# SUBTITLING AS AN ACTIVE PEDAGOGICAL TOOL IN THE DIDACTICS OF TRANSLATION. FIRST RESULTS OF AN EMPIRICAL STUDY.

Sonia González Cruz

Universitat Pompeu Fabra

#### **Abstract**

This article is framed within the field of the didactics of translation and it focuses on the relationship between the didactics of general translation and active subtitling as a pedagogical tool. It is interesting to analyze the level of inclusion of new resources into the existent curricula and observe to what extent these different teaching methods are being used in the general translation classroom. Although subtitling has already become an independent discipline of study and it is a type of translation on its own, it is necessary to do further research on the different didactic varieties that this type of audiovisual translation offers.

Therefore, the main objective of this article is to analyze the inclusion of interlinguistic active subtitling in general translation curricula at several Spanish universities and present an overview of the preliminary results. Far from analyzing the

use of subtitling in the classroom in relation to the didactics of Audiovisual Translation, I focus on the use of subtitling as a pedagogical active tool to develop the so-called translation competence in a non-specialized didactic context. The first results obtained from the analysis of the existent teaching curricula and the actual teaching practices which are being carried out at three different universities in Barcelona will be presented throughout this paper.

Keywords: active subtitling, didactics of translation, translation competence, translation curricula.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the pedagogical context of the didactics of translation, subtitling is used as a didactic tool intended for students to develop certain general and in the translation classroom. skills Therefore, this didactic practice does not have to do with the training of professional subtitlers, as the focus of this study is to analyze the impact that this resource has within a more general and noncontext. A specialized didactic didactic pedagogical context is understood as an educational environment which supports the acquisition and development of certain skills as an essential part of the students' learning process. It implies that a series of educational objectives need to be achieved by both students and professors while applying specific skills to complete a given task.

Within the field of foreign language teaching, as well as within the field of the didactics of translation, several experiments validate the use of subtitling as an active tool used in non-specialized teaching curricula. In this way, language students as well students from different humanistic disciplines can develop different competences within their studies. However, after carrying out an exhaustive analysis of different curricula of the BA in Translation and Interpreting, it is found out that there is still a lack of curricular evidence about the use of this didactic resource in a pedagogical context such as general translation. From a general perspective, the main objective of this empirical study is to analyze the degree of inclusion of these new resources into current teaching curricula and to observe to what extent this type of didactic tool is being used in the general direct translation classroom.

# 2. SUBTITLING AS AN ACTIVE PEDAGOGICAL TOOL.

Apart from being considered a field of specialization within Audiovisual Translation (Bartoll, 2012: 33), subtitling can also be used as an active didactic tool in several educational contexts

(Kruger, 2008). Active subtitling is a translation process which implies that students are in charge of producing their own subtitles. By means of this activity, students are expected to create and edit subtitles for a given audiovisual product (Romero et al., 2011). In contrast, it is relevant to mention that subtitles have also been used as a didactic tool from perspective (Díaz-Cintas, passive 2012). However, this type of task only implies a process of already-subtitled audiovisual visualization of materials

# 2.1 Subtitling and foreign language learning

Focusing on the use of active subtitling as a didactic tool, it is relevant to mention that it has gained an increasing interest within the foreign language learning context. According to Talaván Zanón and Ávila-Cabrera (2015:150), subtitling as an active tool within the foreign language setting can be considered to be "a relatively new method characterized by motivating factors where the students carry out an active and practical task, which aims to imitate a professional activity within a didactic, familiar, and multimedia context". Several empirical experiments carried out by Incalcaterra and Lertola (2011) and Talaván Zanón (2011) show

the didactic benefits which could be obtained from performing this kind of activity in the foreign language classroom. Furthermore, some projects such as LeViS (Learning Via Subtitling) or ClipFlair give access to an online software which includes a wide variety of audiovisual materials to work with by making use of different modes of audiovisual translation such as subtitling, dubbing or voice-over. This is aimed at promoting the active process of language learning by means of video subtitling (Díaz-Cintas, 2012:106). In the same way, it has been proved that active subtitling activities can be used as a didactic tool aimed at teaching language for translators by means of already mentioned educative projects (Romero et al., 2011). Subtitling is a translational process which implies a high process of linguistic reformulation when transferring the source text into the target text. This would help students avoid carrying out a literal translation of the source text and it would lead to the production of a much more idiomatic target text. Also, it is important to remark that the technical and orthotypographical characteristics which constrain the process of subtitling activate several linguistic skills. Therefore, students are expected to develop a greater capacity for synthesis and paraphrasing, as

they have to make a correct selection between relevant information and redundant information

# 2.2 Subtitling and didactics of translation

From a different pedagogical perspective, this type of subtitling task has also been included in the didactics of translation (Klerkx, 1998; Kiraly, 2005). On the one hand, subtitling may be used to enhance the linguistic competence within language for specific purposes curricula, such as language programs for translators (Romero et. al., 2011). On the other hand, it can be included in general translation curricula to promote the development of the translation competence. Translation competence is a controversial term which presents a wide variety of definitions. According to PACTE (2011) translation competence is a holistic model made up of separate partial competences which allow texts to be transferred from one culture into another. Although translation competence also includes a sub-competence which deals with the command of languages, this concept also makes reference to extra-linguistic aspects, knowledge translation, translation strategies, instrumental skills and psycho-physiological elements. Following this line of research, Kruger (2008: 79) makes reference

to the possibility of including active subtitling as a tool in general translation curricula and other courses. He adds that in these cases it is very important take into consideration the way in which subtitling is related to more generic training, in order to make profit of the didactic benefits of this tool in an optimal way. According to Kruger (2008: 86), the availability of accessible and economical software contributes to the fact that subtitling can be included in any type of training program. Subtitling is a specialized translation mode and therefore, a set of clear pedagogical objectives need to be established depending on the didactic context in which the activity is included (Kruger, 2008: 87). For this reason, special attention needs to be paid to the type of translation training that is being provided. For instance, Kruger (2008: 87) remarks that subtitling could be introduced as a specific part of a more general audiovisual translation module, it can also be taught as a translation specialization in order to train professional subtitlers, and it could be used as a supportive tool or as an aid involved in the learning of other types of translation such as general translation. Furthermore, it can be observed that several empirical and observational studies deal with the inclusion of active subtitling in general translation courses or modules by means of both

inclass tasks and exercises (Incalcaterra, 2010) and (Talaván Zanón and Ávila-Cabrera, 2015), and the students' involvement in real subtitling projects (Kiraly, 2005). Talaván Zanón and Ávila-Cabrera propose the use of both active and reverse dubbing and subtitling as L2 didactic tools in order to improve oral and written production skills, as well as general translation competence (Talaván Zanón and Ávila-Cabrera, 2015:149).

# 3. THE STRUCTURE OF THE EMPIRAL STUDY

As noted in the previous sections, several experiments show that subtitling is a valid didactic tool to develop certain general translation skills. However, it should be mentioned that the inclusion of interlinguistic subtitling as an active tool in general translation curricula is an area that has been investigated to a lesser extent in comparison with other didactic fields such as the learning of foreign languages. Therefore, the empirical study that will be described below has been carried out in order to verify its pedagogical validity and analyze the degree of inclusion of active interlinguistic subtitling in written general translation curricula as a didactic tool used for students of the BA in

Translation and Interpreting in the main Catalan universities to develop their translation competence. This study consists of two phases: a an empiricaldescriptive phase that aims at analyzing the didactic study and collecting context ofexperiences, opinions and expectations that have different professors and students from both Catalan universities and Spanish universities regarding the usefulness of active interlinguistic subtitling in general translation teaching programs; and another empirical-experimental phase in which participants perform an active interlinguistic subtitling task in the general translation classroom.

This empirical study will require the participation of two clearly differentiated populations: professors and students. There will be a first group of subjects consisting of professors and students from the main universities in Catalonia where they offer BA courses in Translation and Interpreting: the degree in Translation and Interpretation from the Pompeu Fabra University (UPF), the degree in Translation and Interpretation of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB) and the degree in Translation, Interpretation and Applied Languages of the University of Vic (UVic) currently taught together with the Open University of Catalonia (UOC). This group of subjects will participate both in the

empirical-descriptive phase and in the empirical-experimental phase. After that, there will also be a second group of participants consisting of professors and students belonging to different Spanish universities, who will participate only in the descriptive phase of the study. Although the data obtained in the empirical-descriptive phase have been expanded by collecting the experiences, opinions and expectations of students and professors from the rest of the universities in Spain, this article focuses only on the data obtained from the official bachelors in Translation and Interpreting in the Catalan area.

Within the descriptive phase, the curricula of the general translation courses of the participating universities will be previously examined in order to obtain information about the object of study. Subsequently, online questionnaires will be used to collect the experiences, opinions and expectations of the professors and students of the BA in Translation and Interpreting regarding the use of subtitling in the didactic context of general translation. After concluding the empirical-descriptive phase, an experimental task with didactic purposes will be carried out to verify the pedagogical utility and the possible degree of implantation that an active interlinguistic subtitling task can have as a didactic

tool to develop the translation competence. The objective of this task is to promote the inclusion of active interlinguistic subtitling within general translation teaching programs. In this experimental task students of different levels undertaking the BA in Translation and Interpretation of the Catalan universities mentioned above will be able to participate.

#### 4. DATA COLLECTION

## 4.1 The curricula in general translation courses.

After an accurate analysis of the curricula of the three selected universities, it is verified that the curricula of the general direct translation courses varies considerably depending on university. One of the most remarkable differences is that not all the curricula include general translation courses throughout all the BA years. In the case of the Pompeu Fabra University it is observed that the students undertake translation courses throughout their training, from the first to the fourth (and last) course. As for the Autonomous University of Barcelona, students attend this type of courses during the first three years of the degree, while in the fourth year they focus on specialized courses. In

relation to the curricula of the University of Vic and the Open University of Catalonia, it is important to mention that it is the one that presents a greater number of differences with regard to the curricula of the other two universities. This curriculum does not contain General Translation courses in which students translate from their B language into their mother tongue in any of the four academic years. However, from the third year onwards, students work in general translation from their C language. German or French into Spanish or Catalan. The fields in which students work with English as a B specialized translation language are courses: advertising, legal-economic, literary, scientifictechnical or audiovisual. It is worth mentioning that in the old curricula of the BA in Translation and Interpreting offered by the University of Vic and which has now been replaced, the students took part in courses on direct general translation from the B language only in their first and second years, when they had a course on Theory and Practice of Translation B-A. as well as two courses on General Translation B-A. On the other hand, in the current plan they share with the UOC, they have introduced a course about the translation of informative texts B-A that is taking place in the first year, another course of advertising and translation in the second year and

they have moved the audiovisual translation course from the third year to the second one.

When examining the competences that students are expected to develop in general translation courses, it can be seen that active interlinguistic subtitling is a didactic tool that allows to acquire and develop several general and specific skills. When comparing the curricula of the general translation courses with the plan of the audiovisual translation courses, it is proved that many of the competences associated to these courses are developed in both disciplines. Regarding the general skills, it is observed that analysis, problem solving and creativity competences that are present in both curricula. In the same line, both curricula also coincide in the presence of the following specific competences: excellent written and oral command of the mother tongue, receptive oral and written command of at least two foreign languages, knowledge of foreign cultures and civilizations, research and management of information and documentation (especially in relation to dictionaries of general scope) and accuracy in the review and quality control of linguistic mediation (ability to produce professionally acceptable texts).

### 4.2 Online questionnaires.

In order to verify, complete and expand the results obtained after observing the different general translation curricula, online questionnaires are conducted by means of Google Forms and are answered by professors and students of the BA in Translation and Interpreting. This allows for analyzing the actual level of inclusion of active interlinguistic subtitling as a didactic tool in general translation curricula at the participating universities within the same didactic context, that is, between the academic courses 2014/15 and 2017/18. These questionnaires contain questions with exclusive closed answers ordered by means of a scale of intensity, which are combined with some sections that include non-exclusive closed questions with several alternatives. These questionnaires consist of three parts and all the responses collected are treated anonymously and confidentially. The first part includes questions about the social, academic and employment profile of the respondent. The second part aims at collecting the teaching experiences and teaching practices carried out in the general translation classroom. Finally, the third part focuses on the personal opinion and expectations of the respondents about the usefulness of subtitling as a

teaching tool in this pedagogical context.

#### 4.3 First results.

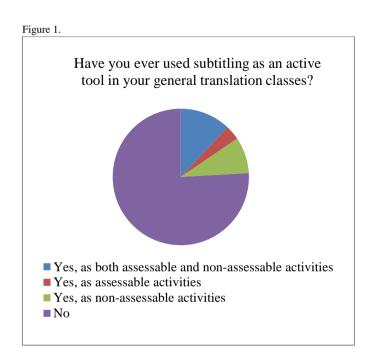
After concluding the analysis of the general translation curricula of the selected three universities, it is observed that none of the three curricula make reference to the use of active interlinguistic subtitling as a didactic tool to develop the students' translation competence in a general pedagogical context. However, references to the use of other types of audiovisual materials can be found. In the case of the Pompeu Fabra University, in the curriculum of a third-year course on general translation reference is made to the use of audiovisual products when working the pragmatic or functional perspective of a specific message, although it does not mention what type of audiovisual products is used exactly, nor what type of audiovisual text will be worked, nor what kind of task will be carried out by the student. Regarding the Autonomous University of Barcelona, also in a third-year course on general translation, the use of film scripts is included to work on the resolution of translation problems in the textual mode (written to be read aloud, written to be said, etc). In the case of the University of Vic and the Open University of

Catalonia, it should be mentioned that in the old plan of the degree offered by the University of Vic, the inclusion of audiovisual materials in the general translation curricula was already implanted. Although there are no references to the use of subtitling as an active tool, it should be remarked that in a second-year course on general translation, professors had already introduced audiovisual advertising, in addition to dubbing to work on the translation of television ads. This progress in the use of audiovisual materials at the University of Vic is reflected in the current curricula of the BA in Translation and Interpreting that they teach together the Open University of Catalonia. mentioned in previous sections. these universities dedicate a single course to work with advertising and translation and students take the mandatory course in audiovisual translation in their second year. Furthermore, it is observed that the University of Vic is the only one that includes a type of audiovisual translation such as dubbing in a more general didactic context. Although the use of dubbing was only present in the previous teaching curricula of the University of Vic, thanks to other methods of data collection like observation in translation classrooms, it has been proved that professors from other universities such as UPF also

include dubbing in their general translation courses. When observing the number of courses related to audiovisual translation offered by each degree, it can be seen that UPF offers a mandatory course on translation and media and another elective course on audiovisual translation that can be taken either in the third or in the fourth year. Regarding UAB, they only offer an elective course that can be done in the fourth year. As it has been already mentioned, the University of Vic is the one that offers a wider range of audiovisual contents, since its plan includes a mandatory course in advertising and translation focused on audiovisual advertising and another, also mandatory course on audiovisual translation. In addition, they introduce audiovisual translation at the beginning of the students' education. In comparison, UPF also offers a similar amount of this type of content, but in an elective mode, whereas UAB only offers an elective course on audiovisual translation.

The questionnaires were distributed in order to gather more information about this type of didactic practices and verify the information obtained from the analyzed educational plans. As an example, some of the questions that professors have been asked will be described later and some of the results obtained so far will be provided to compare these

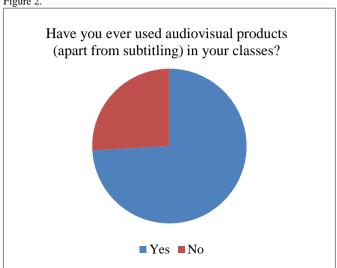
data with the conclusions obtained after observing the different curricula. Within the didactic and temporal context previously specified, a total of 58 responses of professors of direct general translation of different linguistic combinations have been obtained. One of the main questions that professors were asked throughout the survey is whether they had used subtitling as an active tool in their general translation classes. As it can be seen in figure 1 and according to the information extracted from the curricula, 75.9% of the survey respondents, which is equivalent to 44 professors, had not included subtitling in their general translation classes. On the contrary, 12.1% of the participants, which would be equivalent to a total of seven professors, claim that they had already used this resource as both assessable and non-assessable activities. Lastly, 8.6% of the respondents had introduced subtitling as a non-assessable activity, compared to 3.4% of the professors who included it only as an assessable task.



In the previous phase it had been observed that none of the analyzed curricula included the didactic use of subtitling in this study context. However, there were references to the inclusion of audiovisual products of several kinds and other types of audiovisual translation such as dubbing. In order to verify these data, the questionnaires include a statement about the inclusion of various audiovisual products, apart from subtitling itself. As shown in

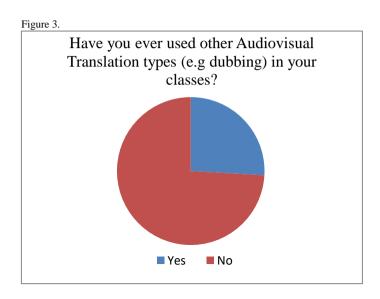
figure 2, 74.1% of the professors said that they had used different audiovisual products in the general translation classroom. In this case the information obtained from the curricula is fully confirmed, since only 25.9% of the respondents had not included this type of resources in their curricula.





Finally, another of the questions that have been made to verify the information obtained from the curricula is related to the introduction of other types of audiovisual translation such as the case of dubbing. Figure 3 shows that only 25.9% of the

professors claimed that they had used dubbing as a didactic resource in their general translation classes. 74.1% of the respondents, which equals 43 professors, refused to have used dubbing in their courses. In this case, it is proved that the difference between the inclusion of subtitling and dubbing is tiny, since only one more teacher used dubbing with reference to subtitling.



#### 5. CONCLUSIONS

As it has been proved throughout this article, active interlinguistic subtitling and general translation are two independent disciplines that can be integrated from a didactic point of view in order to develop general and specific translation Although different empirical experiments have been carried out to prove the validity of the use of subtitling as an active didactic tool in general translation curricula, more remarkable advances have been made in the field of foreign language teaching. In relation to the empirical study described in this article, it should be noted that, after a first observation and corresponding analysis of the curricula of the general translation courses of different universities, it can be concluded that there is not enough curricular evidence concerning the use of active interlinguistic subtitling as a didactic tool within the training of "generalist" translators.

According to the data obtained from this study, it should be taken into account that there is a low percentage of professors who already include this resource in their general translation classes, although most professors of this course have not yet introduced this tool in their curricula. Therefore, this

observation of the preliminary results also shows that there is still not enough awareness among the university community about the existence of this tool for the development of translation competence in a more general pedagogical context. In this way, it is concluded that it is necessary to do further research on the use of this didactic resource within the pedagogical context of the general translation. For this reason, it is essential to collect more information bv using different measuring instruments and designing teaching materials to promote and facilitate the use of this didactic tool in general translation curricula.

#### REFERENCES

- Bartoll, E. (2012). La subtitulació: aspectes teòrics i pràctics. Vic: Eumo.
- Díaz-Cintas, J. (2012). Los subtítulos y la subtitulación en la clase de lengua extranjera, Abehache, Revista da Associação Brasileira de Hispanistas, Vol. 3, 2012, 95-114.
- Incalcaterra Mcloughlin, L. (2010). "Explicitation of the translation process in translators' training through production of interlingual subtitles", in: L. Bogucki

- González Cruz, S. (2019). Subtitling as an active pedagogical tool in the didactics of translation. First results of an empirical study. *Current Trends in Translation Teaching and Learning E. 6.* 307 330.
  - & K. Kredens (eds.). Perspectives on Audiovisual Translation 20, Lodz Studies in Language, Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Bern, Brussels, New York, Oxford, Wien: Peter Lang, 165-178.
- Incalcaterra Mcloughlin, L. & Lertola, J. (2011). "Learn through subtitling: subtitling as an aid to language learning", in: L. Incalcaterra McLoughlin, M. Biscio & M.A. Ní Mhainnín (eds.) Audiovisual Translation: Subtitles and Subtitling. Theory and Practice. Oxford: Peter Lang, 243-263.
- Kiraly, D. (2005). *Project-based learning: A case for situated translation*. Meta: Translators' Journal vol. 50, n° 4, pp. 1098-1111.
- Klerkx, J. (1998). "The place of Subtitling in a translator training course", in: Y. Gambier (ed.) Translating for the Media. Turku: University of Turku, 259-264.
- Kruger, J.L. (2008). "Subtitler training as part of a general training programme in the language professions", in: J. Díaz-Cintas (ed.): The Didactics of Audiovisual Translation, Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 71-87.
- PACTE (2011). "Results of the Validation of the PACTE Translation Competence Model: Translation

Problems and Translation Competence", in: C. Alvstad, A., Hild & E. Tiselius (eds.) Methods and Strategies of Process Research: Integrative Approaches in Translation Studies, Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 317-343.

- Romero, L., Torres-Hostench, O. & Sokoli, S. (2011). "La subtitulación al servicio del aprendizaje de lenguas para traductores: el entorno LvS". Babel 57(3), 305-323.
- Talaván Zanón, N. (2011). "A quasi-experimental research project on subtitling and foreign language acquisition", in: L. Incalcaterra McLoughlin, M. Biscio & M.A. Ní Mhainnín (eds.) Audiovisual Translation: Subtitles and Subtitling. Theory and Practice. Oxford: Peter Lang, 197-217.
- Talaván Zanón, N. & Ávila-Cabrera, J. J. (2015). "First insights into the combination of dubbing and subtitling as L2 didactic tools", in: Y. Gambier, A. Caimi & C. Mariotti (eds.), Subtitles and Language Learning. Bern: Peter Lang, 149-172.