

A Descriptive Study on the Use of Subtitling as a Didactic Tool in Translation Courses at Spanish Universities

Sonia González Cruz

Postdoctoral Fellow at Pompeu Fabra University, Barcelona, Spain, email address: soniaglcruz@gmail.com

Abstract: In the context of translator training, subtitling has already been included into some translation curricula as an independent discipline of study aiming at training future subtitlers. Several scholars have discussed about the benefits from using subtitling as an active tool to develop students' translation competence in generic translation courses. However, there are few studies which focused on the use of active subtitling as a didactic tool in the field of translator training from a generic perspective. This article presents a descriptive study on the application of subtitling skills in generic translation courses which is carried out in the context of translator training at BA level in Spain. The main objective of this descriptive study is to present an overview on the use of subtitling in the translation classroom and analyze its level of implementation in non-audiovisual translation courses as a didactic resource that allows to develop the students' translation competence. Thus, the degree of the inclusion of subtitling into translation curricula at different Spanish universities is presented by providing data collected from questionnaires to both translation students and trainers at BA level. In this way, questionnaires not only provide relevant data about the degree of inclusion of this didactic tool in generic translation courses but also intend to collect students and trainers' experiences, opinions and expectations concerning the use of subtitling in a non-audiovisual translation context. Although the inclusion of subtitling into non-audiovisual translation courses is still quite low, the results of this study prove that subtitling leads to the activation of various general and specific competences in the translation classroom.

Keywords: subtitling, didactic tool, translation curricula, translator training.

Introduction

Several scholars have focused their research on analyzing the educational benefits of including specific subtitling modules within translator training aiming at training professional subtitlers (Blane, 1996; Klerkx, 1998; Williams & Thorne, 2000; Díaz-Cintas, 2001; Neves, 2004; Bartoll & Orero, 2008; Díaz-Cintas, 2008; Kruger, 2008; Bartrina, 2009). Although some of these authors (Klerkx, 1998; Neves, 2004; Kruger, 2008) pointed out the impact that subtitling has on the acquisition and development of general translation skills and argued in favor of its inclusion in generic translation courses, there are still few studies dedicated to analyzing the use of active subtitling in non-audiovisual translation courses. Some of the researchers who introduced specific subtitling modules aiming at training future subtitlers (Klerkx, 1998; Neves, 2004; Kruger, 2008) argue that subtitling can be integrated to other types of translation courses. In an introductory course to subtitling, Klerkx (1998: 264) observes that subtitling activities not only provided students with basic knowledge about the characteristics of subtitling, but also had an impact on the acquisition of other translation skills. In addition, Klerkx (1998) indicates that students provided more creative solutions when subtitling than in other more conventional translation activities. Also, the spatial constraints of subtitling forced students to reformulate the source text (ST) in order to transfer the most essential part of the message. Klerkx (1998: 264) states that subtitling can be used to train students to perform a future career in the media, but it also contributes to training better translators who will not necessarily become audiovisual translators in the future. In a translation course that was held in 1999/2000 in Portugal, Neves (2004) points out that training in audiovisual translation and specifically in subtitling was already introduced. This specific training proved that the students, instead of becoming professional subtitlers, acquired certain skills that were later applied in other courses and activities of their training. According to Neves (2004), carrying out activities that involve going through the different phases of the subtitling process leads to the improvement of a wide variety of translation skills. Kruger (2008: 79) also mentions the possibility of integrating subtitling to generic translation curricula and

other courses. In this regard, Kruger (2008) adds that attention should be paid to the way in which subtitling is related to more generic training in order to take advantage of the benefits of this didactic tool in the most optimal way. In the field of generic translator training, only three relevant qualitative studies (Kiraly, 2005; Incalcaterra 2009, 2010; Beseghi, 2018), a quasi-experimental study (Talaván & Ávila-Cabrera, 2015) and a didactic proposal (Orozco, 2009) related to the use of active interlinguistic subtitling are registered. Subtitling can be integrated to generic translation curricula, either by means of a task-based approach (Orozco, 2009; Incalcaterra, 2009, 2010; Talaván & Ávila-Cabrera, 2015; Beseghi, 2018) or by means of a project-based approach (Kiraly, 2005). According to the holistic model of translation competence proposed by PACTE group (2011), these studies prove that subtitling allows students to develop different subcompetences, such as bilingual subcompetence (Talaván & Ávila-Cabrera, 2015) extralinguistic subcompetence (Beseghi, 2018), strategic subcompetence (Kiraly, 2005; Incalcaterra, 2009, 2010; Talaván & Ávila-Cabrera, 2015), instrumental subcompetence (Beseghi, 2018), translation knowledge subcompetence (Incalcaterra, 2009, 2010). In the same way, the development of the translation competence is influenced by psychophysiological elements like critical thinking, synthesis capability, creativity and motivation (Incalcaterra, 2009, 2010).

In the following empirical descriptive study, an overview on the use of subtitling in the translation classroom in Spain is presented and its level of implementation in non-audiovisual translation courses is also analyzed. This descriptive study can be divided into two phases. The first phase consists of observing and analyzing generic translation curricula in Spain. During this phase the available curricula from different Spanish universities are examined in order to collect data on the use of subtitling as a didactic tool in the translation classroom. The second phase intends to verify that the data extracted from curricula correspond to the actual inclusion of subtitling into generic translation courses in Spain. Throughout this phase individual questionnaires with closed-ended questions are filled by both translation trainers and trainees in order to obtain quantitative data on the actual use of subtitling in the translation classroom. These questionnaires also allow trainers and students to express their opinions on the object of study.

Analysis of genetic translation curricula in Spain

In order to start measuring the degree of inclusion of subtitling into generic translation courses at Spanish universities, the first step to take in the descriptive study presented throughout this article is to analyze the translation curricula of the BA in Translation and Interpreting in Spain. Translation curricula are very heterogeneous in terms of names assigned to translation courses, the didactic contents offered by each university and its distribution within the curricula. Many Spanish universities still maintain the distinction between general and specialized translation courses. On the one hand, general translation courses are compulsory in most universities. On the other hand, some specialized courses are mandatory, while others are elective; even in some curricula all specializations are elective (e.g. University of Granada). In other cases, some universities' curricula only contain one compulsory specialization, whereas the rest of the specialized courses are elective (e.g. University of Vigo and University of Valladolid). In contrast, other universities offer different training itineraries that allow students to specialize in one specific discipline (e.g. Complutense University of Madrid). Exceptionally, at the University of the Basque Country there is no distinction between general and specialized subjects, since all the competences are integrated into courses called Translation Practices. Apart from its diversity, another aspect that can be observed when analyzing the translation curricula from Spanish universities is that many of them do not specify the types of texts to be translated throughout the different courses. In many cases, the teaching plan for each course only includes the competences, the learning outcomes, the course content and the evaluation system, but there are no explicit references to the didactic materials and the texts to be used in the classroom. However, in some generic translation curricula it is mentioned that the contents of the course will be based on "general texts" or "non-specialized texts in standard language". Different types of texts such as narrative (history books, biographies, short stories), argumentative (opinion articles, complaint letters), descriptive (tourist guides, description of characters in novels, etc.), instructive (manuals) and informative texts on different topics are also mentioned. In several generic translation courses, especially in those which are taught during the third or the fourth year

of the BA, students also worked with the translation of literary texts (novels, plays, essays, etc.), journalistic texts (news, reports, biographies, articles, etc.) and advertising texts. In some translation courses it is stated that only journalistic or literary texts are used in the classroom. To a lesser extent, there are also references to semi-specialized texts on different subjects such as technical, scientific, commercial, administrative, biosanitary and even legal. Although very few references to audiovisual translation are registered, in some generic translation curricula it is stated that students will translate audiovisual texts. Audiovisual materials will be used as a didactic support throughout the course and there is even explicit reference to working with film scripts (Autonomous University of Barcelona) or audiovisual products (Pompeu Fabra University). For instance, at the University of the Basque Country there is a fourth-year course which focuses on the translation of audiovisual texts (subtitling) which are combined with other didactic contents regarding scientific and technical and literary texts. In the same line, audiovisual translation contents are also integrated together with literary and advertising texts in a very same course at the University of Valencia. Finally, in a second-year generic translation course at the University of Vigo, a whole unit is devoted to the introduction of audiovisual translation (with a special focus on cinema). This unit covers the history and the techniques of AVT and explicit mention is made to the use of dubbing and subtitling throughout the course.

From these initial observations of the subject of study, it can be concluded that the degree of use of subtitling as a didactic tool in generic translation curricula in Spain is unspecific, which implies that its inclusion into the translation classroom tends to be quite low. The questionnaires that allow to complete the descriptive study contribute to confirm the data obtained from the curricula and also provide information on the opinions of trainers and students regarding the usefulness of subtitling in this didactic context. The questionnaires were administered to both trainees and trainers of the Translation and Interpreting degree from a total of 18 different universities: Pompeu Fabra University, Autonomous University of Barcelona, University of Vic-Open University of Catalonia, University of the Basque Country, University of Vigo, Complutense University of Madrid, University of Valencia, University of Alicante, University of Malaga, University of

Granada, Autonomous University of Madrid, University of Murcia, University of Pablo de Olavide, University of the Basque Country, University of las Palmas de Gran Canaria, University of Jaume I, University of Salamanca and University of Cordoba.

Results obtained from questionnaires on the use of subtitling in the context of translator training in Spain

The data obtained by means of the questionnaires to both translation trainers and students can be divided into two main sections. The first section includes questions that intend to find out to what extent trainers have used subtitling in translation curricula and it analyzes its degree of inclusion in Spain. In this part the use of other didactic tools such as audiovisual products and dubbing is also measured. The second section presents data which are related to the participants' opinions, expectations and preferences concerning the inclusion of subtitling into the translation classroom. In some cases, both groups of respondents were asked the same questions about their preferences concerning didactic practices in the translation classroom in order to establish comparisons between their opinions. However, questions related to the didactic potential of subtitling or the competences and skills involved in it were only answered by the group of trainers. It is also important to mention that the questionnaires were fulfilled by 120 translation trainers and 570 students who belonged to the different Spanish universities that have already been cited.

Concerning the use of subtitling as an active tool in the translation classroom, most of the trainers (69.2%) state that they do not have included subtitling activities into generic translation courses. Some trainers (10.8%) have used subtitling as a non-assessable activity, others (10%) introduced it as an assessable activity, whereas 10% of them included both assessable and non-assessable subtitling activities into the translation classroom. As for other types of Audiovisual Translation such as dubbing or voiceover, the obtained results are very similar to those of subtitling. Only 24.2% of the trainers have introduced dubbing or voiceover into generic translation courses, whereas 75.4% of the respondents had never used this type of activities in their translation classes. Finally, trainers were also asked if they had carried out activities with audiovisual products such as video watching,

movie script translation or publicity. In this case, most trainers (70%) state that they introduced activities which involved the use of audiovisual materials but were not strictly related to subtitling nor dubbing. In comparison to subtitling or dubbing activities, it can be observed that trainers are in favor of using audiovisuals in generic translation courses but prefer not to relate their teaching activities to any AVT discipline. Finally, trainers were expected to provide data about the use of subtitling in other translation courses such as Language for translators, Scientific & Technical Translation, Literary Translation, Theory of Translation and Legal Translation. The course into which subtitling was included the most was Language for translators, as 13.3% of the trainers confirm that they used this tool in their language lessons. Subtitling was integrated to Scientific & Technical Translation and Literary Translation by 5.8% and 5% of the respondents respectively. Only 1.6% carried out subtitling activities in a course about Theory of Translation, whereas none of the trainers used it to teach Legal Translation.

After providing an overview on the degree of inclusion of subtitling and other AVT activities in the translation classroom in Spain, the next objective is to present both trainers' and students opinions concerning the use of this didactic tool in a non-audiovisual translation context. The data that will be discussed in the following paragraphs intend to provide relevant information on students' and trainers opinions and expectations about including subtitling into current and future translation curricula. Regarding the analysis of the data, it is essential to bear in mind that the questions which are ordinal and exclusive are ordered by intensity according to a Likert scale of five values: 1. Not at all, 2. A Little, 3. To some extent, 4. Quite a lot, 5. A lot. This type of questions allows to collect participants' opinions concerning different factors that affect the didactic potential of subtitling such as usefulness or feasibility of the activities together with the respondents' preferences regarding these didactic practices. In this way, a set of questions and their correspondent answers will be discussed as follows.

As for the didactic potential of using subtitling, trainers were asked if they considered it useful to integrate subtitling to generic translation courses. According to the obtained data, the highest result corresponded to 39.2% of trainers that consider subtitling to be "quite

useful”. Also, 30% of them thought that it was useful “to some extent”. Consequently, 11.6% selected the option “5. A lot”, whereas only 10% and 9.2% chose the values “2. A little” and “1. Not at all”. It can be observed that many trainers agree that subtitling can be very useful to train students in the context of generic translation courses. However, the number of teachers who express a more neutral opinion is also representative. From the analysis of these data, it is evident that very few teachers consider that subtitling is not a useful tool and trainers’ opinions are mostly divided into positive and neutral values. Another aspect that was studied was their opinion about designing subtitling activities themselves. Thus, trainers were expected to tell if they considered it feasible to design their own subtitling activities to be included into the translation classroom. As in the previous question, opinions seem to be divided into neutral and positive answers. However, in this case the number of negative opinions has remarkably increased. Although 28.3% of the trainers show a neutral vision towards this aspect and even 27.5% consider it quite feasible for them to design subtitling materials for the class, it is relevant to remark that 23.3% opted for option “2. A little” and 11.6% selected option “1. Not at all”. Despite the fact that these data show that opinions concerning design of materials are very diverse, quite a lot of teachers show a negative opinion towards the design of their own subtitling materials, while only 9,1% consider it very feasible for them to prepare this type of activities. After this observation, trainers were expected to think of a hypothetical situation on which they would be given all the necessary subtitling materials to make use of them in generic translation courses and therefore, reflect on the decision of including subtitling into the translation classroom. In this case, an increase of positive opinions towards the use of subtitling has been registered, as 37.5% of respondents consider it more feasible to integrate subtitling activities once the didactic materials have been provided to them. There is still a high percentage of trainers who express a neutral attitude, 25% of trainers selected option “3. To some extent”. The number of trainers who consider “very feasible” to use subtitling in their classes under this condition has also increased in comparison to the previous items: 17.5% chose option “5. A lot”, whereas only 14.2% and 5.8% selected values “2. A little” and “1. Not at all”.

Concerning the respondents' preferences about the use of subtitling in generic translation courses, trainers were asked if they thought that their students would like to carry out subtitling activities in the translation classroom. In this case, the number of positive opinions is clearly higher than the neutral and negative ones. Most trainers agree that their students would prefer to perform subtitling activities in non-audiovisual contexts, 44.3% state that they would prefer it "quite a lot" and 25.8% think that they would like it "a lot". In comparison to previous questions, the percentage of neutral opinions is still representative, as 25.8% selected option "3. To some extent". In spite of this, the number of negative opinions has clearly decreased, only 3.3% and 0.8% of the trainers considered that their students would like "a little" or "not at all" to subtitle audiovisual texts in the translation course. In the same way, students themselves were asked if they would like to perform subtitling activities in generic translation courses. Translation trainees show a clear positive opinion towards subtitling, 39.5% and 30.4% selected options "4. Quite a lot" and "5. A lot". The percentage of neutral opinions corresponds to 15.3%, while a total of 14.8% show a negative opinion. Based on these data, trainees' opinions are very similar to trainers' ones, as both groups think that students would have a clearly positive attitude towards the use of subtitling in the classroom. Apart from expressing a clear preference for performing subtitling activities in generic translation courses, students also stated that they would appreciate doing more subtitling activities during the whole BA degree. The collected data indicate that 69.9% of the trainees would like to carry out either "quite a lot" or "a lot" more subtitling activities during the BA degree and not only in generic translation courses. In addition to their preferences, both groups were expected to think about the fact that subtitling could increase students' motivation. The opinions of both groups concerning trainees' motivation tend to be very similar as well and both of them show very positive opinions. The most selected value was "4. Quite a lot", 40.8% of trainers and 37% of trainees chose this option. In the same way, 19.2% and 28.6% argue that subtitling activities would increase "a lot" students' motivation. Moreover, the number of neutral opinions has also increased in comparison to the previous values, as now it corresponds to 29.2% in the case of trainers and 24% in the case of trainees. According to these data, it can be inferred that the number of

both trainers and trainees that show negative opinions is very low (10.8% and 10.4%). At the end of the questionnaires, respondents were asked to provide, if they wish, their personal opinion and make open observations about the topic. This allows to obtain further information about the subject of study while obtaining qualitative data that complement the quantitative results that are being presented. Some students took the opportunity to express their personal opinions and wrote comments talking about their preferences about didactic practices in the translation classroom.

These testimonials have been translated from Spanish into English in order to facilitate comprehension for the readers.

Observation 1: I think that subtitling can be a very motivating translation activity for students. It can be included into generic translation courses or even into a separate course on subtitling (and an introduction to dubbing, if possible).

Observation 2: If I had not taken a course on Audiovisual Translation during the fourth and last year of my BA, I would not have learned how to subtitle. I think that having knowledge about the subtitling process is important for a future career as translator. Subtitling should have been integrated to the curricula much earlier.

Observation 3: I am a fourth-year student and I am currently taking a course on Audiovisual Translation. I think that starting using subtitling in generic translation courses would increase trainees' motivation. Also, it would help decreasing the frustration we feel when we face AVT courses and we do not know how to proceed.

Observation 4: At my university we do not learn about Audiovisual Translation until the third year.

Observation 5: I think that subtitling can help us become more capable of translating concepts instead of words. It would also help us be more concise when translating and learn how to summarize. I think that it would be useful for us to perform at least two subtitling activities in generic translation courses before taking a specialized course in Audiovisual Translation.

Observation 6: In our curricula we already have the possibility of taking two courses in AVT, subtitling, accessibility, etc. So, I would not find it necessary to include these activities into generic courses, unless they are presented as different activities aiming at developing creativity, reformulation or analysis and synthesis capability.

Observation 7: There is not any course on Audiovisual Translation at my university. I think that I would like to specialize in AVT in the future, so I am looking for courses and masters outside my university. I think that if I had the opportunity of performing these activities during my BA, it would be easier for me to make this decision.

Observation 8: There is not any course on Audiovisual Translation at my university.

These comments reflect that translation trainees consider that subtitling activities are a resource that can be interesting and motivating not only in generic translation courses, but also in other types of courses of the BA degree. Moreover, these testimonials also verify the fact that translation curricula in Spain are very diverse, and therefore not all students have the chance to acquire knowledge about Audiovisual Translation. Some of them criticize the lack of training in audiovisual translation at their universities, while others think that the AVT contents are introduced too late into the curricula. In addition, they argue that if they had had a previous incursion into the field of subtitling, they would have a more complete background when taking a specialized course on Audiovisual Translation. Also, several students highlight the importance of learning how to subtitle in order to be able to build a professional career in this field. Others argue that, in case of including this type of activities in general translation subjects, they should be complementary and they should not be predominant over the rest of the didactic content. In spite of that, they also highlight the benefits of subtitling to focus on specific aspects of the translation process such as rephrasing, creativity and synthesis capability, which helps them avoid a literal or word-for-word translation.

In relation to this, trainers explained the reasons that prevent them from including subtitling into generic translation courses. First of all, they were provided with a list of factors and they were asked to assign them a score from 0 to 5 depending on the importance that each

of the suggested factors had for them. From their point of view, specific training in subtitling was the factor that obtained the highest score (4.2). They also considered that the time available within the course to perform this kind of activities was a quite important factor and it was given a score of 4. Other aspects such as the level of difficulty of the activity and the classroom equipment were rated with a score of 3.7 each. As well as the students, trainers were also given the possibility of writing their personal opinions and make open observations about the subject of study. Some of them left observations regarding the influence of the factors previously discussed and it is relevant for the study to pay attention to them. These testimonials have also been translated from either Spanish or Catalan into English. These trainers claim that the lack of time within their courses, the lack of knowledge about subtitling and the low level of translation expertise of their students are some of the reasons why they do not use this didactic tool in their generic translation classes.

Observation 1: I do not integrate subtitling (even though I think it allows the student to develop skills that are useful for many other translation specializations) due to the curriculum (which already includes AVT courses) and the time available in my course.

Observation 2: I do not use subtitling because I do not have specific knowledge in that field.

Observation 3: I find it very interesting the use of subtitling in the translation classroom, but I am not proficient enough to integrate it myself.

Observation 4: In my opinion, it is very difficult to introduce training in audiovisual translation in a four-month generic translation course for two reasons: (1) students' translation expertise is still very low and (2) time constraints within the course.

Observation 5: The aim of the generic translation courses is not to translate audiovisual products. I use subtitling and dubbing as a didactic support different from a written text. In this case, the objective is not to learn the technical requirements because this needs to be done in a specialized course.

Observation 6: I think that audiovisual translation can be used in a generic translation course, but it should not focus only on AVT. A module of subtitling could be included into the course because I am sure that it is interesting for the students but it should not focus on specific requirements because the objective of a generic translation course is to acquire more general translation skills.

Finally, trainers were asked to select the specific translation competences and consequently, the generic competences that they thought that trainees could acquire and/or develop by means of subtitling activities. According to the the model of translation competence proposed by the PACTE group (2011), trainers were expected to select the subcompetence/s that they believed that students could develop to a greater extent when performing subtitling activities in the translation classroom. The most frequently indicated subcompetences by trainers were the instrumental subcompetence (54.2%), the extra-linguistic subcompetence (48.3%) and the strategic subcompetence (48.3%). These results indicate that trainers give especial importance to the potential of subtitling when it comes to developing operational knowledge related to information and communication technologies (instrumental subcompetence), acquiring declarative knowledge that can be bicultural, encyclopedic and thematic (extralinguistic subcompetence) and expanding operational knowledge focused on executing the translation process effectively and solving problems (strategic subcompetence). On the contrary, the subcompetences that were less frequently selected by trainers were the subcompetence of knowledge about translation (38.3%), the bilingual subcompetence (32.5%) and the psychophysiological subcompetence (6.6%). Therefore, from these results it can be deduced that the specific translation subcompetences that would be developed to a greater extent are: management of computer tools, knowledge of foreign cultures and civilizations and mastery of translation techniques. It is also important to mention that 26.7% of trainers agree that subtitling allows trainees to develop all the subcompetences mentioned above. As for generic competences that can be developed by means of subtitling activities, trainers agree that subtitling can develop the following competences to a greater extent: problem solving (81.7%), decision

making (77.5%), analysis and synthesis capability (75%), creativity (68.3%) and knowledge about ICT related to the field of study (62.5%).

Conclusion

The questionnaire results together with the curricula analysis allow to measure the degree of inclusion of subtitling activities in non-audiovisual translation courses in Spain. The results obtained by means of this descriptive study illustrate that the use of subtitling in generic translation courses at Spanish universities is still quite low. It should be taken into account that there is a low percentage of translator trainers who already include subtitling in their translation classes, whereas most of them have not used this tool in their curricula yet. Apart from translation courses, it can also be stated that active subtitling is not frequently used in other courses which are not directly related to audiovisual translation. Even though neither subtitling nor dubbing are frequently used in the translation classroom, audiovisual products tend to be highly used in this pedagogical context.

Despite the fact that the use of subtitling is still quite low, it is considered to be a useful tool for the development of the translation competence and most trainers agree on the fact that the use of this type of tasks would increase their students' motivation in the translation classroom. Moreover, both trainers and trainees themselves recognize that students would appreciate doing more subtitling activities during the bachelor's degree. However, trainers' opinions reveal that the lack of subtitling training is a key factor that prevents them from using it. Furthermore, they state that they would be willing to include subtitling in their translation classes if they were provided with the necessary didactic materials. In contrast, those trainers who have already included this type of activities into the translation classroom show a more positive attitude towards its use, but they find it difficult to design new subtitling activities for their courses. It is important to remark that those trainers who have not used subtitling yet do not have a clearly negative opinion against its usefulness for the development of the translation competence, but their answers show a more neutral perspective instead. Translation trainers agree that subtitling can have an impact on the students' development of both generic and specific competences.

This descriptive study presents an overview of the degree of inclusion of subtitling into translation curricula in Spain. By means of the questionnaires, it also collects relevant opinions and expectations about active subtitling and its didactic benefits in the translator training context and the obtained results allow understanding the reasons why subtitling has not been used to a greater extent in this didactic context yet.

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