed average reading speed of the target audience. The "6 second rule" is largely applied, whereby two lines of a maximum of 35 spaces each (a total of 70) can be read in 6 seconds. From these referents one distributes the rest of the values. So, if the actor is talking for 4 seconds, the student would be able to inscribe his message in a subtitle of a maximum of 46 spaces. With an up-to-date subtitling programme this task is very easy. The student decides when to enter the subtitle and when to take it out. The computer will work out the exact time of permanence on screen, to the frame, and the available number of spaces. If the student attempts to go beyond the prescribed maximum, the programme will not allow it. For those without the means to work with one of these programmes, one way forward is to practice with a VHS tape, a video recorder and a TV set. To spot the dialogue, students listen to it, or read it if a dialogue list is available, and decide how to divide the original message and where the breaks should go. A comparison with the way it was actually done for the film or programme in question can be very illuminating.

The spotting or cueing exercise can be very demanding and time consuming and, unless one has sufficient time in the module or the proper equipment, perhaps it is best for the teacher to do it himself following the same pattern and breaks as in the original product. In this case one has to work with a film or programme that has already been subtitled and the emphasis is placed on the linguistic aspects of subtitling rather than the technical ones. Students will then be given a transcription of the actual dialogue, divided according to the times and segmentation that have been implemented in the original scene.

Although perhaps too technical and equipment dependent to be feasible at class, there are other aspects that students should be aware of. It is considered that subtitles pollute the image and therefore their presentation on screen ought to be as unintrusive as possible. For inter-lingual subtitling the agreed solution is that the subtitle will be placed usually at the bottom of the screen and be of two lines maximum. Legibility of the information is of paramount importance and, although the main parameters are mechanically adopted (type and size of font, for instance), students should be able to spot possible instances in which there could be a collusion between the subtitle and the scene's background and suggest other possible collocations; i.e. when the background photography is too light to create a proper contrast for the subtitle to be read, when something very important for the development of the action is taking place at the bottom of the screen or when something written appears at the bottom of the screen.

Another of the tacitly agreed rules is that subtitles should not run over a cut and, although not always possible, the presentation on screen should respect it as far as possible. If the possibility of working with dedicated software exists, then students should try to follow this precept. However, when students can only work with pen and paper for the translation and cannot resort to the simulation of subtitles on screen, it is better to forget about it, but at least let them know what they should be looking at in the real world.

Linguistic presentation of subtitles

The formal presentation of subtitles on screen is not fortuitous or random and it adheres to a series of conventions and norms with which students need to be familiar.

Firstly, students must be familiar with the ortho-typographic conventions that regulate the presentation of subtitles: the use of punctuation, indicating when two people speak in the same subtitle, typographic resources and devices and the use of upper case. An easy exercise is to ask

students to watch several films outside the classroom and draw conclusions from the empirical data. It will soon be apparent that there is not a uniform way of presenting the subtitles. Indeed, one of the main priorities of ESIST has been to devise a code of good practice in subtitling that incorporates some advice on the areas mentioned. The exercise can, nevertheless, be extremely useful in discussing their opinions about the situation -whether the lack of homogeneity can have a negative effect on the perception of subtitles by the viewers, and what are the preferences in the use of a particular linguistic device.

Secondly, students should be trained in the syntactic and semantic considerations that impinge upon the good reception of subtitles. As mentioned before, legibility is of the essence in subtitling and everybody in the process has do his utmost to promote it, including translators. So, when writing out the subtitle, students must learn that as far as possible, subtitles should be self-contained. In a ideal world, each subtitle would express a complete idea. However, if the message cannot be contained in one subtitle some strategies must be implemented. When the subtitle needs to be continued students should break the lines in such a way as to make them coincide with sense blocks, i.e. with the natural breaks in a sentence, clause or phrase structure.

Material and equipment

As in other translation activities, subtitlers have to be fluent in the languages and cultures in which they work. They have to know how and where to look for information in order to find out the meaning of obscure colloquialisms, cultural references or technical jargon to mention but a few difficult areas. These days, not only dictionaries, glossaries and encyclopedias are essential sources of reference, but also the web where intertextual references to other films or television series/programmes seem to be better catered for. For those working in and out of Spanish the e-group TRAG (TRAducción de Guiones de películas) is an excellent discussion group.

The need for accurate terminology is all the more acute in the translation of audiovisual products that can deal with almost anything: computing, legal terms, biology, archaeology, etc. Hence the need for a complete and detailed dialogue list[3]. However, real life shows that many translations are done without a proper dialogue list, and when they exist they tend to be pre-production scripts and, therefore, incomplete and defective. Some institutions prefer to teach students to work from screen, without a dialogue list, since they consider that in this way students will be more in tune with the reality of the profession and they will also pay more attention to the semiotic interaction between words and images focusing:

> on the fact that subtitling is not just a matter of translating some lines from a script and shaping them into neat blocks. Subtitling is a craft in which one recreates the foreign dialogue in one's own (written) language, as an integral part of the original film whose visual content co-interprets the meaning of the lines as they are spoken (Gottlieb 1996: 284).

I would suggest a combination of both approaches. In a way to establish a gradation in difficulty the lecturer could start with some initial exercises in which students can rely on dialogue lists and later move on to exercises where they have to transcribe the dialogue from the soundtrack.

Traditional subtitling programmes would operate with a computer, a television set and a video player. Today, technology has advanced a lot in this field and new dedicated subtitle preparation systems are on the market which allow for the creation, editing and timing of subtitles for television, film and video. The image can be digitised and the whole process (spotting, translation and simulation) can be done on the computer screen. The main problem here is that prices for these software packages are usually prohibitive for most universities. There is a clear divide between the commercial world and the education centres, and although some companies will be ready to offer some discount to universities that intend to use the equipment for educational purposes, the final price still remains beyond the reach of most modern language departments. The other aggravating point, even though as a rule these programmes tend to be very user-friendly, is that students and lecturers alike will need full-time technical assistance and support, which means that some technicians should also be familiar with the subtitling software and available when needed if we want to avoid frustration and disenchantment.

On the positive side, and in order to make the most of the initial investment, the same subtitling

equipment can be used for the production of intra-lingual subtitles, i.e. for the deaf and the hard of hearing. This option helps to spread the costs and opens new possibilities for interaction between different departments or schools within the same university. Besides, since translating from other languages into English might not be in high demand, subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing, a booming industry, is an option that some students with English as their mother tongue may want to pursue. Students that can do both will obviously be more marketable. Given the fact that this subtitling area is highly regulated by governments and that there is a clear intention to homogenise it at a European level, the intra-lingual subtitling in other European languages is an avenue that should not be dismissed.

Without technical support, the last option is to resort to pen and paper, which is the way most subtitling modules started until the institutions recognised their educational value and the attraction to students. A very simple and cheap way to practice subtitling is to show students a clip of the scene they must work on, to give them the actors' dialogue already spotted and to ask them to translate the content according to a maximum number of spaces that the lecturer has worked out according to his own spotting or the cueing done in the commercial video. A designed sheet with 35 spaces (or as many as are deemed to be suitable by the lecturer) can be handed to the students to help them out with the tedious task of having to count letters, spaces and orthographic signs.

Although the interaction between image and text could also be discussed in class, this type of exercise avoids timing and equipment issues by concentrating mainly on the semantic and stylistic transfer, but it still allows some simulation of the typical constraints which characterise this translation activity.

Since subtitling has not been widely taught and it a very new discipline, one of the obstacles that I have encountered amongst lecturers is their fear of teaching a subject with which they are not familiar. Aware of this situation, ESIST offers tailor-made courses to train teachers of subtitling, with a view to expanding into other related disciplines such as voice-over and dubbing.

Students profile and assessment

Students taking the course must be fluent in the two working languages used in the module. Since most audiovisual programmes are plagued with colloquialisms, the ideal scenario is that students should be able to choose this module when they come back from their year abroad, having been immersed in the language and culture of the foreign country. Translation does not have to be into English necessarily. As long as the scenes and programmes are selected carefully, subtitling into the foreign language can be of a high pedagogical value. Besides, studying in the UK does not mean that a student's mother tongue is always English. There are individuals from many different countries that opt to do their degrees or MAs in the UK. The technological advances in communication (e-mail, internet) and the advent of DVD have altered and modified some of the traditional labour practices in the translation world. DVD particularly opens new possibilities since subtitling into other languages than English is going to take place more and more in countries where DVDs are manufactured, by and large the USA and the UK, rather than in the country where the language is spoken. Although the subtitles can be electronically sent from any part of the world to any other, students that reside near these nerve centres will have a marginal advantage. Given that the demand is there, subtitling into French, Greek, Spanish or Portuguese as one's mother tongue in the UK should not be seen as an irrelevant or out of focus activity.

The teaching is conducted in blocks of two contact hours per week. These lessons can take the format of lectures in which the teacher introduces the relevant social theory (history of subtitles, professional process, comparison to other modes, etc.) or linguistic theory (dealing with humour, reducing the message, from oral to written, etc.). There should also be some workshops of a more interactive nature in which the whole class comments on the translations that have been commercialised and in which different solutions proposed by various groups in the class are scrutinised. If the subtitling software and equipment are available, some induction lessons must then be organised for students to become familiar with the computer programme. This induction should take place early on in the course so that students can appreciate and enjoy the practical side of subtitling from a very early stage. Exercises have to be graded according to their linguistic and contextual difficulty and they should be drawn from different programme genres: films, tv series,

ads, documentaries, etc. A module like this, significantly promotes independent learning and working. Between the weekly lectures, students must work outside the classroom on prescribed tasks and/or, upon agreement with the tutor, on particular programmes and scenes of their own choice in order to enhance their enjoyment experience.

Coursework will depend on the number of credits given to the module. The 10 credit module requires students to subtitle two short scenes from English into Spanish and from Spanish into English. The first one is longer and done at their leisure, whilst the second one is shorter and done under exam conditions, since not only the quality of the subtitling is important but also the speed at which students can work. In a professional world where deadlines are very tight, a good subtitler has to be able to produce high quality subtitles in a reasonable time span. Students taking the module for 20 credits have to do the same amount of work as for the 10 credit module plus a course dossier. This dossier may include two additional subtitled clips of the student's choice, agreed by the tutor, from English into Spanish and from Spanish into English that they have to submit at the end of the semester. The subtitles must come with a written commentary on the difficulties they have encountered and the solutions they have implemented. Alternatively, students may present a written essay in Spanish of 2000 words on a particular topic relevant to audiovisual translation that has to be approved by the tutor. In order to complete the course successfully, students must reach an average of 35% (or above) in all parts of the assessment.

The assessment criteria of the actual subtitling takes into consideration the linguistic as well as the technical dimensions. As students do not work from a dialogue list for the assessed tasks, but only from the soundtrack, the accurate aural comprehension and interpretation of what is said on screen is one of the first factors to be taken into account when marking their work. Brondeel (1994:29) suggests three levels of equivalence, although I would prefer to call them dimensions, that can be very useful in the assessment: informative, semantic and communicative. The *informative* dimension takes a look at whether all the information has been transferred from the original, at the elements that have been omitted, the utterances that have been given priority and the impact on the subtitles. The *semantic* dimension considers whether the meaning and nuances of the original message have been transferred correctly to the subtitles. Finally, the *communicative* dimension focus on the shift of medium from oral to written and concentrates on the idiomatic flair of the target language used. To these three, syntactic and ortho-typographic dimensions could be added. The *syntactic* one considers breaks between lines in the same subtitle and between different subtitles, their legibility and cohesion. The *ortho-typographic* dimension pays attention to the proper spelling of words, the right punctuation and the correct and systematic use of typographic conventions. Assuming that we work with the proper equipment and that students do their own spotting, at least two other dimensions need to be part of the equation. The *synchronisation* dimension (that is, the correct cueing of subtitles in synchrony with the actors' utterances) and the *segmentation* dimension, which evaluates how well the original dialogue has been spotted, according to the speech rhythm of the film dialogue, scene cuts and so on.

Conclusions

Although a course of this length can only be considered as a taster to the world of subtitling, it has to be stressed that it is of a highly practical nature and students gain experience at creating subtitles for a wide range of programmes. Given the fact that not many courses are available at present in this country, even an introductory course such as this can put students in a better position when looking for a job in this field.

From a technical point of view, it also helps students further their knowledge of ICT thanks to the continuous contact with the computer, image files, video and tv material and the web. Linguistically, the presence of the soundtrack can be exploited to show certain intonation patterns, the pronunciation of some words and the differences among regional variations of the same language. Students will also have to work with a type of register plagued by colloquialisms and slang that is rarely dealt with in the classroom. The visual dimension will help students to contextualise the message and learn about foreign cultures through the actors' kinesics, the decoration and their way of living. Subtitling can also be used as a one-off pedagogical tool in any language class since it develops transferable skills such as aural comprehension, translation, and the

ability to précis.

It is a very innovative and entertaining activity, certainly when compared with the translation of manuals or technical texts. In short, subtitling is an invaluable all encompassing subject to be taught.

Notes
1. For a more detailed listing of places see Mayoral (2001) and the ESIST web page.
2. For an analysis of the subtitling of taboo expressions from Spanish into English see Díaz-Cintas (in press).
3. See Díaz-Cintas (2001b) for a detailed account on dialogue lists and their importance in the translation process of audiovisual material.

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Useful internet addresses
Associations:
       ESIST, *European Association for Studies in Screen Translation*
          www.esist.org

Discussion groups:
       TRAG, *TRAducción de Guiones de películas*
          www.xcastro.com/trag

Sofware companies:
    Cavena Image Products AB
        www.cavena.se
    Scan Titling
        www.scantitling.se
    Screen Subtitling Systems
        www.screen.subtitling.com
    Sysmedia Ltd.
        www.sysmedia.co.uk
    TitleVision Subtitling System ApS
        www.titlevision.dk

Websites for dialogue lists:
    The Daily Script:
        dailyscript.efront.com/scripts/scriptsbc.html
    Drew's Script-O-Rama:
        www.script-o-rama.com/trans.shtml
    Movie Section:
        www.toptown.com/dorms/creedstonegate/movie/movie16.htm

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